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The Essence of the Soul Is Above Any Place

We have explained that learning about our *Yechidah* is not an intellectual matter; it is a soul matter, and we need to use an inner kind of listening in order to sense it. We are learning here about how to feel and experience the “I” within us – our very essence.

The *Yechidah* can be understood from many angles, but what we are trying to understand is always one thing alone. We are trying to open up many doors to get to it. But it’s always about one thing alone here that we are seeking. The *Yechidah* is always the same essence, and it is just that there are many angles we can use to try to enter it.

The *Yechidah* is also called *Keser* (crown). A king wears his crown above his head; from all of the royal clothing that a king wears, only the crown is above him. This is not by chance; it is on purpose. That is the whole concept of a crown – something worn on top of the head. It is distinct from all of the other royal clothes in that way. The crown that a king wears is the main symbol of royalty – it represents his very kingship. A king is above his nation, and the crown is above the king, thus, the crown represents his entire kingship.

This parable can help us perceive the innermost point within us. The innermost point of the soul, which is who we really are, is not really ‘inside’ us – it is rather **above** us. It is called the innermost point, but it is also called the highest point, the point that is **above** the self – like a crown atop the king.

Where is our essence? Is it deep inside us, or is it above us? The Rambam says that the deepest pleasure is found in our own heart. That seems to imply that the innermost point is inside us, not above us.

But we need to understand the following. The innermost point is not to be understood as “inside” us in the physical sense, like when something is “inside” a certain place. It is not the regular concept of “place” that we are used to. The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that a place, which is called *makom*, comes from word *kiyum* (existence). The real definition of a “place” is something that exists. Hashem is called *makom*, because He keeps the world existing. Thus, the true meaning of *makom*, a place, is not necessarily a place that we can find. It is rather a plane that exists which we can connect ourselves.

For example, something physical is called *artzi*, “earthy”, because it is on this earth, while something spiritual is called *shameimi*, heavenly. Does that mean that something spiritual is in Heaven and not

in this earth? Clearly, not. We call it “heavenly”, not because it is found in Heaven, but because it is above this physical earth. Something heavenly is not connected to this earth, so it is connected to above the physical realm.

The *Yechidah* is either described as the “innermost point” or as the “above” point. These are not two different ways to describe where it is, but rather two ways how to approach it. The *Yechidah* is found everywhere, because it is all-inclusive. The *Ein Sof* of Hashem, which fills everything, is not limited to any place. “There is no place that is empty from Him.” So the *Yechidah* is not in any “place”, thus, we must not think that it is found in a certain “place” that we are trying to get to.

There are people who feel and experience all kinds of experiences and they try to find it in themselves, where it is found. People go through an experience and claim that they can feel it in a certain place in the body. But the experience of our *Yechidah* is not felt in any one place. It is found everywhere, because it is all-inclusive.

To illustrate, the *Beis HaMikdash* had many vessels, which all had certain measurements. In the *Kodesh Kodashim*, there was the Aron, with the Luchos inside. The Sages state that the Aron had “no measurements”. In other words, our *Yechidah*, which is our personal *Kodesh Kodashim* inside our heart^[1], has no place it can be found it, because by essence, it is everywhere.

What do we mean by this? How can something not have a place? Even our soul has a place that it is in, because it resides within our body. So why should the innermost point of the soul be different? Why doesn't it have a place it's in? When people hear about this concept, that the *Yechidah* has no specific place, they think it means that it is unimportant, as if it has “no place” in our life....

The answer is: since it is above us, it has no place. If it would have a place, it would not be the *Yechidah*. The outer layers of our soul do have a place. Our emotions of the soul have a place they can be reached in, but the feelings of our *Yechidah* have no place.

The View From Your Garments and The View From Your Essence

Let's try to explain further what this means, that the *Yechidah* has no place. It is a very deep concept.

