

Havineini



Shiurim of Harav Shimon Spitzer

Parshas Acharei Kedoshim // Year 3

Bitachon
Weekly

Remembering That Hashem Has Accompanied Us Every Step of the Way

▼ "I Have Given You So Much
Goodness and Kindness!"

The *Torah HaKedoshah* is filled with exhortations to Klal Yisrael not to forget the kindnesses that Hashem performed for them. "Don't forget all the kindnesses that I have done for you... I have taken you out of Mitzrayim, I have led and guided you in the *Midbar* for forty years, and I have accompanied you with love and kindness every step of the way!" This is mentioned in the Torah dozens of times—especially in *Parashas Eikev* (see *Devarim* 7:17-19).

▼ Remember—So You Will
Thank

We tend to view these *pesukim* as a part of the obligation to give thanks to Hashem for all His kindness. A person is obligated to look back at his past so that he will notice and recognize how

Chovos HaLevavos,
Shaar HaBitachon—Shiur #72 Part 2

Looking Back at Our Own Story Leads to Bitachon

much Hashem has helped him. We're obligated to do this, because we can't properly appreciate these favors as we're experiencing them. As time passes and we look back, we're able to appreciate them properly and give thanks for them.

In fact, the *Chovos HaLevavos* mentions this idea in *Sha'ar HaBechinah* (Perek 5), writing, "A person must always reflect upon the Creator's orchestration of events in This World in hindsight. One must look back even at those events that were difficult for us, and we will see in them wonderful things—for many happenings come upon us against our will, but in the end, we give praise and thanks for them."

This happens very often: A person becomes upset with his friend who promised to return something that day. "Why didn't he return it?! He promised!" But a week later, he realizes that had his friend returned the item when he promised, it would have been

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Sefiras HaOmer

Transforming Our Middos Through the Light of Our *Neshamos*

Are We Indeed Required
to Transform Our
Nature?

Transcending Nature

The days of *sefirah* are known as a time for personal transformation and improvement of our *middos* in preparation for *kabbalas haTorah* (see *sifrei Arizal* and *chassidus*). When we speak about this topic, the question may arise: What does it mean to transform *middos*? We know that every person must serve Hashem with his own personality and set of natural attributes. Why would we be required to change them?

One person is born with a pleasant disposition. He loves to help people, and he can always be found with a smile. He may not have been so successful in *yeshivah*, yet he was always called upon when things needed to be taken care of. And when it came to *chessed*, he was always there to lend a hand. He naturally possesses a heart of gold.

catastrophic. It was a miracle that he didn't bring it when he promised....

▼ Remember—So You Will Trust

But here, the *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us another reason to reflect and meditate upon the kindnesses of Hashem. Not only will you be awakened to *thank* Hashem, but you will also develop a deep feeling of serenity and reliance.

Even if you don't yet recognize how your *current* situation is for your good, you will nevertheless come to trust and believe that Hashem is doing everything for your good—because you will remember the countless times that He has helped you until today... including countless instances where you thought that things were terrible, and instead they turned out to be wonderful for you.

▼ Thanking Hashem for the Ruined Shidduch

There was an individual with a son who struggled to find his *shidduch*—until one day, a wonderful girl was suggested for him. As the *shidduch* advanced, the parents became more and more excited about the prospect, and they looked forward to an engagement. But it turned out that someone related negative information about the son due to something silly he had done in high school, and as a result, the girl's family decided to abandon the *shidduch*.

This was extremely painful for the parents. It had been seven years since that incident! Was it really necessary to dredge it up when it came to *shidduchim*?! The pain was unbearable.

Said the father with great emotion, “My son became engaged to a wonderful girl a short time later—and I cannot give enough thanks to Hashem for sparing us from the first *shidduch*. When I compare the two, I see incredible *rachamim* from Hashem for having brought us his ultimate *shidduch*.”

▼ Reflection Brings Serenity

Let us analyze this story for a moment: This very person will marry off his child in a few months, and he will likely encounter difficulties, such as how to cover the wedding expenses. He will experience complex worries and doubts that will disturb his serenity. But **if he remembers the kindness and mercy that Hashem showed him in bringing him the *shidduch*, that will bring him serenity and reliance on Hashem!**

If he will always bear in mind how merciful Hashem was to him in breaking that first *shidduch*—even though he was certain at the time that it was terrible, but it turned out to be wonderful—this will help him in the present and in the future to trust Hashem's plan with serenity, even if he doesn't yet see the good. He will believe and trust that the

The next person was blessed with the gift of focus and concentration. He's *mamash* able to sit in one place and concentrate on one thing for hours on end. It would be a shame for this person to devote himself to *chessed*, since he's capable of learning Torah for hours on end. Let him sit and learn! The point is that every person must utilize his unique nature and personality—and this brings about an incredible *sheleimus* in the world. Why did Hashem create the world as a colorful and diverse place? It cannot be for everyone to be doing the same thing!

It is known that the Rebbe Rav Zusha of Anipoli would say, “If I were offered to trade places with Avraham Avinu, I would decline! For what does the Ribbono shel Olam gain from this? There would still need to be one Avraham Avinu and one Zusha! Let me continue to serve Hashem in my unique way, executing my unique mission, according to my *shoresh neshamah*.”

