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## **An Easy and Clean Trade: Parnassah Without Excessive Toil**

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**Choosing a Trade That Doesn't Affect Our Serenity and  
Peace of Mind**

### ***The Ba'al Bitachon Doesn't Toil Excessively***

The *Chovos HaLevavos* outlines yet another incredible benefit of having *bitachon*—on a practical, material level. A person's life will simply be easier and more pleasant:

His *nefesh* will have peace from difficult work and from labor that tires out the body—the *ba'al bitachon* will be able to work for his *parnassah* with *menuchas hanefesh* and serenity of the body, without having to work overly hard at labor that tires him out.

He can abandon the “work of kings” and their laws—the *ba'al bitachon* will not need to work for the king (in those days, working for the government paid better, but the work was very difficult).

### **The Notion That One Must Work Mighty Hard**

Often, we can hear people say, “It's a little crazy to work this hard, but at the end of the day, it pays off. I'm able to make the bills for the month. I may work both day and night... I barely have time for my family... but what are my options? Should I go into debt?! I've got no *koach* to live like that. I can't live boxed in. I'm prepared to work very hard so that I come home with a nice paycheck at the end of the month.”

Says the *Chovos HaLevavos* to this person: You're confusing two things! There's no reason whatsoever to take on work that depletes your body in such a way! I know what you're feeling; you believe that in order to earn more, you must work harder. But if you're a *ba'al bitachon*, you won't need to choose work which robs you of your serenity of the body and soul!

## Work That Leaves Room for the Heart

**And one who trusts in Hashem searches for work that provides serenity for his soul as well as a good name**—the *ba'al bitachon* will only take on work that won't rob him of his *menuchas hanefesh*, and that will leave his good name intact. The *mefarshim* explain that there are certain occupations that rob a person of his good name, as they cast aspersions on the person (see Gemara *Kiddushin* 82a). The *ba'al bitachon* doesn't go anywhere near such vocations. He chooses only work that will bring him a good name.

**[The *ba'al bitachon* will also choose only the type of work that provides him with] a clear and open heart**—the *ba'al bitachon* will take on only work that enables his heart to be clear, uncluttered, and unburdened. His heart will remain open to learning and davening, to spending quality time with his family, and to raising his children properly.

**[He will also choose work that] leaves him with ample time for Torah study**—the *ba'al bitachon* will never take on work that interferes with his *avodas Hashem*.

## Work Doesn't Bring Money

But, one will say, the work that I chose is quite lackluster—maybe it doesn't even count as *hishtadlus*?! Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: The *ba'al bitachon* knows with clarity that it isn't the *vehicle*—the actual work he engages in—that increases or decreases his *shefa*. This [the precise amount of money that he earns] is dictated by the decree of the Ribbono shel Olam alone.

**As the *pasuk* says,** *כי לא ממוצא וממערב ולא ממדבר הרים כי אלוקים שופט זה*

ישראל, *for neither from sunrise nor from sunset, nor from the wilderness comes greatness; for G-d is the Judge; He lowers this one and raises that one (Tehillim 75:7-8).* Even by traveling to the east or to the west, a person will never earn more than is intended for him—*parnassah* has nothing to do with which livelihood you chose. **Only the Ribbono shel Olam raises or lowers a person.**

The *pasuk* also states, בנאות דשא ירביצני על מי מנוחות ינהלני, *in lush meadows He lays me down, beside tranquil waters He leads me (Tehillim 23:2).* The *ba'al bitachon* feels serene and that he has been provided with the best situation: he sees no reason to exert himself excessively at his work.

### One Must Work Diligently, Not Mightily

We must study this piece of *Chovos HaLevavos* closely, because people tend to become confused regarding these matters. Some may think that if they don't take on hard work, they haven't done adequate *hishtadlus*. One may say that he, *baruch Hashem*, has a large family—and it costs lots of money every month. He must work very hard to cover his bills.

The *Chovos HaLevavos*, however, guides us in a different path: First, ascertain whether you're working properly during the hours that you're at work. Verify that you're not wasting work time. If you see that you're still unable to make it, then you must invest elsewhere: You must **toil in your *emunah* and *bitachon*, not in the *sugya* of hard work.** *Parnassah* was never meant to come through terrible tribulations. This is not how the Ribbono shel Olam designed the world.

**We're Created for Toil in Torah: Invest in *Emunah* and *Bitachon***

### What Happened to “By the Sweat of Your Brow”?

When we learn these words—that a person can calmly and serenely search for work that doesn't tire him out very much—the question arises

es: How do we reconcile this with the *pasuk* אדם לעמל יולד, *man was created to toil* (Iyov 5:7)?! We also know the *pasuk* בזיעת אפך תאכל לחם, *by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread* (Bereishis 3:19)?!

Indeed, when people see someone struggling with his *parnassah*, their instinctive reaction is to conclude that he isn't working hard enough or correctly enough... he must invest more into his work!

And in truth, this is a sensitive topic. For in *sefarim* we learn about the evils of laziness, and how one who isn't prepared to work will indeed not have *parnassah*. Laziness is a contradiction to *bitachon*!! – for the *ba'al bitachon* carries out *ratzon Hashem*, which is to work for a living. The *ba'al bitachon* does proper *hishtadlus*, he doesn't sit idly, with one foot on the other, expecting *parnassah* to fall from the Heavens. So how does this conform with what we have been learning here?