When a person gets married, he has a certain place. If he has a happy marriage, he has a happy home. Even if he has fights with his spouse, his marriage still has a place in his life. It is still a marriage. A person has children; his children have a place in his life. Let's go deeper. A person has ambitions and pleasures, things that he likes and hates, and a desire to live well and have a good life – all of these feelings have a place in the soul where they can be found and located. But the essence of the soul, the *Yechidah* – our actual self – has no place where it can be located.

Although we worry about ourselves and we have an ego (except for certain rare individuals who never think about themselves at all), our actual essence has no place. We think our ego has a place only from the perspective of the outer layers of our soul, which are the garments over our actual “I.” When you view your family or your children, or when you want something, it's all coming from a garment over your “I”.

You Are Not Your Will

Not only are your feelings not who you are, but your will (*ratzon*) is not either who you are. Your will should be viewed as a garment, a *levush*, over your actual self.

All of the abilities in our soul are all garments on top of the soul itself, and they have a place in the soul. But our actual essence, which is the very soul itself – the *Yechidah* – is not contained in any place

whatsoever. What we are mainly experiencing in our life is our *ratzon*\will. We are perceiving our self through our will, but our will is not the actual self.

To prove this, we can nullify our will, because we have the power of free will to choose between what we want (*bechirah*). We can uproot our desires for evil. We can train ourselves to want something or to not want something. In addition, sometimes we want something and after some time we lose interest in it; so it can't be that our *ratzon* is who we are. Our actual "I" is deeper than the will itself.

Your "I" can want something, or it can nullify what it wants, thus, your will is not your actual "I". If you would be what you want, then it wouldn't be possible to ever give up anything you want, because that would mean erasing your existence, which is impossible. Our *ratzon* can go away, but our "I" always remains. Our *ratzon* changes as our life goes on, while our "I" remains the same, until our last dying day, and beyond that, whereas our *retzonos* are subject to change.

Is a person ever experiencing his actual self, or he is only experiencing his *ratzon*? Most people are never experiencing their actual self, and spend their whole life from the prism of the *ratzon*.

Our *ratzon* has a place in our soul, and there are all kinds of *retzonos*, but our "I" itself has no place it can be found in.

"Kayin" and "Hevel" in the Soul

I will try to explain this concept better.

People are spending their whole life trying to get rid of the things that aren't comfortable. How much time are people spending on trying to bring in any real content into their whole life?

There are two kinds of avodah in our soul: there is an avodah called "Kayin" and an avodah called "Hevel".

All souls are rooted in Adam, and after Adam this divided into two roots: Kayin and Hevel. Thus, all souls are rooted as well in Kayin and Hevel (according to the Arizal). We thus need to understand what the soul root of Kayin is, and what the soul root of Hevel is, because we all come from them. We don't mean to learn about who Kayin was and who Hevel was, rather, how Kayin and Hevel manifest in our own soul.

Kayin comes from the word *kinyan*, which means to acquire. When a person acquires something, he gets something more. Hevel is the opposite of this; *hevel* means "nothing", to nullify something. These are essentially two different abilities in the soul - one ability that we have is to want more things, and the other ability is to be satisfied and not need anything.

Our actual essence, the real "I" deep within us, lacks nothing. Our soul has everything, because it is connected to the Creator, where it comes from. This is the power of *Hevel* in us - the ability to feel content with our existence. Our essence has no *ratzon*, but it is already connected with Hashem; it's already there.

But because our connection to Hashem isn't complete, due to our various desires in life, which exist on the outer layers of our soul - we also have "Kayin" in us. What we need to do is get through to the "Hevel" deep within us. How can we do this? By giving up the various desires.

Nullifying The Will

Moshe has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word *ratzon* (will). Moshe is the root

of *ratzon*. He had only one desire: to come to the Holy Land. Hashem refused his request. Why didn't Moshe merit his wish?

The simple answer is because of the sin at the Waters of *Merivah*. But the inner understanding of this is because of that one minor sin he did, in some way he wasn't totally nullified to Hashem, and for this he lost out on coming to the Holy Land.

