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An Ehrliche Yid Doesn't Have the Slightest Bit of Faith in the Wealthy

The Freedom of Not Relying on Others

Bitachon Gives Us a Serene Life

In the introduction to *Sha'ar HaBitachon*, the *Chovos HaLevavos* explains that a person who doesn't place his faith and trust in his money merits a sweet and pleasant life. He can always serve Hashem with serenity – without the issue of money getting in the way.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* writes: ולא יחמוד אדם בממונו, *and he will not be desirous of other people's money*. This is the plain understanding of these words; the *ba'al bitachon* won't be envious of other people's money, because he will be serene and content with what Hashem has given him.

The Ba'al Bitachon Is Independent from Others

However, the *Pas Lechem*, an early commentary on the *Chovos HaLevavos*, explains the ולא יחמוד אדם בממונו differently. Sometimes, a person wishes he could be friendly with another person or to be related to him. He isn't actually interested in being close to the other person; he simply wants proximity to his money.

Says the *Chovos HaLevavos*: The *ba'al bitachon* is free of all this. He doesn't go through these thoughts of wishing that he were close to this wealthy person... to have *protektzia* from this *askan*... **The ba'al bitachon lives the good life**, totally uninterested in forging relationships with people who have money.

“Cursed Is the Person Who Trusts in Man”

It is very important to meditate upon this *yesod*—because it is an area in which many people, even those who work on their *emunah* and *bitachon*, can sometimes get sucked in.... They don't realize how much this type of thinking can drag a person down.

The Navi (*Yirmiyah* 17:5) says, כה אמר ה' ארור הגבר אשר יבטח באדם ושם, *Thus said Hashem, accursed is the man who trusts in people and makes flesh and blood his strength and turns his heart away from Hashem*—clearly, one who relies on humans is accursed.

The Navi is referring to a person who thinks: If I'll have a problem, I'll always have whom to turn to... this relative will give me money...this *askan* will take care of things. **Sure, I have *bitachon* in the Ribbono shel Olam, but for 'extra security,' I always know that I can fall back on my wealthy brother...** if things don't work out as I wished, and the Ribbono shel Olam won't hear my *tefillos*, I will always have a way out....

Thoughts That Run Contrary to *Emunah* in Hashem

This person feels that he truly has *bitachon*. He only wants to do some "*hishtadlus*." After all, we can't rely solely on miracles.... But, at the end of the day, **these thoughts are a tremendous obstacle to attaining closeness with Hashem.**

Proof of this is the fact that when this person will need money or to have a certain matter taken care of, he thinks immediately, "Who has connections with this wealthy person...?" And **if he himself has a connection, then he is *certainly* calm and assured.** If his brother or relative tells him, "I got this... I will take care of it...," it brings him great assuredness and serenity in his heart. **This, by definition, means that he trusts in people.**

Trusting in People Automatically Relegates a Person to a Situation of Being Cursed, *R"l*

The same applies to a person whose father or father-in-law is wealthy, and he tells himself, "*Baruch Hashem*, I come from a wealthy family... it

is so sad for my friends who come from poor families... they have no support system." Indeed, he says "*baruch Hashem*" ten times, but he is *l'maiseh* fully dependent upon his father or father-in-law. **In this mindset, he has the serenity that if all else fails, someone will be there for him...** *Baruch Hashem*, in our family we're taken care of. This is what the Navi refers to when he says אָרוּר הַגִּבּוֹר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּאָדָם — *he is nebach an accursed person.*

This *pasuk* also suggests that this person is automatically accursed... he doesn't need to be explicitly cursed. The very fact that that he relies on people automatically cuts him off from the Source of Blessing, and he is therefore liable to fall into danger because he isn't reliant upon the Ribbono shel Olam.

The Preciousness of a Wealthy Person's *Bitachon*

In this vein, Rebbe Moshe Leib of Sasov once said that the *bitachon* of the wealthy person is far more precious than that of the poor person – for the poor person has nothing to rely upon but Hashem, but the rich person can be tempted to rely on his money.

And if he *does* rely upon the Ribbono shel Olam, it means that he worked long and hard on his *emunah* and *bitachon* – and for this reason it is more meaningful.

“My Power and the Might of My Hand” –Even When Relying on Others

People often don't realize that all of these aforementioned thoughts amount to depending on others. We must understand this well... how many times we depend upon others instead of the Ribbono shel Olam.

Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin offers an incredible teaching regarding this (*Sefer HaZichronos Mitzvah* 1): When a person trusts in another person, he is essentially saying כְּחַי וְעוֹצֵם יָדַי — *my power and the might of my hands.* **For what difference is it if he trusts in himself or if he trusts in the power of another person!**

The Mistake of Investing Time and Thought in Impressing the Rich Person

When we see a weak human being who is very far from *Yiddishkeit*, and he speaks of himself, his might, and his wealth with great hubris—he practically says, “I alone, with the might of my hands, created this wealth, and nothing can take it away from me.” Every *ehrlliche Yid* would rightly be revolted by such words. It will be difficult to even *listen* to such words of heresy.

But when this very same *Yid* needs to make a wedding, he’ll ask, “How much does this *oisher* give? Who can put in a good word for me with him?” He takes extraordinary measures to impress the wealthy person in order to receive some of his money.

In other words, he places his entire hope in another person. And this is the same thing as relying on one’s own wealth, power, and might! He will say, “But one needs to have a *mehalech*... the Ribbono shel Olam wants us to do *hishtadlus*....” The truth is that all this “*hishtadlus*” he’s doing is excessive and uncalled for. He is simply placing his trust in another person. Instead, he should be thinking that the Ribbono shel Olam will help him, and we don’t need to give Him ideas regarding how to help us.

