

ביטחון והשתדלות

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**FAITH  
IN GOD**  
*Versus*  
**HUMAN  
EFFORT**  
**BASIC CONCEPTS**



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EFFORT**

**BASIC CONCEPTS**

**Avraham Weinroth**



**FELDHEIM**

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*Dedicated in loving memory  
to my dear father*

**R' Moshe Aharon Weinroth z"l**  
*ben R' Mordechai Eliezer Weinroth z"l*

*and to my dear mother*

**Mrs. Dreizel Weinroth a"h**  
*bas R' Aryeh Aftergut z"l*

*True believers with all their hearts*

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Rabbi CHAIM P. SCHEINBERG

Rosh Hayeshiva "TORAH ORE"

and Morah Hora'ah of Kiryat Mattersdorf

הרב חיים פינחס שיינברג

ראש ישיבת "תורה אור"

ומורה הוראה דקריית מטרוסדורף

בס"ד, חודש תשרי, תשס"ו

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הנה הביאו לפני ספר נכבד ויקר, אשר חיברו הרה"ג רבי אברהם וינרוט שליט"א, והוא ביאור נרחב וגדול ביסודות הבטחון בו יתברך, וענין חובת השתדלות האדם, ענינים נכבדים עד למאד, אשר הם מיסודי אמונתנו הקדושה, שהי"ת שליט בעולמו ואין דבר נעשה כאן בלא בהשגחתו יתברך, וערך הספר בצורה ברורה ומאירת עינים, ביאורים עמוקים מסוגיות הגמרא, הראשונים, ועד דברי האחרונים, ערוכים ומבוארים בטוב טעם ודעת בכל ענין וענין, והכל מוגש לפני המעיין בספר באופן טוב, דבר דבור על אופניו, וניכר מתוך הדברים גודל עמלו ושקידתו של הרב המחבר שליט"א בלימוד התורה הקדושה.

ואף שזה זמן רב שאיני יוצא בהסכמות לספרים, מטעם שעמדי, וגם קשה עלי העיון מפאת טרדות הישיבה כי רבו עלי, מ"מ לא אמנע טוב מבעליו, ועל כן אברך את הרב המחבר שיזכה ויעלה ספרו זה על שולחנם של מלכים, מאן מלכי רבנן, ויתקבל באהבה ובשמחה לפני הלומדים, ויזכה לחבר עוד חיבורים נפלאים כאלו בתורה הקדושה, ולשבת באהלה של תורה כל ימי חייו מתוך מנוחת הנפש והרחבת הדעת.

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ונשיא מועצת חכמי התורה

ירושלים י' מנחם תשס"ו JERUSALEM

## הסכמה

הובאו לפניי גליונות הספר "בטחון בה' והשתדלות טבעית" העוסק בבטחון בה' בהשקפה ובדרך המוסר מעשה ידי אומן נטע נאמן הרב היקר והנכבד דורש טוב לעמו חכו ממתקים וכולו מחמדים, יראת ה' היא אוצרו ועליו יציץ נזרו מוכתר בנימוסים, שבה וקילוסים כש"ת הרב **אברהם ויינרוט שליט"א**. הערוכים כטוב טעם ודעת ואסף איש טהור חידושים וביאורים, רעיונות והגיגים "תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסך דבר דבור על אופניו", ולפעלא טבא אמינא יישר כוחו לאורייתא.

והנני מברכו מקרב לב, יהי ה' עמו, ויעל במעלות רמות ונישאות, ויהא רעוא שיזכה לברך על המוגמר בקרוב, ועוד יפוצו מעינותיו חוצה להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה, ויעלה מעלה מעלה במעלות התורה והיראה ובמדות תרומיות. והיה שמו כשם הגדולים אשר בארץ לגאון ולתפארת.

אורייתא יוסף





# ישיבת חברון כנסת ישראל

## בכעת מדדכי

HEBRON YESHIVA KNESSET ISRAEL GIVAT MORDECHI  
RABBINICAL COLLEGE

בס"ד

י"ג תשרי תשס"ו

לידידי מכבר הימים, עו"ד הרב אברהם וינרוט שליט"א

שמחתי מאוד לראות את ספרו החדש בענייני הביטחון בבורא וחובת ההשתדלות, שכבר כתב מרנא הגר"א בכמה מקומות, שזה היסוד הראשי לעבודת התורה והמצוות של האדם בעולם הזה, ואשריו שזכה להעמיד פרקי יסוד בעניינים אלו.

עוד זכורני ימים מקדם, כאשר חבש ידידי המחבר את ספסלי בית המדרש בישיבת "עטרת ישראל" והיה ככוכב מזהיר בכישרונות נדירים, ובהבנה מעמיקה וחדורת, ועוסק בתורה בביקוש ובצמאון גדול.

ותמיד היה זכור אצלי לטוב תקופה זו שבה מסרתי שיעור בישיבה לתלמידים מצטיינים, ובמיוחד כשמשתתף בשיעור תלמיד כמו ידידי ר' אברהם, החודר לעמקם של דברים בבהירות נפלאה ובסברה ישרה.

וכאשר זכיתי, הרבה שנים אחר כך, לראות את ספרו של ידידי המחבר בענייני גניבה וגזלה, רחב ליבי, ועמדתי משתאה ומתפעל איך הצליח להוציא מתחת ידו יצירה נפלאה זו, ועם טרדותיו הרבים השכיל להעמיד העניינים הקשים והעמוקים ביותר בקרן אורה, והצליח להאיר בבהירות נפלאה ובשפה רווטה מושגים קשים, שיהיו לנחלת הרבים המתענגים על ספריו.

ועכשיו, ברכתי שנית ברכת הנהנין, על ספרו החדש שבו פרקי יסוד בהלכות דעות וחובת הלבבות, ולא הניח ידו גם מלעסוק בפרקי יסוד של עניינים אלו, שהם יסוד לכל הנהגת האדם ועבודתו בעולם הזה.

והספר מלא וגדוש בהיקף גדול, ובכשרון רב, נכתב בשפה בהירה, ומיוסד על מקורות נאמנים. והצליח להעמיד הדברים כשולחן ערוך, כיד השם הטובה עלי.

וברוך השם שזכה לכך, ואין לי אלא לברכו להמשיך במפעליו הגדולים, להיות משכיל בכל דרכיו, ולזכות הרבים בתורתו.

בידידות נאמנה ובברכת כהנים באהבה,

דוד כהן

ר"י בישיבה הקדושה חברון כנסת ישראל  
בעיה"ק ירושלים ת"ו

3/27 כהן  
ר' דוד כהן  
ב"ה ירושלים ת"ו



## FOREWORD

The *Talmud* (*Chagigah* 15b) describes a conversation between the *Amora* Rabbah bar Shilah and Eliyahu Ha'navi as follows:

Rabbah bar Shilah asked Eliyahu: "What does God do?"

Eliyahu replied: "God quotes *Talmudic* discourses in the name of each of the Rabbis, with the exception of discourses by Rabbi Meir."

Asked Rabbah bar Shilah: "Why not Rabbi Meir?"

Eliyahu answered: "Because he was a pupil of Elisha ben Avuyah, known as 'Acher' — ['the other one,' who veered off the path of Torah]."

Rabbah bar Shilah then asked: "What is the fault? Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate, ate the contents, and discarded the peel."

Rabbah bar Shilah meant to say that Rabbi Meir studied Torah under Elisha, but did not absorb his bad influence, and hence there are no grounds for not delving into the *Talmudic* discourses presented by Rabbi Meir.

Rabbi Weinberg (the author of the responsa *Seridei Aish*)

has difficulty with Rabbah bar Shilah's logic. The contention concerning Rabbi Meir was not that he was influenced by Acher and accepted his heretical ideas, but rather that he studied Torah under him, since one is forbidden to learn Torah from a person who abandoned its practice. Thus, "eating the contents and discarding the peel" does not answer how Rabbi Meir could learn from Acher. The problem was not with the "peel"; rather, it was with his eating the "contents" given to him by someone whose behavior was antithetical to Hashem's will.

Rabbi Weinberg resolves this difficulty in a most wonderful manner as follows:

The *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 39b) explains what caused Elisha ben Avuyah to turn into Acher and to forego his faith. There are two *mitzvos* whose rewards of long life are explicitly stated in the Torah: the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents and the *mitzvah* of *shiluach ha'ken* (sending away the mother bird that sits over her eggs or nestlings, before taking them). Now, Elisha ben Avuyah became a heretic after witnessing a father ask his son to climb onto the roof of their house and bring him nestlings from a nest. The son climbed onto the roof, sent away the mother, and took the nestlings as commanded by his father, but fell off the roof and died. The son in this case had performed the two *mitzvos* — that of parental obedience and that of *shiluach ha'ken* — both for which the Torah promises longevity as a reward, and still the son died in the prime of his life. This event left Acher perplexed. "Where is the long life promised for observing these *mitzvos*?" Such thoughts brought Elisha ben Avuyah to abandon his faith and to turn into Acher.

The *Talmud* (ibid.) notes that Acher was mistaken in his interpretation of the verses promising longevity. In reality, they offer long life in the Next World, and not necessarily in this world. Having erred in his interpretation of these verses, Elisha became a heretic.

Rabbi Weinberg says the following concerning the above:

Only a person who has internalized his belief in God and has allowed it to permeate all the chambers of his heart can be so deeply affected by such a sight. This is so because a person feels with his entire soul that the Torah is a “Torah of life”; that God sits and nurtures the entire world, from the largest creatures to the smallest (*Avodah Zarah* 3b); and that “all His ways are just — a faithful God, without iniquity, just and right is He” (*Devarim* 32:4).

But one whose belief in God is [as shallow] as a bird’s chirp, and does not feel with all his limbs that everything came into being by God’s command — such a person is not shocked by anything, and the sight of “the wicked devouring one more righteous than he” (*Chavakuk* 1:13), too, passes by him without much notice.

If a person is not affected by such a sight, this does not necessarily stem from his deep belief and trust in God; this may also happen because his belief is blemished.

Rabbi Weinberg has thus clarified that Elisha ben Avuyah became a heretic because he was shaken by what he saw. A shock of this magnitude characterizes a person who has a vital belief in God, but at the same time lacks a thought-out system for applying that belief.

Hence, when the *Talmud* says that the *Tanna* Rabbi Meir “ate the contents,” this does not refer to the Torah discourses that he heard from Acher, but to that overwhelming belief in God that caused Elisha to be shocked by the sight he had witnessed. It is this sensitivity that Rabbi Meir internalized.

However, “the shell he discarded” — Rabbi Meir rejected the conclusion to which Acher arrived. Conversely, on the basis of that deep insight into the world around him, Rabbi Meir arrived at a more pristine, more profound, purer level of belief.

If one contemplates the issue, he will come to the realization that there are two kinds of believers in God:

1. Plain and simple belief: His worldview is stable, his vision lucid, and his belief pristine and clear. This kind of believer cannot be shocked, since he follows his predecessors’ faith under all circumstances. Even if he is faced with many doubts, pain, or temptations brought about by where he lives or his times, he will not deviate right or left from his belief.
2. The cognitive belief of a sensitive and far-seeing person: At first, this kind of belief seems more deeply rooted, stemming from a more profound intellect and sensitivity. This is the belief that Rabbi Meir succeeded in extracting from Elisha. Nevertheless, at times it is precisely the person whose belief is profound and intellectual who may encounter difficulties and misgivings that indeed perturb him, given his scrutinizing vision and sensitive soul. Reality is arduous and grueling at times. In the absence of



a doctrine for applying his *emunah* to such situations, a wrong point of departure may undermine this type of person's belief. In certain circumstances, this person will be highly susceptible to turning into an Acher.

Rabbi Meir exemplified the second kind of belief. Indeed, it is possible to remain neutral and unmoved, not to pose questions, and not to be shaken by one's surroundings and their difficulties. But this is not the way Rabbi Meir followed. The "contents he ate" means that Rabbi Meir learned to internalize Acher's pure and profound feelings of belief, those feelings that disturbed him upon witnessing something that went against the grain. He learned to be cognizant of events and to observe them with open eyes and a sensitive soul, but "the shell he discarded" — his belief doctrine was orderly and hence was not damaged. We thus see that an orderly belief doctrine is vital in averting doubts and heresy even during the most difficult of times.

Belief is tested precisely during difficult times and is strengthened by what is known as a "trial." Our forefather Avraham was faced with ten trials, the most difficult of them being highly incomprehensible, not only because of its emotional difficulty, but also from the point of view of understanding and belief.

Avraham waited for a hundred years to have a son who would continue his ways and his work, and after he was promised that "your seed will dwell in Yitzchak," this son was born to him in a miraculous way. Then, after all this, he was ordered to sacrifice his son on an altar — something that in a single

moment would thwart a hundred years of yearning for such an heir.

Moreover, Avraham's mission in life was to combat idolatry, one of the prominent manifestations of which was offering human sacrifices to the idol *Molech*. And now he was being called upon to bring a human sacrifice! So, the sacrificing of Yitzchak would thus completely thwart the Heavenly promise and be in direct contradiction to Avraham's opposition to offering human sacrifices.

How would he be able to explain to people that he was now prepared to bring a human sacrifice, no other than his precious son Yitzchak? Still, Avraham did not ask and did not wonder. He did not abandon his faith and did not protest, but arose in the morning, saddled his donkey, took Yitzchak, placed him on the altar, and in the end stretched out his hand to take the slaughtering knife.

Once Avraham withstood this trial, God told him, "Now I know that you are God-fearing."

Avraham was definitely sensitive to the event, if for no other reason than that it involved his own travail and his beloved son. But Avraham had an orderly and clear belief doctrine. He was aware of the fact that the divine was beyond him. He knew he was not dealing with an idol, whose believers think that it is a superior power that is expected to do what a person regards as proper, worthwhile, and just. He recognized that he was dealing with God, Whose ways are beyond human understanding. There is no way for a human being to comprehend divine wisdom. That is Divinity. One who holds an orderly belief doctrine does not collapse in a time

of crisis, but sees it as a trial that strengthens his belief.

It is expected that in the aftermath of a calamity, as in the aftermath of any crisis, a person's strengths that were submerged until that time would surface. A person whose belief was not orderly to begin with might abandon his faith in times of distress. On the other hand, a believer whose belief doctrine is orderly and clear, when faced with calamity and grief, might conversely strengthen his belief and seek closeness to God. He becomes strengthened by the trial.

Hence, an orderly belief doctrine is vital to a person who is sensitive to his surroundings and who has been endowed with a perceptive soul and a refined sense of justice.<sup>1</sup> A single error in interpretation caused Acher to lose his faith. Rabbi Meir internalized the sensitivity, but discarded the "peel," something that he could do since his belief doctrine was orderly and clear.

At times, one's orderly and clear belief doctrine can amount

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1. Rabbi Weinberg points out that an orderly belief doctrine is not only clear, but also possesses beauty that stems from its perfection and clarity. We thus find in *Pirkei Avos* (3:9): "Rabbi Yaakov said: One who walks on the road while studying Torah, but interrupts his study and exclaims, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!' Scripture considers it as if he endangers his soul." This is not meant to require that a person who studies Torah should not be aware of his surroundings or that he should lack a sense of aesthetics, but that he should know that just as there is beauty in a tree and in a plowed field, there is also beauty in the study of Torah that has an orderly and perfect structure. Hence, precisely that person whose soul is sensitive to beauty should understand that one should not break the continuity of his study in order to be enthused about the external beauty of a tree.

to all the difference between a firmly established belief, even in times of calamity and doubts, and heresy and a crisis of belief. This is the difference between Elisha ben Avuyah who turned into Acher and Rabbi Meir, the *Tanna*.

The above demonstrates the importance of examining the principles of belief and gaining an understanding of them.

Note that Rambam, in his *Sefer Ha'mitzvos*, states that "we have been commanded to believe in Divinity," whereas in the chapter *Yesodei Ha'Torah* of his *Mishneh Torah* he rules that "it is most fundamental and the pillar of wisdom to know that there is an existing Primary Divinity and that it is God of the entire creation." We thus see that one is obligated to believe, but is also obligated to know the principles of belief in an orderly and clear manner. Rambam does not stop at requiring that one should believe, but obligates one to know as well, even though this knowledge does not consist of attempting to understand the Divinity, something that is beyond one's reach, or as the *Zohar* states, "He is beyond [human] perception." This kind of knowledge reflects the cognition of belief that stems from an orderly belief doctrine. This cognition is not restricted to the domain of contemplation, but encompasses a person's entire way of life and turns into a vital reality that resonates continuously in one's mind. This orderly awareness is the basis and foundation of the thoughts, ideas, and even the feelings of a believing person in all situations.

An orderly belief doctrine is of overwhelming importance in all that is related to the commandment of trust in God, being as it serves as a cognitive domain with practical consequences in daily life. This is apparent in all that pertains

to the balance between trust and one's obligation to act in a natural manner to attain the desired results, as expressed by the words, "And He will bless you... in all that you will *do*" (*Devarim* 15:18).

Therefore, we have chosen to direct the reader to the sources that are concerned with trust in God and reliance on natural means, subject to the specific stipulation that this work does not pretend to present anything new. Much ink has been spilled in dealing with this immense subject; the Sages of the Jewish nation from all the generations wrote extensively on this issue.

The purpose of this work is to arrange the basic principles in an organized manner, analyze them, formulate them, summarize them, and present them to the reader — as an orderly doctrine.

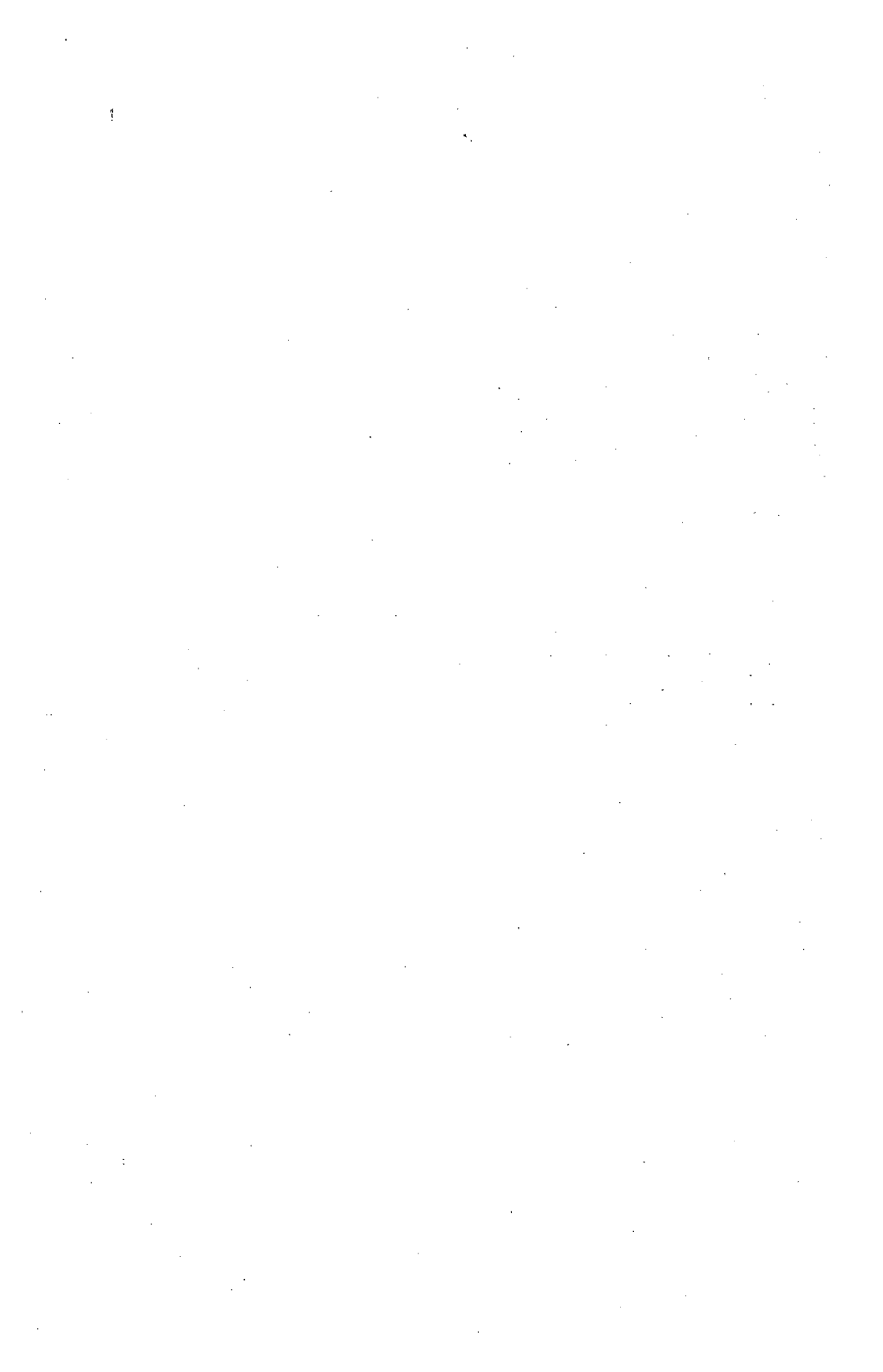


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ביטחון והשתדלות

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**FAITH  
IN GOD**  
*Versus*  
**HUMAN  
EFFORT**  
BASIC CONCEPTS





# CHAPTER 1

## FIRST INTRODUCTION

### BETWEEN BELIEF AND TRUST

#### The Commandment of Trusting God

**A**N EXAMINATION OF the sayings of our Sages brings one to the realization that there is a clear obligation that stems from belief in God to depend on Him and to trust in Him.<sup>1</sup> This obligation forms a leitmotif which is found in

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1. Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona, in his work *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (The Gates of Repentance, gate 3, secs. 31, 32), has clarified that this refers to a commandment and obligation that is incumbent upon us and that stems from the verse (*Devarim* 7:17-18), "Should you say in your heart: 'These nations are more numerous than I am, how can I dispossess them?' You should not be afraid of them." Similarly it says (*ibid.*, 20:1), "When you shall go forth to battle your enemies and see horses and chariots and more people than you, be not afraid of them." Rabbeinu Yonah infers from this that, "We were hereby warned that, should a person become aware of a coming calamity, he should have God's salvation in his heart and trust in it, as it says (*Tehillim* 85:10), "Surely His salvation is close to those who fear Him." Similarly it is written (*Yeshayahu* 51:12), "Who are you that you should fear man who is mortal?"

See also the *Sefer Ha'chinuch*, *mitzvah* 525, where it is clarified that the obligation to avert fear of foes during a war is rooted [in the precept that] "every Jew should have faith in God and not be afraid for his body when he can honor God and His nation."

many Jewish sources and it is one of the principles of the Jewish faith.

To quote *Rishonim*:

Trust is one of the superlative attributes and even one of the fundamentals of the Torah; it is commonly quoted by all, but is planted in the hearts of the chosen few. The books of the Prophets are full of it and the verses of the Torah point to it.<sup>2</sup>

The attribute of trust is a major Torah principle, for which reason we find that the Torah is based on it and is called Trust, after the Godly attribute of trust.<sup>3</sup>

The *Chazon Ish* similarly points out in his work, *Emunah U'bitachon*:

Negation of trust is a deficiency in the cognitive soul, and one [who denies it] barely has any part in the principles of Judaism."<sup>4</sup>

Trust in God is also one of the points of discernment between what has been defined as "blessed" or "cursed," as stated by the prophet Yirmeyahu (*Yirmeyahu* 17:5-7), "Cursed is the person who trusts in man...Blessed is the person who

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2. Rabbeinu Avraham ben ha'Rambam in his work, *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem*, in the preface of the chapter devoted to "trust."

3. Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in his work, *Kad Ha'kemach*, entry: "trust." Similarly, see Rabbeinu Yonah (*Mishlei* 22:19), where he notes that, "Trust is one of the highest levels of the fear of sin."

4. Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (known as the *Chazon Ish*), in his work *Emunah U'bitachon*, chap. 2, sec. 4.

trusts in God, then God will be his security.”

### Trust Stems from Belief in Providence

Trust in God is the consequence of the belief in Divine Providence that applies to everything that happens in our world,<sup>5</sup> as expressed by the *Talmud* (*Chulin* 7b), “A person does not lift a finger down below unless this was decreed

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5. Rambam notes (*Moreh Nevuchim*, part 3, chap. 17) that there are five points of view concerning what is happening in our world. He remarks that the correct point of view is that all of God’s ways are just and suffering does not come to a person by chance. Everything happens in a just and lawful manner according to the principles of reward and punishment. If a person stubbed his finger — this is punishment, and if he had pleasure — this is reward. It all happens as a result of one’s actions.

This is the concept of Heavenly Providence, according to which a person is supervised from above. It follows from this principle that everything that happens in our world is dictated from above on the basis of the principle of reward and punishment. True, a ship sinks in the sea because of a storm, and this is a natural occurrence, but it is God who decides that a storm will indeed occur in the given location and it is He who decides who will be aboard that ship.

Similarly, we find in *Sefer Ha’chinuch* (commandment 169), “One of the principles underlying the *mitzvah* is to steadfastly decide that God, in His providence, oversees every person, and that His eyes are open to all of the peoples’ ways, as it says (*Iyov* 34:21), ‘Since His eyes are on the ways of a person and will see all his steps.’ Thus, we were warned to regard a bad illness as something that was caused by sin. Being that there are many opinions concerning God’s supervision over His creatures, this matter is written about in many verses in the Torah, and there are many commandments that teach this matter, since it is a major pillar of our Torah.”

from Above.”<sup>6</sup> Even concerning living creatures other than man that are supervised in a general (for the entire species, rather than in an individual) manner,<sup>7</sup> we find in the *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 79)* the following: Rabbi Shimon

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6. Moreover, we find in the *Talmud (Niddah 16b)*, “Rabbi Chanina bar Papa said, ‘The name of the angel in charge of pregnancy is Laylah. He takes a drop (a human embryo), places it in front of God, and asks: ‘Lord of the World, what will happen to this drop? Will it [develop into a] strong or a weak person, smart or stupid, rich or poor?’” but he does not ask whether it will result in a righteous or evil person, since everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven.” Rashi explains this as follows: All the character attributes of a person and the events with which he is faced come upon him by the King’s decree (the King here being God), except for fear of Heaven, which is determined by a person’s free will. From this it follows that what happens to a person from beginning to end is decided upon by God.

7. Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim*, part 3, chap. 17) clarifies that providence applies only to one who has the right of personal choice. Animals are unable to choose, and hence have neither reward nor punishment. Therefore creatures other than man are not subject to Heavenly supervision on an individual basis, and providence applies only to the entire species. In other words, God renders the fate concerning each individual animal or bird (as we found in the case of the bird that was previously described); however, that decision is not issued on the basis of the animal’s actions, but is determined by criteria related to each species as a unit.

Concerning this, see Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto’s *Ma’amar Ha’ikarim*, which explains that God decides, for example, that at a given time humanity will need so many heads of cattle. In order to make sure that this quota is met, God sustains each individual of that species and supplies its needs. But there is no discussion in heaven concerning each individual cow, as is done for people — whether it has the right to live or what “quality of life” it will have, whether good or bad. See an extensive discussion in the work *Sifsei Chaim* by Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Emunah V’hashgachah*, vol. I, pp. 19-24.

bar Yochai and his son Eliezer were hiding from the Romans in a cave for thirteen years. When the thirteen years elapsed and they emerged from the cave, they saw a person hunting birds. When Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai heard a voice from heaven saying “*Dimus, dimus* — Release, release!”, the bird escaped. Conversely, when he heard a voice from heaven saying “*Spakula* — Kill!”, the bird was caught. Rabbi Shimon commented on this: If the fate of a bird is determined by Heavenly decree, how much more so does this apply to humans.

From this belief in Heavenly Providence, a person learns that he should place his hopes and trust in God, who is the One that decides what will happen to him.<sup>8</sup> One who trusts

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8. Rabbi Chaim Halberstam, the Sanzer Rebbe, writes in his work, *Divrei Chaim*, on *Parashas Mikeitz*, that the foundation of trust in God is grounded in the belief and the clear understanding that everything is governed to every detail by God. There is nothing extraneous in this world, but everything was created for the needs of man, who is subject to Heavenly supervision. This being so, in view of one’s belief in the providential supervision of each detail of events to which a person is subjected, he is obligated to trust in God alone.

We find even more than this in the commentary of Rabbeinu Yonah on *Mishlei* (3:6), “You should know Him in all your ways.” According to him, this imposes upon a person the obligation to apply this viewpoint to day-to-day life concerning each detail of his activities, and not only to major and portentous actions. To quote him, “There are people who look up to Hashem when dealing with a major matter, for example, when one wishes to sail on the sea for business or to travel through a desert with a caravan. However, when dealing with minor matters they would not mention Hashem, since dealing with the matter is easy. This is why it says ‘in all your ways.’ Do not depend on yourself, but ‘know Him.’ Concerning this, the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 63a) says, ‘Bar Kapara said:

in God is even worthy of salvation in the merit of this trust alone, as it says (*Tehillim* 32:10), “One who trusts God is surrounded by kindness.” So says Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on *Mishlei* (3:6): “The result of trust in God is what it says in *Mishlei*, ‘Know Him in all your ways and He will straighten out your paths.’ Aside from the reward for trust that in itself reaches above the heavens, he will succeed in the action during which he remembered God..”

### **The Undermining of Faith in the Case of “Bad Things that Happen to Good People”**

There are situations that give rise to grave questions, such as how can a person be sure that God will assist him at a time of calamity, when we see that sometimes the evil are successful, whereas the righteous suffer and even leave this world in the prime of their lives?<sup>9</sup> What promise does a righteous person have that he will reach a ripe old age and have sustenance, health, satisfaction, and God’s blessing in all that he does, when life is so challenging at times? What kind of trust is demanded of a person when it seems that he has no

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What is the short statement upon which the entire Torah depends? This is, “You should know Him in all your ways.””

9. The *Midrash* (*Yalkut Shimoni* on *Parashas Shemini*, *remez* 524) tells us that even Aharon Ha’kohen wondered about the ways of God that are beyond human understanding: “The wicked Titus entered the Holy of Holies, stuck his sword into the Temple curtain, and came out unscathed, but the sons of Aharon Ha’kohen (Nadav and Avihu) entered to bring an offering and came out burned.”

assurance that he will be successful?

Indeed, the question of “why bad things happen to good people” and how we relate to it is a very old question, dealt with at length in *Sefer Iyov*. But the discussion there centers primarily on resolving the contradiction that seems to exist between seeing this happen and belief in the principles of reward and punishment.<sup>10</sup>

However, we intend to focus on the domain of trust in God. Within this context, it seems that the explanations given in the domain of belief actually exacerbate the difficulty that arises within the domain of trust in God.

### **The Human Being, with His Limited Vision vs. the Generality of World Conduct**

In the domain of belief, the basic response to why the righteous suffer and the wicked are successful, is the following: Jewish belief is based on the cognizance that the reality of divine conduct is outside the human capacity to understand.

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10. This subject is extensively and comprehensively discussed. See among others: Ramban’s commentary on *Iyov* (particularly on chap. 34), as well as the Malbim on *Iyov*; *Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon* in *Emunos Ve’deos*, 5:3 and 6:8; Rambam in *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:16-17, 22-24, 51; Ramban in *Sha’ar Ha’gmul*, part I; *Rabbeinu Bechaye* in *Kad Ha’kemach*, entry: “providence”; *Rikanti* on *Bereishis* 35:1; *Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Pequda* in *Chovos Ha’levavos, Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*, chap. 3; the grandson of *Rosh* in *Shevilei Emunah*, path 9, part 1; *Rabbi Yosef Albo*, *Sefer Ha’ikkarim*, essay 4:7-15; *Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav*, *Menoras Ha’maor*, candle 5, 3:1,3; *Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto*, *Derech Hashem*, 2, chaps. 2-3; *Rabbi E.E. Dessler*, *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, part 5, pp. 19-23.

God conducts the world according to clearly defined rules of reward and punishment, but this conduct of reward and punishment includes the state of a person during his entire life, comprising this and the Next World. God benefits and rewards everybody. Even the wicked are rewarded for their good deeds. However, the principal reward is handed out only in the World to Come. In His grace, God delays His wrath and collects what is due Him after much time has elapsed, and at times long after the deed and sometimes only in the World to Come, in *Gehinom*. In this manner we can see that in this world the wicked are successful, since they have not yet been judged. Therefore there is no problem to reward them for their good deeds. For the time being, they will have only good in this world.

God conducts a comprehensive Heavenly reckoning that includes many components of the good and bad of which we are not aware, including weighing of the components of credit and liability of different generations, of different worlds (this and the one to come) and of events from different time and existence frameworks.

In contrast, human vision and understanding of the world does not share this wide perspective with the God of all the generations. As above, the transcendence of God in the conduct of His world lies not only in His unlimited power, but also in Heavenly principles according to which He conducts His world. A person can only imagine matters that stem from the domain of experience in which he exists. However, this domain is just as narrow as that of an ant. A person's vision and understanding of events and of his personal occurrences is limited. A person is unable to see and understand



what has been decreed and what will necessarily follow from God's inclusive and eternal vision.

A telling example that will serve to illustrate the above is to be found in Rashi (*Shemos* 21:13) on the obligation of one who killed another unintentionally to go into exile in an *ir miklat* (a city of refuge). Concerning this killing, the Torah says, "And if he did not intend to do so, and God compelled his hand." This would indicate that even an accident is an occurrence that is completely premeditated from Above. And this is the way Rashi explains it there (based on what is said in *Makkos* 10b):

Why should this come forth from Him? (I.e., why does God arrange it that a person who murdered unintentionally should be sentenced to exile? And why was an innocent person killed as a result of the accident?) ... What happened here was as follows. We are dealing with two people. One killed (a person) unintentionally and another was killed intentionally, but there were no witnesses for these acts. (The absence of witnesses prevented their being punished by a *beis din* and they seemingly escaped punishment.) That one (the premeditated killer) was not punished by death and that one (the non-premeditated killer) was not sent into exile. (Still, the Heavenly principles of reward and punishment do not permit such an injustice. Hence) God brings them together (the premeditated and the non-premeditated killer) to a single location. The one who killed intentionally sits beneath a ladder and the non-intentional killer climbs down the ladder and falls on the intentional killer and kills him. (In this man-

ner the premeditated killer is justifiably punished for his action) and there are witnesses to testify about him (the non-premeditated killer, because now there are witnesses to the accident) and obligate him to go into exile. As a result, the non-premeditated killer goes into exile and the premeditated one is killed.

A bystander who only sees the second incident, in which someone fell from a ladder and killed another person, witnessed a tragic accident that caused an unnecessary death, and he will not be able to understand why this happened. Similarly, a person who is only aware of the first occurrence and not the second will think that an injustice occurred in our world, since two people performed two killings and neither of them was punished, as if anarchy rules.

Only a person who sees the entire picture and experiences both events is able to see the Heavenly justice that was meted out here. Indeed, according to the *Midrash*,<sup>11</sup> this case was presented to Moshe Rabbeinu after he expressed wonder at God's conduct and asked from Him, "Let me know Your ways" (*Shemos* 33:13). Moshe followed all the stages of the case and only understood in hindsight, when everything fell into place and the puzzle was assembled into a whole ("You will see My back" — *Shemos* 33:23).

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11. See the Tosafists in the work *Moshav Zekeinim*. It weaves a complicated tale that extends over a number of generations. In such a case, only one who knows the entire chain of events can understand the ways of Divine Providence and the perfect manner in which justice is meted out, both regarding the monetary aspect and the aspect of punishing evildoers.

Having attained this comprehensive view, Moshe said (*Devarim* 32:4), “The Rock, His actions are perfect, for all His ways are just. A faithful God, without iniquity, just and right is He.” Hashem’s actions can only be understood if one looks at “all His ways” — the complete picture.

We have thus seen that man, with his innate limitations regarding the length of his life and the range of his experience, is unable to comprehend all the moves of Heavenly Providence. Under the best circumstances he may be able to see a somewhat wider part of the mosaic and understand a bit more. This happens when using hindsight to get a proper view over a long period. However, “My face shall not be seen.” It is beyond human ability to gain full insight into events as they happen. Hence a person should not wonder about what he sees and ask why the picture in front of his eyes doesn’t conform to the principles of justice, equity, reward, and punishment as he sees and defines them. This is because the divine implementation of these principles is, by definition, beyond human comprehension and confined to the domain of his limited everyday experience.

This point also sets the Jewish faith apart from idolatry. Idolatry consists of believing in a “functional deity” that is expected to satisfy the requests and desires of its worshippers. In contrast, we have our belief in God. According to the Jewish faith, we do not expect Him to conduct His world according to our limited comprehension and according to our relative precepts of justice, mercy, fairness, and truth, but according to God’s unlimited intellect that is beyond our comprehension.

For this reason, we do not have a clear understanding of everyday occurrences and we encounter phenomena that, according to our reasoning, do not conform to the basic tenets of reward and punishment. Indeed, we do not see the manner in which these principles are implemented, since our vision is limited by our experiences, time, and place. Still, this does not detract from the existence of principles of divine conduct. This requires one to have perfect faith, following the wording of the eleventh of Rambam's Principles of Faith, "God, blessed be His Name, rewards with good those who observe His *mitzvos* and punishes those who violate His *mitzvos*."

Conversely, as stated by Rabbi Yehudah Ha'levi in the *Kuzari*, belief takes over at the point where knowledge ends — for, had the world been conducted in a manner in which the principles of reward and punishment could be discerned, there would be no need for belief in God. Rambam in *Yesodei Ha'Torah* (1:1) writes that "the most basic principle and pillar of wisdom consists in knowing that there is a Creator who originates all that exists." Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed* (1:50) defines this knowledge as, "that which is perceived by the soul, the conviction that the object [of belief] is exactly as perceived."<sup>12</sup>

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12. Rambam, at the end of the introduction to his commentary on the *Mishnah* in Chapter 10 of *Sanhedrin* states that "no reason is needed for believing the truth." This means that belief does not need rational proofs and is not dependent on them. It is beyond them.

## **Cognizance of the Concealment of the Manner in Which Reward and Punishment Are Meted out in This World**

The concealment of divine reward and punishment from man in this world stems from the fact that God created man as an entity with the right to and potential for choosing between good and evil. This being so, man is held responsible for his choices by being rewarded for his good choices and punished for his bad ones.

That man is free to choose between good and evil stems from the fact that there is no immediate and clear connection between a person's state and his actions. If man was immediately paid for his actions by being punished or rewarded, this would rob him of genuine freedom of choice. If sin immediately killed the sinner, as with a snake bite, everyone in his right mind would avoid sin, just as he would not drink poison. Similarly, if the reward for a good deed was immediate and visible, every person in his right mind would run to perform *mitzvos* in order to receive his reward. This way man's freedom of choice would be negated.

Hence God conceals His conduct from man and lets it appear as if everything happens "naturally," according to the laws of cause and effect, and without any connection to man's spiritual state.<sup>13</sup> The comprehensive Heavenly reckoning

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13. We find in *Sefer Ha'chinuch* (132) that not only the "natural" conduct of the world occurs in a manner such that Heavenly conduct cannot be seen in it, but also overt miracles are carried out with some measure of concealment, so that it is possible to attribute them to natural events. This is intended to ensure the possibility of free choice by the person to whom the miracle happens. It allows a person who wants to be a heretic

according to which God conducts His world is concealed from man. This is done in order to leave man free to choose between good and evil, so that he may be rewarded for the good and punished for the bad.

### **Bad Things Can Befall the Righteous as a Test**

It should also be noted that, at times, God subjects a person to a trial that is a planned event from the point of view of the relationship between man and his Creator. The purpose of such an occurrence is to strengthen the person's spirit and to increase his reward, provided that he withstands the trial.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, righteous and honest people might be put in

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to do so, and a person who wants to believe to do so.

In this manner the *Sefer Ha'chinuch* explains the *mitzvah* of "Fire shall be burning upon the Altar continuously" (*Vayikra* 6:6) to mean "to light a fire on the Altar continuously every day." Our Sages (*Yoma* 21b) commented that even though fire comes down from heaven, there is a *mitzvah* for a *Kohen* light it. The *Sefer Ha'chinuch* comments on this as follows, "It is known by us and by every knowledgeable person that major miracles that God performs for us in His great benevolence will always be performed in a concealed manner. And they are made to appear as if they came about entirely naturally or close to it. This also holds true with the splitting of the Sea of the Reeds that was a manifest miracle. The Torah writes (*Shemos* 14:21), 'And God caused the sea to go back by blowing a strong eastern wind the entire night, and made the sea into dry land and the waters split.' The knowledgeable will understand that this concealment is for the purpose of the glory of Hashem and the lowliness of the beneficiary. For the same reason we were commanded to light a fire on the Altar even though fire descends upon it from heaven — in order to conceal the miracle."

14. Rabbi Gedalia Schorr, in his work *Ohr Gedaliahu*, points out that the Hebrew word *nisayon* (trial) is derived from the concept of lifting al

challenging situations. This is done to determine whether they will continue along the right path even if their luck runs out. For example, we find the following in the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 15b) concerning the verse in *Iyov* (1:6-7), “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before God and the Satan came along with them. And God asked him, ‘Where did you come from?’ And the (Satan) told Him, ‘Lord of the Universe, I travelled over the entire world.” Satan said to God: “I did not find anyone as true to you as our servant Avraham. You told him (*Bereishis* 13:17), ‘Arise, walk through the land in its length and its breadth for to you will I give it.’ Still, when he could not find a place to bury Sarah (and was forced to purchase one for four hundred shekel), he did not question Your actions.”

Avraham was faced with a trial. It seemed that the Heavenly promise (“I shall give this land to you”) had not been fulfilled. Not only did Avraham not gain possession of the land and he was regarded as a stranger in his lifetime, but even when he had to bury his wife (and needed a plot of land), he had to carry on arduous negotiations for this purpose. The ways of Providence are beyond our understanding. Avraham did not say a word and his belief was not undermined by the fact that the divine promise was contradicted by hard facts. This was a trial and Avraham withstood it.

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nes (“raising a banner”). This is because the ultimate purpose of a trial is to bring forth otherwise latent strengths, whose existence are only known to God. When a person withstands a trial, he discloses his latent strengths, and in this manner the person is carried to his personal peak.

## Testing One's Belief Comes Precisely during Bad Times

The fact that God ill-treats a person who, according to his understanding, only deserves good, should not diminish one's belief in God. This is precisely the trial a believing Jew faces in times of calamity, as stated by Rabbi Yosef Albo in his *Sefer Ha'ikkarim* (essay 4, chap. 46):

No person should regard himself as being steadfast in his belief and in adherence to the covenant at times when he is complacent in his home, and invigorated in his palace, and successful in his endeavors; his flax does not wither and his wine does not sour.

But when one remains true to his trust in God when things go awry in the course of events, and one becomes a pauper and a broken man, he will be regarded as being tested to see whether he serves God lovingly. At the time when bad calamities will come upon him, he will cling to his stronghold; he will not cause disillusionment among his brethren through his own, and will rely on God in all His manifestations.

During peaceful, quiet, and successful times a man will realize that everything is from Him and will not say "my power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth," since it is He, the Blessed One, who gives him strength to bring about success, and one should ask Him to continue blessing him with a good life. And at times of calamity, he will strengthen himself and rely on Him that He will extract him from the calamity and into well-being, and he should ask Him that He should bring peace upon him. Concerning this, David



Ha'melech said in *Tehillim* (62:9), "Trust in Him every moment, O Nation." This is meant to say, both at times of success and calamity, "Pour out your heart to Him" and say, "God is our shelter, *Selah*."

We have thus seen that belief provides clear understandings that explain why the fortune of a believing Jew, who is punctilious in his Torah observance, is not exactly good in this world. Crises that a person faces are not supposed to undermine his belief, but on the contrary, they are meant to strengthen and reinforce it, provided that he reacts to a crisis by drawing on his strengths and beliefs that truly resonate in the shadows of his cognizance and soul.

### **The Inevitability of Evil Contradicts Trust**

All of this applies to the domain of belief, but what about the domain of trust? How can these explanations be reconciled with trust that God will help, shield, and save all who take refuge in Him, and will benefit those who believe in Him? At first sight there is no direct and immediate correlation between actions and their reward, since the Heavenly reckoning of reward and punishment and providence are beyond our understanding, to the extent that one may perform only good deeds and still run into all that is evil. This gives rise to a most critical question: how can one be sure that only goodness and kindness will pursue us all the days of our lives? We have seen above that not only is there no such promise, but also that belief is tested precisely in the course of a trial to which God subjects people.

## What Is Meant by Trust in God?

Does trust in God mean the belief that all will be well and that all our heart's desires will be fulfilled for the good? Or maybe it means that even if things do not turn out as desired, this is something that comes from God, and maybe in hindsight, after some time has elapsed, we will realize that all was for the best?

A similar question can be asked about the essence of prayer. There is no assurance that a person's prayer will be accepted with mercy and grace. At times a person can feel that his prayers were not answered, even though he pleaded with his whole heart.

As a rule, prayer is an institution that is beyond our comprehension, and the question has been asked, "What is prayer all about in a world where everything has been decided on the basis of the principle of reward and punishment?" Hence, if reward is due, it should be granted even without a person's prayer to receive it, and if punishment is due, how will it be nullified by prayer? One of the ways to resolve this question is that God wishes to educate a person to recognize the fact that reward is not a given and one should ask God for everything, since, should strict justice be meted out, no living creature would come out unscathed.

An additional and well-known answer to this question is that prayer changes the person who offers it and the prayer itself draws him closer to our Father in heaven. Prayer holds within itself repentance — when a person stands before God, all his strengths and experiences "take a back seat." He is dependent on God and pleads for his soul and his life, for

his health and for all that is his, knowing that in a brief moment of concealment by his Creator, he could lose all that is dear to him, and that his entire existence depends on God. This is an important principle in serving Hashem.

Additionally, not only can prayer mend a person's relationship with his Creator, but it also can mend his relationship with others. There is a well-known Chassidic tale about a woman who prayed for her handicapped son. After she finished praying, she felt relieved. In the end her son remained handicapped, but after she completed her prayer she accepted her son as he was.<sup>15</sup>

A praying person stands in front of God as a "destitute when he swoons." Therefore it follows that prayer also includes various aspects of repentance and acceptance of things as they are. So praying carries tremendous weight beyond a person's pleading with God for his needs.

### **Even Prayer Cannot Assure Salvation from Evil**

The author of *Sefer Ha'ikkarim* teaches us that a person's belief is tested by seeing whether he clings to it even in difficult times, and seeks salvation from God through prayer. However, he writes (essay 4, chap. 24) that a person cannot

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15. Chassidic tradition interprets the verse (*Tehillim* 141:2), "Let my prayer stand as incense before You," to mean that prayer affects a person's soul in four ways as he stands before his Maker — *kedushah* (holiness), *taharah* (purity), *rachamim* (mercy), and *tikvah* (hope) — the first letters of which form the word *ketores* (incense).

under any circumstances assume that his prayers will be accepted and that salvation will certainly come. “Many times a person will pray properly and in the proper time, but his prayers will still not be accepted. This will not be due to the sins of the person who offers the prayer, but because God’s will does not desire that it be so.”

He clarifies that prayer is not accepted, among other things, because of one of the following reasons:

- As a punishment for misdeeds.
- The recipient must offer additional prayers, or pray more fervently, or perform acts that are indicative of submission, such as fasting or wearing sackcloth as the inhabitants of Nineveh did.
- Other factors may be responsible, as our Sages of blessed memory have said regarding David Ha’melech’s prayer that he should not die on *Shabbos*. It was not accepted because the time had come for Shlomo Ha’melech to become king and “one kingdom may not infringe upon the other.”
- God knows that the desired matter is not good for the person who prays for it, and as a part of providence his prayer will not be accepted.<sup>16</sup> For example, a person

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16. A person does not know what is good for him, and so his prayer is not always accepted, out of consideration for his benefit. At times it is good for a person that his plea not be heeded and that his salvation comes in an entirely different manner. Hence, a person should not ask for salvation to come in a specific manner, and should not point out the manner of salvation to God. One should pray for salvation in a general

prays to have children, but his prayer is not accepted because God knows that children are not good for him and would try to kill him, as was the case of Avshalom, who tried to kill David Ha'melech. Or, if one is praying that he should have money and God knows that money will be the cause of his death, as Shlomo Ha'melech said, "Riches amassed by their owner for his misfortune." Or that (riches) should become the cause of his heresy, as Shlomo Ha'melech said, "Lest I become satiated and deny and say, 'Who is Hashem?'"

- Or for another reason of which we are not aware, but is known to God.

This being so, and for additional reasons enumerated by Rabbi Albo in his *Sefer Ha'ikkarim*, not all prayers are answered positively. But it seems that his statements that explain the matter from the point of view of proper belief in God undermine, at first sight, the basic trust of a person who believes that he will gain and will be saved due to his belief, prayer, and trust in God. Conversely, as much as we have reasonable explanations as to why prayer offered with the proper devotion may not elicit the desired response, this undermines the trust a person feels that he will gain individual salvation after offering a heartfelt prayer.<sup>17</sup>

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form, and ask that he should be saved according to what is really good for him. Concerning this see the sources quoted in my book, "Spiritualism and Judaism," p. 18.

17. We shall demonstrate this by means of a poignant example:

A number of years ago Israel was in turmoil because a soldier, Nachshon Waxman, was kidnapped by terrorists, may Hashem avenge his blood.

## Trust Means Belief in Divine Providence

The above difficulty brought forth the well-known statement by Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (the *Chazon Ish*), in his book *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 2):

A very old misconception has taken up residence in the hearts of many concerning the concept of trust. The

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The Israeli army made preparations to liberate him. This occurred on *Shabbos* and the synagogues all over Israel resounded with heartfelt prayers for his liberation. After *Shabbos* was over, we were told that the operation failed and Waxman was killed. The nation's mood was gloomy. It is certainly true that God conducts His world in a manner that is beyond our understanding and a tragedy that befalls one or many cannot serve as grounds for abandoning faith. Still, the question hung heavily in the air, "How did it happen that fervent prayer, prayer of an entire nation that definitely split the heavens and reached the Heavenly Throne, did not elicit the desired response?" The reply that was given at that time was that God listens to every request, but at times the answer of a father to his children is yes and at times the answer is no, and the response that was given in this case was no.

Why was the response to this request no? We don't know. Conversely, we believe that the prayers both worked and were of benefit in other domains that are beyond our comprehension and that every prayer exerts its influence. (We find in *Parashas Va'eschanan* (*Devarim* 3:23) that Moshe beseeched God to allow him to enter the Holy Land, and the answer was no. Nevertheless "prayer achieves a half" and Moshe was permitted to see the Land.) Still, the case of Nachshon Waxman allegedly demonstrates and sharpens the gap between belief and trust. Certainly in the domain of belief there are clear answers to the question as to what prayer attains. As above, God's ways are beyond human understanding. Conversely, belief begins where human comprehension ends. But what about the domain of trust in God? If, in fact, the reply of our Father in heaven is at times no, how is it possible to trust that we will indeed be saved? Maybe, we will receive a negative answer?

term *trust* that serves to describe a laudable and basic trait by the pious, has been [mistakenly] turned into an obligation to believe that in every case when a person faces an undecided future, and the future holds two ways, one that is good and the other that is not, that it will definitely be good. And should one doubt and contemplate the possibility of the opposite of good, he lacks trust.

But this concept of trust is wrong, since, as long as the fate of the future has not been clarified by prophecy, the future cannot be regarded as decided, since no one knows God's judgment and His rewards.

But the substance of trust is that nothing in the world happens by accident and everything that occurs beneath the sun stems from His pronouncement.

This means that, according to the *Chazon Ish*, when a person is faced with an undecided future, and there is doubt whether things will turn out for the good and he will gain blessing and success, or maybe his destiny is that of grief and pain, there is nothing that will promise a person that only goodness and kindness will surround him. He has no basis for trusting that God will definitely be kind to him and not the opposite, since the future is known only to prophets, and a person who is not a prophet cannot know what the Providence has decreed upon him and along which path he is being led.

What then is the meaning of trust in God? The *Chazon Ish* replies to this that everyone has the duty to be positively sure that even if bad events fall upon him, they are not arbitrary,

without reason and by pure chance, but rather that everything stems directly from Heavenly Providence that guides a person in all of his ways in the manner that suits him, and in a manner that, according to the overall Heavenly reckoning, is intended for his good.<sup>18</sup>

Note that a person may find great consolation in this understanding and trust, since it can prevent a sense of bitterness that stems from the thought that he is subject to an accidental and cruel fate. If everything has a reason and a purpose, and the events are intended in the final analysis for his own good, a person may walk around trusting that he does not walk alone in the pathways of his life, and that there is One who accompanies him and is concerned with his welfare. To some measure, trust in God, according to the *Chazon Ish*, is similar to the case of a father who forces his son to swallow a bitter pill that is needed to restore his health. The child has neither the comprehension nor the vision to understand why he has to take a pill that causes him suffering. But it is important that he should know that he was not given such a pill arbitrarily, but for his own good, out of love and concern. A child's trust in his parent — that everything his parents do is for his benefit and not by happenstance — is very important and even makes it easier for him. True, the pill does

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18. With respect to this, see, for example, Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on *Mishlei* (3:11), "My son, the chastening of God do not despise": "When a person becomes afflicted with suffering, he should strengthen and fasten his trust, and he should know that this is for his benefit much more than success, since suffering cleanses him for the World to Come and God knows what is truly good for a person."



not become less bitter, but the knowledge that he is loved and cared for encourages him and makes it easier for him to endure the misery.

### **The Doctrine Employed by the *Chazon Ish* in Interpreting Statements of Our Sages**

The approach taken by the *Chazon Ish* is not unique to him. This matter was already discussed in the works of our Sages. Thus, for example:

- Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda, in his work *Chovos Ha'levavos* (*Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, chap. 1), explains that trust in God does not mean that all of a person's desires will materialize. This trust means that God does everything that, in His opinion, is for the person's benefit.<sup>19</sup> Rabbeinu Bechaye explains (chap. 3) that not everything that a person wishes for is good for him, and at times it is a case of "riches accumulated by man to his misfortune" (*Koheles* 5:12).<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Bechaye continues this line of thought by

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19. To quote him, "What is the substance of trust? This means the peace of mind of a person who trusts. This includes his heartfelt dependence on the One Whom he trusts to act in a manner that is good and proper for the one who trusts in the One Who is deserving of human trust."

20. The prayer offered during the Blessing of the New Month (*Birkas Ha'chodesh*) is that "all our heartfelt requests should be fulfilled for the good." This is because it is not necessarily good for the person to receive all he requests, though he might not be aware of this. Hence, a person should pray that his heartfelt requests be fulfilled only to the extent that they will be for his benefit and not in a form of "riches accumulated by man to his misfortune."

saying that at times it is decreed in heaven that the righteous person lack food, to the point that he has to make an effort to obtain it. All this is done in order to purge him of the sins that he committed in this world before he became righteous, as it says (*Mishlei* 11:31), “Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in this world.” We thus see that a calamity that befalls a righteous person is actually for this own good.

- Rabbi Eliezer Papo, in his work *Pele Yoetz*, (entry: trust) writes that:

Trust does not mean that one should trust in God to provide for all his needs as per his desire and that no calamity will befall him.

If he were to trust in this manner, he would be highly disappointed at times. That is because there are many righteous people who suffer from grueling miseries of all kinds and are subject to calamities and misfortunes that occur in the world.

But true trust means that one should have faith in God that everything that comes from Heaven is only for the best and that God knows what is good for him.

This is because people usually regard the bad as the good and the good as the bad (*Yeshayahu* 5:20), but God knows what is good for his Heavenly service and for emendation of his soul...

One should not get excessively involved in thought about this emendation and bemoan these events, but rather should have perfect trust that everything is from Heaven and that God will do everything for his benefit

and there is no one who can prevent Him from doing so.

- Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), in his work *Da'as Tevunos* (sec. 54), refers to the verse in *Yeshayahu* (12:1) that says, "I will praise You God even though You were angry with me," meaning that a person is grateful to God that He subjected him to punishment. How can that be? This matter is explained in the *Talmud* (*Niddah* 31a) as follows, "Rabbi Yosef interpreted the verse, 'I will praise You God even though You were angry with me, Your anger was turned away and You consoled me...' to mean the following: Two people went forth to do business; a splinter got stuck in one of them [preventing him from undertaking the voyage] and this caused him to curse and blaspheme. Some time later he heard that his companion's ship sunk, and this caused him to be grateful and to praise [God]. This is what is meant by 'Your anger was turned away and You consoled me.'" On the basis of this, Ramchal explains that a person should trust in God, since everything that happens to him has been decreed by providence and at some later time it will become apparent that it was intended for his benefit. This is because, "there is no minor or major action that is not intended for his complete emendation." Our Sages similarly stated, "Everything that is done from Heaven is for the good."<sup>21</sup> Ramchal points out that when the time

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21. Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, in his work *Pachad Yitzchak on Chanukah* (essay 2, sec. 5), explains that Hebrew words with the same root point to similarity between the phenomena that are expressed by them. (Rabbi Hutner refers there to the root of "praise," which is the same in Hebrew

will come, God will reveal his ways to the Jewish nation and then they will see that “even the admonitions and suffering were solely invitations for the good and actually a preparation for blessing, since all that God wants is emendation of His creation.” This is expressed by the continuation of the prophet Yeshayahu’s words (12:2), “Behold, God is my salvation, I shall trust and not fear.” A believing person trusts in God and is not afraid of bad events. This is because everything, even the travails and pain, were intended from the beginning for his benefit.

Thus, according to this approach, we see that one cannot trust that the Father in heaven will not force him to take a bitter pill and have him drink sourness to the end. Trust [in God] does not mean that everything will be good and sweet. It means that even if something is bad and bitter, it still comes from Above and is intended for one’s benefit

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as that of admittance of facts or accusations, and to being grateful for the good. Similarly, see *Pachad Yitzchak on Shavuot* (essay 8, sec. 6) concerning the root of *pe’er* as well as *Pachad Yitzchak* (essay 18, sec. 5) concerning the root of the word *zemer*.

Following this principle, Rabbi David Cohen (*rosh yeshivah* of Chevron Yeshivah), who is cited in the book by Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser, *Le’sason U’lesimchah* (essay 13), says that the root *nachem*, when used with words that express encouragement and instilling hope (such as *nichum aveilim* — consolation of the bereaved) and the root of *nachem*, when used with words that express regret, come from the same source. A person is consoled when he regrets his view of events as a disaster and sees the rebuilding that they hold within them. A change in a person’s negative attitude toward events he experiences is a source of encouragement and hope. A person is consoled when he understands that even what appeared to be bad at the time may turn out to be good in time. In hindsight, “Blessed is the One Who is good and beneficent.”

according to the general Heavenly reckoning that is beyond our comprehension.

This approach of the author of *Chovos Ha'levavos*, of the *Pele Yoetz*, and the *Chazon Ish* is hence an important tier of trust. In fact, the *Chazon Ish* clarifies that, "Belief and trust are the same, except that belief is a general view of its holder, whereas trust is one's view of himself. Belief has the nature of *halachah*, whereas trust has the nature of action."

After a calamity or disaster, belief has the power to strengthen the spirit of the person whose fate is bitter, because this comes from Above and is intended for his benefit.<sup>22</sup>

### **Belief in Heavenly Providence Does Not Impart a Feeling of Trust in Him**

This approach (which we will term "the *Chazon Ish's* approach" since it is generally quoted in his name) holds a difficulty concerning the basic feeling of trust, that "one who

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22. This is noted by Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in his work *Chovos Ha'levavos* (*Sha'ar Cheshbon Ha'nefesh* 27): "A person's reckoning with himself when a calamity falls upon his person or upon his property consists of accepting everything with gladness. This is because (*Tehillim* 25:10), 'All the ways of God are kindness and truth to those who guard His covenants and testimonies.' This means that should a calamity befall a person, then, if it is intended to expiate his sins, it is the truth; and if it is the beginning of granting compensation for his suffering, then it is a trial and it is kindness. Hence, my brother, do not take your thoughts off this matter; strengthen yourself in your suffering for His sake and this will alleviate the pain of the calamity and bitterness of the suffering. This will show your good will in accepting the Heavenly decree, your consolation, and your trust in Him."

trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness.” True, it comes out that trust in God serves as a means of consolation after, God forbid, a calamity. However, trust in its simple meaning for a person who is facing a momentous event and goes forth toward the future with confidence and peace of mind, does not, according to this approach, implement that attribute of trust. It is quite possible that for his benefit, Heavenly reckoning will decree that he is doomed to days of calamity and pain, and there is nothing to ensure him that everything will come out for the good. Does that mean that there is no room for simple trust in God that may serve as a source of peace of mind even before the momentous event?

Similarly, the above statement of the *Chazon Ish*, who notes there that a person who has trust in God is in an emotional state that inhibits him from performing acts of desperation with a very low chance of success, requires an explanation in the domain of perception.<sup>23</sup> We have seen that the *Chazon Ish* explains that trust does not include a promise that only goodness and kindness will surround a person all the days of his life, and it may be that a person’s state requires, due to Heavenly considerations that are beyond our comprehension, that his fate will be bitter. So, lacking all grounds to assume that God will prevent the calamity and pain that

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23. To quote the *Chazon Ish*, “This will serve as a test as to whether he is sincere, whether he actually trusts, or got into the habit of chirping ‘trust, trust,’ but he does not believe in what he is saying. When he faces a case that requires trust, which will be his guide, recovery and healing — will he at this difficult time turn to *bitachon* and trust in Hashem, or precisely at this time not turn to trust, but rather to haughtiness and falsity, to disgraceful means and empty strategies?”

he faces from coming upon him, what will prevent a person from despair and from performing any act, even if the chances are poor, to save himself?

### **The Approach of the Sage of Novardok**

It appears that there is an approach that is diametrically opposed to that of the *Chazon Ish*. This approach contends that one needs to have complete trust that God will save him, benefit him, and that He will supply all his needs. Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz (the Sage of Novardok), in his work *Madreigos Ha'adam* (p. 222) states that not only does the meaning of true trust mean to depend and trust that God will save him and provide him with his needs, but that actually this is the proper means for attaining these needs. A truly trusting person is sure that he will attain his sustenance, in spite of all the indications to the contrary. This trust in God allows a person to attain all his customary needs and ensure that he will not lack anything. A person who has a true trust of this kind will be saved by God and given all that he needs, without that person doing anything to attain this.

The Sage of Novardok supports this claim by telling the story of a person (it is claimed that the person was himself) that had no candle at night, but he had strong faith that he would have a candle. And this is what actually happened: somebody came to him in the middle of the night and brought him a candle.<sup>24</sup>

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24. This story is similar to that related in the *Talmud* (*Kesubos* 67b), a matter that shall be discussed at length in Chapter 3. We find there that Rava asked someone what he usually eats, and the person answered that

According to this approach, a person has the duty to trust in God and believe that He will save him. This trust is defined by the Sage of Novardok as a manner of ordinary reliance on natural means. The Sage of Novardok refers, in connection with this, to the statement of Rashi (*Shemos* 16:32):

Yirmeyahu chastened them: "Why don't you devotedly pursue the learning of Torah?" Their answer was, "How could we put down what we are doing and learn Torah in this manner? What about sustenance?" He showed them the jar of manna and told them, "Oh, generation, see the doings of God' (*Yirmeyahu* 2:31)... This sustained your forefathers who devotedly pursued the study of Torah. You also should do so and God will sustain you with this. God has many emissaries for preparing food for those who fear Him."

At first sight it appears that the Sage's approach does not deal with the trust that even if things do go wrong, one should believe that this is intended for his good in the overall Heavenly reckoning. It seems that he is referring to an entirely different and unconditional trust, where a person trusts that all the good that he wishes for will come upon him, his needs will be supplied, and his desires will be granted by God.

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he trusts that he will be able to have a fattened chicken and old wine. While they were talking, Rava's sister, who he had not seen in years, came and brought him a fattened chicken and old wine.



## The Approach of Rashbam

The *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 91a) says the following: Rabbi Yitzchak said, "On the day that Ruth the Moabite came to the Holy Land, the wife of Boaz passed away. This exemplifies the saying, 'before someone dies, another person to take care of his household has been prepared.'"

Rashbam has the following to say on this matter: "The *Talmud* comes to tell us that God prepares a remedy before inflicting the wound and one should trust in God."

It seems that the above is different from the approach of the *Chazon Ish*. This is because, in the opinion of Rashbam, a person is obligated to trust that, even if something bad happens to him, God cares about him and will not bring upon him a lethal blow, but will rather prepare a remedy before bringing the blow upon him. Nevertheless, even according to Rashbam, a person cannot trust that nothing bad will happen to him, but still can trust that God will not abandon him, will not act stringently with him, but will prepare a remedy before the blow.

The above seems to differ from the approach of the *Chazon Ish*, according to whom there is no basis for this kind of trust, since it is quite possible that the blow brought upon the person will indeed be lethal, without it being amended by some remedy.

Nevertheless, even this approach is not clear on the face of it. True, this approach, according to which a person should trust that God will indeed be kind to him or will prepare a remedy before the blow, strengthens the feeling of trust in

God as a factor that encourages and evokes certainty that God will help, shield, and save all who take refuge in Him. This induces a feeling of tranquility upon a person who is facing a dangerous and unresolved future. However, such a plain and ingenuous trust seemingly cannot be reconciled with the difficulties that arise under real conditions, after the event, when one sees a person whose family suffered a calamity without it being preceded by any kind of remedy. It is precisely for this reason that Rabbi Eliezer Papo writes in his work *Pele Yoetz* that “trust does not mean that one should trust that God will supply all his needs as per his will and that nothing bad will happen to him. If this be his trust — then at times he will be highly disappointed.”

