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The Pleasure of *Bitachon* That Infuses Us with New Life

Chapter One of Chovos HaLevavos Sha'ar HaBitachon.

But the meaning of bitachon is the serenity of the soul of the ba'al bitachon, and that his heart should be completely reliant on the One in Whom he trusts that He will do what is best and proper for him in whatever matter he trusts Him in, according to his ability and his knowledge that He does what is good for him.

But the ikkar of bitachon, the element without which one cannot have bitachon, is that one's heart should be reliant upon the One Whom he relies on, that He will do what He said He would do, and carry out what He promised to do—and that He will do even what He has not pledged or undertaken to do; He will do it out of a sense of voluntary kindness

Properly Understanding the Real Meaning of *Bitachon*

The First Chapter: The *Meaning* of *Bitachon*

As we begin to learn the first *perek* of Chovos HaLevavos, we must clarify that this section of the *Sha'ar HaBitachon* is different from all others in this *sefer*. While elsewhere the author guides us in *how* to attain *bitachon*, here he establishes the foundation by explaining *the definition* of *bitachon*. Only in the ensuing chapters will he elaborate on *how* we can attain *bitachon*.

Until now, in the introduction to the *Sha'ar HaBitachon*, we learned all

about the tremendous benefits that come to the *ba'al bitachon*. These benefits extend to the areas of Torah and *tefillah*, enabling the *ba'al bitachon* to serve his Creator with serenity: *bitachon* enables a person to let go of his worries, and he knows that he shouldn't have to work too hard for *parnassah*, etc.

Now, in the first *perek*, we will not learn *how important* it is to have *bitachon*, or *how to arrive at the state of bitachon*, and we will also not learn the sources in Chazal for *bitachon*. We will learn one simple principle: **What is the literal meaning of the word *bitachon*? What does it mean when a person is completely reliant upon something? What is the state of the *nefesh* of a person who relies completely upon another?**

The Importance of Understanding *Bitachon*

We may think that we already understand the essence and the meaning of *bitachon*, and all that is left is to delve into the intricacies of the philosophy behind it: When can we rely upon Hashem, and when should we engage in *hishtadlus*? Can we rely on Him in matters of spirituality? How do we employ our *bitachon* properly? And a host of other questions.... But the *Chovos HaLevavos* devoted an entire chapter to explaining **the concept of *bitachon*, and how it interacts with the soul of a person.**

The chapter is indeed small, and then we will move on to the second *perek*. But an entire chapter is devoted to explaining what *bitachon* is—because this is a necessary foundation for everything else we will learn. This is especially important **because so many mistakes and doubts in the area of *bitachon* stem from a lack of proper understanding of its simple meaning.**

The Foundation Is Most Important

Whenever we're engaged in learning about something and we find ourselves making mistakes in that matter, it's usually because we've never properly understood the fundamental principles. The person thinks he knows... but he soon finds out that he doesn't—he has never established a proper foundation.

A sudoku game works this way. We fill in numbers in nine boxes, and everything must align. Sometimes, when most of the boxes have already been filled in, we see that something is wrong. This tends to happen when a person hasn't properly checked all the sides in the beginning. Had he done so, the rest of the game would have gone much smoother and faster. Since he didn't, he will encounter problems later in the puzzle.

Understanding *Bitachon*

Let us thus learn what the *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches us in the first perek: **to understand the idea of *bitachon*.**

We must clarify once again: We will not learn what the *mitzvah* of *bitachon* is, and we will also not learn *how* a person has *bitachon* in the Ribbono shel Olam. The *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches us one *yesod* in this chapter: **what the essence of *bitachon* is**; what it means for a person to place trust in an entity; and what it means when the *nefesh* of a person relies upon something.

Understanding this will drastically change our *bitachon*, and it will bring us many great benefits in the *sugya* of *bitachon*.



A Roadmap for *Bitachon*

The *Chovos HaLevavos* concludes his introduction to the *Sha'ar HaBitachon* this way: After I have explained the benefits that come to the *ba'al bitachon* – both the physical pleasures as well as the spiritual benefits that occurred to him [the author leaves space for many more benefits that he didn't think of at the time] – I will now elaborate on seven major points related to the *middah* of *bitachon*.

