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## Bilvavi Part 4 - Chapter 15 Opening Your Ratzon

### ***Ratzon Is A Constant Power***

*Ratzon* has the same *gematria* (numerical value) as the word *mekor*, source. This shows that the source of all personal development is our *ratzon*.

Hashem created a person in a way that there is always some *ratzon* for something. Sometimes *ratzon* is docile and sometimes it is stronger and more clearly felt, but there is never a moment in which there is no *ratzon*. A person, every second, wants something. Even if we aren't aware of this consciously, it is taking place in our subconscious.

If a person would live for one moment without any *ratzon*, he would perish from existence and immediately become integrated with Hashem. *Ratzon* keeps our existence going.

Thus, before we explain how *ratzon* works, first we need to understand how necessary it is for our existence. *Ratzon* is the key to our inner world, and it keeps a person going every moment; to say it even deeper, *ratzon* is the very essence of a person.

If a person would be in a situation in which he has no *ratzon* – either because he has given up on everything, *chas v'shalom*, or even if he has totally nullified his *ratzon*, he would immediately die!

### ***Even An Unfulfilled Ratzon Is An Accomplishment***

There is a *tefillah* that one says upon making a *siyum* of a *masechta* (tractate) of Gemara, which translates: "We toil and they toil; we toil and receive wages, while they toil and do not receive wages." The question is, don't we see that even people who don't learn Torah also get paid for their work? (Although spiritual reward in the next world will be much greater than any reward found on this world, still, how we can say that those who don't toil in Torah never enjoy any wages on this world?)

The answer to this is that there is a big difference between physical exertion and spiritual exertion. In the physical world, we get paid for our work, but it's only according to how much we *achieve*, but not according to how much we *try*. If a carpenter is building a table for someone and the table breaks in between, he doesn't get paid for his hard work. But when it comes to spiritual work, "we toil and receive wages" – we get rewarded according to how much we *toiled*.

We learn from here a very deep and fundamental point. When it comes to our physical or worldly achievements, only the achievement is worth something, while the steps we take to get there have no value. But when it comes to spiritual work, not only is there a goal we are trying to achieve, but

every step of the way until we get to our goal is a *goal unto itself!*

This is a very deep point. We can give an example how we see it.

Chazal<sup>[1]</sup> state that “If a person thought to do a *mitzvah* and then he was held back against his will to do the *mitzvah*, it is considered as if he did it.” The simple understanding of this is that it is considered as if he did the *mitzvah*, and that is true. But the deeper meaning of this is that because he had a *ratzon* to do it, that itself is an accomplishment. The fact that a person even wants to do the right thing is an accomplished goal - in and of itself.

Of course, a person must try to carry out his *ratzon* and come to act upon it, but we must also understand that having the *ratzon* itself is also an achievement.

### ***The Purpose of An Unfulfilled Ratzon***

To understand this better, we will quote the words of the Ramchal in one of his letters.

He asks: What was the purpose of all the decrees on *Yiddishkeit* throughout the generations? What was the point of the decrees that we shouldn't learn Torah? If it would have been made hard for us, then we can say that these decrees made us learn Torah with more *mesirus nefesh*.<sup>[2]</sup> But the decrees made it they couldn't learn at all, even with all their *mesirus nefesh*. Why did Hashem make it possible that we couldn't learn Torah at all? What did this do for the world?

To answer this question, the Ramchal writes a great fundamental: there are times in which the world is sustained just through our *ratzon* alone. The fact that we wanted to learn Torah, even though we couldn't - that yearning itself was purposeful, because the stronger yearnings purified the *ratzon*. That was an accomplishment for itself.

When a person has a *ratzon* to learn Torah, his *ratzon* is usually minimal. But if he's forced into a situation where he can't learn, his yearnings will get awakened, and now his *ratzon* will be far more ignited than before. It is precisely in these situations that a person has the opportunity to really develop his *ratzon*. This was why there were so many decrees on learning Torah throughout the generations, as the Ramchal writes - to awaken our *ratzon* more.

Maybe you will ask, “Nu, so their *ratzon* got stronger, but in the end they couldn't learn Torah!” But the answer to this, says the Ramchal, is that building the *ratzon* serves a purpose to itself. It is a necessary step in our growth - that one reveals his true *ratzon*.

Our people faced many tribulations throughout the generations, but it is not only the earlier generations who were given that opportunity to ignite their *ratzon*. Every person can do it as well.

A person has many *retzonos*; let us discuss the spiritual aspirations of a person. A person has many aspirations which he doesn't see getting fulfilled. If it's a very strong aspiration, and it's not becoming actualized, a person naturally will have pain over this. He feels, “It's so painful that I want this spiritual attainment so badly, and that it's not happening.”

