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Will & Action

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Will & Action

The Abundance of Donations For The Mishkan: The Power of the Will

In *Parashas Vayakhel-Pekudei*, the Torah says that the nation brought an abundance of donations to the *Mishkan*, and that anyone who was a “*nediv lev*” (generous of heart) could give a gift for the *Mishkan*. The nation came forward with an abundance of donations to help build the *Mishkan*.

There were so many gifts and donations pouring in that Moshe had to command them to stop donating. The simple understanding of this matter is that not only did the nation have a *ratzon* (will) to donate, but they wanted to donate even after there was more than enough.

We know that everything in Creation is governed by Divine Providence, and that there is a purpose and planning for everything that happens down to the last detail. The extra abundance of donations to the *Mishkan* was certainly included in Divine Providence as well. The *Mishkan*, which was the place on the world where the *Shechinah* dwelled, was surely being run with Divine Providence, in all its details. Therefore, the will of the nation to donate to the *Mishkan*, and to increase their donations, was therefore also a necessary part of the plan, even though it seems at first glance as superfluous and unnecessary.

Ratzon/Will and Maaseh/Action

To explain the root of this matter, we must realize that there is a power of *maaseh* (action)

and a power of *ratzon* (will) in our soul. *Ratzon* (will) is present specifically in the heart – whenever a person wants to do something it is the initiating force of man’s actions. The end result is the *maaseh* (action), which actualizes the potential of the *ratzon* and brings it to fruition.

Ratzon is a higher force in the soul than *maaseh*, and therefore, it “takes up more space.” There is more percentage of *ratzon* in a person’s life than actual *maaseh*. In the way that Hashem has designed the world, **it is normal for people to want more than what they actually do, whereas it is not normal for people to do more than they actually want.**

The will of a person is a more powerful force than his power of action, both in quantity and in quality. It is necessary for the will of a person to be bigger in percentage than the action; that is the way things are supposed to be. For example, *Chazal* say that “More than the calf wants to nurse [from its mother], the [mother] cow wants to nurse [its young]”.

The “action” here is the act of the calf nursing from its mother, but the desire of the mother to nurse its young calf is greater than the calf’s desire to actually nurse from its mother. This is true as well with all of Creation: the power of *ratzon* (will) must be greater than the amount of *maaseh* (action) there is.

When Willpower Doesn't Lead To Action

This is a very subtle matter. Sometimes one's *ratzon* is greater than one's *maaseh* because a person wishes very much to actualize the potential of something and bring it to fruition. However, in such a case, the *ratzon* can be delusional, and it will never amount to anything.

For example, there are people who have great aspirations for holiness, and they will speak of a great love for Torah, and their words can be very moving when you hear them. If you ask them, “*Nu*, so how much do you learn Torah during the day?” they cannot give you a straight answer. Their actions greatly contradict their yearning to learn Torah. There is a gaping contradiction that exists between their power of *ratzon* (will) and *maaseh* (action). There is something deficient in their *ratzon*, because their *ratzon* is not leading them to act upon it.

However, we are not dealing with this problem here. Here we are explaining that there is a general rule that a person's *ratzon* is always going to take up more space, than the possibility to actualize it into *maaseh*. Since *ratzon* takes up more space than *maaseh*, the full *ratzon* of a person will not entirely come to fruition.

Actualized Will Leads To Serenity

Whenever a person wanted to do something and then he achieved it, he feels serene as soon as he does whatever he wanted to do. It is actualizing the potential of the will, which feels enlightening to the soul. This is actually a degree of the serenity when Hashem rested after finishing creating the six days of

the week. Everything had been actualized from its potential state to its completed state. This was the *menuchah* (serenity) of Shabbos.

A person also experiences this on some small level whenever he brings anything to fruition by bringing something from its potential state to an active, finished state.

But as mentioned above, it is not possible for a person to fully actualize his wishes. The *ratzon* is always greater in percentage than the amount it can be actualized. That being the case, a person can never have total serenity even after actualizing what he wanted to do. It is like the statement, “Torah scholars have no serenity, not in this world and not in the next world.”¹

The *Gemara* says, “Great is Torah study, for it brings one to action.”² Acting upon the Torah, the revelation of Hashem's will, causes the potential of the Torah to be activated, and this is why “Great is Torah study, for it brings one to action.” It is not simply because learning Torah enables one to know how to act properly. It is because “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the word.” Studying the Torah means that one is looking into the source of Creation. Thus Torah learning is great because it allows one to actualize his potential forces, bringing them from their potential state into their active state.