What would Rashbam reply to this difficulty that arises from the contradiction between trust and reality? We see that one of the approaches (that of the *Chazon Ish*) brings reality into conformance with plain trust and protects against a crisis in one’s trust after the calamity, God forbid. But apparently it comes out that the feeling of trust before the event simply does not exist according to this approach, and when a person is faced with a critical moment in his life, feeling gripped with fear and apprehension, there is nothing that will promise him that only goodness and kindness will surround him.

On the other hand, the second approach (that of Rashbam, the Sage of Novardok, and others) very much strengthens one’s feeling of trust before the calamity, but what will happen to that person’s trust after the thing happens: will he lose trust in God in view of the reality?

So what is the definition of proper trust? Trust according

to the understanding of the *Chazon Ish*, *Chovos Ha'levavos*, and others who follow this approach, or trust according to Rashbam, the Sage of Novardok, and those who follow them?

### **Are We Faced with Two Approaches to Trust?**

Maybe the differences between the two approaches are not as pronounced as it would seem. This is because it is possible that the pronouncement of Rashbam and his followers outlines a special approach to trust that is suitable only to the chosen few who are not in danger that their trust will vanish in face of difficulty and disappointment.

In connection with this, it should be mentioned that even the *Chazon Ish* (*Emunah U'bitachon*, 2:7) explains that:

The trait of trust has an additional aspect in that a spirit of holiness dwells upon the trusting person and he is accompanied by a spirit of strength that proclaims to him that, indeed, God will help him. As this has been expressed in the words of David Ha'melech, "Though an army will besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war will arise against me, in this I trust." This matter depends on the spiritual level of the trusting person and on the degree of his holiness.<sup>25</sup>

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25. Rabbi A.I. Kook, in his work *Ein Ayah* on *Maseches Berachos* (10b) explains, "Conduct with trust in God exemplifies human perfection. Nevertheless, there are different types: One is simple trust — if the moment requires it or if the person is on a high spiritual level — that a miracle should happen. [A second type is] continuous trust — trusting in God that He will help him in his effort." It would seem from this that

It is therefore possible that even Rashbam is only referring to a person who has attained a special degree of trust that is suitable only for special circumstances, or only for perfect and exalted people, and in this respect the *Chazon Ish* will agree.

### **“It Is All for the Best”**

Having presented the different approaches and having delved into their roots, we shall now cite two passages from the *Talmud* and will show that apparently one passage that is attributed to Rabbi Akiva sees trust from the point of view of the *Chazon Ish* and the author of *Chovos Ha'levavos*, whereas the second passage, that deals with Nachum of Gamzu, seemingly approaches trust in the manner of Rashbam and the Sage of Navardok.

Does that mean that we are dealing with a dispute between two *Tannaim*? Let us see.

The *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60b) says the following:

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everyone should follow the approach of Rashbam and Ramchal, even a regular person, that God will indeed help him in his effort. The only difference between a person on a high spiritual level, who has simple trust, and one who “continually trusts,” is that the former are saved by God without effort on their part, through a miracle, whereas a person who has not attained such a spiritual level has to use natural means in order to attain Heavenly abundance. But, even a plain person must trust in God that He will indeed “assist him in his effort.” Would one say that the above disagrees with the *Chazon Ish*?

Rav Huna said that Rav said in the name of Rabbi Meir, and he also taught this in the name of Rabbi Akiva: A person should always be in the habit of saying, "Whatever God does is for the good," as was the case with Rabbi Akiva when he once was travelling.

Rabbi Akiva came to a certain city and looked for a place to stay, but nobody wanted to let him in.

So Rabbi Akiva said, "Whatever God does is for the good," and went to sleep in the field.

He had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a candle. A wind blew and extinguished the candle. A cat came and ate the rooster. Then came a lion and devoured the donkey.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Whatever God does is for the good."

That night the city was occupied by an enemy army that captured all its inhabitants.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Didn't I tell you that whatever God does is for the good?" (Had Rabbi Akiva been staying in the city, he would also have been taken into captivity. Also, had the voice of the rooster or the donkey been heard or had the candle been burning, the enemy army would have noticed him and captured him in the field.)

So we find that the aggravation and loss he suffered saved him from a much greater calamity, and all that happened was for the good.

## **Rabbi Akiva Is Convinced that Something that Was Bad Came upon Him for His Benefit**

Analysis of this case shows that Rabbi Akiva did suffer aggravation and loss. This is because the donkey and the rooster were devoured and this constituted monetary loss. Also, Rabbi Akiva was forced to spend the night in the field and his candle went out, so Rabbi Akiva was saddened by all this. But, in hindsight, it turned out that as a result of all this damage he was saved from a much more severe calamity. With this approach we find that a person indeed cannot expect that nothing bad will happen to him, and that he will find a place to spend the night or that his property will not be damaged and his candle will not be extinguished. But one has to believe that everything will be for his benefit.

It thus appears from the *Talmudic* passage cited above that the concept of “whatever God does is for the good” and the trust of the righteous person that he will be surrounded by kindness does not promise attaining what he regards as being good for him at that time and there is no commitment that his expectations will materialize. The good in which the righteous trust is the absolute good, which will come about on the basis of the overall Heavenly reckoning — one that a person cannot know when the events occur. The righteous knows that whatever happens to him will not necessarily conform to his heart’s desire. Hence, belief is not impaired in any way by calamities that befall a person, even if he is as saintly as Rabbi Akiva. As time passes, one might see that it was for his benefit, but there is no guarantee that it will appear to him as good and desired in the short term.

The above seemingly conforms to the definition of trust according to the *Chazon Ish*. This is a situation in which a person had to swallow a bitter pill, but he believes that this has been orchestrated from Heaven and, in the final analysis, is for his benefit.

In contrast to this, the *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 21a) says the following:

Why was he called Nachum Ish Gamzu? Because whatever came to him, he would say about it, "*Gam zu l'tovah* — It is all for the best."

One day the Jews wanted to send a gift to the [Roman] Emperor. When the question arose as to who should be the one to bring the gift, it was decided that Nachum Ish Gamzu should go, because he had experience with miracles. He was given a crate full of diamonds and pearls [as a gift for the emperor].

He went on his way and spent the night in a guesthouse. The owners of the guesthouse got up at night, stole the precious stones, and filled the crate with dirt.

Nachum presented himself to the emperor, opened the crate, and saw that it was full of dirt. The emperor wanted to kill the Jews who sent Nachum, because he said that the Jews were mocking him.

Nachum heard this and said, "It is all for the best."

Then, Eliyahu Ha'navi came and appeared to those in the emperor's entourage as one of them. He said to them, "Maybe this dirt is that of Avraham. He threw it at his foes — the dirt became swords and the stubble

became arrows, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 41:2), “Gave them as the dust His sword and as driven stubble His bow.”

There was a country that the emperor could not succeed in conquering. They used the dirt that Nachum brought in their war against that country and they conquered it. They brought Nachum to their treasure house, filled the crate with diamonds and pearls, and sent him home with great honor.

When Nachum and those who accompanied him returned from the emperor’s house, they stopped on their way back at the same guesthouse that they used on the way there. The owners of the guesthouse told Nachum, “What did you bring to the emperor that he honored you so much?”

So he told them, “What I took from here I brought there.”

The guesthouse owners demolished the entire building and brought all the dirt to the emperor. They told him, “The dirt that Nachum brought you is our dirt.”

It was checked out, the dirt did not become arrows, and the guesthouse owners were killed.

### **Nachum Trusted that Even Something that Seemed Bad Was for the Best**

Look what happened. The emperor appreciated Nachum and the Jewish nation for the “special” gift that he received from them (dirt) that led the emperor to win the war. As opposed to this, had Nachum brought a crate full of diamonds and pearls, the gift would not have been appreciated to the



same extent. “Also this” — the seemingly bad — had turned out to be an absolute good, certainly compared with what really could have happened.

Actually, Nachum did not lose anything even for a moment, and because of his absolute trust in God, it turned out that what appeared on the face of it for a moment as bad was never bad, not even relatively speaking, but an absolute good and an overt salvation. “It’s all for the best” comes to teach us this.

This approach seems to be trust as postulated by Rashbam, meaning that if something bad happens, God will ensure that it not be injurious. He will provide a remedy before the blow comes, so that in the end something that is absolutely bad will not occur, not even something that is relatively bad. Just the opposite, our situation will have improved immensely.

It is thus seen that the passage in *Berachos* concerning Rabbi Akiva seems to conform to the approach of the *Chazon Ish*, whereas that in *Ta’anis* about Nachum of Gamzu apparently follows the approach of Rashbam. Does that mean that we are faced with a dispute between the two, and if so, how should it be resolved?

### **What Is the Trust that Obligates Us?**

Upon comparing the two passages side by side, we are faced with the question: What kind of trust are we obligated to have? Should we have the faith of Rabbi Akiva or should we strive to attain the level of trust exhibited by Nachum of Gamzu? Another possibility: Perhaps there is no disagreement here

at all, because the level of trust exhibited by Nachum is of the kind that is innate to only the particularly righteous, to people who are described by the *Talmud* as “experienced in miracles,” whereas an ordinary person should trust God as Rabbi Akiva did.

Study of *Talmudic* texts is open to a large number of discernments that may provide a pathway to a more profound understanding of the subject. Our subject is very complex and it would be improper to draw conclusions on the sole basis of a cursory analysis that focuses only on a few of sources. It stands to reason that the matter deserves a comprehensive examination.

In the following chapters we shall try to present basic sources that must be analyzed in order to understand the subject in question. All this will be done with the knowledge that the subject at hand cannot be resolved by unequivocal answers. This is expressed nicely by Rabbi Avigdor Ha’levi Nebenzal, in his work *Sichos Ba’Tanach* (5741), who says the following:

Just as it is known in science that there are sciences that are exact and some that are not, so one must know that the subject of trust in God is the kind of subject that, truthfully, does not have a clear resolution. Trust in God is not like the appearance of the New Moon, and it is impossible to tell a person that he should work for “six hours, four minutes, and two parts.”

This “fuzziness” does not stem from the fact that we are

dealing with a theoretical concept,<sup>26</sup> since these questions have many practical applications, as we shall see below. But as stated by Rabbi W. Wolbe in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, gate 4, in the preface):

Attainment of the true trust is a profound wisdom...

An insignificant person like the present author is entirely unqualified to discuss the virtue of trust, but still, this is Torah and we are commanded to study it.

In fact, we are not walking alone, since our statements are rooted in the words of the Sages. Let it be His will that we shall not err in explaining the depth of their intentions.

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26. Rambam, in his commentary on *Mishnah Sotah* (3: 5), states the following, "Whatever disagreement that may exist between the Sages that does not have a practical application, but is only a question of belief of the matter, need not be resolved in favor of either of the sides." Rambam makes a similar statement in his commentary on *Mishnah Sanhedrin* (10: 3), as well as in the first chapter of Shavuot, "Any kind of rational inference that has no practical applications and is subject to disagreement between the Sages is not to be resolved in favor of one of them."



## CHAPTER 2

### SECOND INTRODUCTION DOES TRUST IN GOD ELIMINATE FEAR AND FRIGHT?

*“The entire world is a very narrow bridge.  
And the main thing is — not to fear at all.”*

*(Attributed to Rabbi Nachman of Breslav)*

**I**S TRUST IN God supposed to impart a sense of tranquility and of refraining from fear and fright?<sup>1</sup>

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1. It would seem that the answer to this question should be positive and self-understood, in keeping with the approach of Rashbam, the Sage of Novardok, and their followers, which was discussed in the previous chapter, to the effect that trust in God means belief that God will prepare a remedy before inflicting the wound, and help shield and save all who take refuge in Him. “And the person who trusts in God will be enveloped in kindness.” But it appears that this matter is not so clear in the opinion of those who think that there can be no promise whatsoever that a person has not been, God forbid, condemned to drink the entire bitter goblet, and that trust in God is the belief that even the greatest calamity is not the result of his cruel fate, but the product of Divine Providence. Certainly, even according to this approach a person is obligated to believe that everything has been done intentionally by the One Who, in the final analysis, directs everything for a person’s benefit, according to the overall Heavenly reckoning that is beyond our comprehension. It would seem that a person should realize that since everything comes from

Further on we shall see that, on the one hand, opinions are expressed in the *Talmud* and in the *Rishonim* to the effect that trust in God obligates a person not to fear at all.

Afterwards we shall present a large number of other sources that describe the fear of *Gedolei Yisrael* concerning the future they faced. This will present us with an obvious difficulty: Why were the greatest Sages of Israel, whose trust in God is indisputable, afraid, even though they definitely trusted in God? How can these sources be consistent with trust in God, as it is defined by the *Rishonim*?

Also, what is the meaning of the contradiction that we will soon find between the different sources that seemingly point in opposite directions?

### **Fear as a Transgression and a Contradiction of Trust**

We shall start by quoting sources that regard fear of an uncertain future as contradictory to trust in God:

- Rabbeinu Yonah, in his work *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (gate 3, sec. 32), explains that trust in God obligates one not to fear at all. The source of this obligation is an explicit verse (*Devarim* 7:17-18), “If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are more numerous than I, how can I dispossess them?’ — [even so,] do not be afraid of them.” Similarly it says (*ibid.*, 20:1), “When you go out to battle against

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Him, who knows better than the Hashem himself what is good for him? He indeed has only his benefit in mind. Still, it is natural that a person facing an undecided future should be fearful when no one can promise him that he will not experience pain, lack, and anguish.

your foes, and you see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not fear them.”<sup>2</sup> Rabbeinu Yonah infers from this that, “We were thereby warned that, should a person see that a calamity is imminent, he should have God’s salvation in his heart and trust in it, as it says (*Tehillim* 85:1), ‘Surely His salvation is close to those who fear Him.’ Similarly it says (*Yeshayahu* 51:12), ‘Who are you that you should fear man who is mortal?’”

- In the *Talmud* (*Sotah* 44a), we find a controversy between Rabbi Yossi Ha’glili and Rabbi Akiva concerning the verse (*Devarim* 20:8), “Who is the person who is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return to his home lest he cause the heart of his brethren to melt like his heart.” Who are the fearful and fainthearted?
- Rabbi Akiva says, “Fearful and fainthearted is as its plain meaning, that one is unable to go forth into war and see a drawn sword.”
- Rabbi Yossi Haglili says, “The fearful and fainthearted is the one who is fearful of his sins.”
- Ramban explains this verse (*ibid.*) as follows, “In the opinion of Rabbi Yossi Ha’glili, when the *Kohen* promises that they will have salvation and not a single one of them will be lost, it is proper that the righteous trust in Him and that the officers should warn those who are worried about their sins...The reason why one would die [in spite of the *Kohen*’s promise] would be that he would indeed be fearful in his heart [of his sins] and run. In

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2. See *Sefer Ha’chinuch*, commandment 525.

Rabbi Akiva's opinion, the verse is according to the plain meaning, that one who is fearful [of war even] after the promise of the *Kohen*, does not have proper trust in God and will not merit a miracle."

- This is to say that Rabbi Yossi Ha'glili maintains that we are dealing here with someone who is afraid to go into war because of his sins. This means that his fear of war stems from his fear of sin.<sup>3</sup>
- As opposed to this, Rabbi Akiva maintains, according to Ramban's explanation, that he should return from the war because he does not trust in God and it is this lack of trust that is the sin.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Rabbi E.E. Dessler (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, part 4, pp. 233-234) explains in conjunction with this that fear of an external event is a reflection of lack of self-confidence, and of one's apprehension that his actions may not be proper, and that, God forbid, he is culpable to be punished and harmed. To quote him, "Our Sages have stated (*Berachos* 60:1) that only sinners are fearful, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 33:14), 'The sinners in Zion are afraid.' The *Zohar* goes even further by saying that fear concerning mundane matters is only imagination, that a person imagines that he is afraid of dangers of this world, but deep down in his heart a person fears his sins. This means that fear in this world is only a substitute for fear of sins. This is because if a person had a pure soul without any blemish, he would not have feared at all. A person who is perfectly attached to God has no reason to fear. 'God is with me, I have no fear. How can anyone affect me?' (*Tehillim* 118:6)."

4. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in *Mi'shulchano shel Beis Ha'levi* (*Shemos* 16:18) has the following to say on the subject, "And being that he is afraid, he may, God forbid, be captured because of this. This is because the wars of the Jews were not fought by their strength, but by their trust [in God], as it says (*Yeshayahu* 30:15), 'In ease and rest shall be your strength,' and the Psalmist says, 'God is with me, I have no fear. How can



- It is thus seen that, according to all opinions, the righteous can and should trust and be positive that they will return unscathed from the war. Fear is an expression of a negative reality and stems from sin, or from insufficient trust in God that reaches the magnitude of sin, whereas the one who trusts in God is not afraid.
- Rambam even includes being afraid of waging a war as a Torah transgression (negative commandment 58) in the number of commandments that he lists.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fright as a Cause of Defeat and Trust as a Cause of Success**

Many verses in Biblical writings are devoted to prohibiting fright and to emphasizing that it both contradicts trust in God and reaches the magnitude of sin that in itself causes a person to fall

In *Mishlei* (29:25), we read, “The fear of man brings a trap, but the one who trusts in God shall be saved.” This comes to teach that a person who becomes anxious and frightened, rather than trusting in God, will cause his own fall, whereas “the one who trusts in God shall be saved;” meaning that

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anyone affect me? (*Tehillim* 118:6); since I have no fear, no one can affect me.”

5. On the other hand, Ramban, in his criticism of Rambam’s *Sefer Ha’mitzvos* (addenda to negative commandments, 10), as well as the author of *Halachos Gedolos* (negative commandments, 261) claim that this transgression does not apply to fright itself, but to retreat from battle. “It is a negative commandment that he should not refrain from going home, so that he does not cause his brethren’s heart to weaken as his heart.”

trust in God is in itself the source for escaping misfortune.

The prophet Yirmeyahu states (*Yirmeyahu* 1:17), “Do not dread them lest I cause you to be terrified by them.”

In the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60a) we find:

Yehudah the son of Nathan walked behind Rav Hamnuna and sighed. Rav Hamnuna told him, “Do you want to bring suffering upon yourself? As you know, it is written (*Iyov* 3:25), ‘For the thing that I greatly feared has come upon me and that which I was afraid of has come unto me.’ And in the prophecy of Yeshayahu (51:12-13) it says, ‘Who are you that you should fear man who is mortal and the son of man who shall be as made of grass, and you forgot God Who made you... and you have feared always...’”

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the author of the *Beis Ha’levi*)<sup>6</sup> explains that man’s fear stems from forgetting God. This is because, had a person been sure that everything that happens in this world comes from God and that nobody can change His decree in the most minute way, neither advance

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6. The author of *Mi’shulchano shel Beis Ha’levi* (on *Shemos* 16:18), explains further: “Even at the time when one person dominates another for the bad, he should understand that everything is from God and that the person is solely a whip by means of which God punishes those who were found culpable in judgment. As it says (*Yeshayahu* 1:5), ‘Behold, Assyria, the rod of my anger,’ and (*ibid.*, 1:15), ‘Shall the ax pride himself over him that hews therewith?’ In view of this, then a person who looks for strategies and entreats his pursuer and does not allow himself to plead to God is similar to one who is being beaten and cries and implores the whip.”

it nor delay it, as it says (*Iyov* 23:13), “But He is alone and who can revoke Him” — he would fear no one. For nobody can harm him if this has not been first decreed in Heaven, as it says (*Tehillim* 118:6), “How can man affect me?” Similarly (*Iyov* 34:29), “When He gives peacefulness, who can make trouble?”

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz lists the verses in *Melachim II* (6:15-18) as an example of this principle, according to which the condition for success is a trust in God that removes all fear and dread. This is because fear is the source of calamity, and Heaven does not perform miracles in order to save someone who is afraid. To quote him:

The Torah (*Devarim* 20:8) says, “Who is the person who is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return to his home lest he cause the heart of his brethren to melt like his heart,” and the Ramban, in his commentary on this verse, quotes the *Halachos Gedolos* to the effect that it is a negative commandment — that he should not refrain from going home — so that he does not cause his brethren’s heart to melt as his heart. It would seem that this law applies not only to a war situation, but to everyone who is fearful and fainthearted and [hence] does not follow the path of belief and trust. Since he may make the heart of his brethren melt like his heart, he should not be found among them, but “he should return to his house” so that no one should see his helplessness...

We similarly find in *Melachim II* (6:15-18):

“And the servant of the man of God rose early and went forth. Behold! A host has surrounded the city, both with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master, how shall we do?’ And he answered, ‘Fear not, for those who are with us are more numerous than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed and said, ‘God, open his eyes so he will see.’ And God opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and fiery chariots around Elisha. And they came down to him, and Elisha prayed to God and said, ‘Smite these people with blindness.’ And He smote them with blindness, according to the words of Elisha.”

Now, the miracle of the horses and fiery chariots that descended around Elisha seemed entirely superfluous, because the army of Aram was smitten with blindness and they were unable to do anything, yet this miracle saved them. So what was the need to see “that those who are with us are more numerous than those who are with them?” The many “who were with them” became helpless and were walking around in the dark, so there was no point in being afraid of them. See the comment by Radak there, that God opened the eyes of the young man and showed him horses and fiery chariots “in order to strengthen his heart that he should not fear... because Heaven does not perform miracles in order to save someone who is afraid. This is so because his fear and panic are the greatest danger for him. It was required that he first calm down, and only then would he be deserving of being saved.”

We similarly find in the *Talmud* that fear reflects sin and contradicts the existence of trust in God. It is told there (*Berachos* 60a) about a *Talmudic* student who was walking after Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Rabbi Yossi, on the main street of the town of Tzion. Rabbi Yishmael noticed that the student looked fearful. He told him, "You are a sinner, since it says (*Yeshayahu* 33:14), "The sinners in Tzion are afraid."

The student asked, "But it says (*Mishlei* 28:14), 'Happy is the man who is always fearful?'"

Rabbi Yishmael answered that this verse applies to Torah. Its meaning is that happy is the man who is always fearful that he may forget the Torah that he learned, and therefore will keep repeating it [so this should not happen]. But fear of a physical calamity is the sole domain of sinners.

Moreover, we find there, "Once Hillel went on his way and heard some screaming in the town. He said, 'I am positive that this does not occur in my house.'" Concerning him it is written (*Tehillim* 112:7), 'Of evil tidings he does not fear, his heart is firm, confident in God.'" It appears that the one who trusts in God is not afraid of bad tidings or of a sudden calamity, and even when he hears that a misfortune occurred in his city, he is confident that this will not affect him, because he trusts in God that He will be kind to him.

Similar statements are to be found in the writings of the *Rishonim*. In *Orchos Tzaddikim* (gate: worry), the conclusion is drawn to the effect that:

Worry is mostly a bad character trait...and a wise man once said, "I never find at all signs of worry in people

with elevated souls.”

A person who is anxious to attain something in this world is detestable and it (anxiety) will not be found at all among people who trust God and believe in Him.

Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona, in his commentary on *Mishlei* (3:26), said:

It (*Devarim* 20:8) says, “Who is the person who is fearful and fainthearted,” this means, who is fearful to the point that he is fainthearted, because he was overcome with fear of the host of the enemy. And it is possible that he really believes that everything is in the hands of Heaven, but because his soul has not grown to the level of trust, his heart is faint, and his nature is depressed, and the weakness of his nature and faintness of his heart take the upper hand.

This conforms with the verse (*Mishlei* 29:25), “The fear of man brings a trap.”

A person’s fear of man causes his soul to sin, sets a trap, strengthens the foe, and brings calamities closer to him. This is because a person should not fear flesh and blood, and he should have only fear of God in his heart.

“But the one who puts his trust in God shall be safe” (ibid.) from the calamity, in merit of his trust, even if the calamity should have, in fact, befallen him. And this is what is written in the next verse (ibid., 29:26), “Many seek the ruler’s favor, but every man’s judgment comes from God.” Similarly in (*Yeshayahu* 51:12), “Who are you that you should be afraid of man, who is mortal.”

Fear stems from baseness of the soul, and it has been clarified there that a person who fears man forgets God, as it (ibid.) says, "You have forgotten God, your maker." This means that upon seeing a calamity that is imminent and salvation remote... you should have recalled that this happened to you at other times and the light of Heavenly salvation and His miracles arose [in the end].

Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his work *Chovos Ha'levavos* (Introduction to *Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*), presents a similar thought:

One of the advantages of the trait of trust in God consists of peace of mind regarding the worries of this world and freedom from anxiety, and then one finds himself in a state of satisfaction and tranquility and confidence in his situation, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 17:7-8), "Blessed is the man who trusts in God and whose hope is God. For he will be like a tree planted by the waters that spreads out its roots to the stream." This is also so concerning his physical rest from long journeys that wear out the body and hasten a person's demise, as it says (*Tehillim* 102:24), "He has afflicted my strength on the way; He has shortened my days."

We thus find that fear completely contradicts trust in God. It is absolutely negated, and even serves as, God forbid, a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>7</sup> "The one who trusts in God, kindness

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7. Concerning self-fulfilling prophecies, see also *Berachos* 55b in the name of Rabbi Banah, "There were twenty-four diviners of dreams in Yerushalayim. Once I dreamed a dream and went to all of them and each one interpreted my dream differently, and all of the interpretations

surrounds him” (*Tehillim* 32:10); there is no reason to fear any calamity.

### **Fear Is to Be Found Even among the Righteous**

As opposed to this, we find a large number of sources that describe the fears of Sages of all generations concerning the future that they expected. We shall present the different sources and then, in the following chapters, we shall try to understand the meaning of the apparent contradictions:

- God promised our forefather Yaakov (*Bereishis* 28:15), “And behold I am with you and I shall guard wherever you will go and I shall return you to this land.” Nevertheless, when Yaakov was put to test, Esav the wicked came toward him with four hundred people and the Torah says, “Yaakov was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that were with him and the flocks and the

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materialized. This is to verify the saying that ‘all dreams materialize according to their interpretation.’” The *Talmud* asks there, “Where has it been stated that ‘all dreams materialize according to their interpretation?’ Is there such a verse anywhere?” And the *Talmud* answers, “As Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘How do we know that all dreams materialize according to their interpretation? This is because it says (*Bereishis* 41:13), “And it came to pass as he interpreted to us.””

See the responsa of the Rashbah (part I, sec. 652), where he writes that one who believes that stars and planets rule his destiny in fact becomes subjugated to them. Similarly, see Rabbeinu Bechaye in *Chovos Ha’levavos* (Introduction to *Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*), where he writes that “If one does not trust in God, he trusts in something else, and to one who trusts in anything besides God, God removes His supervision from him and leaves him in the hands of that in which he trusts.”



herds into two groups.” How was it that Yaakov feared Esav and did not trust in God?

- Moshe, the greatest of prophets, was afraid of the calamity that people might bring upon him because of what he did. As we see, after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, the Torah (*Shemos* 2:14-15) says, “And Moshe was anxious and said, ‘Surely this thing is known,’” and so he fled from Pharaoh. Why did he not trust in God? A possible answer may be that he took all the desirable precautions. But still the question remains: Why did Moshe fear? One may wish to answer that Moshe behaved this way before God revealed Himself to him, but even at the time when this revelation took place, when God commanded him to cast to the ground the staff he was holding, and it became a serpent, Moshe’s reaction was (*Shemos* 4:3), “and Moshe fled from it.”
- Eliyahu Ha’navi was afraid when he was threatened by Izevel, as it says (*Melachim I*, 19:3), “And he saw, he arose, and fled for his life.” Why was he afraid? Where was his trust in God?

### **One Should Not Rely on Miracles**

Concerning Shmuel Ha’navi, we find (*Shmuel I*, 16:1-2):

And God said to Shmuel, “How long are you going to mourn Shaul... fill your horn with oil and I shall send you to Yishai of Beis Lechem, because I provided myself a king among his sons.” And Shmuel said, “How will I go? Should Shaul hear this, he will kill me.” And

God said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I came to offer a sacrifice to God.'"

In this case, the *Talmudic* Sages provided an explanation. At first, the entire conversation seems incomprehensible. God told Shmuel to go, but he resisted in carrying out God's command and tells God that he is afraid of man. How was it that Shmuel was afraid of Shaul and did not trust in God Who sent him? And note that even God did not answer Shmuel with (*Bereishis* 18:14), "Is anything too hard for God?" but instead suggests to him artifices for camouflaging his actions.

This question is discussed in the *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 39b) concerning the case of a father who asked his son to climb onto the roof of their house and perform the *mitzvah* of *shiluach ha'ken*. Now, even though *shiluach ha'ken* and honoring one's parents are the only two commandments for which the Torah promises longevity, the son fell from the roof and was killed. The *Talmud* explains, as we have seen above, that Elisha ben Avuyah erred in this matter and became a heretic. But the actual interpretation of the verse that promises long life is that it does not refer to this world, but rather to the World to Come. The *Talmud* also asks: We have a rule that "people involved in performing a *mitzvah* are protected from harm both on the way to its performance and back." This being so, how did the son fall from the roof and die in the course of performing a *mitzvah*?

The *Talmud* resolves this problem by saying that the son climbed to the roof using a ramshackle ladder, and the rule that "people involved in performing a *mitzvah* are protected from harm" does not apply where danger is involved. Just

the opposite, in this case the rule to follow is “one should not depend on a miracle.”<sup>8</sup>

This is the explanation given in the *Talmud* regarding Shmuel Ha’navi being afraid of Shaul when God told him to go anoint David. In a situation where an element of danger

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8. Even in the Holy Temple, which is the place where miracles occurred on a permanent basis, things were done in a natural manner without relying on miracles. It is most fitting to mention Rashi here (*Shabbos* 22b), who explains that the Torah commanded to light the seven lamps of the *Menorah* in spite of the fact that the seventh lamp had not gone out. This was to be done because “the Torah does not depend on miracles.” In connection with this, see the statement of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller, in his work *Tosfos Yom Tov*, at the beginning of *Demai*, to the effect that we find at the beginning of *Maseches Yoma* that a substitute *Kohen Gadol* was appointed in order to replace the officiating *Kohen Gadol* should he become disqualified on *Yom Kippur*. This was done in spite of the fact that it is stated in *Pirkei Avos* (5:7), “Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Holy Temple...[one was that] no seminal emission occurred to the *Kohen Gadol* on *Yom Kippur*.” Similarly, we find (*Mishnah Shekalim* 6:4) that the table that stood next to the ramp of the Altar was made of marble, rather than silver, in order to prevent the meat for the sacrifices from becoming putrid. This was done in spite of the fact that it is quoted in the previously mentioned *Mishnah* of *Pirkei Avos* that the sacrificial meat never became putrid. Additionally, Rashi says (*Shabbos* 124a) that bars were placed between the sets of the Showbread (*Lechem Ha’panim*) in order to prevent moldiness, and they did not depend on the miracle stated in *Pirkei Avos* that “no disqualification was found in the *Omer*, or in the Two Loaves, or in the Showbread.” We similarly find in (*Shekalim*, end of Chapter 4), that when wine was purchased for libations in the Holy Temple, a clause was inserted into the agreement with the seller that should the wine become sour, it could be returned to him — and they did not depend on the miracle related in the *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 42b) that wine that was brought from the Land of Yehuda never went sour.

is involved, one has to follow the rule that one should not depend on a miracle.

However, it would appear from this explanation that only when a person is dealing with personal survival, nothing can assure him that his life will indeed be saved (even in the case of a Heavenly command to a prophet), because the situation is fraught with danger. Similarly, when a person is faced with going to war, where the situation is definitely filled with danger, there is nothing that will remove fear from his heart. How can one reconcile this with all the sources mentioned above?

### **A Person May Not Put Himself in Danger**

One is specifically commanded not to depend on a miracle and put himself in danger on the basis of trust that God will save him.<sup>9</sup>

It is stated in the Torah (*Devarim* 22:8) that one should built a guardrail around his roof so that “you do not bring

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9. The *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 8b) states that one is released from his obligation to check for *chametz* in a hole between his premises and that of a non-Jew, because doing so might expose him to danger. Similarly, a dispute is quoted there (*ibid.*, 64b) between Abaye and Rabbah about whether precautions were taken (in closing the gates of the Holy Temple) at the time when people were pushing themselves in to offer the *korban Pesach*. The decision rendered in this matter was that one should not depend on a miracle. Concerning this, see Rambam, the laws of *korban Pesach* (chap. 1, sec. 11) that the doors of the Temple should be closed and one should not depend on a miracle that the doors will close themselves.

blood upon your house.” Trust in God should not replace a guardrail, and a person may not put himself in a dangerous situation.

Also, the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 32a) says, “A person should never stand in a dangerous place and say that a miracle will save him, because a miracle may not come about, and even if it should occur, [this miracle] is deducted from his merits.”

Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini, in his work *Sdei Chemed* (*alef, shiurei ha'peah*, sec. 34) lists a number of halachic sources for this. Among others, he quotes the *Sefer Chasidim* that a *mohel* is not obligated to perform a circumcision when he may expose himself to a danger, in spite of it being a *mitzvah*. Since circumcision is not performed where the child is in danger, the same certainly is true where the *mohel* will be in danger.

The *Sdei Chemed* (*alef*, sec. 18) additionally quotes the work *Taharas Ha'mayim* to the effect that a person may not endanger himself by going to a dangerous place, even for the purpose of sanctifying the Divine Name. This is because one should not depend on a miracle. Even though there are three sins (idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed) that the Torah said one should not transgress and rather should let himself be killed, this applies only if others forced him into such a situation. When this happens, one is commanded to sanctify the Holy Name in public and let himself be killed. But a person may not initially put himself into a state of danger that would then require him to sanctify the Holy Name and be killed.<sup>10</sup>

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10. The *Sdei Chemed* records his surprise at the statement made by

The *Sdei Chemed* explains that this is the reason why the Torah did not tell about what Avraham did in Ur Kasdim, where he let himself be thrown into a burning furnace. Such an important event was not recorded in the Torah so that people would not enter into such a situation of their own volition.

Also, the *Sdei Chemed* writes that when Rabbi Akiva's flesh was combed with metal combs, he said, "All my life I yearned for the situation where I could fulfill the verse, 'You shall love your God with all your soul,' meaning even if they take away your soul."<sup>11</sup> Why did Rabbi Akiva yearn? He could have sought out a situation in which he could implement

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Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in his *Chovos Ha'levavos (Sha'ar Ahavas Hashem*, chap. 6), that a person who fears God should not fear anything except for Him: "As was related by a *chasid*, who he met a God-fearing person sleeping in the wilderness and asked him, 'Why are you sleeping in such a place? Aren't you afraid of lions?' He answered him, 'I would be embarrassed in front of my God if He would see me being afraid of anyone except Him.'" This is a most surprising statement. What makes him better than Yaakov, our forefather, who was afraid of his brother Esav and was not embarrassed in front of his God that he was afraid of someone except for Him?

11. The *Talmud (Berachos 61b)* says, "When Rabbi Akiva was taken to be killed, it was the time for reading the *Shema*. They combed his flesh with metal combs whereas he was reading the *Shema*. His students said to him, 'Our teacher, even in such a state?' And he answered, 'All my life I yearned for the situation where I could fulfill the verse, "You shall love your God with all your soul," meaning even if they take away your soul, and now that this situation arose, I should not fulfill it?' He prolonged his recitation of *Echad* and his soul left him as he was saying it. A voice came down from Heaven and said, 'How happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left you while you were reciting *Echad*.'"

this command. But in spite of the need to sanctify the Name of Heaven, a person is prohibited from putting himself into danger of his own volition, trusting that God will save him, as Avraham did in Ur Kasdim.

Our forefather Yaakov was afraid to send Binyamin to Egypt and stated (*Bereishis* 42:28), “For his brother died and he alone is left, should mischief befall him along the way that you travel.” Rashi (*ibid.*, 4) explains, “And at home he is safe from mischief? Rabbi Eliezer the son of Yaakov says, ‘We see from this that the Satan prosecutes in times of danger.’”<sup>12</sup> And, as a general rule, we find in the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 21a) that a child should not be made to travel from one city to another to study Torah. Rashi explains, “Since harm may come upon him along the way, because the Satan prosecutes in times of danger, as it says (*Bereishis* 42:4), “Lest a mischief befall him.” This gave rise to the law that a person can force the population of the city where he lives to hire a teacher for the local children.

How does all of this fit in with what we said earlier? Can a person live a life of trust in Hashem without fear and apprehension regarding his future? Is it proper to be so concerned and take proper precautions or is this actually a lack in *bitachon*? These questions will be dealt with in the following chapters.

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12. Similar to this, we find in *Devarim* (23:10), “When you come forth to fight the enemy, keep away from each evil thing.” Rashi explains, “Because the Satan persecutes at the time of danger.”





## CHAPTER 3

### THIRD INTRODUCTION

#### TRUST IN GOD AND NATURAL HUMAN EFFORTS

**I**S A PERSON'S reliance on natural means an obligation or is there only permission for him to do so?

When is a person obligated to rely on and trust that God will provide for his needs, and when should he resort to natural means for obtaining them?

How much effort is a person obligated to invest in order to supply his needs?

In this chapter we shall discuss the apparent conflict between trust in God and a person's obligation to resort to natural means.

On the one hand, we shall see a number of sources according to which the Heavenly decree, "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread," obligates a person to exert effort as a condition for attaining the Heavenly blessing. Namely, a person is obligated to perform all actions and employ all means that are needed according to the dictates of nature in order to obtain the things he wishes to obtain and, should he not do so, he will not merit the Heavenly blessing.

According to these sources, we must analyze the basic question: If resorting to natural means is a precondition for

attaining the Heavenly blessing, then in what way will man's trust in God express itself? Also, how much natural effort is a person obligated to exert, and at what point does his effort harm his trust in God?

On the other hand, we shall see below that a number of sources say that a person should not engage in any natural effort. According to these sources, it would seem that a person who trusts in God is obligated to refrain from doing anything, while believing that God alone will provide all his needs.

In connection with this, we should consider whether the requirement to refrain from all natural endeavors applies to everyone, irrespective of his spiritual level, and if such a differentiation should be made, how do we determine how much natural effort each person should make?

In this chapter we shall cite the principal sources that serve as landmarks, even though they differ from one another, and we shall examine the different approaches that follow from these sources. Then we shall devote the following chapters to analysis, based on statements by *Rishonim*, and in the final analysis, the reader will be presented with an orderly system, in the sense of "each man with his camp, and each man next to his flag" (*Bemidbar* 1:52).

### **3(1). THE FIRST DOCTRINE – THE ONE WHO TRUSTS GOD NEVER RESORTS TO NATURAL MEANS**

We start by citing sources that say trust in God obligates one to avoid doing anything and he should fully depend on God

to supply all his needs, as in *Yirmeyahu* (2:2), “When you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land that [was] not sown.”

### **Manna as an Example of Heavenly Sustenance**

The Jews were commanded to take a jar and place manna in it as a remembrance of the manna that fell in the wilderness. As it says in *Shemos* (16:32), “And Moshe said, ‘This is what God commanded: Fill an *omer* of it to be kept for generations, so that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out from Egypt.’” Rashi mentions there that at the time of *Yirmeyahu*, when he chastened the people about why they weren’t devotedly learning Torah, their answer was, “How can we put down what we are doing and learn Torah in this manner? What about sustenance?” He showed them the jar of manna and told them, “‘Oh, generation, see the doings of God.’ This sustained your forefathers. God has many emissaries for preparing food for those who fear Him” (*Mechiltah*, *Shemos* 16:33).

This is to say that the prophet put forward a clear demand to avoid all natural endeavors and to trust in God just as our forefathers did in the wilderness when they were brought out of *Mitzrayim* and they did not lack anything. So did he command his generation to conduct themselves likewise and to trust that “God has many emissaries” to provide a person with all his needs.<sup>1</sup> It thus comes out that a person who

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1. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, in his *Sichos Mussar*, in an essay concerned with the attribute of trust, *Parashas Bechukosai* (essay 20) from the year 5731, explains the subject in the above manner and adds the following: “Indeed, it is known what Rabbi Moshe Alshich told his disciples

trusts in God does not exert an effort to achieve anything. Does that mean that such a demand can be made only of the chosen few, like the generation of the prophet Yirmeyahu, or maybe this kind of behavior is expected from every generation, for which reason the Jews were commanded to keep a jar with manna for eternal remembrance?

### **“He That Gathered Much Had Nothing Left Over and He That Gathered Little Had No Lack”**

The chapter about the manna that the Jews were told to emulate for generations is an outstanding example of the lack of point in pursuing natural means of sustenance; pursuit does not change anything. In *Shemos* (16:17-18) we find, “And the children of Israel did so, and gathered some more and some less. And when they measured with an *omer*, he that gathered much had nothing over and he that gathered little had no lack.” Rashi explained, “There were those who gathered a lot and those who gathered little, and when they came home and measured what they had gathered with an *omer*, they

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when they came and complained to him that he delivered a sermon to the effect that a person who trusts in God does not need to do anything except sit in the *Beis Ha'midrash* (house of Torah learning) and occupy himself with Torah and prayer, and God will provide him with proper sustenance — and from all the Torah learners of Rabbi Alshich, the only person who merited and was provided thus was a simpleton wagon driver, who was presented by Heaven with a chest full of golden coins. The disciples said that they also did what that wagon driver did, and nothing of that kind happened to them, to which Rabbi Alshich answered, ‘A miracle of this kind only happens to one who believes unconditionally, and the wagon driver indeed believed so without any reservations.’”

found that the one who had gathered a lot did not have more than an *omer* per person in his tent and the one who did not collect a lot was not found to have less than an *omer* per person. This is the miracle that occurred with it.”

In other words, in addition to the miracle of receiving corporeal food directly from heaven in the form of manna, an additional miracle occurred, where all of their needs were supplied without any relation to the extent of their effort. Their effort in gathering the manna in no way affected the quantity of manna they had upon reaching their tents. This additional miracle was intended to teach us that God fulfills all of a person’s needs without any dependence or relationship to the extent of the person’s effort. This moral was not only intended for those who were brought out of Mitzrayim, but, as the prophet Yirmeyahu said, it also held true in his generation, when no manna fell from heaven. For this reason the Jews kept the manna in a jar as a remembrance<sup>2</sup> for all generations.

It is thus seen that resorting to natural means is to be regarded as a superfluous human activity that provides no return on the investment. A person’s wealth does not stand in proportion to the extent of his natural effort, and it is only God’s

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2. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz points out concerning this (*ibid.*) that, “The chapter about manna comes to teach us that ‘quantity’ is a meaningless concept and everybody receives what he is supposed to receive and what has been decreed that he receive, and that the one who gathers much has nothing over and will not succeed in getting more from his property than what has been decreed; any additional properties that he will acquire will involve him in all kinds of expenses, as it says, ‘he that gathered much had nothing over.’”

blessing that will make him wealthy. Rabbi Shmuelevitz explains that the *Chofetz Chaim* compared the case of a person who worked hard on his sustenance to “that train passenger who was in a great hurry. What did he do? He pushed with his hands on the walls of the railroad car in which he sat. Similarly, all the effort that one expends to attain his sustenance is nothing more than the effort spent in pushing the railroad car wall in order to speed up the train’s arrival at its destination.”

### **The Torah Was Given Only to Those Sustained by Manna**

We find in the *Midrash* that in each generation the only ones who attain greatness in the Torah are the ones who put their entire trust in God, like those who were sustained by the manna, and leave go of any occupation, to the point that they do not know from where their food and sustenance will come.

We find this in the *Mechiltah* on *Shemos* (16:4), “I will rain bread from heaven for you and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day [so] that I may test them whether they will follow my Torah or not.’ From this Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would say, ‘The Torah may be interpreted only by those sustained by manna. How is this? This is someone who presents interpretations and does not know where his food and drink come from, and where his clothing and covering come from.’”

## **Even after Resorting to Natural Means, It Is “The Heavenly Blessing that Makes One Wealthy”**

The *Talmud* (*Bava Metzia* 42a) states, “The Rabbis taught, a person who goes to measure his grain by the threshing floor should say, ‘May it be the will of our God and the God of our ancestors that He sent a blessing to the work of our hands.’ When he starts measuring, he should say, ‘Blessed be the One who sends a blessing to this pile of grain.’ If he measured and then pronounced this blessing, this is a prayer in vain.”

Rabbi Shmuelewitz (*Sichos Mussar*, essay 30, on *Parashas Naso*, of the year 5732), concerning the subject of trust and resorting to natural means, says that every Jew, even the most simple one, may pronounce the blessing (according to some authorities in the full-fledged version of a standard blessing) that God should increase the grain that he already gathered. Indeed, under natural circumstances one cannot expect that the grain that was already gathered should multiply. For this reason, after one measured the grain and its quantity has been defined, such a prayer is a prayer in vain, because this means that he is expecting a miracle and the kind of conduct that overtly runs contrary to the laws of nature. “And still, before he measured the grain, everyone may pronounce such a blessing and trust that God will send a blessing in the threshing floor and the grain will multiply beyond what is contained at present. It can thus be seen that the ‘quantity’ is not the decisive factor and it is the Heavenly blessing that makes one wealthy — except that by measuring, the person sets up the ‘quantity’ and thus discontinues the power of multiplication of his grain.”

It is seen from this that the quantity of grain that a field yields is independent of the extent of sowing and cultivation as well as gathering. It depends only on the Heavenly blessing. What then does a person gain by resorting to “natural” means at the time when “it is the Heavenly blessing that makes one wealthy”?

### **Those Who Trust in God Receive Their Food from Him Without Resorting to Natural Means**

It is related in the *Talmud* (*Kesuvos* 67b) that Rava asked a person what kind of food he usually eats. That person answered that he usually eats a fattened chicken and old wine.

Since this person was dependent for his sustenance on communal funds, Rava asked him whether he thought this was an imposition on the community. The man answered, “Do I eat from something that belongs to you? I eat from God’s hand, as we find (*Tehillim* 145:15), ‘The eyes of all look to You with hope and You give them their food in its proper time.’ The verse does not say ‘in their proper time,’ but ‘in its proper time.’ From this we learn that God gives everyone his sustenance in its time.” And indeed, while they were talking, Rava’s sister, whom he had not seen for many years, came and brought him a fattened chicken and old wine. Rava said, “Why did such a thing happen to me all of a sudden, that I was brought delicacies of the kind that I do not usually eat? This is a clear indication that they are intended for that man.” He got up and gave it to him.

Now if so, this story comes to emphasize that a person who trusts in God similarly to those who were sustained by the



manna is not regarded as someone who is provided for from communal funds, and all the abundance that is imparted to him comes directly from God, without any regard to natural endeavor.

We are hence dealing with a way of life of Torah study, without any concern for sustenance and without any effort to attain such. This is the attribute of trust that includes a complete dependence on God that He will feed the person, similarly to the Jews living in the wilderness who were sustained by manna without resorting to natural means.

We find this approach also in *Vayikra Rabbah* (chap. 15, sec. 3):

There was a person who presented a discourse to the effect that God created a follicle for each hair, so that one of them should not benefit from the other. His wife [then] told him, "And now you are planning to go forth and look for your sustenance? Stay at home and your Creator will worry about your sustenance, just as He makes sure to sustain each of the hairs on your head and created it in a manner that it should have a dedicated source of life on its own."

He accepted this claim, stayed at home, and God provided him with sustenance without him making an effort to attain it.

It seems, from this *Midrash*, that a person can sit at home and avoid making any effort for attaining sustenance for

himself and his household.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Still, it is possible that the entire discussion in this *midrash* pertains to the question of how far should a person travel in order to bring home bread if such is not available close to the house. It is possible that this *midrash* constrains the sphere of endeavor to the local scene, meaning that it would suffice if he would do his best to find his sustenance close to home and trust in God that he will not have to go far. Indeed, a situation very similar to the above is described by Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in *Chovos Ha'levavos*, Introduction to *Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, where he writes:

It was told about a certain ascetic that when he started this behavior he traveled to a distant land to find his sustenance. And, behold, he met an idolater there in the city.

The ascetic told the idolater, "Your worship of these idols shows that you are totally blind and lack discernment."

The idolater answered the ascetic, "What do you worship?"

The ascetic answered, "I worship the Creator."

So the idolater said, "But your actions contradict your statement." The ascetic asked why.

The idolater told him, "Had what you imagined been correct, then He would have sustained you in your land, just as He sustains you here, and you would not have needed to travel so far to this country."

The ascetic was left speechless, returned to his city, and took upon himself a life of seclusion from then on, and travelled no more.

In keeping with this, it would appear that one who trusts in God does not travel large distances to bring bread to his table; God will sustain him while he remains at home. This is expressed by the verse (*Tehillim* 75:7-8), "For neither from sunrise, nor from sunset, nor from the wilderness comes greatness. For God is the Judge — He lowers one and raises another." This statement apparently indicates that a person should restrict his natural effort to attain a livelihood to activities in his immediate vicinity, but it does not require that a person entirely refrain from

## The Commandment to Observe *Shmittah* (Leaving the Fields Fallow Each Seventh Year) — “And If You Shall Say, ‘What Will We Eat?’”

In everything concerning the *mitzvah* of *Shmittah*, we see a command, albeit limited in time but still in force for an entire year, that requires a person to entirely desist from any natural endeavor concerning his fields. It says in *Vayikra* (25:4), “And in the seventh year there should be a Sabbath for the land, a Sabbath for God; you should not sow your field and you should not prune your vineyard.” In fact, the *Midrash* points out that this represents an act of ultimate courage by the farmer: to leave his field open to anyone wishing to enter, and also not to cultivate it for an entire year.<sup>4</sup> Not only is

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making an effort.

4. Yalkut *Tehillim*, 103: “Bless God His angels, the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word.” Rabbi Yitzchak Napcha says, “These are those who observe *Shmittah*. Ordinarily a person performs a *mitzvah* for one day, for one week, for one month, but for the entire year? And this one sees his field fallow and his vineyard fallow and is silent. Is there a greater bravery than that?”

In other words, the *midrash* ascribes to *Shmittah* observers superhuman valor (“Bless God His angels”) in that that they see their fields not cultivated, their crops can be gathered by anyone, and their property is not theirs. All this is for an entire year.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, in his work *Sichos Mussar* (from the year 5731, essay 20) on *Parashas Bechukosai*, which deals with trust, notes in connection to this that, in general, a pledge that a person takes upon himself breaks down and fades away little by little over time. A person is able to overcome his evil inclination a day or two, and by trying harder he may overcome his evil inclination for a week or a month. But to face one’s evil inclination for an entire year, to see his field fallow and his

resorting to natural means prohibited during this year, but a person is supposed to realize from this that his possessions are not really his own and his livelihood is not dependent on working his fields, but on Heavenly blessing from Above.

The *mitzvah* of *Shmittah* provides a rare opportunity to reveal the Heavenly attitude concerning a person's trust in God. He anticipates the people's concerns about *Shmittah* observance and replies:

And if you shall say, 'What will we eat during the seventh year, behold, we shall not sow nor gather our produce,'

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crop being gathered by anyone wishing to do so, this is above human nature. The strength of *Shmittah* observers is hence supernatural, just like that of angels. Rabbi Shmuelevitz notes that the commandment of *Shmittah* was given to the entire nation and not only to righteous people who have attained high spiritual levels. Moreover, the Torah warns (*Vayikra* 20:34-35) that the sin of non-observance of *Shmittah* will cause the Jewish nation to go into exile. At first examination, why exile? Why should Jews being punished for violating a commandment, the conformance to which requires supernatural strength? Rabbi Shmuelevitz's answer is: "The most important reason for the observance of *Shmittah* is to implant in their hearts the attribute of trust — to live once every seven years a life without any material and natural basis."

Note that Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, in his work *Kli Yakar*, explains, as will be seen later, that the yield for the sixth year was not greater than during any other year, but the food increased in the innards of the believer, so that a quantity that usually sufficed for one year was sufficient during the *Shmittah* season for three years. It thus comes out that a person was required not to sow and not to plow, and to let others gather his produce without having in front of him a quantity that under natural circumstances would have been sufficient for three years. And if such a level of trust is not attained — the Temple will be destroyed and the nation will be exiled.

then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year and it shall bring forth produce for three years.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Lack of Trust and Excessive Natural Effort Detract from the Abundance**

Concerning this we find a comment in the work *Noam Elimelech* authored by Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhensk, in the name of his brother, Rabbi Zusia from Annapole, according to which a person’s struggle with himself as to “what will

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5. God’s blessing to *Shmittah* observers will cause the land to produce a yield equal to that of three ordinary years. For the sixth year itself, for the *Shmittah* year that follows, and for the eighth year, until the land will naturally produce a yield after it was not plowed or sowed for the seventh year and will just be starting on the eighth year. Moreover, we find in Ramban’s commentary (*Vayikra* 25:20-21) that even if the eighth year is *Yovel* (the jubilee year to which all the laws of *Shmittah* apply), the yield will suffice for four years.

Also here we find a lack of relationship between natural effort and the abundance and quantities with which a person will be blessed, since ordinary sowing in the sixth year provides a yield for three or four years.

Yet the Kli Yakar wonders: if indeed the yield in the sixth year will be triple that of an ordinary year, why is worry expressed (“what will we eat”) in the seventh year? On the basis of this, the Kli Yakar concludes that the yield in the sixth year will not be different, but that there is a Heavenly promise that this quantity will suffice for three years because the food will multiply in the innards, similarly to what Rashi says on the verse, “And you will eat your food to satiety.”

According to this approach, the attribute of trust is even loftier, since a person has to trust that the same quantity of food will supernaturally be sufficient for a longer time, and on the basis of this belief, he is commanded to refrain from cultivating and sowing and to allow anyone to harvest the produce of his land.

we eat” should already be regarded as an excessive and sinful endeavor that contradict trust in God. This question is in itself sinful and causes lack of Heavenly abundance, for which reason God was forced to renew the Heavenly “abundance conduits” and correct by means of a special Heavenly blessing what people have distorted by their questioning attitude. It appears from the statement by Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhensk that excessive effort not only does not assist a person, and not only is it prohibited because it is contrary to the command of trust, but it also lessens a person’s material possessions.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhensk, in his work *Noam Elimelech on Vayikra 25:20*, says the following:

“Why did the Torah go to a great length to clarify the question, ‘And if you shall say, ‘What will we eat during the seventh year?’” This question acquires force from the fact that usually the Torah speaks briefly, and it would have been sufficient to present the reply, ‘And I shall command My blessing to you on the sixth year,’ and then no one would ask, ‘what will we eat?’” The *Noam Elimelech* resolves this question by means of an explanation presented in the name of his brother, Rabbi Zushia of Annapoli, as follows:

“It seems that God, Who created the world, created His conduits of benevolence through which abundance flows to people. And the nature of abundance is such that it does not cease at all, but when man falls from his spiritual level and does not trust in God... then such a person, by means of these thoughts, causes, God forbid, a flaw in the Upper Worlds, and then, God forbid, the abundance stops and God must again command the abundance to proceed as it did from the start of Creation.

“And this is what ‘if you should say’ means, that the Torah teaches a person God’s ways, that he should be perfect in his trust in God and that he should not at all say, ‘What shall we eat?’ This is because when, God forbid, he will lose his trust and start thinking ‘what shall we eat,’ he, God forbid, makes a flaw in the abundance, and forces Heaven to command

This means that the question “what will we eat” is not regarded by the Chassidic masters as proper planning and a proper effort, but conversely, as lack of trust and, by itself, a factor that prevents the attainment of Heavenly abundance. A person is sustained by virtue of Heavenly assistance that is suitable to his spiritual state and to his trust in God.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, when a person contravenes his trust in God by fearing the future, his very fear causes a reduction in the Heavenly abundance from which he is sustained. For this reason, the Heavenly blessing that was given to *Shmittah* observers was needed in order to emend the shortcoming caused by the improper question of “what will we eat.”

This statement by the *Noam Elimelech* was explained by Rabbi Pinchas Friedman (essay on *Behar-Bechukosai*, in his work *Kor’ei Oneg*, from the year 5761, p. 17):

We derive from his words a major principle, that trust should be regarded as a “conduit” through which abundance flows from Above to below. This being so, when trust is contravened, then the flow of abundance from Above stops, and without a conduit, abundance cannot descend. This is what is written (*Tehillim* 32:10), “The one who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness.” This is so since trust in God draws the abundance in which he believes.

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it again. ‘If you should say’ means, ‘Should you say this, then you have troubled Me “to command My blessing.”’ But, you should not behave in this way and trust in God with your entire heart, and then the abundance will flow uninterrupted always, and you will lack nothing.”

7. See Rabbeinu Yonah on *Mishlei* 3:25-26.

This serves to explain the statement by Rabbi Zushia that God has created the world so that it should not lack abundance. But in order for abundance to flow down to the world continuously, we need to have trust, which is the conduit that enables the abundance to flow.

It is thus seen that, had they not asked, “What shall we eat during the seventh year,” abundance would have continued to flow to every person according to his needs without lacking anything. But since they did ask this question, it showed a defect in trust and this defect caused the abundance to cease.

But in spite of all this, God said that since the Jewish nation wished to observe the *mitzvah* of *Shmittah* as given from Heaven, “I shall command My blessing,” meaning that God will renew the flow of abundance.

### **Belief and Trust Amplify the Abundance**

Rabbi Friedman additionally explains the statement in the work *Ohev Yisrael (Parashas Noach)* in the name of Rabbi Yechiel Michel from Zlotchov:

The word *emunah* [belief] has two meanings: one literal, the belief that this will definitely be so, and the second one, that follows from the verse (*Esther 2:7*) “and he reared [*omen* in Hebrew] Hadassah,” representing continuation and rearing, because belief has this power that it can serve to attain continuation with the source, meaning that by his belief in God and by perfect trust in Him concerning a subject, then the subject is continuous and arrives in perfect condition.



As above, the term “belief” holds [in Hebrew] two aspects: The first aspect follows from the term “reliance” — a person’s belief in what will happen to him in the future. The second aspect follows from the term “raising”, i.e., “growing” — the power of belief to bring down Heavenly abundance that stems from God, Who is kind to those who believe in Him and beseech Him truthfully.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, belief is a two-way street, where on one side a person expresses his belief in God and trusts in Him, and on the other side, because he believes in Him, the belief fulfills itself, because it is the tool by means of which a person draws

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8. Explanation of the verse in *Bereishis* (7:7), “And Noah came... to the ark because of the waters of the flood.” Rashi comments, “Because of the waters of the flood’ – also Noah’s belief was faulty. He believed and did not believe that the flood would come, and did not enter the ark until he was pushed into it by the waters.” At first sight this is difficult to understand. God attested about Noah, “For you I have seen righteous before me in this generation.” How is it then possible to say about Noah that his belief in God’s words was flawed? However, Rabbi Michel from Zlotchov (in the words of the *Ohev Yisrael*) explains,

“Now, the pious Noah definitely believed completely in everything that God told him, with his entire heart and soul, in the uninterrupted perfect way of life. But in this matter he was afraid to believe in a perfect belief with all his heart, because then he would be the cause for bringing about the flood. Meaning that the perfection of his belief would definitely bring about the flood and he did not know how to conduct himself. This is what Rashi meant by saying ‘his belief was flawed, he believed and didn’t believe.’ Rashi was saying that he actually did believe, but he was afraid to perfectly believe that God would bring the flood, because maybe he would be the cause of this (by way of his belief). According to this, we understand why ‘one who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness,’ since one’s trust in God enables him to be the center of attraction for Heavenly powers of benevolence and draw them to himself.”

abundance, blessing, success, and salvation from God.

In keeping with this, we find that a person has to trust in God completely and without reservation, and even a slight apprehension that steals into one's heart and wants to "plan the future," showing concern about sustenance and curiosity about "what shall we eat," produces a flaw in the flow of Heavenly abundance that stems from innocent and unre-served belief.

Hence, in order to merit Heavenly blessing again and a flow of abundance, after they erred by their question, the *Shmittah* observers found themselves in need of a divine promise. Trust in God is seen to be irreconcilable with any feeling of apprehension and a need to plan one's future, and it is incumbent upon the individual to depend solely on God.

Conversely, by lacking trust in God man hurts himself, and his worry about the future not only does not help him, but at times may detract from the Heavenly abundance to which he is entitled.

### **Harmful Reliance on Natural Means**

An additional example of reliance on natural means as a damaging factor is to be found in the story of Shlomo Ha'melech and the Angel of Death, from the *Talmud* (*Sukkah* 53a):

Two Kushites, Aliharaf and Achiyah, the sons of Shisha, served as Shlomo Ha'melech's scribes.

One day Shlomo Ha'melech observed that the Angel of Death was sad. So he asked the Angel of Death why

he was sad. And the Angel of Death answered that he was asked from Above to bring the souls of the two Kushites, the King's scribes, because their time to die had come.

Shlomo Ha'melech hastily sent his scribes to the city of Luz (a city over which the Angel of Death has no control). However, just as the king's scribes arrived at the gates of the city, and before they had a chance to enter it, they died.

On the morrow Shlomo Ha'melech observed that the Angel of Death was merry. So he asked the Angel of Death why he was merry. The Angel of Death answered, "You sent the king's scribes precisely to the place where I was commanded to take their souls."

Immediately Shlomo Ha'melech stated, "A person's feet are his guarantors." A person's feet bring him to the place where Heaven wishes him to be.

The Maharsha explains there:

Shlomo Ha'melech thought that the Angel of Death was sad because he did not want to take the souls of the Kushites. This being so, he sent them to the city of Luz in order to save them. Actually, however, the Angel of Death was sad because he was commanded to take the souls of the scribes at the gate of the city of Luz. The angel was concerned because he did not know how to implement his mission, being that they were not at the gates of Luz but in the palace of Shlomo Ha'melech — in Jerusalem.

By sending the Kushites to Luz, Shlomo Ha'melech

actually solved the problem for the Angel of Death, and speeded up the death of the king's scribes.

It is obvious that, had Shlomo Ha'melech known the full Heavenly decree, he would not have sent them to Luz. But even the smartest of men cannot attain knowledge of Divine Providence, and, as a result, his intervention only brought damage.

An additional, familiar example of reliance on natural means which was not only superfluous, but even damaging, is the story of "Yosef who honors the Sabbath." We find in the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 119a) the following story:

Yosef would honor the Sabbath to the utmost, for which reason he was called "Yosef who honors the Sabbath."

Yosef had a non-Jewish neighbor, who had extensive possessions. One day astrologers told that non-Jew that, in the end, all his possessions would be owned by Yosef who honors the Sabbath. So the non-Jew sold all his possessions and purchased a pearl with the money, which he hid in his hat.

After some time, the non-Jew was walking on a bridge over a river, when a wind blew and flung his hat into the river.

A fish came and swallowed the pearl. Then fishermen caught this fish on the eve of the Sabbath, close to the time of candle lighting, and wondered who would buy this fish at such an hour.

They were told to go and sell it to Yosef who honors the Sabbath, because he was in the habit of purchasing fish

in honor of the Sabbath. They went and sold it to him. He found the pearl and sold it for a fortune.

The non-Jew's effort at safekeeping his wealth from falling into the hands of Yosef who honors the Sabbath not only did not succeed, but it also assisted in implementing the Heavenly decree. A person involved in reliance on natural means is similar to someone who runs, but does not know the direction nor the destination to which he is running. So what does he gain by exerting an effort and running? Such an activity simply makes no sense.

### **Chizkiyahu vs. Yeshayahu**

With reference to the above, a difficulty arises in understanding Chizkiyahu Ha'melech's reliance on natural means, as found in *Mishnah Pesachim* (4:9):

Chizkiyahu Ha'melech performed six acts, three of them were approved and three were not... He chopped off the doors of the Temple and sent them to the king of Assyria, which was not approved, and he plugged up the waters of the Upper Gichon, and this was not approved.

Below is a description of these two actions of which our Sages disapproved:

1. "At that time, Chizkiyahu Ha'melech chopped off the doors of God's Temple ... and gave them to the king of Assyria" (*Melachim II* 18:16). This means that Chizkiyahu Ha'melech removed the gold plating from the doors of the Temple and sent it to the

king of Assyria in order to appease him so that he would not wage war against him.

2. “He, Chizkiyahu Ha’melech, plugged up the waters of the Upper Gichon” (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 32:30), and at the start of the chapter (verse 4): “And they have plugged up all the wellsprings and the stream that flowed inside the country, saying, ‘Why should the Assyrian kings come and find much water?’”

Our Sages did not agree with Chizkiyahu Ha’melech. Concerning this, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller, in his work *Tosfos Yom Tov on Mishnah Pesachim* (4:9) explains that the Sages criticized Chizkiyahu Ha’melech concerning these actions because “he was supposed to have trusted in God.”

This means that Chizkiyahu Ha’melech relied on natural means in order to prevent war. One of these actions consisted of appeasement and payment, and the other of disrupting the water supply to the foe, should he come. At first glance, these are natural and vital activities carried out by Chizkiyahu Ha’melech in preparation for battle with an expected foe. Still, our Sages criticize him for this.

It should be kept in mind that in these cases there was no Heavenly promise or prophecy that the Jewish nation would not be harmed, and we are dealing here with activities required to prevent war, which is obviously a life-endangering situation. Still, our Sages criticized these actions. Does that mean that trust in God requires refraining from all activities, including those undertaken to prevent life-endangering situations?

In contrast, we find that Yoshiyahu Ha'melech was judged precisely because he trusted in God and did wage war. About Yoshiyahu Ha'melech it says (*Melachim II* 23:29), "In his days, Pharaoh-Nechoh, king of Egypt, went up against the king of Assyria on the River Euphrates, and Yoshiyahu Ha'melech went against him and he [Pharaoh-Nechoh] slew him at Meggido when he saw him."

The Sages (*Ta'anis* 22b) expounded:

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Why was Yoshiyahu Ha'melech punished? Because he should have sought advice from Yirmeyahu, but did not do so." What [verse] did he expound: "The sword will not pass through your land" (*Vayikra* 26:6)... But he did not know that his generation was not meritorious.