The *Ba'al Bitachon* Is Free from Servitude

We must think deeply about this: How many times do we have thoughts along these lines, that the *yeshu'ah* will come through this-and-this person specifically?

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is teaching us that a person who thinks this way is, sadly, enslaved. He has a difficult life! He struggles and toils for nothing, thinking constantly about whom he can impress to receive a share of their money.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is telling us: You should know that one of the greatest benefits of *bitachon* is that you will no longer need to struggle! You’ll never need to think about how to forge connections with this per-

son who has money. You'll be assured and reliant only on the Ribbono shel Olam, and not at all reliant on other people.

Remaining Serene Under All Circumstances

A Two-Pronged Loss

There's an incredible and sharp expression from the *Beis HaLevi* in his *kuntres Middas HaBitachon*, in which he says that one who trusts in people commits tremendous foolishness—for not only is he losing out on trusting Hashem, but he also earns the terrible curse, *R"l*, of the Navi mentioned above. And **who would want to receive such a curse, *chas v'shalom*?**

On the one hand, continues the *Beis HaLevi*, when one trusts in man, there's a chance that he will be helped and there's a chance that he will *not* be helped. But what is *certain* is that he will earn the curse of the Navi. You're hoping for a *safeik* but the curse is a ... וודאי *R"l*.

Losing Both Worlds, *R"l*

"His loss will be twofold," says the *Beis HaLevi*. "In This World and in the Next World."

Here, on This World, he will be disappointed, as the *pasuk* (*Iyov* 11:20) tells us: ותקוותם מפח גפש — *their hopes will turn to heartache and despair* — someone who misplaces his hope will be disappointed. And we see clearly that this happens all the time. "Why can't this person help me? He has so much money... can't he share some of it?! Can't he understand my dire situation?!" These thoughts then morph into anger, and then into hatred, *R"l*—all because he has placed his trust in man.

As for *Olam Haba*, one also loses—since he is cursed for trusting in man, not in the Ribbono shel Olam. He loses both worlds, all for trusting in humans, which doesn't even help.

Aggravation, Not from *Hishtadlus*, but From Trusting in Men

We will not discuss whether and how much it is permitted to collect money from people. This is something that the *Chovos HaLevaavos* addresses later. But this much is clear: When a person does reach out to his fellow for money, **it is a terrible mistake to rely on him. It brings only aggravation and heartache.**

The reality is that the actual act of appealing to another person for money doesn't itself cause a person's hair to turn white... it is the *worry* and the *energy* that we invest into it... the thoughts of "How can I access this person? How can I get *protektzia* from this person? He is my relative and he will surely help me...." *This* is what brings disappointment and heartache.

When Adhering to Torah, We're Always Serene

The rule is that when a person listens to the *Aibishter's* Torah, he will always be calm. If a person sees that going out to collect money costs him his health, this is a clear sign that he has deviated from the mission... he got carried away.

If all his efforts to procure money brought him aggravation, he can be certain that this is *not* the *hishtadlus* that the Torah expects of him.

Trust in Man Has Nothing to Do with *Hishtadlus*

Some people think that trusting in another person constitutes *hishtadlus*, but this is a colossal mistake. And we are not just talking about money here – but in every situation where a person is hoping for the solution to a problem: he needs certain documents, he must take care of certain things... and he immediately begins wracking his brains... "Whom do I know, and how can I get to this person... who can help me, and who can take care of this for me...?"

This person forgets to appeal to Hashem, **because he is so preoccupied with appealing to people.** If we're being honest with ourselves, we will see that our hearts are *mamish* twisted when it comes to this –

and this causes us so much heartache. As the Navi says, a person who trusts in others is automatically cursed.... It is *certainly* not part of our *hishtadlus*.

A Yid Must Do His Part, the Money Will Come in Any Case

The *ba'al bitachon* knows that while we must do our utmost to raise money for *Yidden* and Torah institutions in need, **this does not mean that we should trust in a specific person**. If one person doesn't want to give, the money that is meant to come will certainly come through another person! Whoever will have the *zechus* will be the one to give the money that's meant to come.

Ehrliche Yidden never relied upon wealthy people. They surely worked hard to raise money for *Yidden*, but they were serene and calm throughout—always **knowing that whoever is zocheh will be the one to give the money!** Sure, they met with *gevirim* and attempted to persuade them to give generously... but it was never in a way of aggressively pinning all their hopes on one source. They understood that the money doesn't necessarily need to come from that source. **The Ribbono shel Olam will send it through the right conduit!**

It Is Simply Good to Have Bitachon

About this, David HaMelech tells us טוב לחסות בה' מבטוח באדם — *it is better to take refuge in Hashem than to rely on man*. *Tov* means that it is good, it is pleasant! It is simply good spiritually as well as materially. A *Yid* who relies upon the Ribbono shel Olam is able to learn and *daven* properly with peace of mind, and he can function as a calm human being—whereas the טוב באדם is not טוב — it is not good or pleasant.

And the truth is that this is the true test. If a person wants to see if he is in the right place, he should think about whether he feels the טוב לחסות בה'. If he feels good and not strained when it comes to money, it is a sign that he is reliant on the Ribbono shel Olam, not on people.

Bitachon That Comes After the Previous Disappointments

The holy *Sefer Tiferes Shlomo* (Rosh Chodesh) teaches us an incredible *peshat* on the words טוב לחסות בה' מבטוח באדם. It doesn't mean simply that it is *more preferable* to rely on Hashem; there's a much deeper meaning: **How does one arrive at true *bitachon* in Hashem?** מבטוח בנדיבים! — *from relying on generous men*. After trusting in men, and seeing how far it gets him (or *doesn't get him*) then one becomes a בוטח בה'.

After he has gone through so many efforts to trust in others, he is finally convinced that it is pointless—and the only address is that of the Ribbono shel Olam.

