

BILVAVI

**MY
HEART
ASKS**



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

HISHTADLUS

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HISHTADLUS

Q: *The Rav explains that if something is supposed to happen to a person, it is decreed by Heaven on him and making more or less effort won't play a role as to what happens. However, there's a well-known concept that if a person is not on the level of total bitachon, he has an obligation to make hishtadlus (effort). What are the parameters of the obligation to make that hishtadlus?*

A: The simple approach to this is that whether a person will pay up his penalty or not [the penalty upon mankind to make effort], the decree of Heaven will still happen. But according to the views that the decree of Heaven depends on how much a person pays up his 'penalty', the amount of the penalty is determined by the level of one's *emunah* and *bitachon*. There is a way for a person to know how much effort he has to make, based on his current level. If a person is in a certain situation where he's not sure if it's proper for him to just trust in Hashem and not engage in *hishtadlus*, or if he's not able to have enough *bitachon*, then he is obligated halachically to take responsibility for his situation and to engage in some *hishtadlus*, in order to be able to receive the amount of blessing that is supposed to come to him. If a person doesn't do enough *hishtadlus*, and because of this he is not calm, he becomes chaotic and fearful. His doubts will also turn on his imagination, all these factors together will cause him to lose sleep. If that is his level, then his obligated to do some *hishtadlus* in order to calm himself. This is how he is paying up the 'penalty' of having to make *hishtadlus*, and this is necessary for him.

However, if a person in a certain situation is able to have *bitachon* and also be calm and serene about it without making any effort, he is not anxious or concerned about what will happen even if he doesn't make any *hishtadlus* at all. If he is indeed at that level, it is forbidden for him to make any *hishtadlus*.

But if he's 'in-between' the two extremes – if not making *hishtadlus* will cause him to be a bit worried about his future, yet he also feels that he can strengthen his *emunah* and *bitachon* and feel relaxed by this, then he is at the point of free will, where he can choose to either let his *bitachon* get stronger or falter from it. He will have to decide if it's appropriate for him to add on more *hishtadlus*, or if he should strengthen his *emunah* and *bitachon* and calm himself with this and feel stable and balanced.

There is also another way to determine how much *hishtadlus* one has to do or not. If a person thinks that he is supposed to be engaging in certain actions, he has to be clear when doing so that it is not the *hishtadlus* which will make him successful or not, and it is not *hishtadlus* which will bear the desired results. The results would have come due to whatever Heaven has decreed for him.

But even when one is obligated in *hishtadlus*, he still has to have the right attitude about it – he must know that it is not his efforts which are doing everything. Therefore, a person should not overdo *hishtadlus*. He faces an inner contradiction: If he won't make any effort, then he will be anxious about the future and he won't be able to be calm. But on the other hand, if doing anything now will make him think that all success or failure depends on him, then this is a poisonous attitude which resembles denying Hashem. He is denying *emunah* and *bitachon* and weakening these soul faculties, and he is thereby preventing his *emunah* and *bitachon* from being actualized. It's as if he's enslaved in Egypt, in total darkness and exile, where the way out is lost.

Q: *“Many did like Rabi Shimon bar Yochai and didn't succeed” – they tried to have total bitachon without making any hishtadlus, but they didn't succeed. Why couldn't they have more bitachon?*

A: Because they didn't make effort even in situations where they didn't have total *bitachon*. They were not always completely calmed by their *bitachon* and therefore they were obligated to put in more effort to attain what they wanted, but they didn't do so. They became too chaotic and afraid, until they fell apart. Even if they were able to fall asleep on their beds at night, that was only because they imagined and dreamed that they were having *bitachon*. As time passed and they saw that they weren't attaining what they needed even though they were having *bitachon*, they didn't realize that it was a decree from Above for their own good. They didn't realize that their unmet wishes were indeed not meant to materialize and that they weren't really missing anything. So they became saddened and disappointed at their unmet wishes, and this made them suffer and they felt crushed. They blamed their lack of success and unmet wishes on the fact that they didn't do enough *hishtadlus*. Only the few who truly had *bitachon* – to the extent that their *bitachon* made them serene and calm – were those who could feel relaxed whether they would get their wishes or not and accept Heaven's decree. Those few were the ones who succeeded at taking the path of Rashbi.

