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Don't Rely on Patrons

Practice Makes Perfect

Before we continue learning *Shaar Habitachon*, it is beneficial for us to take a look at the commentary of *Rabbeinu Bachaye al haTorah* on the *pasuk* in *Sefer Devarim* (8:16): . . . לְמַעַן עֲנִתֶךָ וּלְמַעַן נִסְתָּךָ לְהִיטֵבָךְ בְּאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ. . .

Rabbeinu Bachaye explains:

All of the suffering in the desert, and the great trouble that they went through, was only a *nisayon* that was meant to train them in the *middah* of *bitachon* and infuse their hearts with *emunah* in Hashem Yisbarach so that they would become habituated in that *avodah*. . ."

Rabbeinu Bachaye's words form the basis of any successful *avodah*. A person who wants to stop putting his trust in his own *hishtadlus* and strengthen his reliance on Hashem will find it very difficult in the beginning. Day after day, his inner voice will continue to tell him that additional efforts will extricate him from his difficulties.

In order to change these ingrained tendencies, he has to refrain time after time from excessive *hishtadlus* and, instead, repeatedly pour his heart out in *tefillah* to Hashem. He will probably find this to be very taxing and stressful at first. Nevertheless, this is the path that he must follow, and **if he persists, the *avodah* will eventually become natural** and pleasant. In times of need, his innate response will be to *daven* and to strengthen his *bitachon*.

From the Depths to the Heights

This concept can help us understand why Hashem repeatedly puts us in situations where we feel totally helpless (like Am Yisrael in the *Midbar*). He does this solely for our benefit, for only when a person

realizes that he can't help himself with his own natural efforts will he turn to Hashem. Over time, this will become second nature, and **he will thus be able to journey out of his own personal "desert"** just as Am Yisrael, after forty years, finally went on to Eretz Yisrael.

This process doesn't have to take forty years. The sooner we can attune our nature to *bitachon*, the sooner we can escape the desert.

Don't Rely on Benefactors

We can now return to the introduction to *Shaar Habitachon* where the *Chovos Halevavos* lists the benefits of becoming a *baal bitachon*.

Among them we find:

וְשֶׁהַבֹּטָח בְּאֱלֹהִים יְבִיאֵנוּ הַבְּטָחָתוֹ עָלָיו שֶׁלֹּא יַעֲבֹד זֹולָתוֹ – *When one trusts in Hashem, his trust will bring him to a point where he will not serve anything other than Hashem.*

It's important to realize that one who relies on any intermediary that has no inherent power, and which is simply a conduit for *shefa*, is compared to one who worships idols. The Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:2) describes the initial development of idolatry. People began to worship the stars and constellations because they mistakenly believed that they had independent power to provide them with their needs. And from there they moved on to serving man-made idols of stone and wood.

וְשֶׁלֹּא יִקְנֶה לְאִישׁ וְלֹא יִיחַל לְבְנֵי אָדָם – *And he won't set his hopes on any person, and won't count on the help of human beings. . .*

The *baal bitachon* knows that salvation comes only from Hakadosh Baruch Hu and not from a human being, no matter how wealthy or influential he may be.

וְלֹא יַעֲבֹדֵם לְהִתְרַצוֹת אֲלֵיהֶם – *He won't be servile toward them in order to find favor in their eyes.*

He will feel no need to invest his efforts into serving the wealthy in order to receive their support.

וְלֹא יִתְחַנֵּף לָהֶם, וְלֹא יִסְפִּים עִמָּהֶם בְּבִלְתִּי עֲבוּדַת הָאֱלֹקִים – *He won't flatter them, and he won't give in to them on something that conflicts with avodas Hashem.*

Since he won't feel dependent on people or their good will, he won't be afraid to let them know that he doesn't agree with their behaviors that aren't in line with the way of the Torah. He knows that **whatever money is supposed to come to him will reach him** even if a particular wealthy individual doesn't want to contribute. He also knows that any funds that are not supposed to come to him won't reach him even if the *gvir* wants to give him money.

וְלֹא יִפְחַדְהוּ עַנְיֵינָם, וְלֹא יִירָא מִמְחֻלְקוֹתָם, אֲבָל יִתְפַּשֵּׁט מִבְּגֵדֵי טוֹבוֹתָם וְטוֹרַח הוֹדָאתָם וְחֹכְבַת תְּגֻמוֹלָם – *They won't frighten him, and he won't fear conflict with them [even if wealthy, influential people threaten him]. He will divest himself of the need to cater to them, and the burden of thanking and repaying them.*

The *Chovos Halevavos* doesn't mean to say that a person shouldn't thank wealthy people who help him. He should certainly acknowledge what they have done for him. However, a *botei'ach* won't feel an exaggerated sense of gratitude – “this rich man saved me!” – to the point where his focus on thanking the *gvir* turns into flattery and falsehood.

