

## ***Bitachon* – Should We Always Expect the Best? – Pt. 1 – JewishClarity.com**

**The *Chazon Ish* discussed the meaning of *bitachon* in his classic work — *Emunah u'Bitachon* (Chap. 2):**

There is an old misconception rooted in the hearts of many when it comes to *bitachon* (trust in G-d). This term...has been transformed into the concept that there is an obligation to believe that, in any situation in which a person finds himself, where he faces an uncertain future with two [different] paths — one good and the other not — that the good outcome will certainly occur. And if one is doubtful and concerned for the possibility of the negative occurring, he [must then] be lacking in *bitachon*. This understanding of *bitachon* is not correct, for as long as the future has not been revealed through prophecy, the future has not been decided. [After all,] **who knows G-d's judgments and rewards?**

Rather, *bitachon* is [simply] the belief that there is nothing random in the world, and that everything which occurs under the sun is the result of a decree from Hashem.

When one internalizes this clear reality, that there is no chance misfortune, but rather all is from Hashem, for better or for worse; when one allows one's *emunah* (belief) to alleviate the fear and give one the courage to believe in the **possibility** of salvation...then one has achieved *bitachon* in Hashem.

Part of this trait of *bitachon* is to be steadfast in one's *emunah* even when one considers the possibility of *yissurim* (difficulties). One's heart must maintain its awareness that this is not a random misfortune, for there are **no** random occurrences in the world at all; everything is from Hashem.

According to this, *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem are one and the same — *emunah* is the general perspective of the believing person, and *bitachon* is the person's perspective in terms of himself; with *emunah* being the theory, and *bitachon* being the practice.

There is more to the trait of *bitachon* — for a holy spirit rests on the one who has *bitachon* in Hashem, accompanied by a strength of spirit that tells him that Hashem will indeed help him, as David HaMelech said — “If you bring an army upon me, my heart will have no fear; if a war comes upon me, in this I will have *bitachon*.” This matter varies according to the level of the person's *bitachon* and his degree of holiness.

When the *Chazon Ish* wrote — “Who knows G-d's judgments and rewards?” he was seemingly assuming that our ability to count on G-d's help depends upon the level of our merits. This is what is known as the principle of “*She'ma yigrom hachet* — Perhaps one's transgression will affect this.”

In fact, the ***Chovot HaLevavot*** says explicitly that a *rasha* (evil person) can **not** be sure that G-d will relate to him exclusively with *rachamim* (mercy), since he has been rebelling against G-d. This also seems to be the logic of “*She'ma yigrom hachet* — Perhaps one's transgression will affect this.”

The *Chazon Ish* and the *Chovot HaLevavot* both seem relatively straightforward, since we know there is *middat hadin* (the trait of judgment) in the world. How, then, could one **not** be worried about “*She'ma yigrom hachet*” — the level of one's merits? In fact, this seems to have been the concern that caused Yaakov Avinu to fear meeting up with Eisav, and not to simply trust in the explicit promise that Hashem had made to protect him.

**Many sources, however, say that we can simply expect the good, independent of the issue of “*She’ma yigrom hachet*.”**

**Rav Dessler** wrote that this approach of the *Chazon Ish*, that our ability to count on G-d's help depends upon the level of our merits, is a high level. However, there are other reliable sources with different opinions on this deep matter.

In fact, **Rav Yuzof** (in *Achat Sha’alti*) explains — many classical sources understand that *bitachon* actually **requires** us **not** to focus on “*She’ma yigrom hachet*” — the level of our merits. Rather, *bitachon* obligates us to trust and rely on Hashem for our needs, and that things **will** be good.

**Rashi** (Yeshaya 50:10) wrote:

Even if a difficulty is coming upon you — “*Yivtach b’sheim Hashem* — Trust in the Name of Hashem” because He **will** save you.

He also wrote (in *Gemara Sota* 48a) that up until the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), there was a group called the *anshei amanah* (men of faith) “who had *bitachon* in Hashem and relied on Him to do good, with no worry about any lack.” As long as they were fully committed to some great mitzvah, they could rely on Hashem to help them to do this good. And if they were lacking anything to do this, they were confident that Hashem would fill this lack.