## Work Hard, But Work Right

*Pas Lechem* (a commentary on the *Chovos HaLevavos*) addresses this very concern as follows:

He explains that the *Chovos HaLevavos* didn't instruct us to take only easy work, so we can sit and relax.... On the contrary, we must work *very* hard! But **instead of working so hard for our livelihood, we must channel our hard work to working on our hearts and minds!** Work so that your "*Chovos HaLevavos*" are pure and properly predicated, with a clear and pure *emunah*.

We have indeed come to This World to toil. But why should we work so hard at things that are fleeting and passing... isn't it so much better to invest our toil in something lasting and eternal—our *avodas Hashem*?!

This is the great gain of the *ba'al bitachon*. Instead of needing to work *physically* hard, he can work serenely and calmly, leaving ample room in his heart and mind. All his toil can be invested in his *avodas Hashem*, his *emunah*, and his *bitachon*.



## Without *Emunah*, Life Is Doubly Difficult

One may ask, if we must toil in any case—either at work or in our *emunah* and *bitachon*—why does the *Chovos HaLevavos* consider *bitachon* a practical and material *gain* of the *ba'al bitachon*? Either way, it is our fate to work hard!

The answer is simple. When a person works hard physically, so that he doesn't have the time or energy to work on the *emunah* in his heart, his life is doubly difficult: **First, his life is difficult in a material sense; he works long hours, day and night.** It's already nine o'clock at night, and he'll still be in the office until 11:45 because he needs to finish up.... And when it's the end of the day or the end of the month, he completely overworks... chasing his own tail, all to catch up on work.

Second, in addition to this, he has added difficulty, because **he doesn't give himself the time and space to develop the *emunah* in his heart;** to learn how to live a pleasant life; to learn how to accept things properly, and to learn to believe that everything is for the good.

## The Error of Focusing on the Wrong Toil

This person loses out on two fronts. One, **his work itself is difficult.** And **two, every challenge that comes his way brings him aggravation,** because he hasn't learned how to deal with things properly. If someone owes him money and hasn't paid up, he eats himself up with *agmas nefesh*.

Every time something unpleasant happens to him, whether with money or with other things, he thinks: **How can this be?! We know that אין בריתוֹת עם בשרוֹנִיָּא**, *Hashem doesn't give a person a nisayon that he cannot overcome.* Why am I being given such difficult challenges? The truth is that yes, the Ribbono shel Olam only gives us challenges that we can overcome, but *you could have prepared yourself for this moment!* You could have worked out the *emunah* in your heart and overcome this challenge in *minutes*, moving on with a smile!

Says the *Chovos HaLevavos* to us: **It's a shame. Why did you have to**

**engage in such toil, not leaving room for your heart and your *emunah* development?** Choose work that leaves room in your heart and mind, so you can fill them with more *emunah*, and thus you will be prepared to take on life's challenges with *emunah* and serenity.

### Preparing Spiritually for a Yom Tov

Leaving room in our hearts and minds for *emunah* and *avodas Hashem* means that a person will have the time to meditate and prepare for an upcoming Yom Tov. One busy worker may say to his colleague, "How do you have the time and headspace to prepare for a Yom Tov by learning *Chassidishe sefarim*? As a *bachur*, I was able to do it. But today, I am so busy! I don't have a minute to learn such things."

Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: It's a shame! **You should have thought about this before choosing this job!** You could, and should, have taken work that leaves you room to immerse yourself in *sefarim hakedoshim* before a Yom Tov—to prepare for a Yom Tov, to learn about what the Yom Tov is teaching us, and to draw *chiyus* from the Yom Tov for the weeks and months to come....

The joy of Purim will accompany you for a longer period of time, the aura of the *Seder* night will remain with you until deep into *Chodesh Iyar*—because you had the time to prepare. The *heilige sefarim* illuminated for you the way to view so many aspects of your life in a proper light. You won't need to run around mindlessly due to your work.

### Toiling Hashem's Toil

So, when the *Chovos HaLevavos* tells us that we can enjoy serene work, that doesn't contradict the *pesukim* that indicate a person *must* toil. **For the more a person will toil on Hashem's toil—working on his *bitachon*—he will need to toil less for his *parnassah*.** He will fulfill the **אדם יודל לעמל יולד** in his *ruchniyus*!

Chazal have already told us (*Sanhedrin* 99b) that this *pasuk* refers to a toil of the lips—the toil of Torah. We can certainly fulfill our need to toil by working on our Torah and *tefillah*. Similarly, we can fulfill the

decree of *לחם תאכל* אפך בזיעת אפך through our sweat on Torah, as the *pasuk* tell *לחמו בלחמי* *su, come and partake of My food (Mishlei 9:5) – lechem* can refer to Torah.

So, if one wishes to have a pleasant life *b'gashmiyus*, **he should work on himself constantly so that his toil is properly placed.** If you will toil on your Torah and your *emunah*, you will be *yotzei* your need for toil. You will see clearly that your *parnassah* will come to you with serenity, and everything will fall into place.

### ***Parnassah Is Unconnected to How Difficult One's Work Is***

#### **“Light Work” Is Just Fine**

We find a great *yesod* related to this entire *sugya* of working hard for *parnassah* in the Mishnah (*Kiddushin* 82a): **Rabbi Meir said, one should always teach his son a trade that is easy and clean.**

These words of the Gemara are the basis for the *Chovos HaLevavos* that we're learning here. Rabbi Meir has said that one may choose an *אומנות קלה ונקיה*, *a trade that is easy and clean*, and we can rely on the great Tanna and choose such work. **We wouldn't be considered lazy in choosing such work; this is indeed the proper *hishtadlus*.**

Of course, it doesn't mean that we can work for two or three hours a day, and it doesn't say that we can slack off in our work. **The first thing is that a person must work along normal lines, according to accepted norms.** But when it comes to the *type* of work, it doesn't need to be back-breaking work that depletes the person of his energy and headspace.