This means that Yoshiyahu Ha'melech was judged for doing things on his own, based on his trust in God, instead of seeking advice from the prophet Yirmeyahu. He should have relied on natural means and yielded to Pharaoh's demands. And Chizkiyahu Ha'melech was criticized for relying on natural means to prevent war. When should one trust God and when should one turn to natural means?

### **The Lofty Level of Chizkiyahu Ha'melech's Trust**

Difficulty in understanding the action of Chizkiyahu Ha'melech (and a partial explanation of our Sages' criticism as described in the *Mishnah*) becomes apparently even more profound upon analysis of his general behavior and of his level of trust in God, as described in *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*

(4:15) on the verse in *Eichah* (4:12), “The kings of the earth and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could have entered the gates of Jerusalem.”

There were four kings; each one of them asked for something else. These are David, Asa, Yehoshafat, and Chizkiyahu.

**David said** (*Tehillim* 18:28), “I pursued my foes and overtook them...” [To which] God said, “I shall do so.”

Concerning this, it is written (*Shmuel I* 30:17), “And David smote them from daylight until the evening of the next day” and God illuminated the night for him by sparks and lightning.

**Asa stood up and said**, “I do not have the strength to kill them, but I shall pursue them and You do it.” To this (God) told him, “I shall do it,” as it says (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 14:12), “And Asa and the people with him pursued them,” for they were destroyed before God and before His host.

**Yehoshafat stood up and said**, “I do not have the strength to kill and not to pursue, but I shall say sing and You do it.” God said to him, “I shall do it,” as it says (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 20:22), “And when they began to sing and to praise, God sent ambushes against the children of Amon and Moav and of the Mount of Seir that came against Yehudah, and they were smitten.”

**Chizkiyahu stood up and said**, “I lack the strength to kill or to pursue or to sing praises, but I shall sleep on my bed and You do it.” God told him, “I shall do it,” as



it says (*Melachim II* 19:35), “And it came to pass that night that an angel of God came out and smote the camp of the Assyrians.”

Chizkiyahu Ha’melech put himself completely in God’s hands and did not rely on any natural means at the time when Sancherev’s mighty army laid siege to the city. Chizkiyahu Ha’melech did not even undertake to sing praise to God, but slept in his bed and asked that God should run the entire war on His own, without any reliance on natural means. Is this to be regarded as proper conduct? Does this represent the obligation of trust that applies to each person?

### **The One Who Trusts Must Put Himself Entirely in God’s Hands**

A spectacular interpretation of trust in God without any reliance on natural means, “sleeping” as if it were, is presented in the writing of one of the Chassidic masters, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef ben Yehudah (“the preacher from Ostraha”), in his work *Rav Yebi* (from the year 5634, p. 29b), concerning the verse (*Tehillim* 3:6), “I lay down and slept, then awoke, for God supports me,” as follows:

I would like to suggest the following interpretation. Our Sages said (*Sanhedrin* 97a), “Three events occur in the absence of conscious thought. These are: the Messiah, finding an ownerless object, and [the bite of a] scorpion.” This applies to every person. Even if a calamity befalls him and he is extricated from it, to him this is as if the Messiah came, and it must be in the absence of conscious thought. This is the interpretation of the verse, “I

lay down and slept, then awoke, for God supports me.”

“I lay down” means that when I am lying before my foes who persecute me, and cannot get up and overcome them, then “I slept,” meaning that I do not consciously think about it, just like a person who does not consciously think of things that he needs while he is sleeping. And then when I do not consciously think, I am extricated from the calamity, as if the Messiah has come, because I was extricated from the calamity. This is meant by “I awoke.”

And the reason why the salvation comes in the absence of conscious thought is that when a person is aware of what is in front of him, then he is giving thought as to how to extricate himself from the calamity, and does not put his complete trust in God. This is because God says, “Since you want to save yourself by some or other activity, I do not wish to help you and we will see how you will be able to help yourself.” But if a person does not think about the calamity and says, “Why should I do anything? God will do whatever He wants” — then God helps, and this is what is meant by the saying, “God supports me.”

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef thus explains that when a person utilizes natural means for extricating himself from a calamity, he elicits a negative attitude towards him by God, as if to say, “If he thinks that he can run his affairs by himself, on the contrary, I will hand him the reins and we will see where he gets.”<sup>9</sup>

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9. It appears that in order to understand this matter, one should examine the writings of Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, in his work *Kli Yakar*, who explains the verse (*Vayikra* 25:36), “Take neither usury nor in-

A person on his own, lacking the ability to know where his path will lead him and what is really in store for him, obviously cannot provide his own salvation. Such effort actually hinders the salvation that was already planned for him. But if he “sleeps” and puts his trust in Hashem, he will certainly be saved.

Now we have in front of us sources that present a clear approach, according to which trust in God obligates us not to rely on any natural means in attempting to extricate ourselves from a calamity, but we are obligated to disregard our predicament and to leave the entire matter to God, like we are “sleeping.”

### **Even Unnecessary Talk Causes Damage**

The above is specifically stated in *Bereishis Rabbah* (chap. 89, secs. b-c) concerning the verse (*Mishlei* 14:23), “But the talk of lips leads only to dearth.” This should be understood to mean that there are cases when reliance on natural means constitutes lack of trust in God, and it thus detracts from a person’s salvation and postpones it.

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terest and fear your God, so that your brother may live with you.” He writes that “the main reason why the Torah prohibited taking interest is because this takes away a person’s attribute of trust. A businessman depends on God in his dealings, since he does not know whether or not he will be successful. But someone who lends money on interest, his income is predictable and known, and he depends on the collateral that he was given, and he will remove his thoughts from God...” Now if so, any kind of reliance on natural means that causes a person to think that from now on everything depends on himself and that he does not need to rely on Heaven, is forbidden since it contradicts a person’s obligation to trust in God.

The *Midrash* exemplifies this with the story of Yosef, who asked the Pharaoh's head butler (*Bereishis* 40:14), "But think of me when it shall be well with you, and show your kindness to me, and mention me to Pharaoh, and take me out of this house."

Note that Yosef is in Egypt, having been sold by his brothers. He is located in a dark dungeon of a jail, forgotten by everyone for years.

Yosef utilizes a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to speak to the head butler, who owes him a debt of gratitude and is about to return to a position of authority and influence. Yosef asks him to mention him to Pharaoh and request that he be released from jail. This appears to be a basic act of self-preservation. But his reliance on natural means is regarded as a liability and brings about a two-year extension to his stay in jail — one year for each word of unnecessary reliance on natural means.

In connection with this, the *Midrash* mentions the verse (*Tehillim* 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the man who put his trust in God' — this is Yosef — 'and did not turn to the arrogant.' By telling the chief butler 'think of me' and 'mention me,' he was left in jail for another two years."

If so, not only is reliance on natural means not a must and not effective, but it is also regarded as contrary to trust in God and therefore detrimental to a person. It can serve as a factor that might impede Heavenly abundance and assistance. It would appear from the sources cited above that a person should put all his hope in God alone and not resort to any acts of salvation and reliance on natural means.

### 3(2) THE SECOND DOCTRINE — RELIANCE ON NATURAL MEANS AS A CONDITION FOR ATTAINING HEAVENLY ABUNDANCE

In contrast to the sources presented above, we find other sources that are at first sight completely different, and according to which one is obligated to rely on natural means as a condition for obtaining Heavenly abundance and blessing.

The *Sifrei* says concerning the verse (*Devarim* 15:18), “And God will bless you in all that you do”: “Does this mean even if one does nothing? [No, since] it says ‘in all that you do.’”<sup>10</sup> It is seen from this that the Heavenly blessing is sent only to someone who does something, and not to one who does nothing. This means that a person is obligated to perform the required acts, and only after he has done so will he gain the Heavenly blessing.

Similar to this, we find in *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*, concerning the verse (*Devarim* 14:29), “So that God may bless you in all the work of you hands that you will do’ — if a person acts, he is blessed, and if not, he is not blessed.”

Also, the *Tosefta* (*Berachos* 6:13) on the verse (*Bereishis* 26:24), “And I will bless you and multiply your progeny” presents the following statement: “Yitzchak taught, since blessing dwells only on handiwork, get up and sow.”

We find (*Shemos* 2:5) that Pharaoh’s daughter went to wash herself in the river. “And she saw the ark among the reeds,

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10. We similarly find in *Bereishis Rabbah* 11:7, “Everything that was created during the Six Days of Creation needs doing.”

she stretched out her hand [*amasah*]’ — [according to the interpretation of our Sages (*Sotah* 12b),] her hand became extended over many *amos* [a measure of length].”

The question arises, if the ark holding Moshe was so far from Pharaoh’s daughter, why did she stretch out her hand toward the ark? Does a person stretch out his hand to reach something that is outside his reach? This comes to teach us that, even when God performs a miracle and delivers to a person something that is far from him, he is first required to make an effort, to resort to natural means and stretch out his hand.

In *Melachim II* (4:1), we find the story of the prophet Ovadya’s wife. It relates that King Achav came to take her sons as slaves for an unpaid debt and the prophet Elisha saved her in the following manner:

And one woman from the wives of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha saying, “Your servant, my husband, is dead and you know that your servant was God-fearing, and the debtor has come to take the two of my sons for slaves.”

And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you; tell me what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house except for a jar of oil.”

And he said, “Go and borrow vessels from the outside from all your neighbors, empty vessels, not few. And you will come and close the door upon yourself and upon your sons, and you shall pour into these vessels and set aside those that are full.”

And she went from him and closed the door upon herself and upon her sons. They brought [the vessels] to her and she poured. And then it came to pass that all the vessels became full and she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel," and he said, "There are no more vessels." And the oil stopped.

So even when the prophet brings about a miracle and the oil multiplies from his blessing, a person has to do something — prepare the vessels — because a blessing dwells only after a vessel has been prepared to receive it.

Moreover, the blessing that dwelt by means of the prophet's blessing lasted as long as there were vessels which were prepared beforehand. The minute when there were no longer vessels, the blessing was no longer in force, because it had nothing on which to dwell.<sup>11</sup>

It is thus seen that it is incumbent upon a person to make an effort and prepare vessels that will receive the blessing, and only then will God send His blessing and fill up the vessels.

### **Success Depends on a Combination of Prayer and Resorting to Natural Means**

The *Mishnah* (*Kiddushin* 4:14) states the following:

Rabbi Meir says a person should always teach his son

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11. In Chapter 9 we present the statement by Rabbi E. E. Dessler that God hides His miracles, and for this reason does not create something out of nothing, but multiplies whatever exists already. For this reason, a person has to prepare vessels in which the blessing can dwell.

a clean and easy profession, and should pray to the One Who is the master of riches and property. This is because there is no profession without poverty and riches, because neither poverty nor riches stem from the profession, but everything is according to a person's merits.

It appears from this that success depends on prayer and on a person's merits, but a profession should be acquired. And, indeed, the *Talmud* (*Niddah* 70b) relates that the people of Alexandria asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya a number of questions concerning proper behavior, and this was his reply:

**What should a person do in order to become wise?**

He told them that one should spend a lot of time learning Torah and little time in conducting business. They told him that many did this, but did not succeed! Instead one should ask for mercy from the One Who is the master of wisdom, as it says (*Mishlei* 2:6), "For God gives wisdom, out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding." What does this teach us? (Why did he advise them to spend a lot of time learning Torah if the matter depends on prayer to God?) It teaches us that one without the other is insufficient (because prayer without resort to natural means is insufficient).

**What should a person do to get rich?** He told them to conduct a lot of business<sup>12</sup> and deal honestly with people.

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12. The Vilna Gaon deletes the words "conduct a lot of business" and leaves only "deal honestly with people." This is compatible with the approach of the *Mesillas Yesarim* that is quoted further below.



They told him, many did this, but did not succeed. Instead, one should ask for mercy from the master of riches, as it says (*Chaggai* 2:8), “The silver is mine, the gold is mine, spoke God.” What does this teach us? It teaches us that one without the other is insufficient.

So prayer and trust are not enough without resorting to natural means. A person should pray and trust in God, but at the same time perform actions that are needed for his success in engaging in commerce and conducting negotiations.

### **The Ramban — Not Every Believing Person Is Able to Trust in God**

Our forefather Yaakov feared Esav, resorted to natural means, and prepared himself through “gifts, prayer, and war.” The Ramban, in his work about belief and trust (Chapter 1), explains in connection to this that Yaakov feared that maybe he had lost some of his merits. Indeed, Ramban explains that if not for this fear, his resorting to natural means would have been regarded as a sin.<sup>13</sup> In general, explains the Ramban, not every believer fully trusts in God, because it is possible for a person to believe in God and still not be sure of His salvation because “maybe sin will cause [a failure].” This means that there can be no trust without belief, and this requires that belief precede trust. But, conversely, belief may not necessarily bring about trust, because there is no promise that he

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13. At first it seems incomprehensible: If Yaakov feared that he had lost some of his merits, what would resorting to natural means help in view of the sin? It seems that a person who sinned cannot depend on being saved without making an effort.

has sufficient merit to be saved from the evil decree declared upon him. Hence Yaakov did everything that had to be done and did not depend on the Heavenly promise that he was given, to the effect that God would watch over him in everything that he did, because he was afraid that maybe a sin had lessened his merits and they would no longer be sufficient to save him. Yaakov thus acted because “that is what people do,” and hoped that the Heavenly promise would be implemented in connection with something else. It is thus seen that every person who was not given any Heavenly promise or is unsure of his merits is permitted and even obligated to resort to natural means, such as “gifts” and “war,” in addition to prayer.

The Ramban further clarifies Yaakov’s behavior on the basis of a belief principle, according to which a person is obligated to resort to natural means in order not to bother God to perform supernatural miracles for his sake.

Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his work *Kad Ha’kemach* (entry: trust), explains in reference to the verse (*Tehillim* 37:3), “Dwell in the land and be nourished by belief,” that even though one is obligated to trust in God...

I do not say that you should leave your doings and business ... for the sake of good deeds, because if so, from where will you sustain yourself and live?

And [the Sages] already expounded “if there is no flour there is no Torah.”

And the *Menorah* in the Holy Temple that alludes to wisdom was at the South and the table with the *Lechem*

*Ha'panim* that alludes to sustenance was at the North, because these points of the compass are lined up, one to the other.

For this reason the verse says “dwell in the land,” do not neglect your activity for your sustenance. Occupy yourself with worldly matters.

“And be nourished by belief” means that even if you were told not to neglect doing things, do not say that you could prosper by gaining wealth improperly, but in dealing with people stay attached to belief; interpret the verse, “Be a friend (*r'eh* — *re'ah*) to belief.” Do not abandon belief by your residing in the land — just the opposite, “know Him in all your ways,” i.e., all worldly activity performed for this purpose should hold within it the fulfillment of belief, which comprises the observance of the entire Torah. This is meant [by the Sages when they said] Chavakkuk came and incorporated them into a single statement, “And the pious will live with his belief.”

The reason why the verse started with trust and ended with belief is that the trait of belief is included in trust, because everyone who trusts in God obviously believes in Him. Trust is like the fruit of the tree of belief, because if there is fruit, this means that there is a tree. But the existence of a tree is not indicative of existence of fruit, because there are trees that do not bear fruit.

Not everyone who has belief also has trust, because he may be apprehensive that maybe his sins reduced his merits or maybe he has already been remunerated for his good deeds.

A person who fears sin may possibly be afraid that a calamity will fall upon him because of his sins, as we find by our forefather Yaakov, that he was apprehensive that his merits were diminished by sin, even though God gave him a promise.

Similarly, David Ha'melech says (*Tehillim* 27:13), "Had I not trusted that I would see the goodness of God" and the Sages expounded on this (*Berachos* 4a), "Lord of the World, I trust in You that you shall properly reward the righteous in the World to Come. But I am not sure that I will have a share with them."

And even though he called himself "pious," as it says (*Tehillim* 86:2), "Guard my soul for I am pious," he was still apprehensive that his sins harmed him.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains further, similar to Ramban, that "if it were not for the fear that one was harmed by his sins, then resorting to natural means to be saved as people usually do would have been regarded as detrimental to belief. This is because it says (*Tehillim* 37:25), 'I was young and also aged, and I have not seen a righteous person forsaken and his children begging for bread.' Although there are righteous ones who are poor, like Rabbi Chanina, this is because he never purchased property, and the term "forsaken" applies only to someone who was originally dependent. One is not forsaken for nothing, everything is with judgment, and hence it is impossible that one who has not sinned should be afraid." Compare this with *Berachos* 5b concerning the difference between a person who had children and they died and one who never had any children.

**A Person Is Obligated to Resort to Natural Means,  
but at the Same Time Is Obligated to Believe  
That His Sustenance Does Not Depend on Him**

Similarly, Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda, in his work *Chovos Ha'levavos* (*Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, chap. 4), notes that a person should not leave his land without cultivating it and without sowing, on the basis of his trust in God. A person may not say, "If God decreed that the earth will sprout, it will sprout also if I do not sow it." A person's duty is to cultivate his land, and at the same time, to trust in God that He will cause his land to bring forth fruit and will protect it from harm. Also, professionals and hired hands are commanded to work for their sustenance, each one in his profession, and at the same time they must trust God because sustenance is in His hands and His mastery. God is the one who guarantees a person that he will be sustained, and He is able to provide sustenance to every person by any means that He desires. A person should not believe that it is the means by itself that can assist him or harm him to any extent.

It appears from this statement in *Chovos Ha'levavos* that a person has been commanded to make an effort to attain his sustenance by resorting to natural means, such as tilling the land, professional work, or commerce. On the other hand, a person should not at all depend on his efforts, because it is possible that God will provide his sustenance in a manner entirely different from the one in which he is involved. A person, in spite of all the effort that he puts in, should be strong in his trust in God, because all his success in his doings depends only on God's will and is not a "natural" result

of his actions.<sup>15</sup> In short:

It seems that putting in an effort to gain sustenance is indeed an obligation, and this is the way one should trust: one should make an effort to gain sustenance while fully trusting in God that everything depends solely on His will.

Ramchal explains (*Mesillas Yesharim*, chap. 21, concerned with ways to attain piousness) that even though it is impossible that a person should lose something that has been allotted to him from Heaven,<sup>16</sup> a person may not be idle. This is because God has punished mankind by saying (*Bereishis* 3:19), “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.”

In view of this, a person has to make some kind of effort in order to attain his sustenance, because this has been decreed by the King of kings. This is something like a tax that humankind has to pay without being able to avoid it. This lies beneath the statement, “Maybe even if he sits idly? The

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15. Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, in his *Sichos B'Tanach* (of the year 5741), explains in conjunction with this that “maybe the most difficult of all the wars within a person’s soul in which one has to engage is the struggle between the demand to trust in God, as it says (*Tehillim* 131:2), ‘like a suckling child at his mother’s side,’ a child that will not take a single step without being led by his mother, and his obligation to resort to natural means.”

16. *Beitzah* 16a, “All of a person’s nourishment is allotted to him from Heaven from one *Rosh Hashanah* to the next.” This abundance is not lessened by “competition” with others. The *Talmud* in another place (*Yoma* 38b) states, “A person cannot touch in the slightest manner something that belongs to others.”

verse says, 'In all that you do.'<sup>17</sup>

If so, a person is obligated to exert an effort, and it is impossible to replace this obligation by trusting in God. This is because these two do not contradict each other, but are mutually complementary and mutually interdependent.

### **Is a Person's Toil to Be Regarded as a Harsh Decree or a Blessing?**

In addition to the differences of opinion concerning whether a person is obligated to resort to natural means or should trust God completely, it appears that there is also a lack of agreement regarding the following question: Is a person's toil to be regarded as a harsh Heavenly decree and a curse that a person must live with, or maybe a person's toil is a blessing for him and even a mode of Heavenly service and emendation of the world? We shall now present a number of sources for both sides of this question:

On the one hand, the *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 82b) says:

We have learned, Rabbi Shimon ben Eliezer says, "I have never seen a deer that dries figs in the field, a lion

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17. The source of this is the previously cited *Sifrei* on the verse (*Devarim* 15:18), "And God will bless you in all that you do." Similarly (see *Mesillas Yesharim*, chap. 5): "Labor is imperative to a person for his sustenance. But there is no need to do labor to the extent that a person should not have time for his [divine] service. We were hence commanded to set aside times for the study of Torah." It would appear from the above that a person is obligated to set aside times for learning Torah, but he must also work, "because labor is imperative for his sustenance."

working as a porter, or a fox acting as a storekeeper, and they sustain themselves without pain. And they were created solely in order to serve me, and I was created to serve my Master. Doesn't it stand to reason that [since] those who were created to serve me are sustained without pain, that I too should be sustained without pain? But I corrupted my doings and [because of this] was deprived from my sustenance, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 5:25), 'Your sins have turned away these [things].'<sup>18</sup>

In other words, animals receive their sustenance without having to learn a profession and without pain.<sup>19</sup> What caused man to be forced to toil for his sustenance and thus be treated worse than animals is the sin of Adam and the curse that came in its wake (*Bereishis* 3:17-19), "Cursed is the earth in your wake, in sorrow shall you eat [from] it all the days of your life. And thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread."

We have previously presented the statement by Ramchal, who notes that the reason why a person is obligated to resort to natural means stems from the above *pasuk*. Ramchal

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18. *Yirmeyahu* 5:25, "Your sins have turned away these [things] and your transgressions withheld the good from you."

19. About man it says, "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." It appears that, should a person toil, he will derive bread from his work. But, in spite of all this, at times one exerts an effort, but does not reap; this is the pain that is intrinsic to man and not to animals. This pain, as distinguished from toil, stems from sin, as it says, "Your sins have turned away."



says that a person must believe that it is not his effort that benefits him,<sup>20</sup> and that work is not a source of blessing, but a result of the curse decreed upon Adam.

On the basis of this approach, he concludes that the obligation to find sustenance consists of only “a little labor”: “Since he made an effort, he has fulfilled his obligation, and space has been created where the Heavenly abundance should dwell, and one need not spend his days in diligence and effort.”

This is to say, since resorting to natural means is in fact a general obligation that does not provide any benefit, but rather something a person must do in order to fulfill his obligation to the decree to which he was subjected, it is obvious that he should not exert himself too much doing this. This is because no sensible person will extend himself to invest in something that has been intended as a curse, and which on its own is actually useless.

In view of this, says Ramchal, the proper combination between one’s trust in God and the obligation to resort to natural means is to follow the pious people of old who made their Torah study their principal occupation and their work only secondary, and succeeded in both of them. This is so since, having exerted some effort, a person should from then on only trust in his Maker and not pay attention to any worldly

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20. Ramchal, in *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 21), quotes in connection with this the verse (*Tehillim* 75:7-8), “For neither from sunrise, nor from sunset, nor from the wilderness comes greatness. For God is the Judge — He lowers one and raises another.” He also quotes Shlomo Ha’melech (*Mishlei* 23:4), “Labor not to be rich, cease from your own wisdom.”

matter. Only then his mind will be available and his heart will be ready to true piety and pristine divine service.<sup>21</sup>

### Sources Concerning the Obligation of Manual Labor

As opposed to this, it appears that Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam (in his work *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem*, in the chapter concerned with trust) thinks that there is an obligation to resort to natural means that goes beyond the limits of "a little labor." This is because labor is not regarded as fulfillment of the curse declared upon man, but it holds within it a blessing. Besides, major *Tannaim* worked hard for their maintenance and sustenance. To quote him:

The verses that exhort people to trust, such as the verse (*Tehillim* 55:23), "Cast your burden upon God and He will sustain you" and similar, or the meaning of the verses that condemn effort and excess industriousness,<sup>22</sup>

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21. Concerning reducing one's labor to a minimum for a different reason, see Sforno on the verse (*Shemos* 20:8-9), "Remember the Sabbath day to hallow it." He explains that a person should arrange his business during the working week in a manner that will allow him to forget about it on the Sabbath and to only think about the Sabbath. How should this be done? "For six days you may labor — which is definitely slavery, since what it involves is that a person is miserable concerning a world that is not his (his earthly possessions do not become a part of him, as opposed to his spiritual possessions), and only labor that is necessary for one who is content [with the minimum] should be performed." All of this means that a person should reduce his labors to a minimum, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and then one will be able to divert his mind from it all on the Sabbath and feel that his labor has been completed.

22. "If God will not build the house, in vain do its builders labor on it;

do not intend to postulate that a person who trusts in God is permitted to sit doing nothing without exerting an effort to find his sustenance and expect that his sustenance will come from Heaven just as the manna did, or from an unknown source as it happened to some prophets and righteous people at certain times and under specific conditions. This is so since such a spiritual level cannot be attained by everybody, and even major *Tannaim* worked arduously for their sustenance:

**Hillel** — was a wood hewer (Rambam’s commentary on *Pirkei Avos* 4:7)

**Karna** — was a drawer of water (ibid.)

**Rabbi Yehoshua** — was a blacksmith (*Berachos* 28a)

**Abba Chilkiyah** — was a day worker in plowing; it was he who prayed for rain during years of drought, and his prayer caused rain to fall (*Ta’anis* 23a)

Also prophets labored for their sustenance:

**Noach** — occupied himself with sowing, as it says (*Bereishis* 9:20), “And Noach became a man of the soil and planted a vineyard.” Targum Onkelos translates “man of the soil” as a man [who] works the soil

**Avraham** — was occupied with pasturing flock, as it says (*Bereishis* 13:7), “shepherds of Avraham’s flocks”<sup>23</sup>

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if God will not guard the city, in vain is the watchman vigilant” (*Tehillim* 127:1).

23. Labor, as distinguished from a life of idleness, is one of the blessed attributes of the Holy Land. The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Bereishis* 29:8) says, “Rabbi Levi said, ‘When Avraham was walking around in Aram Naharayim and Aram Nachor, and saw them eating and drinking and

**Yitzchak** was also a man of agriculture, as it says (*Bereishis* 26:12), “and Yitzchak sowed in that land”

**Yaakov** worked as a hired shepherd, and said (*Bereishis* 30:30), “and now when shall I provide for my house also?”

**Moshe** — was Yisro’s shepherd

...But not only this, they (the Sages of the *Talmud*) advise a person to exert himself for his sustenance, as it says (*Tehillim* 128:2), “When you eat the labor of your hands, you are commendable and all is well with you.” Our Sages also said (*Berachos* 8a), “[What was said] about one who derives satisfaction from the work of his hands is more praiseworthy than [what was said] about one who is God-fearing. This is so, since concerning one who is God-fearing it says (*Tehillim* 112:1), ‘Commendable is the man who fears God,’ whereas about one who eats the labor of his hands it says, ‘When you eat the labor of your hands you are commendable and all is well with you’ — you are commendable in this world, and all is well with you — in the World to Come.”

According to this approach it appears that work is not a curse; just the opposite, our Sages advise a person to derive his living from the work of his hands and to be blessed by this. So resorting to natural means is not an activity to be

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acting fickle, he said, “I do not want to have a part in this land.” But when he came to Sulam Tzur, he saw them weeding at the time of weeding, hoeing at the time of hoeing, and he said, “I wish I could have a parcel in this land,” and God told him, “To your offspring I shall give this land.””

performed only partially to fulfill some requirement, but the one who derives satisfaction from his work reaches lofty spiritual levels, and this is the approach that should be taken by a person in this world — to derive satisfaction from his handiwork.

### **Toil in this World as Spiritual Divine Service**

Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, gate 4, entry 3, chap. 6) explains that resorting to natural means is not only not a curse, but it is required in order to emend Adam's sin, and it is the substance of a person's spiritual service following this sin. He presents the following reasoning:

1. The post-sin world requires effort to differentiate between the good and the bad. This is because after the sin, the good and the bad are intermingled in the entire world, and the differentiation between and separation of the good and the bad are in fact the emendation of the world that has come into being after the sin.
2. The general rule is that God does not bring a "curse" upon a person that does not hold an emendation within it. A person's mission following the sin is to differentiate between the good and the bad. Thus, for example, as a result of the sin, the soil sprouts thorns and thistles along with grain, and a field has to be hoed in order to extract the good from the bad and separate them. This is the differentiation between the good and the bad in grain. Also the

removal of dross from gold and silver comprises this differentiation between the good and the bad. Hence a person's mission is to separate the good from the bad, both in the physical and spiritual domain. A person removes the bad from the good in the spiritual domain by performing physical acts — for the sake of Heaven. In this way he takes the material substance and pours spirituality into it.

3. In view of this, when a Jew eats kosher food and recites blessings before and after eating, he performs a physical act that refines the material substance and separates the good from the bad. This is so since he converts earthly eating into a spiritual activity of divine service, this being so because the food unites with the potency of his body, makes it healthy, and gives him the strength to learn Torah and perform *nitzvos*, something that is an unmistakable labor of separating the good from the bad.

This approach is known in the Chassidic world as having the sense of (*Mishlei* 3:6), "In all your ways acknowledge Him."<sup>24</sup> What is meant here is that a person is obligated to recognize God in each activity that he carries out, including manifestly physical activities. This recognition causes a person

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24. See, among others, the statement by Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhensk in his *Tzetal Ha'kattan* where he advises a person to always devote his thought to the possibility, that if now, while enjoying things, someone would come and place him on a pile of burning wood for the sake of His Name, he would take this judgment upon himself with joy and would perform this *mitzvah*. In this way, such a thought converts all his doings, even the most physical, into a divine service.

to convert his entire material life into an all-encompassing episode of divine service.<sup>25</sup>

As a direct result of the above, it appears that if it has been decreed that a person resort to natural means to attain his livelihood, this should be regarded as an activity that purifies the material substance. A person who exerts physical effort to gain his livelihood in order to sustain his family and maintain their health so that their health and provision of all their needs will make it possible for them to serve God at ease converts physical labor into an eminently spiritual task. By conducting himself in this manner, a person serves God in the sense of “in all your ways acknowledge Him.”

It thus comes out that the resort to natural means by a person who labors for his livelihood is a part of the divine service, in which a person is obligated in the world that has come about after Adam’s sin. This toil obligates him to be involved in emending the world and in separating the spiritual good from the material bad that surrounds him and adheres to him.

### **A Person’s Toil as a Test**

Rabbi Wolbe adds that this divine service also serves as a criterion and test to which a person is subjected in order to return to the spiritual level that existed before the sin. To quote him:

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25. This principle comprises a law that is included in the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, chap. 231.

In this manner God has subjected man to a difficult test: on the one hand, he derives satisfaction from the work of his hands — a person is satisfied with one measure that belongs to him more than with nine measures that belong to another, because he toiled to achieve it (*Bava Metzia* 38a), and toil sweetens its product. On the other hand, man may attribute his success to his strength and the power of his hands, whereas actually it is God who makes it possible for him to do all this. When Adam was sustained without pain and everything was ready for him in Gan Eden without any effort, he did not have to withstand this test. This is the way of the Divine Providence: after Adam sinned and lost his lofty spiritual status, it imposed upon him a major task of withstanding the new test in order to return to his previous spiritual status. This is since, now, after having committed the sin, man has to exert an effort to attain his livelihood, and at the same time be strong in his belief that all his sustenance depends on God and (*Tehillim* 127:1), “If God will not build the house, in vain do its builders labor on it; if God will not guard the city, in vain is the watchman vigilant.” This principle is explained at length in the work *Chochmah U’mussar*, part 1, pp. 41-49. This also serves as a means of extracting the good (belief and trust in God) from the bad (faith in one’s own power).

According to Rabbi Wolbe’s approach, a person is obligated to resort to natural means and toil for his livelihood as a part of his divine service. Hence we are not dealing here with a curse that is to be avoided, but rather with the situation that has come about after Adam’s sin, and resorting to



natural means has become a divine service, since it is an act of emending the world and comprises a manifest spiritual goal of divine service.

### **“Six Days You Should Toil” — “You Should Love Work”**

Indeed we find — concerning a person’s toiling to attain his livelihood — unambiguous statements by *Tannaim* in *Avos D’Rabbi Nasan* (11:1) that it is a blessing and a value rather than a curse that should be avoided as much as possible:

“You should love work” — how? This is meant to teach that a person should love work and should not hate work, since just as the Torah was given as a covenant, so was work given as a covenant. It says (*Shemos* 31:15-16), “Six days work should be done, but on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of rest, holy to God, one who does work on the Sabbath shall be put to death. And the Jews shall keep the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath for generations — an eternal covenant.”

Rabbi Akiva said, “At times a person labors on the Sabbath and is still not culpable for the death penalty, and at times a person does not labor on the Sabbath and still is culpable of death by Heaven. How is this possible? A person sat a whole week and did not work. On the Sabbath eve he had nothing to eat. He had in his house moneys donated for the needs of the Holy Temple and took from them to get food. He is culpable of death by Heaven. But if a person works [during the week] in building the Temple, even if this same kind of money is given to him as wages and he uses them to buy food [for Sabbath] — he is not culpable of death.”

Rabbi Dostai said, “From where do we know that if one has not done any work during the six days, he would do on the seventh? Since he sat the whole week and did not work, then on Sabbath Eve he had nothing to eat, so he went and was captured by soldiers, and they chained him and forced him to work on the Sabbath. All this happened (because) he did not work during the six weekdays.”

Rabbi Shimon the son of Eliezer said, “Even Adam did not taste anything until he did work, as it says (*Bereishis* 2:15-16), ‘And he put him in Gan Eden to work it and guard it...from all trees of the garden you may eat.’”

Rabbi Tarfon said, “Even God did not cause His Divine Presence to dwell among the Jews until they did work, as it says (*Shemos* 25:8), ‘And you should make Me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell among you.’”

Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira said, “What should be done by [a person] who has nothing to do? If he has a ruined yard or a ruined field, he should go and occupy himself with it, as it says (*ibid.* 20:9), ‘Six days you should labor and do all your work.’ This is meant to include that the one who has a ruined yard or a ruined field should go out and labor in them.”

Rabbi Yossi said, “A person dies only because of idleness, as it says (*Bereishis* 49:33), ‘He then passed away and was gathered unto his people.’ If a person gets sick and cannot work and dies — his death came from idleness. One stood on the roof or on the shore of a river and fell and died; he died only because of idleness.”

Up until now we heard [that a person has to labor] as

it applies to men. From where do we know that this also applies to women? Because it says (*Shemos* 36:6), “Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the Sanctuary.” How do we know that also children [are obligated to do work]? This is because it says (*ibid.*), “And the people stopped bringing.”

We thus see that a number of *Tannaim* praised work as a value on its own, to the point that a person is obligated to work even if he does not need to. One should look for and locate a ruined yard or a ruined field that he has and should occupy himself with it.

We have seen above a number of sources that apparently contradict one another. On the one hand we have examined many sources that support resorting to natural means, whereas on the other we have seen other sources that say that resorting to natural means and trust are mutually contradictory and a person is obligated to depend solely on God. He should not do anything, and make himself like he is “sleeping,” and wait for God’s salvation that will come by itself. How can these sources be reconciled and what path should a person choose? Does this issue have an orderly doctrine and a wide and comprehensive framework, into which all these sources fit and which fits the circumstances of each individual?

In addition to seeing this issue from a broad and all-inclusive point of view on the basis of the sources, representing a spectrum of opinions that are apparently different from one another, we also need to resolve daily and incisive questions such as:

- When is a person obligated to trust and depend on God that He will provide him with his daily needs, and when should he resort to natural means to attain his needs?
- What is the extent of labor that a person is supposed to perform in order to supply his needs? Is there a limit? What is the proper measure?
- Is there any difference between labor that is known to be productive and toil, the benefit of which is doubtful?
- Do different measures of toil apply to different people according to their spiritual standing, or is everybody equal in this case?
- Is there any difference in the extent one should resort to natural means to acquire his essential needs as compared with acquiring luxuries?
- Is a person obligated to exert himself to assist someone else as much as he exerts himself to satisfy his own personal needs?
- In conjunction with this, is there any difference between resorting to natural means for satisfying one's personal needs and those of the public at large?

The next chapters shall be concerned with the systematic clarification of these issues.

## CHAPTER 4

### HUMAN EFFORT AND TRUST IN REGARD TO HEALTH MATTERS

**T**HE DESIRED BALANCE between the obligation to trust in God and a person's obligation to exert human effort to attain his goals without depending on miracles manifests itself acutely when a person is faced with a life-threatening danger, and the need for medical attention arises. We shall present a case as an example and give the opinions of *Rishonim* in this context, thus providing an opening for a methodical study of the subject.

#### **It Is Not the Snake that Kills — It Is the Sin that Kills**

Assuming that sickness is the result of sin and serves only as an external symptom of a phenomenon that is fully rooted in the spiritual domain, there does not seem to be any need or purpose to turning to human action in the medical field. This is expressed by the saying that it is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills.<sup>1</sup> It would be proper that any effort

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1. The *Talmud* (*Berachos* 33a) relates the following, "It happened that there was snake in a certain place and it used to injure people. The people went to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, and he asked them to show him its lair. He put his heel up to the entrance of the lair and was bitten by the snake, which then immediately died. He carried the snake on his

being expended to cure a person would consist of emending the sin, which is the source of his sickness, and not of curing the physical toxin that infected the person as a result of his sin.<sup>2</sup> Indeed we find in *Divrei Ha'yamim II* (16:12) that King

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shoulder and brought it to the *beis midrash*. He told them there, "See my children, it is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills." It was then said, "Woe to the person who was bitten by a snake and woe to the snake who bit Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa." On the other hand (see *Shabbos* 55b), "There is death not caused by sin and there is suffering not caused by transgression of the law." Still, it is clearly seen from that passage in *Berachos* that it is not the snake that kills, but it is God Who has decreed a death sentence and the snake is only an emissary.

2. In general, a person should know that the world conducts itself solely on the basis of Divine Providence. This is so, since it is God who directs nature. In his work, *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (vol. 1, p. 181, in the essay concerning miracles and nature), Rabbi E.E.Dessler presents an allegory about a person who stands behind a set of blinds, looks through a crack between the slats, and sees a pen writing. He does not see the person who is writing with the pen. But it is obvious that the pen is not writing by itself and that there is a person in the room who is writing with the pen. Similarly, the world is not conducted on its own, even if we don't see the One who writes, but only the pen. It is not nature that conducts the world, it is God who conducts it by means of nature and, at times, departs from the usual natural conduct. The Ramban, at the end of *Parashas Bo* (*Shemos* 13:16), explains that in fact "there is no nature and everything is a miracle." To quote him:

A person does not have a share in the Torah given by Moshe, unless he believes that all events and all occurrences are solely miracles. There is nothing natural or routine in them, whether pertaining to an individual or to a congregation, but if one will perform *mitzvos*, he will succeed in being rewarded, and if he will transgress them, he will be punished, all as decreed by Heaven.

This is explained by Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz:

What Rabbeinu is saying is that when one sees that the world is

Asa, who had a medical problem with his foot, was criticized that “even during his illness he did not turn to God, but only to physicians.”

### A Physician Is Permitted to Heal

On the other hand, there is a specific verse (*Shemos* 21:19), “And he shall heal.” Our Sages infer from this (*Berachos* 60a) that “this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal.” Permission to heal has to be granted since, as explained by *Tosafos* (*Bava Kama* 85a), we would tend to think that a physician may only heal a wound inflicted by a person, “but when a physician heals a malady that came from Heaven, it gives the appearance of tampering with the Heavenly decree.” For this reason the Torah had to specify that it is permitted to consult physicians for any sickness or malady, including those inflicted by Heavenly decree.<sup>3</sup> Thus, even in the case

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conducted in a supernatural manner, such as “transforming the rock into a pool of water” (*Tehillim* 114:8), and similar miracles,... one should infer from this that there is no difference or differentiation between the natural and supernatural, because both are one and the same... This imparts to a person the belief and knowledge of covert miracles — that because of the sin of eating non-kosher fat, which is a Torah sin, he dies in a natural manner, similar to eating poison that brings death in a natural way. This is because it becomes clear to him that death by intake of poison comes about only because he transgressed the divine decree, for it is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills.”

3. In contrast, see Ibn Ezra on the verse (*Shemos* 21:19): “‘And he shall heal’ — This is a sign that physicians are permitted to heal injuries and wounds that can be seen from the outside, but a malady that is inside a body — [only] God should heal. This is what is written (*Iyov* 5:18),

of a malady that comes by Heavenly decree, one may turn to a physician.

Ramban, in his work *Toras Chaim*, explains that the need for permission from the Torah to seek a remedy for one's illness is a result of the physician's apprehension that he may make a mistake and unintentionally kill his patient. The physician may have misgivings about his healing work, for which reason the Torah permitted the physician to be involved in healing people and permitted him to do this in spite of his misgivings.<sup>4</sup> It is thus seen that according to Ramban's ap-

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'For He makes sore and binds up the wounds.' And it is written about King Asa (*Divrei Ha'yamim II* 16:12) that 'even during his illness he did not turn to God, but only to physicians.'" Therefore, according to Ibn Ezra, a physician is permitted to heal only an external malady. See also in the responsa *Ma'asei Avraham* (part: *Yoreh De'ah*, laws pertaining to visiting the sick, sec. 55), which differentiates between a malady that can be healed and one that has no cure.

4. Rabbi Yaakov Etlinger, in his responsa *Binyan Tzion* (sec. 111), discusses the case of a terminal patient for whom one physician wishes to give a medication that, on the one hand, might save him from death, but on the other, if unsuccessful, will cause the person to die earlier than he would have if he had not taken it. The question arises of whether or not this medicine may be administered. His response is that it is permissible. This is based on the exposition by our Sages (*Bava Kama* 85), "And he shall heal — we derive from this that a physician may heal." Ramban (in *Toras Adam*) and the Tur (*Yoreh De'ah* 336) explain that the physician should not say, "What do I need this headache for? Maybe I will err and kill a person inadvertently." A physician should not have such misgivings. The Tur writes there that one should not refrain from administering medical treatment because of a potential error, since this is regarded as a case of saving a life. If it is permitted to desecrate the Sabbath in the case of a possible loss of life, even if the person may die or may live without this medicine, all the more so it is permissible to possibly kill



proach, a physician is permitted to be involved in medical treatment, and this also implies that the sick person may seek medical help. If there were no risk of inadvertently killing a patient, there would be no need for the verse that permits a physician to heal.

Indeed, Rabbi Avraham Danzig, in his work *Chochmas Adam* (151:25), explains that:

If the Torah would not have permitted a physician to heal, as it says, "And he shall heal," we would have been prohibited from seeking medical help, since one who follows the Torah is protected from bad events...And it says, "Behold, the eyes of God are upon those who fear him," that He in His mercy always watches over them. A person over whom God watches will definitely avoid all calamities. This is what our Sages said, "Jews are not subject to fate"...However, when a person does not conduct himself [properly] and does not adhere to God, then he remains subject to fate (the natural course of events)...But a person is capable of changing his fate.

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somebody when the chance exists that a given procedure will save his life.

Concerning the responsibility for medical negligence, see also the responsa of the Chasam Sofer (part I, *Orach Chaim*, sec. 177), Rabbi Yonasan Eibeshitz in *Kreisi U'Pleisi* (*Yoreh De'ah* 188:5), the responsa *Ma'asei Avraham* (part: *Yoreh De'ah*, laws pertaining to visiting the sick, sec. 55). Also see the discussion in the work by Rabbi Ovadya Yosef *Yechaveh Da'as* (part I, sec. 61) as part of the response to the inquiry whether a person may behave stringently and fast on *Yom Kippur* when this may endanger his health.

God knows that people will not fall into this category [of divine guidance, i.e., of] “Behold, the eyes of God are upon those who fear Him.” Therefore, He created in His world trees and vegetation and similar that would by their very nature provide healing, and gave us permission to use them for this purpose, to be assisted in the natural manner.

Thus, despite a person’s obligation to trust in God and believe that it is not the illness that kills, but the sin that kills, and the illness has been decreed by Heaven in the wake of sin, the Torah has specifically permitted seeking medical help and being healed by human actions.

It appears that there are sources that limit the seeking of medical help, as well as sources that say it is permitted to enlist a physician’s service. In light of this contradiction that apparently exists on this topic, the question arises as to when it is proper to seek medical help for an illness and when it is proper to solely rely on God that He will send his assistance and heal the sick person.

We shall present a number of approaches of the *Rishonim* on this topic, which will at first sight appear to be diametrically opposite. Then we shall examine the explanation of the *Turei Zahav* (Taz), the explanation of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter in his work *Even Yisrael*, and of Rabbi Dessler in his work *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, which states that these *Rishonim* do not disagree, but rather that there is a differentiation between the different levels of trust that apply to different people, according to their spiritual standing. This differentiation provides an important insight into the entire subject.

#### 4(1). **RAMBAN'S APPROACH**

Ramban, in *Parashas Bechukosai* (*Vayikra* 26:11), explains:

When the Jews are perfect [in their belief] and they are numerous, their affairs shall not be conducted in the natural manner at all...

And He will remove illness from them, to the point that they will not need a physician, and neither will they need to follow medical advice at all, as it says (*Shemos* 15:26), "Because I, [your] God am your healer."

And this is what the righteous did at the time of prophecy, that even if it happened that they got sick, they did not turn to physicians, but to prophets... someone who turns to God by means of a prophet... will not turn to physicians.

And what is there for physicians to do in the house of those who follow God's will after He has promised and blessed your bread and your waters and removed sickness from among you?

But they resorted to medications and God left them to the natural course of events.

And this was their [the Rabbis'] intention when they said, "And he shall heal' — this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal." They did not say that this permits the sick person to come and be healed; rather, since the person became sick and seeks medical assistance, being that he resorts to natural medicine, and he was not from God's congregation whose portion is life [and who rely on God alone], the

physician is not prohibited from healing them... since the Torah will not make its commandments dependent on miracles...

But when God is satisfied with a person's behavior, he should not resort to medical assistance.

Ramban resolves the apparent contradiction between the two verses: "Because I [your] God am your healer," according to which a person is obligated to depend on God that He will heal him; and the verse, "And he shall heal," from which, as above, our Sages infer that a physician is permitted to heal.

Ramban explains that these two verses do not apply to the same situation. A person who trusts in God will not initially seek medical assistance, because he is subject to "Heavenly conduct," of "I [your] God am your healer," and hence has no need for a human physician. A God-fearing person will not turn to natural procedures and medication, and will not seek medical assistance, but will turn to prophets. The prophet will improve his behavior, and this improvement by itself will provide a cure for his illness. It is to this kind of people that the verse, "I [your] God am your healer" applies.

On the other hand, the verse, "And he shall heal," that permits a physician to heal, does not apply to those who trust in God, and this permission means that the physician is permitted to heal those who apply for a remedy by natural means. Indeed, a person who has not attained the proper level of trust in God, but proceeds by the way of nature is subject to the natural conduct of the world. Then, if he becomes ill, he must seek medical assistance, because such a person may not depend on a miracle. This being so, the physician is

permitted to heal this person, for whom turning to medical assistance is regarded as a permitted endeavor, after he has not trusted in God.

#### 4(2). RASHI'S APPROACH

We find in the *Mishnah (Pesachim, end of chap. 4)* that "Chizkiyahu Ha'melech performed six acts, three of them were approved and the three others were not." One act performed by Chizkiyahu, which was approved by the Sages, was that "he hid the *Book of Medicines*." Rashi explains, "Because they were not humbled by their illness, but were immediately healed." This means that a *Book of Medicines*<sup>5</sup> existed in the time of Chizkiyahu that was hidden, because the medicines listed in that book were efficient and, as a result, people depended on their ability to be cured by natural means and their illness did not cause them to feel humbled and thus return to their Father in heaven.

This explanation seems to follow Ramban's approach, because it posits trust in God as being incompatible with a physician's efforts to return people to health. Is this indeed so?

#### 4(3). RAMBAM'S APPROACH

It would seem that Rambam's approach is diametrically opposed to that of Ramban and Rashi. In his commentary on the *Mishnah (Pesachim, end of chap. 4)*, Rambam explains

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5. Ramban, in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah, states that this was the *Book of Medicines* that was written by Shlomo Ha'melech on the basis of his wisdom.

the statement about Chizkiyahu hiding the *Book of Medicines* by saying he did it because “the *Book of Medicines* included medicines that the Torah has forbidden to use for healing” What is meant is that it was based on astrology and stated that a given image made at a certain time healed the given malady. This had the potential to mislead people into believing in worship of stars and planets, and this is the reason that Chizkiyahu Ha’melech hid it.<sup>6</sup> However, Rambam does not stop with his interpretation, but quotes that of the previously cited Rashi, and vehemently disagrees with it. Rambam states that:

I discussed this matter at length because I heard, and I was so told, that Shlomo Ha’melech wrote the *Book of Medicines* so that, should a person get sick, he could look into that book and follow everything that is written there and be healed. And when Chizkiyahu Ha’melech saw that people did not depend on God, he removed the book and hid it.

[Rambam vehemently disagrees with this interpretation and notes:] And now you come and listen to the harm of this interpretation and the mistakes that it contains. How is it possible to attribute such a stupidity to Chizkiyahu Ha’melech?...

According to their trivial and warped opinion, when a hungry person will go and eat bread, he will definitely be healed from his major malady, which is hunger. Does that mean that he has already given up his trust in God?

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6. See the comment of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura on this *mishnah*.

They should be told, “Woe to you fools. Just as I shall thank God while I am eating for providing me with that which satiates me, and I shall live and survive, I shall thank Him for providing a remedy for my sickness, when I shall get well.

It is thus seen that according to Rambam’s opinion, just as one is permitted to and should eat, and this does not constitute a lack of trust, so too an ill person is permitted to turn to medical assistance. Resorting to medical treatment does not contradict trust in God, and does not weaken it, but on the contrary, this person will thank God for providing him with his food and his medicine.

We are thus faced with an apparent basic disagreement between Rashi and Ramban on the one hand, and Rambam on the other. According to Rashi and Ramban, a person who depends on God will not seek medical treatment, and a physician has no business in the house of those who follow God’s will.

Conversely, according to Rambam, the opinion that one should not seek medical help is trivial and warped. Rambam vehemently and decisively disagrees with the approach that negates medical help. According to him, there is no contradiction between seeking medical assistance and belief in God; just as a hungry person is permitted to eat in order to survive without this contradicting his belief, he is permitted to take medicine without contradicting his belief in God.

## Explanation of Rashi's and Ramban's Approach

What will Rashi and Ramban reply to the questions raised by Rambam, who asks why it is prohibited to resort to human action for a person's survival and success, when there is no question that a person is permitted to eat and perform other essential activities to keep himself alive? What is the difference between medicine and food?

This question is resolved by the Chasam Sofer (*Parashas Mishpatim*, p. 662) as follows:

See what is written in Rambam's commentary on the *mishnah*...where he asked that, if this is so, anyone who is hungry should not eat bread in order to heal himself from the illness of hunger.

In my opinion [this question] is highly illogical. This is due to the fact that hunger is something natural... and is not caused by sin. This is not so concerning other illnesses: "A person does not lift a finger below unless it was decreed from Above";<sup>7</sup> and (*Berachos* 5b), "God does not punish without sin." That being so, what is the point of trying to outsmart God's decree by attempting to remove the sickness from himself by means of efficient medications?

Let the person investigate the primary cause, which is the sin that he committed, repent, and pray to God that He should heal him. This is clear and correct.

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7. "Rabbi Chanina said, 'A person does not lift a finger below unless it was decreed from Above, as it says (*Mishlei* 20:24) "Man's going is of God, how can man then understand His way?"'" (*Chulin* 7b).



What is meant here is that there is a fundamental difference between hunger and an illness. Hunger does not stem from sin, but is a natural part of God's Creation that applies to each person (whether he is righteous or wicked) — that he will be hungry from time to time. Natural activities to provide for a person's existence are compelling, and there is no question that a person is permitted to satiate his hunger because a person is obligated to watch his health, and conversely the Torah says, "And you should guard your souls."

In comparison, illness is not something that comes naturally to a person, but it is caused by Heavenly decree. Such a decree does not come about without sin. An illness being entirely different from hunger is hence a punishment rooted in sin. From this perspective, taking medicine is an attempt to outsmart the Heavenly decree, because the medicine treats the punishment, while leaving the source of the phenomenon — the sin that caused the punishment — untouched.

A person's repentance and improvement of his behavior is an emendation of the root of the matter, and should a person behave thus, the reason for the Heavenly decree will no longer be valid and he will be healed.

According to this perspective, why should a person take medicine and try to outsmart the Heavenly decree, when he can solve the problem at its very source by examining his behavior, finding the reason for his illness [the sin], and then repenting and praying to God that He should heal him?

The Chasam Sofer's explanation fully clarifies the approach of Rashi and Ramban in their interpretation of the *mishnah*, according to which Chizkiyahu hid the *Book of Medicines*

and the Sages agreed with him. But, conversely, this is apparently a reason to question Rambam's opinion that medications should be equated with food. How can one compare the two?

### **Explanation of Rambam's Approach**

It would seem at first sight that even Rambam agrees that one has to heal the root of the illness, that is, the sin, so that a person can be saved from the Heavenly decree — except that the emendation of the sin does not miraculously heal the afflicted body. The person should repair his body by natural means. The healing of the soul is not achieved through weakening the body and not providing for its needs, but when a person repents as a result of intellectual inquiry, he should also realize that he has to resort to God to heal his weaknesses and privation. When a person is supplied what he is lacking, he is appreciative and returns to God with profound gratitude for being saved from his illness and misery.

Consequently, the comparison of Rambam between food and medication applies to the natural manner of healing one's body, because the strengthening of one's belief in God does not depend on enfeebling one's body and leaving a person in his weakness, just as eating is permitted and does not contradict a person's belief in God. Just the opposite, by eating and healing his body, a person is thanking God for His creation of numerous living things and for satisfying their needs. In the same manner, a person who is sick should not remain with a feeble body in order to fully repent, but on the contrary, he is obligated to seek medical assistance and, when he recovers, thank God for finding a cure for his ailment.

This means that the comparison drawn by Rambam between hunger and illness does not come to convince us that it is possible to treat a phenomenon externally without correcting the root of the matter; and it is obvious that medicines will not help if it has been decreed that a person should die from his sickness as a result of his sins.

Everyone agrees that hunger does not stem from sin, whereas illness does. Therefore, in order to be healed from an illness, it does not suffice to take medicine. A person must change himself spiritually as well. This difference is clear even according to Rambam's approach.

However, the comparison between hunger and illness comes to show that the way of dealing with the root of the matter (by improving the spiritual standing of the person) is not accomplished by ignoring a person's poor physical state, but rather, the emendation of a person's spiritual standing is dependent on attaining awareness of his weaknesses, his dependence, and shortcomings — something that he is able to sense even if his deficiency has been provided for and his situation has improved.

Therefore, according to Rambam, a person who is sick and in need of being healed is led, by virtue of the situation itself, to repentance and strengthening of his belief in God. As long as he is capable of feeling and of discernment, he will understand that his salvation came from God, Who supplied a cure for his illness and provided him with the proper physician. This means that Rambam is of the opinion that the sickness reveals to a person his weaknesses and his dependence on the creation of medications that were provided by

God. When a person faces his Creator and pleads to be saved, his belief is strong and will not be weakened by his need for the cure that has been sent to him. Nothing will weaken his belief by being saved, and he will thank God for His abundant benevolence.

According to Ramban and Rashi, the way of a person's getting well passes into the purely spiritual domain. If one will emend his soul and repent fully, his physical salvation will come as an aftereffect of the emendation of his soul.

According to Rambam, the way a person is healed is a combination of the emendation of his soul together with resorting to human action. When a person faces God and pleads with Him to send him the proper cure and he is healed, the person becomes filled with gratitude to God. Having a strong physical need that was satisfied, now he thanks God for all the physical benevolence that He bestowed upon him, and his belief is strengthened because of this.

### **Two Approaches in the *Talmud***

The difference of opinion between the Ramban and the Rambam in this matter is similar to the disagreement between *Amoraim* in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60a) at first sight:

Rav Acha said, "A person who comes to have his blood drawn should say, 'May it be Your will, my God, that this activity be a cure for me, because You are God, King, the faithful Healer and Your healing is true.' This is because people should not have resorted to medical assistance, but it is common practice to do so."

(Rashi explains that people should not have resorted to medical assistance, but should have asked for Heavenly mercy.)

Abaye said, “A person should not speak so. This is because it was taught in the yeshivah of Rabbi Yishmael (*Shemos*, 21:19). “And he shall heal’ — this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal.”

We seem to be facing the following disagreement:

Rav Acha’s opinion is that a person’s healing process is undergone by way of the purely spiritual domain. It is the person’s responsibility to emend the root of the illness, which is the sin. Resorting to medications is something that has been permitted *ex post facto*, being that people commonly do so.

As opposed to this, Abaye is of the opinion that once the physician was permitted to heal, this means that one may seek medical help at the outset. This does not constitute lack of belief in God; rather, it is the fulfillment of a physical need that causes him to mend his soul and to be grateful to God. Hence, a sick person is permitted to and should turn to a physician, use medications, and be grateful to God for creating medications in His world.<sup>8</sup>

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8. See the statement by Chida in his work *Birkei Yosef* (*Yoreh De’ah* 336:2). There, he explains that in our times one should not depend on miracles, and a sick person is obligated to seek medical assistance, as is commonly done. Should one refrain from doing so, it is regarded as close to sinning. Similarly, see *Nishmas Avraham* in his foreword in *Yoreh De’ah*; and Rabbi Avraham from Sochatchov, responsa *Avnei Nezer*, part 1, *Choshen Mishpat*, sec. 183.

The *Chazon Ish* (*Emunah U'bitachon*, chap. 5, sec. 5) takes the approach that Rambam's contention, which compares medications to food, does not seem to be compatible even with Abaye's approach. The *Chazon Ish* calls into question Rambam's approach by asking: If medical assistance is similar to food, why does the Torah need to include a verse that permits a person to turn to medical practice? Do we need a verse to tell us that a person is permitted to eat? This comes to tell us that hunger is not a punishment and, to the contrary, eating is regarded as a divine service, because the table of the righteous is likened to the Altar, as it says (*Pirkei Avos* 3: 4), "Three who have eaten at the same table and have spoken words of Torah there, are regarded as having eaten from the table of the Creator." On the other hand, illness is a punishment, and a person should strengthen himself in repentance and plead for mercy, but the Torah permitted him to resort to medical assistance because there are very few who depend on God.

However, as above, it appears possible to interpret Rambam's opinion in a manner that would not disagree with that of Abaye. Indeed, illness results from sin, and in this way it is different from hunger. This being so, if the Torah had not permitted the physician to heal, it could have been claimed that if God has afflicted a person, it is forbidden to heal him against God's will.<sup>9</sup> But now, seeing as God permits man to seek medical assistance, this makes taking medication similar to eating. This has the capacity to bring a person to recognize his deficiency and to be grateful to God for filling it.

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9. See a similar statement in Rashi (*Bava Kama* 85a), s.v. *shenitnah*.

## **Eating and Resorting to Medical Assistance as Divine Service**

Much beyond this, eating and taking medications are not only acts of satisfying a physical need, that will bring about gratefulness toward God and a spiritual elevation that stems from this, but if they are carried out properly, they are regarded as divine service. In other words, not only is taking medication not a deficiency in one's trust or belief in God, but, on the contrary, a person who takes medication may come to remedy his soul as long as he will apply proper judgment and guide his actions to strengthen his body for the purpose of divine service. Concerning this, it is apparently proper to apply the rule, "You should know Him in all your ways," according to which a person is capable of elevating himself spiritually also by means of physical acts that he performs for his survival.

Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 231) makes no distinction in the context of the different physical needs of a person, and rules as follows:

In all that one benefits from this world, he should not aim at pleasure, but at the divine service, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:6), "In all your ways acknowledge Him." This means that even mundane matters such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, getting up, intercourse, speaking, and satisfying all of one's physical needs should be for the sake of the divine service or for the sake of something that brings about this service. Even if one was hungry and thirsty and ate and drank for his enjoyment, this is not commendable, but one should intend to eat and

drink to sustain himself in order to serve his Maker... The bottom line is that a person should focus his eyes and heart on his behavior, and to judge his actions applying his intellect. When he observes something that will bring him to the divine service, he should do it, and if not, he should not do it. One who behaves in this manner finds himself in continuous divine service.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that according to Rambam, the verse in *Divrei Ha'yamim* concerning King Asa's resort to physicians does not stem from his seeking medical assistance as such — this being permitted — but from the fact that “he did not turn to God, but only to physicians” is to be interpreted that he saw medications as the essence of it all. Because of this, he did not rectify his soul and was not grateful to God. This is indeed the interpretation offered by Rabbi Yoel Sirkis in his work *Bayis Chadash* (Bach on the Tur, *Yoreh De'ah*, 336a), who explains that Asa “did not at all turn to God, but only to physicians, and this is why he was punished. But if one trusts that God will send him his healing by means of a physician, he is allowed to do so, even in the case of a malady that comes from Heaven, and this is the custom among all Jews.”

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10. This principle is the foundation stone of Chassidic doctrine. See *Tzetal Ha'kattan* of Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhensk, the author of the work *Noam Elimelech*. He notes that anytime a person is not learning Torah, he should devote his thoughts to the *mitzvah* of “I will be sanctified within the Jewish nation,” and should imagine that he sees a fire burning and that he overcomes his nature and jumps into the fire for the sake of His Name. In this manner, he does not sit around doing nothing, but performs a positive precept of Torah.



#### 4(4). THE APPROACH OF RABBEINU BECHAYE IN *CHOVOS HA'LEVAVOS*

An additional approach by *Rishonim*, according to which a person should resort to natural means for health purposes, is that of Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in his work *Chovos Ha'levavos* (*Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*). He explains in his third introduction that a person is obligated to trust only in God, and not to trust God and the physician together. This is "since then his trust in God will be deficient, being that he associates another with Him... And it is well known that everyone who depends on two people to do something for him, his trust in one of them will diminish to nothing. The more so when one trusts in God and in someone else, he contradicts his trust in God alone, and this will be a principal factor in the non-fulfillment of the matter about which he trusted, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 17:5), 'Cursed be the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm.'"

In keeping with this, Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the verse found Asa's sin to be not in his turning to physicians and not to God, but in that that he turned to God together with physicians, and trusted both together.

A person is obligated to resort to natural means, but should be well aware that there is no connection whatsoever between his resorting to these means and his salvation, and that they have no part in his salvation; rather, he should depend solely and fully on God alone.

## **A Person Should Strive to Keep Himself Healthy but Should Know that Healing only Comes from God**

According to Rabbeinu Bechaye, a person should know and internalize that the only one who brings about healing is God alone. Resorting to natural means does not add anything. Indeed, a person should resort to natural means and take care of his health in light of God's commandment of "and he shall heal." But one has to be fully aware of the fact that his healing does not stem from any natural activity. Neither resorting to natural means nor any other recourse contribute to his healing — neither physicians nor medications, but solely the divine will.

At times God works in ways that are the opposite of what one would expect when using natural means. We see this in the story of Elisha, when he healed the bad waters using salt, which ordinarily spoils the water even more.<sup>11</sup> To quote Rabbeinu Bechaye (*Chovos Ha'levavos*, part 1, chap. 4):

This also applies to the matter of health and illness. A person should trust in God, and should be persistent in maintaining his health by human action, and prevent

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11. We find this in *Melachim II* 2:19-22:

And the people of the city told Elisha, "Behold, the situation of the city is pleasant, as my master sees, but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement." And he said, "Bring me a new saucer and put salt into it." And they brought it to him. And he went to the source of the waters and cast the salt into it and said, "So said God: I have healed these waters and there shall be no death or bereavement from there." And the waters were healed to this day according to the words of Elisha that he spoke.

illness by commonly used measures, as God has commanded, "And he shall heal." [But all] this [should be done] without assuming that the natural causes for health and illness will assist him or harm him, but everything [will happen by] permission of lofty God. And when he will trust in God, He will heal him with or without [an apparent] reason, as it says (*Tehillim* 107:20), "He would dispatch His word and cure them and let them escape their traps." He may even heal him by the most harmful means, as you have learned from the story of Elisha and the bad waters, as it says (*Melachim II* 2:19-22), "But the water is bad and the land causes bereavement." And he eliminated the harm by salt...And it says (*Iyov* 5:18), "For he will hurt and dress [the wound]."

So even according to Rabbeinu Bechaye a person should resort to human action for his healing, as long as he does not believe that it is the medicine that causes his cure, but it is solely God Who assists him and heals him of his malady.

#### 4(5). THE ISSUE DISCUSSED IN *MASECHES AVODAH ZARAH*

We find in the *Talmud* (*Avodah Zarah* 55a) a statement by Rabbi Akiva which shows that there is no contradiction between trust in God and resorting to human action; such actions actually amount to the fulfillment and realization of the Heavenly Decree.

Rabbi Akiva was asked an incisive question. How could it be that people go to be healed by idolatry and, although idolatry

is of no substance, we still see that they go there broken and exhausted, and they return healthy?

Rabbi Akiva answered them as follows:

Suffering, when it is sent upon a person, is sworn not to go at a certain day and not to leave (the sick person) except on a certain day and at a certain hour, and by means of a specific person and by means of a specific medicine.

When its time comes to leave (meaning, when the time comes when the suffering is supposed to cease), that person goes to the house of idol worship.

Suffering said, “It would be proper that I not leave” (in order that the person should not think that it was the idol he worshipped that healed him). Then it (the suffering) says, “Is the fact that this fool behaved improperly a good enough reason for me to contravene my oath?”<sup>12</sup>

### **God Determines a Person’s Salvation in a Natural Manner by Means of Medicine**

Thus, God has the suffering that befalls a person make an oath that it will leave “on a given day and at a given hour, by means of a given person and by way of a given medication.”

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12. The *Talmud* there sums up and explains that this is what was stated by Rabbi Yochanan regarding the meaning of the verse (*Devarim* 28:59), “and cruel and trustworthy maladies” — cruel in their mission and trustworthy in their oath (to leave a person when the appointed time comes).