Of course, this is said only regarding a person who learns from past mistakes—not a person who insists on making them over and over. Now he has another *gevir* on his blacklist... but he hasn't learned from the experience that טוב לחסות בה' — it is *good* to trust Hashem.

Let Go of the *Gevir*

In previous *shiurim* we discussed the concept of the *ba'al bitachon* and his belief that money is only on deposit with him—he's only the custodian.

The problem is that there are people who believe that the money in *the other person's possession* is certainly theirs! The *Chovos HaLevavos* is telling us, leave that wealthy person alone already! **Who told you that you must be helped *davka* through him**. Let go of *bitachon* on wealthy people. Only Hashem can help you!

Don't Lower Yourself to Talking About Money Excessively

Speak of *His* Wonders

In recent years, it has become common for people to publicize stories of *Hashgachah Pratis*. This surely is a wonderful thing—reminding us

how the Ribbono shel Olam runs the world, and it gives people *chizuk* that just as Hashem helped other people out of their dilemmas, He will surely help us in our problems as well.

Talking About Money Is the *Opposite of Hashgachah Pratis*

We must point out, however, that just as there's a *positive* aspect to talking about *Hashgachah Pratis*—talk that is focused on the Ribbono shel Olam and His great miracles—so too are we exhorted *not* to talk about certain things... such as excessive talk about money and wealth.

Such talk drags us down and distances us from the Ribbono shel Olam. It is lamentable that it has become so common to talk about wealth and wealthy people... how to access them, how to find favor in their eyes... all of which is the direct opposite of *emunah* in Hashem Yisborach.

It Is Unbefitting to Talk Excessively About Money

Ehrliche Yidden know that there are certain things that it is unbefitting to talk about. Even if it is permitted according to halachah to discuss it, it is still unbefitting for a *yerei Shamayim* to talk about it. One example is excessive discussion about food. The venerated *chassid* Reb Aron Yosef Brizel of Yerushalayim would say that *talking* excessively about food has a more materialistic effect (מגשם) on the *neshamah* that actually *eating* the food.

Similarly, a *Yid* must speak differently about money. It shouldn't be "normal" to talk about how he will pursue the rich person to give him a large sum of money, etc.

So, it's wonderful that we invest in *emunah* and *bitachon*. But we must be careful not to go from there to talking about how to get access to the *gevir*....

This is akin to saying: "It is true that I spoke and heard stories of *Hashgachah Pratis*. This is all well and good. But when it comes to my needs, I need to fend for myself... because, at the end of the day, I need the money...."

Don't Be Dragged Along in the Current

We're unaware just how much we hear this talk all around us. On the one hand, there are so many stories of *Hashgachah Pratis*, but so often they're drowned out by all the talk about money and wealth.

The reality is that so much of the talk surrounds money. We live in such a foolish world, in which we allocate inordinate amounts of honor to wealth and money – **we would need outsized vessels to carry all the honor that is given to money and wealth.** This gives the false impression that we're reliant upon the money of those wealthy people, and we don't realize how much this distances us from the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

So, what is the *eitzah* to remain clear-eyed and clear-minded in this area? The only *eitzah* is to reiterate, again and again, that **we do not want to trust in people. The Ribbono shel Olam Himself will provide for all our needs. It is not our worry how, and through whom, the money will come!**

Receiving Money Without Pursuing It

A *Yid* recently related a personal anecdote in this vein. He was about to finalize a *shidduch*, and his wife told him, "How can you make the *shidduch* when you don't even have the money to make the *l'chaim*?" But the *Yid* was *mechazek* himself with *emunah* and *bitachon*... refusing to let money interfere with the *shidduch*. He indeed closed the *shidduch*, without knowing how he would pay for the *l'chaim* or for the *shadchan*.

Not a few hours passed, and he received a phone call from an old acquaintance who wanted to meet him. He explained that he borrowed a large sum of money from him a long time ago, and now he wanted to repay the loan....

The *chiddush* of the story is that this *Yid* didn't have to pursue anyone or flatter anyone or evoke the sympathies of anyone. He relied purely on the *Ribbono shel Olam*, **and Hashem arranged that he should receive his own money**, without having to impress anyone.

Favor, Too, Is from Above

Even when a *Yid* does need a favor or a donation from another person, the proper approach is to do so with *bitachon*—knowing that it is the Ribbono shel Olam Who is giving him the money, and he doesn't need to work to impress that person.

When we *daven* טוב ושכל הן ונמצא — *we should find favor and grace in the eyes of Hashem and man*, it doesn't mean that we need to work overtime to find favor in the eyes of people—but that *Hashem* should give us *chein*... and then we ourselves will wonder, "I don't know why this person approached me; somehow, I was נושא הן in his eyes without doing anything on my part."

Unimpressed

A *Yid* related the following story that he himself heard from the person with whom it took place: He was raising money for an important cause, and he managed to get an appointment with a *very* wealthy individual. But, he was told, he can have only one minute—sixty whole seconds—in which to make his pitch.

The *Yid* spent *hours* in thought of how to make the best elevator pitch so that he would get the maximum donation. And after all these hours—which he probably called "*hishtadlus*," but were really hours spent on *bitachon* in humans—he decided to say the following words to the *gevir*: I want to give you the opportunity to save the world!

Arriving at the appointment with his line prepared, he said to the *gevir*, "I want to give you the opportunity to save the world." The wealthy man didn't even blink as he responded, "Saving the world?! That's what I've been doing for the last twenty years!"

The petitioner was shocked. He thought he had an original line that no one ever thought of... but the *gevir* was thoroughly unimpressed—after all the thought that he invested.

