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“Ohr Yoshor” and then “Ohr Choizer” - From Thought to Action

We will continue what we began discussing in the last chapter, that there are three garments of our soul – thoughts, speech and actions.

A fundamental rule is that in everything, there is an *“ohr yoshor”* (“straight light”) and an *“ohr choizer”* (“returning light”). We will explain these concepts.

Ohr Yoshor is that for every action a person does, there is a source of the action – something that is the driving force behind the act. It can be that we spurred on the action either through speech, or through thinking, or through simply acting. Whatever the motivating force is, it remains present through the act from the beginning of the act until the end. Sometimes that motivating force weakens, and sometimes it gets strengthened; but if it would cease, then the act would lose its power to function totally.

Ohr Choizer is that as someone does an act, the motivating force behind the act continues to strengthen. This concept is really mentioned in both *Sefer HaChinuch* and *Mesillas Yesharim*: “The heart is pulled after the actions.” When we do something, it inspires us as well on our inside. It is essentially the concept of *ohr choizer*.

This shows us that if not for our inner will to do what’s right, we wouldn’t perform. At the same time, the actions we do awaken our inner will – affecting our thoughts, speech and actions. We know this is true, because when a person doesn’t want something, he doesn’t think about it, nor does he speak about it or practice it. It is only when we want something that our thoughts, speech and actions can spur on our desire for it even more.

The more a person’s *ratzon* has in it *ohr yoshor* – in other words, the more he wants to do something – the more his *ohr choizer* is increased, and his very actions will then strengthen his *ratzon* for it even more.

It is not enough to develop our *ratzon* before we act, speak and think. Our *ratzon* has to keep strengthening as we act, speak and think – or else it will weaken. If a person had a *ratzon*, but when it came to acting up on it, his *ratzon* has weakened – it’s a sign that his *ratzon* needs to still become more revealed. If we don’t seek to keep our *ratzon* going as we act, speak and think of it, then whatever inspiration we do receive from it will only be temporary.

“The heart is pulled after the actions.”^[1] This is a well-known concept, yet we can all see that there

are many actions which people do that do not cause one's heart to be stirred. What is missing from the actions we are doing? Why aren't our actions fueling on our *ratzon* more?

It's not because we are missing *ratzon* in our actions. This cannot be, because every action we do involved some *ratzon*, even actions that are performed mechanically. Our true *ratzon* is there, but it is just that the habitual tendency to be "*melumadah*" (acting by rote) has taken over. Sometimes the "*melumadah*" aspect becomes so strong that a person views the main thing to be getting the action done, and having a pure *ratzon* involved has become a miniscule priority by the person. But no matter how little a person is involved with increasing his *ratzon* through the act, there is always some *ratzon* involved in the act, some *ratzon* to want to do what is right.

When a person has a *ratzon* to improve on something, but this isn't affecting how he acts so much - his actions will not do much for him, and it is because the *ratzon* hasn't become revealed yet.

Thus, there always two parts to *ratzon*. One part of *ratzon* is that we need *ratzon* in order to spur us on to act, speak, and think about *ratzon*. Another part of *ratzon* is that as we act, speak and think, our *ratzon* should become more revealed, and if it isn't, our actions in turn will not be able to fuel our *ratzon*.

Remove the Negative Aspects and then Develop the Positive Aspects

In every part of Avodas Hashem, there are always two steps: "*Remove yourself from evil*", and "*do good*." In other words, we need to remove the negative aspects that are holding us back, as well as build the positive actions that improve us.

In *ratzon*, there are two parts as well to what we need to accomplish - first we need to remove the negative *retzonos*, and then we can reveal our true *ratzon*.

The word "*ratzon*" has the same letters as the word "*tzinor*," pipe, as well as the word *notzar* - to guard. This hints to the two abilities which our *ratzon* can accomplish. On one hand, our *ratzon* can act as a "pipe" and transfer over to us our soul's natural yearning for the Creator, just like a pipe serves to transfer water. That is the "do good" aspect of *ratzon*. The other aspect of *ratzon* is "to guard" - it can "guard" our inner yearning, protecting it from negativity.

