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שיעורי הרב שמעון שפיגער שליט"א

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## Like a Baby on His Mother

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Rav Avraham the son of the Rambam writes in *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem* (8 - *Bitachon*), "The fourth level (of *bitachon*) is when a person entrusts his needs, or one of his needs, to the hands of Hashem, and rids himself of every hope and desire, until it is all one to him whether he achieves that thing or the opposite of it. This means he is completely satisfied with the decision and actions of Hashem." *Chovos HaLevaavos* (7) describes this level as well.

We see that *bitachon* means trusting Hashem, relying on Him completely, trusting that He knows, better than we do, what is best for us. This means we only want whatever He decided for us. We have no other desire.

The Beis HaLevi expands on this concept... *Bitachon* means erasing all personal *retzonos* and looking only and exclusively to *retzon Hashem*. Dovid Hamelech expressed this so beautifully in Tehillim (131:2) אִם לֹא שׁוֹיֵתִי וְדוֹמַמְתִּי נַפְשִׁי כַגְּמוּל עָלַי אִמּוֹ *on its mother*. The Beis HaLevi explains: I subdue and silence my own wants (*nafshi*), like a newly weaned baby, who has no interest in eating food because he has never fed himself; his mother has always fed him. This is how I, too, discard every *ratzon* of my own. Whatever Hashem does – that is all I want.

### Why Daven?

Why, then, are we commanded to daven? What are we davening for? Aren't we supposed to want nothing except whatever Hashem decides for us? And if we do want something different, doesn't that mean we need to work on our *bitachon*, rather than making efforts to change Hashem's decision?

If we say that such a level of *bitachon* is very advanced and we aren't

there yet, still, the question remains. Are we saying that when someone does reach such a level, he outgrows the mitzvah of *tefillah*?

### Should We Daven to Have Children?

Here is another question. The Chasam Sofer did not daven for children, in his first marriage, because he knew that his wife was not destined to have children; if he davened he'd be effectively praying for her life to be shortened. Only when he married for the second time did he daven for children. (He did build a generation of giants in Torah, famous *poskim* and *gedolei doros*.)

Similarly, the Ohr HaChaim *hakadosh* writes (*Parshas Noach*, 6:13) that sometimes Hashem wants a person to remain silent and not daven, because if he davens, the situation will have to change, while in fact the current situation is what's best for him.

On the other hand, we know Chazal say (*Yevamos* 64a), "Why were our forefathers barren? Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu craves the prayers of tzaddikim!"

How should a person know if he is supposed to daven? Someone who has not yet had children (in our own era), or someone in any painful situation: how should he know if he is one of those who must remain silent because this is what Hashem wants, or one of those who must daven because Hashem is waiting for their *tefillah*?

This uncertainty can be very confusing, and can inhibit us from choosing either path. When we try to accept Hashem's will, in the back of our mind we wonder if we ought to be davening for a *yeshuah* instead. And when we try to daven, in the back of our mind we wonder if we ought to be working on acceptance instead.

A person is standing (*lo aleinu*) at the bedside of a loved one who is unresponsive. The doctors have already given up hope. He wants to storm the heavens with Tehillim – but this uncertainty and doubt confuse him in his thoughts and emotions. He knows *tefillah* has the

power to create miracles. He knows Chazal said (*Berachos* 10a) “Even when a sharp sword is resting on one's neck, he should not despair of Hashem’s mercy.” But he sees how the patient looks, and he says to himself: *Look, it's Hashem's will. This is what's best for the sick person and for everyone else, and we need to accept it with emunah.*

### Davening for Children Talmidei Chachamim

In a recent shiur on *chinuch*, I said that there's no such thing as a flawed child, because Hashem created everything in its perfect form and without mistakes. What looks to us like children with various failings, physical and mental – this is only because we assume they were created for a certain purpose.

That was what *we* wanted for them, and it's true they are not suited to that purpose, with these disabilities. However, they were not created for that mission, but for a different mission, which Hashem has chosen for them. If we understand this deep down – then we understand that they are not disabled at all. They are perfectly equipped for their *tafkid*.

When we learn to relate to our children in this way, understanding that they have a unique mission in the world, then we won't shout at them or fight them. We'll be able to build them up. Then they will grow up *l'shem ul'siferes*, to their full potential, connected to Hashem as they fulfill their unique *tafkid*.

After that shiur, a respected person came over and asked me the following question.

“We know many stories of great *gedolim* whose nature was not suited to success in Torah learning, where the father and mother wept and pleaded to Hashem to open their child's heart to the Torah *hakedoshah*. And Hashem opened their son's heart, giving him abilities he didn't have before. These children grew and lit up the whole world with their Torah.

