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A Baal Bitachon Enjoys Peace of Mind

The Benefits of Having Peace of Mind

In his introduction to *Shaar Habitachon*, the *Chovos Halevavos* lists the benefits enjoyed by those who live with *bitachon*. In previous shiurim, we have discussed the first two:

1. Whoever has *bitachon* is under Hashem's control and will therefore be truly successful. Anyone who relies on natural forces, however, is doomed to failure.
2. One who has *bitachon* has no need to flatter anybody, so he remains totally dependent on Hashem.

We will now continue on to the third benefit:

שְׁהַבֹּטֵחַ בְּאֱלוֹקִים יִבְיֵאֵהוּ בְטַחֲוֹנוֹ לְפָנֹת אֵת לְבוֹ מֵעַנְיָי הָעוֹלָם וְלִיחַד לְבָבו לְעַנְיָי
הָעֲבוֹדָה. . .

***Bitachon* leads a person to remove all mundane matters from his mind, enabling his heart to focus entirely on spiritual matters.**

A person who doesn't enjoy peace of mind is miserable, both in mundane and spiritual matters. We all constantly strive for peace of mind, and we'd be willing to pay a fortune to have it. The *Shaar Habitachon* teaches us that it can only be achieved through *bitachon*.

Like an Alchemist

וַיִּהְיֶה דוֹמָה בַּמְּנוּחָת נַפְשׁוֹ וְרוֹחַב לְבוֹ וּמַעֲוֵס דְאַגְתּוֹ לְעַנְיָי עוֹלָמוֹ לְבַעַל הָאֱלֹפִימִיָּה

In his tranquility, peace of mind, and diminished anxiety, the *baal bitachon* will be like the legendary alchemist who could turn silver into gold and copper and tin into silver through scientific skill.

Yet a true *baal bitachon* surpasses an alchemist in ten respects. The first is that an alchemist needs raw materials and equipment, which cannot always be easily found, whereas **one who trusts in Hashem could realize a livelihood through infinite means.** The whole world becomes a possible source of *parnassah* for him.

Am Yisrael learned this lesson through the *mann*. No one ever expected the heavens to open up daily and send down to them food that was all ready to eat. It was against nature. But nothing can hinder Hashem. We see a similar concept with Eliyahu Hanavi. While Eliyahu was hiding from King Achav, Hashem arranged for the ravens to bring him food from Achav's table. The widow who took him in and fed him never ran out of oil. Hashem provided Eliyahu with loaves of bread and a flask of water, which enabled him to walk for forty days without food or drink. Also, during this period, the *navi* Ovadyah hid 100 *nevi'im* to protect them from Queen Izevel who wanted to kill them, and he somehow managed to provide them all with bread and water during a famine!

While a *baal bitachon* realizes that he is compelled to do *hishtadlus*, he isn't pressured by it and isn't preoccupied with its success. He understands that *hishtadlus* is essential in order for him to earn his livelihood, but that ultimately, everything comes from Hashem Who has unlimited avenues for providing his *parnassah*. He is confident that if Hashem doesn't give it to him through one pathway, He'll give it to him through another. With this knowledge, a *baal bitachon* can enjoy life with a level of tranquility that even the wealthiest of people can't enjoy.

Turning Everything into Gold

At first glance, it seems that the comparison to an alchemist is due to the fact that both have a guaranteed income. In the same manner that the alchemist is certain to sustain himself since he can turn copper into gold, so too, the *baal bitachon* is certain to sustain himself since Hashem takes care of him. But if so, why did the *Chovos Halevavos* feel

the need to strengthen his point with this analogy? The value of enjoying peace of mind is self-understood, even without the comparison to an alchemist.

The *Chovos Halevanos* is clearly conveying a much deeper concept. He is using the comparison to illustrate that just as the alchemist can turn cheap metal into gold, so too, **the *baal bitachon* can turn a negative experience into a positive one** through his approach of faith in Hashem. The difference is that the alchemist needs special materials and equipment to accomplish this feat, while the *baal bitachon* with just his life experiences and the proper perspective enjoys peace of mind far beyond anything the alchemist could dream of.

