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# HAVINEINI



**פרשת  
ראה**  
תשפ"ג

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YEAR 1  
ISSUE 39

SHIURIM OF  
HARAV SHIMON  
SPITZER SHLIT" A



לעילוי נשמת

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# Work as Shlichus

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## Better than Alchemy

In his introduction to *Shaar Habitachon*, Rabbeinu Bachya compares the *baal bitachon* to an alchemist, who had the mythical ability to transform simple metals into gold. An alchemist seems to have the best career imaginable, but the *Chovos HaLevavos* lists many advantages that a *baal bitachon* has over an alchemist.

1. To produce gold, the alchemist requires raw materials and tools.

The *baal bitachon* needs no particular supplies or equipment to receive the *parnassah* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has designated for him.

2. The alchemist has to work very hard to transform metals to gold, even sitting up all night to oversee the process. The resultant smoke and fumes may cause him to become ill or even die.

The *baal bitachon* doesn't endanger his health in the effort to earn a living.

3. The alchemist lives in constant fear that someone might discover his secret process.

The *baal bitachon* has no fear of competitors. As Dovid Hamelech said, בְּאַלְקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא מִה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי - *I trust in Hashem and I do not fear. What can any man do to me?*

4. The alchemist has to purchase supplies in advance. If he orders much more than he needs for the near future, there is the fear that his inventory may be stolen. If he orders a small amount just for his immediate needs, there is always the fear that a large commission will come his way and he won't have the materials he needs.

The *baal bitachon* trusts that Hashem will send him everything he needs, in whatever time frame and by whatever means He chooses. Like an unborn child in the womb, even with no direct conduit enabling him to acquire items from the outside, he still receives all that he needs.

5. The alchemist fears that people might report his actions to the king. He mistrusts everyone around him, from the most important official to the simplest passerby, and fears the harm they can cause him.

In contrast, one who trusts in Hashem is feared by all; the greatest and most honored of people are in awe of him. Even the animals and inanimate objects will want to do whatever is in his best interest, as we see described in *Yosheiv B'Seiser Elyon* (Tehillim 91) that all of Creation submits to one who has *bitachon*.

With the allegory of the alchemist, the *Chovos Halevavos* is telling us to imagine the most desirable profession that exists in our time and place – the career that everyone dreams of. That career, as glorious as it seems, pales in comparison to the life of the *baal bitachon*. He lives with tranquility because he knows that whatever his job may be, Hashem provides his needs.

### The Torah Way – Face All the Facts

We generally don't take kindly to someone who points out the shortcomings of a particular career track that interests us. We might call him a pessimist or accuse him of being overly negative. We react that way because **we prefer not to deal with the reality that every job comes with shortcomings**. The issues pointed out by Rabbeinu Bachya are just as relevant today as they were in his generation. Business owners still worry about stocking too much inventory, or not ordering enough supplies. They fear competitors or fines from government inspectors.

One common fear, very prevalent in today's market, is that our skills

will no longer be needed. It isn't a baseless fear; many professions have simply disappeared, with employees replaced by technology.

When those scenarios start to worry us, we mumble, "Hashem will help." That response sounds like an expression of strong *bitachon*, but in most cases it is not. **It's actually a reflection of the natural desire to suppress the thought of potential problems when we have no idea how to deal with them.**

A clue that our "*Hashem yaazor*" may not be an expression of true *bitachon* is if we say those words as our mind is trying to calculate the probability of those fears being substantiated. "The chance of that happening is so slim, I don't have to worry," we reassure ourselves. If we really had *bitachon*, we wouldn't look to statistics to help us feel calm.

The *Chovos Halevavos* is teaching us to neither hide from these concerns nor ignore them. He wants us to put them all on the table and understand that every job, even the most desirable, has many downsides.

Think of a 'dream job' that you are confident can provide you with wealth, happiness and satisfaction. Examine it from every angle, and take note of every possible problem that may come along with that position. This exercise can help us understand that **a job doesn't provide us with sustenance or satisfaction.** Those blessings come directly from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

I once heard someone say he hopes with all his heart that technology will stop advancing, because if it advances just a bit more, he might lose his job.

If we find ourselves worrying that our skills may no longer be needed in a changing world, we shouldn't just say *Hashem yaazor* and hope it won't happen. Instead, **we should acknowledge the possibility.** "It is possible that my profession will disappear. However, that doesn't bother me, because I receive *parnassah* not from that profession but from the hand of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. I work in this profession

because Hashem commanded me to work and my talents and character are suited to it – not because this profession will provide me with *parnassah*.”

This outlook prepares us for all eventualities and gives us the courage necessary to do the right *hishtadlus* when dealing with the unexpected.