A true Torah scholar is one whose Torah learning builds his inner self. The Torah is the revelation of Hashem's will, and when Torah builds the self of man, it builds all of the potential forces of the soul and allows for

¹ *Berachos 64a*

² *Bava Kamma 17a*

complete self-actualization. Thus, “Torah learning is great, for it brings one to action.”

However, the “action” aspect which Torah study leads to is but one part of learning Torah. It is the first and essential part of Torah study, of course, and one must learn Torah in order to act upon it. But even though this is true, not all Torah learning can lead a person to act. Part of one’s Torah learning will remain purely as Torah learning, and it will not lead to any action.

For example, the Sages state that a *ben sorer u’morer* (wayward child) will never exist, and the only reason why this part of Torah exists is so that we can study its laws and receive reward for it. This part of Torah will never lead one to action, because it is of no relevance. It is purely for the sake of Torah learning.

In addition, throughout all of the Talmud, we come across the “initial opinion” (*hava amina*) of the *Gemara*, and the conclusive opinion (*maskana*) in the *Gemara*. The conclusion of the *Gemara* forms the actual *halachah* that we act upon, but we do not act upon the “initial opinion” of the *Gemara*. It is there purely for the sake of Torah learning. (Of course, we cannot understand the *maskana* unless we first learn the *hava amina*.) On a deeper level, the *hava amina* of the *Gemara* builds the entire person’s inner structure, beginning with the root faculties of the mind and ending with the actions. But whenever we learn a *hava amina*, it is not about acting upon it, but about receiving reward for studying it.

This is also true of the many *beraisos* (commentary on the Mishna) brought in the *Gemara* which the *Gemara* does not conclude with. Learning these parts of the *Gemara* are

not about action; they are purely meant for learning. Thus, learning Torah consists of parts of Torah which lead to action, and another part of learning Torah includes parts which do not lead to action, which are purely about learning Hashem’s will. This shows us that there are parts of Torah which is more about “*ratzon*” than “*maaseh*”.

(There is also a level of Torah learning in between these two areas: the parts of Torah which lead to action, but which cannot be acted upon right now. For example, learning the *halachos* of Pesach will eventually be relevant, when Pesach comes, but not right now, when it is not yet Pesach.)

In either case, we see that learning Torah can have more to do with *ratzon*/will, than *maaseh*/action. **Often when learning Torah, we are studying the will of Hashem which we cannot act upon right now.** Although you will find in the words of *Chazal* that the “main thing is action”, this is only true in certain situations. It is not the complete truth. “Torah study is great, for it leads one to action” when we are learning parts of Torah that lead to action. However, when learning parts of Torah that do not lead to action the emphasis is on learning about the will of Hashem, and not on action.

What Is The Most Important Part of Life – Action or the Heart?

When it comes to a person’s *avodah*, the rule is, as the Sages say, “Hashem wants the heart”. Whenever a person learns the words of *Chazal*, he may struggle with the following fundamental issue: What is the main thing in

life? Is the main thing in life the “world of action” for “Great is Torah study, for it leads one to action”? Or is the main thing in life the fact that “Hashem wants the heart”, as it is written, “*For all the hearts seek Hashem*”? What is the most important part of life – the actions, or the heart?

If a person is drawn towards learning *halachah*, he will probably answer that the main part of life is knowing how to act, and he may cite sources for this. If a person is drawn towards the study of *mussar*, he will say that although a person is obligated to act properly and according to the *halachah*, the main thing is the heart.

What is the truth of this matter, though?

This World (Action) and The Next World (Heart)

The true answer to this is that it depends if your perspective is from This World, or from the perspective of the Next World.

On This World, the main thing is action. It is called “the world of action”, so the main thing here on This World is how to act properly. But in the Next World, there are no actions. It is written, “*For there are no deeds or accounting in the grave, which you are heading towards.*” In the Next World, the main thing is not action, but how much heart one had.

(The heart contains three layers. The outermost layer of the heart is the **feelings**, the more inner layer is the **wisdom** of the heart, and the innermost layer of the heart is the heart’s **recognition** of matters. That is a brief description of the three general uses of the heart.)