It is clear from this that seeing a physician and taking medication does not contradict the Heavenly edict, but serves as realization of the Heavenly edict that determines at the very start that a person shall be healed only after having turned to a given person and receiving a given medicine.

Indeed, if a person resorts to a certain physician and a certain medication, he will be healed, not because the medication heals, but because the Heavenly edict from the very beginning decreed that his suffering would be eliminated by means of a given medication. As such, seeking medical help is actually the implementation and acceptance of the Heavenly edict.

The above theme discussed in *Avodah Zarah* seemingly follows the same line of reasoning expressed by the *Chazon Ish* (*Collected Letters of the Chazon Ish*, part 1, 136) that he sent to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (known as “the Steipler”), to the effect that it is desirable that he spend a month in a summer house for the sake of his health. This is since:

As far as I am concerned, I regard resorting to human action in all that concerns health as a *mitzvah* and an obligation, as one of the obligations for completing the image of a person that the Maker has imprinted with the insignia of His world. We find that *Amoraim* visited non-Jewish physicians, and many plants, animals, and minerals that were created for medical purposes; and gates of wisdom were also created so that a person could think, contemplate, and know.

Although there is a path in the ways of Hashem to

circumvent nature and, certainly, to skip much effort, it is very important to lay out [a middle way], because both deviations from the line of precise truth are not straight, whether to trust above the level of trust that I actually attained, or to believe in excess natural effort.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4(6). THE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BACH AND THE TAZ

According to the Bach, seeking medical assistance is a full-fledged *mitzvah*.

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13. Even though, in keeping with what shall be explained further down in the statement by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter concerning different levels of trust, and accordingly, concerning the degree of belief which people have reached, this issue can be brought into line even with Ramban's approach. This is because a person who is situated at the lowest level of belief is indeed commanded to resort to natural means, and the suffering that will fall upon him will leave only at a given time and by given medications. See also the statement by the *Chazon Ish* in the above letter, to the effect that "there is a path in the ways of Hashem to circumvent nature and, certainly, to skip much effort." With respect to people who have attained a high level of belief in God, the way to be saved from illness hence does not include resorting to natural means, and the statement of the *Talmud* in *Avodah Zarah* does not apply to such people. However, this special level of belief only applies to people on such a level of belief in God that it does not even include Rabbi Kanievsky, whom the *Chazon Ish* advises to rest up in order to get healthy. This level does not even include the *Chazon Ish*, who writes, "As for myself, I regard resorting to natural means in all that concerns health as a *mitzvah* and an obligation." And even from the point of view of trust in God, the *Chazon Ish* notes that one who deviates from this level deviates from the line of truth, because a person should not trust above the level of trust that he actually attained.

Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, in his work *Bayis Chadash* (Bach on the Tur, *Yoreh De'ah*, 336), explains that visiting a physician is to be regarded as a major *mitzvah*, rather than something that is unavoidable. We quote:

Since it is permitted to desecrate the Sabbath for healing purposes, we see that [administering] medications is regarded as a life-saving activity, and the saving of a life is a major *mitzvah*...It also follows that a physician who specializes in this profession and who refrains from performing this activity is regarded as a murderer...What is written in *Divrei Ha'yamim*, “that even during his illness he did not turn to God, but only to physicians,” may be regarded as insinuating that it is forbidden to resort to medical assistance in the case of a malady that comes from Heaven. However, [this is wrong] — it should be interpreted [rather, to mean] that Asa did not turn to God at all, but only to physicians. However, if one trusts in God that He will send him his healing by means of a physician, he may do so even in the case of a malady that comes from Heaven, and this is the custom among all Jews.

**According to the Taz the *Mitzvah* to Be Healed by a Physician Only Applies to Those Whose Level of Trust in God Is Low**

The *Turei Zahav* (known by the acronym, “Taz”) has a different approach and states that turning to a physician is not a *mitzvah*, but something that is permitted, and that permission is to be regarded solely as acceptance of an existing

situation. The Taz presents this deduction as a part of resolving the following difficulty.

On the one hand, it has been ruled in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:1), “The Torah has permitted a physician to heal and it is a *mitzvah*, and it is regarded as a life-saving act. Should one refrain [from doing so], he is regarded as a murderer — even if he (the sick person) has someone else to heal him — because a person does not merit to be healed by just anyone.”

This apparently means that being healed by physician is not only permitted, but even a *mitzvah*.

On the other hand, the law brought forth by the *Shulchan Aruch* opens with the words, “The Torah has permitted a physician to heal,” which would mean that this is a permission that has been given to a physician, and not an obligation or a *mitzvah* that one is obligated to fulfill.<sup>14</sup>

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14. At first glance, the question posed by the Taz applies not only to the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, but also to the *Talmud* itself. This is because we find (*Berachos* 60a), “It was learned in the yeshivah of Rabbi Yishmael: ‘And he shall heal’ — this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal.” But the difficulty with the *Talmudic* statement can be resolved similarly to what we find in the responsa of Maharitz Dushinsky (sec. 23), who differentiates between a situation where the sick person’s life is not in danger, in which case the physician is only permitted to heal, and the situation in which the sick person’s life is in danger, in which case it is a *mitzvah* for the physician to heal him. When a person’s life is in danger, there is no doubt that the physician is not only allowed to save him, but is commanded to save him, because it is even permitted to desecrate the Sabbath to save a life (see *Nedarim* 41b and the Ran there). On the contrary, we find in *Sanhedrin* (17b) that “it is prohibited to live in a location where there is no physician,” because it will be impossible



This brings the Taz to the conclusion that, initially, a righteous person should refrain from visiting a physician and put his trust in God,<sup>15</sup> and because of this, seeking medical assistance is not a *mitzvah*, but only consent for a physician to heal, something that should only be done *ex post facto*. However, the Torah understands human nature and knows that one will not be meritorious enough to deserve being healed by a miracle, and in view of this, the Torah permitted that one be healed by human effort. With respect to a person who is not meritorious enough to depend on a miracle, it is an obligation and a *mitzvah* to seek medical assistance. To quote the Taz:

It seems to me that true healing consists of asking for Heavenly mercy. This is because Heaven holds the power to heal him, as it says (*Devarim* 32:29), “I wound and I heal.” However, an average person does not merit this, and is forced to resort to natural ways of healing. God has agreed to this and provides healing in a natural

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to save one’s life without delay under life-threatening circumstances.

15. See in the responsa *Avnei Nezer*, sec. 193, a responsum of the author’s father, head of the *beis din* in the town of Biala, who explains that Asa sinned because a righteous person such as Asa should have solely trusted God and not depended on medical treatment at all. He also declares concerning our times that “a righteous person who is ill is definitely permitted to rely on the Ibn Ezra (*Shemos* 21:19) [cited previously, according to which physicians are permitted to heal injuries and wounds that can be seen from the outside, but a malady that is inside a body — only God should heal] and on the Ramban, regarding the advice of a physician who suggests that an internal malady be healed by means of prohibited food, because the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban constitute a majority against the Bach.”

manner, and this is meant by God's permission [to heal]. Since a person has come to this point, a physician is under obligation to heal him."

We find that the Taz uses this interpretation to explain the disagreement in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60a):

Rav Acha said, "A person who comes to have his blood drawn should say, 'May it be Your will, my God, that this activity be a cure for me, because You are God, King, the faithful Healer and Your healing is true.' This is because people should not have resorted to medical assistance, but it is common practice to do so."

(Rashi explains that people should not have resorted to medical assistance, but should have asked for Heavenly mercy.)

Abaye said, "A person should not speak so. This is because it was taught in the yeshivah of Rabbi Yishmael (*Shemos* 21:19). "And he shall heal' — this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal."

The Taz explains the above as follows:

Rav Acha is of the opinion that the person recites an apology: "Why do I seek healing through the drawing of blood, which comprises resorting to human action, even though it is improper to do so? I really should have asked for mercy to be saved by Heaven. But after people have gotten into the habit of resorting to natural means of healing, I also do so. Even so, I admit that everything comes from God, because 'You are a dedicated healer.'"

Abaye disagrees. One should not say [that he uses natural healing] because that is the custom of people. The Torah has agreed to healing by human action because the Torah is aware of the fact that a person will not be meritorious enough to be healed by Heavenly miracles.

As such, it is impossible to say that the verse "and he shall heal" expresses a *mitzvah*, because a meritorious person is not healed by a physician, but by God. It is only permitted [to be healed by a physician] because such is the way of people.

It follows that nowadays, [according to Abaye,] it has become an obligation and commandment, because according to the person's deeds (in view of the person's spiritual status), it is a *mizvah*, since his life depends on this (i.e., not turning to a physician will be regarded as endangering one's life.)"

It is thus seen that, according to the approach of the Taz, different people are at different levels of trust in God and this is the principal factor in deciding whether one should turn to natural means of healing, and whether this is something that is only permitted or whether it is even a *mitzvah*. Therefore, when dealing with a person of elevated spiritual status, resorting to natural means is regarded by the Taz as something that is permitted, whereas according to the Bach it is a full-fledged *mitzvah*.

#### 4(7). INTERPRETATION OF RABBI YISRAEL SALANTER

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, in his work *Even Yisrael* (dissertation 3), resolves the apparent contradiction between two *Midrashim* concerning Yosef.

The first *Midrash* refers to the verse (*Tehillim* 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the one who made God his trust." Our Sages (*Midrash Rabbah* 89:3) state that this applies to Yosef. This might seem to indicate that Yosef is the quintessence of trust in God.

The second *Midrash* refers to the continuation of this verse in *Tehillim*, "and did not turn to the haughty." Concerning this our Sages say that "by telling the head butler (*Bereishis* 40:14) 'think of me' and 'mention me,' he was left in jail for another two years." It appears that his doing this was considered to be a forbidden resorting to human action; Yosef did not depend only on God here and was punished for it. This seems to indicate that Yosef's trust in God was blemished.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter resolves this contradiction by explaining that there are two kinds of trust: the trust of *Chovos Ha'levavos* and that of the Ramban, as follows:

According to *Chovos Ha'levavos*, a person should trust in God only by resorting to natural means, because one may not depend on miracles. Even though God does not need a person's natural endeavors in order to save him, still a person is obligated to do whatever he can. Asa's sin of seeking medical attention consisted of the fact that he turned to physicians only, as the verse says, and did not trust in God.

According to the Ramban, the meaning of trust is that one should put his entire hope solely in God, without any resort to human action. And what the Sages interpreted concerning the verse “and he shall heal” means that a physician is permitted to heal a person who does not trust in God and turns to him for medical assistance. But the perfect believer in God shall not seek medical assistance and should not make an effort to gain his sustenance, but should solely trust in God.

**The Obligation of Trust in God Depends on a Person’s Spiritual Standing and Is Different for the Chosen Few and for the Masses**

With reference to the above, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter explains that the *Rishonim* are not diametrically opposed to one another, but rather “it seems that ‘these and the others [are] of Heavenly origin.’” What is meant is that both statements are correct and do not contradict one another, but apply to people of different spiritual standing. We find this in the disagreement between our Sages (*Berachos*, 35b):

The Rabbis taught: “You shall gather your grain” (*Devarim* 11:14). What is meant by this? Because it says (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “This Torah should not depart from your mouth,” does it mean it literally (meaning that a person should not deal at all with material matters, but should only study Torah all his life)? The Torah says, “You shall gather your grain” — conduct yourself in a natural manner. So says Rabbi Yishmael.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: Is it possible that a person will plow at the time of plowing, sow at the time

of sowing, reap at the time of reaping, thresh at the time of threshing, and winnow at the time of winnowing? If so, what will happen to the Torah? But [the answer must be that] when the Jews obey God's will, their labor will be performed by others, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 61:5), "And strangers will stand and shepherd your flocks." But at the time when the Jews do not obey God's will, their labor is done by themselves, as it says, "You should gather your grain." Not only that, but the labor of others will be done by them [the Jews], as it says (*Devarim* 28:48), "You will serve your enemies."

Abaye said, "Many did like Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded; like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai — and did not succeed."

Note that Abaye has not ruled like Rabbi Yishmael, but only said that many did like him and succeeded. He meant to say that there is a difference between what is expected from the masses and what is expected of the chosen few. The masses will succeed if they follow Rabbi Yishmael, because most people are not able to follow Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The chosen few should conduct themselves in the manner defined by the Ramban, according to which a person who trusts in God should place his fate only with God, without resorting to any human action whatsoever.

As compared with this, the proper conduct for most people is that which is defined by Rabbeinu Bechaye in *Chovos Ha'levavos*, meaning that one should trust God while resorting to human action, because it is forbidden to depend on miracles.

In conjunction with this, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter calls attention to the statement of Rabbi Chaim from Volozhin in his work *Nefesh Ha'chaim* (gate 1, chap. 8).

Many did like Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded, and many did like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai — and did not succeed. It says specifically “many,” because the majority of people cannot possibly occupy themselves with only learning Torah without devoting even a short period of time to laboring for sustenance.

Concerning this, our Sages said (*Pirkei Avos* 2:2): Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehudah Ha'nasi, says, “Torah study is good together with an occupation, for the effort of both of them causes sin to be forgotten. Any Torah study that is not coupled with labor will come to an end and lead to sin.”

However, each individual who is able to sustain himself by merely studying Torah and performing divine service is definitely obligated not to cease, God forbid, even for a short time, for the sake of gaining his sustenance, as is the opinion of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin continues to explain there that this varies for various generations. The Jews who were brought out of Egypt, who were sustained by the manna, and all their needs were supplied by Heaven without them having to do any labor at all, were not regarded as doing God's will unless they lifted their eyes to heaven and devoted themselves fully to the divine service while learning Torah day and night. For them, “This Torah should not depart from your mouths,” was something to be followed literally “without deviating at all even for a short while from study to seek sustenance, and as our Sages stated, ‘Torah was given only to those sustained by manna.’ This was not so in the time of Shlomo Ha'melech, when the Jews were forced to deviate somewhat to

## Yosef Was Criticized in View of His High Spiritual Standing

This approach explains the statement of the *Midrash* about Yosef. Indeed, Yosef resorted to human action to attain his release by asking the head butler to mention him to Pharaoh. However, Yosef did not depend on this action and did not think that this effort would bring his release. He did not expect anything from him, God forbid, but only made this effort in order not to rely on miracles. In doing so, he trusted in God. This is what the *Midrash* means by saying, “Praiseworthy is the one who made God his trust’ — this is Yosef,” whose behavior exemplifies his complete trust in God. Our Sages see in Yosef an outstanding example of trust in God. It is fully permissible to resort to human action — this in no way contradicts trust in God, as long as it is done solely in order not to depend on miracles and with the recognition that God alone, and not any human action, is what is going to save him.

Still, there exists a certain claim against Yosef in the sense of God being strict in punishing the righteous even for something as minute as a hairsbreadth.<sup>17</sup> This is because Yosef’s

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labor for gaining sustenance, which is God’s real and true will according to Rabbi Yishmael, who is of the opinion that in all that applies to the majority of people, it is more proper to do so — except that when they labor to gain sustenance, they should still be mentally occupied with learning Torah.”

17. In the sense of (*Tehillim* 50:3), “His surroundings are highly restless,” from which we derive that God is strict in punishing the righteous even for something as minute as a hairsbreadth (*Yevamos* 121b). [This interpretation is only viable in Hebrew, where the Sages require that



trust in God was accompanied by resorting to human action, as would fit the kind of trust reserved for the masses. However, Yosef was one of the few of whom it was expected that he conduct himself according to the kind of trust postulated by the Ramban, and which is the one followed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai — trust without any resort to natural means.

It is precisely because Yosef was an outstanding example of trust in God who embodied the verse (*Tehillim* 40:5), “Praiseworthy is the man who makes God his trust,” that he was punished for resorting to human action by asking the head butler to mention him to Pharaoh.

According to this interpretation, there is no diametrically opposed controversy between the *Rishonim* concerning the definition of the *mitzvah* of trust in God and the obligation to resort to human effort; rather, we are dealing with different approaches to different populations. The masses are obligated to resort to natural means, as is specified by Rabbeinu Bechaye in *Chovos Ha'levavos*. On the other hand, the kind of trust specified by Ramban as complete and unconditional trust, not accompanied by any resorting to natural means, applies only to the chosen few.

### **Excessive Resorting to Natural Means Is Regarded as a Shortcoming**

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter additionally explains that the difference between the approaches of the various *Rishonim*

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*nis'ara* be read as alluding to *sa'ar*, meaning hair.]

(Ramban on one hand and Rabbeinu Bechaye on the other) is not as great as it may seem. Not only because their statements apply to different populations, but also because even according to Rabbeinu Bechaye's approach, which permits resorting to human action, it appears that it is forbidden to exert excessive effort, because "excessive effort is a defect in trust, as is well known. One should only resort to normal natural human effort, just as much as is necessary to achieve the desired outcome."

As above, a believing person trusts in God and knows that it is not his efforts that assist him, but Heavenly Providence that enables his goals to materialize. A person should resort to natural means only in a manner that will prevent the doings of Divine Providence from appearing as an overt miracle. This being so, it is sufficient that one resort to natural means only in the small measure that is needed to fulfill this obligation. A person should not put too much effort into natural means, because it is useless by itself, and it is God who saves him.<sup>18</sup>

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18. A very similar approach is found in a statement by Rabbi Zundel Salant: "A person should resort to natural means only because we are not deserving of overt miracles. Therefore, we are obligated to act in such a way that the abundance that flows to us should appear as being brought about by some cause, and this is the full extent of the required resorting to natural means. Since this is so, I purchase a lottery ticket, and by doing this I fulfill the requirement of resorting to natural means because, should I win the lottery, this can be ascribed to a natural phenomenon."

Concerning the lottery as a means of Divine Providence that people mistakenly interpret as a natural result, see Rabbi Shimshon David Pincus (*Sichos L'Purim*, p. 21), and also Rabbi Yitzchak Pinchas Goldwasser in his work *La'Yehudim Haysah Orah* (essay 22), who explains that the gist

A parallel approach is taken by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, in his work *Alei Shur*. He quotes the Ramban (at the beginning of *Parashas Vayishlach*) to the effect that our forefather Yaakov resorted to human effort when preparing himself for his meeting with Esav, who came to him accompanied by four hundred men: "We additionally learn that he did not trust his righteousness and made every effort to be saved."

Yaakov similarly resorted to natural means when he asked for his pay from Lavan and made an arrangement with him whereby all sheep that were speckled and spotted, and all the brown sheep, and all the speckled and spotted in the goats would be his. For this purpose he carved sticks and put them in front of the animals when they came to drink from the well. Ramban comments that Yaakov stopped doing this after God promised him that "He saw the dishonesty with which Lavan treated Yaakov by changing his remuneration, and He caused the newly born sheep to conform to the appearance that Yaakov desired. From then on Yaakov did not place the sticks, because 'one who trusts in God is exalted.'" We thus see that Yaakov made extensive use of natural means until God promised him that He would help him.

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of the controversy between a believer and a heretic is concerning the matter of "chance." A lottery ticket is a classical case of "chance," and a person who thinks that by way of nature, against all the laws of probability, it will be he who will win the prize, without it being a manifestation of Divine Providence, is not a believer. This is meant by the Hebrew expression *karchah*, from the same root as *mikreh*, "by chance," in the verse about Amalek, "who encountered you along the way." According to the approach of Amalek, this is a happenstance, but from our point of view nothing in this world comes by "chance." Everything is orchestrated from Above.

## Even According to Ramban, When Lacking a Heavenly Promise, One Should Resort to Imperative Natural Means

Rabbi Wolbe explains the above Ramban, that “one who turns to God by way of the prophets should not resort to medical assistance,” as being the first part of the continuation of the sentence, “after [He] promised (*Shemos* 23:25), ‘And I shall bless your bread and your water, and I shall take away sickness from among you.’” This comes to say that when there is a specific divine promise, there is no point in resorting to natural means. But lacking such a promise, a person is obligated to employ such means. Rabbi Wolbe continues and notes concerning this:

Also with respect to (*Devarim* 20:8) “Which man is afraid and faint-hearted?” we find in Ramban: “According to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, this is as its literal meaning. One who continues to fear after the *Kohen’s* promise does not trust in God properly and he will not merit miracles.”

We thus see that after the promise was given, he should have trusted in God, and being that he did not, he has to return to his home.

We learn from this that Ramban also requires that one should resort to human action, and only in the case of a specific Heavenly promise should a person trust in God and not resort to any action.

The novelty of *Chovos Ha’levavos* lies in Ibn Pequda’s assertion that a person should make an effort to earn

his livelihood and other needs, and trust in God in conjunction with his resorting to human action.

As to Ramban, it appears that resorting to natural means is at times imperative, but not a *mitzvah* that has to be performed.

So the opinions of the *Rishonim* are not diametrically opposed, and also according to Ramban it is imperative to resort to human effort as long as there is no specific Heavenly promise that one will be saved.

#### 4(8). THE APPROACH OF RASHBA

We shall subsequently show that the basis of this explanation by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter is to be found in the responsa of Rashba (sec. 413), who explains that “trust in God is to be classified by the specific case, depending on the times and on the people [involved],” as follows:

- The righteous, whose lives are conducted “in a supernatural way,” are obligated to trust in God that when they follow the way required by the Torah, it will save them from natural happenstances, as stated by Shlomo Ha’melech (*Mishlei* 6:22), “When you sleep, it shall guard you.”<sup>19</sup>

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19. The Rashba explains that this conduct is noted in the section of the Torah beginning, “When you will persist in hearkening to My commandments,” and the section, “If you will follow My laws.” And it serves as the basis of the verse, “Charity will save from death,” and of the conduct according to which “Divine Providence saves a person from danger without him being aware of this,” as we see from the story of Rabbi Akiva’s daughter and the story of Shmuel and Ablat that are mentioned in the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 156b).

- All other people are obligated to resort to medical assistance when they are ill, provided that they realize that their actual salvation and eventual recuperation come solely from God, and it is from Him that they should ask for a cure to their malady — “and not believe that everything depends on the specific medication and the specific physician.” Not only is it permitted to seek medical assistance, but it is forbidden to depend on miracles, and there is an obligation to seek medical assistance “whether by resorting to medications or to *segulos*.”

The Rashba explains the statement by our Sages, “‘And he shall heal’ — this verse constitutes permission for a physician to heal,” that a physician was given permission to heal because turning to medical assistance does not contradict the Torah’s obligation to depend on Divine Providence. Just the opposite, this obligation is in keeping with the prohibition to depend on miracles, as our Sages said, “Miracles are not performed for one who depends on miracles.”

Thus, Rashba concludes that, “It is permitted to depend on man as long as one does not forget God. And [the Sages] said, ‘Cursed is the person who depends on man and forgets God.’ But it is permitted and a *mitzvah* to trust in God that He will help him by way of a certain person.”

This rule applies not only to medications, but to all human endeavors. Even the most pious is not permitted to conduct his affairs by way of trusting, but should conduct them the way everyone does. Thus, for example, a person should not say, “I shall light a lamp using water or wine and depend that a miracle will occur.” Even though our Sages told us that a

miracle took place for Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, and the vinegar that his daughter poured into the Sabbath lamp by mistake instead of oil, burned.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, according to Rashba, people vary in their spiritual standing, and a person whose standing is not so high should resort to natural means concerning medical assistance and any other material matter. This is so, provided that he is positive that what actually causes him to succeed in his endeavors is not his effort or strength, but only Heavenly assistance.

#### 4(9). RABBI DESSLER'S EXPLANATION

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter's approach is followed by Rabbi Dessler in his work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (part 3, p. 174). He claims that there is no difference between the approaches of Rambam and Ramban; each of them is referring to people of a different spiritual standing.

A person of high standing perceives God's direct conduct, that which is independent of any causes concerning anything that happens to him or to his surroundings. A person who attains this standing will only turn to God for whatever he needs and, should he become ill, turn to the prophet to

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20. The *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 25b) says: Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa noticed on the eve of the Sabbath that his daughter was sad. He asked her, "My daughter, why are you sad?" She answered him, "By mistake I took a vessel of vinegar instead of a vessel of oil and used it to fill the Sabbath lamp." He said to her, "My daughter, what do you care? Whoever told oil to burn will tell the vinegar to burn." The *Talmud* says, "It (the lamp) burned the entire day, until it was used for the light of Havdalah."

find out what it is that God wants from him in order to correct his wrongdoings.<sup>21</sup> Should such a person seek medical assistance, this indicates that his heart is not fully trusting, as if it were possible to circumvent God's will and to get well without correcting what he lacked in divine service, which is the internal source of the malady.

Rabbi Dessler explains that even the Rambam would agree that a person who has attained such a high spiritual standing will refrain from resorting to human action and will not seek help for his illness from physicians and medications.<sup>22</sup>

A person of the lowest standing perceives only natural causes, and for this reason God also hides His conduct from

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21. Rabbi Dessler explains in connection with this that at the time when the spiritual standing of the Jewish nation was such that overt miracles were done for them, this was the way in which their lives were conducted — that when a person became a *metzora*, he did not turn to a physician, but to a *Kohen*. The purpose of quarantining the *metzora*, whose body was smitten because he slandered others, was that he should withdraw from others, analyze his activities, and repent. This served as a warning to move away from the impurity of the sin, so that it would not multiply and the affliction would not become more severe. However, in order to make it possible for a person to determine which sin caused what ailment, one must attain a very high level of holiness and *ruach ha'kodesh*, and, in fact, during the time when the First Temple stood, Jews would turn to prophets for guidance. This is the proper conduct of the Jewish nation, when it attained the highest spiritual standing.

22. Rabbi Dessler notes that the Rambam compares eating to medical assistance; and there are spiritual levels where there is no need for eating, such as when Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah — “Bread I did not eat and water I did not drink.” Similarly, there are levels of spiritual standing about which Ramban writes, “What part do physicians have in a house that carries out God's will?”



him and conducts his life by means of natural causes.<sup>23</sup> Even though a person of this spiritual standing is also obligated to pray to God for his healing, he is obligated to resort to natural medical assistance and to be grateful to God for His providing medications for his malady.<sup>24</sup>

Rabbi Dessler notes that concerning people of this spiritual standing, even Ramban would agree that it is imperative to resort to natural means and be assisted by a physician and by medications. For this reason, the Torah obligated a person who causes damage to another person to pay for his physician, “because the Torah does not base its laws on miracles.”

The divine service of a person, who is under the illusion that

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23. There is a familiar saying that is attributed to the Ba'al Shem Tov concerning the verse (*Tehillim* 121:5), “God is your guardian, God is the shade of your right hand,” to the effect that God’s conduct is similar to the shade. This means that it is suited to a person’s conduct toward God. Conduct toward a person who does only what he is obligated to by the letter of the law, receives precisely that to which he is lawfully entitled. In contrast, a person who behaves in an inspired manner, with devotion and not only in order to conform to the letter of the law, merits special divine assistance and “supernatural” divine conduct, above what one would lawfully deserve.

24. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 230:4, “A person who intends to have his blood drawn should say, ‘May it be Your will, my God, that this doing be a healing for me, because You heal without remuneration.’ After his blood was drawn he should say, ‘Blessed be the One Who heals the sick.’” The *Mishnah Berurah* (*ibid.*, 6) explains that this statement should be made concerning any kind of medical treatment; he should not think that anything is capable of healing him, excepting God’s will, and hence he should express his trust in God by means of this prayer and ask that He indeed heal him.

he may conduct himself like a person of superior spiritual standing, when he is actually at the lowest level, is not truthful. His illusion is labeled by the Rambam as foolishness, frivolity, and blunder.

Rabbi Dessler sums up his doctrine concerning this matter by explaining, “A person should serve God only in keeping with his current spiritual standing, and he may not jump and skip to levels and to intentions that are beyond him.”

Only when one has perfected his divine service at his current spiritual level is he permitted to rise to the next level.

### **The Truth Can Be Realized Only from the View of the Most Elevated Level**

What does an ordinary person gain from knowing that there are levels of trust in God that do not concern him?

Rabbi Dessler resolves this question by explaining that a person who knows that a high level exists in which a person does not seek natural medical assistance, but seeks to be healed by amending his sins, will understand that the real reason for his illness and pain is rooted in his actions, which he must improve and change. We are hence obligated to also be aware of the highest spiritual levels in order to clarify and decide that “the worldview based only on the perception of the lowest level is vanity and void. The perfect truth can be understood only in the light of the true worldview — the worldview of the highest level.”

Rabbi Dessler adds that the differentiation between the spiritual levels of people with respect to belief and trust may at

times involve the differentiation between different levels of the same person, determining his spiritual level at a given time. This being so, a person of superior spiritual standing will exempt himself from any resort to human effort, whereas at times when his spiritual standing is at a lower level, the same person will be obligated to resort to human effort. The transitions back and forth from one spiritual level to another may be frequent.

We shall illustrate the above by means of a story related by Rabbi Wolbe in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, p. 589), “to illustrate the virtue of trust in all its fine points,” as follows:

Once Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin visited the Vilna Gaon. Rabbi Chaim was indisposed and, keeping with the medical procedures of those times, had leeches on his neck, which were covered by a shawl.

The Vilna Gaon sat with his holy disciples and the conversation drifted toward the matter of trust in God. The Gaon elevated the significance of trust according to his standing and enthused his disciples with his holy words to the point that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin felt that he was no longer in need of natural remedies and removed the scarf with the leeches from his neck.

The conversation then drifted to other profound matters and, while delving into them, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin felt that his level of trust had been impaired and that he was again in a state that required resorting to natural means. He picked up the shawl and put it back around his neck.

#### 4(10). SUMMARY

According to all opinions and approaches, a person's healing is only in God's hands and a person should trust only in Him. All that is done naturally works and helps only because of the divine will.

Moreover, "It is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills," and the fundamental solution for anything that happens to a person is to be found in repentance and self-improvement.

Still, we opened this subject by citing a seemingly fundamental difference of opinion among the *Rishonim* (Ramban and Rashi vs. Rambam) concerning the extent to which a person should resort to natural means when he finds himself in a difficult situation.

According to Ramban, we found that a person's sole obligation is to focus on the source of the calamity, which is the sin, and in view of this, resorting to medical assistance has only been permitted *ex post facto*, and only because this is how most people behave.

As compared with this, Rambam is of the opinion that it is initially permitted to seek medical assistance and that a person should use natural medications and be grateful to God that He created medications in His world. This does not constitute a blemish of trust. On the contrary, fulfilling a person's physical need makes it possible to emend his soul and to be grateful to his Maker.

Having delved into the matter, we have seen that it does not

necessarily follow that these *Rishonim* hold diametrically opposed views, because there are two types of conduct by believing people:

One kind involves resorting to natural means, while keeping in mind, trusting, and recognizing that the salvation stems from God's will and not from nature.

The second kind requires total relinquishing of any human effort and dependence on God in a pure and absolute manner.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter claims that "it appears that both [of these approaches] are of Heavenly origin," meaning that both (that of Rambam and that of Ramban) are true and not mutually contradictory, but their statements apply to different kinds of people.

The conduct of the great of the generation is entirely spiritual. They are not healed by natural means, but by emending the sin at its very root. Ramban directs his statement to those who have attained that most exalted status.

As compared with this, the behavior of a person whose trust in God is low and who still does not seek medical attention, is labeled by Rambam as foolish, frivolous, and of unsound mind.

In keeping with this, the statement in the *Talmud* (*Avodah Zarah* 55a), according to which Divine Providence establishes that suffering which afflicts a person shall stop only at a specific time, through a specific physician and a specific medicine, becomes understandable even according to Ramban. Indeed, a person whose level of trust in God is low

is commanded by the Torah to resort to natural means and take the given medicine that will cure him.

The general rule is that a person has to serve God in keeping with his current spiritual standing, and he is prohibited to pretend that his standing is higher than it actually is. Similarly, we have seen that the same person may be at a higher or lower spiritual level at given times, and he is obligated to adjust his conduct to his current spiritual level.

There are different approaches concerning the spiritual level of an average person. Some consider resorting to natural means permissible, whereas others consider the use of natural means as proper and even a fulfillment of a commandment and divine service. Still, the spiritual level attained by most people (with the exception of the very few) obligates one, even according to Ramban's approach, to resort to medication and to be grateful to God that He has provided a medicine for his ailment. This is because, "a person is measured by the measure that he measures himself," meaning that since, at his spiritual level, the person relies specifically on natural medications, the conduct towards him is in the natural way and he hence has to resort to medical assistance and is not permitted to depend on miracles.

For this reason we find in the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* 17b) that a person should not live in a place where there is no physician, and this is the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:1) that "the Torah has permitted a physician to heal and it is a *mitzvah*, and it is regarded as a life-saving act. Should one refrain [from doing so], he is regarded as a murderer — even if he (the sick person) has someone else to

heal him — because a person does not merit to be healed by just anyone.”

A believing person must know that his resorting to human action is not the source of his salvation and did not help him in any way. It is God’s will alone that brings about the healing. Therefore he should refrain from excessive natural activities. Those activities should be just enough to prevent his salvation from appearing miraculous — and nothing more. If a person thinks that he should excessively resort to natural means, it shows that he believes that these efforts alone are sufficient to save him, and he forgets that actually it is God alone Who saves.

Similarly, even someone who did not attain that exalted level of total trust in God, of depending on Him without doing anything — such a person is still obligated to be aware of and study about this in order to understand that it is not the snake that kills and not the medicine that heals, but it is the sin that kills, and it is God Who causes a person to be cured.<sup>25</sup>

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25. To quote Rabbi Dessler in his work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (part 3, p. 174):

Even a person of the lowest spiritual standing should study and realize that there exist standings above his and should clarify to himself that things look different when viewed at the highest level...If a person will know that there exists a spiritual level at which one is not healed by natural means, but by emending his sins and correcting what he distorted, as he will be told by the prophet, then he will understand that if it is incumbent upon him to be healed by natural means in keeping with his low standing, he is still obligated to awaken and learn from God’s conduct towards him and know that it is his sins that are

This means that one should recognize that there are exalted levels of belief and trust. When a person knows that there is such a level, where one can resolve his physical distress without resorting to natural means, he will recognize that his own salvation does not really come from some physical act, but from emending his deeds. Such a person will do everything that he is supposed to do from the physical point of view, because he has not yet reached the level of belief at which the salvation comes solely from trust in God, and he has to resort to natural means without relying on miracles — but at the same time he will know that it is not his effort that brings his salvation, but rather that he was helped by God, whose salvation can come in the blink of eye.

Rabbi Dessler thus sums up and explains that:

This is the rule: a person should serve God according to his spiritual standing and, only after he has perfected his divine service at the level that he has achieved may he ascend to the next level. It is forbidden to jump and skip to levels and intentions which are beyond him.

We are obligated to learn and recognize the most exalted spiritual levels in order to clarify to ourselves

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the real reason for his malady. It is his actions that cause the malady... and he will then start repenting and will emend his shortcomings, something that will save him from every sickness and injury...Even though he has not yet reached the highest level, he is obligated at least to be aware of it and understand it before he completes his divine service at the lowest level. Such knowledge of the highest level will help him to emend what he damaged, [even while he is] at the lowest level.



and internalize that the worldview based only on the perception of the lowest level is vanity and void. The perfect truth can be understood only in the light of the true worldview — the worldview of the highest level.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE SYSTEMATIC EXPLANATION OF RABBEINU AVRAHAM BEN HA'RAMBAM

**I**N THE PREVIOUS chapter we established that there are different levels of trust in God and that a person is obligated to resort to natural means for his salvation in accordance with his personal spiritual standing at a given time.

However, the question as to what are the different levels of trust in God and how a person can identify his proper place on this scale of spiritual levels so far remains unresolved.

Rambam's son, Rabbeinu Avraham, presents us with an orderly and systematic doctrine in his work, *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem*, in a comprehensive chapter devoted to trust. We shall discuss this below.

#### 5(1). DEFINITION OF TRUST IN GOD AND ITS SUBSTANCE

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that trust in God is one of the Torah's basic principles and an indisputable obligation. "It is commonly quoted by all, but is planted in the hearts of the chosen few."

What is meant by trust in God? It is the strengthening of

the belief that God is the Creator of man, He sustains him and provides for all his needs, and all the events in the world, whether general or individual, emanate from Him. This means that the general events that pertain to the entire world, and the fate of the individual, and all the specific events to which he is exposed, emanate from God. He created them, He decreed that they should come about, and He brings them to fruition. In his own words:

In view of this, once one has understood and internalized that He is the One Who creates things, both the general and the particular, and all the regular endeavors are subjugated to His will and attain perfection according to His desire, as Chana said (*Shmuel I* 2:3), “and by Him actions are weighed” — perforce, trust will be established thereof.

This knowledge and belief brings by inference the understanding that it is not one’s actions that bring about different results, for they are solely an external means. Rather, it is God’s will that is directing every matter and event, as it says (*Devarim* 8:18), “For He gives you the power to make wealth” and Onkelos translates it that it is God who gives one the business acumen to acquire property.

What is the applicable result of this knowledge and cognizance?

Should it be inferred from this that a person is obligated to put his entire hope in God, and do nothing for his salvation and success, because anyway everything emanates from God’s will and not from human actions? Is this a proper and realistic conclusion?

Or maybe it would be proper for a person to act according to his best understanding, while knowing and acknowledging that in the final analysis it is not his activity that brings about the result, but God's will and Heavenly assistance? But then the question arises as to whether there is any practical conclusion that emanates from the belief and trust in God.

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam clarifies this. He says that people are divided into a number of groups in keeping with their spiritual standing. At one end is the group that has trust in God. At the other end is a group that has no trust whatsoever. In the middle is situated a group that includes most of the people in the world. This statement shall be explained below in a systematic manner.

## 5(2). AT ONE END — THE TRUST OF THE PROPHETS

The prophets attained a standing where they fully and entirely depended on a Heavenly miracle happening for them, while precluding any ordinary physical activities.

Here are some examples thereof:

- Yonasan and his servant faced the Philistine camp alone.<sup>1</sup>
- David, while still a boy, faced the giant Goliath and trusted in God that He would save him. He said, "God does not

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1. We find in *Shmuel I* (14:6), "And Yonasan said to his arms bearer, 'Let us go and come over to the camp of these uncircumcised. Maybe God will do for us, for there is no restraint on God to save with many or with few.'"

save with sword and spear, for the battle is God's."<sup>2</sup> David even removed his armor when he went to fight Goliath because he trusted that a miracle would happen, as he said (*Shmuel I* 17:38), "because I did not try"<sup>3</sup> — [the word

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2. Here are excerpts from the passage in *Shmuel I* (17:4-47): "And there went out a champion from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head, and he was clad with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had armor of brass upon his legs and a javelin of brass between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield bearer went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, 'Why do you come to wage war? Am I not a Philistine and you servants to Shaul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us...' And all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, and they were dismayed, and greatly afraid... And David said to Shaul, 'Let no man's heart fail within him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' And Shaul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.' And David said, 'The God that delivered me out of the jaw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' And Shaul said unto David, 'Go and God shall be with you...' Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the God of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Who you have taunted, so that all this assembly may know that God does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is God's, and He will give you into our hands.'"

3. *Shmuel I* (17:38-39): "And Shaul clad David with his apparel, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head, and he clad him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his apparel, and he attempted to go [but could not]; for he was not used to it. And David said to Shaul, 'I

“try” in Hebrew is *nisisi*, that has within it the letters *nun* and *samech* = *nes*, “a miracle”]. Rabbi Yonasan ben Uziel explains that David meant that weapons are not a cause for the occurrence of a miracle.

- Eliyahu Ha’navi went into the desert without food and it was supplied to him by ravens.<sup>4</sup>
- The prophet Elisha told a widow to pour oil into vessels that would be brought to her, and was confident and positive that an overt miracle would occur, so that all the vessels would be filled from the single jar of oil that the woman owned.<sup>5</sup>

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cannot go with these; for I have not tried them.’ And David took them off him.”

4. About Eliyahu Ha’navi, it says (*Melachim I* 17:2-6): “And God spoke to him, saying, ‘Get out of here, and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cheris that is before the Yarden. And it shall be that you will drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.’ So he went and did according to the word of God, and dwelt by the brook Cheris that is before the Yarden. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.”

5. *Melachim II* 4:1-6: “Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, saying, ‘Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared God; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.’ And Elisha said to her, ‘What shall I do for you? Tell me: what do you have in the house?’ And she said, ‘Your maidservant has not a thing in the house, except for a jar of oil.’ Then he said, ‘Go, borrow vessels abroad from all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And you shall go in and shut the door upon you and upon your sons, and pour out into all those vessels, and you shall set aside that which is full.’ So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons; they brought the vessels to her and

This spiritual standing is exalted and unusual, as stated by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam: "Such a genuine and perfect trust can be brought about [either] by Heavenly inspiration or by a promise of the exalted God by revelation to His prophets."<sup>6</sup> This trust of a prophet is not obvious, even though it emanates from a specific Heavenly promise, and it is credited to the prophet, as it says about Avraham (*Bereishis* 15:6), "And he believed in God and He counted it to him as righteousness."

Therefore, a person who has not yet attained such a level of trust in God is not regarded as one who is not trusting at all. On the contrary, a person who puts his hope solely in miracles without being on the proper spiritual level, "desires that which is not appropriate for him and sins by impudence (because he regards himself as having attained a status that

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she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' And he said to her, 'There are no more vessels.' And the oil stopped."

6. It appears that in the case of Elisha, who was God's prophet, his confidence that the oil would keep pouring came to him by prophecy, whereas Eliyahu Ha'navi was given a specific promise by God that ravens would sustain him in the desert. Rashi similarly explains the statement by David Ha'melech (*Shmuel I* 17:27), "[The] God that has saved me from the lion' — I know that this did not happen to me by chance; rather, in the future something similar will happen to me for the salvation of the Jewish nation, and I shall rely on it and emerge." He and Mordechai are two righteous people who received a Heavenly hint and were able to arrive at the correct deduction. Regarding Mordechai, Chazal say: "Every day Mordechai would walk in front of the court' (*Esther* 2:11). He would say, 'It is not without reason that this righteous woman was seized for relations with this uncircumcised one; it must be intended that she will save the Jewish nation at a time of calamity.'"



he did not in fact attain, and he expects that God's conduct toward him will be of the kind that he does not deserve). This causes a desecration of the Holy Name (because his hopes prove unfounded and people will wonder why his trust in God was thwarted), and he will definitely be punished for this."<sup>7</sup>

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7. Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, in his work *Sichos Le'sefer Shemos* (discourse 11 on *Parashas Beshalach*), explains that not only does baseless trust turn into a false hope and a disappointment for the person who resorts to it, but it is even regarded as a sin. In connection with this, Rabbi Nebenzahl presents the statement by the prophet *Michah*, who admonishes the Jewish nation and says (*Michah* 3:11), "Their leaders judge for reward and their Kohanim teach for hire and the prophets are charmed by money; yet they lean upon God and say, 'Is not God among us? Evil cannot come upon us.'" Our Sages have commented (*Shabbos* 139a), "They are evildoers, but they placed their trust in the One who spoke and the world came into being. Because of this, God brings three kinds of punishment upon them."

Rabbi Nebenzahl explains that "had we been asked, we would have said, to the contrary, if the judges take bribes and the Kohanim and prophets are greedy, it would have been proper if they would have at least performed this commandment of trust in God. They should place their trust in the One who should indeed be trusted. Should we say that if a person, God forbid, desecrates the Sabbath, we should advise him to also stop eating kosher food? But we see that the prophet says the opposite! 'Therefore, because of you,' because of this perverted trust, 'Tzion shall be plowed as a field, and Yerushalayim will become heaps (*ibid.*, 12)!' The punishment is not only for the sin, but also for the preposterous trust that became added to these sins. If this were not so, then for which purpose does the prophet mention, 'yet they lean upon God'? It is because the reason for such a heavy punishment is that by their contradictory behavior they distort the concept of trust and empty it of all substance. This is since, if trust in God is also something that can be shared by people who degrade the Torah's commandments and transgress them,

## **Even by the Prophets, Not Every Action Was Based on Prophecy**

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that not all the prophets attained this status. "Not all the prophets can expect to attain it, and even a prophet who has attained it for some time cannot expect that it will stay with him all the time."

He uses this statement when explaining the fear of a number of major believers in God when facing a danger. As long as the prophet, and the more holy and pious person who is not a prophet, has not attained the prophetic feeling pertaining to the specific matter that he has to deal with, "he is apprehensive until the Heavenly revelation will come and calm his fear."

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it makes a laughing stock of this fundamental principle. It transforms it into a concept that has no justification for its existence.... This, in addition to the fact that this type of trust is regarded as apostasy, because the Torah says, 'If you will follow My decrees,' it will be good, whereas if not, it will be the opposite — and you say that it will be good in any case! By saying so, you have negated the words of the Torah. Not only this, in any case it leads to failure: If the trust materializes, it appears as if there is no need to observe the commandments. And if the trust does not materialize, this causes desecration of His Name. This is because people will say that this is the fate of those who trust in God. On the other hand, true trust causes the glorification of His Name in the world, because this proves that God is the Ruler of the world and that His conduct toward us is determined by our positive behavior, as the Torah and all the true prophets have promised. This concept, spreading it and its manifestation, is the greatest form of sanctifying His Name."

Thus, for example:

Our forefather Avraham was the first believer in God (see Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 3:1). It says about him that (*Bereishis* 15:6), "He believed in God and He counted it to him as righteousness." This even though Avraham left Eretz Yisrael and went to Egypt because of a famine, and was apprehensive that the Egyptians might see his wife and kill him on her account.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Still, being that this behavior seemingly involved putting his wife, who was a married woman, into a precarious situation, Ramban (*Bereishis* 12:1) comments:

One should know that Avraham inadvertently committed a grave sin by placing his righteous wife into a precarious situation because he feared that they might kill him. He should have trusted in God that He would save him, his wife, and all that was his, because God has the ability to assist and save. Also, his leaving Eretz Yisrael because of famine, even though he was already commanded [to dwell there], was a sin, because God can save him from death [even] during a famine. As a punishment for his action, his descendants were sentenced to be in exile in Pharaoh's Egypt. Where there is judgment, there [you will find] evil and sin.

In contrast to this, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam claims that Avraham committed no wrongdoing whatsoever because, lacking a specific divine promise, he was obligated to take all reasonable natural action, provided that this was done while trusting in God and not in the effort that he exerted. Hence, not only was his action not regarded as sin, but God rewarded him for it and he merited supernatural miracles. To quote him, "Avraham, for example, employed artifices to be saved from the malice of kings [as it says] (*Bereishis* 20:13), 'When God caused me to wander from my father's house.' Similarly, Yitzchak, who cultivated his land and shepherded his flock, moved his household from one place to another because of famine (*Bereishis* 26:1). Also Yaakov used cunning by peeling the sticks in order to obtain his wages (*Bereishis* 30:37-38).

Our forefather Yaakov is counted among those who attained the highest level of trust in God.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this, Yaakov was afraid of Lavan's violence, and employed cunning to run away from him. Yaakov did not hide this fear, and in replying to Lavan's question, "Why did you run away secretly," he answered (*Bereishis* 31:27), "Because I was afraid, for I said, You may take away your daughters from me by force." Yaakov also feared Esav, as it says (*Bereishis* 32:8), "And Yaakov was greatly afraid and distressed." Yaakov did not depend on miracles and his fear brought him to take measures to calm Esav's anger, as it says (*ibid.*, 21), "For he said, I will appease him with the offering that goes before me." Yaakov stopped fearing Esav only after the angel who fought with

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However, in doing all this, they did not depend on their diligence and endeavor, but only on the exalted God, for which reason Divine Providence accompanied them in their efforts and assisted them in their ordinary and natural moves. Supernatural miracles were done for them in all their wanderings. All this was attained because of their true faith and reliance and their trust in the exalted God, and not in their diligence and endeavor. Avraham, whose statement to Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, merited to receive a bounty of material goods from Pharaoh, as it says (*Bereishis* 12:15-16), 'And the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh and Avraham benefitted on behalf of her, and he had cattle and flock...' An unexpected miracle occurred, as it says (*ibid.*, 17), 'And God plagued Pharaoh and his house because of Sarai, Avraham's wife.'

9. Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam noted in connection with this, "It should suffice for you to remember what the Torah said about him, how he gave up the worldly possessions of his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham, and set forth from Be'er Sheva to Charan with his staff. He walked, he had no animal to ride, and no friend to enjoy his company, and no sword to protect himself, as it says (*Bereishis* 32:11), 'Because I crossed this Yarden with my staff.' The ground was his bed and the stone his pillow."

him informed him of his salvation and victory by telling him (ibid., 29), "Because you encountered the heavenly and man and you were victorious." However, as long as Yaakov had not received a specific promise in connection with this, he was afraid of Esav.

The question is asked: How is it possible that a person can believe in God, but not trust Him? And particularly our forefather Yaakov, whose level of trust when he left Charan was so high? Indeed, Ramban (*Collected Writings of Ramban*, vol. 1, p. 353, *Ha'emunah V'habitachon*, chap. 2) goes to great lengths to explain that Yaakov could not have depended on the general promise given to him when he left Charan that said, "And behold, I am with you," because Yaakov was not sure that this promise would materialize. Maybe it would be negated by sin, or maybe he had already been awarded for his good deeds by means of miracles that happened to him up until that time.<sup>10</sup> And without a specific promise, "not every believer trusts."

But this is the very question that is being asked — why? Does this mean that in the absence of a specific Heavenly promise there is no obligation to trust in God? The answer is, as mentioned above, that the obligation to trust in God indeed exists, but that does not mean that a person may depend on

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10. Ramban adds and establishes there the concept, "you (man) should have assisted Me." This is meant to say that man has to perform natural activities so that he will not bother God to assist him in a miraculous way. Also our forefather Yaakov conducted his affairs in a certain manner, because "this is the way it is done," in order, so to speak, not to bother the Maker to change the world's natural course because of him.

miracles. Without a Heavenly promise, trust that a miracle will happen to him is even impudence. This is why Yaakov was afraid.

Concerning the prophet Shmuel (*Shmuel I* 16:1, 2), it says: “And God said to Shmuel, ‘How long are you going to mourn Shaul...fill your horn with oil and I shall send you to Yishai of Beit Lechem because I provided Myself a king among his sons.’ And Shmuel said, ‘How will I go? Should Shaul hear this, he will kill me.’ And God said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, “I came to offer a sacrifice to God.”’”

Why was he afraid of Shaul and did not trust in God Who sent him? Why did he not want to carry out God’s command, telling Him that he is afraid of man? Where is his trust in God? We see from this that one should not rely on a miracle happening for him as long as he was not given a specific promise of it. This being so, “It would not be true to say that Shmuel did not trust in God or that his trust was blemished.” Shmuel stopped being afraid only after God gave him advice that calmed his fears, and which he could follow and depend on.<sup>11</sup>

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11. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (*Da’as Torah, Shemos* 3:11-12), explains that Moshe asked, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh,” which is similar to the question asked by Shmuel, “How will I go? Should Shaul hear this, he will kill me.” This is because “the Patriarchs and the Gedolim kept to the laws of nature and were very loath to go against them. Behold, our teacher Moshe believed that if an emissary like himself would go to Pharaoh, it would be highly unnatural that his plea would be heeded, so he was apprehensive and said, ‘Who am I?’ And God answered him, ‘Because I shall be with you.’ This indicated to Moshe that the conduct here would be of another kind entirely. Yaakov was also promised that he would be guarded wherever went — the effort would be his own, but he would be aided by God. Similarly, all the Patriarchs and Gedolim were

Eliyahu Ha'navi was endowed with divine valor, to the point that he was not afraid to speak bluntly to King Achav (*Melachim I* 18:18) and say, "I did not destroy Israel, but it is you and your father's house [who did it]." Eliyahu Ha'navi was also not afraid to stand before the assembled Jews and say (*ibid.*, 18:21), "How long will you vacillate between two opinions?" And the assembled could not reply to him, out of fear and fright. Eliyahu Ha'navi fought God's wars bravely and killed 450 of Ba'al's prophets on a single occasion. In spite of all this, when Izevel warned him, he became afraid for his life, as it says (*ibid.*, 19:3), "And he arose and went for his life." Why didn't he trust in God? This is because trust cannot be considered to be permission to depend on miracles, unless one is given a Heavenly promise, as God did to Eliyahu Ha'navi when the emissaries of Achazyah, Achav's son, came to take him, at which time God told him (*Melachim II* 1:15), "Go down with him, be not afraid of him."

David Ha'melech was afraid of Achish, the king of Gath, when he was there, and in order to save his life he was forced to change his behavior and appear to be out of his mind (*Shmuel I* 21:14). Why did he not trust in God? Except that "anyone who hopes solely for miracles, without proper preparation, without a revelation, without a true Heavenly inspiration, and without Heavenly assistance, desires that which is not appropriate for him and sins by impudence.

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promised that they would be blessed in all that they would do. This does not apply to the exodus from Egypt: God Himself saved them, but it was His will that Moshe should act as an assistant, for which reason He sent him to Pharaoh. But it would be God who would definitely take them out. This is the meaning of 'I shall be' that was revealed to Moshe."

This causes desecration of the Holy Name and he will definitely be punished for this.”

### **One Who Was Promised by God Must Behave in a Trusting Manner**

In comparison, someone who God specifically promised to save obviously is obligated to depend on the promise, even if this involves the supernatural, because nothing is difficult for God. “A person whose trust is blemished, in spite of the fact that the exalted God has lifted him to such a high level,” should be punished.

This is the manner in which Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam explains the sin of the spies that emanated from lack of trust in God, even under special and miraculous conditions. Because of this, by deviating from perfect trust in God, they brought upon themselves God’s wrath and punishment.

In this situation we are dealing with the generation led out of Egypt, who experienced the supernatural all the time — a pillar of cloud led them during the day and a pillar of fire at night; manna that came from the heavens; water that came from a rock; the Divine Presence dwelled among them, as it says (*Bamidbar* 14:14), “that they see [Him] face to face”; and a reply was obtained from God immediately concerning any question that was asked, as Moshe told them (*ibid.*, 9:8), “Stand and I shall hear what God shall command concerning you.” It is obvious that should people such as these, who lived a completely “supernatural life,” lack trust in God and be fearful of entering the Holy Land in spite of the divine



command, because of the strength of the land's inhabits — this is a very serious accusation.

Indeed, Moshe fulfilled their request to send spies and to depend on ordinary endeavor. This was in consideration of their weakness. But when they returned, their fear only intensified because they had resorted to natural means that moved them further away from understanding the special level of Divine Providence with which they were endowed. For this reason Moshe told them, “Do not be afraid of them or fear them. God, your Lord Who goes before you, will war for you...And in the wilderness that you have seen, God carried you like a father carries his son.”

Similarly to this, the Jews were punished when they asked Shmuel Ha'navi to crown a king for them, at the time when God had saved them up till then from all the foes surrounding them.<sup>12</sup> Concerning this request, God told Shmuel (*Shmuel I* 8:7-8): “For they have not rejected you, but it is Me that they have rejected as their king, according to all that they have done.” For this reason the sign of thunder and rain came during the grain harvesting season, to show them that the conduct toward them was supernatural, and at this spiritual level they should have trusted in God completely, without resorting to natural means.

Now if so, those who were always under Divine Providence,

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12. *Shmuel I* (12:11-12): “And God sent Yeruba'al and Bedan and Yiftach and Shmuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies around you and you dwelled safely. And when you saw that Nachash the king of the children of Amon came against you, you said to Me, 'Nay, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord, your God is your King.”

including God's servants and His prophets, are obligated to trust in God completely and perfectly. As opposed to this, someone who has such trust without being prepared for this level and without a specific Heavenly promise is preposterous if he seeks something that does not suit him. Instead of attaining closeness to God, he moves away from Him and God will hide His face from him. This is what our Sages meant by saying, "Not everyone who wants to take the name [of being on such a level] may do so." And just as they were punished for the sin of the spies that they did not depend on God, so too they were punished for going to war without a Heavenly promise, and in spite of the fact that He had removed His favor and providence from them. This is expressed by the statement (*Devarim* 1:43), "You rebelled and you went presumptuously up the mountain." This act, in which a person puts all his faith in God without a Heavenly promise and puts his life in danger with the hope that God will save him in a natural manner, is not regarded as proper belief and trust, but rather — as impudence and insolence.

**If Fear Is Natural in the Absence of Heavenly Promise,  
Then What Is the Trust of the Person Who Lacks  
Such Promise?**

What is the trust of a person who lacks a specific Heavenly promise? It is clear from the statement by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam that it is possible and natural that such a person should be afraid, since without being promised, he cannot be sure that he will be saved, and who knows the ways of Divine Providence? This is also seen from the verses that he quoted, such as "and Yaakov was afraid." Indeed,

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that in this situation a person is obligated to know and believe that his salvation does not come from his effort, but is dependent on God's will. This is the commandment of belief, but where is the trust? If a person continues to be afraid, and as a result has no trust, what is the meaning of trust?

### **Trust Inspires Courage and Strength to Deal with a Situation, and Prevents Despair**

It would seem that the statement of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam should be understood on the basis of what is said in the work by Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (the *Chazon Ish*) in his work *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 2):

And when a person faces a situation where, in the ordinary course of events, he expects danger, it is natural to be afraid, and his fear will prevent him from remembering that nothing happens in this world by chance, and that nothing can prevent God from saving him... And one should be forbearing during this difficult hour and intuit within himself the known truth that he is not facing any calamity brought about by chance, but everything is from Him, whether the good or the bad, and when the root of his belief relieves his fear and gives him the courage to believe that salvation is possible and that he is not facing a predilection for the bad to a greater extent than for the good — this is what God regards as trust.

This is to say that a person who believes does not despair, but trusts in the divine kindness and in His unlimited power

to save him at all times and in all situations. This person is apprehensive of the future, and justifiably so in the absence of a specific Heavenly promise. But knowing that everything comes from Him and that He has no difficulty saving him, even against all the rules of probability and laws of nature, he does not become paralyzed as a result of this fear, but continues to believe, and does not despair of Heavenly mercy, and hopes for Heavenly benevolence, and offers prayers, and resorts to natural means, without giving up.

We find this, for example, in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 10a) on the verse (*Yeshayahu* 38:1), “In those days Chizkiyahu Ha’melech was sick nearing death and Yeshayahu Ha’navi, the son of Amotz, came to him and told him, ‘Thus said God, “Put your house in order for you shall die and not live...”’ What is meant [by the words] ‘you shall die and not live’ — you shall die in this world and not live in the World to Come.”

The *Talmud* explains that this decree came about because Chizkiyahu did not marry and was not involved in having children. Chizkiyahu explained this behavior by saying that he did so because he was afraid that he would have unworthy children. He turned to the prophet Yeshayahu and asked him that he give him his daughter as a wife, and then possibly the combined merit of Chizkiyahu and the prophet would cause him to have good children.

To this Yeshayahu replied, “The decree upon you has already been declared.” He meant to say that there was nothing that could be done now and Chizkiyahu would not return to health.

To this Chizkiyahu replied, "The son of Amotz, take your prophecy with you and go! I have a tradition from the house of my father's father (meaning from David Ha'melech) that even if a sharp sword is lying on one's throat, one should not despair of mercy."

In connection with this, the *Talmud* presents the statement of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eliezer, "Even if a sharp sword is lying on one's throat, one should not despair of mercy, as it says (*Iyov* 13: 15), "Though he may slay me, yet will I trust in Him." The *Talmud* notes that immediately "Chizkiyahu turned his face to the wall and prayed to God.' What is meant by 'wall'? Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: 'From the walls of his heart.'" And the result was that Chizkiyahu got well and lived fifteen more years!

Hence it is permitted and it is natural to fear. But trust consists in the knowledge that nature is subject to God's will, and in view of this, even if one's chances of salvation vanished, and even if an evil decree was decreed upon him, a person is obligated to continue and hope for Heavenly mercy, and to act trusting that nothing can prevent God from saving him.

A person is obligated to hope for Heavenly mercy in any situation. He may and is permitted to be afraid and apprehensive, but is not permitted to despair!

### 5(3). THE OTHER END — EXCLUSIVE DEPENDENCE ON NATURAL FACTORS

There is a fully rationalistic approach according to which a person believes that if he performs the proper task, he will

succeed as a result of his doings. He is led to think that the results are the fruits of his labor, and depends on it fully and assumes that there is a direct causal relationship between the activity and the result. This approach may emanate both from unadorned atheism (a person who believes only in nature and not in Divine Providence) as well as from covert atheism, which is the spiritual level of most people, who believe in God publicly, whereas in the depths of their hearts they put their entire trust in acquiring property and in medications, and do not think that these are only external means for activities carried out as a result of the divine decree.

The Torah has already warned against this belief by stating (*Devarim* 8:17-18), “And you will say in your heart, my power and the might of my arm have gotten me all this wealth. But you shall remember the Lord your God, for He is the One who has given you power to get wealth.”

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam brings in connection with this the explanation of his father, Rambam, the statement of the prophet Yirmeyahu (*Yirmeyahu* 17:5), “Cursed be the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart has departed from God.” Rambam explains that if it would not have been written in this verse, “and whose heart has departed from God,” then most of the people would have been included, God forbid, in the group of those who were cursed by the prophet. This is because usually the son trusts his father, the wife trusts her husband, a person trusts his partner, and this being so, almost every person would have been included in the category of “trusting in man.”

However, in actuality, all these were not cursed by the

prophet, because the word "cursed" applies not to those who depend on man, but to those about whom it is said, "and whose heart has departed from God."

This means that a person who internally trusts in God and knows that everything is from Him, but is assisted by people or by natural means, is not cursed at all, and is not included in this extreme category, but belongs with the the people in the intermediate level.

**5(4). THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL — THE TRUST  
WHICH IS INCUMBENT UPON ALL THE  
OBSERVANT**

The intermediate level is defined by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam as the desired level of trust, in the sense of (*Tehillim* 147:11), "God desires those who fear Him, those who hope for His kindness," and this is the level of trust that is incumbent upon all the observant. In keeping with this level, one should combine prayer and trust in God and resort to natural means. A person is obligated, on the one hand, to be apprehensive of danger and avoid all risk, because one should not depend on miracles. Also, he should know that it is not his strength and the power of his hands that save him from danger, but that God is the sole Savior. This being so, one should conduct himself like our forefather Yaakov, who prepared with prayer in addition to his preparations for war.

In keeping with this, a person is obligated to sow at the time of sowing and to reap at the time of reaping and to perform any necessary and beneficial labor, but his eyes should turn to God, knowing that it is not his resort to natural means that

brought about the desired result, but it is due to God's will.

One should remember that it is possible that a person should sow and not attain the desired result and it is also possible that one sows and reaps a hundredfold. It is the Heavenly decree that determines the fate of each person, rather than one's talent or labor.

To quote Shlomo Ha'melech, the smartest of men (*Koheles* 9:11), "The race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned, but time and death will come to all of them."

In view of this the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60a) notes that one who is taking a medicine should say, "May it be [His] will that this should be my healing." Also, a person who is going to measure his grain should say, "May it be [His] will that He send a blessing to my handiwork." This is so since it is God's decree that decides that this medication should be effective, and this requires coupling prayer with labor in order to succeed.

### **God Conducts All the World's Affairs by Way of Nature, and at Times Directly by Miracles**

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that scientists who do not believe in God believe instead in everything that has a clear causative connection. According to them, everything depends on the permanent laws of nature, and therefore, they do not believe in individual Divine Providence.

As compared with this, the observant, who understand that



everything comes from God, believe that it is God Who is the basis of all the natural laws and, should He so desire, deviates from them — and performs a miracle. When God conducts this world in a miraculous way, He does so directly, without resort to cause and effect.

When one sees that Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah were saved from the fiery furnace, it reveals that although it is natural for fire to burn, this emanates from God's will, and should He desire otherwise, it will not burn.

Miraculous conduct serves as a sign that God is the basis for each event, and He does not need any material act in order to attain the result He desires.

God is called the "strength of the worlds" because His will and decree are the basis and the source for all the events and phenomena occurring in our world. Still, since He commanded His world to be conducted in general according to the laws of nature in a causative manner, and since the philosophy that Divine Providence negates cause and effect is contradictory to belief and even brings about desecration of Hashem's Name, our forefathers did not depend on miracles. Thus we see that Avraham said about Sarah, "You are my sister," Yitzchak sowed the land for his sustenance, and before Yaakov met Esav he divided the people that were with him into two groups and prepared himself for "gifts, prayer, and war." It is thus seen that our forefathers resorted to natural means with a causative connection between them and reality, but they believed that God is the reason for every "natural" result, and for this reason God assisted them in supernatural ways.

It is only in the World to Come that God will make it possible to live in a world that is entirely miraculous, without the need to resort to natural means, so that no one will depend on any other factor except for Him, as it says (*Michah* 5:6), “And the remnant of Yaakov shall be in the midst of many people, as dew from God, as raindrops upon the grass, in that they will not rely on man or put their trust in people.”

However, until this time comes, a person is obligated to resort to natural means in a proper manner.

### **Trust Prevents Excessive Resorting to Natural Means**

Trust in God is of tremendous benefit even for someone who resorts to natural means in his daily life. A person who knows and has internalized that everything comes from God will not eagerly resort to natural means and will not devote to them his spiritual resources, but, as our Sages said (*Pirkei Avos* 4:10), “Lessen your involvement in business and learn Torah.”

In accordance with the point of view that it is not human labor that brings about the desired results, but they are brought about by Heavenly assistance, it is obvious that a person’s resorting to natural means is only something like payment of a debt which a person has to pay to God as a result of the decree, “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.” Therefore, there is no logic and reason to labor excessively to attain results, and it suffices that a person act in a manner that is sufficient for paying that debt.<sup>13</sup>

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13. The explanation of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam is clearly

Indeed, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam emphasizes that this is not meant to say that trust in God allows a

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echoed in the words of Ramchal, in his work *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 21): "The meaning of trust is that one should put all his hope fully in God, it being known that it is impossible for a person to lack what has been allotted to him, as our Sages said in the *Talmud* (*Beitzah* 16a), 'All of a person's sustenance is allotted to him from one *Rosh Hashanah* to another.' And they also said (*Yoma* 38b), 'A person cannot touch even a thread's-breadth of something that has been prepared for another.'

