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An Intense Ratzon: "Their Hearts Cried Out To Hashem"

The aspiration of every Jew should be as it says in the possuk, "*Their hearts cried out to Hashem.*" We need to have a strong, burning *ratzon* inside us so much until we get to a point in which our heart's emotions burst forth, crying out to Hashem.

There is an external kind of crying out to Hashem, as well as an internal kind of crying out to Hashem. The *sefarim hakedoshim* call the internal kind of crying to Hashem as "a quiet scream"^[1]. The soul has an inner kind of crying out to Hashem which is not always verbalized – it doesn't have to be.

In either kind of crying out to Hashem, the *ratzon* must always be very strong. The more a person merits to reveal his *ratzon* and gets it to become more active, the more success he will see – and the same goes for the opposite, *chas v'shalom*.

The avodah of revealing our *ratzon* takes a long amount of time – it is a vast job. If a person merits it, he can reach a level in which a minute or two never go by in which does doesn't feel an internal wish that demands more closeness to Hashem, to serve Him better. Even if a person never reaches this level, he must still try to develop a *ratzon* that is not only in his subconscious mind, but that it is more and more revealed out in the open. It shouldn't just remain a quiet *ratzon*.

If a person can fall asleep peacefully at night, his *ratzon* to serve Hashem better isn't active, because if it would be, it would give him no rest. Just like, *l'havdil*, a person can't fall asleep at night when he's in debt or when he's very worried about something, so should a person's *ratzon* to serve Hashem better keep him up at night. A person has to feel his *ratzon* inside demanding more and more levels of closeness to Hashem, and he needs to feel an intense *ratzon* to fulfill this yearning.

The ideal level of *ratzon* for a person to reach is that his *ratzon* is always active throughout the day. The problem is always when the *ratzon* isn't active every second, and then all those moments of a person's life get wasted.

If a person's *ratzon* has become more revealed, and he feels in himself a constant demand to always serve Hashem, then generally, such a *ratzon* will get fulfilled. It will be a true, satisfying feeling of fulfillment. The less a person feels his true *ratzon*, the less he will actualize the *ratzon*.

The avodah of having a constant *ratzon* is an amazing kind of avodah. In it lays the root to all success in Avodas Hashem, and the stronger a person develops his *ratzon* for more Avodas Hashem, the more barriers that come between him and Hashem will fall away, with ease.

Retzonos For Materialism Do Nothing For You

Let us diverge a bit and examine our *retzonos* for physical gains.

The Vilna Gaon taught that if someone stole, it was decreed in Heaven that he would get the item, but he still had free choice to decide *how* it will get to him.

This is a fundamental point: the inner layer of a matter is much deeper than how the matter seems on the outside. By the case of stealing, we would say that the item doesn't really belong to him, but in reality, it does, because he was supposed to get it somehow. It is just that the robber misuses his power of free will to get the item by stealing it.

This applies to *ratzon* as well. Even when a person fulfills his *ratzon*, it didn't happen because of his *ratzon*. It happened because Hashem willed it to happen. No matter how much of a *ratzon* he had, that's not what made it happen. Hashem had other ways how He can get the item to the person, and it didn't depend on what the person did to get it.

In other words, the *ratzon* of a person is not what's helping him. Just like we understand that a person who wants a million dollars is being unrealistic and his *ratzon* won't happen, so can we understand the opposite: that even when a person does fulfill his *ratzon*, his *ratzon* didn't make it happen. Whatever a person gained, he would have gotten it either way, through some other means that Hashem can do.

Any *ratzon* that a person has for the physical, even when it gets actualized, didn't do anything. A person has nothing from desiring the physical – nothing except a lot of pain. Whatever is coming to a person will come to him, and whatever isn't, won't.

If a person realizes this truthful fact, he will be able to detach from all his physical *retzonos*. Nobody will try to get something that's impossible for him to get.

