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**HAVINEINI  
HOTLINE**

US - 718.686.8300

E"Y - 072.257.7726

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BE - 03.300.0223

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## The Difference Between *Hishtadlus* and Schemes and Tactics

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### The Mistake of Escaping to Schemes and Tactics vs. *Hishtadlus*

#### Schemes and Strategies Are Tactics from “Under the Earth”

There’s a well-known song from Rebbe Meir’l of Apta in which he expresses the idea that: **Even if I will exert myself with schemes and tactics, and all the inhabitants of the world will stand by to help me and support me, without Your strength and assistance, there is no help or salvation.**

The definition of עצות ותחבולות, *schemes and tactics*, applies to when a person seeks every conceivable way—strategies from “under the earth”—to extricate himself from a situation in which he finds himself. We find this expression in *Mishlei* (24:6) בתחבולות תעשה עמו מלחמה *with tactics you shall wage war with him*. That is, when all else fails in our battle with the *yetzer hara*, one must innovate and search for more ways to wage the battle—all to win the war.

Then, there is the *mehalech* of *hishtadlus*, when a person utilizes the *normal mehalech*... the usual trodden path to get to his destination.

#### The Usual Way and the Backroads

When we want to go from one neighborhood to the next, there are generally two ways to accomplish this. There’s the main road; this is

called *hishtadlus*. Then there are the alternative roads, the backroads. Even if the police have sealed them off, this person will find a way through with his tricks. This is called *עצות ותחבולות*, *schemes and tactics*.

In the above song by Rebbe Meir'l, a *Yid* proclaims that no amount of scheming in the world will help him! **The only path is to do *hishtadlus* in accordance with the dictates of the Torah.** All *עצות ותחבולות* will get you nowhere.

### Weaseling Your Way in

Imagine that an upscale מלכה מלכה is taking place in a shul, and it was determined that every attendee must pay a twenty-dollar entry fee. But one person refuses to pay. "It's *my* shul," he says. "What right do you have to prevent me from entering? What *chutzpah* is this!" But the people at the door insist that there's no way he will be permitted to enter without paying.

But this man is determined. **These people will not tell me what to do.** "Stay right here and ensure that *no one* gets in without paying. But I will soon be inside..." he says. It takes him an hour... but by jumping over a fence, crossing through the *mikvah* chamber, and from there into the kitchen... and he's in! Boy, is he happy. It's not worth twenty dollars to him... he'd pay *two hundred* dollars for this rush.

This is a classic example of *עצות ותחבולות*: deriving a rush and pleasure to the *nefesh* in a crooked and improper manner. **This person could have done the normal *hishtadlus*,** entering through the door and paying the requisite fee. **But he chose the route of *עצות ותחבולות*, *schemes and tactics*.** He worked much longer and harder... his clothing is creased and sullied—all because *he can do it himself*!

### The Two Paths Are Not the Same

So, let's be clear: There's a concept of *hishtadlus*. This is the normal path—doing things without worries and heaviness of the heart. **In this, there are various levels of how much *hishtadlus* we must do.** Sometimes we must do *more hishtadlus*, and sometimes we must do *less hishtadlus*.

People often ask: How much *hishtadlus* must I do? Maybe I'm not doing enough, or maybe I'm doing too much.... But this is all in the realm of *hishtadlus*.

Then there's a concept of *עצות ותחבולות*, which has *nothing to do* with *hishtadlus*! As in the case of the man who weasels his way in through roundabout and crooked ways because he doesn't want to pay the few dollars: **Make no mistake about it: This has no resemblance to *hishtadlus*.** It has a very different name.

### Human Nature Tries to Avoid Normal *Hishtadlus*

It is the nature of humans to seek a way out. This is how it is.... This may be sweet in the beginning, but it usually doesn't end well. One may seek various ways to avoid paying taxes... he'll put it in his wife's name... he'll do other schemes.... If he finds himself in traffic, he'll take the shoulder. This is human nature—and there's a great lack of *הכנעה*, *submissiveness*, in this. Because the person isn't willing to accept the reality that Hashem has ordained for him.

In any case, we must understand the difference well. The usual, normal path is called *hishtadlus*, while the crooked path that seeks to avoid the normal order is called *עצות ותחבולות*, *schemes and tactics*. These bear no resemblance to each other.

