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***“Egrofah shel Chanufah”*: Flattering The Powerful**

We are in the midst of discussing the evil trait of speaking words of flattery, which stems from **water-of-wind** in one’s soul. So far we have explained flattery that stems from the aspects of earth, water, and wind within **water-of-wind**. Currently, we are up to discussing flattery that stems from **fire-of-water-of-wind**.

This is the kind of flattery which the Gemara calls ***“egrofah shel chanufah”*** - the “fist of flattery”. The Gemara^[1] states that ever since people began to have *egrofah shel chanufah* - flattering the government - the Beis Din no longer has that much power, and because of this, people are able to do as they please without having to worry about being judged in Beis Din; and in addition, because there is no Beis Din, people cannot rebuke others properly.

What exactly is the concept of *“egrofah shel chanufah”*? It is to flatter someone who has power, to form connections with one who has power so that you can get what you need from him. This is not the same concept as “flattering the wicked” - we will explain the difference.

The Gemara^[2] brings that the Sages tried to flatter King Agrippas, a descendent from the wicked Hordos (who killed out the entire house of the Chashmonaim). When King Agrippas came upon the possuk in the Torah that says we have a commandment to have a Jewish king, he grew upset, so the Sages consoled him (in the attempt to flatter him) and said, “Prepare, prepare [to become the king].” On that day, because they flattered King Agrippas, much destruction came about to the Jewish people, as *Tosafos* brings from *Talmud Yerushalmi*.

This is called *“egrofah shel chanufah”* - to flatter a person who has power. Earlier, we mentioned “flattering the wicked”, which is when one has to flatter a wicked person for a permissible need that he has. In the case of flattery we are currently discussing, *egrofah shel chanufah*, though, a person flatters a person who has power for a forbidden cause. That was the case with King Agrippas; it was forbidden to flatter him, because it involved encouraging him to become a Jewish king, which he was not fit to become.

Here we will speak about how the concept of *“egrofah shel chanufah”* is used with regards to someone who flatters because he needs something that is **permissible**, though; not someone who flatters in order to get something that is forbidden to him. Although the Gemara uses it in context with flattering for a forbidden cause, it can also be applied to flattering a person for power when a person needs something from him. We will focus on the discussion here on this kind of scenario.

Forming Connections With The 'Right' People: A Form of Flattery

"*Egrofah shel chanufah*" that is common in our times is when we flatter someone who is more powerful than us, so that we can get something out of the person who has power. This kind of flattery is mentioned with regards to flattering the government, but it can apply as well to flattering anyone who is in a position of power.

To give a simple example of this, a person might want to flatter someone in the community who is in any sort of position of power, such as a person who is very wealthy and influential. Even if he's not getting something out of him right now, he might want to form a connection with a powerful person so that at a later time he can get a favor from him. He makes sure to form all the right "connections" with people.

This kind of flattery, called *egrofah shel chanufah*, was always around. But it is especially prevalent in our times. In fact, society in the world we live in today is immersed in "*egrofah shel chanufah*"! We often find ourselves dependent on having to form certain connections with those who have power. All kinds of organizations sit and contemplate how to form connections with people to use them, using all kinds of advertisements and messages. This is really a form of flattery – the kind that is called *egrofah shel chanufah*.

We live in a world in which superficial calculations run many organizations; pursuing what's right and true is not of that much interest. This is not only the way it works in the outside secular world - even organizations of Torah causes are often being run by the powerful and influential.

For example, when a big *g'vir* (wealthy donor) passes away, organizations have to make big memorials for him in the papers and magazines, as part of the protocol, and it's often just so that other people will notice that these organizations exist, because if not, they never make into people's radar. It really shouldn't be that way, but it is.

Another example: A person wants to get his child into a certain yeshiva, and as long as he has the right "connections" with the right people, his child gets in to the yeshiva.

People who work for organizations can relate to this very well. Everything works on based on how much connections you have. People who do fundraising for Yeshivos have to get a lot of their money using flattery, making sure to form the right "connections" with certain wealthy individuals.

This is called "*egrofah shel chanufah*": where flattery makes the world go round. It is a kind of flattery which envelopes society.

Becoming Aware of How Flattery Runs Society, and Letting It Bother You

If one is not aware to this (and one must be sensitive to this - not just intellectually aware of it), he is somewhat disconnected from the deceptive reality that we live in. It's a very big fact of life that the world revolves around this kind of flattery, and there's no way for a person to ignore it.