#### **Everything Goes According to Merit**

The Mishnah continues: And **one should daven to the One to Whom wealth and assets belong, for there isn't a trade that doesn't have poor people and wealthy people in it, and neither does poverty result from a trade nor is wealth derived from a trade: everything goes according**

**to one's merits.** We must repeat and reiterate this: Every job that you will find has both poor people and wealthy people working in it! **Wealth and poverty have nothing to do with which trade you choose.**

Every job that we take, so long as it is called a job, is considered adequate *hishtadlus*. One must only do the job with dedication. **He must ensure that he is loyal and devoted to the job; he comes on time and does the work with dedication.** If he sees that he has many hours left in his day, perhaps he should take another side *קלה ונקיה* to supplement his income—all within the normal, accepted parameters of *hishtadlus*.

The Mishnah tells us clearly that the degree of your financial success has nothing to do with which job you have chosen.

### Every Trade Produces Successful People

We see this clearly when we analyze the various jobs that exist; one person earns very nicely in this field, and the next person in this field is poor, *R"l*. This *rebbe* happens to have gotten a nice position in the field of *chinuch*; a wealthy father happened to have asked him to learn privately with his son and he pays him very nicely every month; or his wife happens to have a nice side income that gives him a monthly surplus... and the next person barely makes the month on his *rebbe's* salary.

Says the Mishnah: **Believe that *parnassah* is from Hashem, and you will have a happy and pleasant life!** Look around and see that every trade has successful and unsuccessful people. It's obviously not the trade itself that dictates success.

You must choose only an *קלה ונקיה* that leaves you with the capacity for your heart to serve Hashem. **When you have the capacity and space in your heart, you will better be able to daven** למי שהעושר שלו, *to the One to Whom all wealth belongs*. For if you choose work that drains you of all your time and strength, even if you will squeeze in a *tefillah* here and a *segulah* there... **you won't have the capacity and space in your heart, because you're so overloaded.** Choose a livelihood that *does* leave room in your heart, and **this space will allow you to daven** למי שהעושר שלו, **and you will indeed see success!**

## You Can Become Wealthy from Easy Work Just the Same

The Maharsha on the above-mentioned Gemara explains:

**One should not choose heavy work that will deem his Torah secondary to his job—no, don't go there—rather he should occupy himself with a clean and easy work that will enable him to make his Torah permanent and his work transient, as we learn in *Berachos*.**

**One should daven to the One to Whom all wealth belongs that he should become wealthy from easy and transient work, for we have seen that there is no vocation that doesn't have both wealthy and poor people in it... and one can become wealthy from light work just as he can become wealthy from difficult and permanent work—it all depends on his merits.**

Some workaholics say: You should be *thanking me* for coming home at all! I could really stay at work for 24 hours... I work *only* 12-14 hours a day!

This thinking comes from lack of *emunah*. The Mishnah points to facts that we see every day: There are people who have become wealthy while engaging in easy work. It has nothing to do with which work you choose.

### *Hishtadlus* Shouldn't Deplete You

The *Sefer No'am Elimelech* teaches us similarly (*Parashas Beshalach*), that the entire *Parashas HaMahn* is here to teach us that the Ribbono shel Olam is always ready to sustain every person. Yes, since the sin of Adam HaRishon, we are cursed that we must work, we must make efforts in *parnassah*, **but the requirement for *hishtadlus* was not designed to knock a person out of his equilibrium.** When we study the lessons of *Parashas HaMahn*, we learn not to make the mistake of giving ourselves away entirely to *parnassah*. **The order of creation was simply not designed in such a way.**

## Animals and Birds Attain Sustenance Effortlessly

Further along in that Mishnah we learn: **Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said, “Have you ever seen an animal or a bird that has a trade?! They’re sustained painlessly! If they, who were only created to serve man, are sustained in this way, shouldn’t I, who was created to serve my Creator, *certainly* be sustained in the same way?! It must be that I soured my ways and thus forfeited my sustenance.”**

When we learn this Mishnah properly, we see a tremendous *yesod*: You think you have to work so hard for your livelihood? Look around you! All of Hashem’s creations don’t have to exert themselves so much for their sustenance.

But what happens?! **If a person doesn’t behave properly**—he doesn’t have adequate *bitachon*; he does too much *hishtadlus* instead of relying on the Ribbono shel Olam—he **won’t receive his *parnassah* in an easy manner**, and the punishment of *בזיעת אפך תאכל לחם* applies to him even more strongly.

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* exhorts us *not* to be among those people. **There’s no virtue in being among the people who aren’t *ba’alei bitachon* and thus must work so much harder.** The more *bitachon* you will have, the closer your *parnassah* will be, just like that of all the other creations of the world which attain their sustenance in an easy manner.

## The Poor Mustn’t Suffer

Rav Shalom of Shotz would make a reckoning of every penny that he had earned that year and take off a tenth for *ma’aser*. But if he earned less one year, he *still* gave the same amount as the previous year. And he would explain, **“Why must the poor suffer if I didn’t behave properly?”**

This *tzaddik* believed with clarity that the sole reason why he earned less was due to his own actions. If so, why must the poor pay the price?

## The World Wasn't Designed for Us to Be Overwhelmed

It is this very principle that we're learning in the *Chovos HaLevavos*, and this is built upon the Mishnah in *Kiddushin*: A person should choose simple and clean work, and he should invest his toil into *bitachon* and *tefillah*. That is where he should invest his work!