This is what we mean: our *ratzon* is made up of two layers. Our *ratzon* has in it the true *ratzon*, which is the will to do the Creator's will, and it is also made up of our various other interests - the "yeast in the sourdough", a reference to the evil inclination.

The other interests we have other than our true *ratzon* cover over our true *ratzon*. To eliminate those negative *retzonos*, we need to use the "*notzar*" aspect of *ratzon*, which is guard our true *ratzon* and return it to its source. We must also utilize the holy desire of our soul, our true *ratzon* itself, by using the *tzinor* aspect of *ratzon* - let us explain this.

What is essentially the idea of a *tzinor*? A *tzinor* pipe transfers something from one end to another. It is not just a hole on one side and a hole on another side - it serves to escort what you are transferring. That is *ratzon* - our *ratzon* connects to our actions, speech and thoughts. This is the "do good" stage.

As for the "remove yourself from evil" part, we use our *ratzon* to return our various worldly interests to their source, the true *ratzon*.

In other words, the way we remove our various worldly desires, our other *retzonos*, is by getting them all to become one single *ratzon*.

Control the Evil Desire - Don't Try To Eliminate It

We will explain how all of this is really close to our souls to work on – simply put.

We mentioned before that the soul has three garments over it: thought, speech and action. *Chas v'shalom*, a person might misuse these garments and have forbidden thoughts, forbidden speech and do forbidden actions. What is our avodah when we get a desire for an evil thought, an evil conversation, or to commit an evil act?

In any Avodah, first we have to avoid the negative, and then we can build the positive. If we are trying to negate our evil desires, we first have to avoid evil before we attempt the second stage, which is to “do good.” First comes “remove yourself from evil” – then comes “do good”. Let us explain.

How do we remove our evil desires? Simply, it would seem that we have to stop desiring those things. After all, the possuk says “remove yourself from evil”.

But there is more to it. Although the goal is to remove the evil *retzonos*, there is no way to actually do this. We cannot succeed if we attack our evil *ratzon* head-on. What we can do, however, is to stop the evil *retzonos* from spreading out into our soul garments of thought, speech and action. When our evil *retzonos* are contained from spreading out into the rest of our soul, it goes back to its source – the true *ratzon*. It then becomes a catalyst to help one improve.

For example, let's say a person has an evil *ratzon* to be haughty, as well as desires for food. Even if he screams all day from morning till night, “I wish I would never have such evil desires!” – it won't work.

How do we get rid of evil desires? It cannot be done by simply deciding that we won't desire those things. That's not the way to go about it. What we need to do is, as we explained before – to use the “notzar” aspect of *ratzon*, which is to make sure that the evil desires aren't spreading.

If we get a thought of arrogance in our heads, for example - instead of continuing to think about this, we just need to stop thinking those thoughts, so that the evil *ratzon* won't continue spreading into our thoughts even more.

Let's say a person has an urge to gossip or to say something improper. What he should do is stop talking, which will stop the evil *ratzon* from spreading further into how he talks.

And if a person is faced with a temptation to commit a sin, *chas v'shalom* – or any action that's beneath him to do – the avodah is to disengage from the action, so that the evil *ratzon* doesn't continue to contaminate how one is acting.

In other words, our avodah is not to try to erase our evil *ratzon* and battle it. Let the evil *ratzon* be as it is! Our avodah is to make sure it doesn't spread further. Let your evil *ratzon* remain - and just disengage from the evil thought\conversation\action you're tempted with.

That is the first part of our avodah – to “remove yourself from evil”. The second part of our avodah “do good” is to actually utilize our true, holy *ratzon*. How can we awaken it? There are two ways.

One way, which is a very high level and not so feasible for us to do, is to always live with our true *ratzon*. This is a very lofty level to reach, and most people do not attain this.

There is another way, however, which all can practice and gain from. It is to use the “*tzinor*” aspect of *ratzon*: when you want to awaken your true *ratzon*, connect your thoughts\speech\actions with your

ratzon. When you perform any action, do it with *ratzon*; when you speak about something you want to attain, speak about it with *ratzon*; and when you think about something you want to attain, combine your *ratzon* with your thoughts.

