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Real Self-Confidence: Being Yourself

Until now we spoke of the first kind of *Bitachon* in our soul, the power to trust in Hashem. Now we will discuss the other kind of *Bitachon* which we mentioned in the beginning: to trust in one's very own self. In our language, this is called *bitachon atzmi*, "self-confidence".

From where does a person draw confidence from?

Let us emphasize that we are referring to a healthy sense of confidence, not *gaavah* (haughtiness). Healthy confidence, *bitachon atmi*, is when a person recognizes his strengths, in a healthy way, not to feel conceited in others, but simply to be able to have a proper self-esteem. When a person sees what his strengths are, he sees his good qualities, and he thus feels confidence in himself. That is the simple kind of confidence one can have. There is also a deeper kind of self-confidence than this, though, and we will explain what it is.

There are situations in which a person finds himself to be confident, but we all know that there are situations in which a person doesn't feel confident. This happens because a person feels confident only in a superficial way, but he doesn't have a real, deeper kind of confidence.

We see this manifest in people when they don't act like their true personalities, and they instead put on a show and act based on what others will think. With such an outlook, a person never accesses his true confidence.

When a person is acting like his true self, he acts like who he is, and he is using his strengths in his soul. Such a person has real confidence in himself, because he trusts himself. But when a person acts a certain way only because he knows that he "has" to act that way - but he isn't being himself - his soul lacks stability, and he cannot have true confidence in himself. He might get himself to think like others because others think that way, but he's still not being himself.

In fact, for this reason, most people don't have true confidence in their souls. Most people are copying other people in how they act and think. They act mainly on self-consciousness: "What will *others* say if I do this..?"

Therefore, when people do things just to blend into society and even act confidently, this has nothing to do with confidence. True confidence from our soul is when a person relies on *himself* to act, on his actual abilities, and not based upon how others act. True confidence is to be able to "lean" on oneself for support - not to lean on others for support. Our personality and strengths are the garments which

our soul relies upon; when we rely on ourselves, our own soul - and not others - we then will have the true confidence.

To give a common example of the problem, many people, when they make *simchos* (celebrations) are mainly concerned with how others will look at it. They aren't being themselves, but basing their actions solely on the opinion of others. All the arrangements by many *simchos* are based on, "What will everyone think, what will they say about this?"

Confidence comes from your soul, not from your middos

True self-confidence is to be able to trust and rely on oneself, to rely on our very own soul for reassurance. What does this mean?

True confidence does not mean that a person relies on his personality, or on his good *middos*, for confidence. These things are just a garment of our soul - they are not the soul itself. A person is not defined by the *middos* he has, nor is he defined by the personality type he is. Those things are just layers covering over our essence.

If a person is confident in himself, let's say, because he thinks that he is a very nice person - then he doesn't have any real confidence. Such a person isn't drawing his confidence from his essence, but from the garments of his soul, which are his good qualities. A person with real self-confidence realizes that his good *middos* or various qualities he has are still not his essence, but only the garments of his soul, and that he can draw self-confidence from his very essence - his soul.

Let's go further with this: let's say a person has self-confidence based on the fact that he gives a *shiur* (Torah lecture). At first, he didn't have confidence in himself, so he improved his confidence by starting to give a *shiur*, and this boosts his confidence. What will happen if a day comes that he isn't able to give more *shiurim* anymore? What will happen if he's suddenly out of commission, like if he gets sick, or if he doesn't have students anymore?

Such a person will lose all his self-confidence, because he was getting all of his confidence from the fact that he gives a *shiur*. The "garment" he was relying on until now has now fallen away, and he will be left with nothing to get his confidence from. All of his confidence was coming from the fact that he gives a *shiur* - not from *himself*.

Each of our Avos (forefathers) had their own unique path in serving Hashem. Avraham Avinu could not have done what Yitzchok Avinu did, and Yitzchok Avinu could not have done with Yaakov Avinu did. It is because each Jew has his own strengths. If we want to have true confidence, we must realize that we each have a unique soul, and no one can accomplish what you can accomplish.