The **first** point: ***"What is *bitachon*?"***

The **second** point: **Explaining the reason people tend to place their trust and reliance in other creations.** Why is it that people so often take the feeling of reliance and channel it to trusting in other creations rather

than in Hashem? The *Chovos HaLevavos* will explain how it happens that we switch our *bitachon* in Hashem for trust in others.

The **third point: Explaining and elaborating on why it's a mistake to trust in others, why logic dictates trust in Hashem, and also on the obligation to engage in *hishtadlus*.**

The **fourth point: Explaining when *bitachon* is desired and lauded, and when it is abhorrent.** In this *perek*, the author will elaborate on when we're obligated to have *bitachon*, and when *bitachon* is actually a bad thing; for example, when a person relies upon Hashem for his *ruchniyus*.

The **fifth point: The difference between the *hishtadlus* of the *ba'al bitachon* and the *hishtadlus* of one who does not have *bitachon*.** Both are seemingly engaged in *hishtadlus* in the same way. Are there differences between them?

The **sixth point: The need to denigrate those who say that they will first engage in all the lusts and desires of This World, and only then engage in *avodas Hashem*.** These people are called the “owners of collateral.” These people who occupy their lives with pursuing *ta'avos* are taking from the Ribbono shel Olam, promising to return the collateral at a later time.

The **final point: Dealing with the forces that cause us to lose our *bitachon* in Hashem, as well as another few *bitachon* concepts that haven't been addressed in earlier chapters.**

He Will Help Me—Even If I'm Unworthy

He Has the Greatest Ability and the Greatest Understanding

Now, let us begin the first chapter of the *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Sha'ar haBitachon*:

The **essence of *bitachon*** is the serenity of the soul that the *ba'al bitachon* experiences, and that his heart will be reliant on the entity in which he trusts—his heart *leans* on the person or entity in which he trusts, because he is **assured that this person will do what it is good and right for him in whatever matters he trusts in him, according to the understanding and ability of that person that this is for his good.**

If this person doesn't have the *ability* to do what is good for me or the *understanding* of what is good for me, I cannot place my trust in him. He may be a wonderful person, a true tzaddik who means very well, and it's not his fault—but **he can't be relied upon**, because he simply doesn't possess the *ability* to do what I need from him. To be able to trust someone, he must have **the greatest level of ability** and also **the greatest level of knowledge** of what is good for me—and only then can I serenely and calmly rely on him.

Dinner Done

An example of this is when one person tells another, "Do me a favor. Please take care of dinner for me this evening. I don't care *how* you do it, I don't care *where* you get it from, and I don't even have the time to discuss reimbursing you for it—**just ensure that there's dinner here this evening.** I don't want to think about it again, and I don't want to have to remind you about it...."

This is called: **complete reliance on this person** that he will take care of this in the best and most pleasant manner.

Trusting the Manager

Another example is when a company grows, and the owner takes in a manager to oversee the various and complex operations in the company, to ensure that everything is running smoothly.

The most important quality that he looks for in a candidate is that this person will do whatever is expected of him, and that **he can rely on him that it will get done....** He won't have to check on him constantly and fix his mistakes—otherwise, he can already do it himself.

The entire point of hiring a manager is that he should *remove* responsibilities and pressures from the owner. Otherwise, he gains nothing from this hire, and the significant salary that he pays him is for naught. If he must continue worrying about the myriad details in running the company, he has gained nothing.

There are businesspeople who thank the Ribbono shel Olam every day because they have found the right candidate to manage their business. **“He understands me completely, he anticipates my every need—and he takes all the pressure off my head,”** they say. “I can be calm, because I rely on him to know and understand what I need. He’s competent and he gets the job done.”

This is an example that properly illustrates the reality of *bitachon*. Not the mitzvah to have *bitachon*; rather, the meaning of complete reliance on another.

The Crucial Condition Necessary for *Bitachon*

The *Chovos HaLevavos* continues: There’s a condition in order to be able to rely on a person or entity, and without this, one *cannot* possibly have *bitachon*.