There is This World, and there is the Next World. A simple way to understand this is that we experience two different times of the week, which reflect these two states. We have the six days of the week, which represent This World of action, and then there was Shabbos, a “resemblance of the World To Come”. The *Gemara* says that one can be a “*ben olam haba*”, meaning that he can be connected to the World To Come even as he is on This World.

How can one be a “*ben olam haba*”? One cannot completely connect himself to the Next World, because this is impossible. On the other hand, one who is connected only to This World, with no connection to the Next World, is defeating the purpose of living. Rather, one needs both “This World” and the “Next World” in his soul. One needs action/weekday/This World, and one also needs heart/Shabbos/Next World. The lower parts of our soul are used for This World, and the deeper, higher parts of our soul need to be used [here] for the Next World, and this is how we connect to the Next World even amidst This World.

The complete level of this was reached by Moshe *Rabbeinu*, whose “lower half was man, and his higher half was angelic.” His “lower half” was human, meaning that part of him was connected to This World, and this was needed so that he could bring the Torah down from Heaven onto This World. This was the “man” part of Moshe, his “lower half”. The “higher half” of Moshe was like an angel, and in this aspect, Moshe was an angelic being; that was how he could ascend to Heaven.

Similarly, every person can have this to some degree. We are far from Moshe’s level, but the Rambam says that **every person can**

resemble Moshe Rabbeinu on his own level. (Rav Elchonon Wasserman in the name of the Chofetz Chaim³ writes about this extensively.)

We are found on This World, and therefore our soul can feel very connected to it. The Vilna *Gaon* was crying on his deathbed that he was about to leave the world, for only on this world can a person do the deeds of the *mitzvos*.

But only the lower part of the soul feels connected to this world. The higher part of the soul is like Shabbos. “A Torah scholar is called Shabbos” – one can live an existence of “Shabbos”, of living a resemblance of the Next World, of a *ben olam haba*, of someone who is designated for the life in the World To Come.

When one lives only for the “world of action” – even the actions of *mitzvos*, of being careful in the *halachah*, etc. – when he eventually takes leave of the world, he will certainly get rewarded for keeping the *mitzvos*, but his perspective is limited to This World alone, and he is missing the perspective of the World To Come, and he won’t be able to ascend there.

This is an amazing, and very subtle, point. If a person can only relate to actions, he can only remain in the “world of action”. If he kept the Torah’s *mitzvos*, the light of the Torah will certainly lift him higher, but because he is only connected to the “action” level of the Torah, he will remain connected to This World.

In contrast, the proper way to live life is to be careful doing all the *mitzvos* and all holy actions and in addition there is a higher place

in the soul which we also need to connect to. This is the area of our soul’s deep *ratzon*, which does not always manifest in action.

The Deep Ratzon (Innermost Will) of the Soul

Our deep *ratzon* is the place in ourselves which can sing songs and praises to Hashem. On our own level, each of us can reach the level of Dovid *HaMelech*, who sang from his soul to Hashem.

The *Kuzari* writes that when the soul becomes overjoyed, it bursts out in song to Hashem, out of gratitude and yearning, to Hashem. This deep part of the soul remains as a desire in the soul, and it is not expressed through any action.

There is a lower part of this deep place in the soul which can be expressed in actions, and these are the *halachos* of Torah which the world stands upon. But the innermost layer of this part of the soul cannot be expressed through any actions. It remains as a deep *ratzon* of the soul, and it is impossible to actualize.

When a person realizes that he cannot actualize the deep yearnings of his soul, his innermost *ratzon*, he may be pained and disappointed, wondering of what use it is. At times a person must simply have *emunah* that Hashem doesn’t want him to actualize all of his *retzonos* for holiness, for whatever reasons He has. But when we understand this matter properly, often we cannot actualize our deepest *retzonos* because it is simply not within our power to do so. We are only able to do that which is in our power, but there is

³ Kovetz He’aros (*hakdamah*)

also a space in our soul full of deep yearnings which we are not able to actualize.

On the one hand, there is pain that comes when we realize that we cannot act upon these deep desires of the soul. But at the same time, we can view it purely as a *ratzon* of the soul, and realize that this, too, has its place – and it doesn't have to be actualized. It can remain as it is – just a deep yearning in the soul.

One needs to let this space in his soul develop and unfold, without trying to act upon its deep desires. A person should try to access it at times, and just let it be, without trying to actualize it or do anything with it. He should simply let the yearning of the soul develop and intensify, watching what happens. Ideally, the best time to do this is on Shabbos, which is the time to access our deep yearnings of the soul.