### Placed in Gan Eden – To Work

The end of the third chapter in *Shaar Habitachon* tells us what one’s mindset should be when going to work:

His intention in his physical and emotional efforts should be to fulfill Hashem’s command to perform the tasks that are required to maintain the world, such as planting and plowing and the like. As it says in Bereishis, וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וַיִּלְשָׁמְרָהּ - *And Hashem took man and placed him in Gan Eden to work it and protect it.*

Adam was also meant to utilize the other living creatures for his purposes, whether to produce and prepare food, or to build cities.

The commentary *Marpeh L’Nefesh* explains that this is also the meaning of the *pasuk* (Yeshayahu 45:18) לֹא תִהְיֶה בְּרָאָה לְשִׁבְתָּ יִצְרָהּ - *He didn’t create the world to be desolate; He formed it to be inhabited.* **The need to work isn't only a penalty that was imposed because of Adam Harishon’s sin.** We see that Hashem commanded him to work even before the sin. Hashem’s *ratzon* was that mankind would work.

*Chovos HaLevavos* adds that a person will be rewarded for working with this *kavanah* of maintaining the world as commanded by Hashem – whether the project he is working on succeeds or not.

### Before and After the Sin

There appears to be a *machlokes* between *Chovos HaLevavos* and *Mesillas Yesharim* regarding the need to work.



The Ramchal writes in *Mesillas Yesharim* (21):

A man would have been able to sit idle and the decree (that he should be sustained) would have been fulfilled – if not for the penalty decreed on humanity that we would eat bread by the sweat of our brow. Therefore, a person has to do some *hishtadlus* for his *parnassah* needs, because that is the decree of the King. It is like a tax that all humanity must pay; there is no escaping it.

According to this, it would seem that the need for *hishtadlus* is a penalty resulting from the sin of Adam Harishon. Nevertheless, *sefarim* explain that there is no *machlokes* here, since the *Chovos HaLevavos* pointed out that the *pasuk* explicitly states that Adam Harishon was commanded to work even before the sin. So how do we understand the Ramchal?

The resolution begins with a concept discussed in *sifrei Kabbalah*. When the world was created, sparks (*nitzotzos*) of *kedushah* fell and were embedded in physical objects. Man was commanded to engage with the physical world *l'shem Shamayim*, to elevate those sparks and return them to their source.

After the sin of Adam Harishon, these *nitzotzos* became embedded more deeply into the material world. It was therefore decreed that we would have to labor “with the sweat of our brow” in order to eat. **That extra effort was now necessary to free those sparks, elevate them and return them to their source.**

We can now understand that there is no *machlokes*. The *Chovos HaLevavos* speaks about the obligation to interact with the physical world that would have applied even if Adam Harishon hadn't sinned. אָדָם לְעִמְלָה יוֹלֵד - *Man is born to toil*. Every person must work in order to settle and advance Hakadosh Baruch Hu's world. That is His will since the beginning of creation. The Ramchal, on the other hand, is talking about the world after the sin, when the penalty of לחם was decreed upon all humanity.

## Career Guidance

Since we are obligated to contribute to the development of the world, we should choose a productive career that suits our talents and character. We should avoid jobs that are of no particular benefit to society. It would be foolish to take such a job just because it promises more money. If we make that mistake, we have allowed our desire for financial success to blind us to the fact that **a job is never the source of our *parmassah***. The need to work provides us with opportunities to fulfill Hashem's will that we maintain and improve His world. Our sustenance comes *min haShamayim*.

In fact, it is for this very reason that Hashem gave each of us different talents and inclinations. It isn't for the purpose of earning money through them, for just as He sustains an unborn baby, Hashem could have easily sustained adults without requiring them to work. He provided us with unique abilities so that we would be able to fulfill our mission of improving and maintaining the world. **One who fulfills his mission will gain pleasure and satisfaction from each working day.**

If that is the case, why does a surgeon generally earn more than a waiter?

Hashem designed it so that people who have the aptitude for performing difficult jobs that require much training would be motivated to invest the necessary time and effort.

## Completing Your Mission

Most stores sell certain items that bring in most of the profit, and other items that bring in very little. People see this as simply a clever way of doing business; if a business sells only items with a high markup, very few people will visit the store.

However, even though the owner may not realize it, he didn't open a store only to make money, but **to fulfill his *shlichus* by providing**

**people with the items they need.** Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to have a variety of products available and therefore made it beneficial to the financial success of the business.