In fact, it would have been possible for a person to sit and do nothing, and the decree [concerning his sustenance] would have materialized anyway, except for the penalty of 'by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread' (*Bereishis* 3:19) that has been decreed upon all of mankind.

Now if so, a person is obligated to perform some labor for the purpose of his sustenance, because the almighty King has so decreed. This is like a tax that mankind has to pay, from which there is no escape. Therefore, the Sages said (*Sifrei, Devarim* 15:18): 'I would think this would be so even when one sits around doing nothing. The verse therefore says, "And I shall bless you in all of your handiwork that you will do."' But it is not the effort that brings the benefit, it is just that making an effort is mandatory. Once he has made an effort he has discharged his obligation, and this makes it possible for the Heavenly blessing to dwell upon him and he does not have to spend his life in pursuit and effort.

This is what David Ha'melech said (*Tehillim* 75:7-8), 'For neither from sunrise, nor from sunset, nor from the wilderness comes greatness. For God is the Judge — He lowers one and raises another.' And Shlomo Ha'melech said (*Mishlei* 23:4), 'Labor not to be rich, cease from your own wisdom.'

But the true way is the way of the righteous of old: they make their Torah study their main occupation, make their work something secondary, and retain both of them. This is because once a person labors a bit, afterwards all he has to do is trust in his Maker and not be miserable about any worldly matter. Then his mind will be free and his heart will be ready for true saintliness and for wholesome divine service."

believing person to sit and do nothing to attain his sustenance, and to expect manna to fall from heaven as happened in the wilderness and to some of the prophets, but he should resort to natural means. This is what we find concerning:

**Noach**, who engaged in planting;

**Avraham**, who engaged himself with shepherding a flock;

**Yitzchak**, who sowed;

**Yaakov**, who was a shepherd;

and **Moshe**, who was a shepherd.

Even some major *Tannaim* worked hard for their sustenance:

**Hillel** hewed wood and **Rabbi Yehoshua** was a blacksmith.

On the contrary, it says (*Tehillim* 128:2), “When you eat the fruits of your labor you are commendable and all is well with you.” And our Sages said (*Berachos* 8a), “What has been said about one who eats the fruits of his labor is more favorable than what has been said about a God-fearing person.”

However, all this does not require obsession with worldly affairs, because Shlomo Ha’melech said in his wisdom (*Mishlei* 23:4), “Labor not to be rich,” and also (*ibid.*, 15:16), “Better is little with the fear of God than a great treasure with trouble therewith.”

But a person should engage in labor for his sustenance by ordinary means, without exaggeration, with internal tranquility and serenity, knowing and understanding that the results are anyway the result of Divine Providence. This being so, one should devote most of his time to the study of Torah in

the sense that (*Pirkei Avos 2:2*), "Torah study is good with an occupation, for exerting oneself for both of them causes sin to be forgotten. All Torah study that is not combined with work will cease in the end and leads to sin." "If there is no flour there is no Torah, and when there is no Torah there is no flour."

By recognizing that success is not the result of the magnitude of the effort and of the diligence of the one who exerts, a person will arrive at the understanding that excessive effort is useless, since a person cannot receive more than Divine Providence has decreed, so that all his effort is in vain.

### **God's Beloved Ones Will Succeed with Little Effort**

Moreover, God's loved ones attain their desires calmly and without or with little effort.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, those who are

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14. We find in the *Talmud* (*Berachos 8a*) and in the *Midrash* (*Tehillim 128*) the following, "Rabbi Chiya the son of Ami said in the name of Ula, 'What has been said about one who eats the fruits of his labor is more favorable than what has been said about a God-fearing person.' This is because concerning a God-fearing person it is said (*Tehillim 112:1*), 'Commendable is the person who fears God.' Whereas concerning one who eats the fruits of his labor it says (*Tehillim 128:2*), 'When you eat the fruits of your labor, you are commendable and all is well with you' (whereas concerning a God-fearing person it is not said 'and all is well with you')."

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, in his work *Sichos Mussar* (of the year 5731, essay 20 on *Parashas Bechukosai*) notes in connection with this that the superiority of the one who eats the fruits of his labor consists in the fact that he clearly sees that diligence does not help, because "he labored in this but earned from another source, and he sees Divine Providence more than a God-fearing person, who believes, but does not attain perceptible

not God's loved ones will be forced to exert more effort to attain precisely the same result.

Now if so, the magnitude of effort that is required is not in direct proportion to the expected result, but it is the consequence of a person's closeness to his Maker. The more exalted a person, the closer he is to God, the less effort is needed on his part for attaining material desires.

This is what is said (*Tehillim* 127:1-2), "If God will not build the house, in vain do its builders labor on it; if God will not guard the city, in vain is the watchman vigilant. It is vain for you who rise early, who sit up late, and who eat the bread of sadness, for indeed, He will give sleep to His beloved ones." There Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains the concept, "He will

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knowledge." Rabbi Shmuelevitz notes that this is true concerning any type of effort, not only in the case of a person's resorting to natural means for his sustenance, but also in a person's effort in learning Torah.

We find this in the *Talmud* (*Menuchos* 7a) that Avimi, who was the teacher of Rav Chisda, forgot a tractate that he had studied and came to Rav Chisda to remind him of what he had taught him previously. The *Talmud* there asks why Rav Avimi went to Rav Chisda, who was his disciple, and did not ask that Rav Chisda come to him. And the *Talmud* answers, "He believed that it would work out better this way." What this means is that in this way he would be more successful than if Rav Chisda would have come to him. Rashi explains, "Because of 'if you labored, you will find'" (see *Megillah* 6b). Rabbi Shmuelevitz notes, "It is rather obvious that walking does not add to the understanding of the student and there is no causal relationship between walking and comprehension, except that effort is a condition for one's success in Torah study, and walking requires effort." So effort is beneficial because of its existence as such and not as part of a causal relationship.

give sleep to His beloved ones," in the sense of (*Koheles* 5:11), "Sweet is the sleep of the laborer," that everything has been decreed from Above, and everyone will get what has been decreed — and it is not [dependent on] a person's thoughts, diligence, effort, and artifices." This means to say that God's beloved ones do not lose sleep and do not exert themselves excessively, because everything has been decreed by Divine Providence and success is not the result of the effort. On the contrary, a person who is defined as God's beloved may sleep and rest from his effort because God will provide him with all his needs, calmly and easily, and he will succeed in all that he does.

### **A Person's Conduct Pertaining to Trust**

In view of this approach, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that a person is obligated to try and locate the point of balance between trust in God at his specific level and resorting to natural means in the following manner:

At first one should labor sufficiently to attain the desired results and check whether or not he was successful.

If he is God's beloved and his actions are desirable, this means that in the merit of his trust in God he will attain his goal with little effort, because God supplies His beloved ones their needs and more than that without effort and bother.

However, if a small amount of effort is not sufficient, one should continue exerting himself, because it seems that he is not sufficiently beloved by God to merit being provided with his needs with this slight effort. This means that it is

required that he exert himself some more.

Still, he should know quite well that it is not his effort that will bring about the results, but God's will. This is something that he should recall at all times, and in this way he will maintain a tranquil mind.

Also, in this case, a person should be primarily concerned with his poor spiritual standing rather than excessively resorting to natural means to attain the results he wants. He is therefore obligated to improve his actions and his spiritual standing, because if he will be beloved by Him, he will no longer need to exert great effort or labor.

### **Caution against Laziness**

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that a person should be aware that he may replace trust in God with something else — plain laziness about exerting any effort.<sup>15</sup> A person has a natural propensity to laziness and rest as Shlomo Ha'melech said (*Mishlei* 28:19), "He that tilled his land shall

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15. Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that a person may not think that his sustenance is assured anyway — as it says (*Tehillim* 136:25), "He gives food to all flesh," and also (*ibid.*, 145:15), "The eyes of all turn to You with hope and You give them their food in its proper time" — and hence, if the sustenance of all the creatures is guaranteed and God guarantees this even to animals who have no intelligence, then whether or not one trusts in God, and whether or not he will engage in some kind of labor, his sustenance will be provided in any case and there is nothing wrong with doing nothing and with lacking trust. This approach is wrong because, at times, sins cause one to lose his sustenance completely or force him to toil for his sustenance; whereas following God's commandments brings abundant sustenance with ease.



have plenty of bread; but he who followed after vain persons shall have poverty enough.” And Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam explains this verse as follows:

“He that tilled his land” — this is the person who labors for his sustenance

“But he who followed after vain persons” — these are people who are empty-headed and believe that, even though they are not meritorious enough, a miracle will happen for them.

“Shall have poverty enough” — this lack of wisdom brings about poverty.

Such people, who depend on miracles because of their laziness, sin by desecrating Hashem’s Name, because they seem to validate the viewpoint of the wicked — who see the poor state of those people who appear to trust in God and are not saved.

### **The Exceptions**

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam additionally notes that sins may hide or delay God’s kindness for a hidden reason that one cannot fathom, and even a righteous person may die, like what happened to the great Sages who were killed by the Romans. This did not happen because God could not save them, but was caused for reasons concealed by divine wisdom and was a form of Heavenly punishment that no one except for Him can perceive. On the other hand, notes Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam, there are people who lead a “supernatural” life. If a person is very pious and his doings find favor in God’s eyes to the point that His light will

shine upon him, the magnitude of God's providence upon him is so great that malignant factors have no power over him. As the verse states (*Tehillim* 91:13): "Upon the lion and the adder you will tread; you will trample the lion cub and the serpent."

This is the meaning of the verse (*Bamidbar* 21:8-9), "Make yourself a fiery serpent and put it on a pole, and anyone who is bitten when he looks upon it, he shall live." The copper serpent that Moshe made did not have any mysterious power that brought salvation. But, as we find in the *Mishnah* in *Rosh Hashanah* (end of chap. 3), "When the Jews looked upward and devoted their hearts to their Father in heaven, they were healed, and if not, they deteriorated." When the Jews devoted their hearts to their Father in heaven, they attained a high spiritual standing, in which they merited such a level of Divine Providence that malignant factors had no power over them.

Similar to this we find in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 33a):

It happened that there was a snake in a certain place and it used to injure people. The people went to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, and he asked them to show him its lair. He put his heel up to the entrance of the lair and was bitten by the snake, which then immediately died. He carried the snake on his shoulders and brought it to the *beis midrash*. He told them there, "See my children, it is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills." It was then said, "Woe to the person who was bitten by a snake and woe to the snake who bit Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa."

## There Are Four Levels of Trust in God

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam sums up his statement by postulating that there exist four levels of trust in God, all of which are praiseworthy, mutually intertwined, and at times act together because of their interrelationship. One would think that there should be only one defined level of trust, but this is not so, because trust is a spiritual state that is unique to each individual. The main factor of a person's trust is not his unique level, but that his heart depends and leans on God for attaining his needs.

The four levels of trust are as follows:

1. **One who puts his hope in God and looks forward to His kindness** — one who expects to attain his desires from God, while still being apprehensive and worried that God's benevolence might be denied to him because of his sins.
2. **A seeker of God** — someone who, in addition to his hope and dependence, also seeks God in his heart and with his mouth, through prayer. His trust is more concrete and brings him to specifically express his desires to Heaven — with his lips and tongue.

A person who has attained this level is also apprehensive and resorts to natural means in order to attain the desired results, but in his heart he leans on God and realizes that the expected result will come from God and not from his personal effort.<sup>16</sup>

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16. To quote Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, this refers to

3. **One who takes refuge in God** — one who trusts in Hashem and believes in Him. This person is confident that he will attain his desires from God without any doubts or apprehension, and without any need for resorting to natural means.

This status cannot be attained by everyone; it is unique to prophets and the very few who were given a specific Heavenly promise or who have another sign for the materialization of their desires, such as the case of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. About him we find in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 34b) that he would pray for the recovery of the sick and would say, “This one will live and that one will die.”

They asked him, “How do you know?”

He told them, “If my prayer is fluent, I know that it has been accepted, and if not, I know that it has been turned down.”

This means that he had a sign that allowed him to know when his prayer was accepted, and from this he had an absolute trust in God.

This status can be attained only by one who is innocent of all sins, clean of all transgressions, has attained perfection, and has tasted from Divine

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“those who cling to the Torah and eat their food and trust in the exalted God that He will provide their sustenance in this world. In the meantime they are involved in commerce, and communicate with everybody, and keep in front of them the fear of Him and depend on Him and not on their effort or business acumen.”

Providence in a measure that mandates this level of trust. Still, this trust should not be regarded as one's dependence on his pioussness and his merits, but as his trust that God's kindness will indeed come about.

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, explains additionally that this status can also be attained by a person who was not endowed with prophecy and Heavenly promise; but, by virtue of the immensity of his belief and holiness, he can attain a premonition of a specific matter. This person will trust in God on the basis of this unique premonition, even though he did not merit a prophetic revelation. This is told in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 60a) about Hillel: The Rabbis taught, "Once Hillel went on his way and heard some screaming in the town. He said, 'I am positive that this does not occur in my house.' Concerning him it is written (*Tehillim* 112:7), 'Of evil tidings he does not fear, his heart is firm, confident in God.'"

4. **The status of entrusting one's affairs in the hands of God** — the most exalted level, in which a person entrusts his affairs, all or part of them, to God's hands and is thus devoid of all expectation or desire concerning the results therefrom. This is so because it makes no difference to him whether he will achieve his desire or the opposite. A person who has attained this status takes all that Divine Providence decrees upon him truthfully and innocently, for better or worse, and completely invalidates his

own desires. He becomes like a tool in the hands of Divine Providence.

This is what, for example, was done by Avraham's slave, Eliezer, when he stood at the spring and said that the girl who will agree to give him and his camels water to drink (*Bereishis* 24:43), "is the girl that God has ordained for the son of my master." This means that Eliezer entrusted the matter to God and not in what he, Eliezer, would want and decide.

This is also the explanation of the statement by David Ha'Melech (*Tehillim* 55:23), "Cast your burden upon God and He will sustain you." This means to say that one should hand over the matter to God, and He will sustain him according to His wisdom. Similarly (*ibid.*, 37:5), "Rely on Him and He will do," meaning God will do according to His will and not according to the desires of the one who trusts.

A person who has attained this level of trust in God, entrusts himself in the hands of his Maker and accepts with love everything that occurs to him, "like a suckling upon its mother" (*Tehillim* 131:2). This means he will act like a child who lies in his mother's lap, and it makes no difference to him where he will go, because no matter where, he is in good and reliable hands, and so he feels calm.

### **Trust That Is Compelled and Trust That Is Deliberate**

It is thus seen that there are four levels of trust, each of

which is proper and praiseworthy, being an expression of the proper state of mind of a person who trusts in God, in keeping with his spiritual level. However, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that a distinction should be made between "compelled trust" and "deliberate trust" — only deliberate trust has been praised in the various sources found. This distinction is explained as follows:

- Compelled trust is a situation in which a person is forced to trust in God because he lost all his wealth, honor, and material standing. In this situation, his circumstances forced him to return to his Maker. He does this because there is no other solution, since he does not have anything else to depend on and he has seen the fallacy of leaning on the ephemeral and unreliable staff of riches, honor, health, and similar matters on which a person depends.
- Compelled trust can always be found, even with non-believers, who depend on various intermediate means, but understand in the depth of their hearts that at the end of the day it is Divine Providence that is behind everything. In view of this, when they find themselves facing a matter of life or death, and all the futile artifices of this world have been taken away from them, they return to God and ask Him to save them. Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam brings as example of this what happened to the idolaters who were together with the prophet Yonah on the ship (Yonah 1:14), when each one of them prayed to his god. When they were not saved, they prayed to Hashem and asked for His salvation.

- Deliberate trust is when the person trusts in God even when he possesses all the intermediate natural means, and in spite of this, he understands and knows that God is the One who gives him the strength to make wealth, and it did not come through his power and the strength of his hands — his natural efforts did not bring about the required results, but God’s will. A person who has attained this level understands that he must depend on Divine Providence and not on any natural means.

### **At Times a Trusting Person Resorts to Natural Means So That His Trust Should Not Be Compelled**

In keeping with Rabbeinu Avraham’s distinction between trust in the absence of any natural means for one’s salvation, and deliberate trust, when a person who is able to deal with a situation by natural means, but still puts his trust in God, Rabbi Pinchas Friedman, in the *Kor’ei Oneg* supplement (*Ha’machaneh Ha’chareidi, Behar-Bechukosai*, 5761), explains the following.

Yosef asked the head butler to mention him to Pharaoh, because as long as Yosef did not have any means of getting out of jail, his trust in God was of the compelled kind. Only after Yosef created a natural channel of salvation by means of the head butler, could Yosef’s trust be transformed into deliberate trust, in which a person trusts in God even if he has an actual alternative of being saved by natural means. Only then will his belief be perfect — when he chooses to trust in God and not in the head butler.

This is the explanation of the verse (*Tehillim* 128:8), “It is



better to take refuge in God than to rely on people.” Why is relying on people even mentioned? What can the comparison be between taking refuge in God and taking refuge in people?

The answer is that having the opportunity to be saved by people is important. The purpose of this is to allow for salvation in a natural manner, while still not depending on it, but rather on God, and then his trust becomes deliberate trust and not just compelled trust.

Rabbi Friedman employs this approach in order to explain, in the Chassidic manner, the verses that concern the *Shmittah* year, during which one does not cultivate his field. The verse states, “And if you shall say, ‘What will we eat during the seventh year?’” which he interprets as follows: Since there is no natural alternative, this is compelled trust, and therefore one’s trust in God is not perfect. If one’s trust is not perfect, then he lacks the merit to bestow upon him the Heavenly Abundance of which he is sustained, and this gives rise to the question “What will we eat?” The answer is, “I shall command my blessing on the sixth year,” meaning, there is a way of natural salvation by depending on the previously produced crop, and still, one should not depend on this, but only on God. Only then will he succeed.

### **The Behavior of a Person Who Trusts in God**

In light of the above, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam concludes as follows:

An ordinary person who has not received a specific Heavenly

promise is obligated to resort to natural means in order to attain the desired natural results. He may not depend on miracles. Hence, a deeply believing person may not sail on the sea or travel through deserts and disregard the possible dire consequences in order to do more business and accumulate wealth. Such activities are permitted only when they come to assist a person to run away from forced conversion to another religion or from another danger. A person should not delude himself by thinking that he may endanger himself and he will still be saved. This is because, if he is not righteous, then his salvation is the reward for his good deeds in this world to prevent him from getting his reward in the World to Come. And if he is righteous, then our Sages have already warned us that “maybe a miracle will not occur to him, and if yes, then this will be deducted from his merits.”<sup>17</sup>

Three corollaries can be drawn from the above:

1. On the one hand, it is obvious that a person who was bitten by a snake should drink an antidote and resort to medical assistance.

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17. Shmuel Ha’navi said (*Shmuel I* 16:2), “How will I go? Shaul may hear about it and kill me.” About Moshe, the greatest prophet, it is said (*Shemos* 2:15), “And Moshe ran away from Pharaoh.” And when the staff became a serpent, it is said (*ibid.*, 4:3), “And Moshe ran away from it.” When Izevel threatened Eliyahu Ha’navi, it is said (*Melachim I*, 19:3), “And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life.” God has already warned that a person should not put himself in danger, as it says (*Devarim* 22:8), “And do not put blood in your house.” Our Sages (*Terumos* 8:4:6) prohibited drinking uncovered water and eating a pecked watermelon. They also said, “A person should never stand in a place of danger and say ‘a miracle will happen to me; maybe a miracle will not happen to him, and if yes, then this will be deducted from his merits.’”

2. On the other hand, it is obvious that the entire purpose of resorting to medical assistance is to carry out one's duties in order to not depend on miracles — in itself it is of no avail. The results do not come from the medication, but from God's will. This being so, a person should not be satisfied with his natural acts and should not think that it is the antidote that heals, but should trust in God and pray to Him.<sup>18</sup>
  
3. The source of salvation does not lie in resorting to natural means, and it is needed only to prevent a situation in which a person depends on miracles. Therefore, when one is faced with a situation for which there is no natural remedy, such as one who was bitten by a snake in the desert and has no antidote with him, or one who sailed on the sea and was caught in a storm, the sails tore and the ship's captain and his officers are helpless — such a one is left with only trust in God. "And the exalted God knows the magnitude of the calamity and will not let one be disappointed in His kindness, but He will save [the person who trusts in Him] in an entirely hopeless situation, just as He saved Chananyah,

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18. To quote Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, "One should not only scratch the place of the bite and drink the antidote, but one must trust in the One in Whose hands all the souls are held, 'Who causes death and restores life.' He is the One Who has punished you by means of this bite and has brought you to His judgment, since you deserved what happened to you, and He will have pity on you in His great kindness, just as He has judged you in His kindness. And as you drink the antidote and take medicine, trust in God that these should be beneficial to you."

Misha'el, and Azaryah from the fiery furnace, and Daniel from the lions' den."

This means that one who trusts in God does not give up hope, but prays and hopes for kindness from God who is able to save one in any situation.

A person who knows and has internalized that everything comes from God will not be excessively eager to resort to natural means and will not devote all his effort to them. One should understand that resort to natural means is akin to paying a debt that has to be paid because of the decree of "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." Therefore, one should behave as if all he has to do is to discharge his obligation and pay the debt, and should not put excessive effort into achieving his desires.

Not only this, but excessive effort will not help and the success is not the result of the magnitude of the effort and the diligence of the one who exerts it, but is the outcome of the Heavenly decree. On the contrary, those who are beloved by God attain their desires calmly and with little effort. On the other hand, those who are not beloved by God will be forced to put in a great deal of effort in order to attain precisely the same desire.

Therefore, a person should make an effort to find the point of balance between belief and trust in the matter that he is facing. One should start by exerting little effort in order to attain his wish and check whether he has been successful. If he is beloved by God, then this little effort will be sufficient. Should this little effort not succeed, one should continue with his labors because apparently he is not sufficiently beloved

by God in order to merit attaining his desire with that little effort. Also in this case a person should be primarily concerned with the deficiency in his spiritual level and not be involved in excessive effort. This is because if one would only improve his behavior and become beloved by God, he would not have to exert too much effort. And only if one exerts more effort and the desired results will not be achieved, then one should devote all his labors to natural means, while remembering all the time that it is not his efforts that get him anywhere, but everything comes from God.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE HOPE OF THE PERSON WHO TRUSTS IN GOD

**I**N THE PREVIOUS chapter we analyzed the doctrine postulated by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam concerning the different levels of trust in God. In connection with this it was seen that nothing can assure an ordinary person, who has not been awarded a specific Heavenly promise, that his hopes will materialize. He is obligated to resort to natural human effort to obtain the desired results and he cannot depend on miracles. In this chapter we shall continue to present the opinions of a number of *Rishonim*, in the attempt to clarify what exactly is the practical manifestation of trust in God, if a person is anyway obligated to resort to natural action for the sake of his salvation. This explanation is important, particularly in view of the previously presented approach of the *Chazon Ish*, according to which, in the absence of a specific Heavenly promise concerning the results of a certain event, a person does not have any basis for trusting that his fate will improve and that his expectations will materialize. It is very possible that God will decree upon him days of trouble and pain. So, if nothing guarantees a person that he will be saved, how can we expect him to trust in God that He will save him?

The *Chazon Ish* explains that trusting gives a person confidence that he is not facing arbitrary forces of fate, but that everything happens on the basis of Heavenly principles of reward and punishment, and is even intended, in the end, for his benefit. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (*Alei Shur*, part 2, chap. 7), further explains in this context that it is impossible to define trust in a manner that would imply that everything which comes upon a person must only be good and painless. There is Heavenly judgment, and trials, and harsh decrees, God forbid. So how is a person who trusts in God to accept them? Concerning this, he quotes the *Midrash* (*Midrash Tehillim* 101), according to which a person has to accept the judgment that is meted out to him in the same manner that he happily would have accepted the Heavenly benevolence that would have been allotted him, because both come from God. To quote the *Midrash*:

“By David, a psalm of kindness and justice I shall sing.”

This is as the verse states, “And the Lord of hosts is exalted through justice.” If by justice then, “And the Lord of hosts is exalted through justice,” and if through righteousness then, “And God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness.”

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Acha: If with kindness, then I shall sing, if with justice, then I shall sing. To You God I shall sing.

Rav Yehudah the son of Shila said: “God gave and God took, may the Name of God be blessed.” No matter what, to You God I shall sing.

Rav Brachyah said in the name of Rav Levi: “But You,



Hashem, remain exalted forever.” You always have the upper hand: about the good, one says, “Blessed be the One Who is good and Who does good,” and about the bad, one says, “Blessed be the truthful Judge.”

Rav Tanchuma the son of Rav Yudan said: One verse says, “If the Lord acts [with rigorous justice], I shall praise His word,” and the other verse says, “When God acts [with mercy], I shall praise His word.” If He treats me with rigorous justice, I shall still praise His word, and if he treats me with mercy, I shall praise His word. Either way — I shall praise His word.

The Rabbis said: “Trouble and sorrow I would find — and I would then call upon God’s Name.” “I will raise the cup of salvations — and I would then call upon God’s Name.” “No matter what, I would call upon God’s Name.”

Rabbi Wolbe explains here that this is the depth of trust: a person knows, understands, and internalizes that his fate is in the trustworthy hands of his Creator, and everything that God gives him, He gives him out of justice. It is human nature to perceive God’s kindness as something obvious. One is not in the habit of asking why God granted him the blessing, even when he did not merit it. A person accepts Heavenly kindness as if it is owed to him. When Divine Providence exercises judgment and takes it away from him, he immediately asks, “Why is this coming to me?” He sees divine judgment as a robber that unjustly took away something that belonged to him. This is what Iyov said: “God gave,” and I didn’t ask any questions; and “God took,” and about this I also do not

ask questions. In both these manners of conduct, kindness and judgment, I bless God, because He knows what is good for me — “May God’s Name be blessed.”

In this context Rabbi Wolbe points out the statement by Rabbeinu Bechaye in his *Chovos Ha’levavos (Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*, chap. 1): “The nature of trust is the peace of mind of the one who trusts, and that his heart relies on the One in Whom he trusts, that He will do what is good and proper for him.”

However, this gives rise to the following difficulties:

When stricken with a calamity, the belief that this calamity did not occur by happenstance, but for the ultimate good, serves as a great deal of consolation for a person. Indeed (*Tehillim* 23), “Your rod and your staff console me; I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” The knowledge that not only the staff but also the lashing of the rod comes from God, and that there is nothing arbitrary, for everything comes from God Who accompanies a person even during his calamity, indeed holds a great deal of consolation at the time of the calamity, God forbid.

However, a person who is facing a momentous event will no longer be able to progress toward the future with a trusting heart and an unworried soul, and cannot be sure that everything will turn out for the good, because nothing can guarantee that he will be treated kindly and that he will not be judged stringently. Does this mean that, according to the approach of the *Chazon Ish*, nothing guarantees a person that he has not been judged to receive suffering and pain? Is there no basis for feelings of calm and serenity, to the effect

that (*Tehillim* 32:10), “One who trusts God will be surrounded by kindness?”

In order to resolve these difficulties, we shall add the statements and explanations of other *Rishonim* to the explanation of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam. Perusal of all this material will show that there exists a clear and complete picture, within which the above difficulties become resolved.

Rabbi Yosef Albo, in his *Sefer Ha’ikkarim*, explains that the principal basis of trust in God for a person who has not received a specific Heavenly promise lies in a person’s hope that he will be saved.

Indeed, nothing guarantees a person that he will be saved, but there is a solid basis for such a hope, because God is very kind and He does good — not only to those who are good, but also to those who are evil.

In this way, Rabbi Albo explains (*Sefer Ha’ikkarim*, essay 4, chap. 46) the basis for a person’s prayer to his Maker that He should have mercy on him and be kind to him. For it is God’s way to grant good both to the evil and to the good who depend on him, who rely on his benevolence and look forward to His kindness.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Albo continues by saying (*ibid.*, chap. 47) that not only

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1. To quote *Sefer Ha’ikkarim*, “Arise [and] assist us and redeem us. Not for our sake, but for the sake of Your kindness. This is so since it is the way of kindness to be drawn to those who trust in God. It says (*Tehillim* 32:10), ‘One who trusts God will be surrounded by kindness.’ This comes to say that even if one is not meritorious on his own, it is the way of trust to extend unearned kindness to those who trust in God.”

is trust in God based on the hope of the one who trusts in Him that He will be kind to him, but also that this hope is a precondition for the fact that God will indeed be kind to him and will help him. To quote him:

Hope and expectation is something that is imperative to the person who has faith in God, in order that he can draw to himself the kindness which is drawn to trust.

The prophet (*Eichah* 3:25) said, "God is good to those who hope in Him"; similarly, David Ha'melech praises Him by saying (*Tehillim* 25:5), "To You I have hoped every day."

Rabbi Albo explains in this context that there are three factors to hope on which the one who trusts in God may lean. It seems that the different levels of trust listed by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam emanate from the source of trust that will be elucidated in the following:

### **1. Kindness-based hope:**

This means that a person should hope that the exalted God will save him solely on the basis of kindness, and not on the basis of any obligation on His part, whatsoever.

In other words, the expectation that God will save and the hope that this is precisely what will happen are based on the fact that God is also kind to those who are not deserving. This is pure kindness, which is one of God's ways. This seems to be the basis of each person's expectation that God's kindness will dwell upon him.

## 2. Honor-based hope:

This means that one should hope that He will save him as He usually does, and if now He will not save him, then this will be regarded as contempt of His honor, because a lord who usually saves his slave, if he will not save him in his calamity, people will say that this is because he is lacking in ability.

When a lord who always assists his slave at a time of calamity now does not assist him, it causes contempt of the lord. A bystander will not necessarily say that the lord decided to disregard the distress of his slave this time because the slave deserved to be punished; rather, such a person might think that this time the lord changed his behavior because he grew weak and could not be of assistance.

Hence, when the Jewish nation faces a calamity and God does not save them, this is a stain on God's honor. This reason alone validates the Jewish nation's hope for God's salvation, for otherwise His honor will become desecrated in the eyes of the nations, in the sense of, "Act for Your own sake and not for our sake, act for Your own sake and save us."

Rabbi Albo says in connection with this that this is the explanation of the verse (*Tehillim* 79:9), "Help us, O God of our salvation," meaning, You, God, Who is in the habit of saving us.

"For the sake of the glory of Your Name." This is to say that we are not asking for assistance on the basis of any

obligation that You may have to us and not because of our merits, but “For the sake of the glory of Your Name” — so that the nations will not say that You are now unable to help as You were able to up until now. This is what is meant by the verse following it, “Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’”

It would seem that this dimension of hope exists particularly when we are dealing with a nationwide calamity, because then it becomes a matter of honor for God’s Name, and should God decide not to save His nation, it will lead to a desecration of God’s Name.<sup>2</sup>

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2. This principle of “honoring God’s Name” that may be defamed by the nations is the basis of Moshe’s prayer that He forgive the Jewish nation. And just like our prayer for salvation is received because of the rule “Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’”, we find that God’s honor is a reason why He should accept the prayer of a non-Jew who prays to Him in the Holy Temple, since God’s honor may be defamed should He not respond to his prayer. This is seen in *Melachim I* (8:41-43), “Moreover concerning the stranger who is not one of your people Israel, when he shall come out of a far country for Your Name’s sake. For they will hear of Your great Name, and of Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm — when he will come and pray toward this house. Hear You in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger called to You for — that all the peoples of the earth may know Your Name, to fear You, as Your people Israel do, and that they may know that Your Name is called upon in this house which I have built.”

Rashi (ibid.) explains that, whereas a Jew’s prayer is not necessarily accepted when the Jew does not deserve it, the prayer of a non-Jew in the holy Temple is accepted in order to avoid desecration of His Name. This is what Rashi says there: “And render unto every man according to all his ways, according to all that the stranger called to You for,” whereas concerning Jews it says, “render unto every man according to all his ways.” This is because the Jew is familiar with God and knows that He has the

Consequently, this is a higher level of trust in God, which is based on an additional reason for hoping in God and expecting His salvation.

### 3. **Promise-based hope:**

And this is the true hope — to hope that He will make His word come true, because He promised him this.

This level of trust refers to the confidence and hope of a person who is given a specific Heavenly promise, which obviously is an absolute and definite hope in God's salvation and in the promised results.

Rabbi Albo explains (*ibid.*) that these three sources of hope produce a distinction between three different levels of trust in God:

#### 1. **Kindness-based hope creates uncertain hope.**

A person who trusts in God on the basis of kindness has no information, promise, or basis for certainty that his desires will indeed materialize and that he will be saved from a calamity. The person only hopes, expects,

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ability, and if one's prayer is not accepted, he assumes that it is his fault and punishment for his sins. But an idolater challenges and says, "The house that is famous all over the world, I made an effort to travel over many roads and came and prayed, and nothing came out of all this, just as there is nothing to idol worship." Therefore, [God hears all the prayers of the non-Jew, as it says:] "Whatever the non-Jew called to You." But, the Jew, if You see that he destroys others with his money, do not give him.

and leans on God's abundant kindness, knowing well that he is found "in the best of hands," the hand of the Omnipotent Who wants to do good for him and save him.

This hope is based exclusively on pure belief, when the trusting person faces God, leans on His abundant kindness, and cries out, 'Be gracious with us and answer us, even though we have no worthy deeds.'

The person is thus facing a major test and is tested as to whether he will still wholeheartedly trust in God, without apprehension about the future, while putting all his hope in God, even in situations where the outcome is uncertain.

This trust fulfills itself, and if a person only overcomes his doubts and apprehension, he will gain, in the merit of his total trust in God, a wonderful kindness, because God wants to have His kindness dwell upon "those who hope in Him sincerely." To quote Rabbi Albo (*ibid.*):

Kindness-based hope is the most commendable (meaning, it is more commendable than hope based on God's honor and based on God's promise), but the hopeful person is not so sure that he will be granted his heart's desire. This is because he does not regard himself as someone who has attained a standing in which he can gain kindness gratuitously; he thinks that the Master will not respond to his request, and because of this he does not hope as much as he should. If he had proper hope, God would not have denied him His kindness, because He (God) always wants to help those



who put their hope in Him as they should. And it says (*Tehillim* 147:11), 'God desires those who fear Him, those who hope for His kindness.' This clarifies that attaining kindness is precluded when the hope is not as it should be.

## **2. Honor-based hope establishes trust in God at a level close to certainty.**

This level of trust applies to a special situation in which Hashem's Name may be dishonored if He will not save His people. This hope is hence the basis for a higher level of trust in God, in which a person is entitled to expect that God will indeed save him from the impending disaster.

Rabbi Yosef Albo notes that this way of Heavenly service was established by Moshe at the time when he asked for mercy for the Jewish nation in the aftermath of the sin of the spies.

Moshe based his plea to God that He should nullify His harsh decree on them because the nations will say that God refrained from saving his nation because He was unable to deal with the seven nations that at that time lived in the Holy Land. In this case, God's salvation was mandatory in order to prevent desecration of His Name.

This trust in God does not, therefore, stem from the personal interests of the person who hopes that God will be kind to him (kindness-based hope), or that He will fulfill His promise (truth-based hope), but appeals

to, so to speak, the interests of God Himself, that His Name should not be desecrated.<sup>3</sup>

However, although this trust in God stands on a most solid and secure basis, in such cases salvation may only be temporary. God may save us from only that specific calamity, but may, God forbid, extract payment at a later time, in other circumstances, under which the danger of desecration of His Name will no longer exist.

Rabbi Albo summarizes it as follows:

Honor-based hope is more certain, and this is because when someone is in the habit of helping a certain person and does not help him, he ought to help him so that the observer should not think that the reason why he is not helping him now is because the master is tired or deficient...

This is the path that Moshe paved in his prayer in the

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3. To quote Rabbi Albo:

Kindness-based hope applies to the one whose hope is based only on kindness, and the promise-based hope is based on truth, and both are for the benefit of the receiver. But the honor-based hope applies only to the giver, because God is, so to speak, obligated on His part in order to preserve His honor. The singer said (*Tehillim* 115:1), “Not for our sake, not for our sake God, but for Your sake give glory.” What is meant is that we do not ask from You as reward for our merits, because what merit does one born of woman have? And [we ask] not for the sake of our benefit, but for the sake of the glory of Your Name, in addition to what you are obligated to do “for Your kindness and for Your truth” — meaning for the sake of Your kindness, which is the kindness-based hope, and for the sake of Your truth, which is the promise-based hope.

matter of the spies, when he said (*Bamidbar* 14:13-16), “The Egyptians will hear it, for You brought out this people in Your might from among them ...Now if You will kill all these people as one man, then the nations that have heard Your fame will say, because God was unable...” Because of this, Moshe was told (*ibid.*, 20), “I have forgiven as per your word.” This means that I will forgive as you said, so that My Name will not be desecrated, but I will take revenge on them in another manner, in which My honor will remain intact.

### 3. **Promise-based hope places trust in God at a level of absolute certainty.**

This level of trust in God is relevant in a situation of a specific Heavenly promise, for example, on the basis of prophecy. In this case there is no reason for any doubt whatsoever that the promise will be fulfilled.<sup>4</sup> This is how a person’s belief is tested, since only if one believes that the One who has promised is able to fulfill that promise and is reliable, can the person who hopes be confident that He will fulfill His promise.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, events that may occur naturally

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4. To quote Rabbi Albo (*ibid.*), “And, because of this, the hope that is based on a statement by prophets, who are definitely truthful...there is no doubt that the person who hopes is certain that it will come...This is so because, even if the expected events may come in a natural way, since they were promised by God, they are, in fact, inevitable, to the point that the person who hopes relies upon them as if they were inevitable.”

5. Rabbi Albo explains (*ibid.*) that this is the intent of David Ha’melech by saying (*Tehillim* 119:49), “Remember the assurance to Your servant by which You gave me hope.” This is since the only way

(such as rain tomorrow or the recovery of a sick person) are subject to various probabilities, since at times such events do not occur. In comparison to this, God's promise must occur, similar to a natural event for which the chain of causes for its occurrence has been completed (such as sunrise). Once a Heavenly promise was made, this creates an absolute certainty of its fulfillment. Rabbi Albo states therefore:

This is the way in which the one who trusts in God and looks forward to fulfillment of the statements of the prophets should hope — as a person who hopes for future events that are bound to occur.

This is what the singer, David Ha'melech (*Tehillim* 130:5-6) says, "I put confidence in God, my soul puts confidence and I hoped for His word. My soul is for my God, more than those watching for dawn, watching for dawn." This is the explanation: since night guardians of [city] walls are subdivided into watches, there is one who guards until the call of the rooster [that usually occurs at daybreak] and there is one who guards until dawn.

Those who guard until the call of the rooster wait for that call without confidence, because there is an equal probability that the rooster will or will not call. But those who guard until dawn look forward with complete confidence for something that will definitely occur on time. [David Ha'melech's] hope in God is that

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in which a master can be obligated to a minor or a slave is if the master promised something.

of the guards of the city's walls, whose watch ends with dawn.

And he said that he looks forward to God and His promise by means of prophets with a greater confidence than those whose watch ends with dawn look forward to daybreak, which is something that is [definitely] bound to occur.

For this reason, he did not compare himself to a sick person who is looking to God [to become well], even though a sick person hopes for this greatly. This is because such a person is unsure whether or not he will be healed, since the probability of a positive or negative outcome is equal. But a person who looks forward to dawn is confident that it will come, because this is bound to occur. The prophet (*Hoshea* 6:3) says concerning this, "Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of God, He is to be found like the morning," meaning, like something that must exist... This is also the explanation of the verse (*Tehillim* 72:5), "They will fear you with sunrise," meaning, definitely, just like sunrise.

The hope for the fulfillment of this promise is called truth-based hope, that a person expects it with full confidence, for God is true and His words are true.

A similar statement is to be found in the commentary of Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona on *Mishlei* (chap. 3). He explains that the trait of trust emanates from the dependence of a person on Heavenly mercy, and on the unlimited ability of God to save at any time. This trust pertains to God's trait of mercy, having mercy upon His creatures, and even upon

sinner who does not deserve to be saved. The hope of a person that God will have mercy upon him and save him from his travails is in and of itself grounds to merit salvation. In view of this, just like fear is an attribute that fulfills itself by suppressing one's ability to act, and causes a person to fall, so too does hope assist itself. Someone who hopes creates an additional source and reason, in the merit of which the person will be saved. As a result, it turns out that one actually has something to hope for.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that hope is by itself the source of fruitfulness and serves as its own source of hope. To quote him:

Trust additionally mandates to truly trust in God's mercy, because His mercies are abundant and His benevolence is plentiful. One should embrace God's traits and truly trust in them, as it says (*Tehillim* 13:6), "And I trust in Your kindness, my heart will exult in Your salvation..." I trust in God's majesty and strength at all times, even when the calamity is imminent. And the hope emanating from this trust is that, even though our sins are many and immense, one will hope for God's mercy... Similarly, if one is surrounded by misfortunes and he surrenders to them, he should trust that Heaven will have mercy upon him, because of these misfortunes, and because of his submission, and because of his hope in God. Know that the expectation emanating from this trust will strengthen the expectation to the point that when the misfortune will be imminent and he will fear his sins, his fright will not overpower the hope, but rather his hope will become stronger, because God is kind to those who are afraid of their sins, and has mercy on everyone who is submissive and asks for mercy. And it says (*Yael* 2:13), "For He is gracious and merciful," and it says (*Tehillim* 27:14), "Hope to God, strengthen yourself and He will give you courage." This means that hope strengthens one's heart, which brings additional hope — but a weak heart reduces hope.

In keeping with the above, it appears that it is possible to understand the substance of trust even in a world where there is a lack of certainty regarding God's salvation. True, there is no certainty. Lacking specific prophecy, who knows what God will decree? God's ways and His conduct of the world are exalted and concealed from our wisdom, and who can really fathom them? But the hope to be saved by God's kindness imparts bountiful strength upon a person even before the event, at the time when a person is facing an unknown future. Hope-based trust relies on God's kindness, even in the absence of a specific promise. As we shall see in the following, this will resolve the previously discussed difficulty with the statement of the *Chazon Ish*.

However, before we try to resolve this difficulty, we should explain in connection with this an important point of distinction and depth that is found in the statement of Rabbeinu Bechaye in his work *Kad Ha'kemach*, concerning the verse (*Tehillim* 37:3), "Trust in God and do good."

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that this verse pertains to trust in God before performing a good deed in order that a person should not think that God is obligated to repay him for this good deed.

A person's trust in God may not be based on the feeling "I deserve," but is based on the expectation and hope that God will have pity and mercy on him, even if he is not deserving on the basis of his deeds and his spiritual level. This being so, a person has to stand before his Maker without any feeling of "I deserve it," with his trust in God preceding his good deeds and not being dependent on them.

This is necessary for two reasons:

1. A person is obligated to perform good deeds because of their intrinsic virtue and nature, as deeds that reflect God's command and will, and not only that one should benefit from them and be rewarded. Concerning this our Sages said (*Pirkei Avos* 1:3), "Don't be like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward."
2. A kind of trust in which a person thinks he should be saved in the merit of his good deeds and his exalted worthiness and standing, produces a prosecutor, as happens to every person who does not ask, but demands.

Similar to this, we find in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 55a), "Three things remind a person of his sins: a leaning wall, the scrutinizing of prayer, and one who submits his dispute with another to the Heavenly Court."

"Scrutinizing of prayer" is defined there as one who "scrutinizes in his heart," and says, "Being that I prayed with the proper devotion and intent, it follows and it is proper that my prayer be accepted."

This is the way in which *Tosafos* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b) explains:

Because this will cause his deeds to be examined, to say, he is positive in his good deeds, let us see what they are...and so is the case of one who passes below a leaning wall, because he depends on his good deeds [to protect him from damage], as well as one who submits



his dispute with another to the Heavenly Court and relies on his merits to cause that the other person will be punished.<sup>7</sup>

The previously mentioned statements of *Rishonim*, who base trust in God on a person's hope for Heavenly mercy, appear to provide a complete explanation of trust according to the opinions that nothing promises a person that he will be saved. His trust in God is only a hope, and not a certainty.

In keeping with this approach of the *Rishonim*, Rabbi Baruch Rosenberg (*rosh yeshivah* of Slobodka) explains in the journal *Mevakshei Torah* (vol. 8, no. 38, pp. 28-29, "Essay on the Substance of Trust") the statement of the *Chazon Ish* concerning belief and trust:<sup>8</sup>

It seems that our Sages and the *Rishonim* explained only that the basis of trust is that God has mercy on all His creations. Even if a person thinks that, strictly

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7. Rabbi Dessler explains in a similar manner the concept of the "evil eye" as an act that causes envy among people. They wonder about the good fortune of this person and ask themselves, "Why does he deserve this?" This thought creates a certain prosecutor in Heaven, and also there that person is looked upon with stringency to check whether he indeed deserves it. Once the trait of judgment is invoked, then a person's deeds are scrutinized, as we say in the prayer, "Who will be found righteous in Your judgment?"

8. Rabbi Rosenberg was asked by one of his students that it appears that the *Rishonim*, i.e., *Chovos Ha'levavos* in *Sha'ar Ha'bitachon* and Ramban in *Ha'emunah V'habitachon*, do not agree with the *Chazon Ish*. Also, it appears from the statements of Chazal in *Yalkut Shimoni* on *Tehillim* that even an evildoer, if he trusts in God, will be surrounded by kindness.

speaking, he does not deserve to be saved on the basis of his deeds, he may still trust that God will have mercy upon him, even though he does not deserve this, and he should not give up hope for mercy. Also, in the merit of this belief he has a basis for hoping that God will have mercy upon him, since God's will is that people should believe that He is all merciful.

But still, all this means is that salvation is possible, but under no circumstances is salvation certain, because one does not know how God's judgment works.

Rabbi Rosenberg adds that even if a person does not have a reason to be certain salvation will indeed come, trust is based on the belief that God is able to save in any situation. Hence, even if in the natural course of events one cannot see how, for example, he will get well, he should not refrain from trusting that God is able to heal him, and hope that indeed this will happen, even though there is no certainty that He will indeed heal him.

This subject will be understood by examining an example from the field of medicine. A person who visits a prominent physician trusts in him. Does anything promise the patient that the physician's treatment will definitely heal him? The answer is no. Still, a person who goes to a physician of known talent and ability knows that he can be calm in his hope to be saved, being that he is "in the best hands" — in the hands of one who will do everything possible to save him and is capable of doing so.

Thus, Rabbi Rosenberg bases the feeling of trust according to the *Chazon Ish* on the following principles:

- God can save him under any circumstances. A person should believe that he is “in the best hands” given God’s infinite ability to save him under any conditions. As such, when a person is in a situation where there is no way in which he can, for example, get well, he will not refrain from trusting that God is able to heal him. Even though there is no certainty that He will indeed heal him, there is hope that this will happen.
- “His compassion is over all of His creatures.” A person is “in the best hands” not only because God is Omnipotent, but also because He has mercy on all His works. Hence, a person should not give up his hope for mercy, even if, given his spiritual standing, he is not worthy enough of being saved. A person is under an obligation to trust that God will have mercy upon him and that He only wants his good, even if he is a sinner. God does not desire that one should die, but that he change his ways and live on. This belief is in itself an additional reason for Heavenly mercy, because it is God’s will that people believe that His mercy is imparted to all his creations.

Rabbi Rosenberg explains further that this belief is based on three basic tenets:

1. **Divine Providence.** The belief that God conducts His world from beginning to end, and there is no action, from the smallest to the largest, which is not the fruit of the Providence of the Creator, Who cares about all his creatures and conducts His world according to Heavenly principles of reward and punishment.

2. **God wants to do good for his creatures.** Nevertheless, one is not promised that the outcome that he desires will indeed occur, and at times God changes the course of events in a manner where one finds himself in situations of sorrow and pain. However, this is done as a part of an overall Heavenly reckoning. In the final analysis, everything that God imparts is for one's benefit.

An example of such a situation is presented in the *Talmud* (*Niddah* 31a):

It happened that a splinter got stuck in a person's foot and because of this he could not board a ship. The ship sailed without him. After some time, that person heard that the ship sank. It is obvious that at the time when he missed the departure he was very sad, but this was for his good, in the sense of "also this is for the good."

3. **Heavenly mercy.** Even though there is no guarantee that a desired result will indeed come about, a person trusts that he is in the best hands, and he has someone on whom to depend and something to hope for, since God is Omnipotent and is able to save one in any situation, and also because God is merciful and compassionate. In this light, even if a sharp sword is placed on a person's throat, he should not despair of mercy.

This explanation is based on the previously cited *Rishonim* — Rabbi Yosef Albo in the *Sefer Ha'ikkarim*, Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on *Mishlei*, and Rabbeinu Bachaye in this work *Kad Ha'kemach*, who

sums up the above as follows:

The substance of trust as explained by Rabbeinu Yonah (commentary on *Mishlei* 3:26), is that a person should internalize that everything is in the hands of Heaven and He is able to change nature and to switch fate, and there is nothing that prevents Him from saving in a major or minor manner.

And even if the calamity is imminent, it can be solved instantly, because He is Omnipotent and nothing can prevent Him.

Even if one sees that a sharp sword is lying on his throat, there is no reason why He cannot not save him.

This is what Chizkiyahu Ha'melech said to the prophet Yeshayahu (*Berachos* 10a), "I have a tradition from the house of my father's father (meaning from David Ha'melech) that even if a sharp sword is lying on one's throat, one should not despair of mercy..."

One of the aspects of trust is that no doubt should creep into his trust, even if he is subject to many bad things and troubles...This is due to the reality that, at times, one thinks that he has made the proper choice, and actually it is the other way around. Hence a person should hand over all his affairs to Divine Providence.

If one sees that bad things are happening to him, God forbid, he should regard them as an admonition by the Almighty, being that God admonishes one whom He loves, and everything is for the good, to cleanse him from his sins and to bring him closer to God.

The reward of trust is double: [the reward for] the commandment of trust and also that he should succeed in that endeavor...

“In all your ways you should know Him” (*Mishlei* 3:6), whether it be mundane labor or the Heavenly service.

“And He shall direct your paths” (*ibid.*), meaning, that in addition to getting a reward for trusting Him, which is higher than the heavens, you will additionally succeed in what you were doing when you remembered God and felt His yoke.

Our Sage said (*Berachos* 63a), “Bar Kaparah expounded, ‘What is the short passage upon which the entire body of the Torah depends? This is, “In all your ways you should know Him.’”

Rava said, “Even when committing a crime.” The proof for this is that people say, “A thief standing at the entrance of a tunnel for entering one’s house, calls upon God [that He should help him].”

Rabbi Wolbe explains similarly in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, chap. 7), that a person who truly trusts does not expect that God’s conduct toward him will always be that of kindness, and he accepts everything that Divine Providence has in store for him with love. But here there exists a trait that is also related to trust — hope. We learn about this trait from the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 10a), where it is noted that the prophet Yeshayahu informed Chizkiyahu Ha’melech, “Put your house into order for you shall die and not live.” Chizkiyahu Ha’melech wished to repent and become involved in having children, but the prophet told him, “The decree upon you

has already been declared.” When Chizkiyahu Ha’melech heard this, he told Yeshayahu, “The son of Amotz, take your prophecy with you and go! I have a tradition from the house of my father’s father [from Dovid Ha’melech] that even if a sharp sword is lying on one’s throat, one should not despair of mercy.”

We derive from this that there is hope even when a sharp sword, such as a Heavenly decree, is lying on one’s throat. Trust in good cannot, in fact, bring about hope that it will be good (rather than otherwise), but a person who trusts in God hopes that all will be good. A person may not delude himself and seriously believe that he will always live calmly, because a calamity may, God forbid, befall him. But, even when the calamity is imminent, one should not despair, since a trusting person should hope that God will save him at the time of his calamity. The hope should be in his soul, in the sense of (*Tehillim* 130:5-7), “I put confidence in God, my soul puts confidence and I hoped for His word. I yearn for my God, more than those watching for the dawn, watching for the dawn. Let Israel hope for God, for with God is kindness and with Him is abundant redemption.” This hope is the meaning of trust in God and it indeed gives strength to a person, even according to the *Chazon Ish*, to whom nothing promises a person that only the good and kindness will be his lot for his entire life.

To sum up, after we have explored the different levels of trust and their basis, we have arrived at the understanding that trust cannot be regarded as a promise concerning certain results, but as a person’s belief that he is in the hands of the benevolent God. Still, this trust definitely inspires a

feeling of security, even in the instant prior to the event and not only in the instant after it. This is because a believing person hopes for Heavenly mercy and does not despair, but trusts that:

- A person is “in the best hands,” because everything that happens to him, from beginning to end, is in the hands of God and decided by Him
- God only wants a person’s good
- Obviously, God is able to save a person under any circumstances, and no one can prevent Him from doing so, because he is Omnipotent
- God is merciful and compassionate; His mercy is upon all his creations, and He will show mercy even upon the sinner after he has sinned.
- What will a person gain by worrying or acting in a manner that has little chance of success, which characterizes a despairing person? He can rather trust in God and put his hope in Him.

Indeed, the *Chazon Ish*, in his work *Emunah U’bitachon* (chap. 2, sec. 6),<sup>9</sup> notes that an act performed out of despair,

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9. To quote the *Chazon Ish* (ibid.):

We have the obligation to carefully consider any act before performing it, if it is in keeping with the trait of trust. Our Sages said in *Midrash Rabbah* (*Parashas Miketz*) that Yosef Ha’tzaddik’s request that the head butler “remember him” showed that his trait of trust was lacking. They said concerning this that the verse, “Happy is the man who places his trust in God,” applies to Yosef, [along



such as someone who is drowning and grabs at a straw to save himself, is contrary to the trait of trust. This is because trust in God requires hope that God will save the person, and belief that God is able to do everything, and that nothing can prevent Him at any time and under any circumstances. From this perspective, even when a person is commanded to resort to natural human actions, this does not mean that any endeavor within this framework is proper and that acts of despair are allowed. The *Chazon Ish* explains in keeping with this, that Yosef's request to Pharaoh's head butler that he remember him and mention him to Pharaoh when he was released from jail, constitutes an act of despair. This is so, because the chance that the head butler would do so

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with the end of the verse] "and has not turned to the arrogant." Because Yosef pleaded with the head butler, it was decreed that he should stay in jail for another two years. In other words, Yosef knew that his salvation was not dependent on any effort on his part and that everything comes from God, but since one is obligated to act and not depend on miracles, Yosef forced himself to use this opportunity and seek the help of the head butler. But since it is not in the nature of people such as the head butler to remember and to return a favor, such an act must have been performed out of desperation. A desperate person does whatever he can, including even futile acts. But a person who trusts should not act this way, and such a deed is not regarded as obligatory effort. What he did was akin to throwing dust on the glory of his belief and trust in God, and being that his effort was not obligatory, it was forbidden. Our Sages are referring to the act as such and not, God forbid, to Yosef's trait of trust. Yosef knew that no human being could help him — only God. But the fact that he sought the help of the head butler was, according to the tradition of the Sages, an error in judgment. He should not have turned to someone arrogant, [who is untrustworthy,] for assistance.

and remind Pharaoh of his transgression for the benefit of a jailed Hebrew slave, was very poor. For this reason our Sages saw Yosef's request as a contradiction of trust and hope in Hashem.

## CHAPTER 7

### UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL SOURCES AS EXPLAINED BY THE *RISHONIM*

IN THE PREVIOUS chapters we examined statements by *Rishonim* and, in particular, of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, which outline a clear distinction between the different levels of the duty to trust God, in keeping with the different spiritual standings of people, and when a person is obligated to resort to human effort in keeping with his spiritual standing. We have seen that prophets and those few who were given a specific Heavenly promise concerning a certain matter, or who had another sign for the materialization of their desire,<sup>1</sup> are totally exempt from the duty to make any effort concerning that subject and, on the contrary, any unnecessary effort on their part will be regarded as a lack of trust. On the other hand, we have seen that when a Heavenly promise was not given and there is no authorized source (a prophet, for example) that one may depend on,

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1. Such was the case with Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. We see in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 34b) that "he would pray for the recovery of the sick and would say, 'This one will live and that one will die.' They asked him, 'How do you know?' He told them, 'If my prayer is fluent, I know that it has been accepted, and if not, I know that it has been turned down.'" This means that he had a sign that allowed him to know when his prayer was accepted, and from this he had an absolute trust in God.

a person becomes obligated to resort to natural human efforts, and a person acting for his salvation is not considered as lacking trust in God. On the contrary, when such a person depends on miracles, “he lusts for that which does not fit him and sins by impudence. This causes desecration of the Holy Name and he will definitely be punished” (Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam).

In this chapter we shall examine a series of biblical sources and we will clearly see the distinction between situations in which there exists a specific Heavenly promise that places the nation into a situation of special Divine Providence and in the world of miracles, and the regular situation in which the spiritual standing of the nation does not allow people to rely on miracles and requires them to resort to human efforts. Once we accept this distinction, we will be able to understand the different sources that seem to contradict one another, if not for our understanding of the above principle.

We shall start with examples of cases in which the nation lived in the world of miracles (on the basis of Heavenly promise) and was hence exempt from putting forth any effort, and conversely, any effort would have been regarded as a sin.

This is the proclamation of our leader Moshe prior to the splitting of the Sea of the Reeds (*Shemos* 14:10-13):

And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes... and the children of Israel cried out to God.

Moshe said to the people, “Do not fear. Stand still and see the salvation of God that He will show you today.”

At first this seems incomprehensible. The Jews stood at the shore of a stormy sea, with the Egyptians behind them. Their state at that time was compared by our Sages (*Midrash Rabbah, Shir Ha'shirim 2:14*) to a dove that escaped from a hawk and pushed itself (barely alive) into a crevice in a rock, and, behold, a snake was nesting in this crevice. Indeed, the situation was extremely precarious. They could not turn back because the Egyptians were behind them, and could not advance because of the sea in front of them. How could Moshe say to the Jewish nation, "Do not fear"? Wherever they turned, their lives were in danger.

But the matter becomes clear after examining the statement by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, that when a specific Heavenly promise was given (*Shemos 14:14*), "God will fight for you and you should keep your peace," then all the dangerous situations vanish and Moshe's command that they should not fear is understood. In a situation where a specific Heavenly promise was given that no harm would befall the Jewish nation, it would be a lack of belief not to trust God.

This example applies not only to the specific event under discussion, but also to other generations, since there is a specific commandment concerning all wars that are a *mitzvah* to wage (*Devarim 20:3*), "Let not your hearts faint, fear not and do not tremble, neither be terrified." This should not be regarded as just a soothing statement, but as a definite prohibition against being afraid. Rambam explains (*Sefer Ha'mitzvos, negative commandment 58*) that one who allows his fears to enter his heart during war is guilty of four Torah transgressions.

Indeed, even when one goes to a dangerous place, if this is done by divine commandment, he may fully trust in God, and lack of such trust is regarded as a sin.

This conforms fully to the explanation of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, in his work *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem*:

The person whose trust is blemished, in spite of the fact that God has elevated him to such a high level [of closeness to God], is culpable for punishment and to receive God's wrath, as happened to the Jewish nation in the wilderness...

You should know that the precondition for trust consists of listening to God's words, adhering to His Torah, and being beware of sins.

...But if a person deludes himself into thinking that he trusts [in God], and in fact [he] transgresses God's Torah, then he is like those about whom Yirmeyahu said (*Yirmeyahu* 7:4, 5), "Do not trust in lying words, saying: 'The temple of God...' But only if you will thoroughly amend your ways and doings." And understand this, because this is the very substance of trust.

Shaul Ha'melech's experience in the war of Michmash, and what caused him and his offspring to lose the kingdom of Israel, should be understood in a similar manner. The prophet Shmuel told Shaul Ha'melech specifically (*Shmuel I* 10:8), "Wait for seven days until I will come to you and tell you what to do." In such a specific case, it is clear that adherence to God's commandment to wait and do nothing is the most practical act imaginable!

But Shaul decided on his own not to wait anymore for Shmuel, in view of the reinforcement of the Philistines' camp, which in the meantime formed against him, and due to the number of deserters from his army that increased daily and from fear of the great strength of the Philistines (*Shmuel I* 13:11). Our Sages explain in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 12b) that this fear caused Shaul's downfall, since having heard God's words through His prophet, Shaul should have been confident and positive in his victory, and waited for Shmuel to come no matter what.

The Torah says about the splitting of the Sea of Reeds (*Shemos* 14:16), "And the Children of Israel will enter into the sea on dry land." Our Sages learn from this (*Shemos Rabbah* 21:10) that Nachshon the son of Aminadav demonstrated ultimate devotion and jumped into the stormy sea, and only then did the waters part, and the Jews passed on dry land. Rabbi Nebenzahl, in his *Sichos Le'sefer Shemos* (*Parashas Beshalach*), tries to understand how Nachshon was permitted to do this suicidal act. His answer is that Nachshon jumped into the sea after God commanded Moshe to split the sea (*Shemos* 14:16) and after there was a specific Heavenly command, "Speak to the Children of Israel and let them go."

However, even though it certainly was an act of ultimate devotion, the fact is that no one else thought to jump into the water and to continue before the waters actually parted. It must be that it was not clear that Hashem wanted them to do so. Therefore, the difficulty remains as to how Nachshon was permitted to perform such an act before the sea actually split. True, Hashem commanded Moshe to split the sea, but wasn't it possible that the sea would be split at some later

time? Without an explicit command to jump, whoever did so seems to have risked his life without just cause.

It appears that this matter is best understood according to the explanation of Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, which will be presented below.

The Torah says (*Shemos* 14:15), “Why do you cry to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them go.” Our Sages say (*Mechiltah*, *Shemos* 14:15), “We have learned that Moshe was standing and praying. God told him, “There is no time for long prayers when the Jews are in trouble.”

At first this is not easy to understand, because it is precisely in troubling times that one should offer long prayers and plea for Heavenly mercy. However, God told him, “Speak to the Children of Israel and let them go’ — all they have to do is go, because the sea will not act as an obstacle.” In this case, prayer was no longer needed, being akin to breaking in through an open door, as Rabbi Levovitz explains:

Prayer here is superfluous, since the sea will not act as an obstacle as it is. The *Talmud* (*Sukkah* 14a) says, “Why is the prayer of the righteous similar to a pitchfork? To tell you, just like the pitchfork turns the grain in the granary from one place to another, so does the prayer of the righteous turn God’s opinion from the trait of judgment to the trait of mercy.” This is the essence of prayer...but here there is nothing to turn because the sea will not act as an obstacle in any case.

Rabbi Levovitz explains further that even though prayer



is needed to attain results in a natural manner,<sup>2</sup> even so, prayer for meriting natural Divine Providence was not needed in the case of splitting the Sea of Reeds, since the entire reality was miraculous rather than natural. To quote him:

All this applies only to the natural world, but it is quite understood that in the supernatural world the concept of prayer does not apply, because there are no obstacles there, and there is no need for prayer. This is what God said to Moshe, “Why do you cry to Me? The sea shall not serve as an obstacle to them.” [God] disclosed to Moshe the secret of the Jewish nation, that all of them are in the supernatural world. The sea shall not serve as an obstacle to them.

In the supernatural world there are no hindrances and no need for prayer...because they are above nature and above prayer. This is because the secret of prayer holds only in the natural course of events.

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2. We find this in the sayings of our Sages on the verse (*Bereishis* 2:5), “And every plant in the field before it was in the earth...for God had not caused rain to fall upon the earth, and there was no man to till the soil.” Rashi there quotes our Sages to the effect that God did not cause rain to fall in order to grow the plants, since there was no man to till the soil — because there was no one to appreciate the benefit of rain. When Adam came and knew that the world needed rain, he prayed for it and it fell, and the trees and plants grew. Rabbi Levovitz explains, “Rain is a natural occurrence. Without rain nothing grows. And prayer came for this purpose, because this was embedded into the world from the time of its creation that all [plants] should wait below the surface of the ground, and should not grow and should not give anything, until man comes. He will take them [up to grow above the ground]. And this taking is by means of prayer.”

In keeping with this understanding of the special status of the Jews prior to the splitting of the sea, when they were in a state which was entirely “supernatural,” to the point that even prayer was superfluous, it would appear that Nachshon’s act should not be considered as suicidal. Under these circumstances such an act may be performed, even in the absence of a specific Heavenly promise that the sea would split immediately after he jumped into it and the guarantee that he would be saved. Nothing in his actions could be interpreted as depending on miracles within the framework of the natural world, because the entire reality was miraculous, in which all kinds of courses of action are different. In a world of this kind, it is definitely permitted to depend on God in a supernatural manner.

This principle manifests itself similarly in regard to the manna that fell in the wilderness, about which the Torah said (*Shemos* 16:19), “One should not leave over from it until the morning.” What is the meaning of this command, and why were they prohibited to perform a simple act of leaving the manna over, so that food should not be lacking for the next day? Should one not be apprehensive that maybe tomorrow the manna will not fall as it did today, because today’s manna arrived in a miraculous manner?

The answer is that, indeed, even a person who trusts that God will provide his sustenance tomorrow is not allowed to expose himself and his family to the danger of hunger. In view of this, lacking a specific Heavenly promise, a person ought to worry about tomorrow and avoid putting himself in danger. In addition, there is a prohibition against testing whether God will perform a miracle for him (*Devarim* 6:16,

Rambam's *Sefer Ha'mitzvos*, negative *mitzvah* 64).<sup>3</sup>

However, when God promises via His prophet that manna will fall tomorrow just as it fell today, one is obligated to trust that this will indeed be so. When dealing with such

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3. Rabbi Nebenzahl explains that, should we implement this approach in our daily life, it is quite possible that it all depends on our spiritual standing. This is because it is a major rule in Heavenly conduct that, "a person is measured using the same measure that he uses" (*Sotah* 7a). The *Talmud* brings a number of examples of this rule. Some of these are, "One who has compassion on people, Heaven has compassion on him" (*Shabbos* 151b); "One who expunges his desires, Heaven expunges his sins" (*Yoma* 23a), and many others.

