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Parnassah with Health and Joy

Bitachon and Health

In the last shiur we discussed the first five of the ten advantages that a *baal bitachon* has over an alchemist (who had the mythical skill of transforming base metal into gold).

The sixth advantage relates to health.

Even endless gold can't guarantee good health, and the alchemist remains as vulnerable to disease as anyone else. If he gets sick, he won't be able to enjoy the wealth he has accumulated.

וְהַבּוֹטָח בְּה' בָּטוּחַ מִן הַמְדוּוּיִם וְהַחֲלָיִים, אֲלֵא עַל דְּרַךְ הַכַּפָּרָה אוֹ עַל דְּרַךְ הַתְּמוּנָה...

The *baal bitachon*, on the other hand, is assured that he will remain free from afflictions and illness except when they are to his benefit, either as a form of atonement for a previous sin, or as an exchange for additional merits in *Olam Haba*.

Just as it is hard to see the *baal bitachon's* advantages in *parnassah*, it can be difficult to see his advantages in health, because the *yetzer hara* skews our vision. However, if we focus properly, we will realize that *baalei bitachon* really are healthier than others. If we do see a true *baal bitachon* suffering from illness, we should know that **he is not at the mercy of the laws of nature**; illness comes upon him only for one of the two purposes outlined above.

Illness from חסר vs. Illness from חסד

A person who relies totally on Hashem's protection receives his full measure of *shefa* from the Source of *brachah*. Just as his *parnassah* is assured, so is his health. On the other hand, one who has distanced himself from Hashem by putting his faith in others cannot receive the

full measure of *shefa*. Therefore, just as his *parnassah* will be limited, his health will also suffer.

One who is not a *baal bitachon* is afflicted by illnesses due to the absence (חסר) of the *shefa* that would keep him healthy. When a *baal bitachon*, on the other hand, does become ill, that illness is an expression of Hashem's *chesed*.

This is not merely a theoretical difference; it defines the way people experience illness. Those who become ill because they have distanced themselves from Hashem will suffer more both physically and emotionally, while ***baalei bitachon* who are close to Hashem experience illness as rooted in the world of *chesed***. They understand that even this illness is a gift, and this understanding mitigates their suffering.

As the Divrei Chaim said: A slap on the back hurts much more when it comes from a stranger than when it is your close friend who slaps you on the back.

Health or Parnassah?

With this comparison of the *baal bitachon* to the alchemist, Rabbeinu Bachya seems to have moved on to a new topic. All the previous comparisons emphasized the *baal bitachon's* advantages with regard to *parnassah*. This sixth comparison seems to present his advantage with regard to health: שְׁבַעַל הַפְּימָיָה אֵינוֹ בְּטוֹחַ מִהַקְּלָיִים וְהַמְדוּיִם - for the alchemist cannot be confident that he won't suffer from illnesses or afflictions.

Is this an admission that the alchemist may in fact succeed in *parnassah* more than the *baal bitachon*? Sometimes people who are feeling unsuccessful try to reassure themselves that successful people still have problems. A person is jealous of his friend's financial success, and says, "He may be wealthy, but I have better-behaved children." It's a weak, unconvincing argument. Is that what we're seeing here from the *Chovos HaLevavos*?

Or is it a sort of scare tactic? “If you follow the path of the alchemist (your worldly ambitions), you may make more money but your health will suffer.” We usually view such threats as a sign of weakness: If you must resort to threats that a lack of *bitachon* makes people suffer from illness, clearly you’re admitting that those who lack *bitachon* can be more financially successful than the good guy who works on *bitachon*.

I once had a conversation with someone who had begun to turn away from the path of Torah. At one point I asked him, “If you continue this way, how do you expect to get married and build a home? Aren’t you worried about how it will affect your children?” He retorted, “Are you trying to convince me to follow the Torah, or are you trying to threaten and intimidate me? If you’re resorting to threats, you must have run out of logical arguments.”

It is therefore important to realize that the *Chovos HaLevavos* is, in fact, still discussing *parnassah*. This is demonstrated by the fact that his next (seventh) comparison relates to *parnassah*.

A Wider Lens

If we think about this discussion of health in the context of *parnassah*, the message is quite clear. Ask people what they want in life, and they may say they want a certain career, financial security, or a beautiful home. But what is it that they hope to get from these things? Even if they don’t verbalize it, what they really want is happiness, pleasure and peace of mind. **They focus on tangible acquisitions because happiness, pleasure and peace of mind cannot be acquired by human effort.** Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu can bestow those gifts, and the recipients may be rich or poor, CEOs or janitors.