Don't Rely on Your Own Intelligence

Rabbeinu Bechaye al HaTorah explains that it isn't enough for a person to have faith in Hashem. Even once he is already a *botei'ach*, he must be careful not to rely on his own intelligence at all since his own intellect won't help him anyway; it can only be to his detriment. Rather, he should be so confident that Hashem will help him that he doesn't even need to know how! He simply knows that Hashem will help him. As Shlomo Hamelech writes in Mishlei (3:8), **בְּטַח אֵל ה' בְּכָל לִבְךָ וְאֵל בִּינְיָתְךָ** - *Trust Hashem with all your heart, and do not rely upon your own understanding.*

If we have complete trust in Hashem, without relying on our own intellect, we know that we don't need a thing other than to know Hashem and to serve Him under any circumstance we confront in life. With this perspective, every experience turns into gold.

A *baal bitachon* is unfazed when the path he embarks on falls through – because he was never locked into that particular route anyway. Once he sees that Hashem doesn't want him to take that path, he immediately retreats and chooses a different one without disappointment since he knows that Hashem will lead him only on the best possible path. **At the start of each day, he makes up his mind to**

place himself in Hashem's hands. He'll test out various avenues to determine which is the one Hashem chose for him, but he'll never be disappointed if a certain path fails since he knows that he has no alternative to the path Hashem will put him on. Rather than get frustrated or discouraged, he rejoices, since he understands that at this moment Hashem prefers him to deal with those challenges instead of focusing on what he had originally intended on doing. He becomes like a child whose father lovingly carries him on his shoulders. And in that sense, every "stumbling block" turns into gold!

Daily Routine

But we might ask: Isn't it proper to plan our daily routine? How could we live from moment to moment? Wouldn't that leave us susceptible to wasting time, or worse, spending time in an inappropriate manner?

It's related about Rav Tzvi Hirsh of Zidichov that he had a packed and rather ambitious daily routine. When he showed his daily schedule to his Rebbe, the Chozeh MiLublin, the Chozeh approved – except for one critical addition: at the end of each line in Rav Tzvi Hirsh's schedule, he added the words: *"And sometimes the opposite."* He wanted him to understand that there will be times when it won't be feasible to stick to the schedule and Rav Tzvi Hirsh would have to do the exact opposite of the activity he scheduled.

We understand from the Chozeh that it is certainly important to have a daily schedule – but at the same time, we must realize that Hashem ultimately decides what our schedule will be, and if He has a different preference, we must yield to that and act accordingly. If I'm planning on engaging in Torah study the entire day, but at some point during the day it becomes obvious that Hashem prefers that I shut my Gemara and tend to some mundane matter, then I will comply without the slightest bit of disappointment. In fact, I will happily and eagerly divert myself to fulfilling Hashem's will for me at that moment. After all, I'm not learning so that I could become respected; I'm learning because I want to do what Hashem wants!

This point made by the Chozeh MiLublin is critical for any *baal bitachon* to absorb. Yes, we should create a daily schedule – but if our ambitions don't leave room for Hashem's will, we'll never experience peace of mind no matter how much we develop our level of *bitachon*. **The ability to live with “sometimes the opposite” is the foundation of the *middah* of *bitachon*** and a cornerstone of a *baal bitachon's* way of life.

We Aren't Autonomous; We Are Hashem's Servants

One of the chief causes of despair and disappointment (*pizur nefesh*) is when our agenda falls through. The moment our plans begin to crumble, we feel frazzled and pulled in multiple directions. On the one hand, our minds are still obsessed with our original plans and somehow we just can't manage to move on. At the same time, reality is sucking us in and forcing us to drift out to unfamiliar territory.

