

SELECTED SPEECHES

A Collection of Addressses and Essays
on Hashkafah, Contemporary Issues
and Jewish History.

Including: "Comparative
Jewish Chronology"

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10 ■ Bitachon

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“אשרי הגבר אשר שם ביה מבטחו ולא פנה אל והבים” —Fortunate is the man who places his full trust in Hashem and does not rely on *rehavim*.” (*Tehillim* 40:5) Our *Chachamim* comment that this *passuk* refers to Yosef Hatzaddik, who lacked full *bitachon* and turned to an Egyptian for help.

What exactly do we mean by *bitachon*? Does it require that we refrain from all exertions of effort on our own behalf, thus showing that we have complete trust that G-d will meet our needs? Or should we rather go about our life-sustaining tasks, and have faith that Hashem will see them through to fruition?

Let us examine the story of Yosef Hatzaddik for guidance

in defining this concept.

Yosef had been languishing in prison for ten years when he saw an opportunity to end his ordeal. As Yosef had foretold, the *Sar Hamashkim* would soon be released, and Yosef asked him to plead his case before Pharaoh. For this reliance on a man for his deliverance, Yosef was punished with two additional years of incarceration. Clearly, Yosef was a righteous Jew and a *baal bitachon*. However, as Rabbeinu Bechaye notes, “לפי שבקש סיבה משד המשקים, “הקדוש ברוך הוא מדקדק עם צדיקים אפילו כחוט השערה”: Hashem is very strict in appraising the actions of *tzaddikim*. Therefore, when Yosef gave in to a very human impulse of relying on the *Sar Hamashkim* rather than *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for assistance, he was punished for this lack of faith; more is expected of such a paradigm.

On the surface, this would seem to indicate that true *bitachon* consists of doing nothing. Apparently, Yosef should not have made any active attempt to gain release from prison. Instead, he should have simply waited for Hashem to free him. This would imply that *hishtadlus* (exerting an effort) contradicts the concept of *bitachon*.

On the other hand, the Torah clearly states, “ואספת דגן—You shall gather your grain, wine and oil.” Obviously, one cannot rely on Hashem to deliver food miraculously and directly into one’s hands. We cannot rely on miracles. Rather, we must work and earn a *parnassah*: “שעת” ימים תעשה מלאכותך.” And if, *chas v’shalom*, we become ill, we should not lie still and do nothing, as the Christian Scientists do. Instead, we are allowed—even urged—to see a doctor. From this it is apparent that *hishtadlus* is not only acceptable but necessary.

This is also evident throughout *Tanach*. Moshe, Yehoshua, David Hamelech and many other Jewish leaders were told to

take direct action to fight their enemies. Eretz Yisrael came into Jewish hands thousands of years ago through painstaking effort. Clearly this is *hishtadlus*.

Then there is the *Midrash* in *Eichah*, which speaks of the requests of four kings: David, Asah, Yehoshafat and Chizkiyahu. David asked Hashem to enable him to pursue, reach and destroy his enemies; and Hashem granted his wish. Asah said, "I have no strength to kill my enemies. I will pursue them, and I ask that Hashem do the rest." His request, too, was granted.

Yehoshafat went further and said, "I am not even able to chase after my enemies. I will only say *Shirah* to Hashem" (or, as it says in *Tanach*, "*Rinah U'tehillah*"). Indeed, the enemies were driven to panic in the belief that they were being attacked, and in the process they killed each other.

Finally, Chizkiyahu came along and did even less: "אִלּוּ כִדָּה לֹא לַחֲדָג וְלֹא לַדְּרוֹף וְלֹא לִזְמוֹד שִׁירָה, אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב עַל מִטּוֹתַי וְאַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה." He did not even say *Shirah*. Instead, he prayed and went to bed. In the morning, the enemy were all dead, slaughtered by a *malach* sent by Hashem.

On the surface, it would seem that Chizkiyahu had more *bitachon* than his royal predecessors. However, this was not so. In fact, the opposite was the case. And this brings us to the very crux of the whole issue of *bitachon*.

