

## ***Bitachon* and *Tefillah* with Severe Difficulties – Part 2 – JewishClarity.com**

How does the Torah want us to relate to severe *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges)? Are we **always** supposed to expect that the situation will **improve**, and continue to daven (pray) for a complete *yeshua* (salvation)? Or, is there some point where one should simply **accept** the tragic reality as it is, and stop expecting and praying for an improvement?

What is the obligation with both *bitachon* (trust in G-d) and *tefillah* (prayer)? In short, what should one believe, expect, and do when facing great difficulties?

**Rav Wolbe** (*Alei Shur*) strongly encouraged us to never give up, and to have hope, even when we feel that a sword or *gezeira* (decree) is on our neck:

While one with real *bitachon* doesn't anticipate that Hashem will deal with him **exclusively** with *chesed*, and accepts with love whatever Hashem **does** bring upon him, there is also a trait that is related to *bitachon* called *tikvah* (hope).

The **Gemara Brachot** 10a says that the prophet Yeshaya went to visit Chizkiyahu the king when he was close to death. Yeshaya told Chizkiyahu that because he had never had children (to avoid the evil offspring that he knew he was destined to have), he would not only die soon in this world, but he would also not merit *Olam Haba*. Chizkiyahu then asked Yeshaya if he could marry his daughter, and through their combined merits possibly nullify the terrible prophesy and decree against him. Yeshaya replied that there was no point, since the decree had already been established. Chizkiyahu responded to Yeshaya — “I have a tradition passed down from the house of my father's father that — “Even if a sharp sword is resting on your neck, don't hold yourself back from *rachamim*.” Right then Chizkiyahu turned his face towards the wall and davened. What was the “wall?” Rebbe Shimon ben Lakish says that it refers to the walls of his heart.

There are many great things we can learn from this story. The main point which is relevant here is that a decree had **already** been issued, and there seemed to be nowhere else to turn. Chizkiyahu, however, did not give up. He davened from the totality of his heart. The **Gemara** continues (based on *Melachim Beis* 20:1–6) — “And Chizkiyahu wept an intense weeping.” Hashem, right away, told Yeshaya to tell Chizkiyahu — “I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. Behold, I am going to add fifteen years to your life.” Therefore, we see that there is hope, even when a sharp sword, i.e., an actual decree from Hashem, is resting on the neck of a person.

**Rabeinu Yona** explained this idea (*Mishlei* 3:26):

An additional obligation of *bitachon* is that we must know with our hearts — “*Hakol biyedei Shamayim* — all is in the Hands of Heaven.” We, therefore, have the ability to change both nature and our *mazal* (spiritual destiny). There is no obstacle for our salvation, neither big nor small, and although the difficulty may be imminent, the salvation can also come immediately. G-d is all-powerful and nothing can hold back His plan... Have *bitachon* in Hashem at all times of difficulty and darkness, and know that, in truth, He can save us from any difficulty, and that His salvation can come in the blink of an eye. Therefore, one should hope for His salvation, even if the sharp sword is resting on his neck. [As Chizkiyahu declared —] “Even if they are coming to kill me, I will still pray to Him.” This prayer emanated from *bitachon*, as it says — “Have *bitachon* in Hashem at **all** times” — in other words, even when the danger is close, and a person doesn't know how to be saved from it.

This prayer which emanates from *bitachon* is rooted in a complete *emunah* (belief). Hashem is all-powerful, and nothing in the world can stand in the way of His will. If He wants to save you, His salvation can come in the blink of an eye. While *bitachon* itself does **not** mean that only *tov*

*v'chessed* (good and kindness) will come, the prayer that emanates from *bitachon* **does** require us to trust in Hashem, since He has the **ability** to save us even when it seems that there is no way out. *Bitachon* and its offspring *tikvah* (hope) are almost two opposites within the same topic: **Bitachon** — not [necessarily] to anticipate that it will be **exclusively** good, and **hope** — that all **will** be good. One with true *bitachon* will combine both of them in his heart.

And, in fact, these two faces of *bitachon* **are** combined by **Rashi** on the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* (1:7) — “Don’t give up from retribution.” Rashi explained — “If you are wealthy, don’t have *bitachon* in your wealth, because retribution could come quickly. Therefore, you should always have **some** fear. And similarly, if difficulties come upon you, don’t give up, since the salvation can **also** come quickly.”