But if we would inculcate within ourselves the fact that **we are not self-governing beings but are *ovdei Hashem*** and will only be able to do that which He wants us to do, we would experience unparalleled peace of mind even if our plans change from moment to moment.

Let's take, for example, Reuven, who is Shimon's messenger. Every day, Shimon gives Reuven a list of daily trips to set out on, and he pays Reuven accordingly. One day, Reuven has a window of free time during the day, which he chooses to spend learning. Suddenly, the phone rings. It's Shimon, giving him another assignment. Reuven has no choice but to close his Gemara and carry out his orders. But Reuven doesn't feel the slightest bit of disappointment, because he understands that he's being paid to be available for Shimon's needs.

Reframe: Hashem Is Not Sabotaging My Plans; He's Guiding Me!

When we are young, we tend to map out our whole lives. But then, something suddenly foils everything that we envisioned, and we are

filled with disappointment and resentment and are left bemoaning the loss of our dreams. With this outlook, however, we will never enjoy any peace of mind. And that is why we must approach life with the perspective that we are just like Reuven. If only we'd prepared ourselves from the outset and realized that we are not independent but are simply Hashem's messengers, **we'd be prepared for a change of plans**, thereby sparing ourselves so much heartache.

In fact, we would experience the opposite reaction: if we realized that **Hashem has actually sent us on a different mission** and is leading us on the best possible course, we'd be ecstatic!

Imagine, for instance, someone who is in *shidduchim*. He has several suggestions, and he's not sure which one to accept first, but then one of the offers is suddenly withdrawn. How relieved he is that Hashem has steered him onto the right path with at least one of his options! He was never locked into this particular *shidduch*; all he wanted was for Hashem, in His providence, to send him the proper match. He approached this matter with total dependence on Hashem, and was happy for Hashem to set him on the proper course, saving him from becoming trapped in a bad relationship.

The *Chovos Halevavos* wants us to change our image of the *baal bitachon*. He isn't simply a passive creature who suffers through life as he keeps trying to remind himself that if this is what Hashem wants it must be good. He is functional and proactive, while at the same time enjoying peace of mind and the ability to rise above the vicissitudes of life.

The Power of Tzaddikim

Moshe Rabbeinu's Reasoning

In *Parshas Chukas*, Hashem chastises Moshe Rabbeinu for hitting the rock to provide water for Bnei Yisrael, rather than speaking to it as he was commanded.

The *sefer Yitav Lev* explains that in order to understand the criticism of Moshe Rabbeinu, we first need to understand the concept of asking a tzaddik to daven for us. Chazal (*Bava Basra* 116a) clearly recommend this practice. "R. Pinchas bar Chama taught: If a member of someone's household is sick, let him go to a *chacham* that he may ask Hashem's mercy." How does a tzaddik's *tefillah* bring about our *yeshuah*?

Let's start by asking how the tzaddik sees his role in this process. It would be the height of arrogance if the tzaddik believed that his *avodah* brought him to such a level of righteousness that he is one of the few tzaddikim who can save others with his *tefillos*. In *Mishlei*, Shlomo Hamelech says, תוֹעֵבֶת ה' קֶל גְּבוּה לֵב – *Everyone whose heart is arrogant is an abomination to Hashem*. It's hard to picture such a person's *tefillah* helping anyone.

On the other hand, if the tzaddik views himself as lowly and unworthy, how can he daven on behalf of others? Such a person feels unworthy to daven for himself, let alone for other people.

The *Yitav Lev* explains that the resolution lies in the *Sefer HaIkkarim's* broader exposition of how *tefillah* works.

To start with, *Sefer HaIkkarim* states that there is no concept of Hashem changing His mind. A human being may attempt to convince Hashem by telling Him how greatly he is suffering, but Hashem already knows everything. He knows the person's pain and feels the

pain even more than the person himself. It's clear that Hashem decided that this must happen even though He knew it would cause the person to suffer. If so, why should He change anything because of *tefillah*?