Instead, he will realize that the wealthy man was the channel through which *shefa* came to him from the Source of all *brachah*. He will express his gratitude in a straightforward way because it stems from a place that is true and spiritual. When he thanks his benefactor, he will feel the same as he does when he is grateful for plants or inanimate objects that were the medium through which he received *shefa* from above.

On the surface, **the two forms of gratitude may appear identical, but they are worlds apart.** One is authentic and brings the person who

expresses it closer to Hashem. The other is distorted, causing the person who expresses it to descend to the depths.

It is important to understand that throughout history, when *gedolei Yisrael* traveled far and wide to raise funds for Torah institutions, when they thanked the donors, they never stooped to falsehood and flattery. They understood that even though they were doing their *hishtadlus* and providing donors with the *zechus* of supporting Torah, the funds received were not dependent on the will of the donor but on the will of Hashem.

An Aspect of Nevuah

Until now, the *Chovos Halevavos* has taught us not to put our trust in any form of *hishtadlus*, and to understand that no amount of *hishtadlus* can bring us more than has been decided above. **We must do the normal, necessary *hishtadlus* that Hashem wants of us, in order to receive the *shefa* that He has designated for us.**

He goes on to emphasize that we shouldn't give in to our tendency to rely on people who are wealthy. Instead, we must strengthen our *emunah* that the *shefa* that has been designated for us doesn't depend on one millionaire or another. Relying on them will only diminish, rather than increase, our *parnassah*. Those who actually spend money to flatter wealthy individuals and find favor in their eyes **are in fact transgressing the Torah's commandment of *bal tashchis*** - not to waste one's resources!

We are surrounded by people who are so distracted with worry about how they will marry off their children, or about the other myriad needs of a Jewish family, that they can't concentrate on Torah or *tefillah*. They don't realize that they are sacrificing a portion of their hearts, minds, and *neshamos* while they hope for people to help them. Day and night, they think about ways to flatter and influence potential benefactors. They worry that the people they rely on may have forgotten them, and they think about creative ways to remind those influential people about their needs.

The life of a *baal bitachon* is very different. His heart and mind are so subjugated to his Creator that he can even experience what the *sefarim* call a *nevuah ketanah*, a minor form of prophecy, that will enable him to sense what Hashem wants of him in a given situation. On the other hand, one who relies on human beings and places his trust in other powers will never have the capacity to experience *nevuah ketanah*.

Step by Step

Rav Avigdor Miller understood that when people learn this and other lessons of *Shaar Habitachon*, they may feel that they are simply not on a level of *bitachon* that will enable them to enjoy the benefits described by the *mechaber*. He would tell them: "I know that we aren't on the level of one who completely fulfills the instructions of the *Chovos Halevavos*, but let's try to at least progress in this area. **We can climb the ladder step by step** and eventually reach the top."

As we mentioned in the beginning, Rabbeinu Bachaye reminds us that we need to practice this *avodah* again and again until it becomes second nature.

Many people complain that even though they have *bitachon*, they don't experience the success promised to *baalei bitachon*, as expressed in the *pasuk* (Tehillim 32:10) **יְהוֹסֵטֶה בְּה' הַסֵּד יְסוּבְּבָנוּ** — *One who relies on Hashem will be surrounded by kindness*. However, if they would take an honest look at their *bitachon*, they would discover how far they are from being *baalei bitachon*. Deep down, they are still relying on millionaires, hoping for their assistance, and trying to find favor in their eyes.

Only by repeatedly implementing the instructions of *Shaar Habitachon* will we gradually progress, step by step, until we can truly deserve the title "*baal bitachon*."

Emunah, Achdus, and 613 Mitzvos

Challenge as a Vehicle for Growth

The Gemara teaches that the Navi Chavakuk summarized all 613 mitzvos with one sentence: “A tzaddik lives with his *emunah*.”

We know *emunah* is an essential mitzvah, but how could it be sufficient in and of itself? Don’t we have to keep all the mitzvos? How can this one *pasuk* possibly include all 613 mitzvos?

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef discusses a similar question: How is it possible for any person to keep all the mitzvos? Some mitzvos apply only to *kohanim*, while others are relevant only to Yisraelim. Still other mitzvos can be fulfilled only by men or only by women.

The answer is that **all Jews are connected through *ahavas Yisrael*. When one Jew performs a mitzvah, all Jews are credited for it;** when a *kohen* fulfills a mitzvah that only a *kohen* can fulfill, for example, that mitzvah is channeled to every Jew through their mutual *ahavas Yisrael*. Clearly, *ahavas Yisrael* is crucial. Without it, there is no way for us to fulfill all the mitzvos.

