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Menuchas Hanefesh – By Separating Actions from Results

The Unifying Power of Bitachon

The *Chovos Halevavos* has been teaching us that a *baal bitachon* experiences incomparable *menuchas hanefesh*.

While we all yearn for that tranquility, how do we attain it when dealing with the trials and tribulations of life?

We can begin to address this question with a *Midrash Rabbah* on the *pasuk* (Bereishis 49:15) in Yaakov Avinu's blessing to Yissachar, וַיֵּרָא מְנוּחָה, . . . וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לְסִבְלָהּ . . . כִּי טוֹב. – *He saw that rest was good . . . and he set his shoulder to carry.* The Midrash says: אין מנוחה אלא נבואה – “*Menuchah*” refers to *nevuah* (prophecy).

The image of bending the shoulder to carry something heavy represents a person who focuses all of his faculties in a unified way on a task. **The unification of all the parts of a person's *nefesh* is the essence of true *menuchas hanefesh*.** A person in that state has the capacity to reach the level of prophecy.

In the same vein, *Midrash Rabbah* (Bereishis 10:9) tells us, באה שבת באה מנוחה – *When Shabbos arrives, menuchah arrives.* When Shabbos came into the world, all the disparate parts of Creation became one complete, unified entity and the *Shechinah* was able to dwell in the world. That unification and completion resulted in *menuchah*, true rest.

With this we can understand the *Shaar Habitachon's* statement that a person with *bitachon* attains *menuchas hanefesh*. ***Bitachon* unifies all parts of a person's *nefesh*, preventing him from being fragmented.** This leads to a state of *menuchah* that enables the *baal bitachon* to experience the presence of Hashem's *Shechinah* in his life. This, in turn,

enables him to benefit from minor forms of *nevuah* in which he is able to intuit what Hashem wants him to do.

Redefining Menuchah

We often mistakenly picture someone who enjoys *menuchah* as a person who has no need to work hard or deal with any challenges in his life. This is a grave error. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created us with the innate desire to constantly work and accomplish. One who sits idle will inevitably suffer from depression. (This is common among people who are so wealthy that they feel no need to do anything productive.)

The *baal bitachon* works hard and has to deal with the same challenges we all face. However, **most of us feel forced to take action due to fear** that if we don't, we will starve or suffer in other ways. A *baal bitachon*, on the other hand, is motivated to take action **because he knows he is doing exactly what Hashem wants him to do**. He enjoys a sense of peace of mind, even joy, resulting from his involvement in activities that he *wants* to do—because he knows he is meant to do them!

Shifting Our Mindset

How do we shift our mindset so that we can progress toward that level of *bitachon*? It seems that the older we get, the more onerous the burdens we confront. Once we get married and have children, the reality is that we are continually busy dealing with our daily challenges and solving our family's problems. Whether we're struggling to earn a living, address health concerns, help our children find the schools that are right for them or do all we can to help them succeed, we often fight simultaneous battles on multiple fronts.

Understandably, if such a person is told that he should set aside more time for Torah study, he responds, "Do you think I am a *malach* with no family and no responsibilities? I have no time! I spend every spare moment tackling my problems."

The *Chovos Halevavos* wants us to realize that if a person is a *baal bitachon*, he won't collapse under the burden. Even in the scenario

where a father of a large family is told, while preparing for his daughter's wedding, that his son has been expelled from school and that another child has to go to the doctor, he will deal with those issues with *menuchas hanefesh*. Harried wives and mothers who multitask all day, every day, can also maintain their grueling schedule while enjoying *menuchas hanefesh*.

The question, once again, is: How?

If You Have Olam Haze, You Have Olam Haba

People often make statements like, "A woman who brings up seven children will certainly merit a place in *Gan Eden*; she already went through *Gehinnom* in this world." While her hard work and angst certainly can't be taken lightly and should be admired, the above statement is inaccurate. It implies that a life of *avodas Hashem* simply can't be a life of *menuchas hanefesh*. In fact, it implies that this mother's "ticket" to *Gan Eden* is her life of pain, suffering, and working herself to the point of exhaustion.