Hashem Will Send *Chein*

People think that they can take certain actions to impress others. **The truth is, however, that you can't do it! *Chein* is from Above!** A good example is *shidduchim*. One person casts a *shidduch* away because it isn't חן by him while the second person grabs it because it is!

A *Yid* can do only one thing: *Daven* that טוב בעיני אלוקים ונמצא חן ושכל חן ושכל טוב. And after *davening* for *chein*, he should go about his business, do what he needs to do. Go over to this person and ask for the favor or the money. If he acquiesces, you know that he is the right *shaliach*. And if not, **then it will be through another conduit.** Don't go away from the Ribbono shel Olan in favor of people. Don't invest in things that aren't true *hishtadlus*.

The Root of the Error—Why We Don't See the Problem

The truth is that it's very difficult to recognize a mistake, even though it's of such epic proportions. People don't think that working to get money from a wealthy person is an example of *bitachon* in people. Many people reading this will raise their eyebrows and say, "Eh, he's exaggerating...."

Why do people think that it's acceptable to pursue money from *gevirim* and think that it's part of *hishtadlus*?

The reason is that the person says, "**Of course I trust in Hashem. I have nothing to do with this *gevir*!** But we live in a world of nature, after all. Money isn't going to fall from the Heavens. We need to create a conduit for the *shefah*.... I am simply creating the conduit... and since *b'derech hatevah*, if this *gevir* is in possession of money, and I am in need of money, then it's natural for me to invest time in attempting to get money from him."

Like Picking a Coin from the Floor?!

These people look at it as though there's a coin sitting on the floor, and he must simply bend down to pick it up. **Can't I just bend down to pick up the money sitting before me?!**

There was indeed a *madreigah* that tzaddikim lived with such that they wouldn't even bend down to retrieve money from the ground. If it is *bashert* for it to come to me, they said, it will come without my bending down! Such a story happened with Rebbe Mendel of Rimanov. He saw a gold coin in the street, but he refused to bend down for it. A *chassid* passed by a short while later and saw the coin. He immediately said, "Such a beautiful coin is a fitting gift for the Rebbe!" And he promptly gave it to the tzaddik. It came to him after all.

But such a story is above our *madreigah*. On our level, we must do some *hishtadlus*—just as it was with the *mann* in the Midbar: the tzaddikim had it delivered to their door while the more ordinary people had to go out to retrieve it.

The problem is that some people view the act of asking others for money is just like retrieving money from the ground, and thus they don't understand the issue of becoming overly invested in it.

The Difference

The clear difference is: When a person finds money on the ground, it was clearly sent there for him by the Ribbono shel Olam. If he was meant to see it, and he may halachically claim it for himself, then it is clearly is there for him.

When it comes to money that lies with another person, however, we don't know that it is meant for us at all. **Maybe your money is in another place altogether!** Therefore, the moment you begin investing in ways to retrieve *that* money, **you have departed from your trust in Hashem**—because you think that you can take something that isn't yours and make it yours through various tactics and means.

If You're Working Hard, You're in Trouble

The golden rule is that as long as the money is before you and you can access it without relying on others, **then it is part of the order that Hashem ordained in the world.** But if the money is in someone else's

possession, and you can't simply take it without all kinds of effort, then you're entering a dangerous zone – one that is fraught with possibly losing one's reliance on Hashem.

Yes, if you approach the *gevir*, and he readily shares his money with you, then you know that it was meant for you. But if you must work hard to pull the money out, you're practically saying, "The money may not be mine, but I will make sure it becomes mine." **You want something that isn't yours... this only brings heartache and disappointment.**

Remember: You Can't Get Money That Isn't Yours

As we have outlined above, this applies also when we're raising money for *tzedakah* or for Torah institutions. We must reiterate that it is the *zechus* of others to give money for this cause. We must constantly reiterate: **Whoever will have the *zechus* will give; whoever doesn't give evidently doesn't have the *zechus*.**

When we live this way, we don't do excessive *hishtadlus* to obtain money from people, **because we know with clarity that we can't get money that isn't meant for us.** And if we try to get money that isn't meant for us, then we're trusting in humans, which brings with it curses, heartache, and distance from Hashem, *R"l*.



The Light of *Teshuvah* Illuminates in the Lowest Places

The Hidden Miracle of Chanukah

Revealing His Love

The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* explain that the miracle of Chanukah is a fusion of revealed as well as hidden miracles. We celebrate the revealed miracles—the victory in the war and the clear miracle of the oil. But there's another *neis*, a hidden one, and that is the miracle that **HaKadosh Baruch Hu revealed His love to the Jewish People, and He assisted them in doing *teshuvah***—the greatest miracle of all.

That is, when we see that the lights of the Menorah burned for eight days, it is only *an indication* that the Ribbono shel Olam illuminated the hearts of Klal Yisrael—and, since their hearts were illuminated, there was also light on the outside, seen in the lights of the Menorah. Thus, **when a *Yid* celebrates the Yom Tov of Chanukah, he gives thanks for the true miracle of the Ribbono shel Olam assisting us in returning to Him.**

All Klal Yisrael

Furthermore, brings the *Chiddushei HaRim*: It is known that the oil for the Menorah was brought by the *entire* Klal Yisrael, since it was a public offering. Thus, not only were the *Kohanim* included in the miracle; it was a miracle for *all* Klal Yisrael. Every single person in Klal Yisrael was included in this miracle. We see from this that the inner miracle of *teshuvah*—which is expressed by the miracle of the Menorah lights—applies to the *entirety* of Klal Yisrael.