While **Rav Shmuel Rozovsky**, one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of *Ponovezh Yeshiva*, was in critical condition during his final illness, he declared that this principle [of Chizkiyahu, never to give up hope] would be true only if the “*cherev chada*” (sharp sword) was “*munachat al tzavaro shel adam* (resting **upon** the neck of a person),” but not “*ka’asher hacherev k’var chotechet b’tzavar* — When the sword is **already cutting** the neck.”

**Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** (*L’Sason ul’Simcha* from Rav Goldwasser, pg. 217–218), however, disagreed, since the source of this statement was Chizkiyahu HaMelech. Chizkiyahu was the one who had introduced the idea that even one who was on the verge of death could still become saved from it. If so, there was no situation of *cherev chotechet b’toch habasar* (a sword that was cutting into the actual flesh) greater than a situation which no person had ever been saved from previously. And, even so, [Chizkiyahu] didn’t hold himself back from davening for *rachamim*.

**Rabbi Kaganoff**, a *Rav* in *Neve Yaakov*, explained that Chizkiyahu the King held that even a prophecy along with a *gezar din* (Heavenly Decree) did not preclude the possibility that his prayer could be successful. Indeed, his prayer **was** answered. Thus we see, that although one may not pray for something that is clearly miraculous, one **may** pray for something which defies a prophecy, particularly if the prophecy is about a punishment, and the person has done *teshuvah* for the evil he was to be punished for (Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 10:4).

The *Sefer Megadin Chadashim* (*Eruvin* 29b) said that we are allowed, and it is actually a mitzvah, to daven for the *refuah* (cure) of a *choleh* (sick person), even where there is no known natural cure. It would only be considered to be a *tefillat shav* (prayer in vain) to daven to change the very **structure** of the world, like to change the gender of a fetus [past 40 days].

**Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky** (*Shu’t Divrei Chachamim* #76) was quoted that it is even permitted to daven for a *goseis* (i.e., where death seems imminent) to live, since medical progress has resulted in this no longer being considered a miracle. The *Steipler* and Rav Elyashiv also permitted this.

**Rav Elyashiv** was additionally quoted by Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (in *Shoshanat HaAmakim*) as saying that even in a case where a cure would be considered a miracle, one can still daven within the blessing of “*Refa’einu*,” because this may be able to lighten the person’s situation. But it is still forbidden to **explicitly** request something which would actually go against nature.

And the **Tzanzer Rebbe** said that, while we shouldn’t daven for a *nes* (miracle) verbally, we **could** still daven for a *choleh* in our **thoughts** alone, and the Knower of all thoughts may then send him a cure (*Darkei Chaim v’Shalom*).

However, Rabbi Kaganoff quoted the **Sefer Chassidim** (#794) as saying:

A person should not pray for something which is impossible under normal circumstances. Although Hashem could certainly make it happen, one is not permitted to request something which is beyond the natural order of the world [since that would be considered to be a *tefillat shav* — prayer in vain]. It is, therefore, forbidden to pray that Hashem perform a miracle which changes the way the world normally functions.

But, even with a seemingly “incurable” illness, **Rabbi Kaganoff** pointed out, one **may** pray that — researchers discover a cure quickly, the person's condition not get worse, or that Hashem simply treat the patient with mercy.

Similarly, the **Maharsha** said — It would be wrong [as a *tefillat shav* — a prayer in vain] to daven for a *refuah* which would be considered to be a *nes* (miracle).

**Rav Shimshon Pincus discussed many different types of *tefillah* in his *sefer*, “*She'arim b'Tefillah*.”**

There is a *tefillah* called “*P'giah*,” which means to make a multitude of requests with a stubbornness and determination to achieve what it is that we desperately need. It is as if we allow G-d no rest or tranquility until He fulfills our request... If we simply increase and persist with our davening without interruption, and even if we are not so fitting according to our deeds, even so, Hashem will fulfill our requests, as long as they are not bad for us...

This is incredible advice, and a very practical approach for us, and this is what Jews did all throughout the generations. When they were determined to achieve something specific, they went all out with their *tefillah*, what people call — “turning the world upside down.” They davened so much, and all of it was directed toward the same goal, that this became a distinctive type of *tefillah*...

One goes out to “battle” with *tefillah* day and night, never stopping and never weakening, until one receives *rachamim* (mercy) from *Shamayim* (Heaven), and he achieves his request.