One of the Ten Commandments is “*Do not covet.*” The *Ibn Ezra* asks: How is it possible to fulfill this commandment? Envy is an emotion. If I feel envious in my heart for someone else's item, how can I feel otherwise? The well-known answer, he writes, is because just like the pauper has no hope in ever marrying the princess, so can a person think that someone else's item is impossible from his reach (ethically speaking). When a person thinks like this, he is able to give up from trying to get what he's envious about.

The same is true with a *ratzon* (for the physical). If one is informed that he will never be able to fulfill a particular *ratzon*, he would stop wanting it, as an automatic result.

Two Steps: Knowing And Internalizing

This point can be understood both intellectually and emotionally. It's possible person knows intellectually that his *ratzon* doesn't help him, but he *feels* differently, and his emotions are still pushing him to be ambitious about his *retzonos*.

In *Avodas Hashem*, there is always a rule of “*And you shall know today, and you will place the matter on your heart.*” First, we need to think about a fact intellectually and let it absorb – in this case, to know that our *ratzon* doesn't really get us anywhere. Then comes the second step, “*And you shall place the matter on your heart*” – to internalize what we know in our heart; to act upon them.

We will be even clearer with what we mean.

At first, a person thinks that things are up to him, and that if he wants something, he'll get it, and vice versa.

Really, it doesn't work like that.

First, we need to be very clear in our minds of this simple point (we are only speaking about *retzonos* for the physical, not spiritual *retzonos*, which are a whole different discussion): whether I want or don't want something, it's not up to me! Reality doesn't depend on how much I want something.

Understanding this helps a person weaken his *retzonos* for the physical. It's like when you tell a person that no matter how much he runs to catch the bus, he isn't going to make it anyway; the person will then not bother to run. When a person realizes that his *ratzon* doesn't make anything happen, and that everything is decreed in Heaven – he will stop having *retzonos*.

Let's expand upon the example of a person running to make the bus. Let's say he runs to catch the bus and he makes it. He gets onto the bus, and he's panting, out of breath. It seems to him that because he ran, that's why he made the bus. What can one do to feel that his *ratzon* didn't really accomplish it?

He can say to himself: "I know and I believe that it was Hashem who enabled that I get onto the bus. Since I know this is true, then that means Hashem wanted me to make this bus – so I would have made the bus anyway. If I wouldn't have ran, then the bus would have remained where it is and I would have made it, because Hashem wanted me to make this bus. My running didn't make it happen."

It's hard for a person to feel this way as he's running toward the bus, but after he settles down onto the bus, he can go over the story in his head and realize that his actions didn't do anything to make it happen.

This doesn't only apply in a case of someone who runs to make the bus. The idea can be applied to any situation – that after putting in effort to do something, one should reflect afterwards and remind himself that his *ratzon* didn't do a thing. The more and more a person gets used to this reflection, the more he will remember even as he's performing that it's not up to his *ratzon*. Even as he's running toward the bus, he will be able to remember that it doesn't depend on how much he runs – if he has worked on this way of thinking several times.

Herein, however, lays a deep point. It's possible that a person knows on an intellectual level that his act of running to the bus isn't doing anything, yet even so, he will still run toward the bus. Therefore, if he wants to improve, he should say to himself as he's running: "I know that running to the bus isn't going to get me to make the bus – but I still don't **feel** that way yet."

In other words, we have to be honest with ourselves and work in steps to improve ourselves. At first, when we begin to improve ourselves, the avodah is to at least understand this on an intellectual level. As a person is running toward the bus, it's hard for him to comprehend with his mind that his running isn't really doing anything for him. He has a lot on his mind right then as he's running toward the bus, and he can't think straight. At this beginning stage, the avodah here is that after a person gets onto the bus and he's settled down, he can reflect afterwards and realize that his running didn't make it happen.

