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[Home](#) > Rosh HaShanah - 024 Changing Our Will | Part 2 of 3

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## Rosh HaShanah - 024 Changing Our Will | Part 2 of 3

### ***Changing Our Heart***

We will briefly review the previous lesson and then continue. Previously, it was explained that if we want to change, we first need to firmly believe that we can change. Hashem provided a power in His creations with the possibility to change.

When a Jew wants to change, however, it is not simply a desire to change, but it is a deeper kind of change - it is a desire to gain a *lev tahor* (a pure heart), to gain a whole new kind of heart. On Rosh HaShanah we can change through renewing ourselves entirely, for Rosh HaShanah is the “head” of all the months of the year, and the moon symbolizes renewal.

To be general, man is comprised of three layers - the actions, the heart, and the mind. Changing our actions are one part of us, changing our heart is another factor, and changing our mind is a third factor. In the previous chapter we were really speaking about how to change our actions. In this chapter we will discuss how to change our heart, and in the next chapter with the help of Hashem, we will discuss how to change our mind.

The first part in changing our heart is to change our *ratzon* (will). Elul is called “*Days of Ratzon*”, days of will. Rosh HaShanah is the head of all changes, thus, the root of change is to change one’s will. There are many factors involved in changing, but the root of change is to change the will.

This is a two-fold job. One part of it is to give up bad things that we want. But the root of the matter is to reveal our deeper *ratzon*.

The “*Days of Ratzon*” are called so because Hashem desires us in these days. Does that mean that during the rest of the year that Hashem doesn’t want us? Do the “*Days of Ratzon*” end on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Elul, and not during the 10 Days of Repentance? The meaning is that the *ratzon* during the 10 Days of *Teshuvah* is a deeper kind of *ratzon*, a whole new depth to our *ratzon*. During the 10 Days of *Teshuvah*, we can get to the depth of our *ratzon*.

It is not about giving ourselves a *ratzon* that we don’t have previously. Rather, it is about revealing new depth to our *ratzon*. During Elul we can gain a *ratzon*, and during the 10 Days of *Teshuvah*, we can reveal more depth to our *ratzon*.

### ***Acquiring A Strong Will For Holiness***

To say this practically - there are things we want, and there are things we want badly. Why are people

not succeeding in their Avodas Hashem and having failures? The failures are only the result. What is the root of all the failures? It is because a person is missing a *ratzon*.

“Nothing stands in the way of the will”. If so, why do people fail? It is because they are missing a *ratzon*. So if a person failed any spiritual test, although it’s true that he failed because it was beyond his capabilities, but if his *ratzon* would have been stronger, though, he would have been able to overcome even something that is beyond his natural capabilities to overcome.

The root of all problems in Avodas Hashem is because people lose their *ratzon*. It has to be a kind of *ratzon* which nothing gets in the way of; such as the will to live. In order to have a real *ratzon* for Avodas Hashem, we need to have a strong amount of willpower to improve, no less than the will to live. A powerful *ratzon* like that will be unstoppable. Hashem is unlimited, and our soul is able to aspire for the unlimited.

The root of the heart is the desires present in the heart. The middos and emotions are rooted in *ratzon*. For example, a person wants to love, he wants to hate. There is only one internal war that goes on inside us: we wage war with what we want.

The root of changes is to change the will in the heart, to renew our will. It is not to reveal in ourselves a will for holiness, but to renew the will completely and thus gain a whole new *ratzon*.

The world survives because Hashem wants it to. He renews His will every day, in the present moment. This shows us what the root of change is. Change is about giving a new will to ourselves. We are a new creation every second, not a continuation of the previous moment. Therefore we have a power in our soul to renew our will completely.

It is hard to change something; it is easier to create something anew. If change would mean that we need to change ourselves as we are previously, it would be too difficult. It’s much easier to change when we have the power to give ourselves a new will entirely.

One has the power to have a strong will for something, and this can extend into other desires for holiness. All of Torah learning and all of our avodah are all the ‘garments’ of what we want. We can want Torah, the mitzvos, to fix our *middos* – but it’s all based on what we want. If our learning, mitzvos and *middos* are attempted without first building our willpower, we will have many branches with no root to them.

