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# Bitachon – Tranquility in a Turbulent World

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## The Fruit of Emunah

In the first chapter of his *Sefer Ha'emunah V'habitachon*, the Ramban describes *bitachon* as the “fruit of *emunah*.” He goes on to explain that because of this relationship, it is possible for a person to have *emunah* without *bitachon*; however, it is impossible to have *bitachon* without *emunah*.

This understanding enables us to differentiate between true *bitachon* that is based on *emunah*, and false *bitachon*. A person develops true *bitachon* by constantly strengthening his *emunah* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu runs every aspect of the world. He also reminds himself that since he is a “*ben yachid*,” an “only child” of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, every event in his life is designed by Hashem for his benefit, not only in this world but for eternity. As he constantly reinforces these fundamental beliefs, he develops the true *bitachon* that provides him with peace of mind.

Conversely, a person who has not built the foundations of *emunah*, but has convinced himself that he has attained *bitachon*, will eventually discover his error. He may have mistaken his naturally calm nature for *bitachon*, but in a crisis, his peace of mind is shattered.

**Even day-to-day challenges can help us determine whether our *bitachon* is solid.** A man arises early for Shacharis and discovers before going to shul that he needs to help his wife and children. If he has internalized *bitachon*, he is prepared to realize that this is yet another situation designed by Hakadosh Baruch Hu for his good; it provides him with an opportunity to fulfill Hashem’s will in the world. He will happily stay home and help prepare his children for school with the same *simchah* he would have felt had he gone to shul.

We can see an illustration of this concept in the famous story about Rav Moshe Leib of Sassov who was on his way to *Kol Nidrei* and heard a baby crying. Since no one was home, Rav Moshe Leib comforted the child, rather than continuing to shul. He and all such tzaddikim had built strong foundations of *emunah* and *bitachon* that prepared them to react as Hashem would want them to in times of *nisayon*. It therefore wasn't difficult for him to modify his agenda to fulfill Hashem's will.

### Quality of Life

It is difficult to describe the tranquility experienced by a true *baal bitachon*. Perhaps it can be compared to the feelings experienced by generous donors to a cause who have been invited to a lavish dinner in their honor. They were given no details about the program, but as they sit at the beautifully arranged tables, that lack of knowledge causes them no unease. They know that the entire evening from beginning to end was planned for their benefit and pleasure. They don't need to know more than that, and they don't try to find out the details. They simply anticipate the enjoyment each part of the program will provide.

A *baal bitachon* wakes up each morning with the same sense of peace and anticipation. He knows that he is about to start a day that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has designed for his pleasure and benefit. **He understands that he doesn't know what will be "on the program."** In fact, he even enjoys the experience of Hashem guiding him to places and situations he never expected. He goes through life with peace of mind beyond anything most people could imagine.

### Encountering Your Destiny

Dovid Hamelech says, בַּקֶּשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְפָּהוּ – *Seek out peace and pursue it.* The *Midrash Tanchuma* points out that the Torah doesn't command us to seek out and pursue mitzvos. Instead, the Torah introduces many mitzvos with the word כִּי, meaning if, or when. "When you see the donkey of your enemy, when you harvest your olives, when you enter your friend's vineyard. . . . You are commanded to fulfill those mitzvos when the opportunity arises, but not to pursue those mitzvos.

The Yismach Moshe writes that we can understand the message of the Midrash by recognizing that we can potentially serve Hashem with everything in our lives and with every moment of our lives. With this outlook, if a person has some free time, he doesn't need to pursue a mitzvah. He should learn Torah (a mitzvah that is כנגד כולם), and he can rejoice that when it comes time to perform a mitzvah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will provide him with the opportunity to perform that mitzvah. For example, when a poor man approaches him, he will realize that Hashem has sent him the gift of the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. As the *Zohar Hakadosh* states, Hashem sends the poor to the wealthy to provide them with opportunities to perform mitzvos.