### For Every Dilemma, There's a *Normal* Solution

We have previously learned that the *Chovos HaLevavos* warns us against traveling to distant places for *parnassah*. That is because the person in that story engaged in something that was never *hishtadlus*. It wasn't *excessive hishtadlus*—it was something that doesn't resemble *hishtadlus* at all.

When a person finds himself in a situation where *parnassah* is difficult, *R"l*, there's a *normal* and *proper* path—which is for a person to reflect and seek to ascertain: **What am I doing incorrectly in my mission?** How can I repair my actions and fulfill my *tafkid*, so that the *shefa* does come to me?

## Looking for the Easy Path of Escape

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* tells us that the nature of humans is to seek to escape to other places. **He doesn't want to think that he needs to work on himself**—because this would require the soul work of humility. He will need to admit *precisely* why he doesn't have *parnassah*, and it isn't because eggs became more expensive; it isn't because his boss doesn't want to give him a raise; it isn't because he's marrying off a child—but **because he's not doing enough in a specific realm.**

This requires the great *avodah* of *עליו יפשפש במעשיו* *אם, if one sees that suffering comes upon him, he should make a reckoning of his ways.* It's not easy or pleasant to engage in such a reckoning, and it isn't fun to admit that we don't have sufficient *parnassah* due to our deeds.

A person would much rather scheme for ways to find things easier and cheaper. He'll work out a plan, he'll travel to a faraway place, he'll find a way out... He doesn't give any thought to the mission that the Ribbono shel Olam is trying to give him. He's preoccupied with *עצות ותחבולות*—ways to outsmart the normal path. *He doesn't want to pay the twenty-dollar entry fee!*

## It Never Helps to Escape

And for this reason, the *Chovos HaLevavos* is displeased with the person who runs far for *parnassah*. **Why are you going there?** No amount of *עצות ותחבולות* will help you attain anything that isn't *bashert* for you. **You undertook this trip for nothing.** You strained your relationship with your family, you exhausted yourself, you claimed you had no choice... and you told yourself that you made a few dollars from it all. **You should know that if you had not gone there at all, you would have received the same amount—or even more!**

We have seen this often. People ran from their situation to other places for *parnassah*—and after a few years they returned home and calmed down. They admitted to themselves that they can make the same money—or even more—at home, without using all these tactics.



The real reason they had traveled there in the first place was to escape their situation. It never had any connection to *hishtadlus*. It was *עצות ותחבולות* all along, trying to find an easy way out. Eventually, the person will realize that it's actually harder that way....

## The Real Reason We Exchange Normalcy for “Tactics”

### Schemes and Tactics Beyond *Parnassah*

This *sugya* applies far beyond *parnassah*. **It applies to all the needs that a person has**; when he needs success in his learning; when he needs success in enjoying This World; when he needs success in having an organized and serene *nefesh*, and so forth.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches us a golden rule for all these things: **If you're escaping your place in order to attain it elsewhere, it is a problem—because you've abandoned the Ribbono shel Olam.** You felt that: “I can manage on my own...”

### The Right Way Takes More Investment at First

We have learned at length in so many *sefarim* that **a person should always feel that he can do nothing alone. Everything is done by the Ribbono shel Olam**—as the song of Rebbe Meir'l teaches us: **I know that if all the inhabitants of the world help me, I still can do nothing without Hashem.**

If so, we must understand: If people know and understand this, why will they so often pursue *עצות ותחבולות*? After a week when things don't go as he wished, the person will run to engage in all sorts of schemes and tactics. **But yesterday you sang Ribbon Ha'Olamim!** “Yes,” he will say. “But I didn't see that the Ribbono shel Olam helped me! So I went back to my *eitzos*....”

The reason people keep going back to the *עצות ותחבולות* is that the other way, the *normal* way, costs more in the moment. *Later*, it is so much more pleasant. But in the moment, a person must be willing to work on

himself. It's so much easier to run around and engage in schemes and tactics.

## The Easy Way Out

There's a deeper reason for a person to make one phone call after another, thinking, "If I push just hard enough, I will get what I want." The reason they do this is not because they think that this is what Hashem wants from them... "In Heaven, They want me to do something, and it's probably that I should make another phone call..." (Indeed, in some instances, a person is *lazy* to take the required steps, and *min HaShamayim*, They want him to overcome his laziness and yes to make that phone call). In most cases, it is because people think the easier route is to do *עצות ותחבולות*, rather than doing the right thing, which will cost more in the short term.