After a person has worked on this, he can then proceed to the next stage, which is internalization. This is that as he's actually running toward the bus, he is able to realize as well that his running isn't doing anything. It is hard at first, because a person doesn't **feel** that that way – he knows it, but he can't feel it. Feel this contradiction in between your mind and heart, and realize that although you

know in your mind that it's not up to your actions to make the bus, you don't feel this way yet in your heart, and it must be because there is a certain lack in *emunah*.

However, don't feel bad at this. The very fact that you have become aware of this inner contradiction in yourself is already a purification process.

There is a well-known story that someone once came to the Chazon Ish and poured out his frustration at the fact that he's a *baal gaavah* (an arrogant person), and that he can't stop being a *baal gaavah*; what should he do about this?

The Chazon Ish replied: "The fact that you're aware of your *gaavah* is already a big step."

Becoming aware of our faults is a necessary step in our growth process. It actually helps you get your feelings to get more in touch with your mind, and as you keep remembering this awareness, your heart will become more purified and it will change.

This can be applied to many situations, in which a person knows that what he's doing is really lacking *emunah*. (We are not referring to sins, but simply actions that lack *emunah*). A person can be aware in his mind that he is supposed to be acting with *emunah*, yet his heart feels that it can't be on that level yet; this awareness is painful, but it's constructive. Keep feeling that pain more and more, and you will find with time that your heart has become opened to really feeling the *emunah* you know in your mind.

Let us repeat again that in the beginning stage of improvement in this, the person running toward the bus won't be able to get himself to stop running toward the bus just by reminding himself that it's not up to him. If someone is at the level of doing this - if his heart feels the same way as his mind - then that's wonderful, but not everyone is at this level to start out with.

Understandably, this idea does not apply to sins - "*There is no advice and no understanding that can go against Hashem.*" That is simple and clear. We are only speaking about how we can improve on our *emunah* and in our *middos*, in which the general plan is to improve slowly and in steps.

Removing The Obstacles To Our Inner Ratzon - Through The Power of Emunah

We have only given one example so far of the concept, but the point is always the same: our soul has a power called *ratzon*, and it comes in many different "garments" and forms.

The true, inner *ratzon* deep within us is clothed by the various *retzonos* of the body, just like all the other *middos* (forces) of the soul. The true *ratzon* we all have is to serve the Creator, but this *ratzon* can get used by the body for four different evil purposes: a *ratzon* to be conceited, a *ratzon* to speak evil words, a *ratzon* for lusts or a *ratzon* for laziness.[\[2\]](#)

Any *ben Torah* has a *ratzon* to serve Hashem, and this *ratzon* has obviously become revealed to some extent. How much it is revealed, though, depends on the level each individual person has worked upon to reveal it. This is exactly what determines the level of a person's spirituality - how much he has worked to reveal his true *ratzon* to serve Hashem.

The *avodah* of a person is to remove the barriers that are covering over the inner *ratzon*, and this will in turn reveal it. The question is: How can we do it? What is the way for us to remove those barriers holding us back?

There are several ways to do it - and one of the ways is through *emunah*.

When a person become aware that any of his physical *retzonos* don't get him anywhere, he will get himself to stop wanting all these various *retzonos*, as we said. In the case of the person running to make the bus, he won't care if he misses the bus, because Hashem wanted him to miss the bus; if he was supposed to make the bus, he would have made it anyway, and if he is not supposed to make the bus, he won't make it no matter how much he runs.

By getting used to thinking this way, a person slowly eliminates these *retzonos* that are ego-oriented. Eventually, a person will be able to give up from all his physical *retzonos*, and his true *ratzon* will be revealed – the desire of the soul, which is to serve Hashem.

The desire to serve Hashem lays in every Jew's soul, but other desires come and hide it. As long as a person hasn't removed these barriers, his inner *ratzon* remains hidden away. By removing these barriers, the inner *ratzon* can become revealed.

There are two methods how a person can awaken his inner *ratzon*.