If we develop our *bitachon*, we will feel a particular affinity for mitzvah opportunities that we had no way to anticipate. **Those mitzvos will enable us to feel the loving hand of Hashem Who wants to enrich us.**

A *baal bitachon* sees *every* aspect of life from this perspective. He doesn't enjoy "pursuing" *parnassah*, because that pursuit convinces him that his intervention provides his needs. He prefers to receive *parnassah* through opportunities that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings his way. Such opportunities enable him to earn a living with the full realization that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is supporting him.

### All Situations Are Equal

The *Tzava'as HaRivash* records the Baal Shem Tov's teaching that a person should get used to feeling no difference between instances where things go the way he wants and where they don't. He should have *bitachon* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives him what he needs, and that everything goes exactly as it should for his benefit. If his plans fall through, he accepts that Hashem must want something else. **It's clear to him that if Hashem had wanted those plans to succeed, He would have helped them come to fruition.** Since that didn't happen, it must be that Hashem intervened on his behalf to prevent something that would have been to his detriment.

If we spend some time thinking about it, we will come to the realization that none of us has the power to ensure that our plans materialize. Look around and you will see that two people may undertake similar projects, and yet one succeeds and the other fails. Very often, there is no seeming reason for the disparity. Therefore, we must conclude that Hashem enabled one to succeed because that would be to his benefit. Similarly, Hashem prevented the second person's success because it would have affected him negatively.

### Wasted Energy

Do we have any idea how much effort, energy, and resources people invest in their attempts to bring their plans to fruition!?! Countless individuals then fall into despair and depression when they fail to actualize plans that they hoped would lead to their success. Had they recognized the truth, they would have realized that their *hishtadlus* never had the power to ensure success. Had they understood that everything depends exclusively on *retzon Hashem*, **they could have abandoned the project at the appropriate time and saved themselves all of that heartache.**

It's easy to understand why we keep making that same mistake again and again without learning our lesson. We can't help focusing on people we know who threw themselves into *hishtadlus* and achieved stunning success. **A voice keeps telling us that if only we try as hard as they did, we will also succeed.**

We need to see through the illusion. That workaholic succeeded only because Hashem enabled him to implement his plans and achieve the desired results. The end result was "disguised" by the natural process of hard work leading to success.

The *Targum Onkelos* emphasizes this in his translation of the *pasuk* (Devarim 8:18), וְזָכַרְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הַנֹּתֵן לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חַיִּיל - ותדכר ית ה', *You shall remember Hashem your G-d for He is the one Who gives you advice to acquire possessions.* Hashem



puts the ideas into our hearts that enable us to successfully implement our plans through natural means.

As we have explained, a person who understands that Hakadosh Baruch Hu provides his *parnassah* **won't be so tied up in his hishtadlus**. He does the requisite *hishtadlus* because that is how he fulfills Hashem's will. Nonetheless, he always remembers that Hashem will send his *parnassah* in whatever way He sees fit. This enables the *baal bitachon* to maintain his peace of mind while putting the appropriate effort into his *hishtadlus*.

### The Correct Request

The *Tzavaas HaRivash* states another basic principle. Shlomo Hamelech said (Mishlei 17:3), גַּל אֶל ה' מַעֲשֵׂיךָ וַיִּכְנֹן מִחֻשְׁבֹתֶיךָ, - *Commit your affairs to Hashem, and your plans will be established*. We should realize that whatever happens comes from Hashem, and therefore we should entrust our affairs to Hashem **by asking Him to always send what He knows is for our benefit and not what our limited intellect thinks is best**. Because what seems positive to us may actually be negative.

We should follow the instruction of the *pasuk* (Tehillim 55:23), הַשִׁלָּךְ עַל ה' יְהַבֶּךָ וְהוּא יְכַלְכְּלֶךָ - *Cast your burden on Hashem and He will sustain you*. The *pasuk* doesn't mean that when a person desires something, he should place the onus on Hashem to fulfill it. Doing so may result in frustration and disappointment that could destroy his *menuchas hanefesh*, since it may very well be that Hashem won't fulfill his wish because He knows that it is detrimental to the person. Instead, he should cast his burden on Hashem by simply asking Hashem to do that which He knows is best for him. That is what the *pasuk* means: **Cast your entire burden on Hashem**, leaving none of it on yourself.