One should ask himself: **have I already fulfilled all of my obligations in my daily life**, that I'm engaging in pushing hard with all sorts of schemes and tactics (which may not even be effective, practically speaking)? Why shouldn't I first try the *normal* path?

## Running After the *Shadchan* Instead of Reflecting

Let's take an example. A father awaits a *shidduch* for his son. He already did everything he could (according to what he considers "doing"). One day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he sits and meditates on his situation: Last year, I went to Lizensk for the *yahrzeit* to *daven* for a *yeshuah*. **I cannot believe that a year has passed since that time, and I have yet to see a *yeshuah*!**

This awakens in him a strong feeling of angst. What does he do now? Instead of fulfilling the dictum of Chazal that if one sees suffering coming upon him, he should take account of his actions, **he picks up the phone and calls the *shadchan* again!** *I will try again....* Why does he do this? Because the other course of action will cost him more energy and *kochos*. It's simply easier for him to pursue the *עצות ותחבולות*.

## Perhaps the Ribbono shel Olam Wants Your *Bitachon*

Of course, the proper course of *hishtadlus* may very well be to pick up the phone and call the *shadchan*, **but we must know that it sometimes falls under** עצות ותחבולות, because the Ribbono shel Olam wants something else from you in that moment. When a person runs to the phone when he's feeling tight—simply to make himself feel that he's doing *something*...like something is *happening*... he wants to calm himself through these actions instead of doing what he *really* needs to be doing: strengthening his *emunah* and *bitachon*.

This person would rather pursue all these actions because he doesn't want to sit down and make the simple reflection that **maybe the cause of this problem is because the Ribbono shel Olam wants something from me**. And maybe it is this very thing that the Ribbono shel Olam wants from me: **not to become nervous or anxious that a whole year has passed and nothing moved**. Not to turn leftward—toward עצות ותחבולות and exaggerated *hishtadlus*—simply because things haven't happened in my desired timeframe. But to comfort myself with thoughts of *emunah* and *bitachon*, not with actions of עצות ותחבולות.

And to the contrary, in most cases, we can see clearly in hindsight how these exaggerated measures and actions had no effect on the outcome—they didn't bring the *yeshuah*. Salvation came from a completely different direction and source. The *shidduch* that was suggested two years ago came to be... **because the kappitel Tehillim brought it back!**

### Why Am I Doing This?

One must reflect strongly upon their motives for taking any given action: Am I doing this in order to carry out the will of my Creator, and thus fulfill my mission on earth? Or am I engaging in עצות ותחבולות—because I feel like *I must do something tachlisdig*.... Since nothing is moving, I will begin doing things to calm myself down.

[We must make very clear that the *mashal* of calling the *shadchan* is just that, a *mashal*. There are many cases where it is important and warranted. The problem is that sometimes the *motive* for taking these actions is only because it's the easier way out. It's much more difficult to do the

right thing: engaging in self-reflection, *davening*, and strengthening our *emunah* and *bitachon*.]

## Leaving Our Place Can Often Be the Wrong Move

### Leaving a *Kehillah*

In Klal Yisrael, there are many holy and beautiful *kehillos*, and it happens that sometimes a person doesn't find his place in the *kehillah* into which he was born, and he searches for a new place. He seeks to leave a *chassidus* or a *kehillah* in favor of a new location.

Here, our aforementioned rule applies as well. Sometimes, it can be the right move. We know the rule of *משנה מקום משנה מזל*, *one who changes his place may change his fortune*. But **in most cases, it is rooted in** *עצות ותחבולות*. In most cases, the person is simply looking to escape.... And if we were to follow them, we would see that they didn't remain in their second choice, but they left to go to a third and fourth place, and so forth.

### Be Honest: Why Did You Leave?

Obviously, if a person didn't find his place at all, and he left in search of a place to grow in his *avodas Hashem*, then it is laudable and wonderful. He found the *derech* that speaks to his *neshamah*.... Wonderful.

But a person who had a place, a *derech*, a Rebbe, and he left the place he was born into—in many cases, this may be the pitfall that the *Chovos HaLevavos* alludes to. **Look at yourself without biases; why did you go to another place?**

This question often can't be asked in the first six months. But after two years, when a person has calmed down, he should ask himself: **Did I leave out of *hishtadlus* or because of** *עצות ותחבולות*?

### Actions That Are the Polar Opposite of *Hishtadlus*

A person says, "They didn't accept my child into the yeshivah. You know what? *Don't* accept me. I am not about to agree to your require-

ments. I will figure it out on my own. I don't need you... I will go elsewhere where it will be cheaper."