So what is the aspiration we need to have on Rosh HaShanah? We mainly need to acquire a strong will for holiness, and after that, we can direct our will, which will be another part of our avodah. But the very step is to first form a strong will for holiness. This is what it means to gain a *lev tahor* – to first have a heart that is pure and wants holiness. When we have that, we can further develop.

The will for holiness is the root of all spiritual success, and the lack of will for holiness is the root of all spiritual failures.

### **What To Daven For on Rosh HaShanah**

When Rosh Hashanah comes and a person is davening for what he wants, what must he daven for? He must daven that Hashem help him gain a will for holiness, that he should have a *ratzon* in the first place. Hashem created our body, and He also created our desires. We have free will of course to choose what we will desire, but Hashem still created our very desires. So we can ask Hashem to give us a desire for holiness, just as He gave us hands and feet.

The will for holiness is the strongest tool in our possession, once we gain it. Through it, anything can

be done.

On Rosh Hashanah, we daven for so many things; we indeed have many aspirations for holiness. I am not speaking of material wants; I am speaking of even spiritual requests. The main spiritual request we need to ask Hashem for on Rosh Hashanah is to ask that we should receive a will for holiness. If we daven for the root and for the branches, this is excellent. But if someone only davens for the branches and not for the root, he is missing the point.

### ***Examples of Motivating Yourself***

There is a rule that “The heart is pulled after the actions.”<sup>[1]</sup> When a person does a good deed, what happens to his *ratzon*? Let’s say a person is helping his spouse washing the dishes (In America maybe this is unheard of, but in Eretz Yisrael, it is more normal). After washing the dishes for four days, he’ll already grow tired from washing the dishes, and he feels fatigued at this. When did he have more strength? On the first day he had more strength to wash the dishes. Why didn’t his heart get pulled after his actions? It is because he doesn’t really want to wash the dishes. He’s always against his will in order to wash the dishes.

So how does he gain a *ratzon* to wash the dishes? He feels forced into it, and every day he’s doing something he’d rather not do it, so of course, he hates it more and more as the days goes on. But if he would say to himself that he really has a *ratzon* to wash the dishes, just that it’s hard for him, then he would wash the dishes with the awareness that he is trying to affect his will. If he does that, his heart will eventually make peace with it, and he will indeed gain a *ratzon* to wash the dishes!

We only gave one example of the concept, but the point is always the same. Although “the heart is pulled after the actions”, we see that although we do many mitzvos every day, our heart is not pulled after what we do. We don’t find ourselves gaining a *ratzon* for holiness. It is because we do the mitzvos, but we are not doing it with the awareness of trying to affect our *ratzon*.

The true barometer is: to know what you want, and to know what your deepest will is. One person wants materialistic things, and another person wants spirituality. If two people want spirituality, what is their deepest will? A person enjoys something he wants to do. He has more joy in something with the more he wants to do it. So the question is if we are just doing all that we have to do, or if we are increasing our *ratzon* as we do our actions.

### ***Happiness: Experiencing Our Will***

This awareness needs to be applied during the rest of the year as well. When we do what we have to do, they must be done with awareness, with paying attention to what we are doing – to do every action with the motivation to increase our *ratzon*, as we do what we have to.

There are many examples throughout the day as well where we can apply this to. Let’s say a person really wants to get up in time in the morning so he can daven on time. But if he goes to sleep late, he will get up late and miss the *minyan*. Let’s say he gets up on time one day. What does he do? He runs to shul. But is he happy that he got up in time? If he never thought about that, he never became aware that he is in the process of changing his will, and then his action of getting up on time and running to *minyan* will not assist him in changing his will. He has to give himself a second to feel happy that he got up in time, and then his *ratzon* to get up on time will be improved. Without a second to pause and feel happy about his accomplishment, his *ratzon* will never get strengthened. He will run to shul, but he has no time to build his heart.

Let’s say a person is shaking the Four Species, and he wants to feel the *simcha* of this. Here he doesn’t have to go against his will, because Baruch Hashem, all of us want to do the mitzvah. But

does he pause a bit to think about how happy it is to shake the Four Species? If he does, he strengthens his *ratzon* in doing a mitzvah. It's not that he didn't have a *ratzon* at all before; Baruch Hashem, he had a *ratzon*. But the depth of his *ratzon* is what he can change, when he pauses a bit to think about his joy in fulfilling the mitzvah.