Q: *Can a person have complete emunah and bitachon and not have to make any hishtadlus?*

A: Ever since Adam sinned, there is no person who has complete *emunah* in every area of his life and who is exempt from making any *hishtadlus*. But there can be certain areas in one's life in which he has a lot of *emunah* and *bitachon*, and in those areas, he won't have to make any *hishtadlus*.

Q: *The Rav explained that a person cannot have bitachon at getting something which wasn't decreed from Heaven for him to get. But it's well-known that there are all kinds of segulos to earn livelihood – such as by davening, or having certain kavanos or yichudim, which are able to take away the “accusing forces” on a person and bring in financial blessing. But if a person can't get anything that wasn't allotted to Him by Heaven, then what is the gain of all these special tefillos, kavanos, and yichudim?*

A: *Bitachon* is above the level of *tefillah*. When a person *davens* in order to get something, or he has certain *kavanos*, with the purpose of drawing down *shefa* (heavenly blessing), or to gain *zechusim* (merits) to be saved from troubling situations – these are all forms of *hishtadlus*. If a person believes that only what

Hashem has willed and decreed is what will happen, then he doesn't *daven* special for certain requests (and the only other *tefillos* he will say are *tefillos* of song and praise and gratitude to Hashem, but not requests). There is a vast difference between a person with *bitachon* who has *menuchas hanefesh* - who doesn't have to make any *hishtadlus* - with a person who lacks *bitachon*, who needs to make *hishtadlus* in order to be calm.

The Chazon Ish explained that there are two levels of *hishtadlus*. There are those who are very far from *emunah* and *bitachon*, who will immediately turn to philanthropists and powerful people to ask them for worthless advice. In contrast, if a *tzaddik* didn't reach *bitachon*, he is exempt from making *hishtadlus* and his heart is focused on examining his deeds and to do *teshuvah*, *daven*, and give *tzedakah* to avert any harsh decrees on him. The Chazon Ish even wrote on himself that his *hishtadlus* is to *daven*.

Q: *It seems from the Rav's words that bitachon is a connection to Hashem's Ratzon – that Hashem's ratzon becomes your ratzon, and therefore you have bitachon that Hashem will do your ratzon as He wills.*

A: And there are also those from *Raboseinu* who explained the verse “*The will of those who fear Him, he does*” not according to the simple understanding – which is that Hashem does what His G-d fearing ones want - but that Hashem does the will of those who align their will with His will, with those who want to do His will.

To analyze this deeper, if we look at the matter from the “branch” of *bitachon* – which is that “my wish will certainly happen since I have *bitachon*” – then the *possuk* means simply that Hashem will give to those who fear Him, what they want. But if we look at it from the “root” of *bitachon* – which is that only the will of Hashem will get fulfilled – then the *possuk* means something deeper, that Hashem is making all those who fear Him that they desire what He wants. And the end of the Mishnah says, “Nullify your will before His will, so that the will of others will be nullified to you” – meaning that if you nullify your will for His will, by removing your wishes for His will, then Hashem will remove other's wishes for you – He will remove the wishes of those who don't want His will. “Every person who has *yiras shomayim*, his words are heard.”

Q: *If a person read the words of the Alshich about bitachon, and he understands from this that bitachon means “Whatever you wish for, if you have bitachon that Hashem can give you what you wish, you will certainly get it” – is that correct?*

A: Certainly. If a person truly succeeds at having totally *bitachon* that his wish will get fulfilled, then it will happen. Even if he gets sudden, temporary inspiration and he gets excited about this concept, the power of *bitachon*. If he truly succeeds at having such strong *bitachon*, he can draw all *shefa* (blessing) and *yeshuah* (salvation) to him. Of him it can be said, *Boteach b'emes uv'tamim she-yavo*, “He truly trusts, and earnestly, that it will come.” He becomes connected to Hashem's *ratzon* through the *tzinor* where all *shefa* comes from.

But in order to become connected to this level, he needs to feel that he really needs a certain thing, meaning that it has to be something which his soul needs intrinsically. If that's the case, it was Hashem

who created the deficiency He's feeling and Who has prepared for the void to be filled. The will of Hashem always gets fulfilled.