The **Ramban** (*HaEmunah v’HaBitachon* — chap. 1) explained that while one with **emunah** may be afraid of “*She’ma yigrom hachet*,” one with **bitachon** will not be afraid:

One with *bitachon* not only believes that Hashem has the **ability** and he, therefore, won't give up, he also has *bitachon* that Hashem **will** actually save him.

While the Rambam and the *Sefer HaChinuch* understand that the *lav* (prohibition) of “*Lo tirah meiheim* — don't be afraid of them” in *Parshat Shoftim* (*Devarim* 20:1) is a prohibition to fear an enemy specifically in times of war, **Rabeinu Yona** holds that this prohibition applies in **every eit tzara** (time of difficulty). This involves two separate requirements:

**First**, a Torah prohibition to be afraid of difficulty at **any** time.

**Second**, to have *bitachon* that the salvation of G-d will **actually** come.

However, Rabeinu Yona would agree that one will not be violating this *lav* except if one actually gives up, which would, in any case, be against the very foundations of *emunah*.

The **Maharal** (*Netiv HaBitachon*) wrote that Hashem will be a shelter and protection in both this world and in *Olam Haba* (the World to Come) for all who place their *bitachon* in Him. Although there may be times when one will not be able to get some good because of a difficult *mazal* (spiritual destiny), even so, one should have *bitachon* in Hashem. Hashem [may even be] able to help from the upper world which is entirely good, if one has a difficult *mazal* in this world... The one with *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*, [meaning] the upper *chessed* [without limits].

The **Leshem** (a work of *kabbalah* written by the grandfather of Rav Elyashiv) wrote that the verse promises us:

*“Habote'ach b'Hashem, Hashem mivtacho — The one who has bitachon in Hashem, Hashem will be his trust.”* Even a *rasha* (evil person) who has *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*. Therefore, it is not good for one to hold himself back from *bitachon* because of the fear of — *“She'ma yigrom hachet,” she'ein davar omeid neged habitachon* — because **nothing** stands in the way of *bitachon*.

**Rav Elchanan Wasserman**, based on the Rambam, explained that the problem with *bitachon* being dependent upon the degree of our righteousness (i.e., *“She'ma yigrom hachet”*), is that we **always** need to have *bitachon* in the *chessed* (kindness) of Hashem. As the *Leshem* mentioned, even a *rasha* who has *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*. If not for this, we wouldn't find any *bitachon* at all, because as the verse says — *“Ein adam tzadik ba'aretz asher ya'aseh tov v'lo yecheta* — There is no *tzaddik* in the world who does good and never ever transgresses.”

**No contradiction — While the “good” is not definite, we still need to strengthen our belief in salvation.**

To reconcile the *Chazon Ish* with these other approaches, we first need to understand that there is **no obligation** to believe that the salvation from one's difficulty will **always definitely** come. Along with our *bitachon*, we understand that the future is not determined, there is *middat hadin* (the aspect of justice) in the world, and our transgressions have definite consequences. But, at the same time, we should not say that the salvation of our difficulty is **merely able** to come. While the “good” is not definite, we need to strengthen our belief in the real possibility of salvation.

The **Ramban** (*Emunah u'Bitachon*) describes *bitachon* not as a *yediah* (knowledge) or *emunah* (belief), but rather as a *nesiat hanefesh* (inspiration of the soul) — to strengthen oneself and to trust that one will merit *chasdei Shamayim* (kindness from Heaven).

**Rabeinu Yona** (*Sha'arei Teshuva*) says similarly:

It is G-d's will that, at the very moment of difficulty, a Jew's heart should be specifically filled with the salvation of Hashem, to the point that he will have *bitachon* and reliance on that salvation, with no fear at all.

Since this *bitachon* is not any type of future knowledge, and the one with *bitachon* is simply strengthening himself, *bitachon* is no contradiction to what our mind understands. Even the one with *bitachon* doesn't claim to know how things will turn out. Ultimately, the situation he faces is unclear — will G-d relate to him with judgment or mercy; with salvation or not?

***Bitachon* in a positive outcome is not logical; it is what Hashem has decreed that we should expect and believe.**

Why, then, should one with *bitachon* assume that the outcome will be specifically good? After all, *hashgacha haElyona* (the elevated Supervision) in which we have *bitachon*, has many different aspects to it — the traits of *chessed* (kindness), *din* (judgment), *rachamim* (mercy), etc. There would seem to be no logic in having *bitachon* that the aspect of *chessed* would be the one which would win out in any particular situation.