Rabbeinu Bachya wants us to understand that not only can’t the alchemist depend on his *parnassah* – the initial purpose of one’s work – due to the factors mentioned earlier, such as fear of governmental interference or the need for supplies, but he also has no guarantee that he will derive pleasure, the ultimate purpose of financial security. Poor

health can prevent even the wealthiest person from enjoying his possessions.

In contrast, **the *baal bitachon's* happiness isn't marred by poor health.** He is grateful not only for the *parnassah* he receives, but even for the gift of illness. In all circumstances, he experiences the happiness, pleasure and peace of mind that most people only dream of but never attain.

The Key of Parnassah

In *Maseches Taanis* (2a), R. Yochanan says, "Three keys are in the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and were not given over to emissaries: the key of rain, the key of birth, and the key of *techiyas hameisim*."

Rain – a person can plow and plant, but without the rain sent by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, he won't have anything to harvest.

Birth – this refers to whether a woman will conceive (*Tosefos HaRosh*).

Techiyas hameisim – the revival of the dead. Everyone understands that this can only occur when Hashem decides that the time has come.

These are the keys that enable new life to enter the world. They were not given over to emissaries, but are found exclusively in Hashem's hands. As much as we try, these three events depend not on systems of nature but on Hakadosh Baruch Hu's will.

The Gemara ends that in Eretz Yisrael they add the key of *parnassah* to the list. (R. Yochanan explains that "rain" in the original list refers to *parnassah*.)

We might be surprised by the Gemara's conclusion that *parnassah* belongs on this list. We might be similarly surprised at the inclusion of **מכלכל חיים בחסד**, Hashem providing our sustenance, in the *brachah* of *Mechayeh Hameisim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*. The Tur explains (*Orach Chaim* 114): "Man's sustenance is like *techiyas hameisim*."

At first glance, *parnassah* seems to be part of a natural process created by Hashem. We do our *hishtadlus* and receive *parnassah*.

However, the *Shaar Habitachon's* lesson about health gives us a much clearer understanding:

- a. When a person strives to earn money, what he really wants is *chiyus*: happiness, pleasure and peace of mind. If he is missing these factors, even if he has millions of dollars, he is no better than a pauper struggling to earn a dollar.
- b. We have no ability to make those things happen any more than we can create life or revive the dead.

With this understanding, it is clear that the key to *parnassah* is exclusively in the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Coming Back to Life

Imagine a man named Reuven who feels broken in spirit by the many difficulties in his life. As he walks down the street with his head down, he encounters Shimon, who has some news for him.

Shimon tells Reuven that he met Reuven's son, who asked him to let his father know that he was tested by his *rebbeim* in yeshivah and they were astounded by his mastery of the material.

Reuven stands up straight and his face lights up. With all his heart, he thanks Shimon for bringing him back to life.

Was it Shimon who brought him back to life? Clearly, it was Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Shimon was simply the conduit for that infusion of life and hope. *Hashgachah* arranged for Shimon to meet Reuven's son, and for Reuven to cross paths with Shimon. But Hashem could also have brought Reuven back to life by countless other means.

Reuven's transformation illustrates what we are really seeking when we ask for *parnassah*. **It is a spiritual state of happiness and**

tranquility, not directly connected to money, **and the key to it lies exclusively in the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.**

It takes hard work to internalize this idea, especially because we are surrounded by a society that is blinded by **the illusion that money can buy happiness**. People envy and idolize the wealthy without realizing that many of them don't get to enjoy a minute of *menuchas hanefesh*.

It's important to stop for a minute to think about what we really mean when we wish for *parnassah*. And to recognize that the way to reach that goal is by strengthening *emunah* and *bitachon*, rather than by increasing *hishtadlus*.

The Pain of Unfulfilled Aspirations

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei (13:12) תּוֹחֶלֶת מִמְשָׁכָה מַחֲלָה לֵב - *Drawn-out, unrealized hope causes illness of the heart.*

If an activity is clearly harmful to our *nefesh* rather than beneficial, we should realize that this activity may need to be eliminated. Just as we avoid eating foods that make us sick, or putting the wrong fuel or oil into a machine, we need to protect our *nefesh* from destructive behavior.

Shlomo Hamelech is describing a person who hopes and yearns for something over an extended period of time.

Is hope unhealthy? "I'm not hoping for something negative. I hope and yearn to get married and have children. Are you telling me to give up my dreams because continuing to hope will damage my heart? Am I supposed to despair and stop davening and hoping for *yeshuah*?"

The answer to this pain-filled question is based on a basic principle in *emunah* and *bitachon*: **Human beings do not have the ability to make things happen.**

Imagine a person standing by the graves of his ancestors. Every few minutes he looks at his watch, waiting and yearning for the moment

of *techiyas hameisim* when they will rise from their graves. His friend asks, "How long are you going to waste your time standing around the graveyard?" The person answers angrily, "You heretic! Don't you believe in *techiyas hameisim*? I believe with *emunah sheleimah* that it can take place at any minute, if Hakadosh Baruch Hu so desires!"