Self-confidence thus makes a person ask himself: "Who am I? Am I my good *middos*? Am I my qualities? Is this who "I" am...?"

Confidence that comes from Hashem in your soul

Yet, we must clarify the following point about self-confidence. A Jew's confidence should not be coming just from relying on himself in the simple sense. It is only when a person realizes that even his own essence, his very soul, is only a garment clothed by Hashem.

Hashem resides in the deepest part of our soul; He is clothed by our soul, and our soul serves as a garment that covers Him. So when a person is confident, his real confidence from "himself" should be

coming from the fact that he relies on Hashem, who is in his soul. With this kind of confidence, a person realizes that his qualities are only a garment of his essence, and they are only a “way” to reveal his confidence, because it’s all coming from Hashem, and not from his human abilities.

So even if a person is confident because he knows that he has a unique essence, from where does he get his confidence from? Is he relying only on himself – on how wonderful he is – or he is relying on Hashem, who is in his soul? That is the question one will have to ask himself.

If a person’s confidence comes from only himself – from the belief in his soul and in its unique qualities, without recognizing that Hashem is the source of our entire soul – then his confidence is only being attributed to a garment of the soul, and we know that garments can fall away, just like clothing can get removed.

But if a person has confidence because he knows that *Hashem* resides in his soul, and that is why he can be confident in his soul – then his confidence is based on a source, and he has the true confidence coming from the soul.

How a person can know if he has true confidence

How can a person know if he has true self-confidence? The way is by seeing where he runs to when he feels distressed. A person runs to where he leans on for reassurance. Where is a person running to when he’s scared?

If a person only has the superficial kind of confidence, then where he runs to for security will depend what kind of person he is. An action kind of person, when he is under a lot of stress, runs to do more action; he gets a feeling of security when he throws himself into doing more action. A feeling kind of person runs to his emotional world to feel secure, and a thinking kind of person will retreat into deep thought in order to feel secure.

But if a person relies and leans on Hashem for his reassurance in life, then whenever he feels stressed in any way, he runs away to *Hashem* for support. That shows that he draws his confidence from Hashem, and this in turn shows that the person has true confidence.

Where we run to when we are scared – that shows us where exactly we are getting our confidence from. Either a person runs into himself for security – which shows that he only has superficial confidence – or he runs to Hashem for security, which shows that he has the real confidence.

The Proper Attitude To Have About Learning Torah Amidst A Crisis

There is also a middle level between these two kinds of people: those who, when in distress, run to go learn Torah in the *beis midrash*. As we said, true confidence is when a person runs to Hashem for security; running to the *beis midrash* amidst a crisis doesn’t always mean that the person is running away to Hashem for help. Let us explain why.

The Torah is *not* Hashem. A person can learn Torah with a sense of Hashem in his life and connect his learning with Hashem, but we also know that it’s also possible that a person just learns Torah, without Hashem in his life.

So when a person runs to the *beis midrash* as a way to escape his pain, this doesn’t always show that he is doing so to connect more to Hashem. It depends why a person is running to the Torah for support when he is in distress.

When a person is going through a time of distress in his life, he can run away into his learning and throw himself into thinking about the *Gemara*. This is indeed a good place to run to, to take shelter in the Torah. That is, *if the person is being himself*. As we said before, confidence is only when a person is being himself. If a person is running to the Torah and he connects his learning with Hashem, then we can say that such a person is acting like his true self. This is our true self.

A person who truly relies on the Torah in this way – one who learns Torah and is connected to Hashem through his learning - he is being himself, and thus he has confidence from his Torah learning. He has Hashem in the equation.

But some people, when going through a rough time, will dedicate themselves to learning Torah in spite of their stress, and they will run to the *beis midrash* to go learn Torah... but without Hashem in the picture. Can we call this 'being himself'? Such a person isn't 'being himself', so when he tries to gain reassurance and confidence from his learning, he will not get true confidence. He's not really "being himself."