One needs to be very careful, however, when utilizing this mode of *tefillah*. There are two points to keep in mind:

**First**, is that we are very far from knowing what is truly good for us. Therefore, we should not be **too** stubborn with any specific matter. We know how frequently we had asked for something and, in the course of time, it became clear just how good it was that we did **not** get what we had asked for. One approach to this is **always** to ask for things in a general way. In other words, that all should be in accordance with G-d's will, and that Hashem should send us only what He Himself knows is best for us.

**Second**, is that we should be very careful that our requests be made with the proper respect to Hashem... Along with the incredible closeness which we need to feel, we can never, for even one moment, forget our obligation of fear and trembling towards His overwhelming greatness. Even if some in the previous generations did make some demands on Hashem, it is impossible for **us** to learn from them since we are so small, and so filled with transgressions.

However, when a person is faced with a difficulty or some pressing matter, and wants to utilize this mode of *tefillah*, he should greatly increase his saying of *Tehillim* and the classical texts of prayer which were composed by our elevated Sages. He should then cry out from the depths of his heart before Hashem, with a determined plea over and over, that G-d's will be expressed through this...

It is natural for complaints to enter the heart, and for one to claim that Hashem is not paying attention to one's concerns. The **Gemara (Moed Katan 18b)** speaks about a woman who came to deny Hashem, since she felt that her prayers hadn't helped (G-d forbid). Be very careful not to stumble in this, and to remember the principles which our Rabbis taught us —

No person ever has a valid complaint against Hashem. Whatever Hashem does is only for the good, plus all of the other foundations of the Torah.

And, when Moshe himself saw that his prayer [to enter into *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel)] was not accepted, he recited the verse (*Devarim 32:4*) — “*HaTzur tamim pa'alo, ki kol drachav mishpat, Keil emunah v'ein aveil, tzadik v'yashar Hu* — G-d's work is perfect, all His paths are just, G-d is reliable without iniquity, He is righteous and straight.”

[Rav Pincus emphasized that —] This understanding is absolutely **essential** for anyone who wants to utilize this type of *tefillah*.

### **Rabbi Lichtenstein — Two essential approaches to *bitachon*:**

According to the **first approach**, *bitachon* is expressed by the **certainty** that G-d stands at your side and will assist you... This approach is expressed in the familiar formula, “With G-d's help, everything will be all right.”

While the *Chazon Ish (Emuna u'Bitachon)* categorically rejected this approach, many *Rishonim* **did** adopt an approach similar to what the *Chazon Ish* had rejected.

**Rabbeinu Bachya** wrote in his work *Kad HaKemach (Bitachon)*:

G-d can transcend the laws of nature and change a person's *mazal* (spiritual destiny). Although a situation may appear to be hopeless, Divine intervention can change that reality in an instant. G-d's salvation is close at hand, for He is Omnipotent. Even if a sword rests on a person's neck, he should not imagine that salvation is impossible... Thus said Chizkiyahu to Yeshaya the prophet: “I have received a tradition from my grandfather's house, that even though a sharp sword rests on a person's neck, he should not withhold himself from supplication to G-d.”

The **Chovot HaLevavot (Sha'ar HaBitachon, Chap. 1)** defined the “essence of *bitachon*” as:

“The peace of mind of the one who trusts, that the one upon whom he relies [whether G-d or man] will do the best and the most appropriate for him in this matter... The main definition of trust is that one's heart should believe that the one relied upon will fulfill what he has promised, and do good on his behalf, not out of obligation, but out of kindness and mercy.”

There is, however, a **second approach** to *bitachon*. **Rabbeinu Bachya** continued in the *Kad HaKemach*:

“Also included in the matter of *bitachon* is that a person must surrender his soul to G-d, and should constantly occupy his thoughts with this matter — If soldiers should come to kill him or to force him to abrogate the Torah, he should prefer to give up his life rather than go against the Torah.”

Obviously, this approach has a completely different meaning. It does **not** attempt to scatter the clouds of misfortune, try to raise expectations, or strive to whitewash a dark future. It does **not** claim that — “It will all work out for the best” either individually or nationally. On the contrary, it expresses a steadfast **commitment** — even if the outcome will be bad, we will remain reliant on,

and connected to G-d. We will remain faithful until the end, and shall not exchange our trust in G-d for dependence on man. This approach does not claim that G-d will remain at **our** side; rather it asks us to remain at **His** side.

Naturally, this approach is much less popular than its counterpart. A demand is always less marketable than a promise. For one who makes an honest assessment, though, this approach also functions as a source of solace and strength. In truth, this approach presents not just a demand but also a message. Being disconnected from G-d constitutes the greatest tragedy that can befall a person.

