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You Want Something That's Important

There is another point we will explain about *ratzon*.

It is written, "A man according to his praise." Every person "praises" certain things he wants – people want things that they place value on.

Every person has a different sense of value for different things, and no one is alike in this aspect. What all people have in common, though, is that all people should place the most value on what is the truth. *How* to get to the truth depends on each person – but the fact that truth must be our top priority is something that applies to all people.

Before we get into the inner dimensions of this discussion, we will reflect on some examples from the physical world to help us understand what we mean. Let's say a person needs to buy a new washing machine and an oven. He comes to the store and realizes that he only has enough money to buy one of them. He has no choice but to decide which one he needs more – he learns how to prioritize his needs. If he chooses one item over the other, it's not because he doesn't value the other item. It is just that he has to see which one he really needs more: Is it going to be harder for me if I don't have a washing machine than if I don't have an oven, or vice versa?

The point we see from this is that a person can get to know what he wants by comparing two different needs and seeing which one he'd rather give up so he can get the other. By learning how to prioritize, you get to know what you want.

In our life, there are many things which we try to do that don't come to fruition. If a person wants to awaken and reveal his *ratzon*, he first needs to see how important his *ratzon* is in comparison to other *retzonos* he has, and that will get him to know if he really has the *ratzon*.

The Test To See How Much You Value What You Want

Now we will give a spiritual example of what we mean, and it is a way for a person to test himself to see if he really wants something.

Let's assume that somebody comes to the conclusion that the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* will be the *sefer* that is most helpful to him in his Avodas Hashem, so he decides that he needs to go out to the store and buy the *sefer*. After he's clear about this, he should reflect with himself: How much money am I willing to spend to get a *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*? Even more so, how much emotional investment

am I willing to put into this?

A person needs to clarify this with himself. He might discover that he's not willing to spend any money to buy the *sefer*, because it's a cheap *sefer* that's on the shelf in any *Beis Midrash* – and therefore it's not worth it to buy...

If a person is totally clear that he needs to own a *Mesillas Yesharim*, he must ask himself if he's really prepared to spend money on this *sefer*, since it's a *sefer* that can be found anywhere. (This is before a person decides how much he is willing to invest in trying to implement what's *written* in *Mesillas Yesharim*...). This is a true test for how a person can know if he really has a *ratzon* (in this case, to buy *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*).

Let's go further in the example we gave: what if the person would find out that there are only three places in the world where he can get the *sefer* – and that all three locations are at the ends of the country? Would he be willing to take a three hour trip to get there so he can get the *sefer*?

Even if he is willing to take the trip so he can get the *sefer*, would he pass up the opportunity, hoping that he will hear of someone who's going there so that he can ask that person to pick it up for him – and if that doesn't happen, "I'll wait for *bein hazemanim*...?"

What we see from this is that it's possible that a person knows that something is important, but he's not actually willing to invest in it – and if he's not willing to invest, it shows that he doesn't really have the *ratzon*. Sure, he knows it's important – but he doesn't really value it, because if he would, he would put effort into actualizing it.

We can go even further in the above example. If a person really wants a *sefer* that he concludes will help him, and he finds out that it's only available in America and he lives in Israel, would he be willing to fly to America so he can get it?

One last inquiry: would he be willing to sell items in his house so he can get the *sefer*? And does he have any doubts about this...?

If each person makes this internal examination, he will find that he has certain areas in which he is willing to invest a lot of it, while there are other areas he's not really willing to put so much effort into; and there are other areas that he's not sure about if he should or not.

Let us emphasize here that the test is about what you're willing to actually **do**, not about what you **think** you would like to do. It's easy to think about doing something worthy, but when it comes to taking action, it's a different story. Who's willing to pay for a ticket so he can fly to another country and get the *sefer* he knows will help him (if the case would theoretically present itself)?

By using this test, a person can discover if he **truly** wants something – or if he's just **imagining** that he wants it.

How Much Is One Aspiring To Become Close to Hashem?

Until now we only gave a *moshol* (parable) of what we mean, and now we will go to the inner point of this.

Before, we spoke about a tool of how to get to Hashem – such as *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. Now we will speak about the actual point we are trying to get to – the Blessed Creator.

It is clear to any person – both in mind and heart – that the purpose of life is to become close to

Hashem. A person needs to figure out for himself how much he is really willing to invest in order to reach this.