What is this fundamental condition? To derive the true pleasure that comes from *bitachon*, **“one’s heart must be completely reliant on whom-ever he relies on.”** If a person is only 70 percent reliant, he will not feel the true pleasure and serenity that *bitachon* brings. If he is 80 percent dependent, he will still not feel the maximum benefits of *bitachon*, and not with 90 percent, or even 99 percent! To have *bitachon*, one must know and feel with 100 percent certainty that every one of his needs will be met and provided in the best way possible.

Furthermore, says the *Chovos HaLevavos*, part of this condition is **“to know with clarity that this entity will do what he promised and what he has undertaken—and that he will think about his welfare even in areas that he hasn’t discussed with him.”** This person or entity will think up and do things for my good even in areas he hasn’t promised

or undertaken. **“He will do it in a manner of voluntary and unsolicited kindness.”**

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is saying that there’s a feeling of *bitachon* that brings an incredible *chiyus* to a person. The person feels incredible pleasure because he can rely on the person. But this pleasure will only come **if you’re 100 percent confident that you *don’t even need to think about your needs!*** You need to have complete trust that the person you rely on will do what he undertook—and even more. He will help you even with things that you didn’t think of—and he will take care of them in the best and most pleasant way.

With this, the first chapter of *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Sha’ar HaBitachon* is completed.

You Will Never be Serene Without This Condition

The commentaries on the *Chovos HaLevavos* explain that this last aspect of *bitachon*—that this person will do good for us even in matters that have never been asked or discussed—is fundamental to the equation. For if there’s no confidence in or reassurance in this, a person can never be truly calm. **There will always be room for worry and doubt that something will happen outside of what was promised,** and then we’ll be on our own. There will always be a nagging feeling that something will happen in an area that we haven’t been assured about, and then we won’t be taken care of.

There’s Always a Loophole

An example of this is when a person promised his friend that he’d call someone on his behalf. “I assure you that I will call him tonight,” he says. “Can I rest assured that you will call him?” he inquires. “Yes, you can be calm and assured that I will call him. I will take care of everything; you don’t even need to think about it.”

The next day, he asks his friend, “*Nu*, did you call?” “Yes, of course I called, more than once, but he didn’t pick up my call. I tried to call him three times, to no avail. I promised to call him, but I didn’t say I would call a thousand times....”

This means that there's always a loophole—territory that isn't covered by the trust. The person can always say, "In this situation, I didn't mean to give you assurance." If so, a person can always be in doubt, feeling that **in this situation, he won't help me**. His heart nags him that maybe things won't be resolved in his favor if something comes up that hasn't been discussed or arranged or promised.

Even If You're Unworthy

For this reason, the *Chovos HaLevavos* adds this important component: In order for a person reap the real benefits of *bitachon*, he must be confident that he will be helped **even if it's "not in the contract."** He will do it out of a feeling of voluntary kindness. It will surely be taken care of.

When it comes to relying on the Ribbono shel Olam, it is one of the great *yesodos* of the essence of *bitachon* that one can rely on Him **even if the person is undeserving!** This is *necessary* to believe as an essential part of *bitachon*. For if a person thinks, "Maybe I don't deserve Hashem's kindness because I have perhaps done an *aveirah*... maybe I'm unworthy of Hashem's grace and kindness..." **then he can close the Chovos HaLevavos, Sha'ar HaBitachon!**

There will always be a possibility that a person is unworthy—for who can say that they have never done an *aveirah*? If so, one will never be able to have 100 percent serenity of *bitachon*.

Bitachon Is Always Assured and Confirmed

For this reason, the *Chovos HaLevavos* establishes the first *yesod* of *bitachon* that—by definition—it means that the person will be 100 percent assured of and confident in Hashem's kindness. It is an airtight feeling with no loopholes—otherwise, by definition, there is no *bitachon*. **The heart must be completely reliant on this without a doubt.** Even if the heart will weigh a thousand pounds, it should be able to sit on the *bitachon* and it will not give way.... If the *bitachon* can be broken for whatever reason, then it's not *bitachon*.