The Will of G-d is that a Jew should go to work and earn a *parnassah*, and go to a doctor when he is sick, like every other person on earth. What, then, makes the *baal bitachon* different? He believes—he knows with certainty—that every penny he earns, and every cure he receives—indeed, every success he enjoys or failure he endures—comes directly from Hashem. It may come about through an earthly agent like a doctor, but its source is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. It is He who grants the physician the skill and ability to heal others; it is

He who ensures that a business venture will be profitable or disastrous. One who looks beneath the surface and realizes this is the true *baal bitachon*.

This, then, is what made David Hamelech greater than the other kings above. He invested his full effort in fighting the war against his enemies, and he was victorious—but he still managed to realize that the triumph was ultimately not his doing but Hashem's. This is a supreme example of *bitachon*. It could not be matched by the other kings, because their own personal efforts against the enemy grew increasingly smaller, until in Chizkiyahu's case he did virtually nothing. Recognizing Hashem's hand in the eventual victory was therefore less of a challenge than in David's case. *Bitachon*, then, does not present a contradiction to *hishtadlus*. We must do what we can, in a legally and morally correct way, to achieve the basic needs of life. Yet, as believing Jews, we must always bear in mind Who provided us with those needs.

Now let us return to the story of Yosef Hatzaddik. Certainly Yosef was a *baal bitachon*. His years in prison inevitably impressed upon him the fact that Hashem is ultimately responsible for all that happens in this world. How else would he have been able to interpret the dreams of the *Sar Hamashkim* and *Sar Ha'ofim* so accurately, if not for Divine help? This knowledge was something that served him well when he rose so meteorically to the position of Pharaoh's second-in-command. No matter how powerful he became, he always remembered to attribute his good fortune to Hashem.

What, then, did Yosef do wrong when he relied upon the *Sar Hamashkim* to help free him from jail? Was he not simply employing *hishtadlus*, which we have said poses no problem to retaining *bitachon*? Consequently, why was Yosef punished with an additional two years of prison?

The answer seems to lie in the effect that Yosef's actions

had. The behavior of *Tzaddikim* should serve a specific purpose: it should bring about a *kiddush Hashem*. Both Jews and non-Jews should be so impressed by a *baal bitachon*'s bearing and impeccable manner that they will be stirred to praise the G-d whose Torah inspired such behavior. In fact, this should be the goal of every Jew when he contemplates action. In Yosef's case, though, the chance to cause a *kiddush Hashem* was lost.

To be sure, Yosef realized without a doubt that his success in predicting the *Sar Hamashkim*'s fate was due solely to Hashem. Had the *Sar Hamashkim* emerged from prison and, on his own, publicly acclaimed this G-d-fearing prophet, a great *kiddush Hashem* would have ensued. However, Yosef then committed an error. He asked the *Sar Hamashkim* to help free him. Although this act of *hishtadlus* may have seemed logical—asking for one favor in return for another—it had a negative impact. For when Yosef asked the *Sar Hamashkim* to intercede on his behalf, he used the words, “הוֹסֵדֵנִי אֶל פְּרִעָה וְהוֹצֵאֵנִי מִן הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה—Mention me to Pharaoh and bring me out of this house.” As a result, the *Sar Hamashkim* got the impression that he, and only he, would be fully responsible for Yosef's release. In effect, Yosef was implying that man, and not G-d, controls worldly events. What Yosef should have said was, “הוֹסֵדֵנִי אֶל פְּרִעָה וְהוֹצֵאֵנִי אֱלֹהִים מִן הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה—Mention me to Pharaoh and Hashem will bring me out of this house.” thus clarifying the concepts that all earthly developments are dependent on Hashem. That he did not do so was a serious mistake. He had a magnificent opportunity to cause a great *kiddush Hashem*, and he failed to take advantage of it. For this, he had to remain in jail for an additional two years.

Yosef did learn his lesson, though. When called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he made it abundantly clear that Hashem was the complete source of his prophetic abilities.

“ויען יוסף את פרעה לאמר בלעדני אלוקים יענה את שלום פרעה” And Yosef answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘It is not me; G-d will answer the welfare of Pharaoh.’ ” Consequently, Pharaoh publicly acknowledged Hashem’s supremacy: “ויאמר פרעה אל יוסף אחודי: —הודיע אלוקים את כל זאת אין נבון וחכם כמותך —And Pharaoh said to Yosef, ‘Since G-d has caused you to know all this, there is no one as understanding and wise as you.’ ” And, as a result, a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* occurred.