“Created to Shatter Nature”

The Rebbe Rav Elimelech writes in the *Tzetal Kattan*, “A person was created solely to break his nature.” Thus, this is clearly our *avodah* in this world. The question is only; how does this all work?

On a practical level, one would say that we should ask people to serve Hashem *within* their nature. This would seem to be the surest path to success. When people do what they enjoy, it will likely bring the most success. In fact, the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 19a) teaches us that a person should always learn those areas of Torah that his heart desires. We see clearly in Chazal the concept that a person should serve Hashem according to his *תכונת הנפש*, his nature and his personality.

On the other hand, we're taught that our primary *avodah* is to *break and transform* our nature.

“To Remove the Negative Shame”

The answer to this question is simple: When we examine the aforementioned teaching in the *Tzetal Kattan*, where the Rebbe explains that we were created to break our nature, we will see that he adds a point that sheds light on this entire topic.

He uses the example of a person who is naturally bashful, which prevents him from davening aloud.

Ribbono shel Olam is leading him on the good path.

▼ The One Who Helped Me Will Continue to Help Me

For this reason, the Torah exhorts us: *זכור תזכור את אשר עשה ה' אליך*, *Remember—surely remember—what Hashem, your G-d, did (Devarim 7:18)*. Remember the favors and the kindnesses that Hashem has done for you in the past, so you will fulfill your obligation and purpose on This World to be a *ba'al bitachon*! It is a mitzvah like every mitzvah in the Torah; a means to become *davuk* in the Ribbono shel Olam.

This is the *yesod* that the *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us here: *הלא הוא אביך קנך, הוא עשך ויכוננך, Is He not your Father, your Creator? He made you and established you (Devarim 32:6)*. The Ribbono shel Olam has created us with all our talents and abilities, He has accompanied us in all our successes and in every detail of our lives—thousands of details that ensured a smooth ride until this moment. If so, Hashem will surely arrange and resolve this small detail over which we are so worried.

Looking at the Big Picture, We See Things Differently

▼ Proportion

This brings us to another aspect of the sugya of bitachon: A great impediment to a feeling of serenity and reliance on Hashem is **when we don't see things in the proper proportion**.

While a person finds himself in a painful situation, it takes him over completely, and he's unable to view the matter in context and proportion. His pinky finger may hurt him, and this causes him to forget about the thousands of things that are going right in his life at that very moment. He's focused like a laser on this small detail, robbing him of all his serenity and his ability to recognize the countless kindnesses that the Ribbono shel Olam is doing for him at this very moment.

▼ Only a Part of the Picture

A person laments about how difficult his situation is... “You can't imagine what I'm going through.” But the truth is that—no matter how difficult, complex, and challenging that situation is—it is *still* only a small part of the picture. Proof of this is that if this person will, *chas v'shalom*, become saddled with an even more difficult problem, he will forget all about the first one.

This is the reality, and we see it all the time. Suppose that a person had a business partner who wronged him. He feels deeply betrayed. After all, he feels he was cheated out of a large sum of money. “I gave him so much trust, and he betrayed that trust so spectacularly,” he feels, and he's consumed by the pain and disappointment. But soon, he is, *Rachmana litzlan*, diagnosed with a devastating illness, and the doctors give him a 50% chance of survival. Does

This person, the Rebbe suggests, should daven loudly, and with fervent motions, for forty days—until he is assisted from Above to be rid of the terrible shame. This **negative form** of shame must be eliminated.

Removing the Negative Aspects of Our Middos

The *middah* of bashfulness is such a beautiful and pure one. In fact, it is one of the innate characteristics of every *Yid*; to be a *ביישן*. It is the highest praise that we can say about a person when we say that he's refined and bashful.

This *middah* of *bushah* has a wonderful aspect, but it also has a negative one—which must be broken! When we're taught that we were created to break *teva*, it doesn't mean that we should abandon any one *middah* altogether—to go completely from *chessed* to *gevurah*. Of course, every *middah* has its positive aspects that we *must* channel for the good. The idea is to remove the *negative aspects* of *chessed* (permissiveness and misplaced compassion, etc.) and retain the positive aspects.

This applies to all *middos*. The *neshamah* of a *Yid* contains all the wonderful traits and attributes that exist. We must only filter these *middos* and hold onto the positive aspects of them—for the negative aspects are a *kelipah* that surrounds the good, and when we remove it, we're left with perfection. **Liberating our Middos Tovos**

We All Possess Positive Middos

Let us delve into this a bit: From where do our *neshamos* acquire their *middos*? From the Ribbono shel Olam! Since the *neshamah* is a *חלק אלוהי-מועיל*, a part of Hashem, as it were, the *middos* that it possesses are essentially from Hashem. All the *middos* with which Hashem conducts Himself are implanted into every single *Yid*.