As noted, the *Chovos HaLevavos* isn't telling us that without 100 per-

cent *bitachon* one hasn't fulfilled the mitzvah of *bitachon*, or that the person isn't a *ba'al madreigah* without having attained this lofty level. **He is simply teaching us the literal definition of *bitachon*:** If we want a feeling to be called *bitachon*, it must meet these conditions. Without this, it's not *bitachon* at all.

How to Derive *Chiyus* When the Heart Is Sad

A Living Thing Must Constantly Be Vitalized

Let us broaden this *sugya* from another vantage point:

The Ribbono shel Olam created the world with many beings and creations—some of them living and some of them inanimate. One of the differences between them is that living things need to be constantly given life and vitality. Nothing lives “automatically.” It must constantly be given life.

For example: **Plants and trees require water, soil, air, and sun for them to remain alive.** If you leave your home for a few weeks and the flowers aren't watered, they will die. This is all the more true regarding animals and humans. If they don't receive food and water, they will die.

Even when it's not being sustained through food and water, a living thing needs to breathe air constantly—oxygen which is like food for the blood; it has important properties which the blood needs to remain alive.

The Soul, Too, Needs Constant Vitality

But it isn't only the body that needs substance—the *nefesh* needs to be sustained constantly as well. It craves affirmation and good feelings, companionship, and attention from other people. The Corona era taught all of us how difficult solitude is for a person. When we don't encounter other people, the *nefesh* suffers.

In short: The Ribbono shel Olam arranged that every living thing was created with a need to be constantly given life. It's not a one-time start of

the engine... **It must constantly be given *chiyus* from the outside, and only in this way can it remain alive.** It must draw life from somewhere every moment of its life.

Drawing Vitality from *Bitachon*

Just as the Ribbono shel Olam made it this way for the body and the soul, He also created the heart with the need for constant substance and life. The heart is most “alive” organ. If we want to know if someone is alive, we check their heart to see if it’s beating.

This is why the heart needs a constant inflow of fresh blood—more than any other organ. If the heart doesn’t receive *chiyus* for a few minutes, it will die, *R”l*. **The same is true of the *nefesh* that lies in the heart. The *nefesh* needs a constant infusion of *chiyus*, which comes from *bitachon* in Hashem.**

Distraction Is a Form of Unconsciousness

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us here that *bitachon* doesn’t mean that a person is naturally unexcitable, that he’s always calm and unflappable and doesn’t become affected by problems. **This nature has nothing to do with *bitachon*.** This person simply lacks *chiyus*... he’s less conscious. He’s asleep.

Generally, when a person sleeps, his problems don’t bother him. Why is this? Because the person has less *chiyus*. He’s less conscious. And this is why he doesn’t worry. The same is true when a person is awake, but he’s distracted and daydreaming. It is a form of being asleep. When a person is less conscious and focused, he is in a state like sleep.

What “It Will be Good” Really Means

If so, a person who isn’t worried because he can easily distract himself from his problems—even if he says the words “it will be good,” but they don’t come from a place of *bitachon* in Hashem—isn’t experiencing *bitachon*. He’s experiencing a state of unconsciousness. He’s not “alive.” He’s sleeping.

Sometimes, we hear a person say: “I’m not worried. It will surely be good.” Why does he say this? Perhaps it’s because he does trust in Hashem. But it may also be that he simply doesn’t have the patience to deal with his problems. He doesn’t have *koach* to entertain all the worries and negative thoughts—so he distracts himself from them. He says, “It will be good,” but this statement isn’t backed up by true belief that it will truly be good.

Sometimes, this statement is based on experiences of the past. If he’s a *Yid* in his fifties who has experienced a sizable portion of life, and his experience has shown him that things do tend to work out for the best—this statement is based in some measure of *bitachon*. He has come to learn during his life that Hashem ensures that things will be good in the end.

Conversely, if a person simply mouths the words as a distraction from the problem, because he doesn’t have the *koach* to deal with the problem, then **his *nefesh* will not derive any *chiyus* from this “reassurance.”** He was asleep... semi-conscious.

When We’re Alive, We Feel Problems

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us a very deep idea:

When a person is in a state of unconsciousness, such as during sleep, he doesn’t draw as much *chiyus*. For example, if a person is hungry when he goes to sleep, he will not feel his hunger as he’s sleeping.