The answer is simply that it is Hashem's Will for us to have *bitachon* in His *chessed* and *rachamim*. Otherwise there would be no room for us to trust that the aspect of *chessed* is specifically what will prevail, and not to be concerned with *“She'ma yigrom hachet.”* In other words, our *bitachon* in the *chessed* of Hashem is not because this is what is logical to us, but

rather because Hashem has decreed that we should have that *bitachon*. And this is even **with** whatever transgressions we may have.

***Bitachon* should be particularly in the *chessed* of Hashem, and this will cause *chessed* to be expressed.**

Many sources say that one's *bitachon* should not merely be in **Hashem**, but rather one should have *bitachon* in the ***chessed*** of Hashem, like the verse in *Tehillim* (13:6) — “*v’ani b’chasdecha batachti* — And I have *bitachon* in Your *chessed*.” While we may never know with certainty why Hashem wants us to have *bitachon* specifically in His *chessed*, we do see that this very reliance on His *chessed* will cause the *chessed* and *rachamim* (mercy) of Hashem to be expressed.

The **Ramban** explained that *bitachon* in Hashem really **means** to have *bitachon* in the ***chessed*** of Hashem:

Even if you have no good deeds and know yourself to be a *rasha* (evil), have *bitachon* in Hashem. He is the *Ba'al HaRachamim* (Master of Mercy) and He will have mercy upon you, as it says — “And His mercy is on **all** of His creations” — in other words, on **both** *tzadikim* and *reshayim*.

**Rashi** (*Tehillim* 31:24) put this very simply:

Hashem protects those who believe in His salvation and rely on it.

**Rabeinu Yona** (*Mishlei* 3:26) also said:

The obligation of *bitachon* is to have true *bitachon* in the mercy of Hashem, because His mercy and His *chessed* are both enormous, as it says in *Tehillim* — “*v’ani b’chasdecha batachti* — And I have *bitachon* in Your *chessed*” (13:6) and — “*Batachti b’chessed Elokim olam va’ed* — I have *bitachon* in the *chessed* of Hashem forever and ever” (52:10).

And additionally:

When a difficulty draws close and one is afraid because of his transgressions, he should strengthen his hope, because the *chessed* of Hashem is above every transgression, and He will have mercy on anyone who humbles himself and requests His mercy.

The ***Sefer Halkarim*** wrote:

The one with *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chessed*, even one not deserving in terms of himself. It is the way of *bitachon* to extend **free** *chessed* to those with *bitachon* in Hashem. (Chapter 46)

There is *tikvat ha’chessed* (hope in the *chessed*) — There is nothing which prevents the salvation in terms of *chessed* alone. (Chapter 47)

And [this is true] even if one has many transgressions...because it is impossible that the power of the transgressor to transgress is greater than the power of Hashem to forgive. (Chapter 48)

***Bitachon*, which is true *d’veikut* (attachment to Hashem), creates an elevated protection.**

The **Gemara Brachot** (60a) says that when Hillel HaZakein (Hillel the Elder) was on the road back to his town, he heard the sound of screaming coming from the town. He declared that he was certain the screaming was not coming from inside of his own home.

The **Gra** explained this *bitachon* (surety) of Hillel HaZakein:

Some say that the *bitachon* of Hillel HaZaken was simply his confidence that there wouldn't be any actual **screaming** from inside of his home, since it would be impossible to say that there couldn't be any **difficulties** at all inside his home. After all, we do find many *tzaddikim* (righteous individuals) who definitely did have difficulties. However, since the **Gemara** based this surety of Hillel HaZaken on the verse of "*Mi'shmua ra'ah lo yira* — [One with *bitachon*] won't be afraid of bad tidings," it appears that the *bitachon* of Hillel HaZakein was that there wouldn't even be any difficulties in his home. In other words, the *s'char* (benefit) of having *bitachon* in Hashem is that — "*Mi'shmua ra'ah lo yira* — From a bad tiding he won't be afraid," meaning that Hashem won't bring difficulties upon him.

