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Parshah

HISHTADLUS: A LEADING OR LAGGING INDICATOR OF DIVINE CONNECTION?

One of the most complex questions in Jewish Thought that is of real relevance to every Jew in their daily lives, is the understanding of the parameters of the Mitzva of Emunah, as it relates to our interactions with the physical world. How much effort ought to be expended in attempting to achieve a desired outcome? Is the concept of a desired outcome itself an appropriate one? Perhaps an expectation of a particular result, is itself inappropriate? Arguably, we just do what we need to, and Hashem should be left to determine the outcome. At what point is our involvement deemed to be excessive, or indeed too minimal? Is there indeed a notion of doing too much or too little?

{This is, in truth, a complex subject, with a number of legitimate Torah approaches, some of which would appear to be incompatible with each other. We shall endeavour to present one, albeit in abbreviated form.}

The Gemara in Brachos raises the question of the propriety of Ya'akov fearing Eisav, given that Hashem had promised "u'shmarticha b'chol asher teileich", absolute protection under all circumstances. Surely, this fear would, in itself, indicate a lack of bitachon, a lack of reliance on the Divine assistance that had been guaranteed. The Gemara answers "shema yigrom hacheit"; Ya'akov trusted in Hashem implicitly, but feared that he might have sinned and thus subsequently become unworthy of receiving Hashem's continued protection. In a stunning twist, his perception of his own unworthiness, prevented him from appreciating the limitless love of Hashem that underwrote the covenant in the first instance. Unable to find common cause with Dovid Hamelech, who never set any store in his own achievements, and expressed his vulnerability and utter reliance on Hashem's Grace - Va'ani Bechasdecha Batatchi - I depend entirely upon Your benevolence.

Indeed, the Malbim understands that the very fact that Yaakov felt this fear, was the source of his distress. 'And Yaakov was very afraid and he was distressed'. The Pasuk can be read to mean that he was distressed as a result of the fear. The fear distressed him because he understood it to be an indication of his lack of Bitachon. The trust¹ that underpins the relationship with Hashem, assures an equanimity, an inner calm. This is the touchstone, the litmus test of the

strength and depth of that relationship according to the Chovos Halevovos in Sha'ar Habitachon. He identifies *Menuchas Nefesh Haboteach*, the tranquillity of spirit as the very definition of Bitachon. The Alshich Hakadosh in a similar vein, sees the composure of the Psalmist in Tehillim 27 as the very route to his salvation—*Whom shall I fear, Hashem is the fortress of my life, whom shall I dread. Even as my enemies confront me in battle, bent on consuming my flesh, my heart shall know no fear*, as a result of which, *Bezos – this very implacability - Ani Boteach, this serves to signpost my Bitachon*, and I may rely on this lack of fear itself to be justifiably unafraid!

The Abarbanel writes that there is no tension between Ya'akov's fear and his trust in Hashem's promise. Bitachon, in his view, makes no demand that a person become impervious or resistant to natural inner turmoil. Rather, it requires of us to acknowledge and give voice to our natural fears, and then be guided by Torah reason and knowledge to prevail over legitimate worry, and banish it.

In his introduction to this Parsha, the Ramban says that Hashem wrote this Parsha in the Torah to teach us that Yaakov Avinu did not rely upon his own righteousness. Rather, he performed acts of Hishtadlus, natural means of preparation. This Ramban is puzzling. Why couldn't he depend upon being saved through Bitachon alone? It is clear from numerous sources² that the utter reliance upon Hashem, despite the evident lack of worthiness, itself serves as a vehicle of salvation that may be relied upon.

Unto Odom, He said...by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. We learn from this that man must do Hishtadlus. Yet, we must never forget that this Hishtadlus is only meant to be done in order to fulfil this curse. Part of Bitachon is knowing that there is no causality that connects the input of Hishtadlus with the output of blessing. Rather, a person must do Hishtadlus and Hashem then gives him the livelihood that had already been decreed for him. Thus, one gains nothing from overdoing his Hishtadlus. The Mesilas Yesharim (Perek 21) explains the concept of Hishtadlus for livelihood by saying that *when one does his Hishtadlus he must place his entire load before Hashem. It should be clear to him that he cannot possibly lose anything that is destined to him, as*

Chazal say in Beitzah (16): All of man's livelihood is decreed on Rosh Hashanah. In theory, a man could sit and do nothing, and everything destined for him would come to him. However, Hashem punished mankind and decreed that man must earn a living by the sweat of his brow. Therefore, man must do Hishtadlus. This is comparable to a tax that cannot be avoided and must be paid. The Alter of Novordhok zt"l (Darchei Bitachon) quotes the Gr"a zt"l on the Pasuk in Mishlei (3:5) *Throw your burden upon Hashem and He shall sustain you.* The Gr"a says that this means that a man of true and deep Bitachon need not do any Hishtadlus. If it is decided in Heaven that he should receive something, he will get it even without any effort on his part. The amount of Hishtadlus a person needs to perform, depends upon how much Bitachon he has cultivated.

However, R Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l adds a cautionary note. Think of Bitachon as a parabola. In the initial stages, when a Bitachon novice steps into the ring, he must be fully engaged with the world. To do any less would be wrong, as he has no Bitachon to rely upon! As he matures in this process, he must slowly diminish his involvement with Hishtadlus, as it is likely to undermine the enterprise of Bitachon that is being nurtured. Thus, Chizkiyah Hamelech could not even sing Shira, as the Assyrian hordes surrounded him, for to do so, he knew, would cause him to mistakenly attribute any subsequent deliverance to the potency of his Shira. He had no choice but to 'merely' sleep soundly, and leave Hashem to do it all! However, as the process nears its maturity, at the level of a Dovid Hamelech, we come full circle. His imperative is to engage fully once again, to *pursue, reach and kill his enemies*, confident in his self-awareness, that despite his total involvement in the process, his heart and mind would genuinely know and feel that he did absolutely nothing, the success of the endeavour relying entirely upon Hashem. The challenge that we all face is correctly identifying exactly where upon the Bitachon continuum we sit.

1. The irony in the stellar rise of cryptocurrencies, whose existence indicates the failure of trust in fiat currencies, the name of the most prominent of which, so closely resembles Bitachon - Bitcoin, is too coincidental to escape mention, at least as a whimsical aside.
2. the Yalkut Shimoni in Tehillim, Ramban in his *Emuna Ubitachon*, the Maharal in *Nesiv Habitachon* & Rabbenu Yonah in Shaarei Teshuva (in sharp contrast to the Chazon Ish *Emuna Ubitachon*)

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2. Once Avraham's name was changed we are no longer allowed to call him by his previous name Avram (unless when learning those pesukim in the Torah) (17:5). Why then do we find that after Yaakov's name was changed to Yisroel (32:29) we can still call him by his previous name of Yaakov?