There is no conflict, then, between the concepts of *bitachon* and *hishtadlus*. On the contrary, we must display a combination of the two. When we earn a living, we must do all we can in an honest way to support our families, but we must always recognize that Hashem is the source of our well-being. And when we fly in an airplane, we should believe *b’emunah sheleimah* that the pilot and the air controllers gain their skills from the *Ribono Shel Olom*. Furthermore, the plane is held together through the mercy of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* alone. If one maintains and displays this attitude, one can effect a great *kiddush Hashem*.

Bitachon, then, is a major component of *kedushah*; but there is also something else: *emunah*. The Rambam wrote an entire *sefer* on it, and at the beginning he states that there can be no *bitachon* without *emunah*. However, it is very often possible for a person to have *emunah* without having *bitachon*. How is this so, and what is the difference between the two ideas?

This can be explained through a common experience. Suppose that a person has to make a long trip through dangerous territory. He has *emunah* that Hashem will help him, and that all will end well. Still, he finds himself experiencing a tingling nervousness; he’s edgy and jumpy, and goose pimples creep up his body. In short, he’s afraid. This is a typical human reaction to an unknown, frightening situa-

tion, and there is nothing inherently wrong with experiencing fear. It certainly doesn't show a lack of *emunah*. Still, it implies that full *bitachon* is missing. When one has complete *bitachon*, one does not know fear, as it says, "הִנֵּה קֵל יְשׁוּעָתִי—וְלֹא אֶפְחָד—Behold G-d is my salvation; I will have *bitachon* and I will not fear."

Everyone is created with a sense of *pachad*. It helps us to be aware of perilous situations. How, then, can it be overcome? The actions of our *Avos* provide a clue.

When Yaakov Avinu was making his escape from the wrath of Eisav, on his way to Lavan, he camped at night in the middle of nowhere—and he was not afraid. This was an act requiring tremendous *bitachon*. On the other hand, when Yaakov was on his way home two decades later, he had a different reaction. The Torah tells us, "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצַד לוֹ—And Yaakov was greatly frightened, and it troubled him." The *Midrash* explains that Yaakov was troubled by this sudden fear. Why was he afraid of approaching his brother Eisav? Where was his *bitachon*?

Yaakov was afraid that he did not deserve Hashem's protection because perhaps he had done something to displease *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*—and in fact, he had. The *Midrash* says that Yaakov should not have sent the *malachim* to Eisav: this was an unnecessary *hishtadlus*. Maybe Yaakov's years of living in Lavan's home had weakened his *bitachon*. Therefore he was overcome with foreboding, and he was disturbed by this.

What did Yaakov then do? He was *mispallel*. He prayed to Hashem to restore his *bitachon*. And Hashem granted his request: after the *tefillah*, Yaakov was no longer afraid.

This shows us that *tefillah* has a tremendous power. If a person is overcome with fear, he should pray for *bitachon*. Being scared in frightening situations is only natural. Yet, if

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This shows us that *tefillah* has a tremendous power. If a person is overcome with fear, he should pray for *bitachon*. Being scared in frightening situations is only natural. Yet, if

one's prayers are successful, one can throw off the restrictive cloak of fear, and gain courage to face the task at hand.

In the *Slichos* we say, “ענו כמו שעמית לאברהם אבינו ברה” —המזריה—“Answer us as you answered Avraham our father on *Har Hamoriah*.” What did Avraham *daven* for? It was to summon up courage that Avraham Avinu prayed at *Har Hamoriah*. Avraham was afraid that he would not have the fortitude to slaughter his son Yitzchak, as Hashem had commanded. Therefore he was *mispallel*, and his reluctance to fulfill Hashem's orders vanished.

This answers an apparent question in regard to the *Bnei Yisrael's* actions after *yetzias Mitzrayim*. As the Egyptians pursued them at the *Yam Suf*, the Jews cried out to Hashem—“ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה'.” Rashi, basing his words on a *Midrash*, writes that they followed in the footsteps of the *Avos* in turning to prayer at this fateful moment.