Thus, we can never say that a person was born with one specific *middah*, and he doesn't have any positive *middos* of which to speak. It is a mistake to think, “This person is great for *chessed* but he's not cut out for learning,” and vice versa... For every *neshamah* originates from Above—a place that grants us every good *middah*.

he even remember the betrayal of his partner?! Of course not—because he now recognizes that this is only a small part of the larger picture of his life.

Part of the mitzvah of *bitachon* is to place things into proportion—that even when we experience a challenge, we should still place it into the proper proportion and in the context of all the things that are going well for us.

▼ We Tend Only to See the Present Moment

When we see a person experiencing a challenge and suffering, we say to ourselves: Wow, this person is really going through a tough time; he's unable to even think thoughts of *emunah*, and he can't focus on learning and davening and his connection to Hashem. A *rebbe* who knows that his *talmid* is going through an ordeal at home will have compassion for that child; "he's a tzaddik for even showing up to yeshivah today," the *rebbe* thinks.

When we see a person enduring suffering, the conventional wisdom is that this person is now incapable of remembering the Ribbono shel Olam: "Listen, it's not simple. I heard from behind the scenes what he's going through...."

But the truth is that there's a much broader picture here that takes into account everything that this person has already experienced and everything

that he will experience in the future. The past and the future in this person's life are as true as the present moment. But the Ribbono shel Olam has placed a thick curtain over it all—only opening a small window for us to peek out at the present, and this all that we tend to see. And this is why some problems seem insurmountable and unbearable.

A Yid awaits children, and he grasps desperately at strands of *bitachon* that will strengthen him in his ordeal. But this is because he doesn't see the future. In truth, the baby's crib is already in his home, as are the baby clothes. The home is even messy from the children's antics... everything is already here. **He's unable to see it, because the past and the future tend to be hidden from us**, and we thus don't see the entire picture. We can't even see what will happen in a few hours, later in the same day; but the *yeshuah* is on its way.

▼ Look at the Past to Strengthen Your Future

The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe Ki Tisa*) says regarding the *pasuk* וראית את אחרי ופני לא יראו, *You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen* (*Shemos* 33:23), the Ribbono shel Olam tells Moshe Rabbeinu: I will not show you the future, because I want you to trust Me with complete reliance and to have no need to explore the future—but look at "My back," at all the past kindnesses and favors I have done for you. Back then, it also seemed difficult, but now

Removing the Façade

The idea that every person must break his nature doesn't mean we must *change* our nature entirely. The idea is that every *neshamah* is born with *levushim* and *kelipos* that conceal the positive expressions of the *middos*. Every person has different, varying degrees of these façades; they are different for every person.

For example, one person is born with a more revealed *middah* of *chesed*. His *chesed* isn't as concealed. This may be for a variety of reasons. One reason may be because he has already toiled and perfected this *middah* in a previous *gilgul*, and therefore he need not repeat this journey in his current incarnation. He has already removed the *kelipos* and coverings. And for this reason, this *Yid* loves to perform *chesed*, and he's always smiling to others. He truly has a heart of gold. His friend, on the other hand, *also* has a heart of gold, but it's more concealed, and he must toil to reach the gold.

Tzaddikim Toiled to Uncover Their Positive Middos

It is said that the Divrei Chaim of Sanz—who was known to be extreme in his *chesed* and *tzedakah*, so much so that he didn't leave a penny in his pocket overnight but gave everything away—was born with the attribute of miserliness.

This doesn't mean that he, *chas v'shalom*, emanated from the world of stinginess and never possessed the *middah* of *chesed* until he toiled to acquire it. This cannot be—for where would he have accessed it? Where would he have attained such a lofty level of giving if he never had a connection to it?

Surely, the *middah* was buried deep within his heart. It was always there. But it was the desire of the Ribbono shel Olam that he should come down to this world with a great concealment over his *middas hachessed*—and he would need to toil mightily until it would shine bright. This toil indeed brought about such great illumination in this area of *chesed*—giving expression to the most beautiful light from deep within his *neshamah*!

Thanking Hashem for Freedom

We find ourselves in the days following Pesach, the Yom Tov of our freedom, when one of the great aspects of *יצאת מצרים* is the gift of freedom that we were given. In fact, it is a mitzvah to invoke *Yetzias Mitzrayim* every single day, giving thanks for this gift of freedom.

We also mention this in *bentching*. After we have eaten and we're grateful for the good that we have been given, we give thanks for other kindnesses that Hashem has given us. This is the nature of a person; once he's in a grateful mood, he gives thanks for other areas of good in his life.

This *Yid* proclaims: I give thanks to You... for the bread I have eaten, but I also want to give thanks for other gifts that You have granted me... For having taken me out of Mitzrayim, out of the house of slaves, and given me the gift of freedom. I am overwhelmed by this, and I feel the need to give thanks for this great gift.

Freedom Means Uncovering the Light

The definition of freedom is when a *Yid* receives the keys to uncovering the *levushim*, coverings, and concealments—the proper methods by which to remove the coverings over his *middos* and elicit the beautiful attributes hidden within his *neshamah*. A *goy*, *l'havdil*, is also considered the “handiwork of Hashem.” But he hasn't been given the gift of freedom—the tools to uncover his positive *middos*. Even animals were created with the instinct of compassion, and surely a human being was too—but not all creations are given the tools to refine their *middos* and channel them for the good.