Furthermore, people who think that by performing one *segulah* or another they can change Hashem's mind are totally mistaken, explains the *Sefer HaIkkarim*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't need *segulos*. He isn't affected by people lighting forty candles or undertaking some practice for forty nights. So what does *tefillah* accomplish?

The *Sefer HaIkkarim* explains that before davening, the person is not ready to receive the goodness that is prepared for him. By davening with sincerity and internalizing the understanding that only Hashem can save him, and that no one else can save him, **he transforms himself into a person who is worthy to receive *tovah* from above.**

This explanation only amplifies our question. We understand that a person's own *tefillah* can help because he becomes a better Jew as a result of his *tefillos*. But how can the *tefillah* of a tzaddik do anything for him? The tzaddik may be transformed by his own *tefillos*, but the person who beseeched him to daven remains the same as he was...?

We must conclude that a Jew who believes in Hashem, and in the power of the *tefillos* of a tzaddik – also undergoes a transformation. He believes both in the power of *tefillah* and that **the *tefillah* of a tzaddik accomplishes more because the tzaddik's *avodah* brings him closer to Hashem.** When a Jew expresses this *emunah* by asking the tzaddik to daven for him, he integrates that truth into his very being and is no longer the person he was beforehand.

It Doesn't Depend on the Tzaddik's Level

A person stands observing the many people who wait in line to receive a tzaddik's *brachah* because they believe Hashem will save them in his merit, and he dismisses them as naive. "They've been indoctrinated since childhood that everything written about the Baal

Shem Tov applies to this tzaddik. That's why they're waiting so humbly in the line, clutching their *kvitlech* and *pidyonos*."

He is wrong to dismiss their belief. It really makes no difference if the tzaddik they are waiting for is on the level of the Baal Shem Tov or not. What matters is that they believe in Hashem, and they can merit a *yeshuah* because by asking a tzaddik to daven for them, they are doing what is right.

The well-meaning Jew is thinking, "I need a *yeshuah*, and if I rely on my own *tefillah* I know that there is a barrier separating me from the heavens. I'll go to a tzaddik who constantly yearns to be close to Hashem. His *tefillah* will bring the *shefa* from above down to my world." Even though his reasoning may be flawed (for his own *tefillos* are also very powerful), he is doing the right thing. He believes in Hashem and in His tzaddikim. He believes that Hashem hears the *tefillos* of His people, especially the tzaddikim, and can change the very nature of the world. Thus, the merit of his *emunah* leads to his salvation.

In other words: **for the purpose of your *avodah*, the spiritual level of the tzaddik doesn't really matter.** For even if he truly is a great tzaddik, the *shefa* can't reach you without you strengthening your *emunah*. On the other hand, if you strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem and in the power of a tzaddik's *tefillah*, the *shefa* can reach you no matter what. (It is important to note that we are not speaking about charlatans who pretend to be righteous but abuse their position to harm others. **We are speaking about leaders with *yiras Shamayim* who strive to serve Hashem** and help their fellow Jews.)

May They Not Be Ashamed of Me

The *Yitav Lev* cites *Daas Kedoshim* who explains a prayer of Dovid Hamelech (Tehillim 69:6),

אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה יְדַעַתְּ לְאֹנִי וְאֲשֵׁמוּתִי מִמֶּנִּי לֹא נִכְחָדוּ. אֵל יִבְשֹׁ בִי קִוְיָה ה' אֱלֹקִים צְבֻקוֹת,
אֵל יִפְלְמוּ בִי מִבְּקִשְׁיךָ אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Dovid Hamelech tells Hashem, “People rely on me. People believe in me and think that I can help them. *Ribbono shel Olam!* Please help and prevent *bizyonos*, embarrassment.”