Let's take the example of an insurance salesman who earns very little on most of the policies he sells. Every now and then, a very wealthy customer purchases policies for multiple buildings and facilities. That transaction provides most of the salesman's yearly profit. Someone observing this phenomenon may pity the insurance salesman. *The poor fellow works day in and day out earning a pittance, just so that one day when a big client needs insurance, he will be available to serve him! If only he could spend just a few days a year on those wealthy clients without wasting time selling all of those little policies.*

The truth, once again, is that even though he may not realize it, the *shlichus* of the insurance salesman is not to earn money but to contribute to the world by providing all sorts of people with the insurance coverage they need. As he fulfills his mission, Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends him some big clients that bring the income he needs so that he can continue his mission.

We find a similar dynamic in the careers of brokers, such as stockbrokers and *shadchanim*. Many people discourage their friends from going into these fields because there are bound to be 'dry' periods when they will earn nothing. This advice is based on a misconception. It all depends on the person's intention. If his goal is merely to earn as much money as he can, without fulfilling his mission, he is destined to fail. But if he understands that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the aptitude for this profession so that he could help others, **he will embrace his profession despite the 'dry seasons.'**

Sometimes Hakadosh Baruch Hu enables a *shadchan* to close a *shidduch* between two wealthy families and receive large sums from each side. The *shadchan* thinks this is Hakadosh Baruch Hu's way of paying him back for all the lost hours of hard work that he put into potential *shidduchim* that didn't work out. But this reasoning doesn't

really align with the *hashkafah* of the Torah. The Torah doesn't see the hours he spent on those "failed" *shidduchim* as a waste of time. **The purpose of those hours was to fulfill his *shlichus*** and not to earn money. When it comes to the question of how a professional *shadchan* is meant to earn a living, we need to remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu provides *parnassah*, regardless of the particular profession. Like Adam Harishon, we work to fulfill our *shlichus* of לעבדה ולשמרה.

## Love Work

The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos* (1:10) tells us, אהוב את המלאכה – *love work*. Rabbi Ovadyah of Bartenura explains: "Even if someone has a source of income, he is obligated to engage in *melachah*, productive work."

This illustrates the concept we have been discussing: The purpose of working is not to earn money, but to use your talents to benefit the world.

The Bartenura continues, "Doing nothing will lead to boredom." Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to find it unpleasant to do nothing. **He created our sense of boredom so that we would be motivated to work even if we have sufficient *parnassah*.**

The *Tosefos Yom Tov* explains, "[When he has sufficient *parnassah*,] it is clear that he isn't working for the salary, but because he loves the work itself. That is why the Mishnah instructed us to 'love work' and not simply to 'do work.'"

*Avos D'Rabbi Nassan* (11) expands this idea:

R. Yehudah ben Beseira says: What should a person do if he has no work to perform? If he has a courtyard or a field in a state of disrepair, he should work on it, as the *pasuk* says שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד מְלַאכְתְּךָ – *You shall work six days, and do all of your work*. What is the Torah teaching us with the addition of "and do all of your work" (once it already said, "You shall work six days")? It comes to include someone who has courtyards or fields in disrepair, [telling him] that he should occupy himself with improving them.

## The Wrong Job?

In light of our explanation that one should work in a profession he loves because he is suited for it, we may wonder what the correct outlook is when a person dislikes his job.

**It's important to determine if he truly dislikes that type of work, or if he is simply unhappy in his job because of peripheral reasons.** An example of such reasons could be an unfriendly co-worker who insults him. In that case, he should continue in his job (because he really does like the work itself) and ask Hashem to help that co-worker do *teshuvah*, which would resolve the unpleasantness.

Even if his salary doesn't meet the needs of his family, **he shouldn't leave a field he loves.** *Parnassah* doesn't depend on any particular line of work. He should continue the work that enables him to fulfill his *shlichus*, and address his lack of *parnassah* by strengthening his *bitachon* in Hashem.

Let's take the example of a *rebbe* who has taught young children for many years. He has become an expert teacher who knows how to make his teaching and his classroom come alive. Eventually his children reach marriageable age, and he isn't earning enough to meet the expenses of marrying them off. He may be tempted to leave teaching and switch to a profession that he isn't really suited for but which offers a higher salary.

If he makes that choice, he might be fooling himself. Why should he stop bringing so much benefit to so many children in order to increase his *parnassah* if the amount of *parnassah* he will receive is determined in *Shamayim*? If he finds a higher-paying position that still allows him to teach Torah, that's fine; in fact, it will probably increase the resources of physical and emotional strength that help him teach children and fulfill his *shlichus*. However, he shouldn't allow a lack of *bitachon* to cause him to leave teaching altogether.

The same applies to anyone who is faced with the choice of leaving

a profession that he loves and is proficient in, to one that he doesn't love and isn't suited for, in the hope of earning more money.

When a person finds himself in these situations, he should ask *daas Torah* for guidance. Many factors may be affected, such as physical and emotional health, *shalom bayis* and *chinuch*. Each person's situation is different and requires Torah guidance.