A *Yid*, however, *was* given this ability. He can remove the *kelipos* and refine his *middos*. He gives thanks to the *Ribbono shel Olam* for his ability to compromise and to tolerate. I can give thanks *as I am enduring* a difficult saga, because this brings forth the shine of my *neshamah*.

Why Misers Are Sad

When we encounter a person who's drowning in money but is unable to share it, we're essentially seeing a person whose *nefesh* is incarcerated. His

you see that everything was for the good. Similarly, you should understand that although you're experiencing events that seem incomprehensible to you, you will later appreciate that they were for your good. Take the past that you now see and understand, and through this you will understand the present and the future.

The idea that “a person going through a hard time is incapable of thinking about Hashem” is foreign to Torah.

▼ It's Not as Bad as It Seems

Of course, we don't judge a person going through a hard time, and Chazal teach us never to judge a person until we have arrived at his place; rather, we're only addressing reality through a Torah lens, the way that Torah wants us to view things. The truth is that it is really good for this person right now: he has a good past and a good future. It isn't true that he's in a terrible *Churban*, for the present is only a small part of the picture, but we don't see the whole truth in front of us right now.

The *Ribbono shel Olam* has given each of us so much good in the past, and He will continue to give us so much good in the future—but we tend to focus narrowly on the present. We refuse to look at the larger picture, and this causes us pain and heartache, thinking that our lives are filled with suffering.

And for this reason, the Torah tells us, that although we cannot strengthen ourselves by looking at the future, because we haven't experienced it yet, we do have the past. We can reflect upon it, and we can think about the immense amount of good that we have received in the past. It's not enough to think generally and superficially about this; it's important to make a detailed accounting of how much good Hashem has done for us, so we can properly appreciate it.

▼ Taking Nothing for Granted

A *Yid* has, *baruch Hashem*, merited to have his *parnassah* provided to him for a number of years, and he assumes that this is the way it will always go. “Of course! I'm talented and driven and resourceful... why *shouldn't* I earn nicely?!” This causes him not to appreciate that *parnassah* is from Hashem, and that he's the recipient of immense blessing.

Who gave him his talents? Who gave him the confidence to feel that he can do anything... that he's cut out for business success instead of *schnorring* for a living? Who gave him the idea that he's any different from the next guy who collects in shul? And the truth is that we could all be that way but for the great mercy of the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Every single day, the *Ribbono shel Olam* proclaims: “This *Yid* likes to think of himself as better... and he thus requires a good *parnassah*... and I will give it to him.” This is a new creation every single day!

When a person recognizes where he came from, as well as the immense volume of blessings that he has already been given in the past, he will demand a little less for himself. Moreover, he will acquire an inner serenity. He won't be so upset and perturbed, and he will be calm in the knowledge that "it will be okay. I don't know how, but I know that Hashem will provide. Just as He has helped me in the past, He will help me in the future."

The Blessings Always Outweigh the Suffering

▼ "Please, Don't Speak to Me About the Past"

Sometimes, when a person hears such words, he may think—albeit to himself—a disturbing thought: "Really?! I don't see all that much good in my past.... I have always struggled. I struggled in yeshivah, and I struggled after I married. If you were familiar with my past, you wouldn't advise me to look back at it.... Do you know what I have been through?! My past gives me no hope or strength for the future. If you insist that things will get better in the future, that's your right. But don't invoke my past..."

▼ Everyone Has More Good Than Bad

The answer to this is that there's not a single person in the world who has more bad than good.

If we encounter a *Yid* who's bitter in the moment, we may not be allowed to tell him the truth—as we see from Chazal that Iyov's friends were wrong in speaking to him in a critical and judgmental way about his suffering. When a person unburdens himself to us about his troubles, it is considered *אונאת דברים* to tell him to think differently and not to complain.

But we must know the truth for ourselves. Sometimes, people ask questions that aren't really questions at all. We don't understand the Heavenly calculations, and there are many things we cannot understand. But we must know the rule: **There's no person in the world who has more suffering than good.** Everyone has challenges in their lives, but there's not a person whose suffering outweighs his blessings.

▼ Make the Calculation Yourself

Of course, there's the principle that the suffering and challenges themselves are for the good. But even without this, the plain reality is that every person is given many more blessings than suffering, and if we will take pen to paper and calculate it, we will see this clearly.

This isn't something that relies on blind faith; it is a fact that we're all surrounded by boundless good. If we look it rationally to determine how much good we have received, we

inner *nefesh* truly wants to give, but he's stuck and unable to share. This creates a conflict within the person, which makes him deeply unhappy. His inner *nefesh* is itching to give, but the coverings won't allow it. He cannot express his inner desires....