But when a person is alive and awake, he does feel his problems and worries: “How will I have enough money? How will I find the right doctor? How will I find a good job? How will I find the right yeshivah for my son? How will I succeed in raising a child who has the difficult personality of fifty problematic children put together?”

Choosing to Draw Even More *Chiyus*

The person who’s experiencing these feelings of worry and anxiety can choose one of two paths: He can put himself to sleep... **he can extinguish his *chiyus*,** in order not to feel the pain.

Or he can choose to **draw on the feeling called *bitachon***. He takes his heart, and he throws it onto the Ribbono shel Olam—thus drawing *chiyus* from *Him*. He's alive! He's very much aware of his problems, but he remembers what it means that the Ribbono shel Olam is capable of *everything*! "He can help me through the regular course of nature; it doesn't require miracles like קריעת ים סוף. He can help me in ways that I could never have fathomed. **The problem will be resolved, because the Ribbono shel Olam is a טוב ומטיב.** He will do good for me, even if I am unworthy of it."

Choosing to Draw *Chiyus* from the True Source

When a person chooses this path and fills his heart and mind with thoughts and feelings of *bitachon*, **he has chosen a way of life**. He has given sustenance and life to his heart—because he has given his heart away to the Ribbono shel Olam, and in turn it receives all the nourishment that it needs.

The feeling of *bitachon* always gives *chiyus* to the *nefesh*, and, unfortunately, it may come to us by trusting in an entity *other* than Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. The problem with this is that our *chiyus* is then derived from an improper source.

Sometimes, it seems to a person that it's easier to place his trust in something other than the Ribbono shel Olam and derive *chiyus* to his heart that way, because the gratification is immediate. We receive pleasure simply by talking to another person, and he reassures you that he will take care of everything through his connections and his money. **This person walks away from the conversation strengthened and encouraged—because he has drawn *chiyus*. But it's *chiyus* from the wrong source**, and it cannot last long. It will ultimately bring him destruction and loss, as the *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches us in the introduction to *Sha'ar HaBitachon*.

Stopping the Vehicle

When we put the wrong fuel into a car, the vehicle will soon come to a halt—because it is drawing *chiyus* from the wrong place. If you put

diesel into an ordinary car, it will stop working after a few minutes, and you will need to clean out every vestige of the wrong fuel.

This is what the *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us: People put in diesel... they draw *chiyus* from the wrong places (i.e., relying on something other than the true Source of sustenance), and they begin driving. But after a short while, they get stuck, because they cannot live on this. A *Yid* will derive his *chiyus* from the true Source, which is pure *emunah* and *bitachon* in the Ribbono shel Olam.



כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו רוח המקום נוחה הימנו

Where to Place Our Primary Emphasis to Be Liked

Which Comes First?

Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa teaches us, *כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו רוח המקום נוחה הימנו*, *a person whom the people feel favorable toward, the spirit of Hashem is likewise favorable toward him (Avos 3:10)*. They go together: If the people are pleased with a person, the Ribbono shel Olam, too, is satisfied with him.

The truth is that we can explain this Mishnah in one of two ways: **The first is that this person seeks to satisfy Hashem**, and the Mishnah is assuring us that an indication of Hashem's satisfaction with him is that the people feel favorably toward him. **The second is that his efforts are concentrated on the people**. He seeks to be liked by people, and he is assured that if people are happy with him, then Hashem is also surely happy with him.

People Pleasing Isn't Everything

When we analyze the Mishnah, it would seem that the latter is more accurate—for it begins with an emphasis on the *רוח הבריות*. The Mishnah seems to be telling us that what people are pleased with a person, Hashem will be satisfied as well. The Ribbono shel Olam will not be pleased with a person who managed to upset and anger people, even if he's stringent and exacting in his personal *avodah*.

But this is a great mistake that people make in interpreting this Mish-

nah. Some people think that one can be lacking in his learning and davening... his *avodas Hashem* isn't the way it's supposed to be, but he's popular.... He's pleasant.... He's part of every group.... He's always at the forefront of things—as long as *רוח הבריות* is pleased with him, Hashem, too, is satisfied with him.