The reason that the *Yidden* needed to be lifted up is because when we live life in the course of our regular existence, it is easy to become swept up in the order of nature . We fall into the *klipah* of Yavan, which says, “What you see before your eyes, that’s all there is.” And if things were terrible until now, they’ll likely continue to deteriorate. And this is how the *Yidden* entered a cycle of fear and the darkness of Yavan.

illuminating the Way

But the *mesirus nefesh* of the Chashmonaim – who believed in Hashem with complete and pure *emunah*, with all their hearts and souls—illuminated the entire generation, and it penetrated the hearts of all the *Yidden* with a spirit of *teshuvah*. Even the *îúééâðéí* experienced pangs of *teshuvah* and recognition of Hashem – otherwise they wouldn’t have merited the open miracle of the lights of the Menorah. Thus, we see clearly that the true miracle of Chanukah was that the Ribbono shel Olam illuminated the hearts of Klal Yisrael with the proper emotions and an understanding of *teshuvah*.

In this vein, the *Zera Kodesh* of Ropshitz teaches that in the era of the *neis Chanukah*, the Ribbono shel Olam brought down a light that penetrated even the hearts of the *îúééâðéí* who had cast off the yoke of Torah and mitzvos. *This* was the miracle of Chanukah: the light illuminated even the darkest of places.

We see from this that the Ribbono shel Olam makes an incredible miracle—in our times just as in those times: He enables us to see and understand events we ordinarily would not, so that we will be able to do *teshuvah*. **In our days, He enables us to see our mistakes in new ways—and to see the world in a truer light.** *This* is the gift that Hashem gave the *Yidden* during the *neis Chanukah*, and *this* is the gift that He continues to give us year after year at the time of Chanukah.

There Is No Time or Place Devoid of *Teshuvah*

Let us discuss one aspect of this special Chanukah miracle. We know that one of the most important tenets of Chanukah is that the light illuminates even below ten handbreadths, *îèä îðùøä èòçéí*. What

does this mean? What is the difference between above ten *tefachim* or below it?

The simple answer is that there are places that are welcoming hosts for אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־בָּא, such as the *Makom HaMikdash*, for example, and there are places that are more lowly and less friendly to the *Shechinah*. When we say that the light of the *Shechinah* reaches even lower than אֲשֶׁר־בָּא, we mean that it makes its way *even* to those lowly places—for מלכות כל עולמים — His Kingdom is the Kingdom of all the worlds....

And just as we understand this regarding the *Shechinah's* ability to rest in all places, so too it applies to *teshuvah*; the Ribbono shel Olam sometimes miraculously sends an aura of *teshuvah* to the most unlikely places. **If we understand that Hashem illuminated the hearts of even the מתחיינים who were so filled with errors and sins, people who were not in a good place... then we can understand that Hashem will send feelings of *teshuvah* even to those who find themselves למטה מעשרה.** There simply is no *matzav* in the world in which we cannot receive an aura of *teshuvah* and to change our ways completely. **There is no time or place in the world that is devoid of *teshuvah*.**

It's Never a Lost Cause

This is a tremendous *yesod*, and it lies at the heart of Chanukah. There's no time that isn't opportune for *teshuvah*. Just because a person has fallen into complications, or because he doesn't *feel* that it's time for a fresh start, that doesn't mean that the cause is lost. The *yesod* of אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־בָּא tells us that at every time and at every place, the Ribbono shel Olam *will* help us become close to Him once again.

For example, if a person will say, "The year has recently begun, it's only Chanukah, but already I feel as if I've ruined my fresh start.... I will wait until next year to begin again...." T We will rightfully look at him like he's out of his mind. We will tell him, "What?! There are months and months of *avodas Hashem* ahead of you... there are the days of Chanukah, Zos Chanukah, *Shovavim*, the days of joy of Adar, the purity of Nissan, the exalted days of *Sefirah* and *Shavu'os*! Aren't you being ridiculous?! Why would you give up already?!"

Picking Ourselves Up on an Ordinary Tuesday

Everyone understands the foolishness of this thinking. But what about a Sunday or a Tuesday that didn't begin as we would have wished? We find ourselves in middle of the day, and everything went sideways. The person says, "Okay, Hashem will help... tomorrow's another day. Tomorrow will look different." **His mistake is no different from waiting a year to begin anew.** He doesn't understand that every unit of time is precious—no matter how small. Time isn't measured only in yearly increments.

One must accustom himself to thinking differently, and to understand that this attitude is rooted in *ga'avah*. He must understand his mistake, and declare, **I am here and now going to return to Hashem and become close to Him.** What will he do now? He will *bentch Birchas HaMazon*, and before that he will do *teshuvah*. And now that he has done *teshuvah*, he will merit an aura and an illumination in his *bentching* that will then help him in his Torah and *avodas Hashem*.

Learning Lessons

If one doesn't grasp the fact that the light of the *Shechinah* reaches even in the lowliest places—that is, in every time and in every place—he passes up valuable opportunities, and one loss leads to the other, *R"l*. (It is interesting to note that when it comes to *gashmiyus*, people are very good at getting to the root of their mistakes and making sure not to repeat them. Anyone with even a bit of wisdom will sit down to take stock of what went wrong and what went right so that he can calculate his next step).

When a person grasps the mistakes that he made, he now knows to be careful. "This isn't right, I see... when I talk to this-and-this person, the talk tends to veer toward *lashon hara* and other forbidden talk.... When I come to *daven* in this minyan, I don't have a good *davening*—it's not for me."

Since he understands where he tends to go wrong, he can make changes. He tries to wake up earlier on the first day so he can *daven*

with a different minyan, but he fails to make it on the first day, and the same thing happens on the second day... but he doesn't forget about it, and he doesn't give up—because he understands that the former minyan isn't for him.

If a person were to use this approach in his *avodas Hashem*, he would find elevation in every *matzav*. He wouldn't succumb and say, "This area isn't *b'seder* by me," and then give up. He would be solution-oriented—focused on repairing this area.

It is the ability to do *teshuvah* in every moment that enables the person to turn around whenever he wishes.