If we tell for a person that for the price of one shekel you can become close to Hashem, without a doubt he'd give a shekel. He'll pay ten shekel also for this. Let's say we tell him that he will have to lose sleep for two nights straight for this. (Of course, this is incorrect behavior, but we are trying to bring out a point); most people would probably be willing to lose two nights of sleep to reach the purpose of life, if that would be the requirement.

But let's say we tell a person that in order to become close to Hashem, you will have to sleep only for three hours every day for the entire year." Now we will get different answers from people.

Is a person willing to undergo some pain in order to reach closeness to Hashem? Would he be willing to give a foot, or an eye, or an ear for this, if so be it?

We are not referring to when someone loses to the temptation of a sin. "When the evil inclination is present, there is no mention of the good inclination."^[1] This is an internal kind of battle and it is a totally different kind of struggle than what we are discussing; the battle with the *yetzer hora* is a true war.

We are discussing a much simpler point – when you're serene and the *yetzer hora* isn't starting up with you, and only your *yetzer tov* is present. You can sit with yourself then and ask yourself how much you're truly willing to invest in order to work on something. If you're sitting by the table and things are quiet in the house, and you have no pressures going on, now is the time to really "pressure" yourself: how much do you want the truth?

This helps a person figure out for himself where he's really holding at in his aspirations to become close to Hashem.

Let's give a simple example of what we mean. We mentioned before that a person needs an hour of *hisbodedus* every day; we brought the words of the Ramchal that if someone makes sure to always keep to doing this *hisbodedus*, he will be very close to reaching perfection, and if he doesn't, he is very far.

Therefore, a person should ask himself: "How much am I willing to invest in *hisbodedus*? Even if it's hard for me, will I try?"

Is a person willing to give up of his time for *hisbodedus*?

Every person should clarify to himself if he really is prepared to invest for Hashem – what exactly he is prepared to give up for this, and what he's not capable of doing for this (it will be hard for the person to admit this, but this is the current reality of the person's level of Avodas Hashem, and he has to know at what level he's truly at); and he should know what he's not sure about.

This helps a person greatly clarify too himself how earnest he really is about his aspirations, or if he's just saying that he wants.

True Love for Hashem Is Only Reached Through Mesirus Nefesh for Hashem

We have a mitzvah to love Hashem, and our love for Hashem is the point that brings us closer to Him and connects us to Him. The mitzvah to love Hashem is "*with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means.*"

What does it mean to love Hashem “*with all your heart*”? It includes all the thoughts and feelings of our heart. Can anyone say on himself that his heart is totally for Hashem? Almost no one can say this. All people want to love Hashem with their entire heart, but the other thoughts in the heart get in the way and prevent that love.

It is indeed a long way to get to *Ahavas Hashem* (love of G-d), but the question is, if a person would be offered a path to get there that will be difficult – yet it will offer very fast results – would a person be willing to put in the effort to take that path? If a person is told that he will have to get a leg amputated in order to acquire an everlasting love for Hashem, would he be willing to?

We also have to love Hashem “*with all your soul.*” Chazal say on this part of the possuk that even when Hashem comes to take one’s soul at the time of death, he must still love Hashem.

Chanoch was taken into Heaven by Hashem, and Rashi explains that Hashem wanted him to leave this world as a righteous person, so that he shouldn’t get influenced by the generation to become wicked. A person can reflect: If Hashem would give me the choice either to die and be with Him, or to remain on this world with its temptations – what would I choose? Would I really give up my life for Hashem?

There are four possible answers:

1. Yes, I am definitely willing to give up myself for Hashem.
2. No, I am definitely not willing to give up myself for Hashem.
3. I’m really not sure.
4. I need to ask a wise person’s advice about this.

We also have to love Hashem “*with all your means.*” Chazal say that this part of the possuk is saying that even if someone values his money more than his body, he should give up his money too for Hashem. The possuk is revealing to us that we don’t have to always get killed for Hashem in order to show *mesirus nefesh* (though there were individuals who merited to do even this for Hashem). The test is about how much a person is willing to give up of himself for Hashem.

We know about the concept of **dying** *al kiddush Hashem* [2], but there is also a concept of **living** for Hashem. To **live** *al kiddush Hashem* is actually a lot more difficult than to **die** *al kiddush Hashem*!