This works in more ways than one. I once spoke with a Jew who was a master of *emunah*. Many Jews were inspired and strengthened just seeing how his *emunah* remained steadfast in the hardest times. They also saw all the goodness in his life, the *chesed* that is promised to a *baal bitachon*. He was a living illustration of the *Chovos Halevavos*. In our conversation, he told me that he was undergoing a very difficult situation, which was soon to become public knowledge. It wasn’t a small *nisayon*, and no doubt people would view it as a slap in his face *min haShamayim*.

This Yid told me that it wasn’t the *nisayon* itself that troubled him. He was mostly concerned about the effect his situation would have on other people’s *bitachon*. He knew that people used him as an example of a *baal bitachon* who was surrounded by *chesed* just as the *pasuk* promises, והבוטח בה' חסד יסובבנו. He feared that when people heard of his troubles, it would result in a *chillul Hashem*. This worry was the focus of his *tefillos*.

His approach to *tefillah* in his situation is correct. (The appropriate *kavanah* for this type of *tefillah* is subtle and sensitive, and a person has to be in the right emotional state to daven this way.) This is exactly what Dovid Hamelech said. “Hashem, You know my wrongdoings: every thought, word, and action is revealed to You. But *Ribbono shel Olam*, I was chosen to be the king, and people rely on me and ask me to daven for them. I beg You to never let those who rely on You be ashamed of me, causing a *chillul Hashem*.”

The *Daas Kedoshim* concludes his reading of Dovid Hamelech’s words: “Because they believe in You, and they seek to receive Your *yeshuah* through me.”

The Tzaddik’s Thoughts

Let’s return to the *Yitav Lev’s* initial question. What does the tzaddik

think when he davens for someone else? If he is a great tzaddik and thinks that his *tefillos* should therefore be answered, his arrogance will surely prevent his *tefillos* from being heard. On the other hand, if he isn't a tzaddik, why should he presume that he's worthy of davening for others?

And this is the conclusion: "At this moment, it makes no difference who or what I am. *Ribbono shel Olam*, I know very well how badly I need to do *teshuvah*. But since **You put me here in a way that people turn to me asking for a *yeshuah***, I beg You to prevent the desecration of Your Name. Please help them, for they are doing what they should."

Water from the Rock

The *Yitav Lev* explains that this dilemma of the tzaddik can help us comprehend the background to Moshe Rabbeinu's sin at *Mei Merivah*.

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Moshe to speak to the rock, he knew that Moshe would think, "Who am I to perform such miracles? Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows just as I do that I am not worthy to bring water out of a rock. Now people will say I am so great that I can produce water from a rock just by speaking to it." Hashem knew that Moshe Rabbeinu would prefer to minimize the miracle and hit the rock rather than speak to it, and in that way Bnei Yisrael would attribute the miracle to the *mateh*, the staff, rather than to him.

This is why Hakadosh Baruch told him to speak to the rock לעיניהם, *before their eyes*. "Their eyes are yearning and hoping for the *yeshuah*. What does it have to do with you? It is all about them! Who gave you permission to reduce the opportunity for the strengthening of Bnei Yisrael's *emunah*? They need that *emunah*!"

The purpose of the miracle was not simply to impress Bnei Yisrael and convince them to follow Hashem because He is so powerful that He can cause water to flow from a rock. Rather, **they needed to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens to the *tefillos* of a tzaddik and performs miracles for the tzaddik and for the Jewish people by**

overriding the laws of nature. This understanding was vital for the Jewish people then, and in the future.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu therefore told Moshe, “You have no authority to avoid speaking to the rock and to decide to strike it because you feel unworthy. What does any of it have to do with you? Even if you feel you are unworthy and need to do *teshuvah* for your wrongdoings, it has no bearing on your mission. If you were chosen to be a leader of Klal Yisrael, you have two duties: The first is to progress in *avodas Hashem* each day, which includes *teshuvah* on any past sins. The second is to speak to the rock in order to strengthen the *emunah* of Bnei Yisrael. They will say, ‘See! Those who have *yiras Shamayim* speak to a rock and water begins to flow.’”

