



KI SAVO THE POWER OF BEGINNINGS

Giving Away Of Our "First" To Hashem

In Parashas Ki Savo, the Torah writes of the commandment to give bikkurim, a tithe of the first crop of fruits, to go to the Kohen.

Besides for bikkurim, where we give away the first of our crops for Hashem, the concept of giving away our first portion to Hashem is also found with all kinds of creations: non-living objects, plants, animals, and even people. We give away the "first" of our non-living objects to Hashem when we separate the first dough of challah. We give away the "first" of our crops to Hashem with the mitzvah of bikkurim. We give away the "first" of our animals to Hashem with the mitzvah of peter chamor, redeeming the firstborn male donkey. And we give away our "first" son to Hashem by sanctifying him with the status of bechor.

Thus, there is a concept of giving away our "beginnings" to Hashem, when it comes to all four kinds of creations: in inanimate objects, in plants, in animals, and in people. This needs understanding: Why, indeed, must we give away our "beginnings" to Hashem?

"Raishis" – Our Bond With Hashem Through Beginnings

The Jewish people are called "bni, bechori", "My son, my firstborn"¹. We have the status of a "firstborn child" of Hashem, so to speak. We are also called "children of Hashem", and Hashem is called "our Father". This sets us apart from the gentile nations of the world, but even more so, it gives us the status of firstborn, which means that we are the very "beginning" that stems from Hashem.

The words of Rashi in the beginning of the Torah are well-known: "The world was created for the sake of the Torah, which is called the "raishis" (the beginning); for the sake of Yisrael, who are called "raishis" (the beginning)." The Jewish people are, in essence, a "raishis" – a beginning. Our bond with Hashem is through the Torah, which is called "raishis".

1 Shemos 4:22

Hashem is the ultimate Raishis (Beginning) of all beginnings. It is written, "I am first, and I am the last."² The depth of why we give away our beginnings to Hashem is because since the purpose of Creation is to bond with Hashem, we are meant to reveal the beginning behind each thing and then give it away to Hashem. This connects us to Hashem, Who is called the "raishis." The Torah is called "raishis", Yisrael is called "raishis", and Hashem is the "raishis" of everything. When we give of our "raishis" to Hashem, it is because this is how we bond with Hashem through the aspect of "raishis".

On a deeper note, each raishis that we come across in creation is like a form of prophecy, reminding us that Hashem is the true raishis. By giving away all our beginnings to Hashem, we reveal how only Hashem is the true raishis, for all the beginnings must ultimately go to Him.

Besides for the tithes of bikkurim, challah, peter chamor and bechor, the concept of raishis (beginnings) expands into deeper ramifications. In everything that a person does, he is meant to give away its raishis to Hashem. The more a person is giving away the raishis of each thing he is involved with, the more it can connect him to Hashem.

Although we need to reach the level of emulating Hashem in all aspects of life (as it is written, "In all your ways, know Him"³), that can only come at the "end" of our avodah - we are not yet at that level where we are at the beginning. At the beginning of our avodah, we need to give away the beginning of each thing for Hashem. Let us give a few examples of this concept, so that this matter can be made clearer.

1 – The Beginning of the Day Every day when we wake up in the morning, we begin our day. What does our very first moment of waking up look like?

After we arise, we wash our hands, but at the very moment we awake, the halachah is that one should not jump out of bed quickly, because this is dangerous to the spine;

2 Yeshayah 44:6

3 Mishlei 3:6

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one is supposed to wait a little bit and then arise. What does one do during those few seconds where he must wait before arising? He says Modeh Ani. But there is also a point that we can start with even before Modeh Ani: one can make sure to give away his very first thought of the day to Hashem, by thinking of Hashem.

Understandably, there is difficulty with this. As soon as one wakes up, one is still sleepy, and the mind is not 100% present yet. But the more a person has purified his being and is becoming aware of his inner state, he can try to give away his first thoughts to Hashem. As soon as one wakes up and feels even minimally aware that he has awoken, he can devote his first thoughts (or at least the very first thought after he feels totally awake and conscious) to Hashem.