And the **Gra** also said (*Mishlei* 25:15):

We have *bitachon* that Hashem will never abandon us... If it were [only] because of ourselves, we **would** be afraid because of "*she'ma yigrom hachet*." However, as long as it is because of His *chessed*, we should not be afraid at all, since His *chessed* is established forever.

### **Rav Wolbe (AleI Shur) discussed how *bitachon* will impact one's *hashgacha* (Divine supervision):**

A fundamental [of Torah] is that the key to *hashgacha* is the person himself. Hashem brings upon a person the positive and negative consequences of his own actions.

In addition to this, however, the story with Hillel HaZakein (**Gemara Brachot** 60a), who was sure that the screaming in his city wasn't coming from his own home, shows us the power of a person's *bitachon* and *d'veikut* (attachment to G-d). They enable a person to enter into a special place of elevated protection, and, therefore, he should not be afraid of bad tidings.

The **Gemara (Brachot** 60a) also tells a story with Rebbe Akiva, facing one difficulty after the next, while on a journey. First, there was no room for him at an inn, then his torch blew out, and finally, his rooster and donkey were both eaten up. He responded to each new challenge by saying — "*Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — All that the Merciful one (Hashem) does, He does for the good." And then, in the morning, he saw just how beneficial every one of these seeming difficulties had actually turned out to be.

Based on this *gemara*, the Maharal (*Netiv Ahavat Hashem, perek aleph*) wrote:

A person should be accustomed to say — "*Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — All that the Merciful one does, He does for the good." And when a person says this about something which appears to be bad, but he has *bitachon* in Hashem that it will be for good, then Hashem will make that "bad" into good...

And, therefore, Rebbe Akiva said — "*Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — All that the Merciful one (Hashem) does, He does for the good," because all *mishpat* and *din* (justice and judgment) that comes upon a person is really for his benefit. [Therefore,] when something comes upon a person which looks bad, but the person has *bitachon* in Hashem, then Hashem will **transform** it into good, because of this *bitachon* in Hashem.

Furthermore, the **Maharal** wrote (*Netiv HaBitachon*):

Even when one sees and thinks that all hope is lost, he should not give up. He should have *bitachon* in Hashem forever, that He is able to save him. Hashem will then save him, just as he had placed his *bitachon* in Him.

Hashem has two different aspects of *chesed* — *chesed* which is limited by *mishpat* (justice), and *chesed elyon* (upper *chesed*) [which is unlimited]. The remarkable power of *bitachon* is that it allows one to access the *chesed elyon* of Hashem. *Bitachon* is the key to unlock this upper world of *rachamim* (mercy) without boundaries.

**Rav Shimshon Pincus** (*She'arim b'Tefillah*) discussed *bitachon* as it relates to the *tefillah* called "*Kriah*," which means to call out to Hashem with His eternal Name (and essence) of unlimited *rachamim*:

When a person has *bitachon* in Hashem, that [very *bitachon*] will save him from all difficulties.

The **Medrash** (*Tehillim* 25) gives a *mashal* (analogy) of one who told bandits who had captured him that he was close to the King. When they brought him to the King, and the King asked him how they were related, he simply answered that he trusted in the King. The King then assured him — "Since you have trusted in me, I will save you."

In the very same way, *bitachon* in Hashem will itself cause Hashem to be concerned for and to save a person, even though that person may not deserve it as a result of his own deeds... The very fact of his *bitachon* in Hashem will be the cause for him to receive his request. This is a fundamental principle of the Torah — that through a person's *bitachon* in Hashem, he will receive his request from Hashem, even though he is not fitting according to his own deeds.

The greater the danger, the more one must recognize Hashem, and the greater must be one's *bitachon* in Him...to the point that one may even need to recognize Hashem's ability to do miracles.

There is a great difference between the *bitachon* required for a *tzadik* and the *bitachon* which a *rasha* (evil person) needs. Since the *rasha* has more *aveirot* (transgressions), he is in much more danger, and therefore requires much more *bitachon* to be saved. If, however, he does have this greater *bitachon*, and recognizes that Hashem can have *rachamim* and *chesed* even for him, then he can also be saved.

This really answers the earlier questions. How can we have *bitachon* [i.e., complete confidence] that Hashem will fulfill our requests? And who can say that he has the necessary merits to guarantee this? The answer is that the *bitachon* in Hashem will itself be the cause of his salvation.