How do we see this is true? We can see that each of are willing to give up our lives *al kiddush Hashem*, and every Jew throughout the generations was willing to give up his life for Hashem as well. Why is it, though, that we find it so hard in our actual life to give up things for Hashem? Why is it so hard for us to overcome our *nisyonos* (difficulties)? The answer is: Because it’s easier to die for Hashem than to *live* for Hashem! Not every person who is willing to die for Hashem is willing to *live* for Hashem.

Why?

To die *al kiddush Hashem* is a difficulty that lasts for about one second. But to **live** *al kiddush Hashem* is a constant struggle. People are able to overcome unbelievably difficult situations – as long as they are only momentary hardships. Chazal say that had Chananyah, Mishael and Azarya been tortured, they wouldn’t have been able to withstand the pressure on them to bow down to the idol. [3] *Tosafos* explain that the physical torture would have been too painful for them to endure.

These *tzaddikim* were willing to get killed rather than bow down to the idol, but to endure constant physical torture – that they wouldn't have been willing to do.

If we want to live with a love for Hashem, we must first precede with this with true *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem. Without being willing to live a life of *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, a person won't be able to live a true kind of life of connection with Hashem.

Recognizing That This World Is Temporary

The words we are saying here seem very far from implementing. Yet, as lofty as they are, they are still close to achieving.

Why do these matters seem so foreign to us? It is because we naturally are pulled after worldly interests. People are running around all the time on this world – and the heart is being ignored. But a person has to bring his life to a halt and stop all this running. If a person doesn't think about the day of death once every day – simply put – he's not really committed to giving himself up for Hashem. The concept of death simply doesn't exist by him. He's just running and running in his life, without ever stopping to think.

There is no guarantee to any person that he will wake up tomorrow morning.

A person has to think about two things: How do I want to live my life – and also, maybe *chas v'shalom* today is my last day on earth; how would I want to spend my last day of my life...?

Without getting used to thinking like this, the matter of *mesirus nefesh* is a foreign and totally alien concept to a person. But any person with a thinking mind is aware that every day, there are obituaries in the newspaper, and that nobody lives forever. Since we do not know when life will end for us, we have to think about how we would like to live our life, in case there is no tomorrow.

Without a life plan like this this, a person is too immersed in this physical world, and he will definitely not be able to gain from the next point we are about to talk about. The first thing one must know before anything is that we have no guarantee whatsoever that we will wake up the next day! There are no guarantees either that we will live even for one more second.

Of course, we do not mean to become morbid all the time and always think about death. When a person acts morbid, he just sinks into a depression and doesn't do anything about it. (There are only a few individuals who are able to think about death all the time without becoming too morbid). We just mean that a person has to live with a minimal amount of awareness that life on this world is not forever.

When a person is laying in his bed at night about to go to sleep, he should not assume that he will definitely wake up the next morning. He should make a self-accounting: Have I fulfilled all my obligations on this world? Writing this down in a notebook would be helpful with this, so that he won't leave this world without paying up his debts. That is one part of what he must think – what he is leaving behind on this world if he dies. The other part of what he must think is: Can I really come to *Olam HaBa* the way I am now?

The point is that no one should think that he lives forever. We do not know what will be tomorrow. This should not make a person sad – it is rather a recognition of how the design of Creation works: Hashem gave a person life, and He did not tell him how long he is going to live for.

When a person feels like he wants to run away from all this thinking, he's really running away from reality. The more a person is in touch with reality, the more he lives with an awareness that maybe

today is his last day – and his life takes on a whole new meaning, as he will now appreciate life more and live it to its fullest.

By doing this, a person takes his life on this physical world and transforms it into a life of serving the Creator, and he prepares himself for the next world, the place where he is headed towards.

Only with this awareness (not just by saying it, but by living it) can a person understand the concept of *mesirus nefesh*. (We are referring to the easier kind of *mesirus nefesh*, which is to be willing to die *al kiddush Hashem*. We have not explained yet how to live a life of *mesirus nefesh*.)

Internalizing This Information In Your Feelings

From an intellectual viewpoint, anyone can see how it makes sense: We have free will on this world, and we all know that we can choose not to sin; if we sin, we lose our closeness to Hashem. If Hashem comes to a person and promises him that he'll become close to Him if he's willing to die right now, it makes sense to us from an intellectual viewpoint.

(We will not get into the other external factors to consider, such as “What about my family after I die?”. We are just addressing the actual truthful point we are trying to arrive at, so we can test ourselves and see where which level we are at).