It appears that this rule also applies to the trait of trust. The following story will illuminate the above rule to some extent. The Rav of Brisk resided in Warsaw at the start of World War II, after it was occupied by the Germans. Food was scarce, especially for the Jews. However, there was one Jew there who made it his business, daily, to bring bread to the Rav of Brisk. When 8 Tishrei arrived, the Rav thought to himself that tomorrow would be 9 Tishrei, and it is a Torah *mitzvah* to eat on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. Because it was wartime and nobody knew what would happen tomorrow, he saved the food that was brought to him on the 8th and left some over for *Yom Kippur* eve. On the morrow, the Jew brought the Rav the daily portion and added that he wanted to also bring fish in honor of *Yom Kippur*, but a bomb fell and destroyed the fish that he had prepared. The Rav of Brisk said, "This happened because I did not have sufficient trust in God and I left food from yesterday for today."

Concerning this, Rabbi Nebenzahl notes that such conduct is suitable for a righteous person with the standing of the Rav of Brisk, but not for an ordinary person. On the contrary, ordinary people are obligated to leave over food in such a situation, because one cannot expect he will find food on the next day. However, a person of elevated spiritual standing may, according to his understanding, have a higher level of trust, and everyone who is spiritually greater than another should trust more and decrease his resorting to human action.

a supernatural reality, there is no point in making an effort and there is no point in worrying. Leaving food for the next day would be regarded as lack of trust.

In keeping with this, Ramban (*Bamidbar* 13:2) explains the sin of the spies and clarifies that the Jewish nation said that since they were going to war, they should, as is done in such cases, collect intelligence, gain knowledge of the roads, and be advised as to which city they should attack first. This was indeed natural and sensible planning before going into battle. Still, Ramban explains that this was sinful because they were a knowledgeable generation, who had observed constant Heavenly miraculous salvation, and in view of this, the people should have followed the *ananei ha'kavod* (Clouds of Glory) without a thorough investigation and without worrying about the future. This is because they had seen with their own eyes that God saved them without their resorting to natural means. Now, why would they need ordinary war preparations at a time when they were within an extraordinary reality of special miraculous Providence?

Rabbi Dessler, in his work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, adds that when the Jews saw that God performed miraculous acts for them in the wilderness, they should have depended solely on trust and not resorted to human action at all. This is because a generation that lives entirely under supernatural conditions feels the existence of Divine Providence. And this feeling, as above, makes it unnecessary to resort to natural means.

These special rules of belief and trust that applied to the generation of the wilderness, based on the miraculous conduct that they experienced, apply even more to a prophet. In

keeping with this, we shall examine what has been said about Eliyahu Ha'navi (*Melachim I* 17:21), who took the dead child of the woman from Tzarfaz, "and he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to God and said, 'God, my Lord, let this child's soul come back to him.' And God hearkened to the voice of Eliyahu; and the soul of the child came back into him, and he lived."

*Tosafos* in *Bava Basra* 114b ask that, according to the opinion that Eliyahu was a *Kohen*, how was he permitted to stretch himself upon the dead child, since a *Kohen* may not make himself ritually impure through a dead body?

*Tosafos* reply that Eliyahu was permitted because he was certain that, by doing so, he would bring the child back to life, and a *Kohen* may make himself ritually impure to save a life.

The Netziv of Volozhin contests this explanation. Why did the *Tosafos* need to say that Eliyahu was certain that the child would live? Even if this was doubtful, it is still permitted to lie on the child in order to bring him back to life, because a *Kohen* may make himself ritually impure to save a life even if there is only a possibility that he will be successful.

Rabbi Nebenzahl notes (*ibid.*) that it appears that this difficulty can be resolved in a simple manner as follows:

Lying on a dead person and believing that this will bring him back to life cannot be regarded as a life-saving act, because in the natural course of events there is no chance that such an act will bring about the desired result. Hence, a *Kohen* who is not a prophet as Eliyahu was would have been prohibited from doing so with the hope that the boy would come back

to life. For this reason, the *Tosafos* explain that this act was permitted only because Eliyahu was certain, based on the strength of his Torah study or on the strength of his gift of prophecy, that the boy would indeed come back to life. The certainty of the results made it possible to regard this as a life-saving act.

We see from this that the way in which a prophet goes about attaining his goal is different from that of an ordinary person. An ordinary person's obligation to resort to natural means applies only to acts that, under normal circumstances, are expected to yield the desired results. As opposed to this, the prophet is absolved from resorting to natural means, and all his doings are supernatural and Heavenly. If this is so, then even an act that under normal circumstances is of no avail and cannot be regarded as life-saving, is permitted to the prophet, even if it involves touching a dead person. This is due to the fact that the prophet was certain that he would succeed in bringing the boy back to life with his action. He based this on the strength of his spiritual standing and of God's word that pulsed in his heart.

Moreover, we have seen in the preceding chapters that, at times, resorting to natural means not only does not help, but it may even serve to avert divine abundance and Providence. A salient example of this is the case of Yosef, who told the head butler (*Bereishis* 40:14), "You will remember me when it will be well with you, and you will mention me and remove me from this house." The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 89:4, 6-5) explains that, as a result of saying "remember me" and "mention me," Yosef remained in jail for an additional two years. This means that even in a dark dungeon, forgotten

by everybody, Yosef's decision to turn to the head butler for assistance is regarded as negative and only extended his time in jail. Why is this so? Because it was a superfluous and improper act considering Yosef's personality and spiritual standing, and in view of the very poor chance that this head butler would indeed help him.

Another example of resorting to natural means that was harmful in the end was regarding the divine command in the case of *Shmittah*. When God commands not to work in the fields during the *Shmittah* year, a person is obligated to follow this command without reckoning and doubts.

Hence, when the Torah presents the question (*Vayikra* 25:20), "And should you say, 'What will we eat during the seventh year?'" this is not considered to be proper planning and proper resorting to natural means. On the contrary, the great Chassidic masters saw in the question something that prevents the attainment of divine abundance.

The need arose for a special divine blessing for *Shmittah* observers, in order to fill the lack of abundance referred to in the question.<sup>4</sup> Had the question not been asked, divine abundance would have been apparent during the *Shmittah* year, as it is during ordinary years when people till their land, and this without any need for a special Heavenly blessing. This is because even during ordinary years, it is not the cultivating of the land that is the source of a person's sustenance, but the

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4. This is the manner in which the subject is explained by R. Elimelech of Lyzhensk, in his work *Noam Elimelech* on the above verse; his statement was presented above in Chapter 3.

divine abundance that is entirely independent of a person's toil. The special need for divine blessing for the *Shmittah* year arose because of the peoples' question, which showed a blemish in their trust in God, since a specific divine command was given not to work the land.

This principle also manifests itself in two protestations that our Sages put forward against Chizkiyahu Ha'melech (*Pesachim* 56a). First, because he chopped off the doors of the Holy Temple and sent them as a bribe to the Assyrian king, so that the latter would not conquer Yerushalayim.<sup>5</sup> Second, because he blocked the water of the upper Gichon wellspring in order to deny water to the soldiers of the Assyrian king, who laid siege to his city.<sup>6</sup> These complaints are, at first sight, difficult to understand: Why should a king not be permitted to carry out political or military actions in order to protect the lives of his citizens?

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5. *Melachim II* (18:13-16): "Now in the fourteenth year of Chizkiyahu Ha'melech did Sancherev, king of Assyria, come up against all the fortified cities of Yehudah, and take them. And Chizkiyahu king of Yehudah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, 'I have sinned; return from me; that which you will impose on me shall I bear.' And the king of Assyria imposed upon Chizkiyahu, the king of Yehudah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Chizkiyahu gave him all the silver that was found in the House of God and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Chizkiyahu cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple of God and from the doorposts which Chizkiyahu Ha'melech of Yehudah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria."

6. The second story appears in *Divrei Ha'yamim II* (32:30), "Chizkiyahu plugged up the source of waters of the upper Gichon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Chizkiyahu prospered in all his works."



Isn't it his obligation to deny his supply of water to the enemy's army? Had there been a specific order from the prophet not to carry out these acts, then such a complaint would be justified. But lacking such a specific order, what is meant by this criticism on actions that every average person would have done?

Apparently, Chizkiyahu was not an average person, and he should have been confident that a calamity would not befall him because of the power of Torah that pulsed within him. We have seen (*Midrash Eichah* 4:15) that Chizkiyahu attained such a sublime and splendid level of trust that, based on it, he said to God, "I lack strength to kill or to pursue or to sing praises, but I shall sleep on my bed and You do."

Rabbi Nebenzahl explains that following God's ways can serve as the basis of trust in God, even in the absence of a specific prophecy. This is so, even though it is more general (as compared with a specific prophecy) and encompasses many details (613 *mitzvos*), something that makes one's ability to properly assess God's salvation almost impossible. Still, Chizkiyahu Ha'melech was required to behave differently than an ordinary person and trust in God that He would protect him. This is because we are dealing with a generation about which our Sages say (*Sanhedrin* 94b) that it was searched "from Dan to Be'er Sheva" (from north to south) and not a single person was found who was ignorant in Torah. Every boy and girl was well-versed in the laws of ritual purity and impurity.

Concerning such a spiritual standing, a specific Heavenly promise was given (*Vayikra* 26:3, 6), "If you will walk in My

statutes...And I will give peace in the land, and you will lie down, and no one will cause you to be afraid, and I will rid evil beasts from the land; neither will the sword pass through your land.” Therefore, excessive resorting to natural means at the time when God promised protection is regarded as contempt of God’s promise. It is for this reason that our Sages did not look favorably upon Chizkiyahu Ha’melech, who chopped off the gold plating from the Temple doors and gave it to the enemy in order to pacify him, and also blocked off the sources of the upper Gichon stream in Yerushalayim.

A similar criticism was levied by the prophet Chanani upon Asa, king of Yehudah (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 16:1-5). Asa was facing the following situation:

Basha, the king of Yisrael, signed a pact with the king of Aram against Asa, the king of Yehudah. After this pact, Basha went to war and even started building Ramah as a blockade to keep Asa in Yehudah.

In response to this, Asa sent an enormous amount of gold and silver from the Holy Temple treasury to bribe the King of Aram to break his pact with Basha.

Indeed, upon seeing the treasures, the King of Aram changed his mind and even attacked a number of cities in Yisrael at the northern border, an action that caused Basha to give up the construction of Ramah in order to free his forces for protecting his northern border.

Following Asa’s act, the prophet Chanani was sent to admonish him (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 16:7), “By depending on the king of Aram and not depending on your God, the army

of the king of Aram has escaped your hands.” Rashi explains (*Melachim I* 11:19 in the name of the *Seder Olam Rabbah*) that starting from that time, Aram harassed the Jews until they were exiled from the land. On the other hand, had Asa trusted in God and had he not feared the pact between the kingdom of Yisrael and Aram, Asa would have decisively smitten Aram and also would have saved the fantastic sum that he paid Aram.

Moreover, our Sages note that the Heavenly edict that caused the Jewish kingdom to split was originally decreed for only thirty-six years, corresponding to the thirty-six years that Shlomo Ha’melech lived with Pharaoh’s daughter. These thirty-six years ended precisely when Basha went to war against Asa. Had Asa trusted in God, the entire Jewish kingdom would have returned to the House of David.

Rabbi Nebenzahl notes that had the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yisrael become reunited, this most probably would have prevented the destruction of the Holy Temple. Asa missed an opportune moment because of his lack of trust in God, and this caused ruination for generations.

The question arises as to why our Sages criticized Asa who, after all, resorted to simple natural means and did not depend on miracles. Isn’t this precisely what he should have done?

Rabbi Nebenzahl replies that if we were not dealing with Asa, there would have been no criticism of this action. But Asa experienced special Heavenly conduct based on miracles. Indeed, the prophet Chanani specifically told Asa that the criticism of his behavior stemmed from the time

he deviated from Heavenly conduct in the war against the Kushim. There, he faced Zerach Ha'kushi who came with an army of a "multitude of thousands."

Asa called out, "God, do You have a problem to save the weak from the many...?" Surely as far as God was concerned there was no difference between a powerful army and a weak one. "Help us, our God, because we rely on You, and in Your Name we come upon this multitude." And, indeed, God helped Asa defeat the Kushim and smite them completely (ibid., 14:8-14).

Not only this, but as a result of the great victory, the Jewish nation underwent a major spiritual awakening and, headed by Asa, they cleared out idolatry from the land of Yehudah, and the people made a covenant (ibid.), "to seek the God of their fathers with all their heart and all their soul, and they swore to God with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with shofars." Such a king, of such a nation, was obligated to depend on God!

As compared with these examples, we shall present one from *Tanach* where there was no divine promise and the nation was not in an exalted spiritual state that allows one to expect special, supernatural conduct. The rule for this situation is, as established by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, that "everyone who depends solely on miracles without proper preparation, without a revelation, without a true Heavenly inspiration, and without Heavenly assistance, he aspires for what does not suit him."

The following case appears to be the direct opposite of what we have found concerning Chizkiyahu and Asa, and which,

without understanding the above principle, would appear to be an absolute contradiction between two sources.

Chapter 23 of *Melachim II* describes the image of King Yoshiyahu. Seventeen verses describe the destruction of the forbidden altars and the thorough smashing of the idols that King Yoshiyahu carried out. “And before him, there was no king who turned to God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might,<sup>7</sup> according to all the laws of Moshe; neither anyone like him arose after him.”

Moreover, it is explained in the *Talmud* (*Ta’anis* 22b) that when Yoshiyahu was about to die, the prophet Yirmeyahu noticed that his lips were moving. Yirmeyahu was apprehensive that maybe, since he was in pain, Yoshiyahu was uttering something improper. He bent over to hear and heard Yoshiyahu say, “God is righteous; it was I who disobeyed His words.” (This verse was subsequently incorporated by Yirmeyahu into his *Eichah*, chap. 1). Upon hearing this, Yirmeyahu proclaimed about King Yoshiyahu (*ibid.*, 4:20), “The breath of our nostrils, God’s anointed.”

But behold, *Melachim* (II 23) ends on a most tragic note, “In his days, Pharaoh-Nechoh, the king of Mitzrayim went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and King Yoshiyahu went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.” The *Talmud* (*ibid.*) even notes that “they made his body like a sieve.” How did this happen? Why

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7. Exactly like what the Torah demands of a person (*Devarim* 6:5), “And you should love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your means.”

did the righteous King Yoshiyahu meet such a tragic death?

A detailed accounting is to be found in *Divrei Ha'yamim II* (chap. 35), where it says that Pharaoh wanted to pass through the Land of Israel during his war against the king of Assyria, without any intention to wage war against Israel. Pharaoh specifically told Yoshiyahu that if he would not go to war against him, he would not destroy him. Yoshiyahu was of the opinion that a generation as exalted as his deserved to merit the promise (*Vayikra* 26:6), "And neither will the sword go through your land." This was taken to mean that not only would enemy armies not fight against Israel, but such armies should not even pass through the Land of Israel. Because of this Yoshiyahu fully trusted in God that He would help him overpower the Egyptian army, and so he refused to allow Pharaoh-Nechoh to pass through. However, this trust rested on a very shaky foundation and Yoshiyahu was killed in the battle of Megiddo.

Why did this trust rely on a very shaky foundation? We have seen with respect to Chizkiyahu Ha'melech that in view of the spiritual standing of his generation, there were grounds to depend on the Heavenly promise. What was different in the case of Yoshiyahu?

This question is posed in the *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 22b) and the answer there is, "But he did not know that his generation did not behave properly."

Indeed, we find (*Melachim II* 23:26), "Notwithstanding, God did not turn away from the fierceness of His great wrath that caused His anger to be kindled against Yehudah because of all the provocations with which Manashe had provoked

Him.” And our Sages explain (*Midrash Rabbah, Eichah* 1:53) that Yoshiyahu did not know that his entire generation was full of hidden idolaters.

Yoshiyahu sent a pair of *Talmudic* scholars to remove idols from Jewish houses; they would enter a house and find nothing. When they left, the house members asked them to close the door. When the doors were closed, the image of an idol that was carved on the two door halves could be seen. The household members would ridicule the two who departed: the very same ones who came and took apart the idol by opening the doors also restored the idol by closing the door.

So it turned out that Yoshiyahu’s generation really was not at a proper spiritual level and did not merit the fulfillment of the promise “the sword will not pass through your land.”

But the question still remains: Why was this held against Yoshiyahu, who was not aware of all this? He trusted in God and conducted himself properly according to the spiritual level of his generation as he perceived it. Why was a death sentence meted out against him by God?

In connection with this we find in the *Talmud* (ibid.), “Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, ‘Why was Yoshiyahu punished? Because he should have consulted Yirmeyahu and did not do so.’”

This in itself requires an explanation. Yoshiyahu was not aware of the fact that things were not the way he imagined them to be, so why should he regard it as necessary to consult the prophet?

The Maharsha answers this question as follows:

It says in *Midrash Rabbah* (*Eichah*, *ibid.*) that the statement by Pharaoh, “What to me and to you king of Yehudah...and God said to frighten me,” was referring to what God said to Yirmeyahu, “This is the tradition that I received from my teacher Yeshayahu (*Yeshayahu* 19:2), ‘And I will provoke Egypt against Egypt,’” meaning, that this is indeed an internal war of Egypt, and Israel should not mix into it.

This means that Pharaoh referred Yoshiyahu to Yeshayahu’s statement, from which it can be inferred that Pharaoh may indeed pass through Israel in his war that has nothing to do with Israel.

Nevertheless, Yoshiyahu did not hearken to this because he assumed that God would not assist Pharaoh, the idolater, to pass through the Land of Israel and the Jewish nation that was innocent of idolatry. Yoshiyahu was of the opinion that this statement did not apply to his nation in its exalted spiritual state. On the basis of his wrong assessment of the state of the nation, Yoshiyahu ignored Yeshayahu’s statement. Yoshiyahu did not consult with the prophet Yirmeyahu to ascertain whether he was actually permitted to disregard the statement by Yeshayahu, and whether the nation was indeed innocent of idolatry to the point that he was permitted to depend on miracles and to refuse the king of Egypt in contradiction to the directive of Yeshayahu.

Rabbi Nebenzahl cites Yoshiyahu Ha’melech’s mistake as an example of someone who trusts in God and fails miserably because his trust did not fit his spiritual level at that time. Indeed, we are dealing here with an exceptionally righteous



king, who had an exalted trust in God, and on its basis he faced the mighty king of Egypt even without a Heavenly promise, but failed because his trust did not conform to the spiritual level of the nation.

We find from perusing these sources that a person must fit the extent of his trust in God to his spiritual standing and to the quality of his actions, or to the fulfillment of a specific Heavenly promise. Excessive effort under conditions when God has promised protection is equivalent to total disregard of the Heavenly promise. This being so, at a proper spiritual level, excessive effort is regarded as a blemish in the trait of trust.

The same applies in the case of a specific Heavenly promise or when the nation has attained such a spiritual standing, concerning which there exists the general Heavenly promise (*Vayikra* 26:3, 6), "If you will follow my decrees...and I shall give peace in the land, and you will lie down and not be afraid, and I shall remove wild beasts from the land and the sword will not pass through your land."

As compared with this, at an ordinary level of trust, it is imperative to resort to natural means and to watch out for any danger; and lack of effort and care is, as mentioned above, regarded as sinful, since the well-known rule is that one should not depend on miracles.



## CHAPTER 8

### WHEN ONE MAY TAKE A RISK AND WHEN “ONE MAY NOT DEPEND ON MIRACLES”

**I**N THIS CHAPTER we shall focus on the question of when it is permitted to take a risk and depend on trust in God, and when a person is obligated to rely on his own human effort and is even forbidden to depend on miracles. We shall attempt to analyze this matter according to the doctrine put forth by Rambam's son, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam.

“The history of our forefathers is a sign of the future of their progeny.” We have learned how to prepare for every calamity from the story of Yaakov, who made preparations to face an imminent armed danger. He did it by gifts, prayer, and war. We have already discussed Yaakov's resorting to natural means, and this is not puzzling in view of the situation that he was facing. Still, when we examine Yaakov's inner world, how he prepared himself mentally for his confrontation with Esav, we are facing a great enigma. One would expect Yaakov, who attained the pinnacle of belief in God and who reached a high level of trust in Him when he left Charan,<sup>1</sup>

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1. Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, in his work, *Hamaspiq*

to demonstrate inner calm and composure that is typical of people who are confident that their way is the most correct one and that God's salvation is under way. Instead, we find in *Parashas Beshalach* that before dealing with Esav, Yaakov simply is afraid.

Yaakov ceased fearing Esav only after the angel with whom he struggled the entire night brought him in the morning the tidings of salvation and victory by telling him (*Bereishis* 32:28), "For you strove with God and men, and you have prevailed." But prior to receiving a specific promise in connection with this, Yaakov feared his brother Esav, as it says (*ibid.*, 32:8), "And Yaakov was very fearful and distressed." The question arises: How is it possible that a person who believes in God does not trust in Him at a time of a crisis and is stricken with fright?

Rambam, in the seventh chapter of his *Shemonah Perakim*, explains that, "The qualifications for attaining prophecy do not include the requirement that the person should be perfect in all his character traits to the point of being innocent of imperfections. This is because... we find (*Shmuel I* 16:2) that Shmuel was afraid of Shaul and said, 'How will I go?

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*Le'ovdei Hashem*, in a comprehensive chapter devoted to trust, explains in connection with this, "It should suffice for you to remember what the Torah said about him, how he gave up the worldly possessions of his father Yitzchak and of his grandfather Avraham and set forth from Be'er Sheva to Charan with his staff. He walked, he had no animal to ride, no friend to enjoy his company, and no sword to protect himself, as it says (*Bereishis* 32:11), 'Because I crossed this Jordan with my staff' — the ground was his bed and the stone, his pillow."

Shaul may hear about it and kill me,' and Yaakov was afraid of facing Esav, as it says (*Bereishis* 32:8), 'And Yaakov was very fearful.'" According to Rambam, there was indeed a deficiency in Yaakov's and Shmuel's trust in God, but a deficiency in trust is not detrimental to prophecy. This approach by Rambam in his *Shemonah Perakim* is contested by the commentary *Chesed L'Avraham*:

This statement is problematic, because the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 4a) has already asked, "It is written, 'I am with you and I shall guard you wherever you go,' and it is written, 'And Yaakov was very fearful.' [If he had God's promise, why was he afraid? And the *Talmud* itself answers that he was afraid] maybe sin would be a cause [for the promise to be nullified].

As for Shmuel, this difficulty is also resolved in the *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 8b), "In cases when harm can be expected, the matter is different." This means that Shmuel was afraid because when harm is likely, a person may not depend on miracles. In view of this, why did Rambam think Yaakov's and Shmuel's fright showed a lack of trust in God? This difficulty is resolved by Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, in his work *Kovetz Ma'amarim* (chap. 3; the essay on trust), who states that Rambam's difficulty with Yaakov's and Shmuel's behavior has no bearing on the questions of the *Talmud* for the following reason:

The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on *Mishlei* (14:26), explains that there are two parts to trust:

1. Trust that emanates from a specific divine promise concerning a certain event.

2. Ordinary trust (that is called “shelter,” as we find, “It is good to be sheltered by God”), where a person trusts God even without a specific divine promise, but on the basis of his belief that God is a merciful and compassionate Father Who is only interested in his good.<sup>2</sup>

The *Talmud* asks how it can be that Yaakov feared Esav after he was specifically promised by God that He would save him. Didn't he believe God's promise? The *Talmud* resolves this by saying that he was afraid that he may have sinned in a manner that annulled the promise, meaning that Yaakov believed that God's promise was conditional and that a sin could invalidate it.<sup>3</sup>

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2. To quote him,

Because there are two parts of trust: one, that God promises to give him a large fortune... and this is called trust; and two, that God does not promise, but the person himself puts his trust in God and this is what is called “sheltering,” as it says, “The Rock, we were sheltered by Him.” This is what is meant by the verse, “It is good to be sheltered by God than to trust in people who promised.” And this is what it says here, “in the fear of God”...when God promises, it is a strong and powerful reliance. And also one's progeny, who were not promised anything, will be sheltered by God.

3. On the other hand, see Maharsha on *Berachos* (4a): “The promise given to Yaakov was not given on the condition that his merits would not lessen; and sin does not nullify a promise when a person is highly meritorious. But both things together — scarcity of merits and sin — may have combined in order to bring about nullification of the promise.” It apparently follows from the statement by the Maharsha that Yaakov did not fear that Esav would kill him at precisely this occasion, since he had a divine promise concerning that, and hence he should not have feared. But Yaakov was apprehensive that through Hashem's kindness to him on

Rambam, on the other hand, questioned Yaakov's behavior for an entirely different reason. Indeed it can be understood that he was apprehensive that the specific promise that he was given was no longer valid because of non-conformance to the basic condition on which it was based, that is, lack of sin. But even lacking a specific divine promise, a person is obligated to trust in God because the obligation to trust, in the sense of "ordinary trust" and "shelter," applies even when lacking a specific promise, and prevails in every person. For this reason Rambam believes that Yaakov's fear should be regarded as lack of trust in God.

Similarly to this, in relation to the prophet Shmuel, the *Talmud* asks why he was afraid to embark on the divine mission to crown David, since the Torah promised that people on a *mitzvah* mission are not harmed, as it says (*Shemos* 34:24), "And no one will covet your land when you will ascend to appear before God three times a year." To this the *Talmud* answers that this promise does not apply when harm is likely.

In contrast to this, Rambam's reservation was that Shmuel should have trusted God under any circumstances, even without relying on the promise of the Torah concerning *mitzvah* emissaries. He should have trusted in the sense of "shelter" and "ordinary trust." Concerning this kind of trust, the problem of "maybe sin annulled the promise" does not

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the basis of the promise, the result would be that his merits would lessen, because a person for whom a miracle is performed loses part of his merits. This being so, then under different circumstances the sin might cause him to die (since he would lack merits for protection).

apply, because this trust applies even to a sinner, and even an evil person who trusts in God “will be surrounded by kindness.”

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman proves this with the following: Should we say that trust in God does not apply to a sinner, then the entire subject of trust in God becomes inapplicable “because there is no one so entirely righteous on earth that he only does good and never sins” (*Koheles* 7:20). This forces us to assume that trust in God applies to a sinner, too, and the fear that “maybe sin will be a cause” does not apply to him.

Rambam questioned why Yaakov and Shmuel were afraid and why they did not trust God simply, as is expected of everyone.

Similarly, in his work *Ha'emunah V'habitachon*,<sup>4</sup> Ramban goes to great lengths to explain that Yaakov could not depend on the promise he was given when he left for Charan, when he was told (*Bereishis* 28:15), “And behold I am with you and will guard you wherever you go,” because he was apprehensive that maybe this promise would not be fulfilled, either because of sin or because he had already used up his merits with the miracles that had happened to him up to that time.<sup>5</sup> And, lacking a specific promise, “not everyone

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4. See *Collected Writings of Ramban*, Mosad Ha'rav Kook, Jerusalem 5724, vol. 1, p. 353, *Ha'emunah V'habitachon*, chap. 2).

5. Ramban, there, adds an explanation concerning the natural approach employed by Yaakov. He establishes the concept of “you (man) should have helped Me,” according to which Yaakov resorted to all kinds of actions in order not to “bother” God to perform a miracle and change



who believes, trusts.”

Why is this? Without a divine promise, is there no obligation to trust in God? When may a person be satisfied with his trust in God, and when is he supposed to be apprehensive and fearful, careful and watchful in face of existing dangers? What is the point of balance between trust in God and a person's obligation to make an effort to avoid risks?

We find in the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 32a) that Rav did not cross over a ramshackle bridge when a non-Jew was standing on it. He was afraid that maybe that person was being judged in heaven and, if he was judged unfavorably, the bridge would collapse.

On the other hand, Shmuel would cross over a bridge only when a non-Jew was standing on it, because the Satan does not work against two nations simultaneously. Rabbi Yanai would check a bridge and then cross over it, in keeping with his doctrine, “A person should never stand in a dangerous place and say that a miracle will happen for him, because maybe it will not happen. And if, indeed, a miracle took place, then it will be deducted from his merits.”<sup>6</sup> Rav

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the established world order for him. For this reason, Yaakov acted in the sense of “the way things are done.” Nevertheless, this still does not resolve the question as to why Yaakov was afraid of Esav.

6. Thus, we find in the *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 20b) that Rav Ada bar Ahavah was annoyed with Rav Huna, who intentionally took him along to retrieve his wine from under a ramshackle house, so that the merits of Rav Ada would protect him from the collapse of the house. Indeed, the house miraculously did not collapse, but Rav Ada was annoyed because a person for whom a miracle is performed loses some of his merits.

Chanin explained that the source for this is in the statement of Yaakov (*Bereishis* 32:11), “I am not worthy of all the mercies and of all the truth,” meaning, that a person may not be confident that God will be kind to him, because he may not be worthy of this.

Similarly, we find in the *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 39b) that a father asked his son to climb onto the roof of their house to perform the commandment of *shiluach ha’ken*. Even though these were two *mitzvos* (honoring one’s parents and the *mitzvah* of *shiluach ha’ken*) for which the reward of longevity is stated in the Torah, the son fell off the roof and was killed. The *Talmud* asks, “But we have a rule that ‘people involved in performing a *mitzvah* are protected from harm both on the way to its performance and back,’ so how did this tragedy happen?” The *Talmud* resolves this question by saying that the son climbed up to the roof using a ramshackle ladder, and so the rule did not apply because an element of danger was involved. Just the opposite, in this case, the rule to follow should have been, “One should not depend on miracles.”

This is the explanation given in the *Talmud* for Shmuel Ha’navi’s fear of Shaul at the time when God sent him to crown David.<sup>7</sup> The *Talmud* wondered why he was afraid and did not trust in God, and why he did not want to fulfill

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7. Concerning Shmuel Ha’navi (*Shmuel I* 16:1-2) we find, “And God said to Shmuel, ‘How long are you going to mourn Shaul... fill your horn with oil and I shall send you to Yishai of Beis Lechem, because I provided myself a king among his sons.’ And Shmuel said, ‘How will I go? Should Shaul hear this, he will kill me.’ And God said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I came to offer a sacrifice to God.’”

God's command. The answer is that a person is commanded not to depend on miracles and our Sages forbid one to place himself in a dangerous situation.<sup>8</sup>

Even in the Beis HaMikdash, which was the place where miracles occurred on a regular basis, things were done in a natural manner without relying on miracles. There are many sources for this,<sup>9</sup> but it is most fitting to quote Rashi

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8. The Jerusalem *Talmud* (*Yoma* 1: 4) brings a source for the prohibition to depend on miracles from the Torah (*Devarim* 6:16), "Do not test your God."

9. In connection with this, see the statement of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller in his work *Tosfos Yom Tov*, at the beginning of *Maseches Demai*, to the effect that we find at the beginning of *Maseches Yoma* that a substitute *Kohen Gadol* was appointed in order to replace the officiating *Kohen Gadol*, should he be disqualified on *Yom Kippur*. This was done in spite of the fact that it is stated in *Pirkei Avos* (5:7), "Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Beis HaMikdash:...no seminal emission occurred to the *Kohen Gadol* on *Yom Kippur*." Similarly, we find (*Shekalim* 6: 4) that the table that stood next to the ramp of the Altar was made of marble, rather than silver, in order to prevent the meat of the sacrifices from becoming putrid. This was done in spite of the fact that it is quoted in the previously mentioned chapter of *Pirkei Avos* that the sacrificial meat never became spoiled.

Additionally, Rashi (*Shabbos* 124a) says that bars were placed between the sets of the Showbread in order to prevent moldiness, and they did not depend on the miracle stated in *Pirkei Avos*, "No disqualification was found in the *omer*, or in the Two Loaves, or in the Showbread." We similarly find in *Shekalim* (end of chap. 4) that when wine was purchased for libations in the Beis HaMikdash, a clause was inserted into the agreement with the seller that, should the wine become sour, it could be returned to him, and they did not depend on the miracle related in the *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 42b) that wine brought from the Land of Yehudah never soured.

(*Shabbos* 22b), who explains that the Torah commanded to light the seven lamps of the *Menorah* in spite of the fact that the seventh lamp did not go out. This should be done because “the Torah does not depend on miracles.”

The Ran<sup>10</sup> explains at length that it is one of the foundations of our faith that the fate of a person is in the hands of God, and as a rule, a person dies only when his time has come or when death has been decreed upon him. However, God has established that there should be dangerous places and situations that endanger a person’s existence and his health. The danger to a person hence stems from God’s will that these situations have the power to harm (in addition to what has been decreed upon the person). Hence, should God not protect a person individually, in a supernatural way, the person may be harmed as a result of the laws that God has embedded in the world. This obligates a person to guard himself from natural disasters and he may not depend on miracles.

For this reason the Torah (*Devarim* 22:8) orders, “When you build a new house, you should place a railing on your roof.” And the *Chinuch* (*mitzvah* 546) explains:

One of the foundations of this *mitzvah* is that the exalted God watches the details of the behavior of people and knows all their doings and all that will happen to them for the good or bad, by His decrees, according to their merits or their demerits, as our Sages said (*Chulin* 7b), “A person does not lift a finger below unless it was decreed from Above.” Nevertheless, a person should

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10. *Derashos HaRan*, essay 4 (Feldman edition), p. 55.

watch out for ordinarily occurring events because God has created His world and built it on natural foundations, and decreed that fire should burn and that water should extinguish a flame. In the same manner it is natural that, should a large stone fall on one's head, it would crush his brain, or if a person falls from a high roof to the ground, he will die. He, may He be blessed, has given bodies to people and breathed into their nostrils a living soul with knowledge that is able to guard the body from all harm, and has placed both of them, the soul and the body, into the basic sphere [of cause and effect] and this guides them and implements their activities. And since God has bonded the body to nature, because His wisdom saw it as proper, and since man is a corporeal creature, God ordered him to guard himself from happenstances, since nature that was handed to him will act upon him unless he guards himself from it.

This being so, the Torah commanded us to guard our dwellings and surroundings, so that death will not befall us because of our negligence, and we shall not endanger our lives by relying on miracles. Our Sages also said (*Toras Kohanim, Emor 8*) that miracles will not happen to one who depends on miracles. And in this manner you will observe most matters written everywhere; because even when the Jews waged a war as ordered by God, they arranged their battles, armed themselves, and did everything as if they depended solely on the natural course of events. So is it proper to do as was explained, and one who will not contradict the truth from wickedness will agree to this.”

Examples of our Sages' prohibition to depend on miracles are countless. However, we shall mention some of the most prominent which have halachic implications:

We find in the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 21a) that a child should not be made to travel from one city to another for the purpose of studying Torah. And Rashi explains, "Since harm may come to him along the way, because the Satan prosecutes in times of danger, as it says (*Bereishis* 42:4), 'Lest an accident befall him.'" This gave rise to the law that a person can force the population of the city where he lives to hire a teacher for the local children.

In another place (*Pesachim* 8b) we find that a person who checks for *chametz* does not need to check inside a hole between his house and that of a non-Jew, for fear of danger.

A dispute is quoted (*ibid.*, 64b) between Abaye and Rava on the question of whether precautions were taken (closing the gates of the Holy Temple) at the time when people pushed themselves into the Temple to offer the *korban Pesach*. The decision rendered in this matter is that one should not depend on a miracle.<sup>11</sup>

Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyah Medini, in his work *Sdei Chemed*,<sup>12</sup> writes in the name of the *Sefer Chasidim* that a *mohel* is not obligated to perform a circumcision when he may expose

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11. Rambam, in *Hilchos Korban Pesach* (1:11), wrote that the doors of the Temple should be closed and one should not depend on a miracle that the doors will close by themselves.

12. Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyah Medini, *Sdei Chemed* (entry: *alef, shiyurei ha'pe'ah*, sec. 34).

himself to danger, despite the *mitzvah* that he is about to perform. Since circumcision is not performed where the child is in danger, the same certainly is true where the *mohel* will be in danger. The *Sdei Chemed* additionally quotes the work *Taharas Ha'mayim*<sup>13</sup> to the effect that a person may not endanger himself by going to a dangerous place, even for the purpose of sanctifying the Divine Name. This is because one should not depend on a miracle. Even though there are three sins (idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed), regarding which the Torah said that one should let himself be killed rather than transgress them, this applies only if one was put into such a situation not of his own volition. When this happens, one is commanded to sanctify the Holy Name in public and let himself be killed. But a person may not initially put himself into a state of danger that would then require him to sanctify Hashem's Name and be killed.<sup>14</sup> The *Sdei Chemed* explains that this is the reason why the Torah did not tell what Avraham did in Ur Kasdim, where he let himself be thrown into a burning furnace. Such an important

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13. *Sdei Chemed* (entry: *alef*, sec. 18).

14. Concerning this, the *Sdei Chemed* records his surprise at the statement made by Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in his *Chovos Ha'levavos* (*Sha'ar Ahavas Hashem*, chap. 6), that a person who fears God should not fear anything except Him. "As was related by one of the pious, he met one of the God-fearing people who slept in one of the deserts. He asked him, 'Why are you sleeping in such a place? Aren't you afraid of the lion?' And he answered him, 'I am embarrassed from my God, if He would see me being afraid of anyone except Him.'" This is a most surprising statement; how could he put himself into danger? What made him better than Yaakov, our forefather, who was afraid of his brother Esav, and was not embarrassed before his Creator that he was afraid of something other than Him?

event was not recorded in the Torah so that people would not bring themselves into such a situation of their own volition. Also, the *Sdei Chemed* writes that when Rabbi Akiva's flesh was combed with metal combs, he said, "All my life I yearned for the situation where I could fulfill the verse, 'You shall love your God with all your soul,' meaning, even if they take away your soul." Why did Rabbi Akiva yearn? He could have sought out a situation in which he could implement this command. But in spite of the need to sanctify the Name of Heaven, a person is prohibited from putting himself into danger of his own volition.

In some cases, however, we find that people have depended on miracles and endangered themselves on their own volition. The following are some examples.

The *Talmud* (*Berachos* 33a) relates the story of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and the snake:

It happened that there was a snake in a certain place and it used to injure people. The people went to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, and he asked them to show him its lair. He put his heel up to the entrance of the lair and was bitten by the snake, which then immediately died. He carried the snake on his shoulders and brought it to the *beis midrash*. He told them there, "See my children, it is not the snake that kills, but it is the sin that kills." It was then said, "Woe to the person who was bitten by a snake and woe to the snake who bit Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa."



The question arises here, how was Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa allowed to endanger himself and how is it that he depended on miracles?<sup>15</sup>

We similarly find in the *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 21a) that Nachum Ish Gamzu laid in a bed in a ramshackle house. His students wanted to move his bed and then take out the household items. He told them, "My children, first remove the household items and then remove the bed. This is since you are

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15. See the Maharsha there, who quotes the Jerusalem *Talmud* in *Maseches Avodah Zarah* that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa prayed [before going to deal with the snake]. Similarly, see the *Sefer Ha'chinuch* (*mitzvah* 546), who makes a distinction in this connection between people who are controlled by nature due to their sins, and the few exalted people to whom God handed nature. The *Sefer Ha'chinuch* notes that:

Indeed there are some people whom the King honors especially, because of their great piousness and the adherence of their soul to the ways of God. These are the most righteous people, men renowned for their devotion to God, such as our great and holy forefathers and many of their progeny after them, such as Daniel, Chananyah, Mishael, and Azariah, and those similar to them, to whom God handed nature. In the beginning, they were subservient to nature, but in the end, because of the great transcendence of their souls, they became the masters of nature, as we know about our forefather Avraham, who was thrown into a burning furnace and was not harmed, and the previously mentioned four pious men, who were placed in a blazing furnace and [even] the hair on their heads was not singed. The majority of people are too sinful to attain such a standing.

See also in conjunction with this the Chida, in his works *Pesach Einayim*, *Iyun Yaakov*, as well as *Shleimah Mishnaso*, all on *Berachos* 33a; *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:18; Ramban on *Iyov* 36:7; Rabbeinu Bechaye Ibn Paquda in *Chovos Ha'levavos*, *Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, chap. 4; *Tosafos*, *Kesubos* 30a.

promised that as long as I am in the house, it will not collapse.” They did so and then the house collapsed. It would seem that one should remove the person first from a dangerous place. How is it that Nachum Ish Gamzu endangered himself and relied on a miracle?<sup>16</sup>

We find in the *Talmud* (*Ta’anis* 19b) that when the entire Jewish nation came to Yerushalayim, they did not have water to drink. Nakdimon ben Gurion went to some high official and asked him, “Lend me twelve wellsprings for the pilgrims, and I shall return you twelve wellsprings. Should I fail to give you the twelve wellsprings, I will give you twelve silver talents.” A time for this return was set. The time came and rain did not fall... In the afternoon the official sent a messenger, asking either for water or for the money. Nakdimon answered him that the day was not over yet. The official mocked him, saying, “No rain fell the entire year and now it will fall?” As that official went happily to the bathhouse, Nakdimon

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16. The *Sdei Chemed* (ibid.) where this passage is quoted and also Rashbam on *Bava Basra* 119b discuss that the daughters of Tzelofchad did not marry until the age of forty because they were looking for worthy husbands, in spite of the fact that we have a tradition that a woman who does not marry until the age of forty in general cannot bear children. The daughters of Tzelofchad depended on a miracle as was done for Yocheved, Moshe’s mother. The *Sdei Chemed* wonders how they depended on a miracle, and his answer (in the name of the *Yad David*) is that in these two cases (Nachum Ish Gamzu and the daughters of Tzelofchad), we are not dealing with a person who endangers his life, but with passive conduct. It comes out that according to the opinion of the *Sdei Chemed*, it is permitted to depend on miracles as long as a person does not put himself into a dangerous situation, but passively avoids acting with proper dispatch for his salvation.

entered the Holy Temple in a sad state. He wrapped himself (in a *tallis*) and prayed. He prayed to his Creator, “Master of the world! You know very well that I did not do this for the sake of my honor, but for the sake of Your honor, so that the pilgrims could have water.” Immediately the skies became covered with clouds and enough rain fell, not only to fill the twelve wellsprings, but even more.

This, indeed, is the power of prayer. But how did Nakdimon borrow wellsprings to begin with without knowing how he would pay back the loan?<sup>17</sup> How did he depend on a miracle, thereby endangering his wealth?

One may try and answer that he was not dealing with any danger to life, but rather with danger to money. But then the more acute question arises concerning danger to life in the well-known passage in the *Talmud* (*Yevamos* 12b), where the opinion of Rabbi Meir is quoted, that a woman whose life would be endangered by becoming pregnant, should resort to contraceptive measures, but the other Rabbis say that such measures should not be used and “Heaven will have mercy,” as it says (*Tehillim* 116:6), “God protects the naïve.” How may one depend on miracles when facing a life-endangering situation?

The *Sdei Chemed* explains that it seems to him that a person is permitted to endanger himself in order to prevent harm to the masses. This is what was done by Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa in order to save the town from the snake, by Nachum

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17. The Maharsha there asks this question and answers that Nakdimon depended on the merit of the pilgrims.

Ish Gamzu in order to save his students from a collapsing building, and by Nakdimon ben Gurion in order to acquire water for the pilgrims.<sup>18</sup> In a case when one is faced with an overall public need, personal considerations of keeping away from danger are seen in a different way.

In conjunction with this, it is interesting to see the decision rendered by Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach<sup>19</sup> concerning a soldier who served in the Israeli intelligence corps, where he succeeded in listening to the communication network of an enemy country and to break its code. The soldier's task was to decipher the code using a computer, even on the Sabbath. The soldier told his superiors that he wished to decipher only parts of the transmissions, those that had a high probability

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18. Still, this does not explain the opinion of the other Rabbis in *Yevamos* (12b), that "Heaven will have mercy," because there it does not talk about saving a large segment of the public, but about a woman whose life is endangered by not taking contraceptive measures. However, the *Sdei Chemed* offers a number of explanations concerning this *Talmudic* passage. Thus, for example, Rabbi Yaakov Etlinger, in his responsa *Binyan Tzion*, sec. 137, explains in a reply to this question that where there is the slightest danger to life all Torah prohibitions do not apply because of the duty to preserve one's life, as it says, "And you shall live in them." But if at present (in the course of marital cohabitation), we are not facing a life-threatening situation, and the only problem is the danger that may arise in the future, we follow the majority and depend on God that He will save from all calamity. The responsa *Tzemach Tzedek Ha'chadash, Even Ha'ezer*, sec. 89, writes that only when the probability of danger is low may one say, "God protects the naïve."

19. It is quoted by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, in his essay "Definition of a Doubtful Life-Threatening Situation — Desecration of the Sabbath for All the Needs of a Dangerously Sick Person." *Asia*, vol. 14, Elul 5754, p. 87.

of presenting a threat to Israel, whereas those that were of less significance for Israel he wished to decipher only after the Sabbath. His superiors claimed that they trusted his judgment regarding the significance of the transmission, but only when it was based on factual information, i.e., after the transmission was fully deciphered. Hence they compelled him to decipher everything and to transmit to his superiors only what was vital. The soldier turned to Rabbi Auerbach, who decided that his superiors were right and that he must decipher all the transmissions for the reasons that follow:

Indeed, from the point of view of the *halachah*, there is no difference between life-threatening danger to one person or to many people, because anyone who saves one Jewish soul is regarded as if he has saved the entire world. However, a difference still exists between the level of risk that can be taken for an individual and for a public.

For example, people do not refrain from an intercity trip in spite of a certain probability, let us say 1 in 10,000, of a dangerous situation. But there is no doubt that the leader of a country who decides to take a risk of 1 in 10,000 regarding his citizens will be considered to be an irresponsible person. This is so because concerning large populations, even such a highly improbable risk level is regarded as unacceptable. Hence, when dealing with national security, the soldier is obligated to decipher all the transmissions, even if the danger to life is extremely low. The risk considerations are different when dealing with the entire public.

On the other hand, when dealing with an individual, a person may take a slight risk, and therefore people may travel in

a car. But as a general rule, the *halachah* is that a person is not permitted to endanger his life and health, and he should stay away from all sources of danger. In fact, it is a public duty to prevent a person from endangering his life.

So rules Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Rotzei'ach Ushemiras Nefesh* (chap. 11), "Many matters were prohibited by the Sages because they can be life-endangering. Anyone who transgresses these prohibitions and says, 'I wish to endanger myself and this is no one's concern' or 'I don't care,' is culpable to Rabbinically instituted lashes."

A similar ruling is found in the annotation of the Rema (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah*, sec. 116):

Similarly, a person should guard himself from matters that cause danger, since [putting oneself into] danger is worse than transgressing a prohibition, and one should be more apprehensive of a possible danger than of a possible sin...They also wrote<sup>20</sup> that one should run away from a city in which there is a plague, and one should leave the city as soon as the plague starts, and [not wait] until it ends (responsa of the *Maharil* 35:41)...And it is forbidden to depend on miracles or to endanger one's life in a similar manner.

This explanation, therefore, defines when a person may endanger himself and when he is obligated to be apprehensive of any danger. In keeping with this explanation, it is clearly understood why Yaakov was afraid of Esav, and why he

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20. He is referring to early sources, such as Avudraham; Mordechai at the end of the chapter *Kol Sha'ah*; Rokeach in sec. 275; and *Maharil*.

prepared himself for the danger in all possible ways, since one should not depend on miracles.<sup>21</sup>

These questions resolve themselves in light of the systematic and comprehensive explanation that we previously presented from Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, in his work *Hamaspik Le'ovdei Hashem*, who presents a clearly defined doctrine on this subject and makes a distinction between the different levels of trust and belief in God.

1. One of the levels is that of the prophets who fully and entirely depend on a Heavenly miracle happening for them, while precluding any ordinary physical activities.

Here are some examples thereof:

- **Yonasan** and his servant faced the Philistine camp alone.<sup>22</sup>
- **David**, while still a boy, faced the giant Goliath and trusted in God that He would save him. He said, "God does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is God's"<sup>23</sup> David even removed his armor

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21. In all that applies to Yaakov, it can be claimed that the danger to his life was not that of an individual, but of the public, because if he and his sons were killed, it would, God forbid, be the end of the Jewish nation.

22. We find in *Shmuel I* (14:6), "And Yonasan said to his arms bearer, 'Let us go and come over to the camp of these uncircumcised. Maybe God will do for us, for there is no restraint on God to save with many or with few.'"

23. *Shmuel I* (17:45-47): "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come

when he went to fight Goliath because he trusted that a miracle would happen, as he said (*Shmuel I* 17:38), “because I did not try”<sup>24</sup> — [the word “try” in Hebrew is *nisisi*, that has within it the letters *nun* and *samech* = *nes*, “a miracle”]. Rabbi Yonasan ben Uziel explains that David meant that weapons are not a cause for the occurrence of a miracle.

- **Eliyahu Ha’navi** went into the desert without food and it was supplied to him by ravens.<sup>25</sup>
- **The prophet Elisha** told a widow to pour oil into vessels that would be brought to her, and was confident and positive that an overt miracle would occur,

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to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the God of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Who you have taunted, so that all this assembly may know that God does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is God’s, and He will give you into our hands.”

24. *Shmuel I* (17:38-39): “And Shaul clad David with his apparel, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head, and he clad him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his apparel, and he attempted to go [but could not]; for he was not used to it. And David said to Shaul, ‘I cannot go with these; for I have not tried them.’ And David took them off him.”

25. About Eliyahu Ha’navi, it says (*Melachim I* 17:2-6): “And God spoke to him, saying, ‘Get out of here, and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cheris that is before the Yarden. And it shall be that you will drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.’ So he went and did according to the word of God, and dwelt by the brook Cheris that is before the Yarden. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.”



so that all the vessels would be filled from the single jar of oil that the woman owned.<sup>26</sup>

This spiritual standing is exalted and unusual, as stated by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam: "Such a genuine and perfect trust can be brought about [either] by Heavenly inspiration or by a promise of the exalted God by revelation to His prophets." This trust of a prophet is not obvious, even though it emanates from a specific Heavenly promise, and it is credited to the prophet, as it says about Avraham (*Bereishis* 15:6), "And he believed in God and He counted it to him as righteousness."

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains that not all the prophets attained this status. "Not all the prophets can expect to attain it, and even a prophet who has attained it for some time cannot expect that it will stay with him all the time."

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26. *Melachim II* 4:1-6: "Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, saying, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared God; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.' And Elisha said to her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me: what do you have in the house?' And she said, 'Your maidservant has not a thing in the house, except for a jar of oil.' Then he said, 'Go, borrow vessels abroad from all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And you shall go in and shut the door upon you and upon your sons, and pour out into all those vessels, and you shall set aside that which is full.' So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons; they brought the vessels to her and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' And he said to her, 'There are no more vessels.' And the oil stopped."

We study this level, even though it is rare, in order to teach us that nothing is just natural, but everything is from Him and there is nothing outside of His realm.<sup>27</sup>

In light of the above, a person who has not attained this level

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27. See in conjunction with this Ramban on *Shemos* (13:16), “And on the basis of the great and famous miracles a person admits the existence of covert miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah, because a person does not have a share in the Torah given by Moshe, unless he believes that all events and all occurrences are solely miracles. There is nothing natural or routine in them, whether pertaining to an individual or to a congregation, but if one will perform *mitzvos*, he will succeed in being rewarded, and if he will transgress them, he will be punished, all as decreed by Heaven, as I previously mentioned (*Bereishis* 17:1 and above 6:2). Covert miracles will become public when the predictions of the Torah concerning blessings and curses will come about, as the Torah says (*Devarim* 29:23-24), ‘And all nations will say, wherefore had God done this to this land. And they will say, because they have forsaken the covenant of the God of their forefathers.’ Concerning adherence to the covenant it says, ‘And all the nations of the world will see that God’s Name is called upon you and they will fear you.’”

How appropriate are, in conjunction with this, the words of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev in his work *Kedushas Levi* (on the portion *Shelach*): “A person in need of a miracle from God should convince himself that this is not a miracle, but everything depends on the will of God who is capable of everything and abundant in deed, the great and the small are equal to Him. And if his belief and trust in God follows this line, then when he needs something, no matter what, then it is done for him and he is assisted; still, the one to whom a miracle happens should not regard it as a miracle, and not see it as a change in the natural course of matters, but only that it is natural that God performs a miracle. This is because a person who is wise does not differentiate between Whoever said that the oil should burn and He who said that vinegar should burn He realizes that to God all these miracles are in the same degree of simplicity, and if so, performing a miracle is not a bother for God at all.”

of trust in God and does not depend on miracles is not regarded as one who has abandoned trust in God. On the contrary, one who depends solely on miracles, without this kind of divine feeling “desires that which is not appropriate for him and sins by impudence. This causes a desecration of the Holy Name, and he will definitely be punished for this.”<sup>28</sup>

The second level is that of most people, according to which one should combine prayer and trust in God with resort to natural means (gifts, war). A person must, on the one hand, be apprehensive of danger and avoid all risks, because one should not depend on miracles. On the other hand, he must know that it is not his strength and the power of his arms that save him from danger and together with his preparations for war — he should also prepare himself with prayer.<sup>29</sup> A person is obligated to sow at the time of sowing and to

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28. In reference to this level it is appropriate to see the statement by the Maharal in his work *Gvuras Hashem* on the Pesach Haggadah concerning the verse in Hallel, “Difficult in the eyes of God is the death of his pious.” He explains as follows, “The pious do not disregard nature, because nature is proper for the conduct of the world, and this is the true conduct. The pious, by virtue of their being pious, desire the truth and do not want the world to depart from the way of truth. But for God, Who performs miracles for them, this is difficult, for if not for the fact that the pious person is not interested in changes in the order [of nature] — and death is part of [natural] reality — God would perform new wonders for them so as not to make the pious die. But since the pious are interested in truth — therefore death comes. Understand it.”

29. For this reason a person who takes medicine should say, “May it be [His] will that this should be for my healing.” A person who goes to measure his granary should say, “May it be [His] will to send His blessing in the work of my hands” (*Berachos* 60a) because it is only through the Heavenly decree that these measures are effective.

reap at the time of reaping and to perform any necessary and beneficial labor, but his eyes should turn to God, knowing that it is not his resort to natural means that brought about the desired result, but it is due to God's will.

One should remember that it is possible that a person should sow and not attain the desired result and it is also possible that one sows and reaps a hundredfold. It is the Heavenly decree that determines the fate of each person, rather than one's talent or labor.

To quote Shlomo Ha'melech (*Koheles* 9:11): "The race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned, but time and death will come to all of them."<sup>30</sup>

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30. The practical upshot of this kind of trust is, as mentioned above, the fact that a person who knows and recognizes that everything comes to him from God will not be too eager to devote a lot of energy to achieve his ends, and will not devote all his resources to it, but will conform to what the Sages said (*Pirkei Avos* 4:12), "Lessen your business activities and study Torah." In keeping with the worldview that it is not human endeavor that brings about the desired result, but it is Heavenly assistance (God's will) that brings about the results, it is obvious that a person's resorting to natural means has the sole meaning of paying a debt that a person is obligated to pay as a result of the decree "in the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread." In view of this, there is no reason to exert a great deal of effort and it suffices that a person should perform an act that is sufficient to pay this debt and nothing more.

Similarly, such a person will be calmer and not be seized by fright when facing a future with difficult problems. This is because everything is decided by Divine Providence and "repentance, prayer and charity remove the harsh decree." But effort by natural means is still needed and one has to guard himself from danger.

Accordingly, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains the behavior of those with the strongest faith and trust in God in times of danger.

Avraham went to Egypt because of the famine and even tried to ensure that the Egyptians would not see his wife and kill him because of her (*Bereishis* 12:10);

Shmuel Ha'navi was looking for a stratagem that would allow him to crown David Ha'melech without endangering his life. This is because a person should not trust that a miracle will happen as long as he was not specifically promised that it would.

Similarly, Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam explains the mood of Eliyahu Ha'navi, who guarded himself against Izevel (*Melachim I* 19:3). Why didn't he trust in God? As long as a divine revelation did not come to promise this, trust in God does not permit depending on miracles.

In keeping with this orderly and clear doctrine of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, it is obvious why Yaakov wanted to protect himself from Lavan's violence and ran away.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, according to this, it is absolutely obvious why Yaakov did not depend on a miracle and feared his brother Esav, since he was apprehensive that maybe his sins were detrimental, which would indicate that he was not given a strong and specific Heavenly promise<sup>32</sup> that would apply also

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31. When Lavan asked Yaakov (*Bereishis* 31:26-27), "Why did you run away secretly?", Yaakov answered, "Because I was afraid that you may forcibly take away your daughters from me."

32. See the explanation of Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov at the beginning

to this situation. And lacking such a promise, there was no point in depending on miracles, and he had to take the required natural steps while having all the time the awareness that everything is from Above. This combination manifested itself in his preparation through gifts, prayer and war.

The explanation of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam places in front of us an orderly doctrine that explains the different sources and combines them. According to him, it is also possible to understand the boundary between trust in God and human activity, including avoiding all danger, in the sense of "one may not depend on miracles." However, it seems that the question as to why did Yaakov fear, and where is Yaakov's spiritual preparation toward his confrontation with Esav, still remains open. Indeed, nothing promises him that he will be saved — after all, there was no specific divine promise and it is possible that a harsh decree had been meted out to him. But, if this is the divine will — and a person must believe that everything that has been divinely decreed is for one's own good — why then did Yaakov fear?

- a) Rambam (*Shemoneh Perakim*) indeed concludes that this constituted a blemish in the trait of trust. He presents this as an example for the fact that even the traits of prophets may be imperfect.

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of *Parashas Vayishlach*: "He could have filled his heart with complete trust in God, and then Esav would have been forced to go on his way. However, Yaakov wanted to pave for his progeny also the way of war with their foes, because he knew that the later generations would not always be able to solely trust in God with all their heart like he could, and then they would also have to resort to war."

- b) Another commonly accepted explanation is that Yaakov was not in a state of fear of physical loss, but he was apprehensive of spiritual loss. This level is indeed appropriate to a great person like Yaakov, to whom God's word is dear. He was engaged in a struggle between two worlds: the world of "I observed the 613 *mitzvos*" and "the complete man who dwells in the tents [of Torah]," and the world of "a hunter, a man of the field." Yaakov was afraid to lose in this awesome struggle regarding the fate of the world, because defeat would mean the loss of the entire spiritual world. For this reason Yaakov feared that "perhaps sin would influence" — that the world of sin would prevail!
- c) Rabbeinu Yonah on *Mishlei* also deals with the question as to how to reconcile complete belief on the one hand with the fear of the pious such as Yaakov and Shmuel on the other hand. And in general he finds it difficult to understand that, in one place it says "lucky is the man who always fears" whereas in another place (*Mishlei* 29:25) it says, "the fear of man brings a trap." Rabbeinu Yonah answers that Yaakov did not fear Esav, but his fear was of sin. Meaning, he feared deficiency in his spiritual situation and made an urgent effort to amend it as a way of facing an imminent physical calamity. In other words, Yaakov's approach was that of repentance and, on the contrary, when a person fears sin and repents, his trust in God strengthens. "And after he will trust

and hope to God, and his fear will be only of sin — then his hope will strengthen.”

As compared with this, the verse “the fear of man brings a trap” applies to a person who is not God fearing, but is afraid of people. This fear of people is a sin and “strengthens the calamity that befalls him; but one who trusts God will be spared the calamity as reward for his trust. And this is what is meant by ‘Who are you to fear mortal man?’, because this comes from lowliness of the soul, and a person who fears man forgets God.”

- d) An additional and wonderful explanation in conjunction with this is to be found in the work of Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman – *Kovetz Ma’amarim*, part 3, as follows:

We find in the *Talmud* (*Menuchos*, 29b) that when Moshe ascended to heaven, God showed him in a prophetic vision Rabbi Akiva deriving a multitude of laws from each of the letters [of the Torah]. Moshe said to God, “Master of the World, you have shown me his Torah. Now show me his reward.” So God showed him how the Romans would comb Rabbi Akiva’s flesh with metal combs. To this Moshe said, “Master of the World, this is Torah and this is its reward?!” and God answered, “Be quiet! This is what I thought to do.” At first sight, this reply is incomprehensible. However, Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz, in his work *Shnei Luchos Habris* (*Shelah*), explained the statement “this is what I thought to do” as follows.

*Rashi* on the verse (*Bereishis* 1:1), “In the beginning of God’s



creation of the heavens and the earth,” explains that use is made here of the Name *Elokim* (which represents God’s trait of judgment) to describe God rather than the four-letter Name (tetragrammaton, which represents God’s trait of mercy), since God first intended to create the world with the trait of judgment. God saw that the world would not last if it would be created with the trait of judgment, so he took the trait of mercy and combined it with the trait of judgment. This is what is meant by the verse (*Bereishis* 2:4), “On the day that *Hashem Elokim* made the earth and the heavens.” The term “this is what I thought to do” hence applies to the trait of judgment, which is the initial trait of Creation.

Why was it that God first intended to create the world with a strict judgment? To this question the *Shelah* answers that before man was created and his soul descended into this world, his soul was concealed in heaven and enjoyed the splendor of the Divine Presence. Why then was man created and the soul was clothed in a physical shroud with which he is sent to this world? The answer is that the goodness which is accorded to the soul in the Upper World is “bread of shame,” meaning, unearned bread which is given to a person without him having to work for it. A person is embarrassed to receive an unearned gift. He prefers to eat bread that he has properly earned. Hence man was placed in this world, and was given the evil inclination, these being his material desires that stem from the material clothing in which his soul was enshrouded. If a person overcomes his evil inclination and his soul clings to God in spite of its material shroud, then it returns to enjoy the splendor of the Divine Presence — legitimately and without the need to be ashamed of the One

who was charitable to it when he provided this as a present.

Since the ultimate purpose of the world is to legitimately earn the reward that God grants to those who cling to His ways, it is obvious, that the “first thought” in which God created the world was the trait of judgment, since if His conduct with us would be on the basis of mercy, our reward would again be unearned (“bread of shame”), and what would then be the purpose of creating the world?

However, God saw that if He conducted the world on the basis of the trait of judgment, the world would not be able to exist at all, “For there is no man on earth that is so righteous that he [only] does good and never sins” (*Koheles* 7:20). Should God apply judgment to its full depth, no one would emerge innocent. In view of this, God softened the trait of strict judgment and added to it the trait of mercy so that the world could continue to exist.

This is the general manner of conduct by God with all of his creatures. However, God is strict with the righteous, even concerning something as minute as a hairsbreadth, since they are able to stand at a higher and more refined level, and it is proper that they eat bread that was earned legitimately and not by virtue of Heavenly mercy. For this reason God answered Moshe “this is what I thought to do,” meaning, that God’s conduct with respect to Rabbi Akiva was on the basis of absolute and complete judgment, which conforms to the initial thought on which the creation of the world was based. In view of this, the question of “This is Torah and this is its reward?” should not be asked, since the full application of the depth of judgment only strengthens the Heavenly

reward and causes this reward to be earned legitimately and not only by virtue of mercy.

In accordance with this explanation of the *Shelah* and in keeping with the principle (*Shabbos*, 112b), “If the previous generations were like angels, then we are people,” Rabbi Wasserman explains that our forefather Yaakov and the prophet Shmuel, who preceded Rabbi Akiva and his contemporaries by many generations, were definitely at a much higher level than they were, and at that level only the trait of judgment rules, without being softened by the trait of mercy:

“This being so, the trait of trust does not apply to them because this trait can in no way apply to a person whose entire conduct is in accordance with the trait of judgment, for trust means that one trusts God’s mercy, as it says, ‘in Your mercy I trust.’ In view of this, Yaakov had no grounds for depending on Heavenly mercy, but only on what he was specifically promised by God and concerning this he feared that this promise was conditioned upon absence of sin — and ‘perhaps sin would influence.’”

This interpretation of Rabbi Wasserman conforms completely to the explanation presented in Chapter 6 above, according to which the trait of trust depends entirely on a person’s trust in Heavenly mercy and in His being compassionate and merciful even to a person who has sinned. We have presented above the approach of the *Chazon Ish*, according to which the obligation to trust consists in believing that even if one is subject to great pain, everything that happens to him comes from God and it is always intended for

his own good according to an overall Heavenly reckoning. However, in the absence of a specific Heavenly promise concerning the results of a given event, a person has no basis for trusting that his fate will improve and that a certain desire will materialize, since it is quite possible that God will decree upon him to be in pain and agony for a long time. Therefore, we have faced a difficulty concerning the feeling of trust, since it would appear that according to this approach, a person facing a fateful situation could not face the future with a trusting heart and a calm soul, and will not be able to trust that things will turn out for the good. This is because it is possible that it was decreed, for his own good, that he would suffer and be in pain. In conjunction with this we have presented the explanation of Rabbi Baruch Rosenberg, based on *Rishonim* (Rabbeinu Bechaye in his work *Kad Ha'kemach*, Rabbi Joseph Albo in the *Sefer Ha'ikkarim*, and Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Chapter 3 of *Mishlei*) that the trait of trust is based on the hope of the person who trusts in Heavenly benevolence and mercy. A person who trusts God knows that he is in the best of hands, because he leans on the infinite power of God to save him at any time, and God's mercy is upon all his creatures. This being so, even if a sharp sword lies on one's throat one should not give up the hope for mercy. Trust in God is hence based on the trait of mercy and grace accorded by God even to sinners, who do not deserve to be saved. To quote Rabbeinu Yonah (who was quoted at length above):

The matter of trust further obligates one to truly trust in God's mercy, because His mercies are bountiful and His kindness is great.