Sweeping the Streets Every Day

The Dzikover Rebbe once said to his *chassidim*, "Once, I was in Vienna, and I saw a street cleaner sweeping the streets. I asked him, 'Why are you cleaning the streets when in just a little bit they will become dirty once again?' He answered me, 'Listen, Rabbiner, if I didn't clean every day, the filth would reach my head!'"

Similarly, when it comes to *teshuvah*, explained the Rebbe, a person says, "Yes, yes, we must do *teshuvah*. It is true... very important. In a little while it will be Chodesh Elul, and we will begin to do *teshuvah*." This person doesn't realize that the world isn't arranged in such a way that we can leave "the filth" to pile up and our mistakes to accrue and accumulate until he has the time to deal with them.

Taking Stock

Take, for example, a person who operates a large supermarket; he has income and expenses on a large scale. He must make a *cheshbon* on a constant basis. He can't just kick the can down the road—because so much debt will accumulate, and he won't be able to deal with it. He has no choice but to sit down periodically to see what came in and what went out.

The same applies to our spiritual reckoning. We can't leave the errors

and mistakes to accumulate; we must constantly be engaged in taking spiritual stock. **And the good news is that the Aibishter gives us the opportunity constantly to do *teshuvah*.**

If someone erred in the way he was *mechanech* his children, it pains him greatly. He realizes that he shouldn't have yelled so much... he shouldn't have gotten so upset. He realizes this only after many years, and he really regrets the way he dealt with his children. He doesn't feel that *teshuvah* applies to a situation like this. He goes to an expert who only pours salt on his wounds. "You fouled up," he says. "It's too late; there's nothing that I can tell you...." This person feels that there's *nothing* he can do to repair the situation.

A similar instance: A person got into a complicated situation with a peer or colleague, and he says to himself... "I'm really in a big mess. There's nothing I can do."

There's *Always* Something You Can Do

What these people don't understand is that *there is* something that they can do at *this* moment. **You must change the way you're thinking about this, and you must do *teshuvah* for it right now, admitting your fault and regretting your actions . And if you snatch the opportunity to do *teshuvah*, the Ribbono shel Olam will immediately send the *yeshua*.**

In the era of Yavan, Hashem sent a spirit of *teshuvah* into the hearts of Klal Yisrael—because He loves them. And this spirit continues to this day—especially in the days of Chanukah. **The Ribbono shel Olam helps those who wish to do *teshuvah*. If you're serious about finding what you can repair, He will help you find the way back.**

Taking the First Step

Rectification Brings More Rectification

And so, let us elaborate on a point that pertains in general to search-

ing one's ways, and specifically to the topic at hand. Generally, people think that when we're exhorted to engage in *ôùdâù áîdùéí*, *making a reckoning of one's deeds* (for example, when *yissurim* come to a person, *R"l*), we think that we need to uncover the *precise* reason for the *yissurim*. Then we'll ask, "How can I know the reason? I have a thousand issues!"

Indeed, this is a *sugya* we can and must elaborate upon, but the first thing a person must know is this: **Is there something that you can rectify right now?** Yes, one will say. "But how can I know that this is the precise reason for my suffering." The answer is, **if you will fix the things that are within your reach, you will become closer to the Ribbono shel Olam, and once you've become closer to the Ribbono shel Olam, you'll already know what else to fix.** Rectification will bring more rectification... until you'll reach your ultimate destination.

Take the First Step

The mistake that people make is that until they find the exact source of their problems, they're unwilling to engage in *teshuvah*. "I'm not going to simply do *teshuvah* just like that," he says. "I'm willing to do *teshuvah* if I know that it will take care of my problems."

This is akin to someone who's looking for work. Yet, he pushes away all the offers that come to him because he's stubbornly set his mind upon some fantasy job. And so, he waits and waits... and his debts only accumulate and accrue.

Similarly, a person who has an apartment for rent has set his heart on a certain rental amount. No matter how many offers come his way, he refuses them all. Meanwhile, his losses on the empty apartment outweigh anything he could have earned from getting his preferred price. But he stubbornly continues to insist on having it his way.

A person must always be willing to accept that what Hashem has placed before him is the step that he must take, and if so, he must grab the opportunity. Later, he will see what to do further. Many tzaddikim would tell those who came before them to ask for *berachos* for *parnassah*: "Do the first deal that comes before you!"

This is the idea: Take the first deal that comes your way.

Don't Think, Do

So it is with *teshuvah*. A person doesn't believe that **the light of the Shechinah** illuminates down in the lowliest places, to even the smallest things.

He says, I know that Chazal tell us that when suffering comes to a person, he should take stock of his ways. Now I need to figure out what the source of the suffering is specifically. *B'li neder*, we'll call a meeting about it. Today I don't have time, tomorrow I also don't have time, and on the following day I already have a meeting about something else. But we'll get to it....

The question to this person is: In the meantime, how's your *berachah* on the coffee you're holding in your hand? Can you do better in that regard? No, this he won't address because it's probably not the cause.... In the meantime, he gets into complications with people, and he makes many mistakes—all the while, he has something that he can do right now, but he doesn't take the opportunity.

Throwing Away the Cable

How many times, as you're lost in thought about your ways and deeds, does someone come up to you with his hand outstretched for a donation? He isn't the poor man from the legends, and he isn't Eliyahu HaNavi in disguise... he's the annoying guy from shul who's already bothered you for a donation once for Shabbos, once for Yom Tov, and once for the weekday. Here's something you can rectify. But what do you say? "Stop bothering me, I'm in the midst of a reckoning! You're disturbing me from doing *teshuvah*."