Moshe Rabbeinu’s Humility

The *Yitav Lev* notes that Hashem told Moshe, “וַהֲוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מִמֶּן מֵן הַסֶּלֶעַ” – you will draw out **for them** water from the rock. Do you know why the rock will provide water even without you hitting it? It’s not because of you. It has nothing to do with you. It depends on them and their *emunah*.”

We see from here that the water flowed because of the *emunah* of the people.

Giving a Pidyon to a Tzaddik

Based on this principle, the *Yitav Lev* explains the practice of giving money to a tzaddik when asking for a *brachah*. The *Igra D’Pirka* (7) notes that this is already mentioned in *Drashos HaRan* as a longstanding practice. In *Sefer Shmuel I*, we find Shaul wanting to give money to Shmuel Hanavi so that Shmuel will daven for him.

The *Yitav Lev* quotes his grandfather, the Yismach Moshe, who said in the name of many earlier tzaddikim that everything depends on the *emunah* of the Jew who is asking the tzaddik to daven for him. How does the tzaddik know if someone truly has *emunah*? Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu can know that. But the tzaddik derives strength from the

Jew's *emunah* in order to daven for him – and for that, **the Jew's *emunah* must be a tangible reality.** That is why the tzaddik may ask the person for an amount of money. If he is willing to part with his money, it's a sign that he truly believes.

Rav Moshe Feinstein's Brachos

In *Igros Moshe (Yoreh De'ah 4, siman 51)*, Rav Moshe Feinstein describes his initial ambivalence when asked to give *brachos* and daven for others:

Since there is a halachic obligation when one knows about his friend's predicament to daven for him and to bless him even [without being asked], and even more so when he *is* asked, I am obligated to daven and give *brachos*, certainly for those who ask that of me.

Even though they ask because they think that I am a *chacham*, [I know] it will accomplish nothing if I tell them they are mistaken and I have not reached the level of *chochmah*. It will simply have the opposite effect; I will be greater in their eyes because they will attribute my words to *anavah*.

I also can't deny the reality that I have become known in the world as a *chacham* because I have a yeshivah and say *shiurim*, and because of the *sefarim* that I have written, even though this is far from the type of *chacham* that R. Pinchas Ben Chama instructed people to follow ["let him go to a *chacham* that he may ask Hashem's mercy"]. . . I am even far from the level of *chachamim* who lived centuries after the completion of the Gemara and even after the time of the *Geonim*. Perhaps it is enough to be a *chacham* in this generation. . . Even though I don't even consider myself one of the *chachamim* of our era, the sick person does believe that I am a *chacham*, and he is obligated to believe that. Therefore, he is following the instructions of R. Pinchas ben Chama.

In the *zechus* of his faith in the words of Chazal, Hashem Yisbarach will accept even my *tefillah* and *brachah*.

This reasoning is correct and this is the *din*: when people ask someone to daven for them and give them a *brachah* because they believe that he is a *chacham*, he is obligated to do so.

The Danger of Cynicism

This leads us to a topic that needs to be explored, as sensitive as it is, and examined through the lens of Torah sources.

Many people are cynical, angry and confused about the topic of *emunah* in *tzaddikim* of our generation. "I wasn't born yesterday," they argue. "Hashem gave me the intelligence to understand what's going on. If there are some innocent, gullible individuals who believe everything people sell them, good for them. I'm too smart for that.

Others say, "Listen, I knew real *tzaddikim*," or, "My father used to go to real *tzaddikim*. How am I supposed to believe in this *tzaddik*? I haven't seen evidence of his greatness. I haven't seen any of the extraordinary *avodah* that I saw in the *tzaddikim* of the previous generation. I'm not going to talk myself into believing in someone when I don't even know if he is a true *tzaddik*."