He implores us: Why would you tell yourself that the Ribbono shel Olam wants you to be constantly overwhelmed with work—and yet think that this falls under “*hishtadlus*.” It cannot be that the Ribbono shel Olam wants us to be this burdened... so that we only realize that it's Yom Tov when we're in middle of Yom Tov already, and we quickly look into a pamphlet for a *devar Torah*... **it cannot be that the Ribbono shel Olam created the world in such a way!** Learn the Mishnah. Have *emunah*. And you will see that things will improve.

### Less Work, Same Money

A *yungerman* related that until last year, he would invest *sixteen* hours a day into his business. At the beginning of this year, he had an awakening, and he decided to take a step back and instead help people in their lives.... With time, he stepped even further back from his work, and he invested *more* of his time into helping people.

This *yungerman* attested that he now gives *eight* hours a day to others, and the Ribbono shel Olam sends him a *shefa* from here and from there. **“I earn the precise amount of money as before, when I would tear myself apart for my work,”** he said.

If people were to make such a change—in a healthy and proper manner—they, too, would see it in their lives. Obviously, this shouldn't be done lightly, and it shouldn't be done out of laziness, but with true *emunah* and *bitachon*, and then we will see clearly that the Ribbono shel Olam provides for every single *Yid*.



יומא דהילולא  
הרה"ק בעל נועם אלימלך  
כ"א אדר

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## ***Teshuvah* in the Tradition and Teachings of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech**

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### **Rectifying Deeds of the Past**

#### **Opening the Gates of *Teshuvah***

In the *sefer Ma'or VaShemesh* (Rus) it is brought:

In the generations that came before the Baal Shem Tov, although they engaged in Torah and *avodas Hashem*, nevertheless, people did not engage in rectifying their past deeds until they reached old age. They weren't aware of the greatness of *teshuvah*, and the depths to which it can reach—until a holy angel descended from Heaven; he was the Baal Shem Tov, and after him came the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, and they opened the gates to Hashem, revealing that it is best to do *teshuvah* in one's youth.

“For a person is obligated to rectify that which he damaged—even in previous incarnations, and certainly in his youth. And in the days of these tzaddikim, there began an awakening in *teshuvah*—and through their constant engagement in a high level of *teshuvah*, they brought down a spirit from the world of *teshuvah* for the entire world.

#### **How Can a Jewish Soul Sin?**

This is an incredibly important *yesod*, and it is well known that it was



one of the primary principles of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, who spent his entire life engaged in *teshuvah* in extraordinary ways. It is worthwhile to study the idea and, we hope, apply it to our lives.

In his *sefer Divrei Chaim* (Parashas Shuvah and Parashas Ki Savo), the Sanzer Rav writes, “I heard from my master and teacher, the Ropshitzer Rav, who repeated in the name of the holy and G-dly master and teacher Rebbe Elimelech, that **one must do teshuvah until his first aveirah**—as will be explained:

For truly, **the soul of a Yid is incapable of sinning** (although it is housed in a *guf*, it nevertheless strives for higher), as the *Zohar HaKadosh* tells us on the *pasuk* **נִפְשׁ כִּי תַחֲטֶא**, *if a soul will sin*. These words must be read in a tone of disbelief: *A Jewish soul will sin?! How is this possible? How does it come to such a thing?*

### *Teshuvah for the “First Sin”*

It must be that this person performed a lighter *aveirah*, and from there, he reached a more severe one. But even so the question arises: How can a *Yiddishe neshamah* do even a *small aveirah*? How did he arrive at this to begin with? Therefore, **one must make a reckoning and an accounting of his deeds—until he finds that extremely light transgression that barely falls into the category of error**. For it is possible that a *Yid* would err in such a way—**כִּי אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ**, *there is after all no tzaddik who does not sin at all*—and this *Yid* didn’t repent for it and left it as it was, and this brought after it more and more severe *aveiros*... until he reached where he reached...

Continues the *Divrei Chaim*: They say regarding the Rebbe Reb Elimelech that he did *teshuvah* and burned his own hands for the sin of having struck his mother as she fed him in his infancy. While none of us are on that *madreigah*, every *Yid* must still dig down and do *teshuvah* until his very beginning.

Thus, we see a tremendous *yesod*: **If a person doesn’t rectify his blemishes—even small ones—they remain within him, and they bring**

**along more and bigger blemishes...** eventually bringing a person to terrible and severe *aveiros*, R"l.

## Holy Hands

Regarding the *teshuvah* of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech for what he did in his infancy, there is a story that accompanies it: It is known that when the Rebbe would give *berachos* to women, he placed his holy hands upon their heads—and there were other tzaddikim who imitated him. But the Shinever Rav came out very sharply against them, saying that only someone of the caliber of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech may do so.

Why is this? “We have a tradition,” said the Shinever Rav, “that once, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech saw a young child striking his mother, and he recoiled, screaming, *מכה אביו ואמו!* But the mother sought to calm him. ‘This is the way of the world,’ she said. ‘When the Rebbe was a child, he surely did the same thing.’”

Hearing this, the Rebbe decided that he must do *teshuvah* on this “*aveirah*.” He explained that all sins stem from that first *aveirah* that a person transgressed, and when a person rectifies that *aveirah*, he will no longer sin. And so, the Rebbe went and burned his hands as a atonement for this. But *Min HaShamayim*, his hands miraculously completely healed.

Said the Shinever Rav, “Such hands, which are entirely spiritual... such hands may be placed on the heads of the women. Anyone not on this level—even if he is a *צדיק יסוד עולם*—cannot allow himself to do so.”