“How can we ever know that it is Hashem's will for our son to spend his life working with his hands, and only learning a certain

amount each day? What if His will is actually for him to *shteig* and grow until he becomes a *gadol b'Yisrael*, a light to the entire generation?

“If it seems that his mind is not built for it, maybe that’s just a *nisayon* for us; maybe Hashem wants us to work extra hard in *tefillah* and then through the power of *tefillah* He will open our child’s heart to learn...”

### The Tradition for Suffering: Silence and Tefillah

Now to address the questions, with Hashem’s help.

We learn in *Maseches Berachos* (62a, see Rashi), קבלה דיסורי - שתיקותא, ומבעי רחמי. *The tradition*, as we have learned from our teachers, *regarding suffering, is silence and pleading for mercy* - one should first be silent and not strike out against the suffering that comes upon him, and then, he should beg for *rachamim*, that the suffering should depart.

As explained in *sefarim*, this means we need to make a distinction between the past and the future. Regarding *yissurim* that have already arrived, we are expected to be silent and accept with love, and even rejoice and thank Hashem for them. Regarding the future, we are to daven and beg Hashem to turn the hidden good into revealed good. חסדך הראנו ה' - *Show us, Hashem, Your kindness!*

People typically draw a very sharp distinction between past and future: only once the loved one has already died do they begin to accept, making the *brachah* with *emunah*, *Baruch Dayan HaEmes*. But when the situation is still ongoing, and the doctors (or the teachers) are making dire prophecies, it can be much more challenging to separate between the past and the future.

### Show Me, Hashem, Your Kindness

Even while the painful situation surrounds us, we need to stand up and declare: “אני מאמין באמונה שלמה”, I believe with full *emunah* that all the suffering I’ve had until now was the best possible thing for me, because Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows better than I do what’s best for me, and He definitely chose what’s best for me.



“Therefore, I accept the past. I am totally fine with it. I am so happy with all the pain I’ve had!

“But from now on, I beg Hashem: הראנו ה' חסדך. Please change the hidden good into good that we can easily recognize as good!”

### The Power of Tefillah

The sefer *Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Parshas Noach)* quotes the Baal Shem Tov, who taught in the name of the *navi* Achiyah HaShiloni: the power of tefillah sweetens the *din* at its source and the hidden good is turned to revealed good. This *tefillah* is perfect, because this is exactly what Hashem wanted: that the revealed good should come to the world by way of *tefillah*. It’s just like when He told Adam Harishon to daven, and only then sent the rain to make everything grow.

But all this has no connection to what’s past. The person who has *bitachon* must rejoice over all the difficulties and pain of his past until now.

### Silence as Preparation for Tefillah

We’ve learned from *sefarim*, and we’ve seen from elder *chassidim*, that the ‘silence’ part of Chazal’s prescription requires a lot more work than the ‘pleading for mercy,’ because at the end of the day a person is only human and the *yissurim* affect his heart and mind. Unless he works very hard to believe that all this comes from Hashem’s kindness, he is not accepting the situation, and this also affects his davening. He cannot daven from the proper position of *bitul* and *hachna'ah*, because he’s still carrying a grudge in his heart at what Hashem has done. He cannot connect to Hashem through *tefillah* because these resentments are an iron wall that blocks that connection.

‘Silence’ is preparation for *tefillah*. *Chassidim harishonim* knew that the preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah, because it’s the preparation that makes the mitzvah what it should be. (It is said of the Kotzker, among other tzaddikim, that he would spend eight hours preparing for tefillah and then daven for half an hour.) So too,

*chassidim* would invest tremendous effort in this 'silence' in order to prepare their heart, and then the *tefillah* would come forth from a pure heart and from true *bitul* and *hachma'ah*.

### To His Daughter's Chuppah

(The following story was related by Rav Eliyahu Roth, a close *chassid* of Rav Shlom'ke Zhviller and a *mashpia* to many, who himself suffered terrible *yissurim*.)

Rav Nachum Yasser of Yerushalayim had an only daughter, a wonderful girl, who was all his *nachas*. As she reached marriageable age, suddenly she became terribly sick. She grew weaker and weaker until the doctors told her father she had only hours more to live.

It was erev Shabbos. R' Nachum said to himself: *I might be busy all afternoon with the levaya and burial; I must get ready for Shabbos early.* He went to the *mikvah* and prepared the house for Shabbos. After these preparations were done, he sat down to study the *halachos* relevant to his coming bereavement, and then left to the hospital to visit his ailing daughter.

On the way, he suddenly realized he should have prepared a knife, to rend his garments when the time came as required by *halachah*. He turned and went back home for a knife. Then he went on his way to the hospital, as always asking himself: "What does Hashem want from me now?"