This is how we can give away the beginning of our day to Hashem. If we make sure to fill our very first thought of the day with a thought of emunah peshutah (simple, unquestioning belief) towards Hashem, and from this state of emunah peshutah we recite “Modeh Ani”, we have made our first thought of the day into a thought of emunah peshutah.

This is not referring to an intellectual kind of thought about emunah, but to a sense and palpable feeling of emunah. Of course, this is not the time to work on acquiring emunah; you have other times of the day to work on this. But the very first thought of your day can still be a thought about simple, palpable emunah; each person on his own level.

This is how we give away a begin-

ning to Hashem. When we begin our day like this, there is a rule that “the body is dragged after the head”⁴ – the rest of the day will mimic this lofty beginning that the day has started out with. When you start the day off right like this, the rest of the day will resemble this good and holy beginning. (The same is true for the opposite situation – if a person begins the day with an evil thought, chas v’shalom, the rest of the day will also be negatively affected by this).

The more a person has dedicated the “raishis” of his day for Hashem, by beginning each day with a thought about emunah peshutah, naturally the rest of the day will follow this beginning, and he will be more easily led to Hashem and to His Torah.

Thus, a simple way to reveal the power of “raishis” in our daily schedule, is that as soon as we become aware upon awakening in the morning, we can slowly train ourselves (and not through pressure) to steer our thoughts in a direction of emunah peshutah. This begins our day with emunah peshutah, and the rest of the day will follow suit; we have given away the beginning of the day to Hashem.

2 – The Beginning of Our Davening

We also have another opportunity to reveal the power of raishis in our day and give it away to Hashem.

When it comes to davening, we know that it is very difficult to concentrate for the entire davening. Almost nobody can concentrate for the entire davening; if someone can, this is a gift from Heaven, which is reached

through much exertion. Which area of davening should we mainly work on to improve our concentration?

The two parts of davening which mainly require concentration are Shema (especially the first part of Shema) and the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei. When our heart feels open, we can concentrate on other parts of davening besides for Shema and Shemoneh Esrei, but when we try to concentrate on parts of davening that our heart isn’t that open towards, or when we try to concentrate on the rest of davening when our heart generally feels closed, it is a very difficult avodah; it can be done of course, but it is very hard to do.

There is a much simpler kind of concentration which is closer to home, especially in our current generation where people feel bombarded and it is hard to concentrate on davening: Take the parts of davening where your heart already feels open towards, and try concentrating on those parts. That is one piece of advice to improve concentration.

However, there is another method to work on concentration: try concentrating on just the beginning of the davening. Many times a person arrives to davening and is frazzled and anxious. He rushes though davening to keep up with the minyan, and there are other factors as well which deter his concentration during davening. When the beginning of davening is rushed, the rest of the davening will also be rushed. The advice for this is to make sure that one starts off the beginning of davening correctly, with concentration.

⁴ Eruvin 41a

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Begin davening with the awareness that you stand before Hashem and that you are talking to Hashem. When you begin davening with this concentration, there is a good chance that the rest of davening will also be with concentration.

3 - Beginning Our Torah Learning

The same is true for our Torah learning. When one opens his Gemara at the beginning of his learning session, he can also devote this beginning to Hashem, by thinking that he is about to learn the Torah of Hashem and that he is becoming connected to Hashem, as the Nefesh HaChaim says to do.⁵ Besides for making sure to refrain from chatting with others and to only speak words of Torah, even more so, this beginning should be about putting our heart into our Torah learning.

When one gives away the first 15, 20, or 25 minutes of his Torah learning to Hashem like this, not only does he avoid idle speech while he is learning Torah and fulfills the mitzvah of speaking in Torah, but he gives his entire mind and heart to the Torah, which will help him in understanding his learning. Even more so, this practice enables a person to begin his Torah learning with a spark of lishmah; to learn Torah for the sake of Torah, to learn Torah because it is the will of Hashem, to learn Torah in order to be bound with Hashem – as the Nefesh HaChaim says.

We cannot always be on this level, but we can at least make the beginning of our Torah learning, lishmah. This will be a purer kind of Torah learning, and it will be a whole different kind of

learning after that.