A person learned Torah for an hour, or he did an act of *chessed*. Does he ever pause to think about this and breathe it in, and feel happy that he did these actions? If he gives himself this moment to pause and think and feel happy about what he did, firstly, he will feel more alive and happy, and secondly, he increases his *ratzon*. His happiness will increase his *ratzon*, because that is human nature, that when a person is happy about something, he increases his will towards it.

When a person does a good deed but he never pauses to look back at this and feel happy about it, he never accesses his *ratzon*, and his *ratzon* will still feel rebellious inside. A person wants something and buys it and puts it back on the shelf. Does he ever stop to think about how happy he was in buying this item? If a person does something but he doesn't breathe it and experience it, his *ratzon* will never become revealed.

There are many more examples we can give but the point is clear. The question is if we are experiencing what we do with the motivation of increasing our *ratzon*. We need to do actions that increase our *ratzon*, with awareness that we are trying to let our *ratzon* become revealed.

*Simcha* (happiness) is essentially experienced when one's *ratzon* became actualized. A person who drinks a cup of water and never felt thirsty, does he feel happy at this? No - because he never felt a strong *ratzon* for the water. But if a person has come back from the desert and his mouth feels parched, and he finally finds water, he is very happy when he gets the cup of water. Why? Because he had a *ratzon* for the water.

Thus, the more there is a *ratzon*, the more happiness there is when a person actualizes his *ratzon*. When we are happy with something, it is a result of *ratzon*.

Another example: on Purim, when we get *Mishloach Manos*, do we feel happiness at this, or do we just eat the nosh from it? You can experience happiness when you receive it. Every mitzvah can be felt by your soul, where you can then feel happy when you do it and thus you reveal your *ratzon* in doing the mitzvah.

That is the first part: doing actions with awareness to strengthen our *ratzon*.

### ***Davening To Hashem For Help***

The second part needed in increasing our *ratzon* is to *daven* to Hashem that He help strengthen our *ratzon*. We really cannot do it on our own, for "The task is not upon you to complete". When we try to change our heart, especially our *ratzon*, it can only come as a gift from Hashem.

Often we can see two children who grow up in the same home, yet they are so different from each other, and they end up going up their own separate ways in life, and it's impossible to believe that they are siblings. True, they each used their power of free will, but there is a deeper reason why they go different ways: one of them was born with a strong will for holiness, while the other was born with a weaker will for holiness.

The most difficult obstacle in a person's path is when one doesn't have a *ratzon*. If someone has a *ratzon* but he has difficulties, we can deal with him and help him. But if he has no *ratzon* at all, we cannot deal with him, because there is nothing to work with. The hardest thing is to get someone to believe that you're giving him something good. If he has no will for something, you can't get him to

want.

Some people are born with a strong will for holiness, and some are born with a weaker will. But even a person born with a weaker will can cry to Hashem to get a new will.

The deepest *ratzon* of the soul comes to a person only as a gift from Hashem. *Ratzon* is essentially an inner gift [and it can only come to a person when he merits from Hashem, through beseeching Him for it].

A person running from a fire is not just choosing to run; his *ratzon* makes him run. There is a very strong will to live, and we don't have to choose it. Thus, our power of *ratzon* is higher than our power of *bechira* (free will). Therefore, when we want to change our heart, it is not so much about "choosing" what the right thing is - it is really about changing what our deepest will is. (We are speaking here about changing the heart, not the mind). This is the root of all change.

So the awareness that we need - not just on Rosh HaShanah but throughout the rest of the year - is to get to the depth of our *ratzon*.

### ***Davening To Hashem To Want Holiness***

We have many good desires for holiness that we haven't actualized; what do we do about them? For example, if a person wanted to get up in the morning but he isn't succeeding, or he wishes he could stop talking *lashon hora* so he keeps taking on resolutions not to talk *lashon hora*, but he keeps failing. What does he do?