However, the problem with this approach is that a person is taking a roundabout way to get to the *tzinor*, and he is not connecting directly to the One Who has the will. People choose this path only because of a superficial understanding about *bitachon* that *bitachon* is just a power that you can access when you need it in order to get what you need. But we explained here that **when people suddenly discover *bitachon*, they don't have a deep perspective about it yet. They don't have the fundamental approach yet and they haven't yet built up their *bitachon*. We always have to build each soul faculty from its root. The root of the power of *bitachon* is to become connected to Hashem's will, as a way to live life. An outcome of that connection is *bitachon*, in which a person believes and knows and feels that only Hashem's will is what will happen, for He alone does everything, and nothing bad can happen to a person if Hashem didn't want it.**

Q: It seems that even if a person is always connected his whole life to what Hashem wants, when he faces a challenge and he needs bitachon, he should just inspire himself with bitachon and learning about bitachon. Why can't he just rely on the fact that he's connected to ratzon Hashem? Why can't he assume that Hashem will empower him with bitachon to help him through his challenges?

A: That's a good argument, and indeed, if a person is involved for his entire life with learning and fulfilling Hashem's will, then when he is tested, he will need to strengthen his *bitachon*, so that his true level will be proven. But, **one can only strengthen his *bitachon* and actualize it if he already developed it from before.** He can easily and naturally awaken his *bitachon* after he has recognized what *bitachon* is by learning about it and building it. What he has to have recognized is that **only what Hashem wants will happen**, and there is nothing that can happen to him or in the world that can control his life – and he can easily access this perspective and be calmed by it. But if one is connected to *ratzon Hashem* only sometimes, and not as a way of life, then when he begins to work on his *bitachon* when he's being challenged, he will have to find new energy that's deep within his soul, and it will be very hard for him to actualize his *bitachon*. In addition, the tendency of a person who isn't used to living connected to Hashem's will is that he will just want to use a certain venue in order to get a *yeshuah* that he needs, and he stays far away from becoming connected with Hashem and with what Hashem wants.

Q: Every person faces many situations in which he must do something, and he won't be clear of what exactly Hashem wants from him. There are no clear-cut definitions for each situation of life. If something is spelled out clearly in Shulchan Aruch what he has to do, then he can know, but in the gray areas which aren't so clear, how can a person know what Hashem wants from him?

A: This is the fundamental and deep question which is relevant to all of a person's life. Hashem's will from us is more hidden than obvious. There are many more situations in life where isn't not clear what Hashem wants, in comparison to cases and situations which are discussed in the Poskim. Generally the advice for

everything is *tefillah*, to *daven* straight to Hashem for help: “*Open my eyes, to know what You want.*” But let us get more specific here. Why doesn’t a person know what Hashem wants from him? It is because he has other personal wishes that are centered around himself, and that prevents him from seeing what Hashem wants from him. If not for those ego-centered wishes, there is nothing stopping him from knowing clearly what Hashem wants from him.

Q: *Perhaps I don’t know what Hashem wants from me because I didn’t learn enough Torah? If I would know more details of Torah then maybe I would know how to do proper teshuvah in each situation I go through.*

A: ‘Not learning Torah enough’ is not a satisfying reason for this. If one’s heart would be pure and clean from ego-driven desires, he would know the whole Torah from himself.

This is because the entire Creation is from the Torah. A person is really comprised of 613 parts corresponding to the 613 mitzvos. If a person wouldn’t have wishes that contradict the Creator’s will – these wishes are obscuring his daas – then he would see and understand, from within himself, what the way of the Torah is. It would be “*From my flesh I see G-d.*” Because a person, and all of Creation, is really built on the Torah. Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world from it. “Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself.” And Chazal said that if there wouldn’t be a Torah, we would learn decent behavior even by observing animals – how an ant doesn’t steal, how doves are loyal to their spouses, etc.

Thus the first way to view anything in the world is through the Torah. But this is something that’s covered over from the eyes of those who veer away from the path of Hashem. So removing one’s personal, ego-driven wishes, and removing the desires of the *yetzer hora*, are the factors that purify one’s heart. If a person wouldn’t want anything other than *ratzon Hashem*, all he would desire is to do everything *lishmah* without any *negios*. The entire Torah hidden in his heart would become revealed to him, for he would know what Hashem wants from him.