A person has to know how the world is really supposed to look like, in contrast with the way it runs now, and then he needs to figure out how to act in the reality we live in. (When you think about it deeply, you can see how it's the entire depth of our exile...) We must first realize that we live in such a false kind of world.

First think about it on an intellectual level, and then become sensitive to it, so that it bothers you.

This doesn't imply, *chas v'shalom*, that everything on this world is false. It is just that the general way

that the world conducts themselves with is through “*egrofah shel chanufah*”.

So the first step here is to become aware of this, and the second step is: to let it bother you. When it bothers you, you will wish to come out of it.

This can be expressed either through your *davening* for the redemption, or through yearning for the redemption – when we will all come out of the corrupt way in which society is run.

That’s one side of the coin to your job in coming out of this kind of flattery that society is entrenched in.

Dealing With A Corrupt World

The other part of your job is: to know how to deal with this, now that we realize that we are all within this problem. How, indeed, can we survive spiritually, in a world which revolves so much around flattery?

We have two abilities in our soul which we were given that can help us fight flattery.

One power we have is ***emes***: truth. When we are in a situation in which we need to engage in some kind of flattery towards a person of power, we can wonder what the truth\emes is, and then pit the truth against the falsity that is found in *chanufah*\flattery.

Practically speaking, when you have to engage in any sort of flattery with influential people or with those who have power, whom you ultimately need to deal with at some point, you can use the power of *emes* in your soul and try to analyze how much truth is involved in what you are doing.

In this way, you’ll notice the elements of truth in what you are doing as well as the elements of falsity, and hopefully, your search for *emes*\truth will guide you in avoiding the *sheker*\falsity that is found in *chanufah*\flattery. That is one way how you can separate yourself from the falsity of flattery when you inevitably find yourself in a situation of having to flatter another: we can try to increase the amount of truth in any given situation, and in that way we have a hope in lessening the flattery.

The other power we have to fight flattery is: *emunah* (faith in Hashem). Through increasing our amount of palpable *emunah* in Hashem, we can less the amount of *chanufah* that we are involved with. When we use our *emunah* to avoid falsity, it is called “*emes v’emunah*.”

Summary of the Two Approaches

To summarize, we have two different abilities that can weaken the amount of *chanufah*\flattery we find ourselves in.

The first method that one can use is to increase one’s sensitivity to what *emes* is, which, in turn, lessens the amount of *chanufah* you will have to engage in. We can see what the *emes* is and what the *chanufah**sheker* is in a situation, and then decide which path to go in; hopefully, we will take notice of the falsity that is involved in having to resort to flattery, because our *emes* has been activated.

The second option we have is to use our power of *emunah* against *chanufah*, and the more we use our *emunah*, the less desperate we will feel on having to resort to *chanufah*.

Using Emunah To Avoid Chanufah\Flattery

When people engage in *chanufah*, what are they really doing? They flatter people when they really need something from them. Here a person comes to a deciding point in his life: what is really meaningful to him?

When we need to talk to the banker, and we are given all sorts of options on how to earn more credits and make some profit, we have two choices in front of us. If we don't have *emunah*, then we will probably be more comfortable with forming a trusty and reliable relationship with the banker. We'll become wrapped up in *egrofah shel chanufah*, because we are desperate to be comfortable.

But if we use our *emunah*, then our *emunah* tells us that only Hashem is in charge of our money, and no one else is; in that way, we'll be able to give ourselves a good chance at avoiding *egrofah shel chanufah* from ensnaring us.

If one does not base his life on a palpable kind of *emunah* in Hashem, when *emunah* isn't an actual part of his life, then chances are that *chanufah*\flattery will take over. But if one's *emes* or *emunah* is actively dominant, then his *emes* or *emunah* will take over and save him from having to engage in *chanufah*\flattery.

Your intellect will probably rationalize with you that you need to flatter people on this world in order to succeed. But your *emunah* can overpower your rational logic and save you from flattery.

Knowing Your Personal Level of Emunah

That being the case, a person has to know really well what his personal level of *emunah* is.