Why did this person leave? Because it was hard to pay the price? **This is called** עצות ותחבולות, **and it's the direct opposite of hishtadlus**. When a person escapes, it's the *opposite* of *hishtadlus*. He says, "I will get what I want in an easier way. I will get it 'under the table.' I will manage on my own...."

## One of Two Mistakes

Usually, people engage in these tactics and schemes because they make the mistake of thinking that there are two entities here: There is "me" and there is "the situation." He forgets that there is Someone Else here: The Ribbono shel Olam!

**When a person escapes a situation, it means that he forgot one of two things:** Either he thinks that there are only humans involved, and for this reason he says to them that they can't tell him what to do, and so forth. He forgot that they're not in charge; the Ribbono shel Olam is.

If he *does* remember that the Ribbono shel Olam is behind it all, then it's even worse. Although he may not realize it, what he is essentially saying is to the Ribbono shel Olam is, "**I can get this in easier ways**. You think I need to learn with intensity or *daven* with a *minyan* in order to get my *parnassah*? I'll show You. I can manage on my own. I know plenty of people who don't *daven* with *minyan* and they do very well." When this person gets carried away with his עצות ותחבולות, he is essentially declaring: **I'm not willing to pay the high price in order to attain the shefa.**

## The Proper Approach to Changing a Yeshivah

The same applies to a *bachur* considering changing from his yeshivah in favor of a new yeshivah. So often, we see that the reason he didn't succeed in the first yeshivah was due to a certain problem. Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: **Why did you switch yeshivos?** Because you insist that the problem is in the people around you....

The *truth*, however, is that **this has to do with “you” and the “Ribbono shel Olam.”** And if so, what is your message by changing yeshivos? Essentially, that you’re unwilling to go through the process and the toil in order to succeed, and you’re looking for the easy way out by engaging in עצות ותחבולות.

### It’s Our Natural Recourse

Of course, people are often pushed from above to change places, and changing yeshivos isn’t necessarily considered “schemes and tactics.”

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* tells us the facts: **You should know that the *nefesh* of the person naturally seeks to turn to עצות ותחבולות.** This is his first recourse, because he wants to avoid the normal *hishtadlus* and to get on board with the plan of the Ribbono shel Olam. It seems to him to be too long and too difficult. **Therefore, reflect.** Are you’re doing this move because you honestly feel that this is what you’re being pushed to do from Above, or is it because it’s easier to escape rather than to do the difficult work of honest self-reflection.

### Leaving When It Is the *Ratzon Hashem*

We must once again make clear that, of course, there are times when it is good and proper for a person to leave—and this is the *ratzon Hashem*! And we have seen this in regard to tzaddikim—the Chidushei Harim’s departure from Koznitz to Peshischa is one example.

But the tzaddik didn’t make this change because it was the easy way out. To the contrary, he understood that from Above, They wanted him to do the more difficult work in a new place even though it would have easier for him to remain in place. The tzaddikim accepted the *nisayon* of לך לך, with all the difficulties that it entailed—they were ready for *mesirus nefesh mamash* for their mission and calling.

The bottom line is that we must be honest and ensure that we aren’t departing from our original place because we’re seeking to escape. Since this is the natural first recourse, the *Chovos HaLevavos* asks us to make a reckoning and think about our motives in seeking to leave our place.

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## Meriting the Light and the Love of Hashem Through the *Shekel*

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### Awakening and Arousing Heavenly Love

The holy *sefer Sfas Emes* (*Shekalim* 5641) explains that we anticipate the Yom Tov of Pesach by reading the four *parashiyos* (שקלים, זכור, פרה, החודש). **On Pesach, the love of Hashem is revealed to us in that He chose us as His nation**, and each year we attain a renewal of this inspiration (i.e., this Heavenly love and being chosen by Hashem).

However, to attain this inspiration from Above, we need to arouse this inspiration down below—as the *Sidduro Shel Shabbos* teaches us regarding Shabbos: **Although the aura of Shabbos is set in place, we nevertheless must prepare ourselves to take on its holiness**, for one who doesn't prepare himself for Shabbos is left without the vessels to absorb the holiness of Shabbos.