This line of thinking is much more widespread than one might think. There are many people walking around in full *chassidish* garb who believe that the teachings of *emunas tzaddikim* in their communities are funded by individuals who want to 'build the business.' "Look, in order to keep the business going, you have to ask the *gvirim* to donate. In order to keep the donations coming in, you have to convince *bochurim* to stand on the *parenches* and *shokkel* fervently back and forth. None of that can happen unless they believe that the head of the operation is as great as the Rebbes described in *chassidische sefarim*. So they get some *avreichim* to convince the *bochurim* to believe in the *tzaddik*. That gets the crowds to keep coming with *kvitlech* and *pidyonos*, and the business keeps running."

The Pain of the Cynics

The cynics are truly angry and upset because they feel that the vast

majority of those who follow Torah leaders are fools who are being cheated. These cynics view it as lies based on lies, and falsehood that keeps growing. "Who decided that *tzidkus* goes from father to son? When did that start? In the time of the Baal Shem Tov it went from Rav to *talmid*, not father to son.

"*Chassidus* has gone bankrupt, and so has Yiddishkeit as a whole," they claim. "It's too bad that I'm the only one smart enough to see through it. The rest are fools. I guess they follow the flock because they don't have anything else."

If you ask these sceptics about the countless Torah sources that speak about *emunas chachamim*, some will shrug, "I don't know," and some will retort, "Sure, as long as there are tzaddikim to believe in, but there aren't." They have questions, and answers, and they are confident in their skepticism.

I know some people will be extremely angry that I'm saying this, but the sources are there, and the cynics have no valid way to reconcile their approach with what is written in the *sefarim*.

Who Appoints Leaders?

The *Yitav Lev* addresses the topic of leadership.

Chazal tell us that Korach truly considered himself greater than Moshe Rabbeinu. He saw that his descendant, Shmuel Hanavi, would be as great as Moshe and Aharon together: משה ואהרן בכהניו, ושמואל בקוראי (Tehillim 99:6). What was his mistake? He didn't understand that even if he was in fact greater than Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem didn't choose to appoint him as the leader of Bnei Yisrael.

A person needs very strong *emunah* in Hakadosh Baruch Hu to accept this. He has to tell himself, "It seems to me that I am greater. However, someone else was chosen to lead. Why was he chosen instead of me? I have no idea. Nevertheless, **since Hashem chose him, his task is to lead, and my task is to follow him.**"

Hashem guides the choice of any type of leader. The Gemara (*Berachos* 58a) tells us, “Even the head of the ditch diggers is appointed *min haShamayim*.” Every leader is chosen by *hashgachah pratis*. Hashem’s reasons for choosing a particular leader go beyond anything we can comprehend.

Dovid Hamelech was the youngest and the weakest of Yishai’s sons. There was even a suspicion that he was a *mamzer*. When Shmuel was sent to anoint one of Yishai’s sons as king, no one imagined that it would be Dovid. Each of his brothers seemed far more suited to the task. Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose Dovid Hamelech, even though no one else even considered him to be a candidate.

Moshe Rabbeinu suffered from a speech impediment. Who would choose a leader of Am Yisrael who couldn’t deliver captivating *drashos*? The *Drashos HaRan* and the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explain that Moshe Rabbeinu felt unqualified to be Hashem’s emissary to Pharaoh. His handicap not only prevented him from speaking clearly, but also eroded his self-confidence. Hakadosh Baruch Hu explained to him that his speech impediment made him particularly suited for the task. It trained him in the attribute of *anavah* that was the prerequisite for Jewish leadership.

In *Maseches Yoma* (22b), Chazal say: “We do not appoint a leader of the community unless he has a ‘box of vermin’ (past wrongdoings) hanging behind his back. For if he starts to get arrogant, we tell him, ‘Look behind you.’”

This is comparable to one who applies for a leadership position and is told that he has to devote a section of his resume to past misdeeds. He must list at least three transgressions to be considered for the job. This would seem counterintuitive to us, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu has different criteria.