Feel the yearnings of your soul. Let them express themselves as they wish. Let yourself cry when you feel the yearnings. Desire, want, yearn, hope, cry – until you can eventually do as Rabbi Akiva did, who cried tears of joy.

When you let your deep *ratzon* become revealed, this is a part of revealing the *Shechinah*.

The “Extra” Donations To The Mishkan Were Also A Part of Bringing The Shechinah

This is also the secret behind the many extra donations that came pouring in for the *Mishkan*. Anything donated to the *Mishkan* was an actualized *ratzon*, where they saw the results from their acts of giving. But much of

their *ratzon* couldn't be actualized. The nation kept bringing donations, and they were told to stop, because it wasn't needed.

Simply speaking, they wanted to donate, but their donations were refused. But the deeper understanding is that this was actually a part of building the *Mishkan*: the very *ratzon* they had to donate more, which they couldn't actually do. This was a part that enabled the revelation of the *Shechinah* upon the *Mishkan*.

The *Mishkan* was therefore comprised of two aspects - the donations that were brought, as well as the desires of all the people to donate. The actual donations for the *Mishkan* were like “Great is learning Torah, for it leads one to action” – they were needed to build the *Mishkan*. As for the donations that weren't needed to build the *Mishkan*, the extra donations, the *Ohr HaChaim* says that a miracle happened, and the amount that was originally needed now changed, and now even the extra donations were needed. The depth behind this matter is because the depth of their *ratzon* to bring more to the *Mishkan* turned into a necessary part of the *Mishkan*!

The donations to the *Mishkan* were from those who were *nediv lev*, “generous of heart”. One part of their heart was actualized, in the donations that were actually used for the *Mishkan*. The part in their heart that was not actualized – their mere desire to donate to the *Mishkan*, even after it was no longer needed – remained as a *ratzon* that they had. Although these donations did not have a part in the *Shechinah* that came upon any of the vessels of the *Mishkan*, it still had its place in the *Shechinah* itself that came to the *Mishkan* and *Beis HaMikdash*.

Even more so, however, there was a higher gain, a higher light of the soul that they

reached: the deep yearning of the soul, as described in the verse, "נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי" – בחצרות ה' – "It yearns, and it also pines, my soul, in the courtyards of Hashem." There was no greater "courtyard of Hashem" than in the place of the *Shechinah*, which was the *Mishkan*.

These are yearnings of the soul which have no end, and of this it is said, חבוקה ודבוקה ברך, "Clinging and attached, to You".⁴ Hashem is infinite, and one who is connected to Hashem will thereby have a yearning for Him which is endless.

This is why the nation kept bringing donations to the *Mishkan*, much more than what was needed, because their *ratzon* for holiness was endless. This was a part of building the *Mishkan*, and of this it is really said, "ושכנתי בתוכם", "And I will dwell amongst them". The *Shechinah*, the revelation of Hashem Who is infinite, was revealed in the *Mishkan*, from the deep yearnings of the souls of the Jewish people to give, endlessly, out of their desire for Hashem.

In Conclusion

This concept is true about the *Shechinah* which settled on the *Mishkan*, but it also applies to every Jew's soul, in every generation. Every person needs these two powers, *maaseh*/action and *ratzon*/will.

A person mainly needs to do action, "Great is learning Torah, for it brings one to action", but upon the actions, one also needs deep desires and yearnings of the soul, for Hashem, for His Torah, and for love of His people, Yisrael. At times, we need to make use of the

lower part of the soul, which is used to perform actions, and at times we need to make use of the higher and deeper part of the soul – the yearnings and desires of the soul. We need to give space to this deeper place in the soul, and to let it yearn for Hashem.

This was the depth of the exile and redemption from Egypt, which was called "Mitzrayim", from the word *meitzar*, "confines." There are evil confines, and there are holy confines. The evil confines refer to exile. The holy confines refer to the "actions" of the Torah which Torah learning leads to.

And, as we have been explaining here, there is a deeper place in the soul than this, where there are no confines at all, just freedom. Of this it is said "There is no *ben chorin* (free person) except one who is involved in Torah study." We need to let this part of the soul free, and to let it yearn as it wishes to, for its deepest wish – to have true *d'veykus* with Hashem.

⁴ recited in the "Hoshanos" of Sukkos