To summarize again, the first part of our avodah is “*remove yourself from evil*”, which is to prevent our evil *retzonos* from taking over. The second part in our avodah is “*do good*”, which is (at least in the initial stage of this) to allow our true *ratzon* to channel over into how we think, speak and act. Our true *ratzon* needs to become apparent in how we are thinking, speaking and acting.

This is the general method in how we deal with our *ratzon*.

Clarifying What You Want

Let us now be more specific.

When we start with the first stage – nullifying our evil *retzonos* – one must first figure out: What exactly **are** my *retzonos*? What are the things I want?

Without figuring out what we want in the first place, we won’t have any interest to want to work on our *retzonos*, and our avodah here will just be cloudy and confusing.

So it is clear that at first we must make a list of our *retzonos*: our holy *retzonos*, as well as our evil *retzonos*. Figure out which of your desires are for a holy purpose, and which are not. If we avoid thinking about this, then we are basically running away from reality, and then our avodah here will not work.

After you figure out what your *retzonos* are (and make sure that you have begun with the first stage, which is “*remove yourself from evil*” – figure out what your evil desires are), now attempt to figure out which *retzonos* you have that are stronger than others.

Now we will arrive at two possibilities.

One option we now have is to begin by weakening our less powerful *retzonos* that are evil, and only after that to work on nullifying the more difficult desires in us that are harder to overcome. If we take this option, then our avodah here is essentially that we are making sure that our evil *retzonos* aren’t taking over and spreading too far. This is the easier approach to take.

Or, we can start with our most difficult evil desire that’s hard to conquer, and after that it will be much easier to get rid of our various other evil *retzonos*. This is a obviously a harder avodah.

We can compare this to a water leak in which water is gushing out of its source, and we want to prevent it from flooding more. If we stuff up the source of where the water’s gushing out of, then we stop all the flooding, but it’s difficult to stop the flood at its source. But if we put towels and other obstacles at ten feet away from the gushing of the water, then it’s easier to stop the flood, because we aren’t directly trying to fight the source of the flood – we are just preventing it from flooding any more. The further away we are from the source of the flood, the easier it is to stop the flooding.

The lesson we see from this is that it will be very difficult if we start by attacking our hardest desires to overcome. Doing this is waging war with the source of all the evil in the soul, and it’s unrealistic that the person will win. It is thus a more feasible approach if we first fight our weaker desires.

Let us emphasize that this depends on each individual. If one has a strong desire for something holy, then it is indeed possible for him to begin by fighting his root evil desire. But if his holy desires are

weak, he should not attempt to fight his root evil desire, and instead he should gain control of his desires in the way we have said.

Therefore, there is no way to answer the issue of, "Which *ratzon* do I start to work on uprooting the most?" Every person has to figure out what all his *retzonos* are, and then differentiate between which *retzonos* are holy and which aren't. He should then see how strong his holy *retzonos* are. The stronger a holy *ratzon* is, the harder it is to fight an evil *ratzon* that opposes it, because for every amount of good in a person that Hashem created, Hashem also created an equally powerful amount of evil in the person that can challenge the good.

After clarifying which *retzonos* one has to fight, one should use the method given above: exercise self-control over the evil *ratzon* that it shouldn't get out of hand. Realize that you have the evil desire, and let it be; your *avodah* here is to make sure it doesn't spread further than what it is now.

Working On This Slowly And Sensibly

What do we mean when we say that one has to make sure that his evil *ratzon* shouldn't spread? It cannot be done so fast. It is a slow process.

For example, if a person is working to eliminate his *gaavah* \haughtiness, he should not decide that from now on, he will no longer have any *gaavah*. Instead, he should do as follows: If in the past he has been doing certain actions that stems from his *gaavah*, he should stop doing those actions. For this, he can accept upon himself that for five times a day, he will not do those actions he was used to doing which spurred on his *gaavah*. He should keep doing this until he totally stops doing those actions which he did out of his *gaavah*.