The cynics must realize that when they declare that everyone else in the community blindly follows the wrong person, **they are declaring**

that Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't know what He is doing. Do they really think He has abandoned the Jewish people and sent us down a path that will destroy us?

The Secret of a Leader's Success

It's important to delineate two aspects of Jewish leadership. The first is that a leader is chosen *min haShamayim* and he is provided with the 'toolbox' he needs to succeed. That includes his strengths and his weaknesses, his past accomplishments and past mistakes, the members of his family and everyone connected to him. **He was destined to lead, and all of these aspects were designed intentionally** to help him succeed in his mission of leadership.

However, we need to understand and internalize another aspect of successful leadership. Even though the leader has been equipped with everything that can help him succeed, only *siyata d'Shmaya* – and **the tearful prayers of his followers** – will determine to what extent he will succeed in this *avodas Hashem*.

In *Maseches Kiddushin* (72b) we find,

“When R. Akiva died, Rebbi was born; when Rebbi died, R. Yehudah was born; when R. Yehudah died, Rava was born; when Rava died, R. Ashi was born. This teaches us that no tzaddik leaves the world until a tzaddik like him is created.”

The *Tzlach** explains that this doesn't have to mean the new leader will automatically have *ruach hakodesh* and the power to bring about miracles. It means the new leader is born with potential. His success in actualizing that potential depends on his *tzibbur*. The more they do *teshuvah*, the more he will progress in wisdom and *yiras Shamayim* and develop into a greater leader.

*Commentary of the Noda B'Yehudah on Shas.

Those who habitually find reasons to denigrate *gedolim* should know that **their *lashon hara* and despicable behavior actually limits the success of those leaders' efforts** to help Klal Yisrael.

Not What You Think

We need to understand that a leader isn't chosen because of a particular *zechus* that he has. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't say, "Here's a person who deserves to be a leader; I'd better send him *chassidim* so he will have someone to lead." It doesn't really work that way. A person becomes a leader only because of the needs of the *tzibbur* and for the benefit of the *tzibbur*.

If the *tzibbur* remains on a low *madreigah*, it may limit the leader's ability to become a great tzaddik. Even though a leader has his own strength, he needs to be elevated by his *talmidim*. This is one explanation of the statement (*Taanis* 7a) מתלמידי יותר מכולם – I gained more from my students than I gained from my teachers and colleagues. What kind of *talmidim* is the *gemara* referring to? Certainly not *talmidim* who sit around finding fault with their Rav and mocking him. The Tanna was speaking about *talmidim* who daven for their Rav's success. **Every person can, and should, daven for the success of their Rav.**

Chazal taught us (*Bava Kama* 92a), המתפלל בעד חבריו והוא צריך לאותו דבר, הוא נענה תחילה – If someone prays for his friend, and he himself has the same need, he will be answered first. The *talmidim* certainly need the success of their Rav, for their success depends on his.

The Angry Shepherd

The Gemara in *Bava Kama* (52a) says, "A man from the Galil said to R. Chisda, 'When the shepherd gets angry with the sheep, he blinds the leader of the flock.'"

When we complain that our situation is so bad because we lack tzaddikim in this generation who can compare to those of the past, let's ask ourselves how we propose to improve the situation. Do we feel

qualified to replace the leader with someone else of our choice? Do we really think we can improve on Hakadosh Baruch Hu's plan? Would we have replaced Dovid Hamelech with someone else because of Dovid's shortcomings? Dovid Hamelech himself was very aware of his weaknesses, but he also knew that Hashem chose him to lead his people.

What the critic can do, and should do, is to look inwards and do *teshuvah*. As more and more people in the community seek ways to improve in their *avodas Hashem*, **their progress will fuel their leader's success.**

In summary: Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't abandon us. He sends *neshamos* of tzaddikim to every generation. If we do what we have to do, those *neshamos* will have the power to change the world.



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