It works similarly with the *kedushah* and the inspiration of Pesach—we must prepare ourselves for it. And for this reason, Chazal have instituted that we read the *dalet parashiyos* through which we arouse Hashem's love here below; thus, we prepare ourselves to be a proper vessel for the aura of Pesach.

### A Precious Mitzvah

The first of the *parashiyos* we read is *Parashas Shekalim*. Two important elements of Hashem's love are inherent in the mitzvah of מחצית השקל: First is the fact that **the very counting of Klal Yisrael illustrates the tremendous love Hashem has for us**. In fact, the *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 57:3) tells us a *mashal* regarding the *shekel*: Once there was a flock

of sheep, and a plague affected the flock. After the plague ceased, the master told the shepherd, "Please count the sheep so we know how many are left." He did so to illustrate that the sheep are precious to him.

But, in addition to this illustration of Hashem's love, the proceeds of the *shekel* went toward the purchase of the *Korban Tamid*, which is said to be **"a clear sign of the love that exists between Klal Yisrael and their Father in Heaven."**

### Blood of the Covenant

The Oheiv Yisrael of Apta (*Parashas Shekalim*) teaches: Following Matan Torah, Klal Yisrael brought offerings, and Moshe Rabbeinu applied half the blood of the sacrifices to the sides of the Mizbei'ach, and he placed the other half the blood in jugs—and then sprayed the blood over the heads of Klal Yisrael, saying, "Here is the blood of the covenant that Hashem has forged with you." Why did Moshe Rabbeinu do all this?

Explains the Apta Rav: The way of people who forge a covenant together, becoming one flesh, is that they give their lives to each other—until their very blood becomes one, for the blood is the *nefesh*, the force behind their very life. In fact, the Abarbanel writes that this is the source of the practice among kings who forge bonds by letting their blood and mixing it together. Thus, they commit to give their lifeblood to each other.

### Two Halves of a Whole

The Kingdom of the Heavens is similar to the kingdom of the earth, and this is why Moshe Rabbeinu applied half the blood to the Mizbei'ach and half the blood to the heads of Klal Yisrael. Half the blood signifies the Ribbono shel Olam's part and the other half is Klal Yisrael's part. By spraying the sacrificial blood on them, Moshe Rabbeinu empowered them to give their lives for the holiness of His Name. This is the secret of the covenant that was forged on that day.

Says the Apta Rav, the very same thing took place with the מחצית השקל. **For through the giving of the מחצית השקל—which alludes to our half, which we bring it to the Mizbei'ach as a complete body** (in the



form of a *korban*)—**we bring about a covenant between the two who love each other.** This is accomplished through מסירות נפש—for by accepting the yoke of מלכות שמים and מסירות נפש for Hashem, we elevate the half and transform it into a whole.

From these holy words we see that **through our reading of Parashas Shekalim, we forge a covenant of love with the Ribbono shel Olam,** and with this begins the process of preparing for the great light of Pesach.

### The Light of Your Face

The holy *sefer Devir HaMutzneh* explains that **the leining of Parashas Shekalim is akin to fulfilling the mitzvah of השקל מחצית השקל as it existed in the Beis HaMikdash!** “In the *yotzros* for Shabbos Shekalim we say אור פניך עלינו נשא, ושקל אשא בבית נכון ונשא, *place upon us the light of Your Face, a shekel we shall raise in the home of exalted One.*

**On Shabbos, the Beis HaMikdash is not in ruins—rather, it exists On High in its full glory!** And this is why Chazal have instituted that the Torah reading is about the mitzvos that we cannot carry out today—because **in this way it is counted as though we have mamash fulfilled the mitzvah in the Beis HaMikdash!** We fulfill the mitzvah of מחצית השקל through our *leining* in shul on Shabbos.

For this reason, the *paytan* wrote the words and supplicates, אור פניך פני שבת נקבלה—as referring to the light of Shabbos (as we say עלינו אדון נשא, we should merit to receive the light of the face of Shabbos).

Shabbos is special. Shabbos is different. Shabbos is a day when the Beis HaMikdash is intact. And Shabbos is a day when we accept the Face of the Ribbono shel Olam כביכול, and thus it is uniquely suited for us to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of השקל מחצית השקל through our *krias haTorah*.

The word שקל has the *roshei teivos* of קודש לה, שבת, further suggesting that it is on this holy day that we’re able to fulfill השקל מחצית השקל in the Beis HaMikdash On High—and merit to arouse much Heavenly אהבה as we inch closer to Him in our preparation for the Yom Tov of Pesach.