And the hope that emanates from this trust is that even if one's sins are great and immense, he should hope for God's mercy, as it says (*Daniel*, 9:18): "For it is not because of our righteousness that we present our supplications before you, but rather because of Your abundant mercy." And it says (*Tehillim* 65:3-4), "To You Who hears prayer all flesh comes. Iniquities have overwhelmed me, our wrongdoings You will forgive." And it says (*Ibid.*, 130:7), "Let Israel hope to God for with Him is kindness and abundant deliverance and He will redeem Israel from all its transgressions...", meaning that even if our transgressions are many, He has abundant deliverance.

It comes out according to Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman that since trust is based on a person's hope for Heavenly mercy, such trust does not apply to *Gedolei Yisrael*, with whom God is strict even concerning something as minute as a hairs-breadth, and his conduct with them is not according to the trait of mercy, but according to the trait of judgment. These righteous people cannot hope for Heavenly mercy, since God's conduct toward them is that of judgment so that they will not receive unearned bread in the next world, but will implement the purpose of the descent of their souls to this world in order to gain their reward legitimately in the World to Come.

Indeed, the *Talmud* (*Berachos*, 17b) describes the attitude of Rav and Shmuel, or of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eliezer, toward the verse (*Yeshayahu*, 46:12) "Hearken to Me, you stout-hearted, that are far from charity", saying that this verse applies to the righteous of the generation who are called

“stout-hearted” and that they are far from charity, meaning that while “the entire world is sustained by charity, they are sustained by their own strength.” *Rashi* explains: “‘The entire world is sustained by charity,’ i.e., through God’s mercy, rather than by their own merits. But ‘they are sustained by their own strength’ means on the basis of their own merits and they are far removed from God’s charity.”

According to this, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman explains that our forefather Yaakov and Shmuel Ha’navi were afraid of a dangerous event and did not depend on Heavenly mercy, because they had no reason to hope, which is based on the trait of mercy, because the conduct toward them followed the strict course of judgment.

It hence comes out that someone who is at the most exalted level cannot hope for Heavenly mercy, and trust that applies to the general public does not apply to him.

Still, Rabbi Wasserman is left with a difficulty concerning this explanation. This is “because King David trusted in God’s kindness — even though God was strict with him as follows from the trait of judgment, for he was even greater than Rabbi Akiva.”

In order to resolve this difficulty as well, it is proper to return to the statement of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam, in his work *Hamaspek Le’ovdei Hashem*, who explains toward the end of his work, that there are four levels of trust in God, as follows:

1. **One who puts his hope in God and looks forward to His kindness** — one who expects to attain his

desires from God, while still being apprehensive and worried that God's benevolence might be denied to him because of his sins. This is the clear and ordinary level of trust that, as above, is based on Heavenly kindness and His great mercy.

2. **A seeker of God** — someone who, in addition to his hope and dependence, also seeks God in his heart and with his mouth, through prayer. His trust is more concrete and brings him to specifically express his desires to Heaven — with his lips and his tongue.
3. **One who takes refuge in God** — one who trusts in Hashem and believes in Him. This person is confident that he will attain his desires from God without any doubts or apprehension, and without any need for resorting to natural means. This status cannot be attained by everyone, it is unique to prophets and the very few who were given a specific Heavenly promise or who have another sign for the materialization of their desires. This status can be attained only by one who is innocent of all sins, clean of all transgressions, has attained perfection and has tasted from the Divine Providence in a measure that mandates this level of trust. Still, this trust should not be regarded as person's dependence on his piousness and his merits, but as his trust that God's kindness will indeed be demonstrated.
4. **The status of entrusting** — this is the most exalted level. "If it can be counted with the levels of trust,

then it is the highest level, and if it cannot be counted with them, then it is above all of them.”

A person who has attained this status takes upon himself truthfully and innocently all that the Divine Providence decrees and completely invalidates his own desires and hopes concerning their outcome. It makes no difference to him whether he achieves his desire or not. This is because he is content with everything that the Divine Providence decrees and does — be it for better or worse.

This is what, for example, was done by Avraham’s servant, Eliezer, when he stood at the spring and said that the girl who would agree to give him and his camels to drink (*Bereishis* 24:43), “this is the girl that God has destined for the son of my master.” This means that Eliezer entrusted the matter to God and not to what he, Eliezer, would intend and decide.

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam presents as an example of this exalted trait the statement by David Ha’melech (*Tehillim* 55:23), “Cast your burden upon God and He will sustain you.” This means to say that one should hand over his matters to God, and He will sustain him according to His wisdom. Similarly (*ibid.*, 37:5), “Trust in God and He will do,” meaning that God will do according to His will, and not according to the will of the one who trusts.

Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam points out David Ha’melech as an example of one who attained this special trait of “level of entrusting.” This is what he said (*Shmuel II* 15:25-26): “If I shall find favor in the eyes of God, He will bring me back, and show me Himself and His habitation. But should He say thus: ‘I have no delight in you; behold,



here am I' — let Him do to me as seems good to Him.”

This means that Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam notes that trust in God is based on a person's hope for Heavenly mercy. However, together with this hope there exists a more exalted level, that is known as the “level of entrusting”, according to which a person trusts in God not because he looks forward to Heavenly mercy, but in the sense that he accepts the Heavenly decision for better or worse, and he places himself in the state “like a suckling upon its mother.” It makes no difference to a child who lies in his mother's lap where he will go — he is free of worry because he is completely held in her merciful hands. David Ha'melech is an example of one who attained this status.<sup>33</sup>

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33. In connection with this see, among others, *Midrash Rabbah* 4:20 to the effect that nothing changed in David Ha'melech's emotional state even after he reached the pinnacle of power, because he was indifferent to the manner in which God would conduct Himself towards him. To quote the *Midrash*: [David] said to God (*Tehillim* 131), “God, my heart was not haughty,” at the time when Shmuel anointed me; “and my eyes were not lofty,” when I killed Goliath; “neither did I get involved in great matters,” when you returned me to my kingship; “or matters too exalted for me,” at the time when I brought the Holy Ark [to the Land of Israel]. We also find in the Jerusalem *Talmud* (*Shekalim*, end of chapter 2) that David Ha'melech was ready to die in order that the Jewish nation should merit the construction of the Beis HaMikdash, that could not be built in his days, but only in the days of his son, Shlomo. This, again, is in keeping with the trait of entrusting, in which a person is indifferent to his personal future and entrusts his entire fate to God to do whatever He wishes. This is what is said there: “There is no generation that had scorners such as the generation of David Ha'melech. What did these vile people do? They would walk under David's windows and tell him, ‘David, David, when will the Holy Temple be built? When will we go to

The above approach allows us to resolve the question put forward by Rabbi Wasserman as to how David could trust God — according to his spiritual standing he could not expect Heavenly mercy, since God is strict with the righteous, even concerning something as minute as a hairsbreadth and His conduct toward them follows the trait of judgment?

The answer to this is that David indeed trusted in God, not in the sense of hope for Heavenly mercy, but with the “trait of entrusting,” where a person places his entire faith in God, and it makes no difference to him where God will lead him and what He will do to him. Hence David trusted in God without expecting Heavenly kindness or mercy; he entrusted himself to God in the sense of “like a suckling upon its mother,” for whatever He will choose.

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the House of God?’ [I.e., ‘When will you die already and we will merit the Holy Temple that will be built by your son?’] And David would reply, ‘Even though they want to enrage me, may it come upon me (a type of oath) if I were not glad with their words,’ as it says (*Tehillim* 122:1), ‘I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the House of God.”’ [However, God would not shorten David’s life even by one minute, even though he was willing to die in order to advance the construction of the Beis HaMikdash.] This is the meaning of the verse (*Shmuel II* 7:12), ‘When your days will be fulfilled, and you will sleep with your fathers.’ God said to David Ha’melech, ‘I am counting your complete days, and not shortened days. Your son Shlomo will build the Beis HaMikdash only in order to offer public sacrifices; but the charity and justice that you do is more pleasing to me than a sacrifice, as it says (*Mishlei* 21:3), “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to God than a sacrifice.”’

In keeping with the systematic explanation of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, a distinction must be made between people with different levels of belief and trust. Likewise, a difference exists between where a specific Heavenly promise was made and where there is no such promise. Lacking such a promise, a person may not depend on miracles.

This explanation lays down a clear formula, according to which all the sources mentioned by us find their proper place.



## CHAPTER 9

### POINTS OF BALANCE BETWEEN TRUST AND THE OBLIGATION TO RESORT TO HUMAN EFFORT

**I**N THIS CHAPTER we shall attempt to establish the proper balance point between trust in God and human effort, and the practical applications that follow from the principles that were discussed in the previous chapters, according to which a person is obligated to make an effort to attain his needs in keeping with his spiritual standing.

We have seen that in addition to the personal effort that one is obligated to make, he must know that this effort does not determine anything. His effort has absolutely no bearing and, by itself, is powerless to achieve results without the divine decree that he will succeed. In the absence of a causative connection between human activity and the results, which were decreed by Divine Providence, why should a person exert himself?

In this regard we have seen that the need for human effort is rooted in the decree of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” as well as in the need to conform to the rule “I shall bless you in all that you do,” according to which a person is obligated to make an effort and to prepare material tools for receiving the divine blessing. This is explained by

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in his work *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 21):

The meaning of trust is that one should put all his hope in God, it being known that it is impossible for a person to lack what has been allotted to him, as our Sages said in the *Talmud* (*Beitzah* 16a), “All of a person’s sustenance is allotted to from one *Rosh Hashanah* to another.” And they also said (*Yoma* 38b), “A person cannot touch even a thread’s-breadth of something that has been prepared for another.”

This being so, one could have been sitting idle, and the divine decree would have materialized, except for the penalty that has been imposed upon mankind (*Bereishis* 3:19), “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.” In view of this, a person has to make some kind of effort in order to attain his sustenance, because this has been decreed by the King of kings. This is something like a tax that humankind has to pay without being able to avoid it. This lies beneath the statement, “Maybe even if he sits idly? The verse says, ‘In all that you do.’” But it is not the effort that brings about results; exertion is necessary only because it has so been decreed.

This worldview dictates several manners of behavior that will be examined in this chapter.

### **9(1). A PERSON ONLY MAKES AN EFFORT, BUT DOES NOT DETERMINE ANYTHING**

Since the effort exerted by a person is only a “tax” imposed upon him, in order to pay the debt and the evil decree that

has been handed down because of Adam and Chava's sin, it should suffice if he exerts himself a little and does only what is absolutely necessary to discharge this obligation. And indeed, this is noted by Ramchal in the above chapter:

And since one has made an effort, he has discharged his responsibility, and now there is room for the Heavenly blessing to descend upon him, and he does not need to spend his days in industriousness and exertion...

And Shlomo Ha'melech said (*Mishlei* 23:4), "Labor not to be rich, cease from your own wisdom." The correct approach is that of the early pious, who made Torah study their primary occupation, while regarding their labor as secondary, and were successful in both. For once a person has done a little work, from then on he only needs to have trust in his Maker and not be concerned with worldly affairs.

Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, in his work *Ohr Ha'meir* on *Parashas Beha'aloscha*, cites the following explanation of the verse (*Yirmeyahu* 17:7), "Blessed is the man who trusts in God, and whose security is God," in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov:

- There is someone who promises — promises to others, such as (*Tehillim* 145:15), "The eyes of all look upon You," for God promises that they will not lack anything.
- There is someone who trusts — this is the one who believes that the promise will materialize.
- And there is security — which is the grounds for the

trust, the basis on which the trusting person is entitled to receive that which was promised to him.

For example, a king promises that whoever will do work will be paid; the person who was promised trusts that the king will fulfill his promise; and the security of the person who trusts is the work that he did, which is the reason for being paid. According to this explanation of the term “security,” attention should be given to the fact that the verse says, “And God will be his security” — meaning that God not only promises, but also is the basis for fulfilling the promise. This comes to teach that the cause for fulfillment of the divine promise is not rooted in a person’s actions, but solely in God.

The Rav of Zhitomir continues and points out that this is the meaning of the command to Moshe to preserve the manna in a jar for generations. The commandment of trust means to believe that sustenance does not depend on human effort, but it is something like the manna, that continues to descend upon a person even today, in a manner which cannot be seen with human eyes. Therefore, a person cannot exempt himself from the divine service because of his need for sustenance. This is what our Sages meant by saying, “Everyone who recites the portion of manna daily is promised that he will never lack sustenance.” But how is it that many do so and are poor? The answer is that it is not dependent upon the recitation of the portion alone; the purpose of this recitation is to strengthen one’s trust in God.<sup>1</sup> A person who will trust

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1. The Rav of Zhitomir explains the verse (*Bamidbar* 11:6), “And now our soul is dried up, there is nothing besides this manna before our eyes,” as follows: A person perceives matters through his senses, and



God in this manner is promised to never lack sustenance. This is because the One Who is good, does good to His

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only in the wake of an experience in his material world is he able to develop abstract concepts, in the sense of “from my flesh I shall envision God.” This being so, the taste and the smell of the manna varied from one person to another, because differences in sensory experience are directly tied to the different levels of abstraction and different divine perceptions [that the person had attained]. The manna was an expression of a sensory experience that reflected the person’s divine perceptions, and, in keeping with the spiritual standing of the person, the matter received an external expression by the way in which the manna fell and how it tasted to him. To quote the Rabbi from Zhitomir: “The taste of the manna changed in keeping with the difference in people’s outlook and the kinds of pleasures they craved. It similarly changed in taste and smell [so that the taster] received material pleasures and spiritual pleasures clothed in the material, since without the material taste one is unable to attain the spiritual taste. In truth, this is the substance of a person — his entire ability to gain insight into the deepest roots is by way of his pleasure... The taste of every Jew changes in keeping with his level of perception and his preparation to seek His Oneness and Uniqueness through the cloak of [spiritual] levels and different pleasures... Those people who had perfect trust in the falling of manna were worthy that the manna reached them without any effort, whereas those whose trust was not perfect had to make some effort in reaching the manna... and those lacking trust [found their manna] far from the camp and were forced to exert a great deal of effort — everyone in keeping with his level of trust. And it is proper for each sensible person to approach the divine service... to strengthen himself in trust in God to the point that he will imagine that it is impossible to even taste a little without divine assistance... One should believe with perfect faith that the matter of manna has not ceased to this very day and it still continues... This being so, a person should prepare all of himself, from head to heel, that he should trust in God in the same manner as the generation of the wilderness who were sustained in keeping with the level of their trust, and then he will be well in this world and in the next.”

creatures and the lack of Heavenly abundance stems only from the fact that the potential beneficiary has not prepared his trust and is not a vessel for receiving it.

The Rav of Zhitomir uses this approach to interpret the following verse (*Bamidbar* 11:6):

**“And now”** — while we are in this world, the material world;

**“our soul is dried up, there is nothing”** — here it is impossible to attain Heavenly perceptions except by a pre-existing sensory experience that is followed by abstraction that allows the examining of the inner substance of matter, and not only its external cloak;

**“besides this manna before our eyes”** — manna makes it possible to see the divine within the material process itself. I.e., by looking at the jar with manna, a person can see that it is the divine which sustains him, and not the external causality.

Once one realizes that human effort is not the cause of what happens, and that a person’s success and salvation come only from God, it follows that a person can and must reduce his amount of effort, and feel calm. His actions or inactions will not cause anything anyway. In accordance with this, we have found that Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam instructs one to find the point of balance between trust in God and resorting to natural means, and to determine whether he is successful in what he is doing. If he is beloved by God and his ways and actions are desirable, this will suffice for attaining the desired results. Only if a person makes an effort and

does not succeed, should he continue exerting himself in his toil, because it appears that he is not sufficiently beloved by God to give him his sustenance with little effort. Even in this case, one should pay attention that if his spiritual standing improves, he may be able to satisfy himself with the above amount of effort, without toiling beyond that point. Only if a person continues to exert himself and observes that the situation does not improve, should he persist in his efforts to the utmost, while knowing and understanding at all times that it is not his toil that brings results, but only God. This approach, of making little human effort and then increasing it gradually, is therefore the first practical point of action that stems from trust in God.

From the cognizance and knowledge that there is no causative relationship between human effort and the results that follow, being the fruit of the divine decree, stems an additional practical conclusion.

A person who recognizes that human effort is only meant to call the Heavenly blessing into effect, which is the sole cause for his gaining wealth, will not take any sinful action that perforce cannot serve as the source for this bestowal.

This is what Rabbi Yisrael Meir Ha'kohen Kagan from Radin (the *Chofetz Chaim*) means in his work *Shemiras Ha'lashon* (*Sha'ar Ha'tevunah*, chap. 9) when he says that a person who steals from another not only sins, but is also a fool and a faithless person, since by definition stealing cannot bring divine abundance, and it is contrary to trust in God. Since we find (*Beitzah* 16a), "A person's entire sustenance is allotted to him on *Rosh Hashanah*," it is obvious that a person cannot

gain anything in addition to what has been allotted to him by stealing from another. On the contrary:

In exchange for his taking the abundance that has reached or is supposed to reach another person, the abundance that has been allotted to him on *Rosh Hashanah* will be taken away from him. In the end, the illicitly acquired wealth will disappear and the kosher abundance that he was allotted previously will also disappear. As our Sages (*Sukkah* 29b) said, “Rav said, ‘There are four reasons why the properties of people are lost: for delaying payment of wages of a hired hand, for non-payment of wages of a hired hand, and for divesting themselves of their obligations and imposing them on others...’”

The *Chofetz Chaim* continues quoting the sayings of our Sages concerning this matter (*Maseches Derech Eretz Zutah*, chap. 3): “If you took something that does not belong to you, whatever belongs to you will be taken away.” The *Chofetz Chaim* adds that one who sins in conducting his affairs not only exchanges the kosher for the non-kosher abundance, but he also troubles God to replace the stolen item, as our Sages say (*Sanhedrin* 8a), and the stolen money will anyway not remain with him.<sup>2</sup>

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2. The *Chofetz Chaim* notes that this is hinted at by the verse (*Bereishis* 31:11-12), “And the angel of God said to me in a dream, ‘Lift up your eyes and see that all the rams that jump upon the cattle are streaked, speckled, and grizzled.’ Rashi explains that angels would bring them from the herd shepherded by Lavan’s sons to the one handled by Yaakov. So Yaakov asked, ‘Why is it permitted to do this, to take from Lavan’s abundance and to give to me?’ To this the angel replied, ‘For I

This means that one who steals does so on the assumption that it is his actions that benefit him, and does not understand that they are only a “conduit” for transmitting Heavenly abundance; thus, a sinful action not only cannot bring about Heavenly abundance, but, conversely, harms it. In this regard, the *Chofetz Chaim* emphasizes that someone who internalizes that it is God’s will that brings about blessing and not human actions will also avoid any effort that involves slanderous talk, because, like any other sin, this is an activity that cannot bring about blessing.

Hence the *Chofetz Chaim* notes that a person is obligated to always strengthen himself in the trait of trust, because:

In addition to its being a holy and compelling trait, it is even more necessary when avoiding slanderous talk. This is because it is well known that many times a person is very angry at another person, and his evil inclination incites him to go out and publicize him as being a bad and malicious person, because he thinks that person interfered with his business, or that because of him his honor was diminished, and he finds it very difficult to overcome his evil inclination in this matter. If a person would start thinking about what our Sages have said — that “one cannot touch even a thread’s-breadth of what is prepared for another” (*Yoma* 38a), and that everyone is granted what was decreed from Heaven, be it honor or wealth, as our Sages said (*Yoma* 38b), “Ben Azzai said, ‘You will be called by your name,

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have seen what Lavan did to you, “that he switched your wages tens of times and took your abundance” — and now I am returning it to you.”

and be seated in your place, and you will be given from what is yours” [i.e., a person is called only by titles of honor that have been decreed in Heaven, sits only in a place prepared for him; and receives only his portion] — then the evil inclination would let go of him.

In addition to avoiding excessive effort in attaining one’s goal or activities that involve sin, there exists an additional (third) aspect that emanates from the trait of trust — and this is charity!

A person who trusts in God understands and believes that nothing will be subtracted from his sustenance by giving to charity — on the contrary, this is a proven prescription for becoming wealthy, as we find in the *Talmud* (*Ta’anis* 9a), where the Sages elucidated the words (*Devarim* 14:22), “truly tithe,” to mean, “Tithe so that you will become wealthy.”

Moreover, the *Talmud* notes there that even though it is not permitted to test God in any matter, as it says (*Devarim* 6:16), “You should not test God,” in the matter of contributing to charity as a prescription for wealth, it says (*Malachi* 3:10): “Bring the tithe to the storehouse, that there be food in My house, and test me therewith,’ said the God of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour you out blessing beyond measure.”

The *Tosafos* there present the following:

There was a person who was rich and had a field that had a yield of a thousand *kur* [a measure of volume]. This wealthy person would take out a hundred *kur* every year for tithes, and he did it during his entire life. When he was on his deathbed, he called in his son and

told him, "My son, I want you to know that this field that I bequeath to you yields every year a thousand *kur*. Make sure that you tithe a hundred *kur* the way I did." The man died and his son took over.

The field yielded a thousand *kur*, just as it did when the father was alive and [the son] tithed a hundred *kur*.

The next year the son realized that the tithe amounted to a large quantity and decided not to tithe. The year after that, the entire yield of the field dropped to only a hundred *kur*.

The son was sad about it. When his relatives heard that he did not put aside tithes, all of them came dressed in white and were very joyous. He told them, "It seems that you are joyous because of my adversity."

So they told him, "There is no reason why we should be sorry for you. You caused your entire downfall. Why didn't you put aside tithes in the proper way? Look at what happened: when the field came into your possession, you were the owner and God was the *Kohen*, because you tithed His part to give to the poor. Now that you have not separated His part, God became the owner and you the *Kohen*, because your field does not yield the thousand *kur* that it used to and (He) has separated for you a hundred *kur*."

This is what is meant by the verse (*Bamidbar* 5:10), "And a man's holy items will be his," meaning, that a person who does not tithe properly will be left only with the holy part, i.e., the tithe. Concerning this our Sages said, "One who holds back his tithes in the end will be left only with one-tenth."

This being so, someone who sees his labors as the essence of everything may be under the impression that when he gives his money to charity, he takes it away from himself. But one who understands that sustenance comes as a result of Heavenly blessing, understands that charity should be given. Indeed, we are dealing here with giving rather than with gaining, [but] this giving is the most appropriate effort for gaining sustenance, because this is an activity that can bring down the Heavenly abundance. On the contrary, this is the only activity about which there is a divine promise that it will bring about wealth, and it even permits people to ostensibly test Him about whether He will fulfill His promise. Does one have a more wonderful kind of effort to gain sustenance than his giving of tithes and charity?

Similarly, one who understands that his sustenance is fixed by Heaven and is not a direct result of his effort, will not waste time that he has set aside for the study of Torah in order to gain a living. In connection with this, we find in the Jerusalem *Talmud* (*Sotah*, chap. 9, end of *halachah* 13): “It happened that a person was studying Torah and [others] called upon him to make business. He said, ‘I am not giving up my study at fixed times; if a customer wants to come, let him come.’”

The *Korban Ha'eidah* (commentator on the Jerusalem *Talmud*) explains there that if a person deserves to make a profit, this will come from God, even after he completes his course of daily study.

The *Chofetz Chaim* (*ibid.*) notes in connection with this that, “This is something that reason definitely compels, since how



is it possible that a person should lose his sustenance that has been allotted to him on *Rosh Hashanah* only because he did not want to give up his fixed study times?”

The *Chofetz Chaim* adds that even if a person was convinced that he would lose a vital business opportunity as a result of studying Torah regularly, and still did not devote this time to the given business proposition that came his way, which he now lost because he did not devote time to it that was allocated for Torah study —

Still, he should not be worried by this, because God has many considerations, and if not today, He will give him on another day.

And one should know that until the time for which the yearly sustenance was allotted to him, which is *Rosh Hashanah*, he will definitely be paid what was allotted to him from Heaven and additional diligence and effort do not contribute anything, because he will definitely not gain more by contravening God's will and meddling with the time set aside for study of Torah...”

It is hence seen that the belief that there is no causative relationship between a person making an effort to achieve his needs and the actual results, leads to an additional (fourth) practical aspect, according to which a person should not cancel his fixed times of Torah study in order to attain sustenance. Such an act is not regarded as a permitted effort and it contravenes trust in God.

## 9(2). WHERE IS THE POINT OF BALANCE?

This statement by the *Chofetz Chaim*, that nothing will be subtracted from a person's sustenance as was decreed by God on *Rosh Hashanah* because he set aside times for the study of Torah, means that there is no reason to neglect his learning in order to make an effort to earn sustenance by natural means. It is thus necessary for each person to establish a proper point of balance in his life, given the following difficulty:

The *Chofetz Chaim* (ibid.) makes it clear that one should not deduct from the time that he set aside for the study of Torah in order to attain material gains. This means that any activity to attain sustenance by natural means must be defined as "free time" that was not originally assigned for the study of Torah. However, what is this free time that a person is initially permitted to set aside for non-study activities?

The *mitzvah* of Torah study is an absolute obligation that encompasses all of a person's time and his life, as the verse states, "[The words of] this Torah must never leave your mouth, and you shall pore over it day and night" (*Yehoshua* 1:8). This is so much so that the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 19b) says, "Rava said, 'A person who speaks about mundane matters transgresses a positive *mitzvah*, as it says (*Devarim* 26:7), 'Speak about them (the words of Torah) and not about other things.'"

A person is obligated to devote all his available time to Torah study, since it is a *mitzvah* that has no measure and no limit. One's obligation to devote himself to it applies to when he goes to sleep and when he gets up, during the day and during

the night, during his young years and his old years, while poor or rich, while being healthy or being sick, at all times and at all hours and in all situations and under all circumstances. To quote Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:8-10):

Every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah, whether poor or rich, whether healthy or suffering from pain, whether young or very old and highly weakened, even a poor person who is sustained by charity which he collects by going to people's houses, even someone married with children [who has to provide their sustenance in spite of his poverty].

...Some of the famous Jewish Sages were wood hewers, whereas others were water drawers, still others were blind, and in spite of all this they were engaged in Torah study day and night...Until what time is one obligated to study Torah? Until his last day, as it says (*Devarim* 4:9), "Lest you forget them all your life."

Indeed, the obligation to study Torah is defined by Rambam as an obligation "to set aside time for the study of Torah during the day and during the night, as it says, 'And you should be engaged in its study day and night.'" It appears that the obligation does not include all of a person's time, but only applies to specific and fixed times, during which a person is obligated to study Torah. This is also the *halachah* codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 155:1): "After leaving the house of prayer, one should go to the house of study and set a time for study, and that time should be fixed and not changed."

However, one must remember here the words of the *Chofetz Chaim* in his halachic work, the *Mishnah Berurah*, where he discusses the previously mentioned *halachah* in the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 155:4)*:

The essence of Torah study has no limits and it is a day-long obligation, as long as one has free time, as it says (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “[The words of] this Torah must never leave your mouth, and you shall pore over it day and night,” and when one has free time and does not study Torah, he is close to what our Sages said (*Sanhedrin* 99a), “Because he despised God’s word” — this is someone who is able to be engaged in Torah study, but does not do so.

And our Sages said in the Jerusalem *Talmud (Berachos*, end of chap. 9), “Rav Chilkiyah said in the name of Rav Simon, ‘A person who learns Torah at certain times [i.e., he only studies Torah during specific times, even though he has more free time for study] is regarded as voiding the covenant. This was derived from the verse (*Tehillim* 119), “It is time to act for God, they have voided your Torah.””

But setting times for Torah study means that one should arrange a set time to learn every day and stick to it under all circumstances, [besides his obligation to learn during his free time]. And if an emergency occurred, which made it impossible to complete his study during the fixed time, he should regard it as a debt and repay it at night, as it says in the *Talmud (Eiruvim* 65), “Rav Acha Bar Yaakov would borrow during the day and pay back at night.” The later authorities say that

before leaving the *beis midrash* in the morning, even if one was prevented from his regular study, he should study at least one verse or one *halachah*.

This means that a person is obligated to study Torah every time he can do so. The concept of “setting time for Torah study” does not limit Torah study to these times only; its purpose is to establish that there should be times during which one may not abandon Torah study, no matter what. Even should some emergency come up that would force one to forego his studies at the fixed time, he is obligated to make up this time later on, in the sense of paying a debt.<sup>3</sup> This law of debt payment does not apply to hours that are not regarded as “set times for Torah study.” However, even during the remaining part of the day, a person is obligated to devote every possible moment for Torah study, as it says (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “[The words of] this Torah must never leave your mouth.”

It is thus seen that every person is obligated to study Torah in an unlimited manner and without reservations at all hours.

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3. It is highly apparent that times set aside for Torah study cannot be used for the conduct of “ordinary” affairs unless there is a specific emergency. It would appear that this also applies to times set aside for prayer, since we find in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 6b), “Ravin bar Ada said in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak, ‘Everyone who usually comes to the house of prayer and misses a day, God asks about him, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 50:10), “Who is among you that fears God, who obeys the voice of His servant? He walked in darkness and had no light.” If he went to do a *mitzvah*, then he has light; and if he went for mundane affairs, he has no light. Why is this so? Because he should have trusted in God, but he did not.”

This being so, since a person is obligated to devote all his free time to Torah study and to do so to the full extent possible, when will a person find “free time” for his work or business? In conjunction with this, we shall present the halachic decisions of Rambam, the *Shulchan Aruch*, and the Rema.

On the one hand, Rambam, in *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* (3:9), says the following:

Torah is likened to water, as it says, “Hear! All who are thirsty, go to water,” to tell you that just as water does not stay on a sloping surface, but flows down from it and accumulates on level ground, so too, Torah is not to be found among the vulgar and in the hearts of the haughty, but only among the downcast and humble who are subservient to *Talmudic* scholars, divest themselves of all worldly pleasures, and labor only little everyday, just to sustain themselves in a manner that if they would not do this, they would have nothing to eat, and the rest of the day and night they should be occupied with Torah study.”

This means that a person is obligated to labor just to sustain himself, so that he has food to eat, and the rest of the day and night should be devoted to Torah study.

On the other hand, Rambam continues and writes (*ibid.*, 3:10):

Each person who takes it upon himself to engage solely in Torah learning without laboring for a living and depends on charity is regarded as blaspheming the Holy Name and disgracing the Torah. He extinguishes the

light of belief, causes harm to himself, and detracts from his life in the World to Come, because it is forbidden to derive benefit from Torah in this world. Our Sages said that one who benefits from the study of Torah takes away his life from the world. The Sages additionally commanded and said, “Do not make them (the words of Torah) into a crown for the purpose of self-exaltation and not into a hoe to dig with them.” They have additionally commanded and said, “Love labor and hate a rabbinical position,” and, “All Torah [study] that is not combined with work will ultimately cease and is sinful, and that person will in the end turn out to be a robber.”

Rambam summarizes the law in this matter (*ibid.*, 3:11):

It is a great virtue that one should sustain himself from his labor. The pious of the old days behaved this way, and in this manner they merited all the honor and all the good in this world and in the World to Come, as it says (*Tehillim* 128:2), “When you eat the toil of your hands, you are fortunate and everything is good with you” — “you are fortunate” in this world and “everything is good with you” in the World that is only good.

If so, a person must create a balance between his obligation to devote his entire being to Torah study and the obligation to work in order to sustain himself through the labor of his hands.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 156:1) rules specifically:

Then (after the morning prayers and learning Torah

during the fixed time)<sup>4</sup> one should go and attend to his affairs, because all Torah study that is not combined with work will ultimately cease and is sinful, because poverty will cause him to transgress his Maker's will. Nevertheless, one should not regard his labor as his primary occupation; it should be treated as something temporary, while the [study of] Torah should be regarded as something permanent.

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4. See in this regard the *Beur Halachah*, who notes, "It is stated in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:1) that a person should set aside time for Torah study in the day and at night. In view of this, it is proper that in addition to the time of study allotted after the morning prayers, he should set aside time for the study of Torah between Minchah and Ma'ariv, because by doing so he fulfills his obligation of Torah study at night. The matter of study between Minchah and Ma'ariv is also alluded to in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 4b), where it says, 'A person comes from the field in the evening and goes to the house of prayer. If he knows how to read, he reads; if he knows how to study, he studies, and [then] reads the *Shema* and prays.' (See there and see also what I wrote concerning the *Shelah* in *simon* 1.) Because of our many sins, a number of people are completely negligent in their Torah study and do not care to devote even a little of their time to the study of Torah. The reason for this is that they are not aware of the severity of the obligation, and our Sages already said, 'God has waived the sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder, but has not waived the sin of not learning Torah.' And the *Midrash Mishlei* (chap. 10) writes, 'Rav Yitzchak said, "Come and see how grave is the Day of Judgment, when God judges the entire world. One who knows *Tanach*, but does not know *Mishnah*, comes along and God turns away from him, and the straits of purgatory strengthen about him. One who comes with two or three orders [of the six orders of the *Talmud*], God tells him, 'My son, why did you not study the rest of the *Talmud*?...And a person who does not prompt himself to set aside daily times for Torah study will definitely remain empty of everything, God forbid. And what will he say when the Day of Judgment comes? 'The wise person looks ahead'"'



We thus find that in spite of the obligation to devote all one's spare time to the study of Torah, a person is also obligated to be concerned with the respectful sustenance of his family, without becoming a burden upon society, and without, God forbid, reaching the state of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Note that we are not dealing with the question: when should a person be counted among those whose sole occupation is Torah and when is he permitted to be among those who labor for their sustenance? This subject is extremely broad and is beyond the scope of this work, which is concerned only with the point where trust in God and the obligation to toil for one's sustenance meet. It is clear that where someone is not permitted to labor for his sustenance, there can be no obligation to do so. Still, it should be noted that this gives a rise to a halachic question of another kind: whether a person may be supported by society while he devotes all his time to Torah. Concerning this, see, among others, the following basic sources:

The Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Shmittah Ve'yovel* 13:12-13) says:

And why did the tribe of Levi not get a part in the Land of Israel and in the spoils, together with his brothers? Because they were designated for the divine service, to serve Him and to teach His just ways and fair judgments to the populace, as it says, "They will teach Your judgments to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel." Because of this they were separated from worldly affairs, they do not go to war like the other Jews, and do not inherit and gain for themselves by the strength of their bodies, but they are God's army, as it says, "God blessed His army," and it is He who takes for them, as it says, "I am your portion and your inheritance." Not only the tribe of Levi, but any person in the world who has volunteered and understood that he should stand apart before God, and serve Him, and toil in order to know God, and proceeded properly as God had created him, and discarded all the worldly calculations, he has become very holy, and God will be his portion and inheritance for now and forever, and will provide for him in the same manner as He did the Kohanim and Levi'im.

It seems from this that even in Rambam's opinion, it is permitted for one to devote his life to the study of Torah and disengage himself from worldly affairs, attaining the status of a "Levi," and God will sustain him. However, we have to reckon with the previously mentioned ruling of the Rambam in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (3:10-11), according to which a person should labor for his sustenance and not become a burden on society. For this reason, Radbaz explains that Rambam's intention in *Hilchos Shmittah Ve'yovel* (13:12-13) was for a person who chooses to be like a Levi and to devote all his time to Torah study, and for whom God will provide enough earnings to be sufficient for his sustenance. This means that Rambam does not rule here that it is permitted to receive one's sustenance from the public. According to Rambam, a person who has decided to devote all his time to Torah study is permitted to abstain from work, but is not permitted to become a burden on society. He can continue with this holy goal only if God will indeed provide him with wealth that will allow him to sustain himself without resorting to receiving the assistance of others. This is apparently clear from Rambam's commentary on the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (4:6):

After I have decided not to speak about this counsel...but still I will say it without fear, without favoring anyone who was before me or who is currently present. Know that it has already been said, "Do not make the Torah a hoe with which to dig," which means do not regard it as a tool for gaining sustenance. And I wish to explain and say that anyone who benefits in this world from the Torah removes himself from the World to Come. People have ignored this clear language, and they have cast its correct meaning behind their backs and depended on the literal meaning of passages that they did not understand — I shall explain them — and they imposed laws upon individuals and communities. They converted Torah appointments into a tax-like law, as well as caused people to think the complete nonsense, that it is necessary and obligatory to assist Torah scholars and their students, and people who are studying Torah and do not do anything else. But all this is an error; there is nothing in the Torah that will verify this and there is absolutely no basis on which to support it. For if one would reflect upon the lives

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of our holy Sages, one will not find imposition of obligations upon people, and no collection of money for honored and esteemed houses of learning, and not for the heads of communities of the Diaspora, and not for rabbinical judges, and not for teachers of Torah, and not for any appointees, and not for any other people. Instead, we find in every generation, in all the communities, that some were extremely poor and some extremely wealthy. Far be it from me to suspect that those generations were not kind and charitable. For indeed, had that poor man stretched out his hand to take, they would have filled his house with silver and gold, but he was unwilling. Instead, he was content with his work through which he would draw his sustenance, whether in abundance or scarcity, and he spurned what others possessed because the Torah precluded him from this...Nor do we find a needy Sage who denounced people of his generation that they do not provide for his comfort, far be it from them. Instead they themselves were pious and believed in truth for its own sake, and in God and the Torah of Moshe, through which one merits [life in the] World to Come, and they did not allow it for themselves. They understood that taking it constitutes profanation of God's Name among the multitude, inasmuch as they will think that the Torah is merely just a profession from which a person sustains himself. This would be despised in their view and would bring about a situation of (*Bamidbar* 15:31), "He has despised the word of God." Indeed, it is a mistake, those who are bold to dispute the truth and the explicit language and take people's money either with or without their consent...You have most probably heard those simpletons who rely on the statement, 'One who desires to benefit may benefit in the manner that Elisha did, and one who does not desire to benefit, let him not derive benefit as Shmuel from Ramasayim.' But this does not at all mean what they think. This is because Elisha did not receive money from anyone, and even more so, he did not obligate anyone by law — far from this. Indeed, he received only refreshments, such as when someone hosted him while he was underway. He would travel, stay overnight with him, and eat by him at that night, and

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maybe in the day, and would leave on his affairs. Similarly, if one wants to stay in someone's house because he is travelling, or similar, he may do so... Indeed, the permission given to Torah scholars is that they should give their money to others [to invest for them], and they should use it for business and derive the benefit thereof; the person who does this business is rewarded, and this is what is meant [by the Sages when they said], "one who fills the pockets of Torah scholars." Also, the merchandise of [Torah scholars] may be sold first...These are the ordinances that God has set for them, just as He has fixed the gifts to the Kohanim and *ma'aser* to the Levi'im...as is the tradition...The Torah has also exempted *Talmudic* scholars from taxes and from communal service, providing lodgings, per capita levies — these are to be paid by the community for them — construction of walls, and similar. Even if the *Talmudic* scholar is very wealthy, he is free of this obligation...This is the Torah law, just as Torah has exempted the Kohanim from paying the half-shekel, as we have explained in its place, and what is similar to it.

This means that *Talmudic* Sages may receive priority from the community in conducting their business, and they are similarly exempt from all kinds of communal taxes and obligations. But a *Talmudic* scholar may not gain his livelihood from the community nor take money from the community (except meals and lodgings when he is on the way).

On the other hand, see Rabbi Yosef Karo, in his work *Kesef Mishneh* (3:10, *Hilchos Talmud Torah*), who disagrees with Rambam, and explains the passages that Rambam presents differently. Thus, for example, concerning Rambam's questions: Why did Hillel toil for his sustenance and not take money from the public? Does it stand to reason that they were not benevolent? To this the *Kesef Mishneh* answers that there is no proof from there that *Talmudic* scholars are prohibited from taking money from the public, because it seems that Hillel worked for a living only until he became famous and [until then] was like any other Torah student. But when he became a Torah Sage and taught others, does it stand to reason that he remained a wood hewer? Rabbi Karo concludes that it is permitted to take money for teaching Torah to pupils or from someone

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who wants to come closer to God, or in the case of a judge who is involved in judging the public. To quote him:

Our teacher of blessed memory (Rambam) spoke much in his commentary on the *Mishnah* (*Pirkei Avos* 4) concerning support given to Torah scholars and rabbis...But if one studies for the sake of Heaven and then is unable to find sustenance unless he takes from others, this is permitted. There are three parts to this: either he takes from the parents to teach their sons or to teach the parents themselves. Or if he sits and learns Torah and whoever wants to join him and study the same, he brings him closer to Torah and *mitzvos*. Or he metes out highly fair judgments...The rule appears to be that one who has nothing to live on is permitted to take a salary, either from his students or from the community. It is similarly permitted to take money for rendering judgment from the community or from the litigants upon conformance to rules that are listed in the laws of *Sanhedrin*. After God has informed us of all this, we may say that our teacher's intention here is that a person should not stop working in order to gain his sustenance from other people, and then go and learn Torah. Rather, he should learn a profession that will sustain him, and if this works out, all is well. If not, he can take his sustenance from the community in order to study Torah and there is nothing wrong with that...And even if we will say that this is not our teacher's opinion...we have a rule that whenever the law is undecided, follow the custom. And we have seen that all the Sages of the nation, before the time of our teacher and after him, take a salary from the community. And even if we agree that our teacher is correct in interpreting the *Mishnah*, it is possible that all the Sages of all generations have decided that "it is time to act for God, they have voided your Torah" — that if students and their teachers would not have readily available sustenance, they could not study Torah properly, and the Torah would have been, God forbid, forgotten, whereas when it is readily available, they could study Torah and make it great and glorious.

This being so, according to Rabbi Karo there exists a temporary dispensation, according to which a Torah scholar may take money from

The Rema, in his annotations on *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:21) rules as follows:

...And one should work daily for his sustenance if he has nothing to eat, and the rest of the day and night he should study Torah. And it is a great virtue that one should sustain himself from the toil of his hands, as it says (*Tehillim* 128:2), "When you eat from the toil of your hands..."

And anyone who decides to study Torah, and not do any work, and sustain himself from charity, desecrates the Holy Name and defiles the Torah, because it is not permitted to benefit from the study of Torah. And all Torah study that is not accompanied by work brings about sin, and he will end up becoming a robber (quote from the Tur).

All this applies to a healthy person, who is able to work or do some business to sustain himself (Rabbeinu Yerucham and Rabbeinu Yonah, path 2, and also in Ramah), but someone who is old or sick may benefit from his Torah study and be supplied with food (according to all opinions).

Some authorities are of the opinion that even one who is healthy may do so (*Beis Yosef* in the name of the Rashbatz, part 1, 147-148).

For this reason it is the custom in all places where Jews live that the city's rabbi has an income and support

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the community in order that every generation will have people who are studying Torah properly, and Torah will not be forgotten from the Jewish nation.

from the city's residents so that he need not perform labor in front of people, and this would denigrate Torah to the populace (Abarbanel in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*).<sup>6</sup>

This applies only to a *talmid chacham* who needs it. But if he is wealthy, it is not permitted.

There are other authorities who are even more lenient — that a *talmid chacham* and his pupils may receive their needs from those who give in order to support Torah students, because this allows them to learn Torah in contentment.

Still, one who is able to sustain himself properly from his handiwork and study Torah, this is the trait of piusness and a Heavenly gift. But this does not apply to most people, because most people are not able to study Torah at a high level of understanding while earning a living.

And all this refers to what is permitted — to take support from the community or a set stipend — but one should not accept gifts from people.”

This being the case, an ordinary person is obligated to work for a living on the one hand, whereas on the other hand he should study Torah whenever he can. Hence a person should strive to find a balance between his Torah study and his trust

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6. The Vilna Gaon brings a large number of proofs for this approach in his commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* (subsection 4). For example, there is the statement by Rashi (*Sotah* 40a): ‘A major *talmid chacham* that is qualified to lead... is given presents and is made wealthy in order that he be esteemed and his rulings be accepted...’

in God, and the need to earn a living, while being aware of the fact that he may not devote time to earning a living beyond what is needed for his sustenance.

So, where is this point of balance located? What is its proper definition and what is the proper test for finding it? How many hours is a person supposed to be learning Torah which should not be devoted to the need to sustain himself, since God will not detract from his sustenance that he was allotted on *Rosh Hashanah*? How many hours should a person assign to earning a living? At what point in time and according to what criterion is one obligated to stop his learning and work for sustaining his family?

We have cited above the statement by Ramchal in his work *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 21 — “Means of Acquiring Piousness”): “The correct approach is that of the early pious, who made Torah study their primary occupation, while regarding their labor as secondary, and were successful in both.” Rabbi Luzzatto notes that since the need to resort to natural means is a harsh edict, one should reduce it to the barest minimum. But the question still remains concerning the meaning of the “barest minimum.” What does it actually mean? One hour, two hours, three hours, six hours, eight hours? What is the balance point?

Ramchal in *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 1), notes that:

The very substance of man’s existence in this world is solely the performance of *mitzvos*, serving of God, and withstanding trials. The world’s pleasures should serve only to aid and assist him by way of providing him with the contentment and peace of mind that are requisite



for freeing his heart for the service that was imposed upon him.

However, usually contentment and peace of mind are the fruit of habit, because a wealthy person does not attain peace of mind until he is supplied with all the material things that are absolutely not needed by one who is not used to them. This gives rise to the question: what is the level of comfort which a person should become accustomed to, without sinning regarding the purpose of his life in this world on the one hand, and without foregoing the needs of the material world that are vital to him on the other hand, in order to attain the contentment and peace of mind that one needs in order to perform *mitzvos* and serve God?

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner makes a distinction between one's needs and luxuries in accordance with the basic distinction between the "pain of lacking" and the "joy of availability." There are things, the lack of which does not pain a person, but the attainment of which causes him joy. Such things are to be regarded as luxuries. As compared with this, there are things that a person needs and will be pained not to have (such as basic food products), but when he has them, they do not cause him to be joyous, rather they provide him with the feeling that "this is the way it should be." These things are regarded as human needs.

Still, it appears that the distinction between what provides one with the "joy of availability" and is regarded as luxury and what causes a person to feel the "pain of lacking" and is hence regarded as need is different from one person to another depending on his habits and various circumstances. The

question remains: What should be the criteria? According to what measurement should a person check his actions and adjust his behavior?

In conjunction with this we have to deal with the question: What is sustenance? Meager rations and barely sufficient water? Extreme wealth or something in the middle? And if so, what is that “middle”? Does a general scale exist, according to which one may distinguish between what is considered vital and what is considered luxury?<sup>7</sup>

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7. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Ha’Kohen explains in conjunction with this in his *Mishnah Berurah* (156:2): “One should work only for his sustenance. However, even in this matter one should be aware of the evil inclination, which lures one [with the argument] that he needs to work all day for this purpose. But the main thing is that one should make his own consideration as to what are his absolutely vital needs, without which it would be impossible for him to function, and then he can attain a state where his work is secondary and his Torah study is his main occupation.” Similarly, he notes in his work *Chofetz Chaim* (in the introduction, positive commandment 12, in a footnote) a certain absurdity, according to which a person who is financially comfortable suffers from the poverty of a dire lack of time because of his need to improve his business. This is precisely the person who is financially well-off and does not have to toil to sustain his family, who has even less time for learning Torah. In his own words: “Whatever God will increase in his benefit and cause him to earn even more from his business, the evil inclination will tempt him and say, ‘Now, according to the wealth that God has granted you, you must live in a more comfortable apartment, and walk around wearing embroidered clothing, and conduct yourself in the manner of most respectable citizens, since otherwise you will be held in disgrace by your contemporaries. Hence, you must now cancel the times set aside for the study of Torah and travel to a certain place to do more business.’ And then, when God will help him and he will become highly successful, the evil inclination will tempt him that he should engage in additional

This question will be discussed in the closing chapter, which provides a true-to-life sketch of the life of a person who trusts in God. However, in this chapter we shall deal with this matter at the principal level, as a part of the general and more basic question: Where is the line between permissible toil to attain a livelihood and excessive effort that is regarded as being detrimental to trust in God? What is the point at which a person is supposed to discontinue his labors, put his hope in God, and return to his Torah study and prayers?

### **9(3). THE COMPREHENSIVE DOCTRINE OF RABBI DESSLER**

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, in his work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (vol. 1, pp. 187-203), delineates an orderly and comprehensive doctrine in this complex subject of finding the point of balance between human effort and trust, in keeping with the following line of thought and viewpoint:

At the time when Adam Ha'rishon was at the highest spiritual level, all the needs of his refined body were supplied by themselves. The need to toil in order to attain material

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business ventures. And when one will not be able to do [all the work] on his own... the evil inclination will demonstrate the existence of another need: 'Now that God has granted you many business ventures, you must hire a large number of people to work for you...' To make a long story short, what will happen in the end is that the more good and success that God will grant him, the more will the evil inclination incite him to neglect his prayers and Torah study, to the point that he will not even have time for communal prayer... This being so, a person must very seriously consider what his true needs are, without which he cannot go on, and the rest should be eliminated."

results stems from the decree of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” which expresses the descent of Adam Ha’rishon, in the aftermath of his sin, to a corporeal state that carries in its wake the need to resort to natural means.<sup>8</sup> But a person is obligated to aspire to be as spiritual as possible, and this requires that he reduce the above curse as much as possible.

What is the measure of toil that is “the barest minimum? To this Rabbi Zundel from the city of Salant (the mentor of Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant, the founder of the Mussar movement) replies that:

One should toil for his sustenance because we are not meritorious enough for overt miracles. In view of this, we are obligated to work in such a manner that will allow attributing the abundance that descends upon us to some [natural] cause.

In other words, a person does not need to do what is required to definitely cause a desired result, but it suffices to do something that under ordinary circumstances may bring about these results, even with a very low probability, so that it will not have to be said that the results came about by an overt miracle. Thus, for example, said the Rabbi of Salant, if I buy a lottery ticket I fulfill my obligation to exert myself for

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8. See the *Mishnah* (*Kiddushin* 4:14), “Rabbi Shimon the son of Eliezer says, ‘Did you ever see an animal or a bird that has a profession, yet these sustain themselves without pain. But they were created only to serve me and I was created to serve my Maker. It stands to reason that I should have been sustained without pain, but I acted wrongly and lost my sustenance.’”

sustenance because, should I win, I can always regard it as a natural occurrence.

This means that it is not expected that the effort exerted by a person will indeed be the cause for the salvation, since the results anyway do not depend on human effort and it is Divine Providence that brings the salvation.<sup>9</sup> However, God does

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9. In connection with this, beautiful are the words of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ha'kohen (author of the works, *Ketzos Ha'choshen* and *Avnei Miluim*) in his preface to one other of his works, *Shev Shmaita*, where he writes:

Even though there are people who must be involved in some business, business dealings should be with honesty, and this is how a person is first judged by the Heavenly Court (as we find in the second chapter of *Maseches Shabbos*, that when the soul arrives in the World of Truth, it is asked at the very outset, "Did you deal faithfully?"). This is according to the verse, "And the faith of your times shall be a hoard of salvation," about which our Sages say that faith applies to *Seder Zeraim*. And *Tosafos* quotes the Jerusalem *Talmud* that this pertains to a person who has faith in Hashem and sows, and not like those who engage in business and say, "My power and the might of my arm have brought me all this wealth." This is because when one sows he throws his seeds, he plows his soil, and covers them there, and the seeds get lost and rot — until God will have pity on him and deposit dew, will make the wind blow, and he will joyously reap and carry the sheaves. (I.e., a person who sows resorts to natural means while continuing to believe in God, since the seeds that he sows rot in the soil and he must pray for rain so that he can joyously carry the sheaves after he has sowed in tears and with hope.) For this reason *Seder Zeraim* is called "faith." Similarly, all business dealings should be with faith, that is, he should believe that what he buys or sells, borrows or lends, is similar to throwing seeds on the ground, and his desire will be completed by Heavenly benevolence, and this is the explanation of "did you deal faithfully."

not want one to feel that it is He Who manages the world (to the extent that it will deprive one from the freedom of choice). This being so, God wishes that every outcome that He decrees should happen in a “natural” manner. The fact that the probability that one’s action will bring about the desired results is very low is not important, since in any way the purpose of the activity is not to bring about the required result, but solely to provide natural “clothing” for the results that were fixed by Divine Providence. In view of this, it suffices that one should perform some act that can hide the miracle that was performed by Divine Providence, so that if He decrees to save him by means of a covert miracle, the people will see a “natural course” of things, to which the salvation can be ascribed.

Rabbi Dessler takes issue with those who assert that a person is under obligation to labor to the best of his ability, who support this argument by claiming that this toil is a *mitzvah*, as it says, “Six days you should labor,” and they also quote the passage in the *Talmud* according to which “the verse (*Tehillim* 106:3), ‘Who performs kindness at all times’ applies to one

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The basis for the above is to be found already in the writings of Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his work *Chovos Ha’levavos* (*Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*, chap. 4):

Similarly, artisans, businessmen, and owners of property for rent are commanded to seek their sustenance while trusting in God. This is because sustenance is in His hands and His possession, and He guarantees it to a person and completes it in any way that He chooses. Do not think that the way [in which one attained his livelihood] helped him or damaged him in any way. Should his sustenance come to him by any of the means in which he toils, he should not trust those means and be happy with it and depend on it, since by doing this he will weaken his trust in his God.

who provides livelihood for his wife and small children.”<sup>10</sup> To this Rabbi Dessler replies that if one will look at the above words of *Mesillas Yesharim* and the books that enumerate *mitzvos*, he will find that this is solely permission to labor for a livelihood, and in no way an obligation. Working for a living is a penalty and a curse, and little effort suffices.

Indeed, one who uses his earnings to sustain his wife and children performs an act of kindness, but it is not true that, should he make a greater effort, he will earn more and be able to provide his family with a more comfortable living.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, there is no causative relation between his effort and the results, and in view of this, why should one toil beyond the absolute minimum?

In this connection, Rabbi Dessler additionally criticizes the saying, “We have not left anything to chance,” according to which a person, so to speak, does everything in his power and with the strength of his hands, and does not know that actually all this activity only amounts to the effort that he is supposed to exert in order to hide the fact that it is God Who conducts his world.

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10. See the *Talmud* (*Kesubos* 50a) concerning the verse (*Tehillim* 106:3), “Commendable are those who uphold justice, who perform kindness at all times.’ How can one perform kindness at all times? The rabbis of Yavneh, and some say it was Rabbi Eliezer, expounded, ‘It is one who sustains his wife and his small children.’”

11. Rabbi Dessler suggests in connection with this an interesting test: “And the people who think that all their business is conducted for the sake of His Name, let them check whether a spiritual thought comes to their mind in the middle of their business, or conversely, whether business thoughts bother them in the middle of the Amidah prayer.”

Effort on its own will not get one anywhere and places everything in the hands of Divine Providence. The only purpose of one's labor is to provide a "natural" excuse for the results, so that the matter should not appear to be an overt miracle and be detrimental to man's free will — for if one would clearly see Divine Providence, he would naturally refrain from heresy and from violating His *mitzvos*, and his belief would become simple knowledge. Because of this, God masks His Providence in rules of "nature," whereas in actuality everything is done solely by God.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Dessler explains that the conduct of Rabbi Zundel of Salant, who was content with purchasing a lottery ticket as something that exhausts his natural effort for the purposes of his sustenance, manifests a level of trust in God that is specific only to the chosen few. An ordinary person who would, out of excitement, imitate Rabbi Salant, exposes himself to the danger that maybe God will test him and will not provide him with his ordinary sustenance; he will not withstand the test and regret that he did not exert a sufficient effort in this matter, i.e., in the case of failure, a person will think that what happened was caused by not exerting himself sufficiently. This will seriously maim his belief in God, since this idea stems from a lack of recognition and belief that it is God Who decides what the results will be.

So the initial excitement that causes one to put all his hope in God and to refrain from making a natural effort may end up in disappointment, regret, and more serious harm in his faith and trust in God. Therefore, an ordinary person is obligated to think about whether he will react in this way or not.



Rabbi Dessler sums this up and notes that:

This weighing must be done with great precision and enormous exactitude, because the evil inclination lies in wait on both sides:

Should one resort to excessive effort — then he denies God's influence.

Should one make little effort and fail — he will regret his previous actions and will also deny God's influence.

It is impossible to reach the true point except by means of pure fear of Heaven that protects one from personal considerations.

The measure of a person's effort should consist of a balance between the following opposite considerations:

**On the one hand:**

A person's effort to attain his needs by natural means manifests his descent, as a result of sin, to a material state that involves the need to toil for his sustenance. Therefore, one who increases his labor, which is nothing but a penalty imposed upon a person because of this spiritual decline, shows that he has not attained the recognition that this is solely a punishment. He does not understand the meaning of resorting to natural means as being an expression of a person's low spiritual standing.

A person who puts forth much effort to attain his goals suffers from a weakness in the belief that effort as such does not bring about any results.

Similarly, any activity that is not absolutely necessary, not

only does not help and is indicative of a lack of trust, but comes at the expense of the study of Torah and the divine service. Inappropriate effort exerted by a person to gain his livelihood is regarded as an unjustified neglect of Torah study.

**On the other hand:**

A person should be wary of a situation in which he tests his faith; it may weaken in the case of failure.

In the case of failure, such a person may regret his reducing of effort and blame this for his lack of success.

This regret is a failure in a person's faith, since it stems from the inference that his failure does not come from a Heavenly decree, but from his refraining from making a greater effort, the meaning of which is that, in his opinion, it is a person's actions which navigate the course of events in our world.

It is hence imperative to maintain a spiritual balance, according to which a person will feel that, even if he, God forbid, fails, he will not regret his lack of effort and will not think that he, from his point of view, did not do enough, but should be perfect in his faith that this was the divine will.

The point of balance between human effort and trust in God consists of the stage at which a person feels truthfully and sincerely that "he did what he was supposed to do." From that point onwards his success does not depend on him, but entirely on the divine will. When a person reaches this level, if he fails, God forbid, he will not ascribe it to lack of effort on his part. He expended the proper amount of natural effort,

and from then on, anything more would be superfluous.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that this point of balance is personal and, naturally, varies from one person to another according to each one's personal circumstances, nature, and spiritual standing. But a person's current spiritual standing is not to be regarded as the ultimate. A person is able to and needs to attain higher and higher levels of belief and trust, so that his point of balance will be noble and pure, to the point that his natural effort will be minimal and he will truly and sincerely feel that after performing even a minor effort he has done everything he was supposed to do, and from this point onwards — success depends only on Heavenly assistance.

The stronger a person's faith — i.e., the greater the extent to which he does not regard natural effort as a means of achieving a material need and hence his failure to attain his desire does not subject him to a serious trial of faith — the greater his obligation to decrease his resorting to human effort.

Rabbi Dessler notes that there are a number of ways in which a person can reduce his regret and maintain his trust if his

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12. It would appear that by saying this, Rabbi Dessler describes the highest level of natural effort — the point at which a person who does not succeed will not blame his lack of effort. However, it stands to reason that a person should not begin with the top level. The words of Rabbi Dessler correlate with those of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, who notes that a person should start with minimum effort, which will increase gradually upon observing that it is insufficient to attain his desires. In fact, it appears that even with this gradual experiment, which is emphasized by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, a person should not exceed the maximum level of effort which Rabbi Dessler suggests, and at this point he should discontinue his labors.

effort did not succeed.

1. **Spirituality** — A person should strive to reach higher spiritual levels at all times, and this in itself will cause him to reduce his natural effort to attain his needs, in the sense of “make your Torah study permanent and your work casual.” A person who strives for spirituality will not regret that he did not succeed in worldly affairs, because regret stems only from disappointment due to a striving that did not succeed.
2. **Being satisfied with little** — To the extent that one learns to be satisfied with little, he will reduce his effort in worldly affairs, and this is the meaning of the *Mishnah (Pirkei Avos 6:4)*, “This is the way of Torah, eat bread with salt...” Similarly, to the extent that a person gets used to being satisfied with little, so will his disappointment diminish if his effort did not bring about the desired results, and hence he will be more immune to crises of belief.<sup>13</sup>
3. **Modesty** — God has imprinted into the human heart the trait of shame, which causes a person to perform unbecoming acts clandestinely. For this reason, after sinning, Adam was ashamed of his nakedness, even though the physical parts of the body are necessary for the continuation of humanity.

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13. However, one should obviously pay attention to the fact that as he reduces his food intake, his hunger for this food will increase. The balance point hence subjects the person to an additional trial.

The same applies to resorting to natural means — even though it is an absolute necessity, this should be done modestly and with a feeling of shame that one is engaged in something that appears to be at odds with God’s honor. This shame alone, if internalized, will cause him to reduce his natural effort.

Thus, just as modesty aids in reducing lust,<sup>14</sup> so will it aid in reducing human effort and bring it into the proper proportion.

4. **Prayer with the proper devotion** — until one inculcates the fact that God is Omnipotent. As such a realization grows and takes hold in his heart, so will his regret lessen when his natural efforts fail.
5. **Contemplation and study** — “To contemplate the subject of trust and to study *sefarim* about it. Also, when laboring to attain results, one should think that all he is doing is fulfilling the curse of ‘by the sweat of your brow’ and that his toil will not do anything for him. In doing this, the matter of trust will become strengthened in his heart.”

Note that, at times, a person refrains from exerting sufficient effort and then fails. This happens because the reason for his inaction was not trust in God, but personal laziness. It is obvious that it is only trust in God that brings about divine assistance in the sense of (*Tehillim* 33:22), “May Your kindness,

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14. See the explanation of the Vilna Gaon on the verse (*Yehoshua* 2:1), “And Yehoshua sent... people as clandestine spies” — “that they should not stumble as they did the first time.”

O God, be upon us, as we have yearned for You.” Laziness does not bring about Heavenly assistance. Therefore, a person should be careful not to mistake laziness for trust, because at times one refrains from acting because he is lazy and ascribes this to trust in God.

Moreover, Rabbi Dessler notes that laziness is a trait that pervades all of a person’s ways. Therefore, it is preferable that a person be hard working, despite the fact that this increases the extent of his natural effort. This is so because it will also bring about assiduousness in his divine service, whereas should one reduce the extent of his labor because of his laziness, this will cause him to be lazy also in the divine service.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, it is obvious that we are dealing here with a very fine balance and it is highly probable that a person will miss the proper balance point. Rabbi Dessler notes that a person can know the truth if he is willing to know it: “One should only concentrate and view the matter truthfully, and then his heart will distinguish the true way.”

Rabbi Dessler notes (in the name of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv

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15. Rabbi Dessler additionally states, “One should not fool himself by claiming that he is using his laziness as a way to bring about trust, in the sense of ‘performing a *mitzvah* not for the sake of His Name, since [this very performance] will cause one [in the end to] perform *mitzvos* for the sake of His Name.’ This is because the concept of ‘not for the sake of His Name’ does not apply to trust, because the *mitzvah* is not refraining from taking action, but it is the intention that comes from one’s heart, and there is no concept of ‘not for the sake of His Name’ in *mitzvos* that are performed by one’s heart.” Concerning this, see also Rabbi Dessler’s statement in *Michtav Me’Eliyahu* (vol. 2, pp. 77-78).

of Kelm) that there exists an indicator which can serve as a person's measuring stick, allowing him to determine whether he stands at the balance point. The rule is that if one feels a panicky need for more effort, this indicates that he should abandon this labor "because it is definite that it comes from the evil inclination."

As a rule, a person encounters an internal resistance and difficulty in performing a *mitzvah*, and he needs a lot of willpower in order to overcome it. Making an effort in the proper manner is equivalent to performing a *mitzvah*, and because of this it is accompanied by a feeling of internal resistance that has to be overcome.

In contrast, if a person has a burning internal urge to immediately take action in order to achieve a certain result, this means that the person has deviated from that which is permissible, and his evil inclination does not oppose him, but, conversely, encourages him to do so.

This principle is clearly demonstrated by the episode of the spies Moshe sent to explore the Land of Israel. Rabbi Dessler explains it as follows.

Ramban in *Parashas Shelach* explains that the Jews claimed that before going to war, it is necessary to gather information about the roads and to determine which city should be attacked first. This was sinful because they had witnessed constant Heavenly salvation and they should have just followed the Cloud of Glory. Moshe accepted their suggestion in order to satisfy their desires. (Similarly to this, the Ibn Ezra says, "It found favor in my eyes' — because you all agreed.")

In other words: Moshe decided with the people to send spies because he was concerned about the point of balance between trust and making a natural effort to conquer the Land of Israel. Moshe thought that perhaps it was indeed proper to analyze the approaches and collect intelligence before going into the fateful battle for conquering their ancestors' inheritance.

True, there was a divine promise to the Jewish nation that they would conquer the Land. God Himself led the Jews out of Egypt and a chain of miracles followed — having in front of them the Cloud of Glory by day and the Pillar of Fire by night. But even under these circumstances, maybe they were supposed to fulfill the obligation of making a natural effort?

God told Moshe, “Send for yourself” — meaning, “according to your opinion.” This comes to say that God did not want to tell Moshe where the point of balance was, since this was a test. It had to remain free choice — not sending the spies could have been a mistake to the same degree as sending the spies (which turned out to be the wrong choice).

Actually, the Jewish nation indeed erred in this point. Because they had observed overt miracles all the time, they should have trusted and not done anything additional, because resorting to natural means is needed only to cover up God's miraculous conduct of His world, to prevent matters from being seen as overt miracles. However, the generation of the wilderness was living a life of overt miracles. Why would they need any natural action? However, the Jews were apprehensive that the miraculous conduct would cease when they came to the Promised Land even before the conquest



was completed, and then they would need to resort to ordinary military strategy.