## A New Being

The Tiferes Shlomo cites a Midrash which states that the Ribbono shel Olam absolved Avraham Avinu from the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim* entirely. The reason for this, explains the Tiferes Shlomo, is that due to his lofty level of holiness, every trace of his parents was removed from him. For this reason, Avraham Avinu had to endure the *nisayon* of *אור כשדים*—to remove every vestige of that parental influence, transforming him into a recreated being.

This is what is meant when we say והוצאתו מאור כשדים—that through אור כשדים, every vestige of his parental influence was taken out of him. Thus, there was no reason for him to accord his parents any honor, as they were no longer a part of him.

Similarly, not only were the *hands* of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech transformed; his *entire body* became reborn through his great *avodah* of fasting and penance. As the son of Rebbe would say, “I heard numerous times the way my father would say to his students; ‘*halevai* that you would succeed in purifying your *souls* to the level of the holiness of my *body*.”

## The Root of Bad Habits

Getting back to the *yesod*—it is a principle in *teshuvah* that can help us, even the simple ones among us. This is why the Rebbe himself wrote about this in *Parashas Shoftim* and elsewhere, and his *talmidim* cite it in his name as well: **When a person struggles with a negative habit, he often tries to battle that habit without success.** He is unable to change his personality, his essence. He has already accepted upon himself—with all his strength—to change his habit, to no avail. *Something* is standing in the way of uprooting this habit.

Says the Rebbe: We’re accustomed to thinking that a bad habit is just that, a bad habit. A person would like to stop speaking *lashon hara*, but he finds it difficult. He feels compelled to be the life of the party... to constantly supply new gossip to his friends. Or a person is accustomed to getting up late or allowing his eyes to wander where they shouldn’t, and so forth. **He thinks that it’s a local problem—but the truth is, the Rebbe reveals to us, that this is *not* the source of the issue.**

## Don’t Fear the Horses

In *Parashas Shoftim* we learn, כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך וראית סוס ורכב עם, *When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot—a people more numerous than you—you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d, is with you Who brought you up from the land of Egypt (Devarim 20:1).*

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* suggests that this battle refers to the battle with our ultimate enemy, the *yetzer hara*. In this battle, there are two difficulties that weaken a person's position, he says. The first problem is that **the person isn't as adept in this war as his adversary, the *yetzer hara*, is.** The second issue is that **the person is naturally drawn to so much of what the *yetzer hara* wishes him to do** regarding dishonesty, haughtiness, and eating everything that his heart desires—all these things prevent the person from adhering properly to Torah and mitzvos.

**All the more so if a person has already fallen prey to *aveiros* in the past, *R"l*—this increases the power of evil within him, and prevents him from fighting effectively.**

### Hashem Is With You

For this reason, the Torah encourages a person and says: If you go out to battle and you see **a horse**—the *yetzer hara* who is much stronger than you; and you will see **a רכב, *a chariot***—רכב can also be understood as the constitution of the person which is drawn to *ta'avos*; and you will see **a people more numerous than you**—which refers to the bad things that a person has already accumulated, *R"l*, which draw him to further evil, nevertheless, says the Torah, do not be afraid—for Hashem is with you.

It is true that if a person were to go into this battle relying on his own strength and abilities, there is no way he could prevail. But since Hashem is with you, His power is great to shield you. For when a person comes to purify himself, the Ribbono shel Olam's right Hand accepts him, and he becomes connected to Hashem, Who will bring his enemies to their knees.

The *pasuk* concludes with the words *המעלך מארץ מצרים, I am Hashem Who brought you up from the land of Egypt*—the ultimate sign that the Ribbono shel Olam shatters the *kelipah*, which lies at the heart of the exodus from Mitzrayim. This sign is meant to strengthen us as we embark on the battle with the ultimate evil.

## The Root of All Evil

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* is revealing a secret: **When a person sees that he struggles with a certain habit, and he finds it difficult to emerge from it, he should know that this is due to the powers of evil that have accumulated within him from prior *aveiros*.** It's not merely a matter of a habit having become ingrained in him due to repeated actions, or because he became addicted to it; there's a root to it—and the root is ככלב בו קשורה הזה בעולם אחת עבירה *העובר עבירה אחת בעולם הזה קשורה בו ככלב*, *one who transgresses even one aveirah in This World, that aveirah becomes tied to him like a dog (Sotah 3b)...* he cannot shake it off. This is the power of impurity. And when a person learns this secret, he comes closer to the solution.

The reason for this is simple: So long as a person thinks that it's simply a matter of a habit that he must uproot—using modes and methods that were developed by addiction experts—he will never find peace. One must understand that it is his *aveiros* dragging him down in all areas of his life—preventing him from advancing and growing.

### Past Aveiros Weigh a Person Down

#### Breaking Barriers

Every *aveirah* that a person does not only robs him of eternity, but it also lays waste to his every good attribute. It intervenes in his daily life, it disturbs his *shalom bayis*, it extinguishes his joy in life, it robs him of his *parnassah*, and so forth. **There's a long list of negative things that an *aveirah* does to a person—in addition to severing his connection to the Ribbono shel Olam, which is the worst calamity of all.** And this is true even for “lighter” *aveiros*, not only regarding more severe *aveiros*.

**And what is the root cause of these *aveiros*? The previous *aveiros* that a person did!** The Rebbe Reb Elimelech is revealing to us that even *aveiros* of our infancy—and even those that we did in a previous incarnation—have the effect of giving birth to a *kelipah*. It doesn't matter whether one can be punished for these *aveiros*; they remain with the person and they impact him.