Conversely, people interpret the Mishnah to mean that those who are introverted and quiet, who are less social... even if they do serve Hashem properly... *רוח המקום* isn't pleased by them.

This is the mistake that some people make in learning this Mishnah.

You Can't Please All the People

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Sha'ar Yichud HaMa'aseh*, Chapter 5) tells us otherwise: He explains that **it cannot possibly be our stated aim to satisfy people**—for a person may do many things to be liked, only to have his efforts fail. It's out of our control. You can smile to people, and you may help people... but these efforts aren't at all guaranteed to succeed in making you liked.

“Even if we were expressly commanded to please others,” says the *Chovos HaLevavos*, **“how can we satisfy all the people of the generation when it is at times impossible to please even the members of our own household?”**

How often do we get into altercations with our teenaged children—even if it wasn't our intention. Is it then realistic to attempt to please all the people?! This certainly cannot be Chazal's intention.

What People's Approval Really Means

“Rather,” explains the *Chovos HaLevavos*, “one should invest in satisfying the desires of his Creator, and *He* will ensure that the person will be liked by the people, as it says *וְגַם אוֹיְבָיו יִשְׁלָמֻם אֵתוֹ*, *when Hashem favors a man's ways, even his foes will make peace with him* (Mishlei 16:7).” That is, if a person satisfies Hashem by performing His mitzvot, the Ribbono shel Olam will then perform a miracle and cause him to be

liked by others. He continues, “If we see that all the creations, from small to big, praise and laud a person and his deeds, this indicates that the Ribbono shel Olam sowed for him seeds of love within their hearts and placed a good name for him upon their lips.”

“This is something that Hashem does not do for His foes, and it is thus great proof of Hashem’s desiring him. But for the pious person to make direct efforts for people to approve of him and his *avodas Elokim* is surely not the befitting him. Therefore, one should refrain from this (flattery and impressing others) and other temptations of the *yetzer hara*, for he strives to guide you down this path and ultimately entrap you into the trap of the חונף, *the flatterer*.”

The Positive Side of *Tiferes*

Let us understand the words of the *Chovos HaLevavos* a bit deeper. There’s a well-known concept of *Hashem created a balance between good and evil, and He awarded qualities to both sides in equal measure. They often mirror each other, and we may confuse one for the other because of this.*

As it relates to the *מדת התפארת*, *the attribute of beauty*, there’s a good side to it, which is referenced in the Mishnah, and leads to being liked by Hashem and by people. And then there’s the *kelipah* side of *תפארת*. These are two very different things that may seem similar on a superficial level.

A good example of this (זה לעומת זה) is the difference between true joy and *ליצנות*, *jesting*. A superficial observer may confuse the two. He may think that the clown, the jester, is truly joyful. But nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, he may be so depressed that all his laughter and jests are a façade to remove some of the cloud of sadness that hovers over him. This person’s jokes are usually inappropriate and targeted at all the wrong things.... Conversely, **joy is the essence of holiness**— *might and joy are in His place* (*Divrei HaYamim* 1- 16:27), we learn. One is the pinnacle of *kedushah*, while the other is at the precise opposite end of the spectrum. They couldn’t be more different—despite the superficial similarities.

“But He Was Well-Liked!”

So, too, it is with the matter of רוח הבריות נוחה הימנו, as well as the exhortation of Chazal שיהא שם שמים מתאהב על ידך, *that the Name of Hashem should become beloved through you* (Yoma 86a) and similar statements of Chazal in this vein:

There’s a side to this quality of being liked which is deeply holy—and we must aim for it. And then there’s an aspect that is similar to this one but which is terrible for us, and it causes us, *chas v’shalom*, to lose everything. A superficial observer may not catch the difference. He will say, “This person was so well liked!” This may be a wonderful thing, but it can also be a negative thing.