But how can we love every Jew? What about a fellow Jew who hurt me? This is where *emunah* comes in. As we grow in *emunah*, we understand that everything that happens is *hashgachah pratis*. Even if another person decided to do something wrong, **he couldn’t possibly cause me any harm that wasn’t supposed to happen.** Had that person not hurt me, Hashem would have found another way to actualize His plan.

With this we can understand Chavakuk’s declaration that *emunah* is the underlying principle of all the mitzvos. In order to connect to all the mitzvos, we must love every Jew – which demands a great deal

of *emunah*. This is not easy; it is a tremendous *avodah*, which we spend our entire life striving for.

Developing Our Emunah

How can we develop our *emunah*?

If we look at nature, we see beautiful precision. Every apple is rich with taste, color and health benefits, all tailored to its purpose. The sky is a perfect color, so soothing to look at. Every aspect of nature is a model of perfection.

However, it's easy to go through life oblivious to the wonderful world we live in. Anyone who has struggled in life will tell you that the world is far from perfect. How often do we hear statements like, "That's how the world works!" "That's life. You can't have everything." "Life is tough."

These expressions reflect a view that challenges are something we wish to avoid. If we have no choice, we'll suffer through them, but we'd really rather they disappear. Instead, if we can come to view challenges as custom-made growth experiences, we will embrace them even if they're unpleasant.

Imagine the manager of a large company. Of course he hopes things will run smoothly, but he is not surprised or disappointed when things don't go as expected, because that's his job. He understands that issues are bound to come up that he'll have to deal with, and he's confident that he can deal with them.

Certainly, if our challenges come directly from the "Big Boss" Himself, we know that they are what we need. **We expect that we'll have to work hard – but these are opportunities, not pitfalls!**

We sometimes wonder: why did Hashem create nature with such perfection, and yet there is still so much suffering?

The truth is that **our very lack proves our inherent perfection**. We were created to refine ourselves. The apple and the sky don't need

refinement, but we are constantly trying to come closer to Hashem – and that is possible only through overcoming challenges.

Start Your Day the Right Way

We can wake up each morning and look at our struggles as a gift from Hashem, precisely tailored for us. The *Zohar hakadosh* teaches that it is a gift from Hashem when a poor man approaches us, giving us an opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. Similarly, **it's a gift from Hashem when there is a challenge to our *emunah***. If we withstand the challenge, we will grow from it and become closer to Hashem.

Everything that happens to us is a gift, and all of those gifts combine to help us fulfill our individual purpose in this world. Hashem may send one situation to empower us to reach a new *madreigah* in *avodas Hashem*, and another to help us truly disconnect from an *aveirah* in our past.

Ultimately, a challenging situation is meant to push us to grow in *ruchmiyus*. In the midst of the difficulty, it can be hard to see the benefits. We don't understand why it has to be this way – but that is precisely what a *nisayon* is! **If its purpose would be perfectly clear, then it wouldn't be a *nisayon***. And only through *nisyonos* can we fulfill our individual mission.

What is more perfect? A beautifully formed apple or a human life? If we live with the truth of *emunah*, all our difficulties have meaning. An apple remains an apple – but man can reach incredible heights by growing through his challenges.

What Your Neshamah Needs

Every mitzvah can be performed either by rote or with all our heart and soul. Hashem designed our *neshamos* to be sustained by mitzvos performed with enthusiasm and feeling. Mitzvos that are performed mechanically simply can't sustain the soul.

The Satmar Rav touched on this idea while he was on a ship to Eretz Yisrael during the week of *Parshas Korach*, 1955. He asked how *kohanim* can perform the *mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz*, the agricultural *halachos* that apply to Eretz Yisrael, since the Torah states that they did not inherit a portion of the land.

He answered by referring to Rav Chaim of Tchernovitz's *Sidduro Shel Shabbos*, which cites the Midrash on the *pasuk* (Iyov 41:3) מִי הִקְדִּימְנִי וְאֶשְׁלַם – *who came before me and I will pay his reward*. The Midrash says: “Who made for me even one *mezuzah* before I gave him a house?” When someone builds a house, and then has to put up *mezuzos*, he may search for the least expensive *sofer*, hoping he won't have to spend much on the *mezuzos*. Hashem says, “I have given you an entire house. Now that I ask you to put up a *mezuzah*, you pinch pennies?”

The *Sidduro Shel Shabbos* reads the *midrash* as follows: Hashem says, “I would like to see someone who first makes a *mezuzah* and then builds a house.” How do we understand that? Without a house, you have no need for a *mezuzah*!

He explains: Typically, a person builds a house, and then, before moving in, he says, “I can't live here like a non-Jew. I'm obligated to put up a *mezuzah*. I must go buy a *mezuzah* to fulfill my obligation.” However, there are people who deeply yearn to fulfill the mitzvah of *mezuzah*, **hoping to build a house in order to fulfill the mitzvah**. Such a person's noble yearning connects him to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. . . From Hashem's perspective, it's as if he made a *mezuzah* and then built a house.