But we must understand, however, that Hashem planned this out. He gave us many such aspirations which we will never be able to actualize; there are *retzonos* that people have which they simply don't have the energies to put them into action and carry them out. Why do such *retzonos* exist? Their purpose to us is no less important than our actualized *retzonos*. Just to have these very *retzonos* serves a purpose, even when they don't get fulfilled. The fact that a person wants something so badly and yearns for it - when it's a spiritual aspiration - is an accomplishment in and of itself. It shows that he really wants spirituality.

## ***Ratzon - The Basis of Everything We Want to Build***

When it comes to materialistic pursuits, just wanting something has no value unless it happens. For example, a person has an idea to build a new house. After two years his friend meets him and asks, “*Nu*, what’s going on with the house?”

He replies, “I still want to build it, but I never get around to it yet....”

We would laugh at him; it’s very nice to want to do something, but you have to act upon it! A person can want and want, but his *ratzon* has no value unless he actualizes it. That’s the way it works when it comes to materialistic *retzonos*.

But when it comes to *ruchniyus*, it doesn’t work that way. Any *ratzon* of a Jew’s soul for something truthful, for some more closeness to Hashem, is the most precious thing there is. Even if the *ratzon* doesn’t end up getting actualized, and a person finds himself still very far from Hashem, feeling totally unsuccessful in actualizing his spiritual aspirations - the very fact that he has a *ratzon* for more *ruchniyus* is already a big accomplishment. A person has realize, though, that it is indeed his avodah for him to know that Hashem wants him to merely have a *ratzon*.

We do not mean, Heaven forbid, that one does not need to try to actualize his *retzonos* for *ruchniyus*. Obviously, our purpose is to keep the Torah and the mitzvos. What we are describing here is how one can build himself, and the very first thing that a person needs to build within himself is his *ratzon*.

That is the first, basic step. After that comes the next step, which is for a person to attempt to actualize his *ratzon*. For this, a person needs carefully planned thought; it is written, “*With wisdom a house is built.*”

However, using our mind alone isn’t enough; it has to be accompanied with pure, truthful desires for more growth in *ruchniyus*.

Building our point of *ratzon* is the root of all roots to anything we attempt to develop. If the root is weak - in other words, if our *ratzon* isn’t that strong (and the person is just acting *shelo lishmah*), then the foundation will be weak, and whatever we build upon it will not last.

### ***How Important It Is To Have A Ratzon for Ruchniyus***

The root of the issue here, though, is that a person naturally isn’t used to building his power of *ratzon* at all. People initially prefer to behave in the exact opposite approach of what we are saying.

For example, when a person is money-hungry, his desire for money begins to burn within him. His lust for money - his *taavoh* (desire) for it, is growing, but he never actually builds his *ratzon* (will) for the money. His *ratzon* is merely out of control. This is an example of an undeveloped *ratzon*. It resembles a thorn that grows by itself, which is not true growth, but rather something that’s out of hand and undeveloped.

How did his *ratzon* for money enter him? He saw all kinds of things that triggered it. Maybe he saw a wealthy person and thought to himself, “Wow, this person is so happy and successful”, and he imagined that he must have a lot of money in order to be happy. His desire for money got awakened due to various factors.

Now, have we ever heard of a person who thinks about his *ratzon* for money for three years, and to build up his *ratzon* for money? No one does that. People who want money run after money, and people who don’t have a *ratzon* for money don’t pursue it. But no one is building their *ratzon* for

money.

Our natural orientation is that we don't need to develop our *ratzon*. When we want something, we naturally begin to think how we can get what we want – but when it comes to trying to build the *ratzon*, we do not see a need for this – even when it comes to materialistic *retzonos*.

Materialistic pursuits can get fulfilled even without building the *ratzon*. But acquiring *ruchniyus* doesn't work that way. With *ruchniyus*, our *ratzon* for *ruchniyus* itself won't amount to anything unless we work to build it and develop it. Just to have a *ratzon* or yearning for *ruchniyus* isn't anything, and we can't build anything in our Avodas Hashem upon our natural *ratzon*; we need to take our *retzonos* for *ruchniyus* and **develop** them, in order for our *ratzon* to amount to anything.

We can all see that there are people who search to grow in their *ruchniyus*, and they really are full of aspirations to work on so many areas. You can have a person who sees a big nice sign in *shul* with the words “*Amen yehei sh'mei rabbah*”, and he gets inspired to say *Amen* with a lot of concentration; the next day he sees a sign about signing up for a *shemiras halashon* program, and he gets an awakening to improve on his *shemiras halashon*. Then come the signs about how we have to improve on *tznius*. Every day, people are getting inspired to work on something else...one day a person has a *ratzon* to work on answering *Amen* properly, the next day his *ratzon* is to work on something else.