There are so many examples of the way a person can throw away the rope that can propel him to the next step. That is, it may be that this indeed is not the root cause of your suffering, but in order for you to be able to get to that root cause, the Ribbono shel Olam condenses His *Shechinah* to the lowliest places. **He throws a rope into the pit so you**

will be able to climb out—and once you climb out and see the light of day, everything is clearer... you'll already see what to rectify. The rope was thrown down to you. Grab it. Give the poor man some *tzedakah*: it will give you the *siyatta Di'Shmaya* to find the light and through this your way back!

A Drink for the Way

A person must open his mind and understand—yes, I don't yet know what I need to repair... but, until we get to the tavern, we need a drink too, as the saying goes. **Until we begin the big program of *teshuvah*, we must also do *teshuvah*.** One must say, if this is the right thing to do, I will do it. He must understand that the Ribbono shel Olam is talking to him, saying: **You, in your state, this can be the move for you to begin the process...** then you will begin to move forward.

Many *tzaddikim*, when giving people a *derech* in *teshuvah*, didn't give them broad and overarching programs. They gave them small steps that they can do immediately. The holy Ruzhiner once instructed a great *ba'al aveirah* to be careful to say *Birchas HaMazon* from a *siddur*. The *chassidim* wondered about this... but the end of the story was that this *Yid* attained incredible *madreigos*.

We learn from this story that there are many rungs to the ladder, and a person must ascertain which step he can take *right now*—and once he takes that step, he'll be able to take further steps.

Don't Think About *Teshuvah*

The legendary Lubavitcher *chassid* Reb Mendel Futerfas would say that thinking about *teshuvah* is worse than thinking about an *aveirah*. For thinking about something means that we're thinking about it and pining for it, but we stop short of doing it. If so, it's a great complaint against the person. You were right there! Why didn't you take the plunge?!

We ask the person, "What are you doing?" And he answers, "I'm being *ïäöäø áúüäää*, *thinking thoughts of teshuvah*." "And what does this mean," we ask. "I know that there are things in my life that I need to

repair. *Im yirtzeh Hashem*, I'll will get to it." He doesn't utilize this opportunity to take an immediate step—smile to another *Yid*! Do you know how much the light of *teshuvah* can be condensed?! **It can be condensed to such an extent that even with a smile to another *Yid*, you may be able to fulfill your *teshuvah*!**

We must internalize this, for this is the rope that pulls us upward. A person is about to do a *chessed* for another *Yid* and he says, "This is my problem?! I have so many bigger problems!" That may be true, but this *chessed* is the rope that will pull you upward.

Condensing the Light of *Teshuvah*

We are taught by tzaddikim that the Ribbono shel Olam takes the incredible light of the Torah and He condenses it down so that we, on this lowly world, will be able to access it. Even a child... even a *ba'al aveirah*... can find *something* that he can rectify in this moment.

This *tikkun* is like *hishtadlus*. We know that we must do *hishtadlus* for *parnassah* and for other things that we want to attain. This is not because the *hishtadlus* will bring the *yeshuah*, but because it is the right thing that he can do right now—and once he does this *hishtadlus*, it helps him get to the next step. So too it is with *teshuvah*: Do the right thing right now. It will propel you forward.

Indeed, the צמצום — the condensation of the light of *teshuvah* (i.e., our ability to latch onto a small, concrete action and be propelled to the highest levels of *teshuvah*) is beyond anything we can imagine.

Often, a person doesn't realize that he can do *teshuvah* during a conversation with his friend. He's conversing with another person when he realizes that the conversation has gotten out of hand... he spoke in a manner that is unbecoming for a *yerei Shamayim* (he spoke in anger, for example). He becomes aware of this, and he's pained by it.

If this person believes that the light of *teshuvah* reaches down low, he can awaken himself right there during the conversation and say, "I apologize. I shouldn't have spoken in such a manner. I want to repeat what I said—this time in the right tone and tenor."

This applies whether he spoke with anger or indicated a lack of *emunah* or his words had a whiff of *ga'avah*. In every conversation that lasts ten minutes or more, a person is liable to engage in such talk, unfortunately. But the good news is that right then and there, he can become aware of it, and he can do *teshuvah* on the spot.

Always There for Us

Immersing in the Rambam's *Mikvah*

There's a well-known Rambam at the end of the halachos of *mikvah* in which he says, **"Just as when a person immerses in a *mikvah*, he becomes cleansed even though nothing on his body actually changed—so too, a person who has in mind to purify his *nefesh* from its impurities [thoughts of sin and improper thoughts], the very moment that he decides to separate himself from these impurities, and he's immersed himself into the "waters of knowledge [of Hashem]"—he's immediately deemed pure.** As the *pasuk* says, אָעוֹרֶנּוּ וְיִטְהַר אִישׁ מִדָּמָתוֹ וְיִטְהַר אִישׁ מִדָּמָתוֹ וְיִטְהַר אִישׁ מִדָּמָתוֹ, Hashem Himself purifies us when we only make a firm decision to become pure.

A person, in whatever *matzav* he may find himself, when he realizes the error of his thoughts... he finds himself thinking in negative, unhealthy ways—he must remember: I want to separate myself from these thoughts! Help me, Ribbono shel Olam, to let go of these ways of thinking.

Or when a person thinks in ways of עֵצָה אֲדַאֲוִי עֵאֵי, *my might and the power of my hands*, and he counsels himself. **"Do *teshuvah*! But how do I do *teshuvah*?! Daven to Hashem that He should help me separate myself from these ways of thinking.** I don't want to think like this. Help me rid myself of these ways of thinking. **I want to immerse myself in the waters of knowledge [of Hashem]."**

Always Accessible

This *mikvah*, i.e., the ability to purify ourselves wherever we are, is

always accessible to us. One of the Gerer Rebbes once said, “What did the *Yidden* do in the *Midbar* where they didn’t have a *mikvah*?! They immersed in the Rambam’s *mikvah*!”