Who is right? On one hand, this declaration of the man in the graveyard is certainly correct. We must believe in *techiyas hameisim*. On the other hand, standing in the cemetery looking at his watch indicates that he expects to influence Hakadosh Baruch Hu to speed up the process. He forgets that man has no ability to produce results and make things happen.

He should continue to recite *Ani Maamin* with all his heart, while remembering that *techiyas hameisim* will take place only when Hashem decides the moment has arrived.

R. Yochanan taught us that this same principle applies to *parnassah* and to conceiving a child. We are allowed and even obligated to hope for, daven for, and anticipate the *yeshuah* that will redeem us from our difficulties. At the same time, we need to remember that the keys to results are exclusively in Hashem's hands. **To think we can control the future is futile and causes sickness of the heart.**

Healthy Hope

In his commentary on Mishlei, Rabbeinu Yonah explains that not all extended hope is damaging to the heart:

The hope of tzaddikim is not a disease of the heart, **for they find joy in their hope.** Their hope isn't based on the strength of their hands or their wisdom, but rather on the mercy of Hashem.

Even if their hope remains unfulfilled for a long time, they rejoice in the opportunity to hope for and rely on Hashem's mercy. **The longer it takes for their hopes to be realized, the longer they are able to enjoy the *avodas Hashem* of hope and *bitachon*.**

Not Only for Great Tzaddikim

When Rabbeinu Yonah speaks of “the hope of tzaddikim,” we shouldn’t take that to mean that only great tzaddikim can combine hope and joy. Thousands of Jews who have begun to climb the ladder of *bitachon* can testify that as they progress and grow, **they have more *menuchas hanefesh* and are less distressed when their hopes aren’t fulfilled.** They do the necessary *hishtadlus* because that is Hashem’s will, and at the same time they know that the results are totally in Hashem’s hands.

When Wishes Come True

We must remember that even when something we hoped for comes true, there is no guarantee that we will attain what we truly wanted. A person may picture what he needs in order to have peace of mind and tranquility. He’s sure that he needs a certain number of children, a certain type of house, and a specific career. But there is so much that he doesn’t know!

Sometimes people desperately wanted to have a child, but then the child was born and became very sick and they never experienced the pleasure and peace of mind they were sure would come with the end of childlessness. Sometimes it was the child’s behavior that brought the parents only pain and aggravation.

A person must recognize that even if his request for *parnassah* or a child is granted, **nothing can guarantee that he will attain his underlying wish: happiness and tranquility.** However, if he leaves the results to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, depends entirely on Him, and davens, he can acquire the joy and tranquility that he truly seeks.

Anticipating Redemption

Why then, are we supposed to anticipate and look forward to the *Geulah sheleimah*? Won’t that destroy our hearts?

The answer is that *צפיה לישועה*, davening and longing for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, is not a debilitating process of

waiting. It's constructive. Each time a person sincerely yearns for the *geulah*, he adds another stone to the spiritual construction of the Beis Hamikdash and brings the *geulah* closer. **The light of *geulah* enters his world, even within the *galus*.**

The same is true for a person who awaits redemption from a personal *galus*. If someone lent his friend a significant sum of money, and it becomes apparent that the friend will never repay the loan, he finds himself in the darkness of a personal *galus*. He should take the normal steps of *hishtadlus*, but at the same time, he should remember that results come only *min haShamayim* and we cannot bring them down by force. Attempting to do so will only weaken his heart. However, when he *davens* to Hashem and relies on Him, he immediately begins to feel the relief of *geulah*, **and the *shefa* he needs will reach him more quickly.**

In Summary

Dovid Hamelech says in Tehillim (42:4-6), הִיָּתָה לִי דִמְעָתִי לֶחֶם יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה, בְּאָמַר אֵלַי כָּל הַיּוֹם אַיִה אֶלְקִיָּהּ.... – *My tears were my bread day and night, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your G-d?"*

מָה תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה נַפְשִׁי וְתַהֲמִי עָלַי הוֹחֲלִי לְאֱלֹקִים כִּי עוֹד אוֹדְנֶנּוּ יְשׁוּעוֹת פָּנָיו – *Why are you downcast, my soul, and why do you cry within me? Hope to G-d; for I will yet thank Him for deliverance [that will come from] His countenance.*

Of course, we are human, and we sometimes fall back into the darkness, pain and despair of our situation. In such times, these words of Dovid Hamelech remind us that the happiness and tranquility we truly desire are attainable by pouring our heart out to Hashem and relying on Him.



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