One way is to directly awaken it, which is by awakening one's yearning to serve Hashem; this method was explained in the earlier chapters.

A second way is by removing the barriers holding back the inner *ratzon* – to remove one's physical *retzonos*. These are the various personal interests that a person has, other than the *ratzon* to serve Hashem. This method doesn't work directly with the inner *ratzon*, but instead it removes the factors holding back the inner *ratzon*, which in turn will reveal it.

Removing these outer *retzonos* will at first seem very hard. This is due to the fact that a person has many, many *retzonos*. Common *retzonos* that people have are desires for honor (which is rooted in *gaavah*\conceit), desires to chatter, various lusts, etc.

The truth is that if a person tries to work on uprooting each of these *retzonos* individually, it's overwhelming. People have many *retzonos*, and to try to get rid of each one will take too long. By using this approach, a person will minimize these *retzonos* somewhat with time – but only minimally, because he's trying to work on all of them. He will chip away at some of them, but he will still remain with some *taavah*, some *gaavah*, some *kavod*, etc.

It will take a long amount of time, and the gain itself will only be minimal, because it will also only be a partial elimination of the external *retzonos*.

But there is a better way to uproot the *retzonos* – there is one single power that can get rid of them all at once!

Let us illustrate what we mean with the following parable. If someone wants to remove two floors of a house, there are two ways how he can do it. One way is to take a sledgehammer and knock down each brick, one by one. But there is another way which is much simpler – he can break the pillars on the first floor supporting the second floor, so that the second floor will fall down as automatically, and he won't have to work as hard.

If we are trying to get rid of our evil, there are two options. The first way is to work on each bad middah separately – to work on getting rid of our *gaavah*, and our *taavah*, and our desire for *kavod*, etc. – which is possible, but it will take too long, and who knows if we will get to the end of it? Or, we have a different option: we can work on our *emunah*, and this in essence will remove all other *retzonos*. By removing the root of the problem – a lack of *emunah* – all the other parts of the problem, the *retzonos*, will fall away and disappear.

One Single Power That Can Do A Lot

We can give some more examples to think about, so that we can identify more with the concept.

Let's say a person wants to do something which he thinks will gain him a lot of honor. He knows deep down that it's wrong to be honor-seeking, and he would like to get rid of his desire to be honored. He has three possible options he can do to work on himself.

One option is to think for a long time how bad the desire for honor is. A second option he can try is to think that if he receives honor on this world, he's losing honor in the next world. A third option is to think that maybe he won't get any honor at all from what he's doing. There are many other possibilities as well he can think about that will get him to avoid seeking the honor.

All of these options are fine, but we can give a totally different solution which will be much more effective, and this is to make the following reflection:

"Will my actions gain me honor? I probably will get honor if I do it. But that is a superficial perspective. The truth is that Hashem has already decreed if I'm going to get honored or not. Whether I do this action or not, whatever will happen will happen anyway, regardless if I do this or not. If I was supposed to get honored, I will get honored, and if I wasn't supposed to get honored - then I won't get honored, even if I engage in this act. If Hashem decreed that I won't get honored, nothing I do will get me to have honor, and if anything, I'll end up degraded. Thus, my desire for honor is impossible to fulfill, because even if I will receive honor, it's not because of anything I did."

By thinking this way, the desire for honor gets weakened. It doesn't disappear totally, because a person might still be hoping that Hashem decreed that he will get honored. But at least the motivations of the person will change. The more a person does certain actions to try to get something, the more his *retzonos* grow; thus the more a person stops pursuing those actions, the more his *retzonos* will fall away.

This is an example of how one single point can do so much all at once.

Another example: a person is sitting at his table and he feels a desire to nosh on something. He has the following options. Either he can quickly give in to his desire, or he can decide he will hold back from his desire and not eat the food, or he can work on this slowly in steps.