A person must have the ability to *toivel* in the Rambam’s *mikvah* (by making a firm decision to separate himself from impurities and thus become instantly pure). Not tomorrow, now! “But,” one will say, “what can I do? I have no *mikvah*!” Immerse yourself in the Rambam’s *mikvah*!

He’ll say, *ehrlliche Yidden* would run to the *mikvah* if they became angry—for when a person has *ka’as*, the *neshamah* runs away from him. “But I’m not on this level, and also practically, I don’t have the ability to immerse in the *mikvah* so often.” But the Rambam’s *mikvah* you *do* have! **If you’re unhappy with the *ka’as* that has filled you, immerse in the Rambam’s *mikvah*!** Have in mind to separate yourself from the ways of thinking that brought you to the anger in the first place.

He Opens the Door

The *Sfas Emes* explains that we know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is *ôâúç ùðø ìããð=é áúúäää*, *He opens the door to those who rap in teshuvah*. He explains that a *tzaddik* is one who constantly thinks thoughts of *teshuvah*—many times throughout the day for *aveiros* large and small. This is the designation of a *tzaddik*. You want to be a greater *yerei Shamayim*? Think thoughts of *teshuvah* at all times.

By the way, the reason for this is that the *tzaddik* doesn’t become broken by these thoughts of *teshuvah*. His *heart* is broken, but his *spirit* is not, and so he doesn’t fall into despair. On the contrary, he becomes elevated by this experience. He learns more and more about himself through this process—and he’s thus able to repair his ways.

This is akin to a home in which there’s a leak. The homeowner can’t find the source of the leak, and he calls down a professional who comes with his gadgets and begins to search. After half an hour, he excitedly calls the homeowner, and with a wide grin shows him the source of the leak. What’s he excited about? He found a *problem*! The obvious answer is that now that he has found the source of the problem, there’s hope

that he can repair the pipes. So too, the tzaddik isn't depressed by the negative findings within himself; he now has hope to fix his problems.

Banging on the Door

Says the *Sfas Emes*, a person who works to find the improper thoughts within himself and to repair them is called one who *ãâ÷ áúùää*, *he bangs on the door in teshuvah*. And if he fell in with *aveiros* for which *teshuvah* is ineffective, *R"l*, since he's engaged in the work of *teshuvah*, and he finds the things that he must rectify... he immersed in the "Rambam's *mikvah*" multiple times a day, **then the Ribbono shel Olam opens a special door for him to forgive even those severe *aveiros***. A special door is opened for those who bang on it in constant *teshuvah*.

A *ãâ÷ áúùää* is one who realizes that he thought or spoke in improper ways, and he implores Hashem that he shouldn't go back there. He pays attention to his mistakes, and he accepts upon himself not to repeat his mistakes and to truly change. Those who engage in this—beginning with a few times during the day, going up to hundreds of times a day—merit that Hashem will open this special door.

A Generation of *Ba'alei Teshuvah*

All of this is in line with the words of the Chozeh of Lublin, who said: **In our generation, we're all considered *ba'alei teshuvah*. The *avodah* of our generation is *teshuvah*.** We have problems and we sometimes fall in, and we must do *teshuvah*.

One reason a person doesn't enjoy the process of *teshuvah* is because he doesn't see himself as having a clean slate afterward. And this is because the Ribbono shel Olam wants him to continue working—and so He withholds the declaration that he was completely cleansed.

Even so, we often experience that call from *Shamayim* after we do *teshuvah*. It may come in the form of a special success in learning or *davening* or in other areas of *avodas Hashem*... and the person understands from this that his *teshuvah* was accepted.

Teshuvah Tethers Us to the Truth

The Chozeh of Lublin asked, what's the point of constantly doing *teshuvah* if a person continues to sin?! The answer, he said, is that through *teshuvah* a person gains an understanding of himself and his flaws. Another insight, another understanding....

When a person makes a reckoning of his deeds, he becomes tethered to the truth, and then everything around him is illuminated.

The stamp of HaKadosh Baruch Hu is *emes*, חותמו של הקב"ה אמת — and so, when a person does *teshuvah*, everything around him receives the stamp of truth! When a person searches for the truth, and he seeks to see the world through the proper lens, the Ribbono shel Olam assists him in this. He merits great *siyatta diShmaya*.

The Light of Chanukah

And so, instead of being *afraid* of the *teshuvah* lifestyle, and in the place of thinking that life will be more pleasant when we *ignore* our issues... as some people will say, "It's so painful to think about how many *aveiros* I do in a day! I can't deal with it. In any case, Chassidim emphasize joy!" No, no, no! Chassidim emphasize *teshuvah* with joy.. The idea is that since it's possible to do *teshuvah* at any given time, we can always tap into the great light that fills our hearts with joy.

Especially on Chanukah, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu brings down such a great light—a **light that enables us to see clearly that we can do *teshuvah* and we must do *teshuvah*** whenever we notice that we thought or spoke in ways that are unbecoming. Then, one must immediately immerse in the *mikvah* of the Rambam, determine to become close to Hashem and to *daven* for it, and if he falls again, *chas v'shalom*, he will pick himself up once again.

Beginnings Are Difficult

The important thing that one must understand is that every moment is a new beginning. Those who understand that every moment represents a fresh start those who are likely to stay aboard for the long haul.

To declare our pure intentions on Yom Kippur at Neilah doesn't show very much commitment. But if one jumps aboard at 3:15 on a random day with an ironclad commitment to do *teshuvah* – it is likely to remain with him for the long term, because this person recognizes that he can always come back to Hashem at any time.

This is the message of Chanukah: the light that penetrates and illuminates in the lowest of places, providing us with the opportunity to come close to Hashem wherever we are.