The opposite is true. Those who easily access *Gan Eden* after they leave this world are those who have learned to access and experience *Gan Eden* in this world since **they don't view their challenges as a crushing burden**. They have developed a level of *bitachon* that enables them to simply work hard doing what they have to, while enjoying *menuchas hanefesh* and *kirvas Elokim*.

Unfortunately, the assumption that a person who devotes his life to *kevod Shamayim* must suffer has infiltrated every level of our society. We hear a devoted *askan* complain, "I have no day and no night, no *davening* and no learning, just endless telephone calls." He consoles himself with the thought, "At least I am involved in helping the *tzibbur* and I earn more *zechuyos* each day."

Shaar Habitachon tells this *askan*, "You can work hard to help the *tzibbur* while at the same time enjoying a life of *menuchas hanefesh*

without worries. You can still enjoy your *tefillah* and Shabbos. You will even find ways to set aside time to learn Torah.”

The Starting Point

Rabbeinu Bachya taught us that the root of all mitzvos is the mitzvah of אנכי השם אלוקיך – the mitzvah of *emunah* and *bitachon*. All other mitzvos are meant to be performed within this context.

We mistakenly assume that when we have to stop and throw ourselves into taking action in response to an unexpected challenge, it takes us away from our *avodas Hashem*. If we only strengthened our fulfillment of that first *mitzvah*, our *emunah* and *bitachon* would enable us to see that whatever efforts we are involved in don't impair our ability to enjoy *kirvas Elokim*, but actually enhance it.

How do we go about strengthening ourselves in this area?

We must constantly remind ourselves that a human being has no power to make things happen. Neither a parent nor an *askan*, or anyone else, has the power to solve any problem great or small. This should be our conclusion when we see two people of equal abilities working in the same profession, and one succeeds while the other fails. A person must perform those actions that a responsible person should, but in no way can he determine the results of that action. **Results are entirely in Hashem's hands.**

This is the message of the *aggadata* at the end of *Maseches Niddah* (70b):

The people of Alexandria asked R. Yehoshua ben Chanina, “What should a person do to become wise?” He answered, “He should spend much time in *yeshivah*, and limit his involvement in commerce.” They said, “Many have done that and it didn't help.” He told them, “They should ask for mercy from the One to Whom all wisdom belongs. . . .” One [spending time in *yeshivah*] without the other [asking for mercy] won't work.”

They then asked, "What should a person do to become wealthy?" He told them, "He should increase his involvement in commerce and he should give and take with *emunah*." Once again, they responded, "Many have done so and it didn't help." He told them, "He should ask for mercy from the One to Whom all wealth belongs."

This *gemara* clearly teaches us that a person can perform the action of learning in yeshivah, or increase his honest involvement in commerce; nonetheless, the results are entirely in Hashem's hands, and a person must daven for His mercy.

Similarly, in *Maseches Kiddushin* (82b), R. Meir says, "A person should always teach his son a trade that is light and clean, and ask for mercy from the One to Whom all wealth and possessions belong. For poverty doesn't come from the profession, and wealth doesn't come from the profession, only from the One to Whom all wealth belongs."

It's Not in Your Hands

If you want to acquire something, or even to reach a certain location, remember that it is entirely out of your hands. You can certainly do things that would naturally produce the desired result. **You are even obligated to do so! Nonetheless, the results are completely in Hashem's hands.**

And you must remember something else. **Your very ability to take those natural steps depends on Hashem enabling you to do so.** The *sefer Imros Tehoros* quotes Rav Yaakov of Skver's *peirush* of the *pasuk* (Devarim 14:29) אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה יְדֶה אֱלֹקִים בְּכֹל מַעֲשֶׂה יְדֶה אֱלֹקִים : People assume the *pasuk* means, "Hashem will bless you and bring the results – if you will do what you have to." I understand it to mean, "If I will bless you and support you, you will be able to do what you have to."

How Much Hishtadlus

Let's take the example of a man who is trying to get his son into yeshivah. Unfortunately, the family doesn't have any of the connections

that can “open doors.” Time is running out, and his son doesn’t know where he will learn in Elul.

The father’s mind is constantly racing as he tries to think of ideas. His heart is heavy because he is worried for his son. He needs to remember that his only task at this time is to focus on giving to his son and fulfilling the mitzvah of teaching his son Torah. He will do what is necessary and appropriate, but the question of **what will result from the *hishtadlus*, or what his son’s future will look like, is not up to him.** He has to leave that to Hashem.