### The Peace of Helplessness

The *Chovos Halevavos* tells us that a person who has developed true *bitachon* in Hashem will retain his calm and equilibrium even if he receives news as bad as that told to Iyov. He won't lose spirit, and will

remain happy and good-hearted. He views the changed situation as a **new road in life that Hashem has paved for him**. He knows that this new path will improve his life, and he rejoices in the new opportunity.

Someone once told me that the most pleasurable moment in his life was the moment when he was fired from a position with a \$20,000 monthly salary. He echoed the words of the Chazon Ish, who said that there is no pleasure on Earth that can compare to that felt by a person who finally arrives at the realization that his *yeshuah* cannot come from any natural means.

This outlook provides us with a litmus test for *bitachon*. If we see that we are lacking *menuchas hanefesh* (peace of mind), then we need to realize that we don't have true *bitachon*. And how should we develop true *bitachon*? We should start by deciding at the beginning of each day that we are going to do that which Hashem wants us to do, and nothing else. **If we frame our day that way, we will be able to happily shift gears** to do whatever Hashem sends our way.

### Don't Fight It

We suffer only because we want our life to be different. A *baal bitachon* never fights against the type of life he is given. He has trained himself to want that which Hashem wants for him because that is what's best for him. This relieves not only emotional suffering, but even physical suffering. Psychologists formulated this phenomenon (which we have known for centuries from the Torah) as **"grief + resistance = suffering."**

I have spoken with people who are undergoing terrible *yissurim*. They told me that the moment they acquired the *emunah* that Hashem is doing that which is best for them, both their spiritual and physical suffering decreased. It isn't only the degree of physical pain that causes suffering, but also the person's reaction to the pain.

### Spiritual Suffering

This holds true not only for physical suffering, but perhaps even

more so for the suffering that results from disappointment. Much of the suffering we experience in our lives results from our reaction to events that don't go the way we wanted them to.

Sometimes we are enveloped by sadness as a result of a minor mishap. Take, for example, a person who wasn't careful, and damaged something that is valuable to him. He may get so upset that he obsesses over his loss and can't concentrate all day. That same person is capable of spending thousands of dollars without hesitation. The reason for his extreme reaction is because **he lost money in a way he hadn't planned for.**

We throw ourselves into our efforts to implement our agenda. If something hampers our plans, we become discombobulated. A true *baal bitachon* maintains his equilibrium even if he experiences an unexpected reversal. He simply thanks Hashem for redirecting him, and goes on with his tranquil life.

This is the deeper meaning of the saying quoted by the Rema (*Teshuvos Rema 5*), אין שמחה כהתרת הספיקות – *No joy can compare to the joy of clarifying doubts.* The *baal bitachon's* heart is open to hearing what Hashem wants him to do. **He therefore lives in a constant state of resolved doubts**, for he knows that if Hashem placed him in a specific place or situation, it is exactly where he should be.

### Keeping Ambition in Check

According to many, the Torah source for the mitzvah of *bitachon* is the *pasuk* (Devarim 18:13) תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – *You shall be whole with Hashem.* One interpretation of the *pasuk* is that it commands us not to try to divine the future, but to accept wholeheartedly all that befalls us.

A *baal bitachon* doesn't seek to become a *maggid shiur* or *rosh yeshivah*. He doesn't turn the world over to reach the goal he has set for himself. He has one and only one ambition: to fulfill Hashem's will.

People tend to have images of what their future should look like, and they feel compelled to do all they can to actualize them. There is

no doubt that people who live that way will have no *menuchas hanefesh*, only heartache and resentment if Hashem doesn't answer their prayers. "Didn't I ask Hashem with all my strength?" they will assert, or: "I had *bitachon* that Hashem would grant my wish; why didn't it work?" These people have made a grave error. Their way of life is antithetical to the life the Torah guides us to live.

**We need to stop wanting so much, and start opening our hearts to what Hashem wants.** We will then experience *menuchas hanefesh*.