The problem is, why did the *Bnei Yisrael* have to feel compelled to follow the *Avos* in this situation? Wouldn't anyone in their precarious place have automatically cried out to G-d, without having to rely upon the example of the *Avos*?

What Rashi means is as follows: Upon leaving *Mitzrayim*, the *Bnei Yisrael* had every reason to place their full faith in Hashem. After all, they had just witnessed an unsurpassed display of *nissim* and *nifla'os* performed by Hashem on their behalf. Their *emunah* was unshakable.

However, when they reached the *Yam Suf*, their confidence vanished. They were facing annihilation from the oncoming Egyptians on one side and the raging seas on the other. They may still have had *emunah*, but their *bitachon* was gone. Therefore, they did as the *Avos* had done to restore *bitachon*: they turned to *tefillah*. Their *bitachon* returned, and their fears vanished.

“ענו כמו שעמית לאבותינו בים סוף”—Answer us as you an-

owered our fathers at the Red Sea.” Just as they prayed for a full measure of *bitachon* to overcome their fears, so must we pray constantly for Hashem to provide us with the *bitachon* to allow us to go unhesitatingly through life. And, in fact, we say in *Ahavah Rabbah* every day, “אבינו מלכינו בעבוד אבותינו Our Father, our King, for the sake of our forefathers who trusted in You and whom You taught the decrees of life, may You be equally gracious and teach us.” We ask Hashem to be as gracious to us as He was to our *Avos*, who had *bitachon* in Him; and to teach us His Torah.

What is the relationship between *bitachon* and *limud Torah*?

We find the statement in the third *perek* of *Avos*: “Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds is compared to a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few. Then the wind will come and uproot it and turn it upside down . . . But one whose good deeds exceed his wisdom is like a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many. Even if all the winds in the world were to come and blow, they could not move it from its place.”

The *passuk*, “והיה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים—And he shall be like a tree planted by the waters . . . in the year of drought it will not worry, nor will it stop from yielding fruit,” is connected here with the person whose actions are present in greater abundance than his knowledge. It is also associated with the *passuk*, “אשרי הגבר אשר יבטח בהשם—Fortunate is the man who trusts in Hashem.” Clearly, one who has *bitachon* will lead his life in the proper Torah-oriented direction, and his actions will have a permanent effect. The ferocious storms of the *yetzer harah* have the potential to blow away a person’s *emunah*, his whole *Yiddishkeit*. However, if his *bitachon* is steadfast, then his roots in *Yiddishkeit* will have penetrated

so deeply that they cannot be pulled out.

How does one develop this deep-rooted *bitachon*? By increasing his מעשים, his deeds. Specifically the *Mishnah* means here his מעשה לימוד—his acts of diligent and determined learning.

There are many people blessed with high intelligence. They may have photographic minds, and can memorize facts with ease. Yet, if they do not bother to exert an effort on behalf of *limud Torah*, an effort which must even exceed that which they can easily grasp, their achievements of wisdom will be short-lasting. Their attachment to Hashem can be swept away with the first storms of doubt. They may have the outward appearance of great intelligence—the “branches” that are obvious to all—but their knowledge of Torah will be only superficial, and thus easily lost.

On the other hand, if one truly strives to learn and comprehend the Torah, and spends hours upon hours immersed in Torah study, then he will gain a full understanding of Hashem’s Divine plan. He will develop a strong *bitachon* which will enable him to perform *mitzvos* without fear of personal repercussions, and his actions will have a lasting effect.

Therefore, if we want to accomplish anything in our lives—anything that will make a permanent impression—we must put our full effort into Torah learning, and in carrying out the *mitzvos* we have mastered. We might not be able to understand everything we learn at first. Nevertheless, we must learn Torah as our *Avos* did. We must have *bitachon* that Hashem will allow us to gain full insight into His teachings. This is what we mean when we say, “בעבוד אבותינו שבטחו בך ותלמודם חוקי חיים בן תחש ותלמודו.”

This is where *hishtadlus* is really necessary. We may need some *hishtadlus* in regard to professional and material

pursuits at times; but there can be no stinting in our *hishtadlus* when it comes to Torah learning. There is always more to learn, and the more we learn, the more *bitachon* we will gain.

May we all, therefore, have our prayers answered, and become “בעלי בטחון” in the truest sense of the word.