When he calls someone who may be able to help, he should train himself not to think at all of what may result from this phone call. He should only think about **doing his best to fulfill Hashem’s desire for parents to help their children.** He should recognize that by helping his son, he is following Hashem’s path, for just as Hashem does *chesed* we, too, should do *chesed*.

If he does focus (as most people do) on what may result from his *hishtadlus*, he prevents himself from having *menuchas hanefesh*. **For if the results are not as he hoped, he will worry even more and feel that he must redouble his efforts to succeed.**

However, when he truly understands and feels that he has no control over the results of his actions, he will have peace of mind and even joy, for he has performed the mitzvah of *chesed* for his son.

Of course, he must combine reasonable *hishtadlus* with *tefillah* exactly as recommended in the Gemara. Let us apply the Gemara’s instructions to this case: “If 220 boys apply to the *yeshivah* and only 40 will be accepted, what can one do to get his son into yeshivah? Write a letter to the *hanhalah*. But many people have done so and have not succeeded? So daven to the One to Whom all wisdom belongs, and He will bring the *yeshuah*.”

Don’t ask how Hashem will bring the *yeshuah*. *The Chovos Halevavos*

has already taught us that a *baal bitachon* knows that Hashem can bring him *yeshuah* and *shefa* by infinite means.

Once the father has done these two things—reasonable *hishtadlus* and *tefillah*—he has done what he is obligated to do and can maintain his *menuchas hanefesh*.

You Caused the Problem

Recently I heard someone bemoan his situation.

“I did all that I could and I didn’t manage to get my son into any yeshivah. I have so many connections that I never imagined it would be a problem, but nothing worked.”

I thought to myself, “I pity you, for **by relying on your connections and *hishtadlus*, the harder you tried, the further you got from *yeshuah*.** If only you had combined reasonable *hishtadlus* with pure *tefillah*, rather than relying on one connection after the other.

How Can This Be True?

We find it difficult to accept this idea because we observe the opposite taking place every day. It seems to us that people who invest maximum effort and *hishtadlus* are the ones who succeed. And that once they have achieved success, they are the ones who live with *menuchas hanefesh*.

We must realize that when our observations contradict the truth, we are probably seeing the world as the *yetzer hara* wants us to. **He causes us to have “tunnel vision,”** to focus on the small amount of *sheker* even though there is so much *emes* around us.

For example, we all know that many foods sold in supermarkets aren’t healthy and that an unhealthy diet can lead to illness. Nonetheless, most people desire those foods and can’t refrain from eating them; their craving for intense flavors rules over them. Would we come to the conclusion that these foods must be healthy because so many people consume them?

The same applies to *emunah* and *bitachon*. If we can remove the veil that the *yetzer hara* has placed over our eyes, we will see that **those who have *bitachon* and don't pin their hopes on *hishtadlus* are the ones who live tranquil lives** with peace of mind and happiness.

In Summary: Living with Menuchas Hanefesh

Every one of us should begin our day by framing everything on our agenda in the context of *emunah* and *bitachon*.

- We will then proceed to do what is necessary to fulfill Hashem's will, performing the mitzvah of *chesed* and taking care of those who depend on us.
- As we apply ourselves to our tasks, we will remind ourselves that Hakadosh Baruch Hu runs the world and doesn't need our help.
- We will daven not as an attempt to convince Hashem to fulfill our requests, but with the *emunah* that Hashem will do what is best for us.

We will look forward to a day of positivity, deriving joy from the knowledge that we are doing what Hashem wants – without the stress that comes from feeling responsible to generate specific results.

Ani Maamin – How the Coming of Mashiach Affects Us Today

Anticipating Mashiach

During these three weeks of *Bein Hametzarim*, we give more thought to the twelfth of the Rambam's thirteen *ikkarim*.

אני מאמין באמונה שלימה בביאת המשיח, ואף על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא.

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Mashiach; and although he may tarry, still, I await his coming every day.

Of course, it's always good to sing it, but how can we further develop and deepen the yearning for Mashiach?