The goal of this, however, is not just to get rid of the haughty actions; the inner goal here is to try to uproot the will to be haughty in the first place (by avoiding the actions that spur it on). When a person only focuses on abstaining from haughty actions - but he's not trying to get rid of his *gaavah* - then he is acting like the "fake humble ones" described in sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*, who merely act humble on the outside, but deep down, are full of *gaavah*.

We want to uproot the very *ratzon* for having *gaavah*. But we cannot do this by simply trying to uproot the *ratzon*. In order to do it, we have to stop doing the actions which spur on the *gaavah*, with the underlying intention that we are trying to uproot the *ratzon* for *gaavah*, in the process.

So although we are trying to get rid of the very *ratzon* for *gaavah*, we cannot do this by attacking the evil *ratzon* head-on. We need to work with the garments of the evil *ratzon* (which are the actions, words or thoughts that are spurring on the *ratzon*), not the actual evil *ratzon*. As we do those actions, our motivation should be not just to improve our actions, but to get rid of the evil *ratzon* behind it.

In this example we gave - working to uproot the *ratzon* for *gaavah* - the person should not think that he's trying to stop doing actions of *gaavah*, but that he's trying to stop his *ratzon* for *gaavah* from getting out of hand. This has to be the mentality as he refrains from *gaavah*-oriented actions: "My *ratzon* for *gaavah* is making me act a certain way, and by refraining from those actions, I am preventing my *ratzon* for *gaavah* from getting out of hand."

Going Upwards

Usually, when a person is involved in self-improvement, he has to begin with improving first his actions, before he begins to work on improving the speech and the thoughts. This is because speech and thoughts are higher abilities than our actions, and generally the *avodah* of a person is to work his way upwards ("*m'lisata l'leila* - to "go from below to above").

For example, we gave the example of a person who wants to get rid of his *gaavah*. A person's *gaavah* manifests itself in all three layers of the soul – in the actions, in the speech, and in the thoughts. A person thinks about *gaavah*, so he has *gaavah* in his thoughts. A person also talks in a manner of *gaavah* – even though he doesn't realize it. A person acts with *gaavah* – his whole expression is giving off the impression of *gaavah*.

Which area should he work on first – action, speech or thought? The sensible approach is to start from the outermost soul layer, which are the actions, and eventually get to the innermost soul layer, which are the thoughts. You can't go straight to working on the root – you have to begin further from the root, and then eventually make your way towards the root as you progress. So one needs to start working on the actions he does out of *gaavah*, and then he should progress to working on the words he speaks out of *gaavah*. After that, he can work to get rid of his thoughts of *gaavah*. But he must go in this order, working his way from the bottom up.

If someone understands his soul a bit, he knows quite well that it's a harder to fight for control over one's thoughts than to control how one talks, and it's harder to control how one talks than to control how to act.

Why?

It is because the battle here is not about what to “think” and what not to think, what to “say” and what not to say, and what to “do” and what not to do. It is about gaining control of the evil *ratzon* behind all of this, to stop it from spreading out any further. If the evil *ratzon* has spread all the way until it is affecting one's actions, then to work on uprooting the evil thoughts is not sensible, because it has spread much further than that. It has spread all the way to how one acts. You can't attack the problem closer to its root – it's much more difficult to deal with. That's why one needs to first work on improving the actions, and only after to progress his way towards working on improving his speech and then his thoughts.

There are some rare individuals who can work first on attacking the problem at its root, but this is not the simple approach, and thus it will work for most people. Most people do not have such a powerful, holy *ratzon* to be able to attack their evil thoughts with.

Sometimes, there are situations in which a person is able to uproot even his evil thoughts right away. This only happens rarely, and it is not a daily feat. As proof to this, people have a hard time concentrating during *Shemoneh Esrei*, and their thoughts are everywhere at once; people try to fight these thoughts, only to be unsuccessful. There is almost no one who can control his thoughts so well.

Therefore, it is not recommended to begin with uprooting evil thoughts. We must begin with improving the actions, and then progress to improving how we speak, and after that to improving on how we think. All of this has to be done as a step-by-step process, with the intention that we are trying to get rid of the evil *ratzon* behind them – as we mentioned before.

First Uproot The Incorrect Way of Thinking

We will now mention another very important point.