The *Poskim* have already told us this principle regarding forbidden foods that a person eats in his youth (even before bar mitzvah). Although he isn't punished for these *aveiros*, they nevertheless have a long-term effect on the person.

All of this isn't meant to make *Yiddishkeit* harder for us or to discourage us; to the contrary—**we are introducing a great light as taught to us by the Rebbe Reb Elimelech**, who is exhorting us not to give up! Why are you in despair? Because you tried one hundred times, and you continue to hit a brick wall. **This is because you're approaching it the wrong way!** There's unfinished business that you must take care of!

**The concept of עבירה גוררת עבירה, one aveirah brings another, is real!** It's at the heart of the battle between good and evil, the holy and the impure. A person must uproot this evil within him—and if he does so, he will see that he will get very far in his personal battle.

### Rectifying the Past

Supporting this point is the teaching from the tzaddikim of the Belzer dynasty who taught that when a person repents for the early *aveiros* in his life, **the Ribbono shel Olam doesn't only forgive those sins, but He helps him uproot bad habits.** This underscores our point that bad habits are rooted in old *aveiros*.

And so, often a person will say, "I have done *teshuvah*, I regretted my past actions, and still, my bad habits remain with me." One of the answers to this is what we're learning here from the Rebbe—a person doesn't realize that he must go deep, to the root of the matter, and deal with it. **This person regretted his past and resolved for the future, but he didn't understand that there are still herds of מלאכי חבלה who were brought into being through his past actions... and they haven't yet been dealt with.**

### The Fourth Pillar of *Teshuvah*

*Teshuvah* is comprised of numerous aspects: regret, confession, and

resolving for the future. But **there is another aspect: understanding and appreciating what has been wrought through his past deeds**—*kelipos*, *kochos hatumah*, and evil angels, all of whom were created through his *aveiros*, creating a black stain upon his *neshamah*. And so, even though he has engaged in the first three aspects of *teshuvah*—and can thus be considered a **ידיד ה'** whose *tefillos* are accepted—he must know that these blemishes are still here, and **only when he uproots them will his bad habits go away.**

The idea that it's even possible to uproot these *kelipos* of long ago is extremely novel and unique. **HaKadosh Baruch Hu has given us not only a mitzvah of *teshuvah*, but also a gift of *teshuvah*! A light of *teshuvah* through which we can uproot all the blemishes.** And when the blemishes go away, everything is filled with light.

The person becomes purer, more refined, and transformed into a new person. And then he comes to understand how his sins became transformed into positives: because **he hasn't only resolved for the future; he has positively uprooted everything that was in the past, becoming pure and clean.**

### Purified Through Penance

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech was known for his meticulous *cheshbon hanefesh*, his accounting of every action and deed. But in addition to this, the Rebbe was also known for his **סיגופים**, *penances* and self-punishment that he performed regularly. He famously went into exile along with his brother, Rebbe Zusia, and he fasted frequently over a period of twenty-one years—seven years for his own rectification, seven years for the sins of his generation, and another seven years for the rectification of future generations. These were in addition to numerous other **סיגופים** that he performed.

These actions were taken to remove any blemish so he would remain clean and pure. He testified that he had purified his *neshamah* to such an extent that he delivered it to the *Kisei HaKavod*! We're talking about lofty levels the likes of which were not heard of in any generation. The Rebbe

engaged in this because he saw it as his mission—for *his* generation and for the *future* generations.

At the same time, it was the Rebbe Reb Elimelech who warned that our generations are not capable of performing such things, because it would weaken our *avodas Hashem*. But this doesn't mean that we're absolved from repairing and rectifying our blemishes of past sins. To the contrary, the tzaddikim have indicated to us easier paths by which we can accomplish these *tikkunim*, and if we properly engage in them, new windows and vistas will be opened before us.

### Awareness of Our Trauma

And so, let us talk *l'maiseh*. There are several stages that a person must go through in the arena of *teshuvah*, as the tzaddikim explained to us. The first one: To be aware of these blemishes. **One must know that his *neshamah* experienced trauma. It went through pain and aggravation, becoming blackened and blemished by this experience.** And although a person has taken steps to improve for the future, and he has come close to Hashem—he must know that his *neshamah* is still suffering from that trauma, and he must address the pain.

**A person must know the truth. He must know that *this* is what is holding him back in his *avodas Hashem*, and if he succeeds in dealing with the problem, new doors will be opened for him, and he will advance without limit.**

### Cleanse Me and Purify Me

The second step is *tefillah*. Every time a person wants to get *anywhere*, he must daven to Hashem—and all the more so when we're talking about the very lofty goal he wants to attain. **If so, one must daven especially fervently for the blemishes of his past to be removed.** Indeed, this is what we say in the *yehi ratzon* prior to the recitation of *Tehillim*: **To forgive our sins and transgressions... and to uproot the thistles and thorns that surround the Heavenly rose.**

We're asking the Ribbono shel Olam to restore the severed connec-



tion. **We're in need of תחיית המתים—but the Ribbono shel Olam is a מחיה**! **מתים** If He does so for the physical body—providing healing and rebirth to those who are ill—He will surely do so for the *neshamah* of a person who davens to Him for this. **The very fact that a person is aware of and acknowledges the fact that he needs healing and rebirth brings it about.** It doesn't happen on its own; one must daven hard for this. It's no different than any other need that the Ribbono shel Olam *wants* to give to us, but they're unable to come down unless a person understands that he is in need and davens for it.