Conversely, a person who loves to give, and indeed shares with others, is a satisfied and joyful person. He may be in debt, and he may be experiencing challenges in his life, but these remain superficial. He's dealing with a health crisis, his wife is laid up in bed—but he's a giver, and this brings him joy. This is the rule, and it always applies: If a person gives of himself—for the right reasons—he will be a joyful person, and **this is because his *neshamah* is free to express itself.**

The *Ribbono shel Olam* has given us methods and tools through which to free our *middos* and express them properly. This doesn't happen on its own. We were all born with coverings and concealments around these *middos*. But we must know two things: **That all positive *middos* can be found right within our hearts.** And that **the *Ribbono shel Olam* has given us the tools to uncover them and express them.**

Uncovering the True You

The idea that "a person was created to break and transform his nature" doesn't mean that he must *change* his nature completely—but rather to *remove* the *levushim* covering his *nefesh* in order to allow it to shine. *This* is the purpose of our creation, and this is the definition of freedom: our *neshamah* can now shine, and the *Shechinah* can rest upon such a person.

The *middah* of hubris, too, is only a covering over the natural humility within every *Yid*. When we think of a person as a great *ba'al ga'avah*, we're essentially thinking of the *galus* from which this person cannot seem to free himself. His *neshamah* naturally wants to be humble and refined, but his *nefesh* is caked over with feelings of hubris. He's constantly fighting with others and becomes upset with them, and it's so unpleasant for him. But this

will see that it far outweighs any suffering we have endured.

If we analyze it, we will see that even those who seem to have it all—health, wealth, wonderful children, and so forth—if they don't accustom themselves to appreciating Hashem's blessings and recognizing them, they will become completely lost at the first sign of trouble. The moment someone bothers them, they instantly forget all the blessings in their lives.

All this isn't to minimize the pain of suffering at all. We're only asserting that the *avodah* of *bitachon* is to place our emotions about the present on the side, and look at the entire bigger picture. Don't merely focus on what you're feeling in the current moment; look more broadly at how much goodness and blessing you have received over the decades, and you will become infused with serenity and *bitachon*.

▼ Don't Let a Difficult Day Darken Your Life

A *Yid* stands on the street in a heavy downpour, having forgotten his coat at home. It's cold and he's soaked to the bone, when a car passes by at high speed and showers him with muddy water. Just then, he takes a phone call telling him that his son was expelled from yeshivah because he was disrespectful.

This person loses it, and deep in his heart, he feels as if

the *Ribbono shel Olam* has abandoned him completely. He doesn't even have the wherewithal to work on his *bitachon*. But isn't it true that the *Aibishter* has been so good to him all his life? His feelings are simply misplaced.

It's true that it's raining right now, and he has experienced an aggravating event—but we must not forget all the blessings that Hashem has given us and continues to give us—and even amid this *tzarah*, the *Ribbono shel Olam* continues to orchestrate thousands of details in our lives for the good.

▼ The Eitzah That Works Even Amid the Greatest Suffering

We often don't feel this. When we're going through a *tzarah*, we become so absorbed in our own feelings of pain that we forget about the entire world around us. Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: You *must* look at your past. This will persuade you that just as the *Ribbono shel Olam* has helped you until now, and He has orchestrated and resolved thousands of details that no one else could have ever done, He will continue to help you in the future as well.

This *eitzah* isn't only for people who have everything going well for them, and now, during their first *nisayon*, we urge them to look back at a wonderful past. No. The *Chovos HaLevavos* tells us that this *eitzah*

isn't really "him." It's the *kelipah* that surrounds him. If he can somehow free himself from this prison, his natural humility will begin to shine, and then his natural sweetness and beauty will shine forth.

The Great Value of Unlocking the Good Within

The Neshamah Becomes So Elevated That Our Sins Are Forgiven

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a) teaches us, כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, *one who forgoes on his middos will have his sins forgiven*. This is plainly understood to mean that when a person does something difficult for him in This World, this arouses the same measure Above, and his sins are forgiven. Perhaps this is the principle of ה' צלך, *Hashem is our Shadow*, and He conducts Himself with us as we conduct ourselves with others. If you smile at others, you will be smiled upon from above. This is the simple understanding, and it is worth keeping in mind.

But there's a deeper meaning to this Gemara, and that is that when a person is מעביר על מדותיו, his *neshamah* becomes elevated to such an exalted place, and when he reaches that exalted state, his sins are automatically forgiven.

Becoming "Honored"

Every reward that a person earns essentially reflects what has just transpired within his nefesh. We see this idea in the Mishnah (*Avos* 4:1) where we learn איזהו מוכבד, המכבד את הבריות, *who is honored? One who honors others*. It doesn't say that if a person gives honor to others, he will receive the reward of being honored by others—measure for measure. **There's something much deeper here: One who has refined himself to the point of being able to honor others has now become a truly honored person!**

This isn't a superficial reward. When this person gives honor to others, his *neshamah* becomes free and revealed, and its inner honor

applies to even the greatest *ba'al yisurim*—even people whom we can't look in the face because of their immense suffering, *Rachmana litzlan*. Even they—if they reflect on the good that Hashem has done for them, they will be able to strengthen their *emunah* and *bitachon*!

▼ We Don't Need to Work on Bitachon...