We have said that it is not recommended to begin with working on thoughts. There are two factors to this: the way of thinking that a person has, and the various fleeting thoughts that goes through a person's mind. They can each present a different problem.

What we have been discussing so far are random, passing evil thoughts. But there is another kind of problem we haven't discussed, and it is a much deeper problem. This is when one has certain evil way

of thinking which he usually sticks to – when he has formed for himself certain learned beliefs which are erroneous.

In the case of *gaavah* we discussed until now, we mentioned someone who has passing thoughts of *gaavah*. But there is another kind of *baal gaavah*, and that is someone who thinks that there's nothing wrong with being a *baal gaavah* in the first place! Such a person thinks: "It's healthy for my confidence to be a *baal gaavah*! I am truly special..."

If that is his *hashkafah* (way of thought), then his very thinking patterns are wrong, and this needs to be corrected – before he begins to try getting rid of *gaavah*-oriented thoughts.

The previous kind of problem we discussed before this was a simpler problem to deal with. This is a person who knows in his mind that *gaavah* is a bad *middah*, and he knows all the sources in *sefarim* that say that *gaavah* is bad; but he still struggles with it, and he tries to work on uprooting his *gaavah*-oriented thoughts. This kind of a person, as we said, needs to begin by working first on improving his *gaavah*-oriented actions, and only after that to work on his *gaavah* thoughts.

But this method cannot help someone who has set in his mind that there's nothing wrong with *gaavah*. His very way of thinking is misguided, and his problem is deeper.

If such a person wants to work on himself, before he begins to improve his actions, he needs to get rid of his erroneous mindset. His very way of thought, his "*tavnis hamachshavah*", must be improved first. After he realizes that his way of thinking was wrong, he can then begin to improve his actions, speech, and thoughts.

If a person wants to get rid of his *gaavah*, he cannot begin to improve himself at all if he still thinks in the back of his mind that there's nothing wrong with being a *baal gaavah*. He should not even attempt to improve his actions, because it won't help. He has to get rid of his very way of thinking and realize that he's mistaken.

Different Souls Need Different Methods

To finish up, we must emphasize an important point.

There is a very good chance that everything that was said in this sefer isn't feasible for some people to try to implement. This is due to the fact that the matters here aren't meant for every soul to practice.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of people. There are souls who are more action-rooted. There are souls that are more emotional and focus less on action, and then there is a third group of souls which are more the thinking, analytical type. (There are other souls who are none of the above, but they are extremely rare.)

If someone has a soul that is more rooted in action than in emotion or thought, he will have a hard time coming to terms with what has been said in this sefer, because since he identifies with the action more than with what's behind an action, he's not so motivated to understand the inner depth behind an action, and he doesn't see this as a necessity.

What we have been discussing in this sefer is how to uproot the evil motivations that are behind an act, and this is all about uncovering the inner depth behind our actions. It was mainly about uprooting the *ratzon* behind the action – that by improving our actions, we are able to come to weaken the evil motivations behind them. This is a difficult point to understand for someone who is more action-oriented, because he sees everything in terms of how to act, not in what's behind the act.

Therefore, this sefer is only for a more internal kind of person, who sees beyond action. If an action-oriented person tries to implement the words of this sefer, he will not really feel the need to work on these matters, and even if he thinks about them, it will be just be only superficially.

Not only that, but the truth is that this sefer has presented many different ways on how to work on our *ratzon*, and there is no one way that is for everybody. Each person will have to figure out if the words here in this sefer are meant for him to work on.

This is not only true when it comes to working on our *ratzon*, but it applies to working on any area of Avodas Hashem. There are always many possible approaches on how to improve. The inner point of all of them, however, always remains the same; it is just that there are many approaches to get to that inner point.

Therefore, if there are words here which do not speak to the heart of the reader, it doesn't mean anything is wrong with you, and it doesn't mean that you're not motivated to improve. It is simply that the paths delineated in this sefer are not any of the paths that are meant for you to take. If your soul feels that these words do not speak to you, often this can indeed be the case.

May Hashem help all of us merit to do his Will, throughout all our life.

[\[1\]](#) *Sefer HaChinuch*

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