Q: *But the Gra on Mishlei says that no one can say on himself “My heart is purified from all traces of evil.” No one can say his heart is pure. So a person always has to suspect himself that even if he thinks that a certain thing is what Hashem wants from him, maybe it’s the opposite of what Hashem wants from him, and he’s making a mistake, due to the fact that his own personal wishes are swaying him.*

A: There are many kinds of questions like this. The answer to all of them is one principle. There are always two extremes – a purified aspect and a ruined aspect. Between those two extremes are an endless amount of levels. Even if we can’t get to complete perfection, we still need to try hard to get there, each person as much as he’s able to, to get closer and closer to perfection. So although the *Gra* says that we can’t get completely purify our heart from ulterior motivations and various wishes that sway us from the truth, it’s certainly possible for a person to peel away the desires to commit sins. Beyond that, one can go further and recognize the depth of envy, stealing, lusts, and to uproot the roots of these sins. And beyond that, a person can get to subtler layers, of actions and movements in his soul that are dirtied from ulterior motives. And a

person can get even further than that, of purifying himself. It is a process of inner work, of erasing one's personal desires. Gradually, the more one increases the purity and cleansing of his soul, it becomes more pristine and it shines, and then he is able to see clearly from his soul - and then he will see what Hashem wants from him.

Q: *Before the Torah was given, the tzaddikim could purify their hearts and get ruach hakodesh to know what Hashem wanted from them. But today that is not possible, because the yetzer hora today is so strong. The Gra says that the only way to know anything is to go in the way of the Torah and do the mitzvos and not do aveiros. So a person can never trust his heart no matter how much purifies himself, because the yetzer hora will certainly win over him.*

A: The way to understand the *Gra's* words is that a person cannot go in wonders like Avraham Avinu did and to live his life based on purifying his heart, for only the Avos could get the Torah from within themselves. They didn't need the Torah to be given to them and they didn't have a Shulchan Aruch. They knew the entire Torah from within them. But the *Gra* says that this doesn't exist today, because the *yetzer hora* today is so deeply embedded in our hearts that no one can say on himself "I purified my heart". So no one today can learn Torah from within himself. And therefore we cannot take any new paths. No one can decide to create a new world for himself in which he will have his own *halachos* and mimic the Avos and the Shevatim. After the Torah was given, we have to give ourselves over entirely to the Torah.

The basis for living is to learn *halachah* and keep it. When a person doesn't know what the *halachah* is, or he doesn't know the answer to a certain question, he should ask a Rav. He has to turn to Poskim who are Talmidei Chachomim, or to Mashgichim or baalei mussar or baalei Chassidus, and if he needs to, he should present his doubts to the Gedolei HaDor. **But, many times a person finds himself in a situation where he has to act fast and he isn't able to get advice on how to act. Sometimes he knows that a certain topic has many differing views.** Sometimes he gets a response where something is permitted, but he is told to be *machmir* if he can, and he doesn't know if he's on the level of keeping to the *chumra* or not, if it will damage him or not. Sometimes he asks and gets an answer, but he isn't clear of how well he understands it. Sometimes he doesn't succeed at understanding the answer. Or, the answer gave him several options and he doesn't know which answer is the most desirable to Hashem. Halachic issues can be addressed to many reliable Poskim, and the sources are easier to check up, but issues of how to act in *hashkafah* can be much more complicated, and mistakes can easily be made, much more than with halachic issues. Although it seems that there are many people today to ask advice to, who says they are reliable? In Halachah it's clear what the Torah's parameters are, relatively speaking, when compared to *hashkafah* and how to behave and act. **There are deep doubts that a person can have privately, which he cannot get advice on if he asks someone who doesn't understand him accurately. Sometimes the person himself doesn't succeed at expressing himself properly and he doesn't say precisely what his doubt is, because he doesn't even know what he's not sure about. And when it comes to questions about the**

psyche, many of the experts in the field have gained all their knowledge from sources outside of the Torah, and those who use them for their advice are taking the risk of falling into severe mistakes.

For all these situations, the way to act is to go in the way of the Avos – purify your heart from all your various self-serving wishes. Then it will become easier for you to know and understand what Hashem wants from you.



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Torah Bank Service

USA 718.521.5231 #2>4>12

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For Inquiries on

"Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"

Contact: 052.763.8588

Email: bilvavi231@gmail.com