We're generally not accustomed to thinking about the immense good that Hashem does for us at every moment, and if we do, it's usually superficial. We're usually occupied managing our needs and wants in the present. It tends to be when we run into trouble, and we need thoughts of *chizuk*, that we tell ourselves that Hashem has helped us and He will continue to help us.

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* tells us that this isn't the way a Yid must live. We must accustom ourselves to thinking deeply about this from morning till night—only taking a break to address matters of necessity—and then immediately return to reality and to the truth. We must become accustomed to finding and recognizing the kindness that Hashem does for us every day. This will cause our *emunah* and *bitachon* to grow. **We won't need to work on *bitachon*; just thinking and reflecting about the *chasdei Hashem* will fashion us into the greatest *ba'alei bitachon*!**

▼ How Do We “Work on Bitachon”?

People often say, “I worked on my *bitachon*, but I saw no results.” Very often, this means that they worked on *bitachon* solely to acquire a specific desire or result. They doubted whether it would happen, and they forced themselves to believe that it will be good so that it will come to happen. They *really* wanted a certain outcome, and they told themselves that it will indeed happen. This doesn't constitute “working on *bitachon*.” This was merely a means to calm themselves....

“Working on *bitachon*” means that long before you run into a problem, you followed the *eitzah* that the Torah gives to each of us; to think day and night about how good Hashem is to us, and this automatically will transform us into true *ba'alei bitachon*. Later, when you become transformed, people will say about you; “Listen, he's that kind of person... he's always happy and upbeat... I'm not that kind of person.”

The good news is that *everyone* can become *that kind of person*! We must only become accustomed to thinking straight—to contemplating and reflecting upon the immense good that Hashem does for us always, and each of us will become a “*Chovos HaLevavos Yid*,” and a satisfied, joyful *ba'al bitachon*.

is likewise revealed. People who encounter this person will sense the goodness and purity that emanate from him. They will respect him because of who he truly is. His *neshamah* shines, and this naturally earns him respect. It has nothing to do with his position or job or talents or abilities; rather, it is the inner truth of his soul. People recognize the light of his *neshamah*, and this is what they respect—not to return the honor, but out of recognition of the truth.

However, if the *guf* maintains its hold on the *neshamah* and drags it down into the mundane, human struggles—he belittles others and he insults others—this covers the shine of the inner *kavod* within his *neshamah*. People in turn look down at him, saying, “Why do you speak this way? Why do you look down at people?” They can't respect him, because they cannot see the *neshamah* that earns the *kavod*. The person himself doesn't feel it, and those around him don't feel it either....

Uncovering the Light of Our Neshamos

The same applies to the aforementioned *Mishnah* of *המעביר על מדותיו*: When we forgo our own desires, we haven't simply shown a nice *middah* and gesture; we have now expressed the innermost Godliness of our *neshamos*. The *Ribono shel Olam* Himself possesses this *middah*, and He has placed it into our *neshamos*. When we're *מעביר על מדותיו*, we draw out the essence of our *neshamos* that has never been blemished, and when this aspect and essence is allowed to shine, our *aveiros* are automatically erased.

Our *aveiros* are, by definition, connected only to the external aspects of our *neshamos*. But when we give expression to our essence, our inner essence is revealed, and thus there's no space for our *aveiros*.

Escaping at the Last Minute

In connection with this, HaGaon Rabbi Meir Chadash, *z"l*, related a story that happened to him personally. He would say

that if there was one incident he could point to that changed his life forever, it was the following:

In his younger yeshivah years, he learned diligently. But when he turned eighteen, World War II broke out, and tens of thousands of people began wandering from place to place. Entire waves of refugees fled to areas they felt were safer from the Nazi threat, only to later be forced to flee from there as well. One time, he was with friends in a small town when news arrived that the Nazis were approaching. He ran to the marketplace to find a wagon driver who could take them away from there as soon as possible, before the *resha'im* arrived and, G-d forbid, kill all the Jews there.

Waiting for a Friend

When they arrived, they saw a wagon preparing to leave, with exactly two empty seats. At that moment, his friend said, “Oh no—I left behind my bag, which has my *tefillin* and my money. I’ll run to get it. Please do me a favor—wait for me and don’t leave without me.”

Rabbi Meir later recounted:

I agreed to wait, and I didn’t get on the wagon—even though every moment felt like an eternity. I waited and waited. Meanwhile, the wagon left, and I saw another wagon fill up and depart as well. I stood there under tremendous pressure, knowing that soon there would be no more wagons to escape—this was a matter of life and death. Why is he taking so long? I began thinking that I should just get on the next wagon—but then I thought, no, I won’t....

My thoughts went back and forth until I decided I couldn’t do that to my friend. I couldn’t leave him alone. The last wagon left. No one remained. I stood there alone—where was my friend? Finally, after all chances of escape seemed gone, he came running. We both stood there wondering what to do next. Suddenly, a wagon filled with people passed by. We signaled for it to stop, and the

driver did—but indicated there was only one available spot.

My friend didn’t hesitate. He jumped onto the wagon, took the spot—and the wagon drove off, leaving me alone and stranded....