### *Tefillah vs. Kelipah*

Just as we understand that grass will not grow from the soil without *tefillah*, and so too, any other *shefa* that needs to come to a person will not come without asking for it—so too, we must understand that the *kelipos* and thorns will not be removed from the *neshamah* unless we plead with Hashem for this. The *kelipos* prevent the *neshamah* from retaining its glow—and the *tefillah* has the power to do battle with the *kelipah*. Thus, **when a person davens—especially when he recites chapters of Tehillim, which is a great segulah to tear out the thistles and thorns—he does much good for his *neshamah*.**

In this vein, the Baal Shem Tov and his holy *talmidim* explain the *pasuk* *ימלל גבורות ה' ישמע כל תהילתו* Hashem, [who] can make heard all of His praises (Tehillim 106:2) thusly: The word *ימלל* can also mean *to crumble*. One who wishes to crumble the *גבורות*—which refer to measures of Heavenly judgment that emanate from the *kelipah*—should *make heard the praises of Hashem*. This is the greatest antidote against *kelipos* and the judgements that emanate from them.

We must understand that the *kelipos* rob us of our *shefa*, not allowing it to reach us. We see that David HaMelech himself davened for this: *אילותי לעזרתי חושה*, O my Strength, hasten to my assistance (Tehillim 22:20). Help me! Erase my *טהרני מעוונתי ומחטאתי* *טהרני מעוונתי ומחטאתי*, abundantly cleanse me from my iniquity, and from my sin purify me (Tehillim 51:4).

These *tefillas*, words, letters, and *sheimos* all work very effectively on

the *neshamah* of a person—and a person *must* engage in this. The Rebbe Reb Elimelech is clearly teaching us this, again and again.

## Settling Old Debts

### We're All Debtors

Chazal teach us that a *ba'al teshuvah* must increase his Torah learning—and so we learn in the *Midrash (Parashas Kedoshim)*: If a person transgressed an *aveirah* and thus became liable for *מיתה בידי שמים*, *death at the Hands of Heaven*, what can he do if he wishes to live? If he was accustomed to learning one page of Torah, he should [increase this amount and] learn two. If he was wont to study *one* chapter, he should learn *two* chapters.

Because **part of the humility of the *ba'al aveirah* is to know that he is not like everyone else: He is different from those who aren't *ba'alei aveirah*.** A wealthy person can afford to spend on things that others would never *dream of*. Conversely, one who is deep in debt—although he would wish to spend on those things—simply cannot afford to do so. He knows that he must set aside money every month to repay his debts. If people were to see him spending on luxuries, they would be very upset with him. “A debtor has no right to spend on such things,” they would say.

### Settling Old Debts

We must understand that although we may be growing and elevating ourselves in our *avodas Hashem*, and everyone notices the great change that we're experiencing, **we still have old debts to resolve, accounts between us and our Creator that must be settled.** This person has no choice: in addition to his regular learning, he must add some more... another *daf*, another fifteen minutes, to rectify past blemishes.

We're talking here about a humble person, a person who understands the score. He says *Tehillim* while having in mind to settle his old debts—and he does other aspects of *avodas Hashem*, even those he must do in

any case, having in mind to address his transgressions of the past and cleanse himself from them.

It is especially helpful to do something difficult, as we quote often in the name of the Rebbe Reb Shmelka of Niklosburg: When a person wishes to close his *sefer* because he is already tired or itching to get to work—but he overcomes this urge and remains learning for a little while longer—**this wipes away** *דין ומיתות כרייתות*, *punishments of kareis and death at the hands of Beis Din that he may deserve*. **This person lives with the awareness that he can't do whatever he wants. The “debtors” are watching him.** His bank account is limited, and he must work every day to repay his debts.

### The Difficult Things

We're referring here to actions that may take just five minutes. The most important thing is the attitude, the approach. One who lives with the feeling that he is in debt, that he must repair, will get very far in his closeness to Hashem and his *deveikus b'Hashem*. It is a major *yesod* that gives the person firepower in his *avodas Hashem*. **He isn't merely learning another five minutes; he is cleaning up the blemishes of the past!** These blemishes hold the person back from advancing, not allowing him to flower and blossom—and by cleansing himself of these blemishes, there's no limit to what he can attain.

This is especially true when it is difficult—as mentioned in the name of the Rebbe Reb Shmelka. Difficult learning, difficult davening, difficult *tzedakah*.... *Tzedakah* hurts. A person debates whether or not to give.... He knows that he already gave *ma'aser*, and he already gave as much as a *fifth* of his earnings.... “But you know what?” he says... **“I will give in order to rectify the blemishes on my neshamah.”**

### Everything for Life

The Baal HaTanya rules that—although one is generally told not to give more than a fifth of his earnings to *tzedakah* (see *Kesubos* 50a)—if he does so for the *tikkun* of his *neshamah*, it is *encouraged*! For **“whatever a man has, he will give up for his life** (*Iyov* 2:4). A person says to

himself, “I have already given so much. I already decided not to give anymore....” But then a lightbulb goes off in his mind: **If it is so hard for me to give, I will *davka* give, expressly to cleanse old blemishes.**

A person may have spent decades failing in the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim*, he didn't honor his parents the way we are commanded to do. Now, he decides to begin adhering to this mitzvah, giving extraordinary honor and respect to his parents. Do you think that because you're behaving properly from now on, everything from the past is erased?! Not at all! This needs special rectification! And it is the same with all other mitzvos in the Torah.

### Rectification Through *Emunah*

We have spoken thus far about: 1. **The rectification of old blemishes.** 2. **To daven for this rectification**, and pour out one's heart, especially in reciting *Tehillim*, which is an especially effective tool for this. 3. **To improve and increase good deeds**; learning Torah, performing acts of kindness, etc. — all due to the recognition that one is in debt, and he must repay these debts, little by little.