Step by Step

It's important to remember that while it is Am Yisrael's destiny to transform the world, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is waiting for each of us as individuals **to take relatively simple steps toward that goal.**

When we think of a term like *teshuvah sheleimah*, we immediately think of the highest levels, which to us seem unattainable. That is a mistake. We should think about the small changes that Hashem wants us to implement in our lives as we move forward step by step.

Hear the Call

Imagine a group of friends who plan to travel somewhere together. They gather at the designated time and place, but one person is missing. The whole group is waiting for that one person. A friend calls him and asks, "What's going on? Everyone is waiting for you. Where are you? Do you need me to pick you up?"

When it comes to Mashiach, we don't have that sense of urgency and active waiting. We live our lives calmly and follow our daily routine. If Mashiach were to call and ask, "Where are you? Do you need me to come and get you?" –we would understand that someone is waiting for us; we'd feel a sense of urgency and start making progress toward our destination.

It is so difficult to hear that call. When it comes to esoteric concepts that are hard to define, there is a particular *yetzer hara* that prevents us from grasping the reality of the situation. We feel so distant from the concepts of Mashiach and *geulah*.

You Make a Difference

Let's imagine we somehow know that if a certain twenty people finish a certain *masechta*, Mashiach will arrive. At some point, there is a message informing the twentieth member of the group that the other nineteen members have already finished the *masechta*. Everything now depends on him completing his task. How will he respond? I think we can all agree: there's no Jew in the world who wouldn't learn that *masechta* with all of his strength.

By contrast, when we think about the millions of Jews in the world who all have to perform 613 mitzvos, **we don't feel that Hashem is waiting for us.** We have difficulty believing that our mitzvah will make a difference. This apathetic feeling undermines our *emunah* in *hashgachah pratis* and in the coming of Mashiach.

This is why we are supposed to say בשבילי נברא העולם – *The world was created for me.* Each of us must understand that when we fulfill our role in Hashem's world, we bring the *Geulah* that much closer. We have our own individual *tafkid*, and if others have their own assigned parts to play, that doesn't make our contribution any less important.

We must tune in each day to the heavenly voice that calls out to us: "If you repair certain aspects of your life, the *Geulah* will come

sooner." If we truly internalize this reality, we will work on that needed *tikkun* with all our strength.

The True Destination

The *Ani Maamin* continues, ואף על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום, שיבוא - *Even if he tarries, I will wait each day for him to come.* The famous *niggun* that we sing was composed by a Yid during the darkest of times, on the train that was taking him to a concentration camp. He understood that, like all of Klal Yisrael, he was traveling toward the *Geulah*. He hadn't lost his grip on reality. He had no illusions about the Nazis' plans; he knew that the train was carrying him to almost certain death. But **he also knew that he was traveling to another destination** - beyond the camps and beyond death.

If I see someone boarding a bus and ask him where he is going, he might reply with the name of a certain bus stop. Of course we understand that after he gets off the bus, he won't remain at that stop. He will continue on to his true destination.

In fact, rather than replying with the name of a bus stop, he might tell me he's going, for example, to a *simchah* on Rechov Yerushalayim. That would be a much more accurate answer, since his desire to attend the *simchah* is the only reason he got on the bus.

With his *niggun*, that Yid on the train was telling us, "You ask where I'm going? Yes, there is a stop on the journey where they murder Yidden. **But that's not my destination. I am traveling to the *Geulah*.** The Nazis don't understand this, but I know where the train is going."

We must not get confused and frightened by the intermediate stages of our journey. We have to understand that everything we experience is part of a greater journey. When a person travels long-distance, he passes through cities and states. He drives through dark tunnels and sunny fields, up high mountains and down deep valleys. He understands that there will be many different stages in his journey.

There are countless factors that influence the process of *geulah*. It could come *בעיתה*, in its set time, or *אחישנה*, at an earlier time. Some of us need to do *teshuvah* in one way and others in another way. Each of us simply has to do the best we can to keep moving forward. If we encounter a narrow bridge or a dark tunnel, **it only means that we have to work our way through** as we continue our journey to the *Geulah*.

A Small Amount of Territory

When an army goes to war, the first goal is to conquer a relatively small amount of territory and make it fully their own. Once they have secured that gain, they'll move on to conquer another piece of land.