He *davens* to Hashem for help - but that still doesn't get to the root of all the problems. Instead, a person has to *daven* to Hashem that he should be given a strong will for *kedushah* (holiness) in general.

### ***Nullifying The Negative Desires***

There are two parts to our *ratzon*. There is our general good *ratzon* for *kedushah* (holiness), and there are various other holy desires we want. The various desires are from our heart; some of them are holy and some are not holy.

Until now, we addressed how to increase our *ratzon* for holiness. But we also have a will for things that are not holy.

Every person has a certain line he doesn't cross when it comes to material matters. One kind of person needs to eat a certain amount of food, and beyond that, he doesn't eat, because he considers it gluttonous for him. Another person needs to eat a little more than this in order to feel satisfied. In either case, we all have a certain limit, though, to what we desire. (Unless a person doesn't keep Torah and mitzvos, *chas v'shalom*, he has limits).

We can't fulfill all that we want, as we know. A person who wants a certain amount of money knows he might not get it. But if we see something we want, we can tell ourselves, "Enough." We don't have to get everything we want.

For example, when you see something in the store you want, you can tell yourself, "No." You make limits for yourself. But does that change your heart? It usually does not change the heart, because the heart will continue to desire it; it is just that you are able to be in control of your desires and not give in.

But if we want to change the heart and get rid of our negative desires, for example, if we want to eat more food that we don't need to eat, we can tell ourselves, "Enough."

What should you think, though, as you hold back from eating more food? Don't tell yourself "I will not eat it." Instead, tell yourself, "I want to nullify my will to eat it." Just like we can increase our *ratzon* through our actions, so can we do an action for the sake of nullifying a *ratzon*. When you hold back from eating the food, do it for the sake of nullifying your *ratzon* to eat the good. Without this awareness, holding back from eating the food will not weaken your *ratzon* to eat the food.

### **Summary Of Our Avodah**

We all know that there are things we want which are not good, like when we look at improper places or when we eat things we don't need. How do we improve? We will summarize the three steps.

**1)** We need to first firmly believe we can change. **2)** We need to pull back from the negative action with the specific [conscious] intention to nullify the evil *ratzon*. **3)** We need to daven to Hashem and cry to Him for help. As you hold back from the desire or from the negative emotion, cry to Hashem for help, because ultimately, we cannot do anything on our own, and we need Hashem's help.

As a rule, in all that we do, we always need three tools: **emunah** (faith) **avodah**(work), and **tefillah** (prayer). The "*emunah*" aspect here is to believe we can change. The "*avodah*" part is to hold yourself back from the negative action\desire\emotion with conscious awareness that you are trying to nullify your evil *ratzon*. The "*tefillah*" part here is to cry to Hashem for help with this.

### **The Root of All Our Avodah: Working With Our Ratzon**

The root of all our *avodah* is to work with the *ratzon* of our soul. We all have good and evil desires; the root of evil desires needs to be broken through nullifying them, and the way to build our holy desires is through deepening our awareness to our actions.

Our *avodah* is always to "remove ourselves from evil" and then "do good". We "remove ourselves from evil" by nullifying our evil desires, and we "do good" by deepening our good desires.

When a person commits an evil deed, even if it was by "accident", it's really because deep down, he wanted to do it. If he wouldn't want to do evil, he wouldn't do it (unless he is forced). The "days of *Ratzon*" of Elul are here to help us change both our holy *ratzon* and our evil *ratzon*. Thus, it is not enough to hold back from sin - one has to nullify his *ratzon* for the sin.

So we need to get to the root of the evil behind the action and uproot it, and not just to avoid the evil actions.

### **In Conclusion**

To summarize, before Rosh Hashanah, we must strengthen our *ratzon* for holiness, and believe that we can have a new *ratzon* entirely, and that Hashem can uproot the evil as well from within us.

Although this is indeed a difficult *avodah*, if we feel these words here and we don't forget them, we will be able to cry to Hashem and pour out our heart to Hashem that He help us change our *ratzon*, to strengthen our *ratzon* for holiness and to uproot our evil *retzonos*; and then our obstacles will be removed, so that we can get to our desired *shleimus* (perfection).

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[1] *Sefer HaChinuch*: 15 and *Mesilas Yesharim* Chapter 3

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