If he does the first option - to quickly give in to his impulse to eat - this is simply a lack of self-control. If he tries the second option, which is to try to fight his desire for the food, he's entering a full-fledged battle, and it will be most difficult to fight the desire to eat it. The third option, however, is a level in between these two extremes: he can **weaken** the desire for the food, and after the desire has been weakened, he will have a much easier time controlling himself not to eat the food.

The food is in front of him, and he can think to himself a little bit: "Is it up to me if I'm going to enjoy this good or not? Hashem decided how much enjoyment I will get each year, so it's all up to Hashem if I will enjoy this food or not. It seems that it's up to me to enjoy the food or not, because I can just take it and eat it. But that is only the superficial perspective. Really, if Hashem wants me to have it, I'll have it, and if He doesn't want me to have it, He'll make sure I don't have it, and there will be nothing I can do about it."

In this way, a person accomplishes two things - first of all, he controls himself from eating impulsively, because he first thinks. Secondly, he realizes that even his desire for the food will not bring him the food, unless Hashem willed it - so the enjoyment of the food does not depend on any of his efforts to get it. Thinking like this more and more weakens the desire for the food.

Of course, at the beginning stage, a person only knows about this just on an intellectual level, and it will be too hard for him to actually feel this way; he will still feel that he has some part in making it happen; hopefully one day a person will be on the level in which he feels it, but practically speaking, it's too high of a level to be on. Yet, doing this more and more will still have some effect on the heart, and it will weaken the physical *retzonos*.

After a person sees that his physical *retzonos* have been weakened and that there is no point in pursuing all these interests, the inner *ratzon* to serve Hashem will definitely become more revealed in his life.

This Is Not For Everybody To Work

We should emphasize that the method we have presented here is not for everybody. There is no one way of Avodas Hashem that can work for all people. The common denominator between every Jew, though, is that we must all search for how to get close to the Creator and to give Him a *nachas ruach*. It is just that there are many different ways how to get to Him, and "just as faces are not equal, so are not all *de'os* (opinions) equal." The *de'os* of each person differ one from another, and our *de'os* are called our "*middos*" by the Rambam; each of us have different *middos*, and thus we are all unique - there is no one method that speaks to every person.

Whatever we have said until now is included in this rule. This is not to say that the way presented here isn't always truthful; it is certainly truthful, but it is a method which requires a lot of reflection, patience and mental strength to live with these words. Therefore, someone with a weaker mind amount of intellect is more emotional, because he's more in touch with his heart than with his mind, and the way here will not work for him, because the way we have presented here has a lot to do with using our mental abilities; such a person needs a different method than what we have said here.

The method we have said here can only be worked on by someone who has a strong, clear intellect. This is someone who is already stable in his Avodas Hashem - meaning, that he has weakened his childish antics and impulses, and he has begun to think calmly and reflect into matters. If one doesn't possess such mental capabilities, then trying to work on these matters will only be detrimental, as they are beyond what he is capable of.

We are stating this to avoid any misunderstandings, so that people will not try to work on levels that are above them. Whatever we are saying here is not necessarily for all people to work on, and each person has to figure out if these words are meant for him to work on, or not.

On one hand, "The task is not upon you to complete." Yet, "you are not exempt from it." This teaches us that sometimes people run away from their obligations, excusing themselves with the argument that "it's not meant for me to work on this." It's a subtle test.

Therefore, a person should always daven to the Creator of the world and put in a special request that if he hears about an area to work on, he should receive the proper understanding to figure out if this is something he is indeed supposed to work on it. In this way, one's Avodas Hashem will be successful, in whichever area of Avodas Hashem that one is trying to improve on.

[1] *tzaakah b'lachash*

[2] *In sefer Shaarei Kedushah of Rav Chaim Vital, it is brought that there are four basic elements of the soul, which result in the four primary negative traits: fire\conceit, wind\evil speech, water\desires, and earth\sadness and laziness.*

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