### Even When It Comes to Learning

We can be 100 percent certain that in the case of a large percentage of the Jewish people, it is not Hashem's will that they remain in "full-time" learning, but that they go out and work. How can we be so certain? Because He didn't allow them to remain in kollel. **He put them in situations and circumstances that made it clear that they must go to work.\***

When we say that Hashem doesn't want them to learn, we don't *chas v'shalom* mean that He doesn't want them to learn at all. He certainly wants them to be *kovea itim*, to learn as much as they can and continue *shteiging* and developing into high-level *bnei Torah*. They can still aspire to reach high *madreigos*, and even to the aspect of *ruach hakodesh* that can be achieved in our generation. Nonetheless, Hashem did clearly show them that He didn't want them to continue in full-time kollel, even if they imagined that they would continue learning for X number of years.

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\*Of course, not every difficulty that one encounters is a heavenly sign that he must leave full-time learning. It should be expected that everyone who tries to learn Torah will face *nisyonos*. This is part of what Chazal meant when they said (*Brachos* 5a) Torah is acquired by *yissurim*. However, there are some very obvious signs that definitively indicate that a person won't be able to conduct his life as a proper Jew unless he leaves yeshivah or kollel. When a *baal bitachon* encounters such signs, he should ask *daas Torah*, and he should understand that by following the instructions of his *moreh derech*, he will be doing what Hashem wants, even if for years he imagined his life would have turned out differently.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells a person, “I will help you connect to me with *dveikus*, and to merit all the *brachos* written in the Torah. However, that beautiful future is conditional upon you taking the path I have chosen for you.” So many people become attached to another path, one that they imagined for years would be theirs. **They end up resisting the path Hashem has chosen for them**, and they have *ta’anos* that Hashem isn’t helping them live the life they imagined they should live.

Why is it so hard for them to shift gears? Often, they are worried about what others will say about them. They worry about losing their status, or that certain shidduchim will be out of reach for their children. This causes them to “go to war” with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and lose both worlds, as they drown in worries and burdens they weren’t meant to have.

This is precisely the message of the *pasuk* תמים תהיה עם השם אלוֹקִיךָ. Stop thinking about shidduchim. Stop trying to make your fantasies a reality. Want only what Hashem asks of you, and you will live a life of *menuchas hanefesh* and *dveikus* in Hashem, meriting all the *brachos* written in the Torah.

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## Division Is Not an Option

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### When Mashiach Comes, Everyone Will Return

At the beginning of World War I, Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz found refuge in the city of Ratzfert in Hungary. A *chaburah* of *talmidei chachamim* formed around the Rebbe. The head of the *chaburah* was Rav Moshe Dovid Teitelbaum, *av beis din* of Laposh and a grandson of the Yitav Lev.

Rav Moshe Dovid gave a *drashah* to the *chaburah*. “Bnei Yisrael are suffering, and they must do *teshuvah*,” he declared. He then turned to Rav Yissachar Dov and said, “Belzer Rav, if you will inspire the community to *teshuvah*, it will help them repent fully and merit a complete redemption.” His *drashah* went on for almost an hour.

When he concluded, the Belzer Rav turned to him and said, “Laposher Rav, have you concluded your arguments? If Mashiach arrives, Bnei Yisrael will automatically do *teshuvah*. **The most important factor is for Bnei Yisrael to love each other.** Each of us has to love even the worst Jew as he loves himself. We must unify all of our hearts and distance anything that may divide our hearts. This is what the *yeshuah* of Klal Yisrael depends on in times of trouble.”

This principle can be found in all of the *sifrei Chassidus*. There may be many imperfections among the Jewish people that must be repaired by *teshuvah*, but when Mashiach arrives, everyone will be *chozer b'teshuvah* and every blemish will disappear. **The real problem is that Mashiach can't come as long as the hearts of the Jewish people are divided.** When we love each other, he will come.

### Eliyahu Comes Only to Increase Shalom

The Mishnah (*Eiduyos* 8:7) clearly states, אין אליהו בא אלא להרבות שלום

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בעולם - *Eliyahu comes only to increase peace in the world.* Eliyahu precedes Mashiach because only when we reach a state of *shalom* will Mashiach arrive. Once he arrives, all will be repaired.