If a person in distress runs to a place that isn't who he is, he has no true confidence in himself; even if he is running to the *Torah* for reassurance. Part of having confidence, we mentioned before, is to be who you are. If a person is relying on just learning the "Torah" itself for confidence, and Hashem isn't in the picture – he isn't in a place that is really "himself", and he will not find solace from his distress.

One who runs to his Creator in his distress, however, has who to rely on for confidence: Hashem. Such a person's confidence comes from Hashem; he relies and leans on Hashem for support, and that is whom he takes refuge in when he needs to feel reassured.

Contradictions hold back Confidence

A person who just runs to learn Torah as a refuge from his stress might be running to a *part* of the Torah, not to the actual Torah itself in its entirety.

Only a person who learns Torah with Hashem in the equation is considered to be running to the Torah for reassurance. Without Hashem in the equation, a person might be running to a *part* of Torah, but he's not running to the actual Torah itself. He might find that although he's running away to the Torah for reassurance, he still has no one Who he can rely on to gain reassurance. Only when someone runs away to *Hashem* will he find that he has who to rely on, and from there, a person can feel confident and reassured, safe and secure.

Most people, though, are doing things the whole day that are not really who they are. They aren't being themselves. A person has to be himself, and in order to be himself, he has to know who he is – who he is, and what his qualities are; he must know that his qualities are not his actual self, but only branches from his root. All his qualities are just the branches of one's actual self.

When a person isn't himself, he will also do things that contradict himself, and this holds back his inner essence from being revealed.

We will give an example of this: the Sages say that one should not get angry on Erev Shabbos in his household. Let's say a person feels like getting angry about something in his house on Erev Shabbos, and he holds back his anger. What is he feeling inside, though? Does he feel that it is only his **body** that he is holding back from anger, or does he feel that his **soul** as well agrees not to get angry?

If a person is just feeling that it is his body which he is restraining from getting angry, not his soul, then there is a contradiction between what his body is doing and what his soul is doing. His soul is really seething deep down, and this results in a sadness, because he isn't being himself.

What a person should really do in such a situation is not only to feel that he's holding back his body from getting angry, but that he's holding back his soul as well from getting angry, and then there wouldn't be this contradiction.

Recognizing yourself from your root, not from your branches

Most people never truly recognize themselves; at most they know themselves partially.

Once I asked someone, "What is your strongest quality you have?" He answered me: "I am a good *chazzan*." This person thinks that his main quality is that he sings well, and this is how he identifies himself. He doesn't know how to identify himself! He thinks that his good voice, which is really only a branch of himself, that it's his essence. Such an outlook comes from considering oneself to be a body, not a soul.

A person has to know the root of his soul (his essence) as well as the branches of his soul (which are his qualities), and a person has to know that he is *not* identified by his branches.

Let's say a person has a certain good quality; for example, he is a nice and caring person. Is this why he has confidence in himself? If he does, he is only confident in his "branches", but not in his roots. He relies on his branches for confidence, but he isn't drawing confidence from his very self. What will happen when he feels distressed and he needs confidence? He will simply increase his caring and niceness toward others, trying to gain a sense of security from his niceness, but he isn't really being confident in himself.

This is the question: Where does a person run to in a time of distress? Does he return to his roots – or to his branches? A person has to make sure he returns to his roots in his soul. In order for this to happen, a person has to know who he is, to know that he is not identified by his branches.

Most of the downfalls that people have are because they only know of their branches in their soul, and they only recognize themselves according to their branches. If they lose their branches, they fall apart, because their entire self-confidence is based on their branches, which are only a "garment" that can fall away.

All fears are really because a person only recognizes himself based on his branches, and thus he has nowhere to really run to for reassurance when he is in distress. It only makes sense that such a person should be afraid – after all, he has nowhere to get his confidence from when he needs it.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/actualizing-our-faith-005-real-self-confidence>