He said to himself: "What would I be thinking if I were now walking my daughter to her *chuppah*? Those same thoughts should accompany me to the hospital, because this is Hashem's will!" As he walked, with the knife in his hand, his heart became filled to overflowing with *simchah*. As he neared the hospital, his joy increased, as if he were bringing his daughter to her *chuppah*. He almost danced as he walked, his face shining, surrendering with joy to Hashem's total authority. At the hospital entrance, it

occurred to him that it's not proper to enter a place of illness with such a display of rejoicing. He realized it would cause distress to his wife at this painful time. He therefore stopped smiling and adopted a sober expression.

As he entered the hospital, Dr. Wallach told him, "Your daughter's tests show that the infection in her blood has stopped. It is now possible that she may recover." Within a short time, the girl was out of danger. She recovered completely, and ultimately built a beautiful family in Yerushalayim.

Let's think about this. Where was this *chassid* on his way to the hospital? Why didn't he say the whole *Tehillim*? Why didn't he promise *tzedakah* for a guaranteed *segulah*? Just because the doctors said she had just hours to live, why did he lose hope so quickly, making sure to pack a knife to rip his clothes, in advance of the tragedy?

### Rejoicing to Do Hashem's Will

This is how the *chassidim* of old conducted themselves, without feeling that it contradicted their need to daven. Of course, they poured out their hearts like water before Hashem. But their *avodah* included all of these aspects. "I don't know what's best for me. Maybe Hashem is doing right now what's best for me. I'll work on 'being silent,' first, as Chazal taught us. Once I feel absolutely no complaints in my heart – only then, once I'm happy and rejoicing with Hashem's will – then I'll daven to Him to change the hidden good to revealed good."

It wasn't for a *segulah* that they did this. It wasn't for the knowledge that doing this would remove the *yissurim*. *Chas veshalom*. They did it purely because they were surrendering completely to the will of their Creator. *I'm not the one who knows what's best for me*. They welcomed the *yissurim* wholeheartedly, with unconditional love.

And yes, they were human, flesh and blood like the rest of us. R' Eliyahu Roth remarked: "Do you think I have a heart of stone and don't feel pain? I am a person like you. I have feelings, too, and it's hard for

me, too, at first, to be strong. But I know what I have to work on, and I work on it; I return to it again and again, until I am *zocheh* to believe that all my suffering is purely for my good."

### Hit Me as Much as You Want

I heard the following from a grandson of R' Nisson Pilchick. "It's as clear in my memory as if it happened yesterday. My grandfather lay in his sickbed, writhing from unbearable pain. Once I went in at five o'clock in the morning, and heard him saying: 'Ribono Shel Olam! I am all Yours! Hit me as much as You want!'"

When R' Nisson walked in the street, although he was in constant pain, he'd stop and talk to people who were passing. He would say to them: "Did you hear what Rava said?! Rava said (*Berachos* 60b) – with regard to the teaching of the Tanna that we must make a *brachah* on the bad just like on the good – Rava says, all that's required is to accept the *yissurim* with joy."

### Let It Be This Way!

The same grandson shared an Erev Pesach memory. R' Nisson's children wanted to *kasher* his false teeth for Pesach, but when the time came, they couldn't find the teeth. "We searched all over, for six hours straight, in his little apartment. We were unsuccessful. My grandfather was terribly distraught at the thought he might not be able to eat his *kezayis* of matzah.

"I felt his pain and said to him, 'Zaide! What will be with the *kezayis* matzah? How will you be able to eat a *kezayis* of matzah without teeth?'

"My grandfather thought for a moment and then exclaimed: 'If Hashem wants it this way, let it be this way!'

"Two minutes later, he was singing a joyous *niggun*..."

R' Nisson remembered, with his grandson's question, that at this moment it was Hashem's will that his teeth were not found. As soon

as he remembered this, the clouds departed and the sun once again shone in his heart... No, he did not rejoice because it would help him find his teeth, but because he ignored his own will and put Hashem's will foremost. And because it was perfectly clear to him that right now, the best thing for him was that the teeth were not found.

### The Remedy for Suffering: Acceptance

Now that we understand the fundamental concept that the first level is accepting *yissurim* with love, we can approach what the *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh* revealed to us (in *Parshas Vayigash* 46:7).

Only after "Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all of that generation," (Shemos 1:6) did the oppression of *shibud Mitzrayim* begin. Chazal said that as long as the original 'seventy souls' still lived, the oppression did not start; and the *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh* suggests that this was their reward for accepting Hashem's decree and going willingly to Mitzrayim. They were spared the suffering, because "סמא דיסורי קבולי - The remedy for suffering is acceptance."