Built from Disappointment

Rav Meir continued:

At that moment, I felt a deep shock, seeing how ungrateful a person can be. I was so broken that I resolved never to make that mistake again. I would never wait for someone else again. People take advantage of me and then leave me behind; this will never happen to me again!

But a moment later, my *yetzer tov* said to me: “Meir, Meir! Did you wait for *him*?! You waited for *yourself*! You drew out from within yourself a good *middah*—that you are not the type of person who abandons a friend. When someone pleads with you to wait, you don’t run away! You are a *Yid*, a *nefesh*, a *ben Torah*! If the other person behaves differently, should that diminish your greatness? Did you wait because you’re weak, because people step on you? No! You waited because you are an elevated person—and there is no reason to change your behavior.”

And Rav Chadash concluded, ‘At that moment, I resolved to myself that this incident would not change me—on the contrary, it elevated me. I rose to a higher level. And I can testify now, fifty years later, that from that moment on, I became a different person. I grew from it.’”

It Was Worthwhile!

The truth is that every person must have such a story in his arsenal—because we all experience such stories. We have all done favors for others—only to be betrayed. And this hurts very much. We lent someone a precious item, and this person went on to lose it. We told them clearly that we *really* need it back in two days, and they feign ignorance...

In every such scenario, there are two very distinct aspects: how *they* behaved, and how *we* behaved in response.

If we responded with the proper honesty and integrity, we have uncovered a wonderful aspect and essence of our *neshamah*—one which we cannot allow to become darkened again. You cosigned on a loan for a fellow *Yid*, knowing that he’s struggling... you knew full well that he’s down on his luck, and you did it anyway, because “I am a *Yid*, and I don’t want to tell him no.” Now he defaulted... he couldn’t pay up. Don’t retreat to your “prison.” You were given the gift of freedom, of uncovering your *neshamah*! You have given expression to the best version of your *middos tovos*! Yes, you’re suffering right now... but don’t bury yourself again. You have gained so much in the spiritual realm of *middos tovos*.

Don’t Learn the Wrong Lesson

Many people will take away the wrong lessons from such a saga. “Okay, I will never again cosign for anyone... I won’t allow myself to be trampled upon... I always must be the nice one.... And when I need a favor, I can’t find anyone to help me. From now on, I will stand up for my rights....”

Such a story can push us in either of two directions: One is to conclude that we’ll return our *neshamah* to prison in a future situation, but the other is to resolve never again to return to that prison.

We must choose the right path! Recognize how elevated and exalted your *neshamah* became from this story and always reiterate that *no one loses from listening to Hashem*! Although it may seem in the moment that you have lost out, you have really gained twofold: You have removed the coverings and *levushim* from your *neshamah*, you have drawn out the hidden light from deep within it, and you have received the gift of freedom.

<<< Continued from page 8

gotten what he wanted. Now, we can try to explain ourselves... “I truly didn’t mean it, I truly, truly didn’t mean it.” Yes, but the damage has already been done. The other person has been deeply hurt, and a division of hearts has already taken place.

Speech That Prevents Us from Growing

Very often, it goes much further than causing emotional pain to another *Yid* or to the *Shechinah HaKedoshah*, which feels the pain of one who has been hurt; it also truly damages the spiritual growth of the person who was hurt. It prevents him from *shteiging* in Torah and *avodas Hashem*. Rashi here gives us one example that can very commonly occur in *yeshivos* or *kollelim*: “Do not say to him: ‘Yesterday you were... and now you come to the world of Torah? Ah, welcome... look who’s trying to grow and make something of himself...’” Rashi is telling us that that using this type of language is a *lav d’Oraisa!*

When we look around, we will see that there are very many unique *yetzer hara’s* in this area—not bombastic and loud *yetzer hara’s*, but much more subtle temptations.... Let us examine some of these instances and

scenarios that are unfortunately all too common.

Tormenting Due to Lack of Sensitivity

Sometimes there are those who hurt people simply because they don’t have sufficient sensitivity to the feelings of others. They may not have even said anything major, but it caused great pain to the other person. For example: people come together with friends or family, and one of those present is still waiting for the blessing of children. People say to themselves, “He holds himself together so well... he’s not broken, he doesn’t walk around shattered—it seems he has come to terms with the situation...” and throughout the conversation, those people talk about their own children, without the sensitivity to feel that now is not the time to describe how sweet your children are.

The same is relevant later in life, when one reaches the stage of *shidduchim* for their children. So many people have children of age, and they’re waiting to make a *shidduch*. Sometimes the child is already a bit older—to say nothing if there are two or three children in the queue.... It is extremely painful when people are not sufficiently sensitive about speaking of the *shidduchim*

that they have, *baruch Hashem*, made for their own children.

Just Think!

Surely, one cannot tell a person, “Don’t speak about anything except the weather... and perhaps not even that, since there is someone to whom the weather causes great distress.” That is not the point. The *Ribbono shel Olam* only demands that we use our heads. Be the kind of person who thinks ahead before he speaks.