There is a deep statement from one of the Chassidic Rebbes, who said, "If Hashem would come to me and ask me if I want to become Avraham Avinu, I would refuse." Why? Who wouldn't want to be Avraham Avinu? He explained, "What would Hashem gain from this? If there would be two Avraham Avinu's now in the world, then Hashem would gain from this. But if I am merely switching places with Avraham Avinu, then what does Hashem gain this? There will still be only one Avraham Avinu in the world, so Hashem gains nothing from this."

The natural response of most people would be: "To become Avraham Avinu? Of course! I would gain such a lofty soul and become so close to Hashem and always do His will and reveal Him on the world! I would be able to return everyone to *teshuvah*!"

Imagine if Hashem would come to a person and ask him if he is willing to become an animal, or a plant, or a rock. Would anyone be willing to do this? Most people would not, and the reason for this is, because people are not willing to become nullified to Hashem. People have a desire to acquire, but there is no interest in nullifying oneself.

Having a desire for spiritual levels does not mean that a person is willing to do something for Hashem. There are people who want to sin or pursue base desires, while others channel their desires in a holy direction; they want high spiritual levels, Gan Eden, lofty comprehensions, etc. They would not either be able to become a rock if Hashem would ask them to do this. People might understand that they need to nullify their physical desires, but to nullify their spiritual desires?! No one would be willing to do this.

But the truth is, if Hashem would wish for a person to become a wall, that is what he should really do! Most people would react that they are not on the level to do this. But that is what we really should do, if we were even given such a test.

People want and want. All of the layers of the soul are gates to enter more inward into the soul, which we need to open up and get past, so we can get closer and closer to the soul's essence itself. The *ratzon* is the gate that leads straight to the essence of the soul, because it is directly in front of the soul's essence. If a person is willing to give up his *retzonos* for Hashem, he gets past the gate of his *ratzon* and enters more inward into his soul, and there, he will find the "I."

Why aren't people getting to their "I"? Why indeed is it so hard? It is because people do not know how to get past their *ratzon*.

To take this even further, the *ratzon* to get to the "I" might even be what is holding back a person from getting to the "I"! People want to get to their true self and they have a strong will for this, but that itself can be detrimental. The stronger the will is - even if it is the loftiest kind of will possible - the thicker of a wall it creates to really get to the "I".

Here we come to a very subtle and deep *avodah*. It is how we penetrate to the *Yechidah*.

If a person misunderstands this concept and he simply lets go of his entire power of *ratzon*, deciding that he will no longer want anything, then *chas v'shalom*, he won't want to keep Torah and mitzvos; he will destroy himself. If he goes in the other direction and he develops the *ratzon* more and more,

then he will reveal the *ratzon*, but he is still being held back from reaching the "I", as we explained. So what should we do? Which way do we turn?

Expanding and Contracting The Will

Here we come to the concept that we began to mention. It is called "expansion and contraction" [which was first mentioned in *Getting To Know Your Self*]. We will now apply the concept of expansion and contraction with regards to how we expand and contract our *ratzon*\will. We can take our will and either expand it or contract it.

Let's say that a person is informed that there are a thousand people in a certain place whom he can be *mekareiv* (draw closer to Judaism). He travels there for 10 hours and when he arrives, there is no one there. He asks around, "Where is everyone?" They tell him, "People were here yesterday, but they all left." He realized that he miscalculated by a day. How would he react?

It is, naturally, disappointing. "I traveled here for nothing and wasted so much time", he probably thinks. If he is more spiritual, he would think, "Hashem considers it as if I did it. I meant well, and Hashem will take this into account and consider it as if I was *mekareiv* them". Indeed, Chazal say that Hashem considers a thought for a mitzvah to be considered actualized, as long as a person tried to fulfill it and was held back due to circumstances beyond his control.

But the true reaction should be based on the following: The Gemara says that Rebbi Akiva expounded the meaning of every word "es" in the Torah, until he came to one place where he couldn't expound. He said, "Just as I received reward for explaining, so will I receive reward for abstaining."