Yet, knowing about this on an intellectual level isn't enough. We have feelings also, and we need to get the information in our intellect to be felt as a feeling. One's *avodah* is to get his feelings to be in line with what he knows in his mind.

One should thus sit with himself and ask himself: If Hashem would come to me and ask me if I am prepared to die in order to be close to Him, what would I want? If the answer is, “Yes, I am prepared”, this is very commendable. If the answer is “No”, then the *avodah* is to go back to the beginning stage mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: to figure out how important the truth really is to you.

We cannot jump immediately into the stage of *mesirus nefesh*, even though that is the goal we are striving for. First, we need to figure out what we are willing to give up for Hashem – and what we aren't. Then, we can keep working on this point until we feel ready to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Each person should know exactly what he's willing to give up for Hashem, and what he isn't – and what he's not sure about.

Progressing, Step After Step

Let's give an example. A person has a house he lives in; is he willing to give this up for Hashem if he would have to? If he isn't, he should ask himself what he really wants in his life more: to be close to Hashem, or to have a house? Which one do I want more?

Even before doing this, there is an initial stage as well: to think about the purpose of life. A person should ask himself if he indeed has any aspiration to get to the purpose of life.

To summarize the plan, the first stage is to clarify what the truth is and to ask ourselves if we have any interest in getting to it. The second step is *how much* he want it.

The purpose of life is to become close to Hashem. A person should ask himself: Is this a fact – or do I have any doubts about this? Is this piece of information just something that the *sefarim* mention, and it's a debatable point...? If a person that being close to Hashem is an arguable point, his *yetzer hora* is

already succeeding at getting him to evade the purpose.

So first, one has to be totally sure in his mind that the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem. If a person has any doubts about this in his mind, then he has to clarify it – and he has to daven to Hashem that he should see the light.

After this point has become clear to one's mind, one should then try to get his *ratzon* to be in line with what he knows. He should talk it out with himself: "Being close to Hashem is the purpose of life. It is the only true good – anything else that people think is good is not the true good (as the *Mesillas Yescharim* has stated).

See yourself standing in between two sides – good on one side, evil on the other. Hashem is on the side of good, and everything else besides Him is standing on the side of evil. Say to yourself: "I know what the truth is in my mind, but my heart feels differently."

If there is something you're not sure about giving up for Hashem, begin to talk with Hashem about this: "I know I need to give this up for You, Hashem. I know that this (for example, my house) will not bring me to the purpose of my life, and I know that being close to You is the purpose. But what am I to do? I don't **feel** that I am willing to give up for You."

Keep saying these words – talk it out with yourself, and with Hashem as well. With yourself, you can tell yourself: "I know anything else other than closeness to Hashem is worthless, and that my feelings of doubt about this are incorrect. But that is how I feel right now." Keep telling yourself that you know the truth in your mind, but you don't feel it in your heart; and tell this to Hashem as well and then beg Him to help you be prepared to give up for Him.

After working on this point – which is realizing that one isn't ready to give up for Hashem – now a person can proceed to the next step. But first, one has to realize the first step, which is that he isn't at the level of giving up for Hashem – and he should keep repeating to himself that point, as we have said.

For all of a person's life, a person has to keep increasing his amount of *mesirus nefesh* – how much he is willing to give up for Hashem. There are an endless amount of levels to this.

How can a person know if he has indeed reached *mesirus nefesh*? If he doesn't feel any opposition in his heart at these facts, and he realizes that *mesirus nefesh* is a simple concept. As long as *mesirus nefesh* feels like an overwhelming challenge, it is a sign that the person hasn't gotten to *mesirus nefesh* yet. As long as it feels hard, a person has to keep working on the first stage we have said, and he must not attempt to work on the second stage.

After a person merits to feel that he's willing to give himself up entirely for Hashem – in other words, if he is prepared to die *al kiddush Hashem* if the opportunity presents itself – he can then proceed to the next stage, which is to increase his *ratzon* to live a life *al kiddush Hashem*.

May Hashem merit us that the *ratzon* of each individual *neshamah* should be to be willing to give ourselves up entirely for Hashem – that we reveal this power from within us, and that we merit to attach ourselves to the Eternal Creator.

[2] *Sanctifying the Name of Hashem. The mitzvah to get killed al hakiddush Hashem applies when a Jew is being faced with one of the three cardinal sins: murder, immorality, or idol worship; see Yuma 9a.*

[3] *Kesubos 33b*

Source: <http://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-4-chapter-18-investing-your-ratzon>