While it is true that these are clearly desires for holiness, and they stem from an earnest search for more *ruchniyus* in one's life, the problem with this is that the person doesn't build and develop his *ratzon*. He is inspired and left with an indelible impression of what he wants to work on, but every day he wants to work on something else, and this hampers one's growth.

We can compare this to a person who tries to build an upper floor in his house before he builds the lower floors. Without the foundation, everything will crash.

We can't build our *ratzon* even from hearing lectures, from reading *sefarim*, or from other forms of inspiration. One has to figure out exactly what it is that he has to want, and he has to work for a long time until he discovers what it is. It might even take months to develop a true *ratzon* for one to decide that he will work on just one area that needs improvement. This has to be done before a person attempts to work on any area.

If someone is impatient by nature, he wants to see immediately results in his *ruchniyus*. He right away wants to know: “*Nu*, what should I do, *l'maaseh* (practically speaking)? Tell me what I have to do already!”

However, the possuk says, “*Those who plant with tears, reap with joy.*”[\[3\]](#) This is the process of Avodas Hashem – we first have to “*plant with tears*” by going through some difficulties, and only then can we “*reap with joy*” and enjoy results. But someone with an impatient nature has a problem in that he immediately wants to jump to the end of the possuk, to “*reap with joy*”, before he even does any “planting”\investing in his Avodas Hashem.

Not everything we hear in a lecture we are able to work on right away. Although the Ramban wrote in a letter that a person should try to actualize what he has learned as soon as he gets up from his *sefer*, not everyone can do this. It should definitely be an aspiration. But when we only know intellectually in our mind that we need to do work on something – or if we just believe in it – if we still don't **feel** that we really want to work to improve, then nothing will result from our Avodas Hashem.[\[4\]](#)

### **First, We Need To Really “Want”**

There is another point we should know. As we said in the last chapter, a person has a *ratzon* every

second for what is truthful. If a person would cease to have a *ratzon*, his whole existence would cease with him, and he would become integrated with Hashem.

So if we always have a *ratzon*, where is it?

Sometimes it is revealed out in the open, and sometimes it is hidden deep away in our soul. If we want to build our power of *ratzon*, we need to realize the concept of *ratzon* all the time; it has to become more revealed within our soul.

To do this, a person has to continuously want something truthful - and he has to want it every second.

At first, this can only happen slowly, because the beginning stage is for a person to clarify to himself more and more what his *ratzon* really is. But eventually, the *ratzon* has to always become alive in the person - a burning desire.

The *ratzon* of most people is usually hidden away for the most part of the day. If we meet a Jew in the street and we ask him, "What do you want right now?" he will respond, "What do I want in my **life**? Oh, I want this, and I want that..."

"No. I'm not asking what you want in **life** - I'm asking you what you want right now, at this very moment."

"Oh", the person will probably respond, surprised. "I don't know exactly what I want right now. I'm too busy right now thinking about other things..."

There is no person who has never experienced a revelation of his true *ratzon* at times - both for good and for evil. When a person has an evil desire for something or when he gets angry, he can see what he really wants. The same is true when it comes to good, like when one gets inspired from a good speech. But throughout the actual course of the day, people just act by rote, and a person's *ratzon* is put to rest. A person "knows" what he has to do (at least, that's what he thinks...) and he just lives his life knowing what he has to do.

If a person truly wants to build himself, he has to become a person who **truly wants** *ruchniyus*. He has to reach a point in which he can feel his *ratzon* for *ruchniyus* burning within him. If a person is walking through the street, he should be experiencing yearnings for *ruchniyus*; but if he isn't, he should at least *want* to *want*. There must be at least some small iota of *ratzon* going on at all times in a person!

As for the depth of the *ratzon* - how much it has become internalized in the person - that's a different issue. But the first step is for a person to develop a simple point: I *want* that I should *want*.

### ***Practical Guidance In How To Awaken Your Ratzon***

How can a person actually awaken within himself the power to "want" to begin with that he should have a *ratzon*?

It is clear that the only *ratzon* which a person needs to have is to become close to Hashem. "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good." But before we figure out **what** we want, we first have to build up within ourselves the very concept that there such a thing called *ratzon*.

This will require a full day's work! Just *hisbodedus* alone that we spoke about before will not be enough for this. In order to awaken our truthful *ratzon* throughout the day, our avodah has to be spread out over the entire day.