The person in the above story is trying to console himself with all kinds of thoughts: "Hashem didn't want" or "Hashem will count it as if I did it," etc. All kinds of answers. But the deeper and truer way to react is, that part of our life is about building our will (*binyan haratzon*) and another part of our life involves nullifying our will (*bittul haratzon*). Sometimes, we have to "not" want. Our *ratzon* is a garment (*levush*) in our soul that wraps around our essence. A garment is something you wear and remove. You can wear it, but you have to be able to remove it also.

Even our Tefillin, which is called a "sign" between Hashem and the Jewish people, we do not always wear. We don't wear it on Shabbos or at night. Tefillin is a very important mitzvah, but Hashem tells us that sometimes, you don't wear it.

A *mitzvah* is never constant. Some mitzvos are at night and some are at day. The inner reason behind this is, because the mitzvos are also our garments, which we sometimes have to do, and sometimes we don't do them, because now is not the time.

There is a sin called *bal tosif*, not to add onto the Torah. What is the depth of this sin? It is to train us that although we must want the mitzvos, sometimes we need to not want something. We must treasure the mitzvos, of course, but there is no mitzvah which we can always do, and the reason for this is, because we cannot always be revealing our *ratzon* for holiness. Even the greatest mitzvah, learning Torah, which is by day or night, is sometimes forbidden, like on Tisha B'Av. We are not allowed to think Torah thoughts in certain places.

If someone has a *ratzon* for holiness and never limits it, what will happen? He might wish to wear Tefillin on Shabbos or wish to sit in a sukkah for more than 7 days, which is forbidden; it is *bal tosif*. He has a desire for holiness, but he does not know how to limit it, and he is doing something forbidden.

So there are boundaries for everything we must follow, even in *retzonos* for holiness, as we see from

the *mitzvos*. We need to open our *ratzon* for holiness, but we must also know how to remove it sometimes when the situation calls for it.

Dealing With Disappointment - Through Nullifying The Will

I met someone who traveled somewhere for a business opportunity which would help him expand his business. He was met with disappointment; it did not help him. He was very bothered at his failure. I asked him, "Why are you so upset?" He told me, "Because I didn't succeed." I asked him, "Did you not succeed because you didn't try hard enough?" He said, "No, I tried as much as I could. But I didn't succeed even though I tried so hard."

Why indeed does Hashem place us in such situations, that we try our hardest yet we still fail? It is to give us an opportunity to get used to the concept that just because we try, that doesn't mean we will succeed.

Of course, that doesn't mean, that we shouldn't try. We need to always try our best, but when we do fail, we must tell ourselves: "Let go. Stop *wanting*."

Once there was a shortage of *esrogim* in Eretz Yisrael, because the country wasn't allowing business with other countries at that time, and no one had *esrogim* that year. Someone came to the Brisker Rov zt"l and told him that he may be able to secure an *esrog* from Morocco. The Brisker Rov encouraged him to make all the efforts to get the *esrog*, and the messenger succeeded. The next year, again there was a shortage. A messenger came to the Brisker Rov and said, "I can get a letter from the government that will allow me to order an *esrog* from another country. Should I try to do it?" The Brisker Rov complied. The messenger came back, though, empty-handed. He was crestfallen. "I tried all I could. But in the end, I wasn't able to get an *esrog*."

The Brisker Rov then started to beam with joy. The messenger was stunned. Everyone knew that the Brisker Rov was very careful with observing the *mitzvos*, and that he would go to great lengths and sacrifices in order to observe any *mitzvah*. "Rebbi", the messenger said. "Please teach me what is going on over here. How can the Rebbi not be sad that there is no *esrog* this year?"

The Rov responded, "What did Hashem want from me? He wanted me to try all that I could to do His *mitzvah*. I did all I could. Hashem obviously did not want. If Hashem didn't want the *mitzvah* of *esrog* this year, then why should I want? This year, Hashem wants me not to want." And he said these words with great joy on his face.

This is the reaction of a great person. Why was he so great? Because in one moment, he was able to remove his *ratzon*. He had a powerful *ratzon* for the *esrog*, to do the *mitzvah*, more than anyone else. But as soon as he realized that his *ratzon* couldn't be actualized, he let go of it. He was aware that his *ratzon* was a garment, which is sometimes worn, and sometimes it is removed.