Fulfilling Mitzvos by Yearning

The Satmar Rav elaborated on this explanation. Usually, the only way we can fulfill our mitzvah obligations is by actually doing the mitzvah. However, when it comes to a mitzvah that we are unable to do, we are still supposed to yearn for it. This *hishtokekus* can achieve a level of *shleimus* that often isn't reached by those who perform the mitzvah.

Our inability to perform the mitzvah actually fuels the yearning. **When a person cannot perform a certain mitzvah, his yearning for that mitzvah grows.** Meanwhile, the very same person might robotically perform the mitzvos that he does have the opportunity to fulfill.

The restrictions during the Covid epidemic helped many people discover this aspect of human nature. People who davened with a minyan in shul for years without any passion found themselves yearning to go back to shul. The latent emotions surfaced only when it was impossible to fulfill the mitzvah.

The *Sidduro Shel Shabbos* and the Satmar Rav teach us that Hashem gave us two ways to perform mitzvos. We must physically perform every mitzvah that we can. However, it is also possible to fulfill a *mitzvah* that is beyond our reach – by yearning for it.

These two forms of *kiyum mitzvos* are certainly not an either-or choice. ***Shleimus, complete fulfillment of a mitzvah, can only be achieved by a merging of both physical performance and hishtokekus.***

Now, how is any Jew able to perform all 613 mitzvos with *shleimus*?

No one Jew is even obligated to perform all of the mitzvos. Some only apply to *kohanim*, some to non-*kohanim*, some to men, and some to women. Only through *ahavas Yisrael* can we ever fulfill all the mitzvos. If Bnei Yisrael love each other and want to benefit each other, **one Jew's physical performance of the mitzvah will combine with another Jew's yearning** to fulfill the mitzvah, enabling both to fulfill the mitzvah fully.

Twelve Tribes – One Nation

Some people grow up in a community with a particular *derech of avodas Hashem*. They proudly follow that *derech*, knowing that it has roots in the *avodah* of great tzaddikim who lived long ago. If they have an open mind and a broad outlook, they will realize that there are other legitimate *derachim* as well. **Am Yisrael began with twelve Shevatim,**

each of whom had their own approach and emphasis in serving Hashem. Today as well, some communities emphasize *sur mei'ra* (staying away from wrongdoing) while others emphasize *asei tov* (performing mitzvot); some concentrate on learning one area of Torah, others on another area.

A Jew who sees the many beautiful ways that people serve Hashem sometimes finds himself wanting to follow all those paths. He soon discovers that it simply isn't possible. He may learn how important it is to learn Torah from after Maariv until midnight; *sefarim* tell us that this lights up the darkness. He may also learn about the importance of learning Torah from midnight until morning, for that was the time of Dovid Hamelech's unique *avodah*. Then he opens another *sefer* and learns that there's a problem with sleeping during the daytime. Ultimately, he must realize that while it would be wonderful to do everything, it simply isn't possible!

The same applies to different *derachim* in learning Torah. He wants to learn halachah so that he will know what to do, but he also wants to learn *Shas*. It's important to learn Chumash and Rashi, but when will he learn the other *mefarshim*? And when will he learn *mussar* and *chassidus*? And of course, he knows the importance of *chazarah*, reviewing what you've learned. Once again, he realizes that even though he wants to learn everything, it simply isn't possible.

Does that mean he must give up on major parts of Torah and *avodah*? Absolutely not. He needs to embrace the understanding that there are Jews who excel in certain areas of Torah in which he and his community do not. Does that mean he should leave his community and join theirs? Certainly not. His community excels beyond others in other areas of Torah. Eventually he will realize that **Hashem wants us to connect our neshamah to the neshamos of all other Jews** so that we all benefit from each person's *shleimus*.

Shared Benefits

Let's take, for example, a person who does not say all of *Sefer Tehillim* before Shacharis on Shabbos. He simply isn't able to. Still, he shouldn't

stop wanting to do so, and he shouldn't disassociate from people who do so. He should love them, admire them and yearn to emulate them.

He should also be aware that those who actually say all of Tehillim need his yearning to complete their mitzvah. Most people don't maintain the same level of *hishtokekus* once the recitation of *Sefer Tehillim* on Shabbos morning is part of their weekly routine. **He should continue to yearn, and they should continue to say Tehillim.** Together, they achieve *shleimus*.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef taught us that we can only live this way by strengthening our *emunah* that **Hashem created a beautiful, complete world by giving each of us different strengths and weaknesses.** Where a person without *emunah* sees a world of failure and incompleteness, we see the beautiful, complete world that will result if we join together in *emunah* and *ahavas Yisrael*.



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