And in these words of the *Chovos HaLevavos*, we learn that the difference is in the intention: **What is your intention, your striving? Is it to be מוסר נפש for the Ribbono shel Olam?!** We know the overarching principle of מוטב לו לאדם שיקרא שוטה כל ימיו ולא יקרא רשע שעה אחת לפני המקום, *it is preferable for a person to be called a fool for all his life rather than be called a rasha before Hashem for even one moment* (Eduyos 5:6). This person is willing to sacrifice his money, his standing, his position, and everything that he has for the sake of bringing pleasure to Hashem. **We did not come to This World to please people. Not at all. Our one and only goal is to bring pleasure to Hashem.**

The Real Purpose of Satisfying Others

Perfecting Our *Middos* Pleases Hashem

Indeed, a great part of bringing pleasure to Hashem, and a great *yesod* in *avodas Hashem*, is the perfection of our *middos* and our interpersonal behavior. *Only* in this way can a person emulate the Ribbono shel Olam, and *only* in this way can the *Shechinah* be with him.

An important aspect of תיקון המידות is to become truly humble—not only to *behave* differently, but also to become *transformed* into a humble person at our core, a person who respects and values others and remains

mindful of his own shortcomings, a person who always places others and their needs before himself and his own. **A person must become this way, not for others, but for his own perfection**—as Chazal have taught us that a person must give *tzedakah* for his own purification, and it is the same way with all *middos*. It is necessary for a person, because the *Shechinah* cannot be with him otherwise. He cannot understand Torah properly, or become a vessel for the *Shechinah*, without perfecting his *middos*.

Even on a Remote Island

A person must perfect his character even if he lives on a remote island with not another person in sight. You need it for your *Olam HaBa*. The fact that there are people around us is a great kindness that Hashem does for us so we may measure the state of our *middos*. But this isn't the ultimate point. The ultimate purpose is to perfect ourselves.

And a person can feel when he's more elevated. When his *ga'avah* has been diminished, he can feel the presence of the *Shechinah* upon himself in a greater measure. He can daven better, and he can better sense feelings of *kedushah*. He doesn't feel the need for anyone to know the good things that he does, or for them to affirm and compliment him, and he doesn't need constant feedback from others.

Feedback from People Affirms That We're on the Right Course

It is true that a person needs periodic acknowledgement and encouragement in order to affirm that he's on the right course. The question is whether he *lives* because of this or if it simply serves to give him a push to continue in the right direction. When a person serves Hashem and sees success in his *avodas Hashem*... he succeeded in his *סור מרע* to withstand a forbidden temptation...In the past, this was very difficult for him, but today he succeeded. He is deeply grateful to the Ribbono shel Olam, and no one even knows about this, and he doesn't *need* anyone to know. But he is deeply joyful about his success. He withstood a *nisayon*... he understood a *blatt Gemara*... he had another success in his *avodas Hashem*...

However, this person lacks affirmation. He is in doubt. He himself doesn't know if he's on the right path or not, whether or not he's prioritizing the right things. His entire essence is invested in growth and elevation—but growth and elevation are often accompanied by setbacks. This is how it goes. We're all familiar with the concept **שבע יפול צדיק וקם**, *the righteous may fall seven times* (Mishlei 24:17). This doesn't ever end—for at every level that a person ascends, he experiences setbacks. It's never a cakewalk. And therefore, a person must have affirmation whether he's walking the right path.

Hashem Expresses His Pleasure Through People

How Hashem Speaks to Us

If a person were to hear a Heavenly voice encouraging him that he's on the proper path *despite* his failures—that he should not become discouraged, that he should look at his successes of the past year and how far he has come, that he has advanced in so many ways, and that perfection is for the Next World—he would be overjoyed and satisfied.

Sometimes, a person begins to work at a new company. He buries himself in his work, and he gives it his all. He needs only one good word from his boss to affirm his work, to know that he's on the right path. He needs that feedback.

Says the Ribbono shel Olam: I created you with this necessity for affirmation. I know that you need it. And so, know that **if the people are satisfied with you, it is a good sign that I, too, am satisfied with you.** But **pleasing and satisfying people is *not* what you live for.** It's **not the end game**, and the person shouldn't be preoccupied with whether he has pleased those around him.

You Can't Make People Like You

Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: Know that **when people express their satisfaction with you, it is the Ribbono shel Olam Who implanted those feelings in their hearts.** It's not you. It's like the person who does

hishtadlus, but it's not the *hishtadlus* per se that brought the results. It's Hashem.