Without a doubt, a person who tries this practice each day before he learns will see a different kind of learning. The rest of the day will follow the way it has begun. If the beginning is done right and it has been devoted to Hashem, the light of the Torah will begin to shine upon the person during this “lishmah” time. He will be affected by this for the rest of the day, even when he is not consciously thinking of Hashem.

When a person gets used to beginning his learning like this each day, it will certainly transform his learning.

In Summary: Beginning From A Purer Place In Ourselves

All that we have said here are not merely superficial resolutions to take on. It is not just about accepting upon yourself that each day when you wake up you will think about Hashem. It is not only about accepting upon yourself that each day you will concentrate on the beginning of Shema and Shemoneh Esrei and it is not just about accepting upon yourself to begin your learning each day with an intention of learning Torah lishmah. Rather, these should be viewed as practices which slowly help us go deeper and deeper into our soul, training us to begin from a purer place in ourselves.

We have given three examples of how we can begin from a purer place in ourselves: How we can begin the day when we wake up, how we can begin our davening, and how we can begin our Torah learning (which is the main avodah we have throughout the day). By getting used to these three practices, we slowly train ourselves to

start to do each thing from a purer, truer place in our soul.

It will slowly spread into the rest of the day as well; we will find that we are reciting Bircas HaMazon from a truer place in ourselves, because we will have acquired an importance for each beginning.

Concentration When Reciting Selichos

Getting used to this will also help us through the days of Selichos, where it is difficult to concentrate throughout all of the Selichos every day.

Usually people do not know what the words mean, and even when we do know what we are saying, it is hard to concentrate so much and put our hearts into the Selichos. The truth is that the prayers of Selichos are above our normal level; it is way above the level that most people can handle. So what are we to do? Usually on the first day of Selichos there is a lot of inspiration, and it is easier to concentrate. But for the rest of the days of Selichos, how can we keep concentrating on the words we are saying?

We will need more than inspiration; we need a certain da'as (a mature perspective) in order to approach it. We need to remain with our aspiration to concentrate on all of it, even though we aren't actually on the level of concentrating for the entire time. We can make sure to at least utilize the beginning of the Selichos: by trying to concentrate on the very beginning of the Selichos. That much, we can all do. In this way, we give away the “beginning” of all our Selichos to Hashem.

This is not an attempt to inspire ourselves – it is rather stemming from inner clarity that all beginnings need

⁵ See Nefesh HaChaim shaar daled

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to be devoted towards Hashem.

Training Ourselves To Put Our Heart Into The Mitzvos This perspective, when we reflect on it, causes a deep change in one's entire soul. Many times people enter a matter without reflecting on it, and it is done without preparation and without any thought. The inner way to live is to enter all that we do with reflection and thought beforehand.

The Nefesh HaChaim says that before one begins to learn Torah, one should awaken oneself to have fear of Hashem and to do teshuvah. This is not only talking about Elul and the ten days of repentance – it is referring to every day of the year. Before a person is about to learn Torah, he needs to gather his thoughts and think about Hashem. It is because one needs to enter a matter after having reflected on it, where his mind is settled, as opposed to throwing ourselves into it when we are frazzled, or from acting by rote.

The more a person trains himself to utilize the “beginning” of his deeds - by reflecting on what he is about to do and he puts his mind and heart into it - everything will look different. It changes the entire quality of one's life. It is a slow process where we train ourselves to get used to this entirely different way of thinking, and it transforms our entire day.

Preparing For The Power of 'Beginning' We are approaching Rosh HaShanah, which is a new beginning of a new year. We are given 30 days of Elul to prepare for R"H: we can see from this how important the power of beginnings are, for we are given a full month to prepare just for this beginning.

We do not find so much preparation when it comes to other matters. Preparing to receive the Torah took three days. However, we do not find a concept of preparation when it comes to Sukkos, Chanukah, Purim, Pesach, or Pesach. When we are used to devoting our beginning of our mitzvos to Hashem throughout the rest of the year, we are then even more prepared for Rosh HaShanah, which is the beginning of the entire year; and then we will be able to give this beginning to Hashem.

The Depth of "Malchiyos" on R"H Rosh HaShanah contains two aspects – it is the Yom HaDin (day of judgment), and it is also the day of “malchiyos”: declaring Hashem as King. Now we can have a greater understanding of malchiyos on Rosh HaShanah: it is to declare Him as the Beginning of all beginnings.