Dealing With Tragedy

Sometimes there is a tragedy that takes place - it can happen that a couple loses a child. The parents can be inconsolable at this, and they feel like there is no one to talk to about this who will be able to console them. But if a person knows how to nullify his *ratzon*, he is able to speak to others about it and get comfort.

How? Is it because such parents are apathetic and they didn't really love their child? *Chas v'shalom*. The parents certainly loved their child. Love is a kind of *ratzon*, so it can be nullified. If a person was used to nullifying his *ratzon* already from beforehand, then if he ever goes through a more difficult situation, such as the loss of a child, he will be able to nullify his *ratzon* even in this kind of situation

as well, even though love is a very deep *ratzon*.

If a person never learned how to let go of *ratzon*, then he will not be able to survive a difficult time, because he will feel like something has been unjustly taken away from him, and he will not be able to deal with this.

Getting Used To Nullifying The Will

If we want to reach our *Yechidah*, our deepest part of our self, we must realize this concept of getting used to nullifying our *ratzon* more often.

There was someone who came from Haifa to these classes here, and then something came up that he had to go back home. Imagine what he feels as he's going back home. It can be so disappointing; he traveled all the way from Haifa to get here, for nothing. If a person never learned how to nullify his *ratzon*, then he will feel disappointed and that he has traveled for nothing. But if he is already used to the concept of nullifying the *ratzon*, then he will use this as a learning experience - that he has learned how to actually nullify his *ratzon*! That's what he gained! So he didn't really waste his time!

Every day, all the time, we are going through unfulfilled *retzonos*. The question is how we react to these situations. A person needs money now, so he goes to the bank and he finds that it's closed. It can be very disappointing. These are everyday occurrences, and all kinds of these situations keep happening throughout the day. How do we deal with situations like this?

We can realize that even our constructive *retzonos* don't have to become actualized. This is the key to penetrating into our essence.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't ever want anything. It means, that when the things you want don't happen, you should agree to let go of your *ratzon*. By getting used to this, we have the key to entering our innermost point.

Let's say a person wanted to have a happy Yom Tov, and for some reason, it didn't happen. Not only that, but he's sad from it, because he is disappointed that he didn't get to rejoice. The truer way to react is, "If I didn't merit to rejoice on Yom Tov, I can accept that it is the will of Hashem that I did not reach joy from Yom Tov". Reacting will this will actually help you reach true joy, because you will enter inward into your soul.

How much disappointment do we go through in life! How much difficulty we go through! How do we deal with it?

Once I came to a place where I was supposed to give a *shiur*. When I came, there was no one there, except for me and the person who invited me. The other person was getting anxious; he said to me, "Oh no, people aren't coming..." I said to him, "Okay, so no else will come. What's so bad?" He said to me, "Are you sure?? Will it be okay for you?" I said, "If people come, fine. If they don't, I'll go back home, and it is not a problem."

We need to be able to deal with disappointing situations. Without knowing how to let go of our *ratzon*, life is full of pain. We yearn for things and want things, and many of the things don't become actualized. It is very painful, if we never learn how to let go of what we want.

The *ratzon* is the strongest power of our soul, but it is not our soul itself. If we can penetrate it, then we have overcome the strongest barrier in our soul that is preventing us from reaching our essence. If we can't get past our *ratzon*, then even if all our *retzonos* are spiritual, those *retzonos* will be holding us back from getting to our essence.

Moshe Rabbeinu - The Root of Ratzon

No one knows where Moshe is buried. This always bothered me. How could it be that we have no place where we can visit the grave of Moshe Rabbeinu, who gave us the Torah? It's so disappointing. Moshe broke the Luchos. How could he do this? Break the Luchos, which he had worked so hard to get? Moshe also led the people for 40 years in the desert, gave us the Torah, and went through much difficulty to lead the people. The entire generation died in the desert, when he had gone through so much to lead them, and the purpose of all the 40 years was because Hashem had told him to lead the people into Eretz Yisrael, and in the end it didn't happen.