We cannot give concrete rules for this to every person. But there is one point, an inner point, which we can say, and each person can take from it respectively.

Our souls do not all share the same root. Some people were born with a strong amount of *ratzon* for spiritual matters, while others are born with a burning desire for materialistic pursuits, or worse, for even the lowliest *aveiros* (*chas v'shalom*).

Let us use a savvy, ambitious businessman as an example for what we are trying to convey here. Many businessmen are constantly filled with motivation, every second. We are not discussing about if the goal is worthy or not; a lust for money is not a good thing, but the point we see from here is that we can see the power of *ratzon*. The *ratzon* here is being clothed by an undesirable garment, but the very *ratzon* itself is a positive, healthy power that gets him very far.

Every person should sit and reflect: How many times a day do I feel like I really want something?

There are two parts to this reflection: what you like to avoid, and what you aspire for.

Ask yourself how much of the day you are experiencing a *ratzon* for something. What you actually want is a different question, and that will be a later stage. First, ask yourself: How often are you having a *ratzon*, whether if it's that you're trying to avoid pain, or something you're pursuing?

If a person comes to the conclusion that he isn't experiencing that much *ratzon* for anything – only rarely – he should sit himself once every hour, and think for half a minute: “What do I want from myself? What do I want??”

We do not mean that one should make for himself a *cheshbon hanefesh* every hour; we just mean that one should awaken in himself a truthful point he is striving for, something he has begun to want from himself: “Do I want something, or do I not want something? If I do want something – what is it that I want?”

Work on this one point, and then slowly more and more, increase these exercises throughout the day. If you were doing this once an hour, for example, start doing this reflection once every 50 minutes. Keep reminding yourself of this simple point: “What do I want? Is there anything I want in life, or am I just like a rock that doesn't want anything...?”

We should again mention that before doing this, *hisbodedus* must precede it; we discussed this in the previous chapters. Without *hisbodedus*, the current *avodah* doesn't really begin, and it will just feel like some pressurized homework; nothing will come of it, and it lead to failure.

### **Summary of Our Avodah**

Let us summarize our *Avodah* from what we learned in the beginning of this sefer up until the current point.

We explained at length before that a person needs an hour every day in which he clarifies what he wants, and that he should beg Hashem that he should want.

After doing this, a person hopefully arrived at the point in which he clarified to himself that the only *ratzon* which he must have is to have a desire for closeness to Hashem.

A person realizes that he although he knows he must have this *ratzon*, he doesn't actually have the *ratzon*.

He needs to remind himself more and more throughout the day about this. He needs to thus figure out what his *ratzon* currently is, because he never figured out his *ratzon* yet.

A person should keep doing this more often throughout the day, clarifying to himself what his *ratzon* is more and more. Hopefully he will feel his true *ratzon* alive more and more – and after this, the *avodah* is to purify the *ratzon* even more.

When people just look for what to do “*l'maaseh*”, or what *mitzvos* and *chumros* to work on – and they never build themselves up inside in the way we have described – they might get a lot done, but they will be missing the inner point. Doing more *mitzvos* is not our ultimate goal; Chazal say that even the emptiest Jew is full of *mitzvos*, equal to the amount of seeds inside a pomegranate.<sup>[5]</sup> Why then are they called “empty”? They are still empty, because they are missing the inner point of it all.

In order for a person to live like a true Jew, his aspirations have to become very real. We do not mean for one to engage in self-aggravation or for one to constantly fear sin every second. Those are high levels. We are referring to a much simpler point: that we should always be in a *wanting* mode. When a person always has a *ratzon*, he awakens the depths of his soul – and he will then have the energy to serve his Creator.

As long as a person's aspirations to improve in *ruchniyus* are still weak, he might have very lofty thoughts, and he is well aware intellectually of what he has to do...but he builds himself upon this, and what he has built will not last. A true *ratzon* needs to be developed, and it can take full months to work on it. Only then will one have the possibility of truly building himself, with the help of Hashem.

May Hashem merit all of us to recognize what's going on in the depths of our soul, how really deep down, “it is our will to do Your will” (*retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*); and that we should awaken our *ratzon* to become more alive and active. As a result, we should merit from this as well to keep to our *ratzon* and become close to the Creator.

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<sup>[1][1]</sup> Berachos 6a

<sup>[2]</sup> self-sacrifice

<sup>[3]</sup> Tehillim 126: 5

<sup>[4]</sup>(The general plan of what we will need to do is to take our mind's **knowledge** that we need to improve (or to extend our **belief** that we need to improve) and to extend that knowledge\belief into really **feeling** that we want to improve (which will be explained later.)

<sup>[5]</sup> Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:3

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