This is the way we have to approach *avodas Hashem*. **Target one small part of your day – and go to war until you conquer that small segment.** It may be only a small piece, but as with a small military conquest, this victory will bring you that much closer to your goal.

We shouldn't get discouraged by the fact that *Mashiach* may be *מתמהמה*, taking time. We have endured countless hardships since the *Churban*, but **we also have to realize that we've traveled very far!** When a child is struggling, progress can be slow and the parents may feel ready to despair. However, if they take a moment to see the big picture, they will see things differently. True, this may be the thirty-fourth difficulty they have to deal with – but looking back, they will realize they've already traversed 33 difficulties.

Bitul Creates Connection

In his *sefer Eretz Tzvi*, the *Kozhoglover Rav*, *Rav Tzvi Aryeh Fromer* *הי"ד*, asks:

R. Shimon Bar Yochai said, “יכול אני לפטור את כל העולם מן הדין, I can exempt all of the world from judgment.” If so, why didn't he do it?

The *Kozhoglover Rav* explains that in order for a *tzaddik* to help someone and exempt him from *din*, **the person must first be *mevatel***

himself to the tzaddik. The Midrash compares tzaddikim to a *shoshanah*, a rose. Just as the rose was created so that we could enjoy its beautiful scent, tzaddikim are created to bring *yeshuos* for Klal Yisrael. Of course, in order to enjoy the scent of the rose, you must go near it. A person who wants to benefit from tzaddikim must be close to them.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu designed the world in this way because he wants us to be *מתאבק בעפר רגליהם* – to roll in the dust of the feet of tzaddikim (*Pirkei Avos*). Closeness to a tzaddik inspires us to improve and to do *teshuvah*.

The *Eretz Tzvi* then quotes the Gemara in *Maseches Makkos*:

“How foolish are people who stand up for a *sefer Torah*, but don’t stand up before a *gadol* in Torah. . . The Torah said *ארבעים יכנו*, a sinner receives forty lashes, and the *Chachamim* said this means thirty-nine.”

From all the many *limudim* of Chazal, the Kozhoglover asks, why did the Gemara choose that particular *limud* to illustrate the greatness of *Chachamim*?

He explains that when we stand up for a *gadol*, we are *mevatel* ourselves to him. The Gemara’s implication is that if we want *chachamim* and tzaddikim to be able to save us from harsh and painful judgments, **we first need to stand up and express our *bitul***. That forges our connection, which enables them to help us.

Connecting from a Distance

Similarly, the mitzvah of *aliyah l’regel* is essentially an act of *bitul* and connection. When a person decides to be *oleh regel*, he commits himself to a journey, knowing full well that he will encounter many unknown difficulties. **The journey to *kirvas Elokim* requires him to accept the principle of *אף על פי שיתמהמה***. There will be delays; there will be periods of time when he feels stuck and unable to progress. Sometimes he will have to backtrack. However, his very *bitul* and *dveikus* as he

persists in his journey **will allow him to experience *kirvas Elokim* from afar, even though he hasn't arrived yet.**

When a person truly believes that Hashem is waiting for him, he has the strength to continue his journey, little by little. That persistence truly expresses our *emunah*, *dveikus*, and longing for Mashiach. Those who travel in that way are connected, even now, to our destination – the *Geulah Sheleimah*.

Hishtokekus – Yearning for the Real Thing

The King's Request

In *Sefer Shmuel Beis* (24), Dovid Hamelech conducted a census to count Bnei Yisrael, but he did so in an incorrect manner. The *navi* Gad told him that as a result of his transgression, the nation would be punished. He gave him a choice of three punishments: war, famine, or plague. Dovid Hamelech realized that in war, the strong warriors would have an advantage. In famine, the wealthy might suffer less than the poor. He chose the punishment of plague, where all are equal.

Immediately after the plague (24:18), the *navi* instructed Dovid to purchase the land for the Beis Hamikdash from Aravnah HaYevusi.

R. Shimon Bar Yochai explained the connection between the two events with a *mashal*.

A man punished his son by striking him. However, the son had no idea why he deserved to be punished. When he asked his father for an explanation, his father said, "For days, I have asked you to do something for me, but you ignored my request. Now, go perform that task." The son now understood why he was punished.