This aspect of Rosh HaShanah is unique only to the Jewish people, who declare Hashem as King on Rosh HaShanah. The nations of the world have a status of servants, who are forced to serve the King (as the Vilna Gaon writes), whereas the Jewish people willingly accept upon themselves Hashem as King.

This is the power of “raishis” that is only in the Jewish people: on the very first day of the year, which is the beginning of beginnings, we declare Who the real Beginning of all beginnings is: Hashem. To prepare for this, we need 30 days of Elul. We prepare in Elul to declare Who the very “Raishis” of the world is, and this is essentially the “malchiyos” of Rosh HaShanah.

By devoting our raishis throughout

the year to Hashem, we can better relate to the malchiyos of Rosh HaShanah. If one is not used to giving of his raishis to Hashem during the rest of the year when he does the mitzvos, his declaration of malchiyos on Rosh HaShanah essentially begins and ends with Rosh HaShanah.

Thus, the depth of the concept of “malchiyos” is to give our “raishis” to Hashem. When we become used to giving our raishis to Hashem during the rest of the year before we approach our mitzvos, our declaration of malchiyos on Rosh HaShanah will be a revelation of the ultimate Raishis to us.

Practically Applying This Concept If one attempts to give away the beginnings of all of his mitzvos at once to Hashem, this is not realistic; instead, one should try devoting the beginning of some of his mitzvos to Hashem as explained here; by starting off the act with a thought about Hashem.

In this way, we enter our mitzvos with some preparation beforehand, as opposed to just falling into it thoughtlessly; and then the quality of our mitzvos will change over totally, for the better.

In Conclusion May we merit to have true preparation for Rosh HaShanah, which reveals the Beginning of all beginnings, and to declare Hashem as King – For He is the First, and He is the last; and may it be revealed to the world that Hashem is the Beginning of all, when all of the world will willingly accept upon themselves His malchus.

[from BILVAVI ON THE PARSHAH]

Summary: In the previous chapter, it was explained that the world of action is perceived of as an absolute reality, whereas the inner world is usually not perceived of as a reality, and thus there is a difficulty in entering the inner world. Besides for this factor, there is an additional difficulty in entering the inner world. The inner world is a world of faculties of the soul which are more hidden than the world of action. The world of action is the physical world that we see in front of us, and we are familiar with the world of action and we know how to use it, more or less. Our five physical senses help us connect with anything on this world. But the inner world is a world of faculties of the soul, which our physical senses cannot aid us in. Since there is difficulty with recognizing the inner world, there is difficulty in entering it. Therefore, in order to enter it, we must learn to recognize it well, and the clearer we recognize this inner world, the more precisely we can enter it.

THE CRAFT OF BUILDING OUR INNER WORLD

The inner world – which is our soul – is a complete structure with many ‘floors’ to it. Each ‘floor’ is a world unto itself, with rules and parts to it. Working with our inner world is a skill of building, which is comprised of steps, one after the other. When a person wishes to construct an apartment building, he first needs to know what kind of building he wishes to build and he needs the money to do it, and then he needs to buy land for it, etc. He has to oversee the process from beginning until end. Then he needs to get a permit to build, and finally after all these preparations, he needs to bring workers and buy the materials to build with, and it will involve a step-by-step plan. Only after the building is complete can there be an appropriate living residence for people to come live in, as he wishes.

The soul is a structure, and entering it and working with its faculties requires a lot of preparations, as

well as actual work, building it in gradual stages. For this reason, Torah scholars are called builders. They build the world in the collective sense, and they build the soul in particular. The soul is called a “complete world”. The Gemara says that Torah scholars are called “builders”, because for all of their life they are building the world.¹

The truth is that there’s a big difference between a physical building and the building of the soul. If a physical structure never gets built, it doesn’t exist. It has to get built, from beginning until end, and then it exists as a building. But our soul is always in existence, and it is already built and developed to a certain degree. In the physical world of action, in order for there to be a building, it must get built. But in the inner world, nothing has to get “done”, because it already exists and everything is already made (so to speak). The inner world consists of soul-faculties that already exist, and a person does not have to “make” these abilities.

What, then, does it mean to build and develop our inner world? The answer is very fundamental. We must know that whenever we are clarifying a topic, there is a perspective that comes from the world of action and a perspective that comes from the inner world, and the two perspectives are fundamentally different. From the view of the world of action, we see an action and that is the main aspect of what we want to clarify. But through the view of the inner world, we see the **fundamental definition** of something, and we will see it as the main aspect in something.

From the view of the world of action, the subject of building the soul means to that we need to do certain actions to build the soul, which would essentially mean that we would be building something that wasn’t around before. But from the view of the inner world, we are looking to give a fundamental definition to it, and what we see is

¹ Talmud Bavli Shabbos 114a

not a physical structure built through action, rather it is the work of combining together parts, and continuing the work of building the soul (as will be explained in the coming lines).

Building the inner world means combining parts together, organizing and unifying together the faculties of the soul, and bringing them to a situation where it is all one complete structure. To clarify a bit, it is not we who are actually building our souls. Hashem is the One Who built our souls, so it is not our task to build our souls from beginning until end. Rather, **Hashem has left it up to us to be His partners, as it were, and continue the building process. He already built the structure, and we have to continue the building by combining together the soul's parts.** Continuing the work of building our soul takes an entire lifetime, and it even continues into the next world: "Torah scholars have no serenity, not in this world and not in the next."²

ORGANIZING OUR SOUL

When a person reads or hears topics that are relevant to his internal world, usually he has no order and structure of the concepts, and instead all the information is scattered. Even when he is trying to build certain parts of his soul better, he doesn't see how one part of his soul connects with another part, and instead builds each part separately. The parts never become combined together into one complete structure. The truth is that even the parts which he will try to build cannot be built completely, since they have not gone through the proper steps.

Certainly there is a benefit to work with our souls even in if it's not done in organized way, but in order to build the soul into one complete structure that is well-organized, all of the parts of the soul which one is working have to be connected

together, each in its proper place.

For example, if we wish to build a structure, we first bring all the materials that will be needed for the site – the stones, beams, glue, paint, etc. We also bring the building tools – the hammers, nails, ladders, etc. It is certainly beneficial to bring all these materials and tools to the site, but that won't be enough. We can't only rely on the workers to build it – we will need a contractor and architect. In order to combine together all the materials, each thing will have to go in its proper place, and in the proper order, step after step.

This serves as an analogy to building our souls. All the parts of the soul which one recognizes or which he is working hard to repair, are able to serve as the materials needed to build the soul. But a person will still have to organize it all and connect it together, from the first step until the last step. Hashem already built the first part of our soul, and the truth is that He finishes its structure as well. "It is not upon you to finish the task."

But in the interim of the beginning and end of our soul's development, it is we who are given the task to combine together all our parts and add to the structure which we started out with. That is our job, and "you are not free to be exempt from it." Any part of the soul which we recognize or which we are working to repair needs to be connected to its proper place within the collective work of building our soul. Hashem will be the One to finish building our souls, when He brings the third Beis HaMikdash, as a complete structure that will descend from Heaven, may it come speedily in our days.

RECOGNIZING THE STRUCTURE TO PLACE THE PARTS

A person who tries to combine all the parts of his soul and add to the soul's structure without recognizing the design of how the structure is supposed to look, is like a person who tries to put away items without knowing where they belong.

² Talmud Bavli Berachos 64a

If he walks into his house with many groceries and he puts away the milk in the dresser, the cookies in the washing machine, the flour in the bathtub, the detergent in the freezer, or if he has bought appliances and he places the fridge in the bathroom and the sofa in the kitchen- although he has put away each item, none of them have been put into their proper places.

Since the external world covers over the internal world and hides it, we don't recognize the way to build our internal world, and therefore one is very likely to misplace all of his parts. In order to know the appropriate place for each concept and inner work, and to connect all the parts into one complete structure that will look nice, we first need to recognize well the general structure of the internal world.

Then we can know where to apply each concept, where each part belongs, and then we can see one complete structure that's nice and organized.

THE WORLD OF ACTION AS A DISPARATE VIEW

One of the main factors that causes one to perceive his soul-abilities as disparate from each other and unorganized is due to the perspective that comes from the "world of action" which we live on. Chazal also call it the *alma d'piruda*, "world of separation". When a person lives with the perspective that comes from the world of action, he becomes connected to a perspective that can only see disparate parts from each other, where he can only see each thing separately and where he does not see Creation as one complete structure.

For example, a person may be familiar with many topics that are relevant to the internal world, yet he doesn't see all these topics as part of one structure. Instead, he sees each topic by itself. He might have even learned mussar and heard lectures on the topic, and he is very familiar with

topics like *ahavas Hashem*, *yiras Hashem*, *tikkun hamiddos*, the *nefesh*, *zerizus*, *simchah*, and many other topics. But each topic to him is separate from the others, and he doesn't see a connection between all of these topics, what order to work in, and where to 'place' each topic.

Since he doesn't see an order or unity here, he does not see a structure. He thinks that each part stands as its own subject, and that each part can be worked on separately: I need to learn how to love Hashem, and I also need to learn how to fear Hashem, I need to fix all the *middos*, I need to recognize the soul's abilities, I need to work on *zerizus*, and I need to be *b'simchah* all day, etc. None of these topics are connected, in his perspective. It then becomes very hard for him to work with his internal world. This is because he is trying to work with the internal world – which is really a unified world – with a perspective that comes from the world of action, a perspective of keep everything separate from each other.

In contrast, when one enters into a process of building the soul with the proper perspective on it, he discovers how all the topics unify with each other. The deeper he enters into the layers of his soul, the greater unity he can reveal between all the parts of any soul layer. The innermost layer is where there are no divided parts at all, only one part – a "*Yechidah* to declare Your Oneness."³

One needs to understand and internalize that the internal world is one structure, but it is currently a shaky structure because one hasn't developed it yet, and one's work is to combine together all his parts and give order and unity to them, thereby becoming a "partner with Hashem" in building his soul.

to be continued next week- A Sefer That Builds You - The Mesillas Yesharim

³ Recited in Hoshanos

ספרי הרב המחבר שנדפסו עד כה

- בלבבי משכן אבנה – סט ה' כרכים
- בלבבי משכן אבנה – א-ב
- דע את ביתך
- דע את גאולתך
- דע את דמיוןך
- דע את הרגשותיך
- דע את הויתך
- דע את ילדיך
- דע את מידותיך – יסוד העפר
- דע את מחשבותיך
- דע את מנוחתך
- דע את נפשך
- דע את נשמתך
- דע את עצמך
- התבודדות
- הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש
- ספר בעל שם טוב עם פירוש בלבבי משכן אבנה
- ספר להב אש
- נפש החיים – שער ד'
- ספר מסילת ישראלים – 3 כרכים
- מועדי השנה – ב' כרכים
- ספר עולם ברור
- פרקי יסוד
- שאל לבי (שו"ת תשע"ח-ט)
- תיקון כח הריכוז
- תיקון כח התאוה
- Bilvavi on the Holy Days
- Bilvavi Parsha Bereishis-Shemos
- Bilvavi Parsha Vayikra-Devarim
- Bilvavi on the Path
- Building a Sanctuary in the Heart Part One & Part Two
- Gateways To Hashem For Today's Jewish Woman
- Getting to Know Your Feelings
- Getting to Know Your Home
- Getting to Love Your People
- Getting to Know Your Redemption
- Getting to Know Your Self
- Getting to Know Your Soul

אזל

- ספר קל"ח פתחי חכמה פתחים א-ד
- ספר קל"ח פתחי חכמה פתחים ה-יז
- פתחי שערים נתיב הצמצום
- פתחי שערים נתיב עיגולים ויושר
- פתחי שערים נתיב אורות אח"פ דא"ק
- ספר הקדמות רחובות הנהר חלק א
- ספר עץ חיים שערים א-ג
- על התורה – פרשיות תשס"ו
- תורת הרמז – פרשיות חומש
- ספר דרך ה' עם פירוש
- שבת קודש – הכנה לשבת קודש
- בלבבי משכן אבנה – ח"א אידיש
- Un Santuario en mi Corazon
- J'edifierai un Sanctuaire dans mon Coeur
- В сердце моем Святилище воздвигну