## Faith and Love

These two approaches stem from different obligations in *halacha*. The **first** is, practically speaking, an aspect of the mitzvah of **emunah** (belief). This mitzvah has a purely **cognitive** aspect, which asks of a Jew to recognize certain metaphysical or historical facts.

The proclamation, “Though He may slay me, still I will trust in Him,” expresses a trust in G-d **Himself**, not as a function of what I can receive **from** Him, but rather as trust **in** Him. This trust is unconnected with what one may get out of the relationship, but simply describes a connection to G-d...

This **second aspect** of *bitachon*, then, can be said to flow from the mitzvah — “You shall **love G-d your L-rd**” (*Devarim* 6:5).

In summary then, Judaism recognizes both the hopeful and expectant ***bitachon* based on *emunah***, and the steadfast and yearning ***bitachon* based on love**.

On the one hand, *bitachon* demands that a person be convinced that G-d will assist him; on the other hand, it demands that a person be prepared for a time when, G-d forbid, help will not be forthcoming.

Rebbe Akiva hoped; he anticipated the best, and believed that it would transpire. Yet, when this did not come to pass, when faced with a cruel and painful death, in this last, most bitter hour, he smiled...

And the *Yerushalmi* (*Brachot* 9:5) tells us that his smile was not any indication of “belittling of suffering,” but rather a sign of great *bitachon*.

*Bitachon* is not an independent topic, but rather is associated with both *emunah* and love. The ability to nurture the quality of *bitachon* depends upon one's internalization of a general fear of Heaven, which is related to the quest for closeness to G-d, as well as to the centrality of religious values in a person's life. The attribute of *bitachon*, especially with respect to its second aspect of love, is not independent of other qualities, and it certainly cannot simply be activated, like a proverbial faucet, during an hour of need. Rather, *bitachon* is a function of a person's general relationship to G-d; and depends upon his service of the heart, practical mitzvah observance, devotion to study of Torah, and sensitivity to G-d's constant overarching presence, in the sense of the verse in *Tehillim* (16:8) — “I have placed G-d before me **always**.”

(“Trust in G-d” in a collection of essays from Rabbi Lichtenstein entitled — “By His Light”)

The ***Leshem*** (a work of *kabbalah* written by the grandfather of Rav Eliyashiv) wrote: The reality is — “*Ein davar omeid neged habitachon* — Nothing stands in the way of *bitachon*.” Even a *rasha* with *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*.

As the **Ramban** (*Emunah u'Bitachon*) explained the *possuk* (verse) —

“*B'tach baHashem v'asei tov* — Have *bitachon* in Hashem and do good” (*Tehillim* 37:3). [He pointed out that] it does **not** say — “*Asei tov u'b'tach baHashem* — Do good and have *bitachon* in Hashem,” since the *bitachon* is not dependent on our good deeds **at all**. Rather, “*b'tach baHashem*” — whether you are a *tzadik* or a *rasha*, and afterwards “*Asei tov* — Do good.” But with the *bitachon* itself, in whatever you have *bitachon* — nothing will stand in your way.

You need not wonder about the many *kedoshim* (holy people) who endured many difficulties and hardships — why they didn't simply employ the trait of *bitachon*, in which case they would certainly have been saved. We need to know that they had other traits as well.

Some of them simply accepted their *yissurim* with love, like Rebbe Akiva (*Brachot* 61b) or Rebbe Eliezer ben Rebbe Shimon (*Baba Metziah* 84b).

Some of them did not want to trouble their Creator. They, therefore, utilized the trait of *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to give themselves over to Hashem, to do with them whatever was best in His eyes, like Rebbe Yehuda ben Bava (*Sanhedrin* 14a), and not to do what they themselves thought was best.

There is one final hidden idea. Sometimes it is G-d's specific will to bring a *gezeirah* (decree). Therefore, He may actually limit someone's free will and place a type of depression on that person's heart, until it is impossible for that person to then strengthen himself to have *bitachon*. And in this way, the *gezeirah* will be fulfilled.

In addition to these possibilities suggested by the *Leshem*, **Rav Elchanan Wasserman** (*Kovetz Ma'amarim*) discussed another idea. Although one should certainly have *bitachon* in the *chessed* of Hashem, many *tzadikim gemurim* (completely righteous individuals) felt that they were able to stand up to *midat hadin* (the trait of Justice) without the mixture of *midat harachamim* (the trait of mercy). Hashem, therefore, related to them this way. This explains why Yaakov Avinu, who was being dealt with exclusively through pure *din*, was afraid when he met up with Aisav.