### Employment Opportunities

Sometimes, a person who doesn't enjoy his job wants to search for another type of work that he can enjoy. If he doesn't manage to find something else that he enjoys, **it may be a sign that, for the time being, his *shlichus* is to work in his current position.** (Perhaps Hashem wants him to serve as an example to other Jews in the workplace who now have the opportunity to work with someone who has *yiras Shamayim*, *emunah* and *bitachon*.) He can certainly daven again and again that Hashem help him find another type of work that suits his personality and talents so that he can contribute more to Hakadosh Baruch Hu's world.

### Employee vs. Entrepreneur

Some people claim that a person who earns a standard hourly wage isn't doing enough *hishtadlus*. They point out that even if he works twenty-four hours a day, he will never earn enough money to marry off his children. Their assessment of the situation is totally mistaken. **If you work in a job that suits you, you are fulfilling your *shlichus* and have no obligation to do more *hishtadlus*.** In terms of future expenses, you should increase *tefillah* and *emunah* and *bitachon*. The necessary *parnassah* will come *min haShamayim*.

### What about Learning?

Don't some people fulfill their *shlichus* in this world by learning Torah?

If a person has the ability to learn full time, and has another source of *parnassah*, he should certainly learn day and night. **The very fact that**

**Hakadosh Baruch Hu provided him with the ability to learn and a source of *parnassah* indicates that he is meant, like *shevet Levi*, to fulfill לעבדה ולשמרה by learning Torah.** Everyone agrees that the benefit brought to the entire world by his learning is immeasurable.

There are also those who have the ability and the desire to devote themselves to learning even if it means that they and their family will live on bread and water. **These exceptional people also fulfill their *shlichus* by devoting themselves to learning.**

However, some people are not suited for full-time learning or do not have a source of *parnassah* that can meet the basic needs of their family. If they continue learning, they begin to sink deeper and deeper into debt, sometimes resorting to illegal ways of dealing with their financial woes. **Such a person must search for the role that he is meant to fill in Hashem's world and find productive, enjoyable work that will enable him to fulfill the mandate of לעבדה ולשמרה.**

### Why Not Animals?

We shouldn't limit the concept of לעבדה ולשמרה to benefiting the world in a material way. As we mentioned, something much deeper is taking place as we work. Our interactions with the physical world *l'shem Shamayim* extricate and elevate the sparks of *kedushah* that were embedded in the material world, thereby hastening the *geulah*.

The *Otzar HaMidrashim* brings the following fascinating *midrash*.

גדולה מלאכה שכמה בריות ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו ולא מסר מלאכה אלא לבני אדם בלבד...

[We can discern] the importance of work by noting that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created so many animals in His world, but He assigned work only to human beings. R. Meir would say, "Have you ever seen a lion who is a porter, a bear who harvests figs, a fox who is a shopkeeper, or any wild animals doing work?" This isn't because animals are insignificant, **but because work is so significant.**

The Midrash then demonstrates the greatness of work by giving examples of great people who worked; Yaakov Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid Hamelech were all shepherds. The Midrash concludes:

*Melachah* is so important that the *Shechinah* did not dwell among Yisrael until they worked. As it says (Shemos 39:43), וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמְּלָאכָה... וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶתָם מֹשֶׁה יהי רצון שתשרה שכינה במעשה ידיכם - *And Moshe saw all the work . . . and Moshe blessed them.* What was the blessing? - may it be His will that the *Shechinah* rest on the work of your hands.

In other words, Hashem could have created animals with the ability to perform every type of work, leaving us free to learn Torah. He chose not to do that because only human beings can extract the *nitzotzos* of *kedushah* from the material world.

### The Ultimate Worker

Everything we have learned comes together to portray a person who works according to the *hashkafah* of the Torah. He submits to Hashem's will, and knows that by working, he fulfills a very important *shlichus*. He has set times for learning, and he davens with the *tzibbur*. He is aware that by working in the right way, he elevates sparks of *kedushah* from the material world and brings the *Shechinah* into the world.

Someone who works with that mindset will receive all the *parnassah* he needs from Hakadosh Baruch Hu and will lack nothing. However, if he forgets that he is on a mission and works with the belief that his job provides his *parnassah*, he will actually receive less. He has cut himself off from the source of *shefa* by relying on his *hishtadlus*, and also abandoned his *shlichus*.

### In Summary

There is a principle in halachah that the hand of the messenger is just like the hand of the sender - יד שליח כיד משלח -



When we go to work with the intention of fulfilling the *shlichus* that Hashem has assigned to us, we are doing Hashem's work. We bring Hashem Yisbarach into the realm of our work, elevating it into a source of *hatzlachah* and *brachah*.







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