Now we will introduce yet another tool in this arsenal. It has been revealed to us by great tzaddikim who taught that **what once required** תעניתים וסיגופים, *fasts and penances*, **can today be accomplished by strengthening our *emunah*** לית אתר פנוי מיניה, *there is no place devoid of Him* (especially when it is difficult; such as in interpersonal matters where we tend to think that it's *not* from Above, *chas v'shalom*).

### Light Chases Away the Darkness

When a person meditates on the Presence of the Ribbono shel Olam — despite the darkness and concealment that is all around us — he nullifies through this the *kelipos* and evil angels who draw their life from this darkness. **When a person coronates the Ribbono shel Olam over the entire world, these *mazikim* are left with no sustenance, and thus they vanish automatically.**

This is an incredible *yesod* from the tzaddikim, and it explains why

the tzaddikim invested so much in *emunah*, guiding and instructing their followers to do the same. If a person has an interpersonal dispute... a person upset him... things didn't go as he wished... this *Yid* will proclaim: **The Ribbono shel Olam orchestrated events this way; what is there to complain about?**

This isn't merely a matter of living a happier life and meriting *הבוטח* *יטובנו* *בה' חסד יסובנו*, *to be surrounded by Heavenly kindness on account of one's bitachon*—he will also succeed in nullifying the old blemishes of his past by shattering the *kelipah*, cutting off its sustenance—a true act of *מחיית עמלק* in every sense.

### Attachment to Tzaddikim

Yet another *eitzah* in rectifying blemishes of the past is to become connected to tzaddikim. The *Me'or Einayim* (Rus) writes that a person merits to do *teshuvah* through his *התקשרות*, *his connection and attachment* to tzaddikim. Similarly, it is brought in the *sefer She'eris Yisrael*<sup>1</sup>: **From the days of Rebbe Yisrael Baal Shem Tov and onward, the *tikkunim* take place not through fasts and penances, but through attachment to G-d-fearing Yidden.**

Why is this so? It is because when a person understands that there are blemishes on his *neshamah* which he must remove, he understands that he needs extra *siyata diShmaya* that *kedushah* should rest upon him and remove the forces of *tumah*. **And when a person attaches himself to true tzaddikim whose entire essence is *השראת השכינה*** (See *Bava Kamma* 50a), **for they are always submitted to Hashem and engaged in *teshuvah*, he receives inspiration and power from the tzaddik to remove these stains.**

### Connecting to the Rebbe Reb Elimelech

Indeed, every one of us can become connected with the *בעל ההילולא*, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, whose entire essence was constant repentance his entire life. **And one who connects to the Rebbe is likewise infused**

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1. Authored by Rebbe Yisroel Dov Ber of Vilednick (1789-1850).

**with this power of *teshuvah* and to remove the blemishes of the past.** In this vein, it is said that one who has been at the *tziyun* of the Rebbe in Lizensk will not depart This World without having done *teshuvah*; it has an incredible ability to cleanse the *neshamah*. Learning in the holy *sefer No'am Elimelech* is likewise a tremendous vehicle by which to become attached to the Rebbe.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz would say that simply reading the words of the *sefer*—even without understanding what one is reading—has the power to cleanse the *neshamah*, “for these are holy words that the tzaddik has drawn down to This World in order to purify *neshamos*.”

Rav Yeshayale of Kerestir would recite words from the *sefer No'am Elimelech* at his *tisch* without even explaining them. He would often say: **The holy words from the Rebbe Reb Elimelech themselves have the power to purify the *neshamah*.**

### On the Chofetz Chaim's Table

A *Yid* from Switzerland once came to Radin to visit the Chofetz Chaim, and he was astounded to see the *sefer No'am Elimelech* lying on the table. Seeing his surprise, the Chofetz Chaim said to him: **“I believe that if there's a *Yid* anywhere—in any corner of the earth—who has awakenings of *teshuvah*, it is in the merit of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, the author of this *sefer*.”** When the Belzer Rav heard of this, he expressed his surprise that a *Gadol* who was not among the followers of the *derech haBaal Shem Tov* nevertheless came to this realization.

### The Unstoppable Torrent of Tears

A *Yid* from Lugano, Switzerland, came to the Rachover Rebbe, who then resided in Switzerland, and unburdened his heart, informing the Rebbe that his son had left the path of *Yiddishkeit*. The Rebbe gave him the following suggestion: **Knowing that your son works as a taxi driver, suggest to him to drive me to the resting place of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech.** I promise not to discuss one word about *teshuvah* throughout the entire 12-hour trip.

Upon arriving in Lizensk, the Rachover Rebbe said to his driver: "As I will be reciting the entire *Tehillim* at the *tziyun*, why don't you come in and say *one kappitel*? The boy acquiesced and began to recite a *kappitel Tehillim*. In that moment, a torrent of tears began to flow, and he could not regain his composure for a long while.

He began the *teshuvah* process and went on to become a *talmid chacham* and *yerei Shamayim*, and he established a beautiful Torah home.

Indeed, there are countless stories of the *הרהורי תשובה* that came to people through their connection to the *בעל ההילולא*, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, whose life's mission was *teshuvah*.

A *Yid*, while on This World, must do everything to do proper *teshuvah*, revealing his *neshamah*, cleansing it and letting it shine. One of the ways is by connecting to the *tzaddikim*, especially the Rebbe Reb Elimelech.

זכותו יגן עלינו ועל כל ישראל אמן