This is one area in which people tend to think that they *are* in charge—that they're responsible for the results. But this is wrong. Some people think that that can cause people to approve of them—and they even have proof of this: They know how to smile and how to flatter and how to compliment. They have studied and mastered all the social rules, and they employ them. They use this as proof that they're socially adept. "I tell you," they tell their friends, "I learned from this-and-this *ba'al ga'avah* how to 'grease the wheels.'" Such people believe they can manipulate others into liking him. Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: This is a mistake. No one can compel others to like him—and the Ribbono shel Olam will often prove this to people."

Often, we hear of tremendous disputes and disagreements that have erupted between the best of friends, and it's almost impossible to believe. **Anyone who thinks that he can avoid disagreements... because he was born likeable... will often be shown that it's not that way.** One needs great *siyata diShmaya*. And when a person is liked, it's not because of his own efforts. And just like *hishtadlus*, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't smile at others—*of course* we should give people a smile. But don't think for a second that your overtures are causing others to like you. Here, the *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us yet another point in *bi-tachon*: you can smile and flatter all you want. But **if you're liked, it's because the Ribbono shel Olam gave you *chein* and favor in the eyes of others.**

Hashem's Spirit Is Placed into People

This concept was already taught to us by the Rishonim. Rabbi Yosef Nachmias, a prime disciple of the Rosh, teaches us that we learn the idea of נוחה הימנו רוח הבריות נוחה הימנו כל שרוח המקום from the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* that says, ואת רוחי אתן בקרבכם, *I will place My spirit into you*. This tells us that when we see people approving or loving a person, it's not because of their own feelings—rather it is the spirit of Hashem within them that is making them feel this way. **The Ribbono shel Olam plants the seeds of love or hatred in their hearts.**

As for the need to receive words of affirmation and encouragement from others, there's certainly a place for it—in the following way, for example:

Affirmation Will Eventually Come

One *Yid* struggles with his interpersonal interactions, and another person draws his attention to the fact that he can sometimes offend people without realizing it—and he's truly awakened to want to improve his *middos*. He recognizes that he has a weakness, and that he can inadvertently offend others. This *Yid* davens from his heart to the Ribbono shel Olam. **"I want to improve. I want to change. I don't want to hurt a *Yid*."** He works on all fronts to improve his character and awareness in this area.

This *Yid* should know that he will eventually receive affirmation for his efforts. One day, he will hear that others are pleased with his behavior and comportment and his manner of interaction. **This is nothing less than a message from the Ribbono shel Olam, encouraging him to keep on advancing.** He literally placed the words of encouragement into the mouth of this person. Keep on davening to Hashem! Speak to Him and emulate His ways.

Animated from Above

Furthermore, says the Rabbeinu Bachya, the *pasuk* tells us, ויפח באפיו, נשמת חיים, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life (Bereishis 2:7). One who blows, blows His own essence. Thus, we are all imbued with the soul and the spirit of the Ribbono shel Olam on a constant basis—and therefore, everything a person feels or experiences internally is really animated by a spirit from Above.

Therefore, it's possible that a *Yid* overlooked his *shemiras einayim* on an occasion, and he forgot all about it—but a short time later, he suddenly gets into a dispute with his neighbor. He doesn't associate the two events. He tries this *segulah*... another *segulah*... and he doesn't understand that **if this person is angry at you, it is because the Ribbono shel**

Olam is upset with you. It is only being expressed *through* another person.

(It should be pointed out that respecting other people doesn't mean that we reckon with the opinions of *all* the people. The *mefarshim* themselves underscore this. The Maharal points out that Chazal say תפארת לו מן האדם, we should reckon with the feelings of those who behave like *people*.... There's a well-known saying that a *rav* who is liked by the *everyone* in the town must be doing something wrong.)

Thus, we must know that our mission on This World is to bring pleasure to Hashem. Proper interpersonal interactions have two purposes: **to bring us closer to Hashem**, Who desires that we treat people with respect and honor, and to **serve as a voice** through which the Ribbono shel Olam affirms for us that we're truly bringing Him pleasure.