The Midrash (*Aggadas Bereishis 8:7*) states: "In *Olam Hazeh*, because they don't unite, they are jealous of each other. As long as they remain divided, they continue to descend. In the future, they will unite and become elevated. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will say, 'You have united; I will rise up together with you.'"

Jealousy stems from division. **If people loved each other, they would rejoice in what others have and in their success, rather than feeling jealous.** Chazal say that one is not jealous of his son or student. There are many true stories of *talmidim* who grew greater than their *rav*, to the delight of the *rav*. Countless parents are happy and proud when their children surpass them and become famously successful.

Rav Moshe Zilberberg said, "When I was a child, they called me 'the grandson of the Pittsburgher Rav.' When I got married, they started to call me 'the grandson of Rav Gedaliah Schorr.' When my son (Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg) became known, they began to call me 'the father of Rav Tzvi Meir.'"

This is the natural *ayin tovah* that comes from love and a feeling of connection.

### Does Everything Really Depend on Ahavas Yisrael?

This concept requires further study. One would think the Jewish people are plagued with issues that are far more damaging than a lack of *ahavas Yisrael*. Yet the sources teach us that everything depends on *ahavas Yisrael*. How can we understand this?

We can ask the same question from another angle. Chazal teach us that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred. Aren't there more serious transgressions than *sinas*

*chinam*? Chazal's statement certainly reinforces the idea that had there been love and unity among the Jewish people, even if they were guilty of terrible *aveiros*, the Beis Hamikdash would not have been destroyed; only the lack of love and unity led to its destruction. Why is this so?

The recurrence of this question helps us realize that we are not seeing things from a Torah perspective. But in order to change our perceptions, we must first understand the underlying concepts. Indeed, one of the key aspects of Torah study is transforming the way we look at things. A person who comes to learn Torah must ask himself if his goal is to find backing for his *hashkafah*, or if he wants to hear the *hashkafah* of the Torah.

When approached by a poor man for *tzedakah*, we may ask, "Why must I give him money? He doesn't deserve it." We need to open a Chumash and read (Devarim 15:10): וְלֹא יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתַתֵּהּ לוֹ - *Your heart should not feel bad when you give to him.*

A person may say, "I enjoy davening alone. Why should Hakadosh Baruch Hu care if I have nine other people davening with me or not?" Once again, we ask this Jew if he wants to assert his *hashkafah* or if he wants to hear the *hashkafah* of the Torah. The Torah's *hashkafah* is that the *Shechinah* only dwells in a gathering of ten men.

Learning Torah enables us to change the way we see the world as we adopt the Torah's definitions of what is major and what is minor, more important and less important, primary and secondary.

The Torah's *hashkafah* regarding the Beis Hamikdash is quite clear: **It cannot stand if Jewish hearts are divided.** *Galus* and *geulah* are dependent on Klal Yisrael's level of *ahavas Yisrael*. You can go on and on about *teshuvah* and countless wrongs that need to be rectified, but without *ahavas Yisrael*, it simply won't help.

### Another Puzzling Midrash

In the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah Shoftim* 10) we find,

R. Shmuel bar Nachman said, "The generation of Achav were idolaters, yet when they went out to war, they were victorious.



Why? Because there were no talebearers among them. When Izevel wanted to kill all of the prophets of Hashem, what did Ovadiah do? He hid them, and no one told Achav, 'This is what Ovadiah did.'

"But in the generation of Shaul, they were all talebearers. When Shaul pursued Dovid, everyone told him *lashon hara* [about Dovid].... Therefore, they were defeated in their battles."

This is a shocking *midrash*. Achav's generation worshiped *avodah zarah*, yet emerged victorious in war! It is clear that **the Shechinah leaves Klal Yisrael when *lashon hara* is prevalent**, when Jewish hearts are divided. When their hearts are united, they succeed.

*But what about the terrible sin of avodah zarah?* you may argue. Once again, you must ask yourself if you want to learn Hakadosh Baruch Hu's *hashkafah*. If you honestly want to see the world through the lens of Torah, you will learn that even when idolatry is prevalent, as long as there is unity, the Beis Hamikdash can continue to exist.