However, according to the *Chazon Ish*, while Hashem would certainly want us to always yearn and hope for His *chesed*, that is not the essential point of *bitachon*. As he explained, *bitachon* is simply the belief that nothing in the world is random; all is from *Hashgacha* (Divine supervision), and all is **ultimately** for our good.

***Iyun tefillah* — a particular type of certainty with *bitachon* — can be dangerous.**

There is, however, a concept called *iyun tefillah* (intense prayer) which can actually be destructive. As Rashi explains it:

“The person says in his heart that his request will be fulfilled **because** he davened with *kavanah* (focus).”

Seemingly, the same is true when a person says in his heart that he is sure his request will be fulfilled **because** he had *bitachon* in Hashem. This thought of “*magia li* — this is **coming** to me” because of some merit, is very dangerous. Our *bitachon* needs to be in the **chessed** of Hashem, not in the great **zechut** (merit) of our *bitachon* in Hashem, nor in the **zechut** of our *tefillah*.

In fact, it is possible that this issue is even more serious with *bitachon* than it is with *tefillah*. If one has *bitachon* specifically in the **zechut** of his *bitachon*, then he will ultimately be lacking in the *bitachon* itself, since he will no longer be relying **exclusively** on the **chessed** of Hashem.

### ***Chalishat hada'at* (anguish/hopelessness) also influences us badly.**

Just like *bitachon* and reliance on the **chessed** of Hashem has a positive influence on our future situation, similarly *chalishat hada'at* (anguish or hopelessness) influences us negatively.

The Torah (*Devarim* 20:5–7) discusses three military exemptions — a person who built a house but had not yet dedicated it, one who planted a vineyard but had not yet redeemed it, and one who began marriage but had not yet consummated it. In all three cases, the Torah states a reason — because another man may come and finish this process which he began, and Rashi tells us — “this would be anguishing.”

The **Maharal** (*Gur Aryeh* on *Devarim* 20:5), explaining these words of Rashi, said:

The concern is **not** that the death of the one in battle will cause this anguish, but rather the opposite — the concern is that the anguish will cause his death. It appears that there are people who will feel anguish over the thought that another man could come and take what is theirs, as Rashi expressed it — “this would be anguishing.” And then, as a result of this anguish, his *mazal* (spiritual destiny) will be damaged, which could ultimately become the cause of his death in the battle.

This point is actually spelled out in an explicit **Gemara** (*Horayot* 12a):

“Perhaps one will have *chalishat hada'at* (anguish or hopelessness) and that [itself] will damage his *mazal* (spiritual destiny).”

This shows us the benefit of having *bitachon* in the **chessed** of Hashem, and not being held back from this *bitachon* by the fear of “*she'ma yigrom hachet*.” This *bitachon* will itself help to awaken and actualize that very **chessed** of Hashem in our lives.

There is also a second benefit to having *bitachon* in the **chessed** of Hashem. The *kavod* (glory/honor) of Hashem will be expressed and revealed through this very fact that people are relying on the **chessed** of Hashem.

### **We should not doubt *bitachon* even when we don't see the *yeshua* (salvation).**

We should not doubt the remarkable power of *bitachon* even when we don't actually see the *yeshua* (salvation). While we may not always see the results of our *bitachon*, we need to know that it will certainly be successful to impact us with the **chessed** of Hashem. There are different opinions as to how this occurs.

The **Sefer Halkarim** said it is impossible that the one with *bitachon* will not attain his request if his *bitachon* in the *chesed* of Hashem is true and complete. This is also the explicit opinion of the *Leshem* — “*She’ein davar omeid bifnei habitachon* — There is **nothing** which stands before *bitachon*.”

**Rabeinu Yona** (*Mishlei* 10:28) pointed out:

If you don't attain the matter which you are yearning for, the effect of your yearning will still be the cause for many other significant benefits and kindnesses in the same area which your soul desired, as it says — “*v’ha’boteach b’Hashem, chessed y’sovevenu* — And the one with *bitachon* in Hashem will be surrounded by *chesed*.”

The **Ramchal** said similarly:

*Bitachon* in Hashem is true *bitachon*...and if [the salvation] is delayed, wait for it; and if it is not in this world, it will be in *Olam Haba* (the world to come). But it is impossible that your hope will be lost forever.