It can truly sometimes happen that a person *be’emes* did not know that the other person was struggling greatly with a certain matter, and because of this the other was hurt by him. For this we have the principle of “והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים, *you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy*”—when a *Yid* tries on his part, the *Ribbono shel Olam* will give him heavenly assistance to succeed. Hashem does not demand of us to be *malachim*. But He *does* demand that one not torment people out of carelessness and insensitivity.

Incidentally, this is also one of the problems of “boasting” about which *tzaddikim* have spoken so strongly. When a person boasts about his success, how good and accomplished he is, and how greatly he has succeeded with

his children, this brings many problems. One of the obstacles caused by this is that if another person is struggling with the matter, this can be literally a Torah prohibition of לא תונו איש את עמיתו. We don't realize, and we speak of things that cause pain to other *Yidden*.

"He's Laughing It Off..."

A second example is the foolishness that the *yetzer hara* talks into people is by saying, "Oh, it surely doesn't bother him.... I know him well, he is not the type who is hurt by a comment. He enjoys it, he laughs along... he even adds flavor to the joke... he is a strong character. There are unfortunate souls whom one must be careful not to torment, but *he* isn't like that...."

This is simply false! Certainly, there are stronger people—not everyone has the same nature. But it causes pain to everyone when a joke or a comment is made at their expense! The question is only how quickly he can overcome the pain—but it certainly causes him pain.

It is very common for people to introduce something to someone that will cause him pain, preceding it with, "Can I tell you something? It won't bother you, will it?" If

one makes this introduction, may one then torment him? Certainly not! "לא תונו" was said also when asking prior "permission." It brings about division and pain, it brings pain to the *Shechinah HaKedoshah*... one has hurt a *Yiddish kind*, and one has certainly fulfilled "לא נהוג כבוד זה לזה." One must become accustomed to the idea that there is no difference whatsoever what type of person he is—one may never violate the honor of another person. There are enough other things one can speak about. On the contrary, one can receive much more *chiyus* from sharing positive words of affirmation and encouragement!

"Can't You Take a Joke?"

A third example is another expression people use. "It's not considered hurting him—I just made a joke." This person has given it a new name. "Can't you take a quip? Can't you take a joke? What's the problem? Must you take everything so seriously?" But this makes no difference whatsoever regarding the prohibition of "לא תונו"!

It may sometimes seem that when one imitates another person or makes a joke at his expense, everyone will laugh. But a joke is absolutely no permission to torment a *Yid*. It is a Torah

prohibition of "לא תונו איש את עמיתו" and it leads to nothing good.

The Carefulness of Ehrliche Yidden

On the other hand, we all know that a *Yid* who has been hurt can now merit many good things. The *avodah* of the one who has been hurt is to completely remove his mind from the pain and not bear any grudge or resentment toward the other. On the contrary, he should in his heart *thank* the other person for bringing him the gift of *kapparas avonos*!

One indeed sees that *ehrlliche Yidden* and great *tzaddikim* established countless safeguards, and they went about with a tremendous caution and vigilance, because "*chas v'shalom*, another person will be hurt." Stories are told of *tzaddikim* who, when they went to a *simchah* dressed in *bigdei Shabbos*, were careful not to pass by the house of a *Yid* who had sadly not been blessed with celebrations—because *maybe* that person would see and feel saddened by it!

Ehrliche Yidden developed a tremendous sensitivity in the concept of not causing pain to a fellow *Yid*—even unintentionally. When one is careful in this, it brings the השראת השכינה and many great *hashpa'os*. *Amein*.

Point to Ponder

Never Hurting a Yid — Even Unintentionally

The Prohibition of "Ona'as Devarim"

The *pasuk* teaches us: וכי יגור אתך גר, בארצכם לא תונו אותו, *and when a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him (Devarim 19:33)*. Rashi explains that this refers to אונאת דברים, *verbal wrongdoing*. There is a Torah prohibition against tormenting a convert. "Do not say to him: 'Yesterday you were worshipping idols, and now you come to learn Torah which was given from the mouth of the Almighty.'" One may not say to him something that can cause him pain: "Yesterday you were so far, and now you come to the world of Torah..."

The *pasuk* speaks specifically about a *ger*, but this does not refer

Continued on page 10 >>>

only to a convert. The prohibition of אונאת דברים applies to every *Yid*. A *ger* is only more sensitive, since he's not part of the community; he is a newcomer, and therefore he feels a bit distant. There is a *mitzvah* to notice this and to be very careful not to torment him.

It's Wrong—Even If One Did Not Intend It

This matter—of not tormenting any *Yid*—requires much *chizuk*. We're not speaking of a person who, *chas v'shalom*, directly goes around insulting and hurting other people. But the *yetzer hara* derives much pleasure from even unintentional אונאת דברים, which can occur in the

course of our regular lives. The *yetzer hara* invests itself strongly in this point, because it brings him very far-reaching results.

It is known in the name of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov that *tzedakah* is a *mitzvah* even if one did not have the proper intention while doing it—because in the end the poor man benefited. Even if the person did not have in mind all the right thoughts, he has in practice given the poor person something to eat or given a good word to a broken *Yid*... the kindness has been performed.

The same is true in the opposite direction. If another *Yid* was deeply hurt, the *yetzer hara* has already

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