### A Small Mistake that Spells Disaster

The Torah clearly views the sins of idolatry, forbidden relations and murder as the most serious of all transgressions. These three *aveiros* are the only times a Jew is required to give up his life rather than transgress. If so, how can we say that everything depends on *ahavas Yisrael* and not on the *tikkun* of the most serious *aveiros*?

Apparently, there is a paradox we must resolve to help us comprehend the idea that our ability to have the Beis Hamikdash depends on *ahavas Yisrael*.

Among the forces that Hakadosh Baruch Hu put in place to govern our world, we find the power of gravity. Not long ago, a tall building in Florida collapsed, and unfortunately many people were killed. Certainly, Hashem is sending us a message with this event (as we will

soon explain), but there is also an external explanation for the physical event. One oversight, one tiny mistake of an engineer, led to the catastrophe.

Similarly, if a pilot forgot to press one button, or if one item was overlooked during the pre-flight check, an airplane can crash, killing hundreds of people. It seems out of proportion. We understand that it's possible to kill multiple people with a gun or a knife. But **we have difficulty accepting that a small oversight can lead to a great disaster.**

Even though every event is decreed from above by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we need to understand the systems that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created in His world.

### **There Are Rules!**

It's a simple fact that *Olam Haze* has rules. If someone acts in a way that conflicts with those rules, the result can be disastrous. After the fact, no apology can turn back the clock. Regret can't reverse the repercussions. Once we learn that this is the way of the world, we also learn not to try to outsmart the system. Attempting to do so will inevitably lead us to regret our actions.

There are far fewer airplane accidents than car accidents. The reason for that is precisely because pressing the wrong button can cause the death of all the passengers. If people want to travel rapidly from one country to another, they must utilize a means of transport where one small mistake can result in catastrophe. Therefore, from the earliest days of long-distance air travel, protective measures were put in place to prevent that small mistake. They designed planes with two engines, so that if one fails it remains possible to fly with the other. They implemented laws, restrictions and safety procedures, with one fail-safe after another – because they knew they had no choice. **The alternative was unacceptable.**

Despite it all, since human beings aren't perfect, airplanes have crashed. When that happens, there is an immediate and thorough

investigation, and all planes of that type are grounded until the cause of the crash is identified.

### From Physical to Spiritual

In *Parshas Bo*, the *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh* explains that Hashem wants us to learn lessons from the laws of nature that will help us understand the workings of the spiritual world. He uses the example of a magnet to help people understand how sparks of *kedushah* are drawn to *kedushah*. That magnetism is why the arrival of a tzaddik in a certain location causes all of the *nitzotzos* of *kedushah* in that place to be drawn to him as metal is drawn to a magnet.

The physical world is a constricted yet parallel form of the spiritual world. That is why we can learn much about *ruchniyus* by observing the workings of the physical world. Hakadosh Baruch Hu knew that if we had to discuss spirituality in its own terms, we wouldn't be capable of understanding it. He therefore gave us tangible examples in the physical world, which we can see and understand, that help us visualize the workings of the spiritual world.

What can we learn from the example of the airplane? We learn that some aspects of the spiritual world leave us no room for error, and **we must set up one safeguard after another to ensure that we don't run against those laws of spiritual nature.** Crossing one of those lines will bring disaster, and it won't help to say we didn't know or that we are sorry and will try harder next time.

Imagine how we would take the apologies of an engineer, a pilot or an airplane technician. "I was so busy that day; my daughter was getting married; I simply forgot. I'm really sorry the building collapsed, but what can I do, I'm human. I'll try to make sure it doesn't happen again."

His excuses would fail to impress us. Someone who builds tall buildings or flies a plane must know that there is no room for such

errors. If you choose to undertake tasks whose very nature means that mistakes are a matter of life and death, you need to know that there can be no excuses. That's why the criteria for such positions are so demanding – and that is why, thankfully, such disasters are rare.

### Life and Death in Ruchniyus

If we apply this model to Yiddishkeit, we find that every Torah-observant Jew understands that there are certain red lines that can't be crossed no matter what. Sometimes the same person has other areas of Yiddishkeit where he gives himself more leeway.