When a person accepts the suffering that was decreed upon him, with love, and does not try to escape it - then the suffering is removed from him. The *yissurim* are *shefa* that comes down to him... Not all of the food we eat is absorbed into our bodies, and similarly, not all the *shefa* that is sent to us is absorbed. If a person does not receive it, but tries to fight it with all his might, then the *yissurim* are not absorbed to his benefit, and this means he may need more *yissurim*. But if he receives the *yissurim* with good will, then they are absorbed properly, achieving their intended purpose, and this means no more *yissurim* will come.

### The Child Eliyahu Hanavi Saw

The following story is told about Rav Yosef Meir of Machnovka. When he was six years old, his grandfather, Rav Yitzchak of Skver, often tested him on his learning. One day, R' Yitzchak asked, as usual: "What did you learn today?"

"I didn't learn today."

“Why didn’t you learn?”

“Today was the cattle market day, and since I heard that Eliyahu Hanavi is at that market, I decided to go there and see him,” said the child.

“Well, did you see him?”

“No, I didn’t see him, but I’ll tell Zaide what I saw.

“I saw all the sellers bringing the oxen to the market, and tying them to the fence so they couldn’t run off. I saw many of the oxen struggling with all their might to free themselves. Not only did they not succeed, but the knots became tighter and tighter, until the rope was too tight around them and caused them a lot of pain.

“On the other hand, I saw many other oxen, that also didn’t enjoy being tied to the fence, but they stood still and didn’t struggle to break free. Slowly their bonds loosened, until they were able to walk around a little.

“I saw from this,” the child said to his grandfather, “that if a person is decreed *yissurim* and he accepts it with love, it will go easier for him and gradually his bonds will loosen and he can be released. And if he doesn’t accept with love, but tries to struggle to gain release, not only is he unsuccessful, but it brings on even more pain and suffering.”

His grandfather heard this and his face lit up. “You didn’t see Eliyahu Hanavi, but Eliyahu Hanavi saw you. And you were *mechaven* to what it says in the *Meor Einayim* (*Parshas Vayetzei*): every person can potentially be *zocheh* to experience a revelation of Eliyahu Hanavi, by finding truth in the Torah.”

### Daven with Humility, Not with Aggression

How do we explain the human tendency to fight and resist *yissurim*? It is a fight of the *nefesh*. The *nefesh* refuses to bear the burden of these

*yissurim*, and fights them with all its might. Then, when the person stands up to daven, he davens as if he's in the middle of a war. All his *hishtadlus* is done in a war zone.

A person must first accept the whole package of *yissurim*, welcome it and be happy about it. Only then can he daven and do his *hishtadlus* to convert the hidden good to revealed good. This is the two-stage process described by Chazal. "The tradition regarding suffering is silence—" and only then, "and davening for mercy."

What if I'm not on such a *madreigah*? The answer: review these principles again and again, until your mind becomes dominant over your heart, and then you can be *zocheh* to reach this *madreigah* at least a little.

You may find yourself backsliding into resistance mode. You are human and you have a heart that feels emotions. Once again, set your mind to rule over your heart, and again, teach yourself to accept *yissurim* with love. You are not an angel, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows that you can do it. By reminding yourself of the principles of *emunah* and *bitachon*, by the power of words, you can make your mind ruler over your heart, compelling your heart to accept the situation. And once you accept *yissurim* with love, you'll be able to get up and daven to Hashem.

### Happy Is the Nation

I recently spoke with the sons of R' Avraham Dovid Weiss, a Yid who has suffered incredible *yissurim*. His sons shared the following story.

We were in the hospital with our father and we saw a non-Jewish man sitting alone and sobbing desperately. We asked about his troubles; he told us his wife was sick. She had been sick in the past, and been cured, and now the illness was back, and the prognosis was bad.

We tried telling him to take heart: "G-d will help, and she'll recover from her illness." Here the man stopped us and said: "No, no, I don't believe in all that stuff. I'm a distinguished professor. I studied in a university, and I know exactly how the world began." (These were his words.)

To our amazement, he continued: "I'm jealous of you. I keep looking at you, and I see that you have Who to turn to. I don't have anyone to turn to..."

Hashem created His world in a way that in every situation, it's possible to be happy and at peace. But to get there, a person must connect to his Creator. This gentile with his impoverished mindset can't begin to understand this. From his point of view, the world is chaotic, wrecked, and miserable, and the only way to get away from the misery is to put an end to his life. He looks at the Jews and his eyes burn with jealousy. He sees that in every difficulty, the Yid has where to turn. The Yid never has to lose hope, never has to go wild in despair.

When we say in davening, והאר עינינו בתורתך, that also means *enlighten our eyes to walk in the ways of the Torah*. And the more we shed tears in *tefillah*, the more we daven to be *zocheh* to internalize these truths, the more we will advance in *madreigos* of love and acceptance.











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