Rabeinu Yona and the Ramchal agreed with the *Sefer Halkarim* and the *Leshem* that it is **not** possible for one who has *bitachon* in Hashem not to be successful in having the *chesed Hashem* express itself all around him. Hashem has promised His *chesed* to those with *bitachon* in Him. This promise is certain, and independent of any condition at all. Their disagreement is simply the degree to which this *chesed* will be specifically according to the request and hope of the one with the *bitachon*.

While the mitzvah of *tefillah* (prayer) requires that we ask of Hashem whatever we **ourselves** perceive to be our needs, we understand that only Hashem knows what is truly good.

The same is true with the mitzvah of *bitachon*. G-d's will is that we have *bitachon* in His *chesed*, and strengthen ourselves that what we see as our salvation will really come. But, even so, we need to understand that only the *Hashgacha Elyonah* (G-d's elevated supervision of the world) knows what is really best for us.

In terms of hopes, prayers, and requests which are not answered as we would like, the **Sefer Halkarim** (4:24) points out a fundamental principle:

**Sometimes a *tefillah* which one thinks is best is not accepted, not because of any transgressions, but because it is simply not what Hashem wants.**

[In addition,] if Hashem knows that this request will not be good for the person, then it will [also] not be accepted...

Therefore, an ideal *tefillah* for a *chacham* (wise person) would be — “Master of the Universe — Do Your Will in the Heavens above and grant satisfaction to those who fear You below. Do whatever is best in Your eyes... In other words, whatever I *daven* before You, **don't pay attention to my [specific] words and my requests** to do what my heart desires or what I request. Many times I request and *daven* for what is not good for me, because I imagine that it **will** be good. But You know much more than me if this matter is good for me or bad. Therefore, You should decide and not me. Do what **You** know is good, and not what is merely good in my own eyes.”



Our Rabbis thus said (*Brachot* 54a, 60b) — “One is obligated to bless on the bad just like he is obligated to bless on the good.” This is because the real evaluation of the good is only with Hashem, not with man.

The most proper prayer is, therefore, general, and not too specific. Otherwise, it is as if we are trying to force the *ratzon Hashem* (Will of G-d) to what **we** think is best, and not trying to force our own will to be more like the *ratzon Hashem*.

Similarly, the **Rashash** (*Brachot* 16b) pointed out:

We ask Hashem “*l'malei mishaloseinu l'tova* — to fulfill our requests **for good**” [in general terms] because [we understand that] some specific requests which appear proper in our eyes are not really the best for us.

**Rav Wolbe** (*Alei Shur*) explained:

*Bitachon* flows from one's *emunah* (belief) in *hashgacha pratit* (Divine Supervision). Even with *bitachon*, however, it is impossible for us to think that everything which occurs will be exclusively *tov v'chesed* (good and kindness). There is also the trait of *din* (judgment), as well as tests and decrees [from Heaven]. How does one with *bitachon* accept all of this?

The depth of *bitachon* is that a person knows he is in the reliable hands of his Creator, and everything that He gives him is measured and with justice.

The nature of man is to take all of the kindness of Hashem as if it is expected. He never asks why Hashem has given him so much more than he deserves. However, when Hashem takes from him through the trait of judgment, he immediately asks why this is happening to him. He views the *middat hadin* (trait of judgment) as if it were a thief taking what is his with no justification.

This is the point that Iyov (Job) made — “*Hashem natan* (G-d gave)” and I didn't ask any questions, “*V'Hashem lakach* (and G-d took)” and I am **also** not asking any questions. And with both aspects, both *chesed* (kindness) and *din* (judgment) — “*Y'hi sheim Hashem m'vorach* — I will bless Hashem” — since **He** knows what is really best for me.

This is *bitachon*. A person knows — in other words, his soul knows — that he is in the trustworthy hands of Hashem. And this is how the *Chovot haLevavot* (*Sha'ar Bitachon*, Chapter 1) expressed it — “The essence of *bitachon* (trust in anyone) is *menuchat nefesh* (peace of mind); one's heart is relying on whomever he is trusting that he will only do whatever is good and proper for him.” [And we need to realize that] this is speaking about peace of mind and the reliance of one's heart, not [merely] an intellectual awareness.

## ***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 *chessed*, 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 Metzieh* 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 *chesed* 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 Eisav.

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 *chesed*. 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***