R' Yisrael Goldhaber told me that he heard this story from the *chassid* R' Nachum Mendel Tzeilingold:

There was a non-Jewish police officer in the town of Stolin. If someone was caught smuggling goods to avoid taxes, it was this officer's job to make sure he was punished. Occasionally, the policeman would visit Rav Yisrael of Stolin to ask his advice, and they developed a very friendly relationship.

One day, the policeman and his Jewish assistant, a man who had unfortunately strayed from the path of Torah, came to seek the Rebbe's advice regarding a certain issue. In the course of the conversation, the policeman said that he wished to express his admiration for Torah-observant Jews.

"We caught two Jews who were apparently smuggling. We told them that if they swore they hadn't smuggled, the charges would be dropped and they wouldn't be punished. So they stood up and took an oath that they had never smuggled. They were then told to sign their names to a document attesting to their oath. The Jews insisted that they were unable to sign because it was Shabbos.

"I wanted to tell you about these two Jews who were willing to be imprisoned just so they could avoid writing on Shabbos."

When the policeman left, his Jewish assistant remained in the room. He approached the Rebbe and whispered in his ear, "Everyone knows that those two Jews are professional smugglers. They swore falsely! Is it praiseworthy that they didn't want to write on Shabbos?"

The Rebbe answered, "Why don't you understand? When a Jewish child picks up something that is *muktzeh* on Shabbos, his mother cries out in a panic, 'Shabbos, Shabbos!' Those cries are engraved in the child's heart and absorbed in his bloodstream. When those children grow up, they will keep Shabbos under all circumstances.

"At the same time, if their mother didn't keep her promises, they learned that falsehood is an option."

This ingrained value system isn't necessarily logical, but it becomes a way of life. **People get used to the idea that certain things can be played with, and certain things cannot.** If a child grows up in a home where the very idea of telling a lie is not an option, throughout his life he will continue to view falsehood as a red line that cannot be crossed.

## Foundations and Buildings

Let's return to the question of how a tiny mistake can produce such disproportionate, catastrophic results. The answer is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted us to learn that there are indeed small actions that can cause vast destruction. This natural law is intended to help us understand that in the world of *ruchmiyus* as well, **certain systems cannot be tampered with at all and must be safeguarded with great care.**

The *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh* teaches that even someone who ate something forbidden *b'shogeg*, inadvertently, is afflicted with *timtum ha'lev*, a blocked heart, impairing his ability to experience *kedushah*. Even though it was a mistake. In the physical world we all know that

if someone swallows poison by accident, the results can be fatal. That is why we take strict precautions with poisonous chemicals.

So too, when it comes to *machlokes*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “You must understand that there is a foundation and there is a building. It’s true that there are *nisyonos* in many areas, and much to improve and repair. But *ahavas Yisrael* is the foundation. Everything else is built on top of that. **Just as a physical building constructed on shaky foundations will fall down, if the hearts of the Jewish people are divided, the building cannot remain standing.** That is why *sinas chinam* caused the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.”

The Midrash (Bamidbar 15) explains a *pasuk* in Amos (9:6) וְאֵינֶנּוּ עַל יְרֵכָהּ וְאֵינֶנּוּ עַל יְרֵכָהּ :

This is similar to a palace built on rafts that are tied together. As long as the rafts are connected, the palace stands. If they separate, the palace can no longer stand. So too, *k’vayachol*, Hashem’s Throne is established above when the Jewish people are connected and form one united group.

What a frightening image! The presence of the *Shechinah*, the Beis Hamikdash, *korbanos*, and Hashem’s Throne all stand on one foundation: the unified souls of Klal Yisrael. If that connection disintegrates, no matter how much we work on improving ourselves, all of the above will collapse. That is the nature of the world as created by Hashem.

### Bayis Rishon and Bayis Sheini

We now have to resolve another seeming contradiction. Chazal tell us that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people transgressed the three *aveiros* of *avodah zarah*, *gilui arayos*, and *shefichas damim*, and the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*. This implies that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed *despite there having been unity during that time*. Why is that?

