

Pursuit of Purpose

פרשת

וישב

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The Power of Maintaining Our Hope in Hashem

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

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In this week's Parsha, פרשת וישב, Yosef requests that the שר המשקים mention him to פרעה. This resulted in postponing his release from prison, as he should have had בטחון instead of relying, even the tiniest bit, on the שר המשקים. This episode has been explained by Rishonim and Achronim throughout the ages, allowing us to expand our understanding of השתדלות and the מדת הבטחון. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter famously says that Yosef erred by doing השתדלות, as he was on the same level as Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai for whom השתדלות was unnecessary and therefore a sin. The Chazon Ish takes a different approach that the problem was that Yosef's effort was inappropriate and silly, as it was very unlikely that the שר המשקים remembering and mentioning him to פרעה would amount to anything. Some people say the issue was with the wording that Yosef used, implying that the שר המשקים had the power and it was not from Hashem. Whichever way you interpret this story, it is clear that the מדת הבטחון is a complex topic which requires further and deeper analysis.

It is well known that the Ramban says that anyone who has Bitachon must have Emunah, but not everyone who has Emunah has Bitachon, because maybe they sinned. Now this interference with Bitachon is very sensible, as a person may find it difficult to emotionally feel 100% confident that his request won't be disappointed, if intellectually he feels undeserving. We would assume that while fear of being undeserving might prevent a person from feeling fully confident in the outcome, he would still be able to achieve the lower level of hope-קיווי that he will get what he wants.

However, the Sefer Haikkarim tells us that even the level of hope is impacted by the concern that one is undeserving. He writes, "Hope is something that is necessary for a believer in order to draw Chesed upon him. As the Pasuk says, 'Hashem is good to those who hope'....Hope is approached in three ways: One is hoping for Chesed, that Hashem will save you completely out of His Chesed, and not based on being deserving at all....Hoping out of Chesed is the most praiseworthy, however he is not fully confident that he will receive his request, due to thinking that he is not on the level that Hashem will do free Chesed for him. This results in him not properly hoping, because if he was properly hoping, Hashem's Chesed would not have been held back. Hashem constantly wants to give to one who properly hopes, as the Pasuk says 'Hashem desires those that fear him, and those that put their hope in

the Chesed Hashem.' It is clear that Chesed is only held back because he is not properly hoping in Hashem."

This Sefer Haikkarim shows us that a person who feels undeserving can't even maintain this level of hope as a result of his thought process that he is undeserving of a free Chesed. However, he can overcome this challenging thought and maintain his hope by focusing on the fact that Hashem wants to do Chesed to those who hope in Him. Through maintaining his hope in Hashem, he will receive Hashem's Chesed.

We can glean an important insight from this Sefer Haikkarim. Generally, we are under the impression that influencing the result, and getting what we want is based on reaching a level of Bitachon where one is 100% confident.

This thought is very discouraging for many people as they feel that this Madreigah is out of their reach. However we see from the Sefer Haikkarim that even in the lower level of hope, one will not be let down as long as they maintain their hope, and don't give up. This is a level that is more relatable and most people can reach.

Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky once said over the following story about a couple. The husband was learning and the wife ran a business. The wife went to go buy merchandise in Kovno, and took a huge portion of their money in a wallet. While there, she lost the money and she was very distraught. Luckily, a Jew had found it, and eventually she located it and gave a Siman.

Shockingly, the Jew refused to give it to her citing the Halacha that in a city that is mostly non-Jews, we assume there was 'אוש, and the one who found it can keep it. The woman felt that the only way her husband would accept this situation was if that was the Psak of the Rav. They went to Reb Yitzchak Elchonon Spector, and he told the person to give her back the money. He explained that the wives 'אוש was irrelevant as the money really belongs to her husband, and he was unaware that it was lost, so it was 'אוש שלא מדעת.

Rav Galinsky then paused and screamed, "When we are hoping in Hashem, how can we be 'מייאש? We are not the owners of the world, Hashem is the one in charge! Hashem is the only one who can be 'מייאש!"

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Shir Hashirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

"I was asleep, but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one (Medrash – my twin)!'” (Shir HaShirim 5:2).

Throughout Shir HaShirim, we see Hashem’s boundless, infinite love for Klal Yisroel regardless of their spiritual state. This unconditional love is often compared to the love of a parent for their child—a love that persists despite the child’s flaws. However, Chazal reveal a deeper reason for Hashem’s love in the following teaching:

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 20) states: There are four central desires in this world: 1. The desire of a wife is solely for her husband. 2. The desire of the Yetzer Hara is solely for Kayin and those like him. 3. The desire of rain is solely for the earth. 4. And the desire of Hashem is solely for Klal Yisroel.

The Maharal (in Derush L’Shabbos HaGadol) explains this teaching: Like attracts like. The Yetzer Hara, being evil, desires those who are wicked, for evil clings to evil. Similarly, Hashem, who is the essence of goodness, desires Klal Yisroel, for they are inherently good. Good is naturally drawn to good.

How profoundly comforting are these words for every Jew! The infinite love of the Creator for every individual Jew, as expressed in Shir HaShirim, is not just the unconditional love of a parent for a child. It is the natural attraction of that which is similar to each other. Imagine: Hashem Himself overflows with love for even the most rebellious Jew—not just because “a son is always a son,” but because deep down, that rebellious Jew is a reflection of goodness. This inner goodness draws Hashem, the ultimate source of good, to them.

Next time we are tempted to look down on a rebellious Jew, let us remember how Hashem views them. He looks at them and says, as in the opening Pasuk: “My twin!”



Emunah Highlights

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The chief cupbearer did not remember Yosef; he forgot him. Because Yosef placed his trust in the cupbearer to advocate for him, he remained in prison for two additional years. This aligns with the verse: “Praiseworthy is the man who makes Hashem his trust and does not turn to the arrogant” (**Bereishis 40:23** with Rashi).

The Medrash highlights Yosef as the prime example of a bote’ach b’Hashem: “Happy is the man who makes Hashem his trust—this refers to Yosef—and does not turn to the arrogant - as a result of his request to the cupbearer, ‘Remember me and mention me,’ two years were added to his imprisonment” (Tehillim 40:5; Bereishis Rabbah 89:3).

Despite his prolonged suffering—being separated from his father, thrown into a pit, sold to a foreign land, and jailed for a crime he did not commit—Yosef never lost his extraordinary trust in Hashem.

This raises a question: If Yosef was punished for a lack of bitachon, why does the Midrash praise him as “the man who makes Hashem his trust”?

Rabbeinu Bachya resolves this apparent contradiction. Yosef indeed placed his trust solely in Hashem. However, he sought to use natural means, asking the cupbearer to advocate for him as part of Hashem’s plan for his salvation. For an average person, this would be considered an appropriate hishtadlus. However, given Yosef’s exceptionally high spiritual level, even this action was deemed a slight deficiency in bitachon.

Thus, the Midrash remains consistent. Yosef was a model of complete trust in Hashem - “the man who makes Hashem his trust.” However, on his elevated level, he fell short in the additional expectation to avoid turning to any intermediary, even as part of the natural process of salvation.