So too, when the instruction to build the Beis Hamikdash came immediately after the punishment, **Klal Yisrael was to understand that they were being chastised for failing to yearn and daven for the Beis Hamikdash.**

R. Shimon concludes:

If they, who never experienced the Beis Hamikdash, and didn't

experience the *Churban*, were punished for not davening and yearning for the Beis Hamikdash, we, who had the Beis Hamikdash, and recently experienced the *Churban*, have a greater obligation to daven and yearn for the Beis Hamikdash.

At that time, the *Chachamim* composed the portions of the *tefillah* and *Birkas Hamazon* that express our desire for the Beis Hamikdash.

Reminders, Not Replacements

R. Shimon taught us a basic and powerful lesson: The world is meant to have a Beis Hamikdash. A Jew must mourn its loss and yearn for its rebuilding.

Special times of the year — such as the *yamim tovim* — and special places — like the *Kosel* or *ktivrei tzaddikim* — help us access the *השתוקקות*, the yearning, that exists in every Jewish heart. But the ultimate place for that experience is the Beis Hamikdash. **There, a Jew could truly discover and experience his yearning for Hashem's closeness.** And so, even as we celebrate *yamim tovim* or visit *mekomos hakedoshim*, we must remember that we are missing the real thing.

Imagine a *maggid shiur* in a yeshivah who invests much care and effort into preparing his *shiurim* and connects with his *talmidim* on a deep level. Suppose he is absent for a week, and a *kollel jungerman* substitutes for him. When the *rebbe* returns, the students tell him, "It was amazing. The *shiurim* were great. We could really just continue learning with the substitute."

It's hard to imagine this conversation ever happening. Everyone recognizes that there is a world of a difference between the efforts of an inexperienced substitute teacher and the expert teaching of an experienced, professional *maggid shiur*.

If we are content with our situation in *galus*, we are like those students who cannot distinguish the difference between the real thing and a poor substitute.

The Taste of Simchah and Kedushah

We celebrate Yom Tov with joy, as the Torah commands us: ושמחת בשמחה. However, we must remember to be mindful in Mussaf that מפני בחגיך. *because of our sins, we were exiled from our land.* **The experience of a joyous Yom Tov should awaken us, even more than on a regular day in galus, to yearn for the true simchah of the rebuilt Beis Hamikdash.**

On Shabbos, even as we are elevated by the *kedushah* of Shabbos, we say (in *Lecha Dodi*), התנערי מעפר, קומי... רב לך שבת בעמק הבכה - *Shake off the dust, arise; you have sat long enough in the valley of weeping!* - expressing our longing for the complete *Geulah*.

When we say *Birkas Hamazon*, we thank Hashem for all that He gives us, and at the same time, we say רחם נא, asking Hashem to have mercy on us and bring the final redemption.

Chazal teach that when a person is *mesamei'ach* a *chassan* and *kallah*, it's as if he rebuilt one of the ruins of Yerushalayim. Yet in the height of our joy, we shouldn't forget that it's only כאילו - *as if*. A substitute for the real thing. We break a glass at the end of the *chuppah* to remind us of this, and many communities in Yerushalayim do not play musical instruments at weddings (with the exception of drums).

The taste of *simchah* and *kedushah* should increase our desire for more and deeper closeness to Hashem. And we should utilize those times and those emotions to daven with all of our strength for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim.

Loving Reminders

The Covid pandemic shook us up and reminded us that we are in *galus*. As difficult as it was, we must remember that everything that happens to us comes from love. As the *Zohar Hakadosh (Bechukosai)* states, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves us and wants to bring us close. Even when He punishes us, לא מאסתים ולא געלתים. He has never rejected us or cast us aside. He yearns to draw us close.

When we go through hard times, we must remember that when we are in *tzaar*, the *Shechinah* is also in *tzaar*. Despite all the adversity that we experience in *galus*, we must remember that **Hashem's love for Klal Yisrael remains constant.**

May our *teshuvah* and our *hishtokekus*, our yearning for the complete *Geulah*, build the foundations of the third Beis Hamikdash *bimheirah b'yameinu*.



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