The Beis Hamikdash serves two purposes: it is a place for *hashra'as haShechinah* in this world, and it is a place that unifies the Jewish people. The prevalence of those three cardinal sins during the time of the first Beis Hamikdash interfered with the ability of the Beis Hamikdash to serve as a home for the *Shechinah* in this world. The Divine Presence cannot coexist with such evil, so it departed. And without *hashra'as haShechinah*, the Beis Hamikdash crumbled.

However, the nature of that *Churban* was such that the Beis Hamikdash was able to be rebuilt. The palace fell, but the foundation remained.

Despite their great transgressions, the Jewish people during the era of the first Beis Hamikdash were united by *ahavas Yisrael*. They had descended to a very low spiritual level, and even when they returned from Babylonia, they were on a very low level. Nonetheless, they were able to rebuild the Beis Hamikdash because it would be able to fulfill its purpose of unifying the Jewish people. **The infrastructure of *ahavas Yisrael* still remained.** The *hashra'as haShechinah* never equaled that of *Bayis Rishon*, but it was still a functioning Beis Hamikdash.

However, when *sinas chinam* became prevalent, when divisiveness took hold, the Beis Hamikdash was no longer able to perform its function of unifying Klal Yisrael. The foundation deteriorated, and the building was destroyed and was never rebuilt, to this day.

### The Only Way to Rebuild

This was the message of the Belzer Rav, and of the Mishnah quoted above. There may be many areas in which we have to improve. But it is **impossible to build the third Beis Hamikdash without first rebuilding the foundation.** Countless tzaddikim have taught that if the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, it can only be rebuilt with *ahavas chinam*.

It is now easy to understand why the *yetzer hara* invests so much energy in his attempts to foment *machlokes* and division among us. The

*yetzer hara* is a smart investor who only invests where it is worth his while. We also have to be smart and invest as much as we can in defeating *sinas chinam* and fostering *ahavas Yisrael*. **We must relate to anything that may divide us as a non-negotiable red line that must not be crossed.** We can't play around with it at all, because doing so leads to destruction – *Churban*. And causing *churban* is simply not an option.

## Rising to the Challenge

Here's a person who says, "I am not up to the challenge. Someone wronged me and embezzled my money. How am I supposed to avoid hating him?"

He is right. The challenge is great and we can't trivialize people's experiences. Nevertheless, we must understand the extent of destruction that comes about when Jewish hearts are divided. If this person automatically wants to react with hatred and strife, **he must realize that it simply isn't an option.** The repercussions of that decision would be too devastating.

So what do we do when we are wronged? We must remind ourselves of the fundamental principles that free our hearts of hatred and resentment even toward someone who wronged us:

- First and foremost, we need to strengthen our *emunah* and *bitachon*. Everything comes from Hashem, and that person who wronged me is simply the "stick" that was used to hit me.
- Next, we should remember that אדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, a person is shaped by his actions. When people of great *yiras Shamayim* would see themselves drifting into feelings of animosity toward a fellow Jew, they would go out of their way to do *chesed* with that person until those feelings subsided. It is natural to develop feelings of love for those we give to. If we know that we have no choice but to love our fellow Jew, we will take the necessary steps, even if it's hard, to eradicate animosity from our hearts.



## Learning the Hard Way

Recently, after one of the shiurim, someone approached me and told me about a terrible family feud that had broken out over the division of an inheritance. At the same time, tragedy struck that family again and again. Family members died in sudden and unusual ways.

They were frightened. What could they do to prevent further tragedies? They realized they had no choice but to make peace. Even though they were arguing over an inheritance worth millions of dollars, what other choice did they have? To keep arguing until everyone died?

Klal Yisrael is one family. We often feel that we have valid reasons to resent, hate or cut off others. Yet what choice do we have? **Should we cause the plane to crash or the building to collapse?** Our only option is to strengthen *emunah* and *bitachon* and do everything possible to love rather than hate others.

## In Summary

When Klal Yisrael will be united by love, Mashiach will arrive and we will do *teshuvah*. If not, there will only be ongoing *Churban*, both physical and spiritual. When we finally internalize this and realize that division is not an option, things will start to move. We will find ways to love each other and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will help us succeed.







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