How disappointing!! It seems that his life was one big disappointment. How could he deal with this?

The answer is: we know that Moshe is the root of the power of *ratzon* [as we mentioned earlier]. He was able to nullify his *ratzon*. If Hashem didn't want the generation to enter Eretz Yisrael, so be it. If Hashem doesn't let me enter Eretz Yisrael, so be it. That was Moshe's greatness - his ability to let go of his *ratzon*. That is why he embodies *ratzon*.

The Yechidah - Deep Within, and Above

We began this chapter by explaining that the *Yechidah* is within us and it is also above us. What does this essentially mean?

It is "in" us because we need to penetrate deeply into ourselves in order to reach it, to get past all the layers until we get to the innermost point. But it is also called "above" us, because the innermost point of the soul, the "Moshe Rabbeinu" within, is our power to really use the power of *ratzon* - and the depth of using our *ratzon* is to go above our will, to "not" want. This is why the *Yechidah* is called *keser*, crown, because the crown is above the king's head - it represents the power to go above the will. It represents the ability to remove the will - to be able to want and not want, to wear our *ratzon* and be able to remove it.

The Menuchah of Shabbos - In The Soul

Deep in our soul, when we reach this point of accepting to let go of our *ratzon* at times, when we get used to this concept, then we reach what is called *menuchah* (inner serenity).

On Shabbos, *menuchah* (rest) comes to the world. This shows us that rest can only come after there is action, which is represented by the six days of the week that involve activity. In our own soul, there is "action" and "rest" as well. If all we do is want, then we are only involved in activity, and our soul has no "rest". Only after nullifying our will can our soul feel serene.

It is not only on Shabbos that we have *menuchah*. During the six days of the week as well we can have *menuchah* - in our own soul. This is when we let go our *ratzon* when it doesn't happen. It makes us serene. Getting what we want doesn't make us serene, because if we wouldn't get it, we would be upset. The only way to be serene is, by being prepared to accept the disappointment of not getting your *ratzon*.

The six days of the week and the day of Shabbos represent two kinds of *ratzon* we can access. The six days of the week represent our *ratzon* for holiness, and Shabbos represents the deeper *ratzon*: I have a *ratzon*, but even if I don't get it, I accept it - and I am prepared to give it up in one moment. [This is true regarding both physical *retzonos* as well as spiritual *retzonos*].

It is not only in the future Shabbos that we will get our *Yechidah*. We can reach it even now - if we are prepared to immediately give up our will when the situation calls for it. If we develop this ability, then

we will be serene even within our own *retzonos*, because our *retzonos* then will not make us anxious.

A Difficult Task Indeed!

This concept is a way to go through life properly, and these are not just mere words or intellectual definitions. It is a way to live life, and it is a difficult concept to acquire.

It's easier to talk about this than to actualize it. When I speak about this concept, I am talking to myself as well; if I would have come here to this *shiur* room and the door would be locked on me, would I have been able to handle that, and to accept this calmly? No, it would not be easy for me. It would take hard work on my part. But I know that it's a lot more difficult for me if I don't know how to accept disappointing situations. That is a much more difficult life to live.

You can live a life in which your *retzonos* don't take away your *menuchah*. It is impossible to always stifle our reactions. It is normal and expected to get angry, upset, and frustrated; even Moshe Rabbeinu got angry once. So we cannot attain this perfectly. But the issue is: How much are we trying to draw closer to the point of nullifying our *retzonos*?

The words here will apply differently to each person who hears these words, and the concepts here are also not for everyone to work on, because not everyone has the inner fortification to work on this. But what all of us have in common is that we can all try to let go of our *retzonos* sometimes, and that will give us a path to reach our *Yechidah* – the innermost point is us that is attached with Hashem.

[1] Sefer Nefesh HaChaim (Shaar Aleph) describes the concept of a “Kodesh Kodashim within the heart.”

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