

# POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

The Shulchan Aruch tells us that we must say the above pasuk with special kavana and if we forget to, we need to repeat from Pote'ach et Yadecha until the end of Ashrei (O.C. 51:7; Mishna B'rura 15-16). We learn from Chazal (see Rashi, Radak, Metzudos Dovid, et al.) that this pasuk tells us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu provides food, parnasa, and other desires according to what people want. Accordingly, the traditional translation of this verse is, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Technically speaking, however, in order to mean this, it should say ... R'TZON KOL CHAI not L'CHOL CHAI RATZON. The technical translation then should be "You open Your hands and fill every living being with desire."

My problem with the explanation of Chazal is twofold:

1) we know that Gd doesn't give us everything we want. (The world simply could not survive were we all spoiled brats.)

2) the pasuk before this one states very clearly that He provides everyone with food: EINEI CHOL EILECHA Y'SABEIRU V'ATA NOTEIN LAHEM ET OCHLAM B'ITO (The eyes of all look to You with hope and You give them their food in its time). In addition, it says two verses

later that R'TZON Y'REIAV YA'ASEH (He does that which those who fear Him desire). Again, seemingly the same thought, so why repeat it?

I am not about to dispute Chazal, they know a lot more than I do. There must be something here that I don't understand. But because these questions stand, it would imply that we are to learn an additional message.

To be true to the p'shat, I offer the following: To be MASBIA RATZON, would seem to mean that Gd satiates, gives to all a complete portion of RATZON - of will. Meaning that He makes sure all of us are blessed with the necessary desire to continue living our lives regardless of the portion that has been meted out to us - rich or poor. So, if what one receives from Gd is sparse and one is an oni, what enables him to continue and go one and not give up? RATZON. What makes it possible for anyone who has been handed difficulties to continue and not give up? RATZON. And that will, that RATZON, is what Hashem gives us so that we can successfully deal with the lot we have been given. We have always been told that Gd never gives a person a NISAYON or burden that he can't handle. It must be because He has blessed us with the necessary amount of RATZON to continue.

If this is true, then it is easier for me to understand the halacha that requires us to repeat from POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

until the end of Ashrei, if we haven't properly concentrated on those words. Why not simply repeat that one verse? Because if the above meaning is true, then the verses are all one unit: What helps the person activate this RATZON to continue? What assurance does he receive? The knowledge that although TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV (Hashem is righteous in all His ways), although Hashem is a Gd of DIN and justice, He is CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV (magnanimous in all His deeds) - He operates LIFNIM MISHURAT HADIN, not in strict judgement, and so we are dealing with a compassionate Being and there's every reason for hope. Especially since KAROV HASHEM L'CHOL KOR'AV, L'CHOL ASHER YIKRA'UHU VE'EMET (Hashem is close to all who call to Him, to all who call him in truth) - when we are having difficulty with our portion, despite being blessed with the necessary RATZON, Gd is close to us when we call out to Him sincerely for His help. And R'TZON Y'REI'AV YA'ASEH ... - He won't ignore our pleas, but will respond and redeem. SHOMER HASHEM ET KOL OHAVOV V'ET KOL HOR'SHA'IM YASHMID. And for those who are on the high level of coping without complaining and operating purely out of a love of Gd, He responds by protecting them so there is no need for them to call out, while He deals with their enemies. Therefore, T'HILAT HASHEM Y'DABER PI VIVARECH KOL BASAR SHEM KODSHO L'OLAM VA'ED (My mouth will speak the praises of

Hashem...), it more than behooves us to proclaim the praises of He Who granted us the will, the desire, the strength to continue against all odds and to be able to trust in His help always.

I can't ignore, however, the understanding of Chazal so, perhaps, the meaning that is eluding me is something like this:

If we look at the word RATZON in a different way, understand it on more than a superficial level, a truer meaning can emerge. We have RATZON of which we are aware and RATZON of which we are not aware. The RATZON of which we are aware would, more often than not, fall into the category of material needs and desires. We know what we want. And, very often, what we want is not necessarily what we need or even that which is good for us. The RATZON of which we are less aware is the one that is related to our spiritual needs, the desires of the NESHAMA. We are usually not tuned in to those desires. Our lives are spent in a struggle between the desires of the NESHAMA, indeed, its needs, and material desires. Sometimes, they are in harmony with each other, but, more often than not, this is not the case. Despite this, we know that what is truly best for us is that for which the unsullied NESHAMA longs.

An example of this true desire of each person is in the Rambam (Hilchot Gerushin 2:20) where he discusses forcing a man to give his wife a get. On the one hand, a get that is given through

coercion, is not valid. On the other hand, we are told that the Beit Din can administer lashes, they are KOFIN OTO, they force him until he agrees to give the get. So how is this not coercion? Because, says the Rambam, the man is actually doing what he wants to do - as a Jew, he wants what his NESHAMA wants, to do the right thing.

If this is so, if we place that definition of RATZON into the verse in Ashrei, it becomes more believable. Because Gd, indeed, does satisfy the desire, this inner RATZON of everyone. For the desires of the NESHAMA are pure and are exactly what is good for the person and the same desires that He would want for us as well.