However, the **Leshem** continues: The reality remains that — “*Ein davar omeid neged habitachon* — Nothing stands in the way of *bitachon*.”

Therefore, it is appropriate for every *ma'amin* (believer) to have a proper heart with *bitachon* that Hashem will reveal the good, and not to deviate for any reason, G-d forbid. After all, there are many verses in the Torah that *ratzon Hashem* (G-d's will) is that a person should place their *bitachon* in Hashem constantly.

The verse promises — “*Habote'ach b'Hashem, Hashem mivtacho* — The one with *bitachon* in Hashem, Hashem will be his trust.” Even a *rasha* who has *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*. Therefore, it may actually be wrong for one to hold oneself back from *bitachon* because of the fear of — “*She'ma yigrom hachet*.”

Finally, the *Leshem* explains:

The root of the fear of “*She'ma yigrom hachet*” is actually a lack of belief in **ourselves**. We, therefore, doubt whether we are truly worthy of having miracles done for us. As a result, we don't strengthen ourselves sufficiently to have the proper *bitachon* in Hashem. However, *Ein davar omeid neged habitachon* — Nothing stands in the way of *bitachon*. And this itself is what surrounds us and redeems us with a complete redemption to bring upon us all future good.

### Three final sources discuss the remarkable power of *tefillah*:

**Rabeinu Bachya** (*Kad HaMemach* — *Tefillah*, *Devarim* — Chap. 11) explained:

You need to know that the power of *tefillah* is great — even to change nature, to save one from a danger, and to nullify a decree:

**To change nature** we learn from Yitzchak. The Rabbis asked — “Why were the Matriarchs barren? [They answered —] Because Hashem desires the *tefillot* of the *tzadikim*. We see from this that the Matriarchs were not barren except because of *tefillah*, and when they davened for this, they actually changed nature.

**To save one from a danger** is learned from a series of verses in *Tehillim* (107:23–29).

**And to nullify a decree** is learned from Chizkiyahu since Hashem added fifteen years to his life through the power of *tefillah*. As Chizkiyahu said to Yeshaya the prophet — “I have a tradition passed down from the house of my father's father — “Even if a sharp sword is resting on your neck, don't hold yourself back from *rachamim* (mercy).” We see from here that *tefillah* is even higher than *nevuah*.

The **Meiri** (*Beit HaBechirah* on *Nedarim* 49b) wrote:

Although we say that people are judged on Rosh Hashanah for life and death, poverty and difficulty, loss and profit, a person should not give up from *tefillah* and *teshuva* **every** single day. Even the *gezar din* (Heavenly Decree) of a person can be torn up through *teshuva* and lots of *tefillah*; the gate is never shut before us. And all the more so, since some of the great Rabbis said that a person is judged **every** single day. Both opinions are really true for those who possess understanding.

Although it seems like we can justify our **daily** davening only according to the opinion that a person is judged every single day, that is only in terms of **general** prayers which are said for the sake of **others**. Any prayers for ourselves, as well as **specific** prayers for others, even the Rabbis [who say that a person is judged only on Rosh Hashanah] will agree [they can be made every day], since [we know that] — “Even if a sharp sword is resting on your neck, don't hold yourself back from *rachamim* (mercy).”

And finally, the **Maharsha** (*Kiddushin* 82a) said:

With much effort and help from Heaven, with *tefillah* and with *zechuyot* (merits), it is possible to change a *gezeira* (decree from Heaven). The foundation of these matters, that a Jew with his *tefillot* and requests is able to change his *mazal* and *gezar din*, and to transform them to the good, is explicit in *Gemara Rosh Hashanah* 15b — Rebbe Yitzchak said — Four things tear up the *gezar din* of a person — *tzedaka*, *tza'aka* (crying out to G-d), changing one's name, and changing one's actions. And some say — Even changing one's location.

The *sefer*, *Achas Sha'alti* from Rav Yuzof, a *Rav* in *Kiryat Sefer*, deals very thoroughly with the topic of *bitachon*. It provided most of the classical sources on *bitachon* which are presented here. Rabbi Dov Lev, a colleague and neighbor in *Ramat Beit Shemesh*, supplied many of the sources which discuss *tefillah* (prayer) in the face of severe *yissurim*. The two of them, along with the many others who helped with this presentation, should see only *bracha* (blessing) and *hatzlacha* (success), in both *ruchniyut* (spiritual matters) and *gashmiyut* (physical matters).

**This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun***