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## **Bilvavi Part 4 - Chapter 03 The Importance of Reflection**

### ***There Must Be A Basis***

As we approach Avodas Hashem, we first have to know where to begin. What is the basis that all these matters stand upon?

We cannot skip over this basis. If someone lacks the patience to build the basis, he won't be able to develop himself either, and he definitely will not gain from anything here.

### ***The Ramchal's Amazing Advice***

What is the basis that all of our Avodas Hashem stands upon?

We will quote the words of the Ramchal (*sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) and then explain them: "The general rule is that if a person doesn't think about this, it will be very difficult to reach perfection, but if one thinks about it, he is very close to perfection."

In other words, there is basic point here, and if someone doesn't use it, it will be very difficult for him to reach perfection. This is very clear.

It is hard to understand how one can run away from this advice of the Ramchal. The Ramchal himself is testifying that one should think about this advice and use it. This can bring a person "very" close to perfection, as the Ramchal puts it so exactly. Without making use of this advice he is about to say, one is very far from Hashem.

Anyone who is involved with inner Avodas Hashem knows that it is impossible to see any growth without this advice from the Ramchal. Anyone who searches for the truth knows how important it is. If someone doesn't appreciate it, then he needs to learn how to want this truth.

What is that advice?

*"A person goes by so many years of his life thinking about all kinds of things. Why can't he think at least an hour a day about who he is and why he came onto this world, and what Hashem wants from him? And what will be with his end? This is the greatest remedy against the yetzer hora. It is easy to do, and its results are tremendous. A person, every day, should empty out all his thoughts for an hour a day."*

The Ramchal stresses that this is easy to do, as opposed to the mistaken notion that it's too hard.

During this time, a person should empty out his thoughts – he shouldn't think of his family, and he shouldn't talk on the phone. He should be totally alone. Of course, a person is never truly alone, because Hashem is always here.

What should a person do during this time? The Ramchal continues: *"He should think about this that I have said. He should ask himself in his heart, "What did the forefathers do that they became so desired by Hashem? What did Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech do, and all the great leaders who came before me?"*

The Ramchal then quotes the Zohar, who says that it is indeed hard to find someone who sets aside an hour each day to reflect. But the Ramchal is teaching us that if we want to have the fundamental to succeed, we must be prepared to do this every day.

### **Deciding To Practice This**

Before we explain more in detail how to go about this, we must know that if we seek truth, we must decide, *bli neder* (without accepting a vow) that we will practice it. If not, we are fooling ourselves.

A person might learn advice from this sefer and that sefer, but he will never get anywhere if he never decides to practice any of it. There are all kinds of good advice in the sefarim, and they are all true, but they do not help a person if a person doesn't decide he will practice them.

Thus, each person should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) with Hashem and decide that he wants to serve Hashem, or else everything here is just a waste of words. If a person truly has a will to change, he shouldn't push it off for three or four months and then do it – he should do it now, *bli neder*! A person needs to decide that *bli neder*, he will set aside an hour each day for reflection.

The truth is that we are all very busy. That is the way it is with people. But this is our test – if we will set aside time every day, or not. This is the basis to connect to Hashem! Even a thousand inspiring lectures or all the *sefarim* in the world won't help you grow unless you have this time you set aside every day to reflect.

Even after you decide you will do this, know that all beginnings are hard. It will be hard at first. If you fail, don't fall apart; instead seek other advice that will help you keep to this reflection time. If you lose one day, don't give up, and try again tomorrow.

Know that in order to live an internal kind of life, your soul depends on this hour of reflection every day. Ask advice from others about how you can keep to it, but one thing is clear: realize how important it is.

### **What to Do During This Time**

Now we will explain what to do during this time. Each person has his own way of doing things, and we cannot give a formula for everyone. But we can give general rules, and each person can find his unique way.

The Ramchal has already said what to do: that a person should think, "What did the forefathers do?" Before this, he also wrote, "He should think what his purpose is, and for what he was created for." We all know what a person was created for: to bask in the pleasure of Hashem, as the Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*. If so, it should be very clear to a person that the one thing we seek in our life is: closeness to Hashem.

The problem is that our heart is full of various desires. *"For the heart of man is evil from his youth."*

The bad middos of jealousy, desire and seeking honor remove a person from the world - they remove a person from the true desires of a person, which is to be close to Hashem.

When a person has an hour each day to reflect in solitude, he can realize during this time that his purpose is to become close to Hashem. He can then begin to beseech Hashem that He help him want this. Although on a deep note, every Jew wants to be close to Hashem, this will isn't so revealed by people.

A person daven to Hashem, saying: *"Ribono Shel Olam, I know that the truth is that the purpose of this world is to become close to You. But I feel that I have other desires than this. Please help me and direct me on the right path."*

The more a person builds himself up, the more time he will find that he is able to spend with talking to Hashem. He will find that he has an hour, even two hours a day, to talk to Hashem. If someone is already practicing this, he doesn't need to be guided more. He has already built up his ability to speak with Hashem.

The words here are meant for those people who aren't yet used to this, and they are trying to get used to it. What a person should do is lock the doors, take his mind off everything, and begin to speak with Hashem, in the way we have said. He can say, *"Ribono shel Olam, help me desire the truth. I know the truth, but I don't feel it."* A person should continuously beg Hashem as much as he can for this.

After five or ten minutes pass like this, a person will probably lose the energy to continue. The truth is that all beginnings are hard. A person can take a break for a few moments and say to Hashem, *"Ribono shel Olam, my true desire is to daven to You, but it is hard for me, so I am resting for now."*

Then he can add on, *"To talk to You is too hard for me right now, so I will say Tehillim instead to awaken Your mercy on my behalf, that my prayers be accepted."* One can give tzedakah during this time.

After a few minutes he can close his Tehillim and begin again to talk to Hashem for another five minutes. He can keep repeating this cycle until the hour finishes. Although it might end up that he only spoke to Hashem for fifteen minutes in the hour he put aside, still, he has accomplished in that he has set aside an hour each day to try to become closer to Hashem.

A person should keep talking to Hashem from the depths of his heart, and if he can't do this, he should daven to Hashem that he should be able to express himself: *"Ribono Shel Olam, I know this is all true, and I know that I must beg You for this, but even this is hard for me. Help me that I should know how to daven to you as I should."*

The main thing is never to give up. Even if a person doesn't have energy to say Tehillim during this hour and he doesn't feel like talking to Hashem, he should at least sit during this hour and reflect. After five minutes, he should say to Hashem a few words: "I want to talk to You, but I don't have the energy. I will not budge from here, though, until I am given the strength I need. For this hour, I am sitting here."

All beginnings are hard, and if someone isn't used to this, it's even harder, but this is the first step for anyone who seeks the truth. If the Ramchal is telling us that this is the fundamental point of life, then this hour of reflection is the key to success. We have to be very stubborn about it, at any price.

### ***The Hour That is the Basis for the Rest of the Day***

This hour of reflection is not just an hour of the day to itself. It is the basis of the entire day, and from it a person should draw his energy for the rest of the day!

Throughout the day, it is very hard to be connected to Hashem all the time (unless a person is on a very high level). It is thus proper to at least have one hour a day of closeness to Hashem, which will serve as the basis for the rest of the day. It is a time each day to simply speak with Hashem, a time of solitude and yearning for the truth. Besides for the mitzvos we do each day, our davening each day, and saying Tehillim each day, a person needs one hour which is devoted to one thing alone: closeness to Hashem, a time in which a person feels that the “true good” on this world is to be close to Hashem.

Without this, a person will never really become close to Hashem.

Imagine if someone comes to us and says, “Fellow Jews! I have a piece of advice for you that will get you straight into Gan Eden, to Olam Haba, to truly be close to Hashem.” Wouldn’t we all run to listen to this advice? The Ramchal is telling us this advice! I am not the first person to tell you this.

The problem is that we have a *yetzer hora* who prevents us from keeping to it. That is the only way to explain how people can see these words of the Ramchal and not keep to it.

These words are not a lecture, nor are they ideas. Without a doubt, anyone who tries to practice it will encounter pressure from others not to do it. Hashem should help each person reach the truth and practice these words in his actual life, and discover that the true good is closeness to Hashem – as it is written, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is what is good.*”

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