If one's *emunah* is just on an intellectual level but it is not palpable to him, he will not have the power to overpower the tendency to engage in *egrofah shel chanufah*. Even if he says "*Ani Maamin*" every day, if he doesn't have a palpable sense of faith in Hashem in his life, then his *emunah* is only intellectual and not active, and it will not be strong enough to help him avoid depending on *egrofah shel chanufah*. One needs palpable *emunah* in order to overcome the urge for *egrofah shel chanufah*.

Here is an example which really brings out the concept. Most *bnei Torah* are struggling with having to make *parnassah* (livelihood). A few *bnei Torah* merit not to have worries about it, but most *bnei Torah* do not have it easy with *parnassah*. Sometimes a *ben Torah* is offered a way to make some money, as long as he does such and such, and he is very tempted to engage in some efforts to make a little money on the side. Being that he is a *ben Torah*, he will of course not think of it if it might compromise on his *ruchniyus* in some way. However, way before that, a person first has to know how much effort he needs to make in the first place! And he might find out, upon examining himself deeply, that he has no *emunah* at all.

If that is the case, then he may make more effort in making some money. But if he discovers that he does have *emunah*, then it's not appropriate for him to engage in making *parnassah*. This is because the whole entire need to make a living is a penalty placed on mankind^[3]; but if one has *emunah*, there is less of a penalty on him.

The point of the above example is to bring out the concept that one has to discover how much *emunah* he really has. This is not a small discovery one notices in his life – it's an issue of how he lives his entire life.

Woe to the person who leaves this world after 120 years and he never knew what his level of *emunah* was! There are many actions that people do which are really not appropriate according to a person's level of *emunah*. Knowing your personal level of *emunah* is very important, and it might even be the most important things you can ever know about yourself.

Of course, it's impossible to go by life for 120 years and never flatter anyone. But the question is: How much do you really need to flatter others and form 'connections' with others? Where do you draw the line? If one knows what his level of *emunah* is, he can know how much he needs others or not, and this will greatly lessen the amount of *chanufah* he relies on in order to get by life.

(This is not addressing the need that one feels to make friends, which fulfills emotional needs. That's a different topic).

On a deeper note, this is really the meaning behind the words of Chazal that "It is permissible to flatter the wicked." When one knows his level of *emunah* well, he is able to engage in flattery without getting negatively affected.

Remembering Who Is In Charge

Thus, in order to avoid *egrofah shel chanufah*, when you do have to engage in some kind of flattery another in order to form a connection with someone whom you need, you need to remember that it's always up to Hashem if you will succeed or not. Don't think that some person will help you get anywhere, no matter how powerful or influential he is, without Hashem letting it happen. Try to always remember that Hashem is in charge, not people.

This is a very practical way to get by life during this exile we live in. Pit your *emes* and your *emunah* against the amount of *chanufah* in your life. This will gradually weaken your dependency on having to engage in *chanufah* even as you find yourself in a situation where you need to use some kind of *chanufah* in order to get by.

Lessen The Amount of People Whom You "Need"

In addition, after you have worked on these two steps, realize that your need to form connections with people on this world should be few. Most of the people we are involved with are not truthful; we mostly have to deal with people who live life superficially, who are not concerned about being truthful. So it's better for us the less we are involved with having to deal with so many people.

The more a person lives an inner kind of life, he will find that he is fine without having to make that many connections with others. So if you're afraid that your son won't get into the yeshiva you want him to get into, you can *daven* to Hashem about it and strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem, rather than engage yourself in *chanufah* and form the right "connections" with certain people.

Of course, you can't run away totally from having to deal with the world. You will have to form connections with people and need others to help you get by, but the amount of flattery you have to engage in can still be lessened to a great degree, when you have make sure to increase your *emunah*. Your *emunah* tells you that you don't need *chanufah* to get by. So use your *emunah* by telling yourself that you will disconnect from having to need people on This World.

Surely, you also need to make efforts to achieve any results, and this will inevitably involve *chanufah*. Although it appears to us that life is about making the right connections with others, the inner and true way to live life is to disconnect from all of these connections - and to instead reveal your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

In Conclusion

So the very first thing you need to do, to counter *egrofah shel chanufah*, is to disconnect from needing people on this world to get by; and if you succeed in doing that, you can then have the ability of deal with the world of deception you are inevitably must live with and deal with - through using

your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

[1] Sotah 41a

[2] *ibid*

[3] *Mesillas Yesharim*. For more on this subject, see ***Tefillah #112 - Bitachon And Making A Living***

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