Moshe was apprehensive about this expedition and sent only pious people,<sup>16</sup> consulted God, and prayed for Yehoshua, “God, save him from the counsel of the spies.” The Maharal quotes a *Midrash* that the Jews wanted to send spies even before this, but Moshe did not permit them to do so until the incident of Miriam slandering Moshe. She was afflicted with *tzara’as* and the entire nation waited seven days for her, during which time she sat outside the camp until she was healed. Only after the people learned a lesson about the severity of slander did Moshe send the spies, with the hope that they would avoid slandering the Land. This is what was meant by Rashi who said, “Why is the incident with the spies written next to that of Miriam? Because she was afflicted for slandering her brother, and these wicked people observed this and did not learn the lesson.”

Rabbi Dessler notes that it appears that the Jews definitely had trust in God and, had the Satan incited them not to believe in God at all, he would not have succeeded. But he misled them concerning a matter which was “like a hair’s breadth.” And this is the way the matter is described in the *Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, at the start of Parashas Shelach)*:

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16. Rabbi Dessler notes that the spies were capable of withstanding this test, “except that one chooses foolishness for himself, and even the greatest of men still remains a ‘chooser’ and may switch matters from one end to the other (since if this were not so, he would lack the freedom of choice), and about this the verse (*Devarim* 32:20) says, ‘Because they are a generation bent on inversion.’”

The Jews said to Moshe, “Our teacher, should we send people ahead of us?” To which Moshe answered, “What for?”

They said to him, “Because we were already promised by God and He told us that we will enter the Land and we will inherit the entire wealth, as it says, ‘And houses filled with all the good.’ So they [the Land’s inhabitants] heard that we are going to enter and they will prepare secret hiding places. Should they hide their wealth, we shall enter and find nothing, and this will void God’s words. Therefore, let spies go before us.”

It doesn’t say here “and they should see the Land for us,” but rather that “they should dig for us” — they should go and find what was [hidden] in the digs of the earth.

When [Moshe] heard this, he became ensnared by them, as it says, “And the matter found favor with me.”

This means that here we were dealing with the generation of the wilderness, a wise generation, who explained that they wanted to send spies in order to avoid a situation in which, God forbid, His Name would be desecrated. They claimed that spies should be sent because the nations might hear that the Land was about to be conquered by the Jews and they would hide their silver and gold, and this would cause God’s words to be voided. They claimed that the sending of the spies was not intended to find the places where the wealth was hidden in order to enrich themselves, but in order to prevent desecrating God’s Name.

In view of this claim, it turns out that both the wise generation and Moshe their teacher did not detect their error, as

it says, “And the matter found favor with me.” When something was presented as involving the honor of His Name, Moshe decided “to be stringent” and ordered the spies to find the hidden treasures of the Land.

However, in actuality, the sending of the spies was nothing other than the result of a natural tendency to do things in the ordinary way and not the result of concern for the honor of His Name. The Jews erred in this point (and misled Moshe).

One who errs is not regarded as having sinned intentionally, and even more so when one errs in a point that requires a fine differentiation, but even an unintentional sinner is still a sinner, because a person will not err concerning something that is rooted in his understanding. A person errs because his understanding of the subject is not perfectly clear; or maybe it was just convenient to err, and on some level he wanted to do it. In other words, even though an error appears to point out to a cognitive failure, whereas will is an expression of alert cognitive activity, and so error and will are in a sense “mutually contradictory” — nevertheless, Rabbi Dessler refers here to the statement by Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (former *Mashgiach* of the Mirrer Yeshiva), that the statement in the *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 8:8)*, “One who wants to err, let him do so,” indicates that “error comes about intentionally,” because a person usually errs in matters about which he doesn’t really care about erring.

Indeed, the Jews could have identified the negative aspect of their desire to send spies from the fact that “all of them approached me,” about which Rashi said, “Disorderly...children were pushing elderly people.” And the rule is, as was

mentioned previously, that if a person feels haste in his need to do something, it is proper that he does not do it.

Rabbi Dessler notes further the well-known principle<sup>17</sup> that God does not punish as revenge, but in order to teach. This is because God is not interested in one's death, but in his repenting and continuing to live. Hence, the purpose of the Heavenly punishment is to educate and teach and not to destroy and hurt. Accordingly, one should understand that Adam's punishment of "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread," which is the source for the need to make an effort to attain a desired end, is not intended to torment a person, but rather to correct what has been distorted in the following manner:

Adam Ha'rishon wanted to be one who "knows good and evil" and by means of this he imparted substance not only to the spiritual (the level of Gan Eden), but also the corporeal. Therefore, the emendation of this sin should be by discovering the spiritual that is concealed within the corporeal.

A person is capable of doing this when he acts in a natural manner and imparts an outer cloak to the result of his effort, but still knows that it is not his work that brought about the results, but Divine Providence and God's will is the true cause of everything that occurs in our world.<sup>18</sup> Hence a per-

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17. This principle is presented in the writings of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (the Sage of Kelm) in the essay "The Path of Faith" and in the work *Chochmah U'mussar* (essay 45), and other places.

18. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv writes in his essay "He Gave Wisdom to the Wise" (sec. 166), "A person who does not contemplate Divine Providence is regarded as an animal that recognizes only the result,

son must realize that nature is in fact a concealed miracle, but its regularity hides this fact, and he should refrain from the tendency to think that things occur naturally.

In this context, it is incumbent upon a person to know that to have the free will to choose good and evil it was imperative that Divine Providence be concealed. Had it been clear and visible to all, a person would be forced to believe in God and would not have free will. In view of this, it superficially appears like a person controls all his business affairs and his livelihood as he desires. This appearance makes it possible to make a mistake and claim that it comes from “his power and strength of his hands.” Toiling in order to achieve is therefore a natural and external course of events that conceals Divine Providence. A person should recognize that actually nothing great or small occurs without God’s command, as it says (*Eichah* 3:37), “Whose pronouncement was ever fulfilled unless God commanded it?” A person should internalize the recognition that even if he performs a certain act, this does not bring about any results and it is only God’s will that does.<sup>19</sup>

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whereas a person also recognizes the cause. The mental status of a wise person is measured by the depth of his knowledge.”

19. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv in *Kisvei Ha'rashaz* (part 2, in the essay “*Derech Ha'emunah*”) as well as in the work *Chochmah U'mussar* (sec. 48) discusses the question: why did God obligate a person to toil to achieve his means, since irrespective of his effort, one’s sustenance is allotted to him from one *Rosh Hashanah* to another, and his livelihood comes to him by means of a miracle that has the same status as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds? His answer is that it is a trial, because God placed man in a world in which there is freedom of choice, and to ensure that this freedom prevail, God’s will materializes surreptitiously and

This is a difficult trial. A person performs an act and thinks in his heart that in fact there is nothing in it to actually help him. The action is carried out naturally, whereas the internal cognizance of a believing person is that the external and natural form is illusory and everything is decided solely by God and without any connection with one's actions. And, in spite of the fact that, as a rule, to quote the *Sefer Ha'chinuch*, "hearts are drawn after actions," a person who trusts in God is commanded that this cognizance is not to be drawn after an action, but should know at all times that the action that he performs is only an external cloak and facade of reality, that everything is really spiritual, which is the real reason for all that happens in his world.

The use of natural means serves only to subject a person to a trial intended to clarify his understanding of the seemingly natural results of his actions, and to see that these are, in fact, unnecessary and it is only God's will that brings about the hoped-for results.

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Divine Providence is not evident to all. Externally it appears as if a person has complete control over all his affairs and sustenance, and he can claim, "My power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth." The need to make an effort to attain the desired results is hence the natural and external course of events, within which Divine Providence is concealed. And a person should recognize that actually nothing great or small occurs without God's command, as it says (*Eichah* 3:37), "Whose pronouncement was ever fulfilled unless God commanded it?" Hence, even when one puts forth effort to achieve his goals, one should know that it is only God's will that brings it all about.

#### 9(4). FIVE LEVELS OF BALANCE BETWEEN RESORTING TO NATURAL MEANS AND TRUST

In keeping with the above, Rabbi Dessler explains that there are five levels regarding the extent of effort that a person is obligated to make:

1. **The highest level** applies to a person who has already withstood the trial and has recognized the fact that both miracles and nature are miracles and there is no nature at all, but it is God Who determines everything that happens in our world and conceals His routine conduct in the form of nature. A person who has attained and internalized this level of belief no longer needs the trial of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” because it will not contribute anything. On the contrary, he should devote all his time to clinging to God. Hence, all his needs in this world are handed to him by means of overt miracles, since there is no point in concealing the miracle from him or in regard to him.<sup>20</sup>

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20. Indeed, there were righteous people who were apprehensive that God’s salvation would appear as an overt miracle, and so they performed natural actions in order to cover and conceal the miracles. Several examples follow: Elisha, who resurrected the son of the Shunamite woman by means of a miracle, did so by placing his eyes upon the child’s eyes and his mouth upon the child’s mouth. The Radak (*Melachim II* 4) explains that Elisha did not resurrect the child by natural means, but by means of a miracle. All he did was place his eyes upon the eyes of the child and brought about natural “warming up” of the child only in order “to conceal the miracle [and make it appear] as if this happened naturally.”

Similarly, we read (*Melachim II* 4) about a widow whose creditors came to take her children. Elisha asked whether she had any vessels and she

Rabbi Dessler presents a number of illustrations of this:

- The *Talmud* (*Berachos* 35b) presents the following statement, “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says, ‘Is it possible that a person plows at the time of plowing, sows at the time of sowing...then what will happen to the Torah? However, at the time when the Jews obey God’s will, their labor will be performed by others.’”

This comes to say that, according to Rabbi Shimon bar

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told him that she had nothing. Elisha told her, “Go, borrow vessels abroad from all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.” Then Elisha told her to shut the door and to pour oil from the vessel she was holding into all the vessels that she borrowed from her neighbors. And a miracle happened, and all these vessels filled up so that she could sell the oil and pay her debt. Please note that also in this case, he did not perform a miracle of creation of something from nothing — new oil, or new vessels, but the little oil that the woman had increased, with the blessing acting sight unseen, in vessels that she borrowed from the neighbors.

The Alter of Kelm, in his work *Chochmah U’mussar* (sec. 58), notes an additional example of this principle. Our forefather Yaakov took stones and placed them around his head (to quote our Sages, “made a semi-canal around his head”) for protection when he slept at night alone while on his way to Charan. What does it help to place stones around one’s head? What kind of protection against animals does it serve? Except that, actually, he was guarded from Heaven from all that is bad, but in order to reduce the appearance of the miracle, he put them around his head.

Similarly, Yaakov put sticks he had peeled at the trough from which the sheep used to drink, so that the females would give birth to sheep that were “speckled and spotted.” In this context, Rabbi Dessler notes that, were this action capable of bringing about such a result naturally, it would seem to be an act of stealing from Lavan. However, in fact, all this occurred miraculously and angels sent him all the speckled and spotted sheep. So why did Yaakov place the sticks? In order to conceal the miracle!



Yochai, a person should put all his hope in God and not make any effort, and God will supply all his needs.

Indeed, this happened to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, when he was hiding with his son in a cave. It is told in the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 33b) that a miracle occurred and a carob tree was created from which he sustained himself, and a spring from which he drank, without him having to be involved in any worldly affairs.

- Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa — it is told about him in the *Talmud* (*Ta'anis* 25b) that he noticed on *Shabbos* eve that his daughter was sad, because instead of preparing oil for lighting the *Shabbos* candles, she used vinegar. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa consoled her by saying, “The One who said that oil should burn will say that vinegar should burn.”

Indeed, a miracle occurred in the merit of his absolute trust in God, and the vinegar burned.

The question arises: why didn't God provide him with oil by some natural way in order to avoid the overt miracle of vinegar burning? The answer is that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa had attained such a spiritual level where the fact that oil burns was, in his view, also a miracle, and from his point of view, both miracles and nature were to be regarded as overt miracles. So there was no reason to conceal God's conduct anymore and an overt miracle occurred to him.<sup>21</sup>

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21. It would seem that it is also possible to explain in this manner the statement of the *Midrash* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 15:3) that was quoted above

2. **The second level** applies to a person who has recognized the fact that his actions are of no use and everything comes from Above, only that emotionally he has not yet attained the perfect recognition of the miracle within nature, and it cannot be claimed that the overt miracle and nature are entirely one and the same for him. This being so, in order to attain perfection, he has to fulfill the harsh decree of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.” He must be occupied with natural pursuits, while all the time believing and knowing that his actions are meaningless. Miraculous conduct does not apply to this person, and the conduct toward him will be natural. If a miracle is performed for him, this will diminish his merits (*Shabbos* 32b).

This is the level to which Rabbi Yishmael refers in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 35b) by expounding on “and you shall

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in Chapter 3. “There was a person who presented a discourse to the effect that God created a follicle for each hair, so that one of them should not benefit from the other. His wife [then] told him, ‘And now you are planning to go forth and look for your sustenance? Stay at home and your Creator will worry about your sustenance, just as He makes sure to sustain each of the hairs on your head and created it in a manner that it should have a dedicated source of life on its own.’ He accepted this claim, stayed at home, and God provided him with sustenance without him making an effort to attain it.” This person understood that the supply of sustenance to a hair is not something natural, but simply a miracle. When a person attains this level of spirituality, there is no longer a point in him being involved in natural pursuits and he is no longer in need of the trial of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” but it is proper that he devotes all his time to clinging to God. Thus, all his needs will be provided for him through overt miracles, because there is no reason to conceal the miracles from him.

gather your grain” — “conduct yourself in the natural manner.” Should such a person abandon natural behavior and rely on miracles, he will not succeed. He is obligated to be involved in natural pursuits, and this is what Rashi writes there, “Conduct yourself with Torah study in the natural manner, because should you be lacking, you will in the end neglect your Torah study.”

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, in his work *Nefesh Ha'chaim* (1: 5) explains that Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai do not disagree with one another, except that Rabbi Yishmael is referring to people who have not attained the high level to which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai referred. Our Sages said, “Many did like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and did not succeed” because they did not attain the perfection of his level and they did not deserve for a miracle to occur to them.

A person who attains this level (which is an exalted level) continues at all times to scrutinize each of his actions to see whether it has any meaning, until he attains the cognizance that he has no affect on what is actually happening. This being so, a person who attains this spiritual standing should persist in resorting to natural means and thus train himself to attain perfection. And since he does so for the sake of His Name, his actions are blessed, as it says, “And I will bless you in all that you will do.” This is what was meant by our Sages of the *Talmud* (*Niddah* 70b), “What should a person do to become wealthy? He should do a lot of business and deal honestly with people and pray to Hashem...” Indeed, the effort that he puts in does not help on its own, and it should be coupled

with prayer.<sup>22</sup> A person should include in his prayers a plea that God should have pity on him and give him the wisdom to understand that his action is of no avail and that he should internalize that it is Divine Providence that causes things to happen and his actions, as such, are of no use.

Moreover, Ramban (*Bereishis* 6:19) explains that “he (Noach) made it (the ark) large in order to reduce the magnitude of the miracle. This is so with all the miracles — to do whatever a person can do and the rest is in the hands of God.” Thus, even when a miracle is performed for a person, he must do everything he can to reduce the apparent magnitude of the miracle. This is what our forefather Yaakov did (*Vayishlach*), “He did not rely on his righteousness and made every possible effort to succeed.” This is because human actions elicit the Heavenly conduct, meaning divine influence from above.

3. **The third level** applies to a person who, when witnessing an overt miracle, understands that everything is from God and it strengthens his faith. But he does not see clearly that nature is just an illusion. Indeed, he sees nature as a tool in God’s hands, and to him, just as a

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22. We find in the *Talmud* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b) that since a person is judged by Heaven at a specific time for the entire year, if he notices that he is successful, this means that he has been judged favorably. So he should hurry and sow plants that yield their fruit within a short time, because until he will be judged again, he will be able to enjoy the fruits of his toil. So a person is not only obligated to resort to natural means, but he should conduct them with reason so that they should become integrated within the Heavenly judgment and be as profitable as possible.

person writes with a pen, so does God conduct the world by means of nature. But according to his approach, nature has an existence of its own and operates according to fixed rules, so that if a person exerts himself and labors, his so-called success is based on the natural rules of causality between the action and the result. A person at this level does not always realize that natural activity has no bearing whatsoever on the final results. In view of this, it is beneficial that miracles be performed for a person at this level.<sup>23</sup> Such a person must be concerned that the effort he exerts will blind him to the fact that it does not help at all and that he only imagines that it has substance. Hence a person at this level should avoid resorting to natural means as much as possible.

In this context we find in the *Talmud* (*Chulin* 105a), “Shmuel said, ‘Compared to my father, I am like vinegar, the son of wine. This is because my father surveys his properties twice a day, whereas I survey my properties only once a day.’”

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23. Chazal relate (*Shabbos* 53b): “It happened that someone’s wife died and left him a suckling child. He had no money to hire a wet nurse. A miracle occurred and he was given two breasts like those of a woman, and he nursed his child. Rabbi Yosef said, ‘Come and see how great this person is that a miracle such as this was done for him...’” This is because only a person who is at this level merits a miracle. On the other hand, a person at the fourth level, where he does not recognize God even after an overt miracle happens to him, does not merit such miracles. At the same time, it is Abaye’s opinion there that an overt miracle represents a lower spiritual level. Thus, at the second level miracles are not performed for people, as we have seen. According to this, the third level is lower than the previous one because here Hashem does perform miracles.

Why didn't Shmuel do what his father did? Why is the person who is more involved in natural effort considered to be on a higher level?

Shmuel's father, who was on a high level, was extensively involved in human effort, and in this way attained increasingly higher levels. This is because every human activity that a person performs while he keeps on repeating and internalizing that there is actually nothing to it, brings him to perfection in trusting God. Divine service from his point of view is the natural endeavor that involves cognitive effort and increases the proper awareness.

In contrast, Shmuel was not extensively involved in human effort, because he was not at his father's spiritual level, and hence every human activity on his part was regarded as an additional trial of his faith in God. As we say in our daily prayers, "Do not bring us to a trial and not to disgrace."

The general rule is: the third level pertains to those for whom miracles strengthen their cognizance and nature weakens their cognizance. It is proper that such a person reduce his resorting to natural means and it is preferable that he is saved by a miracle rather than in a natural manner.

4. **The fourth level** applies to a person who has negated even overt miracles and has attributed everything to the natural course of events, even when it is clear that Divine Providence acted towards him in a supernatural

manner.<sup>24</sup> Miracles are not beneficial for these people, who do not accept the idea of miracles or that miracles are done for them. Each one is a missed opportunity and a trial that they failed. For them, miracles were golden opportunities to acknowledge God's existence, but they still denied it and their sin became greater. In view of this, Heavenly conduct with these people is through natural ways.

Rabbeinu Bachye in *Chovos Ha'levavos (Sha'ar Ha'bitachon)* said, "One who trusts in nature is handed over to nature." On the contrary, the only emendation that can change a person's worldview at this spiritual level is, indeed, when he exerts every possible natural effort and still does not succeed.<sup>25</sup> Only then is there a chance that he will again come to trust in God, return to Him, pray, and recognize Divine Providence.

This being so, a person who sees everything that happens in the world as a natural event — even if in his

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24. A person who denies miracles thinks that even the miracle is something natural. Thus, when the Sea of Reeds was split, all the waters in the world split along with it in a manner that whoever wanted to deny the miracle could say that this was not done just for the Jews, but it was a natural occurrence of the rise and fall of tides and of an easterly wind that blew "naturally" at precisely that time.

25. This approach allows for the explanation of many verses and sayings of our Sages, such as, "Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you" (*Bereishis* 3:18); "It is good for me that I was afflicted" (*Tehillim* 119:71); "I will give thanks to You God, though You were angry with me," (*Yeshayahu* 12:1); "Lest I be satiated and I deny [You]" (*Mishlei* 30:9); and, "Poverty is proper for the Jews" (*Chagigah* 9b).

speech he uses expressions such as “with God’s help” and “thank God” — and still deeply in his heart only depends on his natural effort, will regard all that befalls him as happenstance.

What should he do to avoid this calamity? A person at this level is obligated to reduce his efforts as much as possible in order to internalize his trust in God. He should contemplate matters of belief extensively and make an effort to clarify to himself the truth that nature does not do anything. Should he be unsuccessful in something natural that he resorted to, he should not say that it was caused by applying too little effort, but should understand that this was from God to test his level of trust.

5. **The fifth level** applies to a person who has no belief in Divine Providence at all and thinks that his power and the strength of his hands is what made him this wealth. This person excessively resorts to natural means, and Heaven accords him success and assists him precisely because he devoted himself to denying Divine Providence, and Satan was given permission to mislead him by showing that the way of evil is successful.<sup>26</sup> The entire abundance of this

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26. See in this context *Yirmeyahu* 44:15-18: “Then all the men who knew that their wives sacrificed to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, even all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Yirmeyahu, saying, ‘As for what you have spoken to us in the name of God, we will not listen. But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to sacrifice to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Yehudah and in the streets of Yerushalayim; for then we had plenty of food, and



world that comes to him comes from the depth of impurity, and in the end he will be lost entirely, together with it.

In keeping with these five levels, Rabbi Dessler explains the *Midrash* (*Midrash Rabbah*, introduction to *Eichah Rabbasi*) that there were four kings; each one of them asked for something else. These are David, Asa, Yehoshafat, and Chizkiyahu.

David said (*Tehillim* 18:28), "I pursued my foes and overtook them..." [To which] God said, "I shall do so."

Concerning this, it is written (*Shmuel I* 30:17), "And David smote them from daylight until the evening of the next day" and God illuminated the night for him by sparks and lightning.

Asa stood up and said, "I do not have the strength to kill them, but I shall pursue them and You do it." To this (God) told him, "I shall do it," as it says (*Divrei Ha'yamim II* 14:12), "And Asa and the people with him pursued them," for they were destroyed before God and before His host.

Yehoshafat stood up and said, "I do not have the strength to kill and not to pursue, but I shall say sing and You do it." God said to him, "I shall do it," as it says (*Chronicles II* 20:22), "And when they began to sing and to praise, God sent ambushes against the children of Amon and Moav and of the Mount of Seir that came against Yehudah, and they were smitten."

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we were well, and saw no evil. But since we ceased sacrificing to the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink-offerings to her, we have lacked all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine."

Chizkiyahu stood up and said, “I lack the strength to kill or to pursue or to sing praises, but I shall sleep on my bed and You do it.” God told him, “I shall do it,” as it says (*Melachim II* 19:35), “And it came to pass that night that an angel of God came out and smote the camp of the Assyrians.”

It is seen from this that one’s resort to natural means should be in line with his spiritual standing. According to King David’s level, he should have been involved in pursuit and smiting the foe. Asa believed that he was not permitted to smite foes, so that it would not be said, “My power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth.” Yehoshafat was apprehensive even concerning pursuit and only used spiritual means. Chizkiyahu was apprehensive that he might become haughty and think that the foe was defeated because of his singing. For this reason they all decided to depend on miracles, because there are situations in which sharpening one’s recognition that there is nothing except for God is more important than all other matters, and it saves from all kinds of calamity.

### **9(5). ACTING FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS**

Rabbi Dessler explains that, in addition to the five levels of belief and cognizance, the point of balance between trust in God and resorting to natural means changes abruptly when it is not a matter of a person’s doing something for himself, but for another person.

Rabbi Dessler presents here the statement of the Ba’al Shem Tov that nothing in our world was created without reason, and even people’s bad traits are beneficial under certain

conditions. This being so, there is a need and utility also in the human tendency to perform natural acts at the expense of one's trust in God. This negative human trait of "not leaving anything to chance" and being excessively involved in one's affairs is seemingly an improper trait that stands in complete contradiction to the trait of trust. However, this tendency is also constructive when one acts for the benefit of others.

When a person in need asks for assistance, one should not preach to him that he should have faith and place his hope in God. We are obligated to utilize our natural inclination toward "getting things done" in order to make a strenuous natural effort for the other person. After all, others might be brought closer to belief in God in the manner used by our forefather, Avraham, who first was charitable with people by providing them with food, drink, and lodging, and only then got involved with their spiritual standing by asking them to be appreciative of the gifts of Heaven.<sup>27</sup>

Rabbi Dessler has the following to say about this subject:

It would seem that if natural labor is of no avail, then why is one supposed to be involved in another person's affairs and

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27. B. Yaushzon in *Me'otzreinu Ha'yashan* on *Parashas Beshalach* notes that a woman came to Rabbi Chaim of Sanz and lamented her bitter state. Rabbi Chaim consoled her and said, "Believe in God and your salvation will come." To this the woman replied, "Holy Rabbi, but our Torah says differently. First it says (*Shemos* 14:30), "And God saved on that day," and only then it says, "And they believed in God and in Moshe, His servant." Rabbi Chaim was very impressed by this simple woman's reply and kept repeating it at every appropriate occasion.

supply him with sustenance? What sense is there in making an effort in something that is worthless? And, in general, why should a person apply one rule when dealing with the needs of others and another rule when dealing with his personal needs?

However, this matter was defined in the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 10a), “The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, ‘If God loves the poor, why doesn’t He provide them with sustenance?’ To which Rabbi Akiva answered, ‘So that we should have the merit.’” This means that God expects us to assist others in need, not because God is unable to resolve the problem, but because He wants us to merit the *mitzvah* in doing so. Whereas a person is obligated to reduce his natural effort for his own needs (because this effort is in fact a punishment), when being of assistance to someone else, much effort should be exerted, since this is a *mitzvah* that is beneficial to the one who performs it.

In view of this, when it says (*Tehillim* 55:23), “Cast your burden upon God and He will sustain you,” this is meant to apply to a person’s own affairs. But as to the affairs of others, it appears that God has sent them to us in order that we exert ourselves to provide for their needs. How can we do for them only a little, and how can we send them back to the One who sent them to us? In this case trust does not apply and an effort must be made.

Rabbi Yechezkel Sarne, in his annotation on *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 21), deals with the following problem:

In the case of natural effort which is regarded as a *mitzvah*, such as making an effort for the needs of another and even

more so for the needs of the community — is there an obligation to make an unlimited and unreserved effort? Does a person have to toil without limits until the desired results are attained? Or perhaps a person is not obligated to work harder than he would have worked for himself? The two sides of this question are refined as follows:

On the one hand, since we are dealing with performing a *mitzvah*, there is merit in each additional exertion. If this is so, then there is no limit or reservation to the effort that is required to attain the goal.

On the other hand, even in the case of communal needs there must be some limit to the effort that should be exerted, because even in the case of assisting another person, like all human deeds in our world, it is not of any real use, since there is no causal connection between human action and the results. In view of this, how much effort does one have to exert for something that has no actual use and no practical influence?

Rabbi Sarne comes to the conclusion that in principle one has to act according to the following rules:

- A person's effort in conducting his own affairs is permitted under two conditions:
  1. An activity that is definitely beneficial, such as baking bread, is permitted without any reservations. In contrast, one should diminish effort where the benefit is in doubt, even though people generally apply diligence in order to achieve the desired result. Concerning these activities, the rule is that

postulated by Ramchal in his *Mesillas Yesharim*, that, “since one has already once made an effort, he has fulfilled his obligation and now he should place all his trust in God that nothing prevents His hand to save, be it by much or by little.”

2. An activity intended to attain one’s minimum needs is permitted. In contrast, an activity intended for achieving things that are regarded as luxuries is a superfluous activity and is forbidden. The definition of the concept “luxury” is obviously different for each person, in keeping with his personal, social, and financial circumstances, and primarily in keeping with his spiritual standing — “Everything according to the kind of person that one is.”

In contrast, when dealing with the needs of another person, even that person’s luxuries are to be regarded as one’s own needs. I.e., for himself personally, a person can decide that a certain need is just a luxury and that he can get along without it. But when dealing with another person’s needs, he should not hold back and preach to him about being satisfied with little. A person is obligated to do whatever he can to obtain for others even something that he personally regards as a luxury.

### **9(6). ADDITIONAL DIFFERENTIATIONS FOR LOCATING THE POINT OF BALANCE**

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, in his work *Sichos Le’sefer Shemos* (*Parashas Beshalach*) notes that when one wishes to locate

the point of balance between trust and making a human effort, one should consider a number of additional differentiations that may be germane to the matter, as follows:

- The difference between someone whose faith is deeply rooted and one who has not yet internalized it.

To the extent that faith is rooted deeper in one's heart and to the extent that a person has reached the true understanding that (*Devarim* 4:35), "There is no one else besides Him,"<sup>28</sup> to that extent one can trust more that his

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28. This means that there is no power in the world except for God, and a person's desire should be nothing other than to fulfill God's will. For a wonderful example of this principle at a most exalted level, see Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov's *Chasidim V'Anshei Ma'aseh — Kechudo shel Machat* (5728, p. 87): "It is told about Rabbi Eliezer Bialostoker that he was once found by his comrades dancing on the roof of the Rebbe of Kotzk...and he could be heard singing from one end of the city to the other, 'To God is the earth and the fullness thereof — there is no one else besides Him!' The Kotzker Rebbe walked out of his room and gazed at Rabbi Eliezer's face for a long time. Finally, he called to him on the roof and said, 'When is the time of favor? When God is crowned over the whole world. Come, Eliezer, and I will bless you with the birth of a boy at your old age!' Rabbi Eliezer did not cease dancing and he answered his teacher, 'I do not lack anything, even without his *Va'yatzmach* (meaning without a son who will say *Kaddish* after me, including *Va'yatzmach Pirkunei Vi'ykarev Me'shicheih*), because one minute with the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven on this roof is preferable to the entire World to Come that a son imparts to his father after his death.' So the Rebbe said, 'Why should Eliezer need to prepare for himself *Kaddish* when the time comes for it? He is already standing in front of his Maker right now, him and not his son, and says with all his 248 limbs and 365 tendons, *Yisgadal V'yiskadash Shmeih Rabba* and all the people are answering with all their might, *Yehei Shmeih Rabba M'vorach Lolam...*'"

needs will be supplied from Above and he may reduce his natural effort.

Rabbi Nebenzahl cites the Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13) as an example:

One who wishes to achieve the crown of Torah, to engage in the study of Torah at night, but is apprehensive that this may damage his health, if his trust in his Maker is strong, and in keeping with his spiritual standing, he may reduce his hours of sleep and increase the time devoted to learning, provided that he does not depend on a complete miracle.

- The difference between an individual and the public at large.

A person cannot know his spiritual standing — whether he is meritorious enough that a miracle will be performed for him, and what will remain of his merits, and what will be deducted if a miracle indeed happens to him (see *Rashi, Bereishis* 15:1).

However, it is doubtful whether this applies also regarding the entire Jewish nation, because about them it says (*Shir Ha'shirim* 4:7), “You are completely beautiful my beloved, and there is no blemish in you.”

Hence with respect to matters concerning the entire public, i.e., in matters that concern the majority of the residents of Eretz Yisrael, and where danger is not present or very severe, it is the right and duty of the public to resort to ways of trust.



- The difference between Eretz Yisrael and all other lands

The very holiness of the land brings about a differentiation between the Heavenly conduct in Eretz Yisrael and that outside of it. We have a specific verse (*Devarim* 11:12), “The land that your God cares for, the eyes of God are always upon it.” Under such a level of Divine Providence there is much more capacity for overt salvation and disregard of nature than at the level of providence that exists in other countries. (Still, even in his case one should beware of trust at a very high level, as Yoshiyahu wanted to conduct himself.) The holy people residing in the Land of Israel should increase their trust in the Strength of the Worlds, and (*Tehillim* 125:1), “Those who trust in God are like Mount Tzion that does not falter, but persists forever.”

### 9(7). **SUMMING UP —**

#### **THE PROPER BALANCE POINT**

The conclusion to be drawn from all the above is as follows:

A person who trusts in God at the proper level internalizes the realization that only God determines everything that will occur to him in his world, and that a person’s effort does not change anything. This being so:

- He will have peace of mind and will not be under the pressure of either doing something or refraining from so doing, nor will he be apprehensive concerning his actions, because, as it is, nothing depends on him, his

actions or inactions, since it is God's will that decides everything.

- He will refrain from any action that is contrary to the *halachah* (such as slander, theft, moving a neighbor's landmark and everything else that the *halachah* forbids) because such actions definitely cannot be regarded as the kind of effort that will bring divine abundance.
- He will set times for Torah study and prayer, which will be inviolate except for a real emergency (and then he will "repay his debt" to God by setting aside an additional time for Torah study). He will be aware of the fact that his livelihood comes from God and that his pursuit of sustenance cannot be at the expense of his set times for Torah study.
- He will not be apprehensive when it comes to devoting his time to Torah study, performing charitable acts, or contributing to charity. Indeed, this amounts to giving and not to accumulating. A person's wealth is fixed by God and the best way of increasing it is precisely by contributing to charity, about which it is said, "Tithe so that you should gain wealth."
- He will reduce the effort to attain his needs because anyway it is to no avail. In this respect, Rabbi Dessler outlined a clear differentiation in spiritual levels of different people, as follows:

The highest level is where a person understands perfectly that everything is done by God and there is no point in making any effort.

A person who has not attained this level of perfection and is at a level where he continues clarifying to himself whether a specific action has any meaning, should extensively resort to natural means, and in this way train himself to attain perfection. This is what our Sages said (*Niddah*, 70), “What should a person do to become rich? He should do a lot of business, deal honestly and pray to Hashem.”

Someone who is at a lower level and doesn't clearly see that nature is of no relevance — he thinks that nature serves as a tool in God's hands, but, so to speak, with a life of its own and with rigid rules of a causative relations between cause and effect, and he has not yet attained the clear understanding that natural effort does not get one anywhere — must be apprehensive that his activities will not aid in clarifying to him that his effort is of no use, but it is only God's will that governs all his affairs. A person at this spiritual level may think that his actions have a standing; he is therefore obligated to reduce his resort to natural means.

The point of balance between human effort and trust in God is located where a person really feels that he will do what he thinks he should in any case — and as of that point, success does not depend on him but on God's will. Should he fail, he will not attribute this to lack of effort on his part, but will realize the fact that we are only supposed to act, but the activity does not contribute anything and it is only God's will that decides matters in our world.<sup>29</sup>

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29. This balance point is the top ledge of natural effort and it appears that it should not be used as the starting point, but one should proceed in the manner postulated by Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, that

A person must be careful not to mistake laziness for trust, because at times one refrains from action out of laziness and makes it appear as if he does so out of trust.

Unlimited resorting to natural means is permitted when the activity in question is definitely beneficial in the ordinary course of events and when the purpose is to satisfy the most necessary needs. However, when dealing with other people's needs, we are to regard even their luxuries as necessities.

A person's obligation to reduce his effort increases in direct proportion to the strength of his faith, or to the extent that the subject of effort is not satisfying a material need regarded as a matter of paramount importance and subjects one to a severe test of his faith, should his desires not materialize.

A person is under obligation to strengthen his faith to the point that he will indeed internalize and implant the cognizance that it is not his actions which bring about results, but on the contrary, toil is a penalty imposed upon mankind by the decree of "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." This being so, one should not regret that he did not exert himself more in the case of failure, because anyway everything has been decreed from Above, and he is not obligated to make a greater effort, something that will not bring the anticipated results and is considered to be a punishment. However, whereas a person's effort on behalf of himself is

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was quoted previously. According to this approach, a person should start with little effort and pray that it be sufficient, and only if he does not succeed in this way, he will understand that his spiritual standing does not permit attaining this result with little effort. Therefore, he will increase the amount of his natural effort to the above maximum point.

solely the fulfillment of a curse “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” effort expended on behalf of others is the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* that increases his reward. In view of this, a person should minimize activities for his own benefit and should make a great effort on behalf of others.

The rule is that if a person feels an urgency to do things, it is proper to avoid such action, “because it definitely comes from the evil inclination.”



## CHAPTER 10

### PRAGMATIC EFFORT AND PRAYER

**I**N THE PREVIOUS chapter we looked for the proper point of balance between the obligation to trust in God and the need to do things in the natural manner. The question was: To what point should a person act in the pragmatic domain and when should he cease in doing so and put his entire hope in God? Where is the balance point?

This balance point is the point of friction between the spiritual and the material. This is so because a person who increases his trust in God and reduces his natural effort emphasizes the spiritual aspect of his life; and to the extent that a person increases his natural effort, he emphasizes the material aspect.

In this chapter we shall see that there exists another much deeper layer, because even after a person has figured out how much he should act, he is obligated to determine an additional balance point — in the plane of faith and cognizance. This one is more difficult than the previous one and yet more important.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, pp. 596-598), explains that Adam was punished for his sin with the curse (*Bereishis* 3:18-19), “Cursed is the ground for your

sake, in suffering you will eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." We learn from this that working the soil by the sweat of one's brow is not a natural process that was started at Creation, but came about as a punishment. This means that before the sin and its punishment, the natural course of events did not include this toil. In the beginning, God created His world in a manner where the growing and ripening of foods happened without human input. Just as a seed now grows into a sweet and juicy fruit, then a seed became a grain of wheat and continued to ripen to the point that it was ready to eat, just like baked bread.

After the sin, man was forced to work for his living. If man wishes to grow grain, he must hoe his field to remove the thorns that grow among the grain. Similarly, if he wants to obtain silver or gold, he must smelt the metal in fire to free it of the dross that is mixed in with it. Nothing is obtainable anymore in its pure form without man toiling to separate the good from the bad.

Rabbi Wolbe explains that this work that was imposed on man also applies to spiritual matters. Natural effort and trust are mutually intertwined, and man is charged with sorting the grain from the chaff.

Here is an explanation of man's attitude now toward labor:

1. God sweetened human toil, and even though human achievement involves sweat and hard work, man actually enjoys the toil of his hands. Work imparts a sense of accomplishment and self-fulfillment.



2. Labor also sweetens the product. A person loves himself and all that is associated with him, and hence he loves the fruit of his labor to which he is linked through ties of investment, sweat, and toil.

Therefore, we find in the *Talmud* (*Bava Metzia* 38a), that “a person prefers a *kav* (a measure of quantity) of his own to nine *kav* of someone else’s.”

3. But this identification of the fruits of labor with the person who toiled may give rise to the feeling that “my power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth.” A person may attribute the fruits of his success to himself. Actually, he should know that it is God Who gives him the power to make the wealth; the seed that he sowed rotted long ago, and it is God Who caused the rain to fall and caused, in His great kindness, that the fruit should grow.
4. A person’s labor goes beyond the need to balance between faith in God on the one hand and his effort on the other hand. Human labor includes a much deeper stratum of balancing between the satisfaction that stems from one’s toil and the knowledge that he actually does not do anything.
5. A person is obligated to build a house and guard its walls, and to know at the same time what David Ha’melech said (*Tehillim* 127:1), “If God will not build a house, in vain do its builder labor on it; if God will not guard the city, in vain is the guard vigilant.”

After Adam sinned, man is indeed obligated to toil, and this toil includes discerning between good and evil in two balance points:

- The first balance point — the pragmatic — comprises the point between trusting the Creator and man's own efforts in the field of human activity. A person must sort his actions and classify them so that he will only perform such actions that can be regarded as natural endeavor in accordance with his spiritual level and refrain from actions that are contradictory to his need to believe in the Creator and to know that everything is from Him.

This comprises the technical balance between the activities of a person who knows when to act and when to refrain from activity. However, this balance can be regarded only as preparation for the second and principal balance point that is to be found in the cognitive and intellectual domain.

- The second balance point — the cognitive — comprises the point between toil as a means that supplies satisfaction and self-fulfillment and a person's realization that he in fact did not do anything, and that his achievements and the "fruits of his toil" should not serve to strengthen his belief in himself, his strengths, and talents.

When a person toils and brings forth fruit, he must know that the fruit is not his, but everything is to be seen from the perspective of "if you toiled, you found." After you toiled, the results are to be

regarded as something “found” — something that occurred outside the “cause-and-effect” system.

In view of this, a person’s toil serves as a point of discernment and balance between self-fulfillment that is inherent in the work and the cognizance that “this emanated from Hashem” and he himself did not bring about the final result. This balance lies in the cognitive domain.

A person who successfully passed the first test and has concocted for himself an exact dosage of activities which comprise the permissible and imperative endeavor — including refraining from activities that contradict belief and trust in Divine Providence — may find himself sinning in the second cognitive balance point if he attributes his success to his abilities and actions.

The second, cognitive balance point is the objective of trust in the Creator and it is more difficult to attain than the first (pragmatic) balance point, because it requires toil, not only physically, but also cognitively. Also, these two points lead us to a paradox — an internal contradiction. On the one hand, the Creator has endowed a person with love for his work, in order to make his work easier by virtue of the fact that his creation is seen by him as his “I,” and that toil and effort bring about self-fulfillment. On the other hand, a person is obligated to know that he did not really attain anything or create anything new, but that rather everything, from beginning to end, was done by God and that “there is nothing besides Him; there is none other.”

This being so, how can one obtain satisfaction from something that he did not attain? How can one achieve self-fulfillment when he knows that everything is solely from God. “Everything is from You and from Your Hand it was given to you,” but then “What are we?”

The cognitive undertaking in this fine balance point is extremely difficult and requires one to think in direct opposition to his natural instincts. This balance requires one to toil in order to feel satisfaction and self-fulfillment, and to simultaneously uproot the buds of the conceit of “I” at the very point of germination of his personal satisfaction and creativity.

An acute expression of the implementation of the additional (and cognitive) balance is to be found in prayer. Rabbi Wolbe notes the *Talmudic* passage (*Niddah* 70b) in conjunction with this, where it is told that the Jews of Alexandria asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, “What should a person do to become wealthy?”

To this he replied, “He should do a lot of business and deal honestly with people.”

So they told him, “Many tried this approach, but did not succeed. Rather, he should ask for mercy from the One Who owns all the wealth, as it says, ‘The silver and the gold are all Mine.’”

The *Talmud* then asks, “What is the novelty of this message?” And the *Talmud* answers that the novelty is that “this one is insufficient without the other one” — i.e., that it is insufficient for a person to engage in a lot of business; he

also has to pray. The implication of this statement is that attaining a goal requires a person to toil and also to maintain a purified faith in the fact that it is not his doings that have brought about his achievements.

### 10(1). PRAYER AND TRUST

The main thing is to accustom oneself to the article of faith that everything is in the hands of Heaven... The Jews are beloved and do not need an intermediary, and every person is capable of finding the good by means of prayer; and God desires, so to speak, the prayers of the righteous.

Prayer is the staff of power in everyone's hands.

To the extent that a person will put his hope in Him, the Exalted, to the same extent he will ascend and be successful and will be protected from everything that hampers the true study of Torah.

Study and prayer are intertwined.

The toil of Torah study assists in the light of prayer, and prayer assists Torah study.

Prayer that has the status of "routine" distances Torah study and sluggish Torah study prevents prayer.

Obviously, this is a very difficult and time-intensive task.

*(Letters of the Chazon Ish, part 1, letter 2)*

What does the word "prayer" mean? A person stands before God and asks wholeheartedly for the fulfillment of his

desires: complete recovery from all his ills, sustenance, domestic tranquility, success, a life partner, children, long life, and anything that requires a remedy, salvation, and success. Upon reflection, why is all this needed? Doesn't God know all this ahead of time?

The purpose of prayer cannot be to tell God about one's needs, because all this is known to He Who is the primary cause of all that happens in this world. Obviously, God does not need the sick person to ask for healing in order to know that he is sick and needs salvation, because the illness itself has been decreed from Above.<sup>1</sup>

If prayer is intended to ask for mercy, then the question arises: since it is one of the fundamentals of faith that poverty, privation, illness, lack of success, etc., are not accidental, but are decreed by God Who brought these upon the person after a comprehensive Heavenly reckoning of reward and punishment, on what basis can one ask God to annul something He himself decreed?

Either way, it is difficult: If a person's actions are such that he deserves a reward, then he will receive it from God Who can be relied upon to reward to those who fear Him and punish those who transgress his *mitzvos*. Why should one ask for a reward that is owed to him anyway?<sup>2</sup> And if, on the contrary,

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1. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, in his work *Chochmah U'mussar* (essay 1), additionally asks in this regard, "Obviously, God has pity on someone to a greater measure than the person himself. Proof for this is that the entire source of a person's self-pity is only 'a strength that was planted by God' — i.e., an offshoot of what God planted in him.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, in his work *Sifsei Chaim (Pirkei Emunah*

one does not deserve anything according to the principles of reward and punishment — to what avail is his prayer and how will it change anything?

The Torah source for a person's obligation to pray is from the verse (*Devarim* 11:13), "To love your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." Concerning this, the *Talmud Bavli* (*Ta'anis* 2a), as well as the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Berachos* 4:1), state: "What kind of service is performed by the heart? This is prayer."

Prayer is a person's service to God — in his heart. So what is meant by this divine service? What is its purpose?

Since God does not need a person's plea in order to know his desires or in order to fulfill them, of what use is this service? It follows that this is service that the person needs. And if it is the person who needs it, why is it regarded as divine service?

May we say that a person serves God when he asks Him for his needs and focuses on the most egoistic requests?

The Maharal of Prague, in his work *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha'avodah*, chap. 3), answers this question and explains that when a person stands before God and pours out his heart to Him — as a son who comes clean to his father — he is

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*U'bitachon*, vol. 1, p. 450), formulates this question as follows: "The matter of prayer needs to be understood: what is the need for prayer and how does it help? If it were possible to give us our heart's desire, God would definitely have given it to us without asking because, in His great kindness, He wants to grant us all that is good. And if there are reasons for not giving it to us, what will prayer help?"

expressing his belief that his world is conducted in a Heavenly manner. He recognizes his powerlessness and his nothingness before God, in Whose hands are the souls and the spirit of every human being.<sup>3</sup>

During prayer, a person realizes the fact that life and recovery, success, honor, peace of mind, and contentment, and — God forbid, death, illness, want, and pain — are all in God's hands, and man is only a speck in which the divine spirit breathes and passes judgment over his fate, for the bad or the good.

Indeed, man has freedom of choice, and he is the crown of Creation and its ultimate purpose. Man has tremendous potential. But success comes with Heavenly assistance, and should God leave him alone even for a moment, he would lose everything. It takes only a second for the most successful person to, God forbid, lose his health, or his life, or his dearest ones, or the source of his success and existence — and then the hope of his life is lost and he becomes like a clay shard, windblown dust, or a passing cloud.

This is the feeling that throbs in the heart of a person who stands before God and prays fervently. This being so, it is

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3. To quote the Maharal:

The divine service that Jews have in every place in the Diaspora is prayer. The reason why prayer is called “service” is because a person who prays to God shows that he is dependent on Him and he needs Him; he has no existence without Him. When a person depends on God, it is regarded as if he sacrificed himself to Him and handed himself over to Him. This is the service of prayer that connects the “caused” to the Exalted Cause.



clear that even though one asks for his own needs, it comprises the divine service because his prayer stems from his realization that man is nothing compared to God and that everything comes from Him.

A person who prays also feels that God listens to him, watches over him, and worries about him. A person has someone to talk to. He has someone to turn to.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, he will pour out his supplication before God and cry from the depths of his heart.

This cognizance by itself is a profound and important act of faith, and comprises the refined divine service — the service within one's heart.

In keeping with this, Rabbi Wolbe defines prayer as a human need, because everything that happens in one's world does not stem from a causative relationship between acts

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4. Rabbi Wolbe, in his work *Alei Shur* (part 2, p. 348), said:

What we are seeking is our perfection, not our success. And faith is the basis of perfection. Our faith is not the kind of faith that "God indeed exists"; this is something that we know fully. Our faith consists of certitude in the presence of God and His Providence to the point that we see the world and each event through the eyes of faith. The way to attain this vitality in faith is only by means of prayer. In it we are training ourselves to turn to God concerning all that we need, because there is nothing else in the world that can fill this lack. And this is a refined feeling that has to be rejuvenated three times a day.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, in this work *Chochmah U'mussar* (part 2, essay 1), notes that prayer is a human need that reminds him and helps him to imagine that he is in the hands of Divine Providence every time and with respect to everything.

and results, but from a Divinity that is the primary cause of everything. As Rabbi Wolbe wrote (*Alei Shur*, p. 349):

The way we see things, all the worldly matters appear to be governed by cause and effect:

A person is poor because he does not have the requisite skill.

He is sick because of heredity or a virus.

He does not succeed in his studies because he is not talented.

But we must get into the habit of knowing (meaning to create within ourselves the cognizance), that everything depends solely on God's will and not on material reasons.

Prayer is incompatible with the law of "cause and effect," and here we must breach this first axiom of causality.

Immediately after beginning to pray, we must elevate ourselves to the point of view of the "supernatural."

And this is meant by the service of prayer.

Note that a person who prays and asks God for his needs cannot be sure that his prayer will indeed cause his request to be fulfilled. As a rule, a person will not be granted that which he does not deserve, based on the principle of reward and punishment. Prayer and pleading for one's needs do not cause his requests to be granted. The course of the matter is as follows:

Prayer to God to grant needs comprises the divine service, in which a person recognizes the fact that nothing can be

obtained without divine kindness, and that a person's actions are not a sufficient cause for his success or failure. They can only be regarded as a proper effort, but actually everything is granted by God, because He is the primary cause of everything.

Indeed, only if a person serves God truthfully and with a pure heart is he deserving of reward. One's needs will be granted only when he is deserving, based on the comprehensive Heavenly reckoning that manifests one's spiritual standing. Hence, when prayer does not bring desired results immediately concerning specific needs, this should not be regarded as contradicting a person's trust in God, for the prayer indeed was of benefit to him.<sup>5</sup> Prayer is an exalted act that lifts a person to lofty spiritual levels, where he is then deserving of reward and the fulfillment of his needs and desires. A person who performs the divine service is defined as God's servant and indeed merits reward that, at times, may manifest itself in the fulfillment of his requests.

Hence prayer is of use to a person even if he is a sinner and

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5. This is to be understood based on the statement of the *Chazon Ish* in his work *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 2, sec. 1), that the meaning of trust is not that "there is an obligation to believe that it will surely be good." A person cannot be sure that certain results will come about and we don't even know what is good for us. Should a person suddenly win a fortune in a lottery — is this a guarantee of happiness or is it serious trouble? According to the *Chazon Ish*, there is no happenstance in this world and everything happens because of divine decree. "If, when facing all of life's upheavals," says the *Chazon Ish*, "a person will strengthen himself to implant in his heart the well-known truth that nothing that is bad comes by happenstance, but that everything is from Him, this is what is called the trait of trust."

does not deserve to be saved, since prayer with devotion as such purifies him, and this purification carries with it the potential for salvation, because it elevates a person to a high and exalted level.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in his commentary on *Mishlei* (chap. 3), explains that “the one who trusts in God will prevail’ against calamity in the merit of his trust. Even though the calamity should have fallen upon him... and the hope that is inspired by this trust is that even if his sins are great and mighty, he may still hope for God’s mercy, as it says (*Daniel* 9:18), ‘For not because of our righteousness do we put our pleas before You,’ and it says (*Tehillim* 65:3-4), ‘O You, Who heeds prayer, unto You shall all flesh come. Iniquities have overwhelmed me; our transgressions You shall purge them’.. Similarly, if calamities overwhelmed him and he subdued himself to God in their wake, he should trust in God’s kindness that He will have pity upon him because of his calamities, because of his subservience, and because he put his hope in God.” If a person who has sinned and is in a poor spiritual state, prays with true devotion and from a searing heart, it elevates him and places him in a spiritual state in which he is worthy of divine salvation.<sup>6</sup>

How very fitting is, in conjunction with this, the profound statement by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in his work *Nefesh Ha’chaim* (gate 1, chap. 9):

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6. Rabbi Y. Beyfus, in his work *Lekach Tov* (*Parashas Eikev*), adds that when a person trusts in someone and relies on him unconditionally, this expectation produces an obligation on the part of the one on whom that person relies.

Hence, when the Sea of Reeds was split, God told Moshe (*Shemos* 14:15), “Why do you cry to me? Speak to the sons of Israel and let them go,” meaning that it depends on them — if they will have faith and trust, they should go toward the sea without fear [because] their very trust will cause the sea to split in front of them.

By doing this they will bring about an arousal above that a miracle should occur and the sea will split in front of them. This is what is meant by the verse (*Shir Ha’shirim* 1:9), “To a steed in Pharaoh’s chariot I have likened you my beloved” — that just like Pharaoh’s horses behaved in the opposite manner of what normally occurs, that the rider leads his horse, whereas Pharaoh’s horses led their riders, so I likened you. I (God) ride atop the heavens, but when you (man) pray, you are leading Me by your actions. This is because the link between Me and the worlds occurs according to your actions — to where they lead.

Just as there are cases where the horse leads its rider, so can a person by his deeds determine his fate and redirect God, Who rides atop the heavens, for his benefit. A person who prays to God strengthens his belief that the world does not automatically run by means of cause and effect, but that there is the Primary Cause on high, and he should plead with God to fulfill his desires. When a person amends his actions and his faith, he can be sure that, in the end, he will be found worthy of his proper reward.

It is hence understood that prayer is rooted in the devoutness that is put into it, and that “prayer without devotion is

like a body without a soul.” This is because the substance of prayer consists of a person’s self-purification and his cognizance that everything comes from God, so he prays from the depths of his heart.

Rabbi Y. Goldwasser, in his work *Tzerufah Imrasecha* (p. 325), concerning the verse in *Devarim* (11:13), “And to serve Him with all your heart,” notes a wonderful point. It is stated in the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 73b) that the *Kohen Gadol* prays upon leaving the Holy of Holies that God should not accept the prayer of wayfarers who ask that no rain should fall as long as they are under way. At first this is difficult to understand, because as it is, their prayer should not be accepted. Many thousands of Jews are waiting for rain, there are dozens of statements from our Sages extolling the benefit of rain to the world, so why should God hold back rain because of a handful of wayfarers? Why should the *Kohen Gadol* pray on *Yom Kippur* that the wayfarers’ prayers should not be accepted?

This seems to indicate that since prayer is the service of the heart, a handful of people who pray from their heart with true feeling concerning a minor calamity are at times preferred to a large number of people who pray out of an intellectual understanding concerning a major calamity.

Indeed, the Jewish nation intellectually understands that should there be no rain, they will face a calamity. But at the present they are still in good shape because of the crops they just harvested. Hence their prayer is offered with their entire mind, but does not emanate from a searing and aching heart.

Not so is the prayer of an individual, who is under way and

soaked to his marrow. That person is asking wholeheartedly that the rain should stop “for the time being,” until he arrives home. His problem may not be so great, but his prayer is fervent and comes from his heart.

“God desires a person’s heart.” The greater a person’s understanding of the meaning of the calamity from which he wants to be saved, the higher in heaven will his prayer reach, for he reaches the peaks in his prayer, and his spiritual state compels that Heaven should have mercy.

As Rabbi Wolbe points out (*Alei Shur*, p 591):

A person who wishes to become wealthy and runs to his business in the morning after a fleeting and dry prayer — who knows what kind of Heavenly assistance he deprives himself of, because he is not used to communal prayer that is offered deliberately and with a great deal of devotion! Actually, one gains everything only by means of prayer. Extensive study of Torah for those who seek wisdom and honest dealings for those who seek wealth are only the conditions for acceptance of their prayers. A person who builds his life on trust in God will be successful — and this building consists of blending natural activities with prayer.

In addition, prayer is a kind of effort a person makes to attain his needs. Since God desires a person’s prayer, He makes it possible for prayer to bring about results.

Thus, for example, we find in Rashi on *Bereishis* (2:5) that grass was created on the third day of Creation, but did not grow until the sixth day because “there was no man to work

the soil,” meaning there was no one in the world to value the growth. Only on the sixth day, “when Adam came and knew that the world needs them, he prayed for them, and the trees and grasses descended and grew.”

Rabbi Wolbe deduces from this that “the world is similar to a tremendous clock. Inside the clock are many gears that move one another until the motion reaches the hands. The watch has a spring that sets the gears into motion. Our ‘spring’ is prayer. And since the vitality of our belief depends on it, we were given the opportunity to attain salvation by means of it.” This means that prayer is the effort that is incumbent upon a person in order to bring about the flow of divine abundance into the world.

Thus, prayer has two aspects:

- One aspect consists of the divine service that prayer entails — this is a person’s cognition that everything comes from God, and for this reason he stands in front of Him and prays.
- The other aspect is that prayer itself is an act of effort by a person who wishes to attain his needs, by virtue of the fact that he lists them in front of God in order to attain divine abundance.

The interconnection between the two becomes most perceptible in prayer. When praying, a person takes responsibility for his needs; he makes the utmost effort. However, he also knows that everything is from God, and for this reason he stands before Him and prays. This interlacement comprises the grounds for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya’s statement



to the people of Alexandria — that a person must pray in addition to conducting business.

This was the approach of our forefather Yaakov when he prepared to meet his brother Esav — by means of gifts, war, and prayer. Yaakov resorted to prayer, which is a spiritual effort, plus awareness of the fact that it was not the gifts that would help, and it was not the war that would save — but, rather, the word of God from on high.

Yaakov transmitted this message to his sons when he prepared them for meeting the master of Egypt (Yosef), when they were going there to buy food and were forced to take Binyamin with them (*Bereishis* 43:11-14):

And Yisrael told them, “If it must be so now, do this, take the best fruits of the land in your gear and carry down for the man a present in your sacks: a little balm, a little honey, spices and myrrh, nuts and almonds. And take double money in your hands and the money that was returned in the top of your sacks, carry it again in your hand in case it was an oversight. And take your brother and arise and return to the man, and God will give you mercy before the man.”

Rashi explains the words “and God will give you mercy” — “All that you need now is prayer, and I pray for you.”

A person must know that it is not “my power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth” — and without prayer and cognizance that abundance comes from Above, he will not be able to succeed.

Prayer is a tangible expression of deep faith, demonstrating

the balance a person needs to achieve between faith and action.<sup>7</sup>

We shall conclude this chapter<sup>8</sup> with a quote from Rabbi

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7. Note that this balance point is not the point of friction between the physical and the spiritual, but conversely, it is their combination. This is explained by Rabbi Avraham Grodzinski in his work *Toras Avraham* (p. 288): Before he sinned, Adam in Gan Eden enjoyed all the material pleasures without their affecting his spirituality. As a result of his sin, the physical desires penetrated Adam's personality and, the more man gives in to his physical desires, the more he moves away from his spirituality. Conversely, when a person sanctifies and purifies himself, his table becomes a sacrificial altar and his wine becomes like the libations of sacrifices. He is not debased by the material, but instead uses it in his divine service and it becomes elevated.

So a person should not disregard his material needs during his prayers, but just the opposite, he should pray about them and he should have the feeling that these needs, from the largest to the smallest, come to him from God. In this manner a person elevates his material needs to the spiritual level, and they do not cause him to fall from his exalted standing.

A person should ask for his needs in an elevated manner — like asking for the material needs of another person. Then he does not mix the request with selfish desires. Divine service in this respect obligates one “to empty himself from selfishness, disregard his leaning toward material needs, and to pray for all the people of the world, of whom he is also a part, and then he will feel the lack of spiritual matters the way one feels about his lack of material needs.” (And indeed, it should be remembered that this is the wording in the prayers and divine service of the High Holidays.)

8. For an extensive discussion of the interconnection between trust and prayer, see Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (The Alter of Kelm), in his work *Chochmah U'mussar* (part 2, sec. 1, 8); Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (former *Mashgiach* of the Mirrer Yeshiva), in his work *Da'as, Chochmah U'mussar* (part 1, sec. 4); and Rabbi Avraham Grodzinski (former *Mashgiach* of

Wolbe concerning the statement of Rabbeinu Yonah in *Sefer Ha'yirah*, according to which a person should come to the synagogue, sit down in his place, “and not open his mouth until he waits a bit and thinks about in front of Whom he is sitting and Who it is that hears him speak...”:

A person who comes to the synagogue no later than one minute before prayers start, and sits quietly in his place, concentrating inwardly and on the prayer that he is about to start, will see wonders — how this minute will affect his entire prayer.

We live in a state of constant pursuit, dictated by modern life in which everything has to be done fast... Therefore, even this minute of coming and concentrating before the prayer requires effort and struggle, but one should not relinquish it.

(*Alei Shur*, part 2, pp. 349-350)



## CHAPTER 11

### THE LIFESTYLE OF A PERSON WHO TRUSTS IN GOD — THE PRACTICAL ASPECT

**T**HE BASIC PRINCIPLE, which was discussed in the preceding chapter, according to the doctrine of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, is that there are a number of levels of faith and trust, and every person should act according to the spiritual level at which he finds himself at the given time.

We have similarly discussed the approach of Rabbi Dessler, according to which the criterion for differentiating between the permitted resort to natural means and that which is not permitted and expresses lack of faith and trust in God, is rooted in the question of whether or not a person who, God forbid, fails in something, will feel that it happened because he did not exert himself sufficiently. Obviously, this is a totally personal balance point that changes even in the same person from time to time in keeping with his current spiritual standing.

In the absence of uniform criteria for every situation, a person is expected to conduct himself on the basis of his spiritual standing, and it may appear that this is not practicable. But to the contrary, there are many practical aspects and

consequences of the basic principles that were discussed above.<sup>1</sup> The life of a person who believes that he makes an effort and “does what he is supposed to be doing,” but the results are decided solely by Divine Providence is entirely different from that of a person who believes that the fulfillment of his life and his contentment are the fruit of his effort. A person who believes that there is no causative relationship between his effort and the results will refrain from excessive eagerness and from the stress and anxiety that envelop one who believes that his fate depends only on his actions. A person who believes that everything that happens to him is the fruit of Divine Providence and his efforts are intended only to fulfill the duty that has been imposed upon mankind with the decree of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,” lives an entirely different life.

The subject of trust in God goes beyond the intellectual and spiritual plane. The lifestyle of a person who trusts is different, among others, in the following three aspects:

1. The order of priorities and the time devoted to labor as compared with Torah.
2. The kinds of activity which a person must carry out in order to fulfill the obligation of making an effort.
3. The manner and the way in which the person who trusts carries out his tasks.

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1. According to the *Chazon Ish (Emunah U'bitachon*, chap. 2, sec. 6), “Even though the main point of trusting in God is an obligation of the heart, with practical *mitzvos* emanating from it... still, there are limitations to the extent of permissible effort; and at times trust clashes with human effort and prohibits resorting to certain means.”

This chapter will discuss these aspects and the general and practical criteria with respect to each of them. We will attempt to provide a practical interpretation of the philosophical issue under discussion, keeping in mind that these specific criteria fit each case in the light of the circumstances. Please note that nothing that follows is to be regarded as a halachic decision.

### **11(1). RESORTING TO NATURAL MEANS VS. TORAH STUDY — TIME AND ORDER OF PRIORITIES**

As we have seen above (Chapter 9(2)), the *mitzvah* of Torah study encompasses the entire scope and time a person has from the instant he opens his eyes in the morning to the time he closes his eyelids at night. It applies under all conditions to which a person is subjected, and he is obligated to study Torah whether he is wealthy or poor, healthy or sick. Even when a person is upset or even dying, as long as his soul has not yet left him, he is obligated to study Torah.

Still, a person goes forth in the morning to his labors and toils for his livelihood. It would seem that he should be obligated to make an effort and work only to the extent that is absolutely necessary for his sustenance, so that he should not die from lack of a basic need, and everything done in excess of this should be regarded as wasting time from the study of Torah.

Moreover, since these actions are regarded as the sin of wasting time from the study of Torah, they represent a deficiency of faith and trust in God that He will supply a person with all his needs. This is because, as explained above,

the obligation to exert human effort does not include sinful behavior, which cannot be regarded as permissible effort at making a living.

Is this indeed so? Does it mean that everyone who labors beyond what is needed for his bare sustenance is regarded as lacking faith and trust? And does it mean that a person may not labor for his livelihood in order to maintain a comfortable lifestyle?

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the Steipler), in his work *Kehillos Ya'akov* (on *Maseches Shabbos*, sec. 11, "Concerning the Commandment to Study the Torah and to Pray"), discusses the important differentiation between one who is obligated to perform *mitzvos* but is prevented from doing so by circumstances beyond his control, and one who is entirely not subject to the given obligation.<sup>2</sup>

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2. In conjunction with this, see the statement by Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman to the effect that even one who was prevented from performing a *mitzvah* due to circumstances beyond his control is still obligated to perform that *mitzvah*, and the fact that he was unable to do so just exempts him from punishment.

Apparently it is for this reason that he quotes the *Talmud* in *Maseches Chagigah*, according to which some are of the opinion that the commandment of bringing the *Korban Chagigah* applies on the first day of the Festival, and to begin this sacrifice during the other days of the Festival is regarded as "recompense" for not having performed the *mitzvah* on the first day. Hence, a person who was exempt from performing that *mitzvah* on the first day of the Festival (if, for example, he was lame), then even if this disability disappeared in the course of the Festival, he is exempt from performing this *mitzvah*. On the other hand, if he was prevented from performing this *mitzvah* on the first day of the Festival due to circumstances beyond his control, he is obligated to offer this



Rabbi Kanievsky explains in conjunction with this, that a person who is poor and has no money to distribute to charity is not regarded as being constrained from giving to charity by circumstances, but is exempt from it. This is because charity is a *mitzvah* that has no set amount, and only obligates each one to give according to his ability. When one has no money, he is not obligated at all to give.

The same applies to the study of Torah. Since the Torah did not specify the amount of time to be devoted to its study, the obligation to study Torah is according to one's ability. When a person needs to do other things, he is not regarded as not studying because he has constraints. His obligation is to study to the extent possible, and what is beyond that is not included in the obligation.

Rabbi Kanievsky, in his aforementioned work, notes the words of *Tosafos (Menuchos 99b)* that “the study of Torah should not be regarded as an obligation” — one should not occupy himself only with Torah. This means that a person is also obligated to work for a living, in the sense of “Torah study is good together with an occupation.” In keeping with this and with the previously mentioned differentiation, Rabbi Kanievsky declares that:

A person is not obligated to entirely ignore his pursuit of a livelihood.

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sacrifice during the remaining days of the Festival once the constraint has been eliminated. We deduce from this that an outstanding *mitzvah* debt is subject to “repayment,” and the constraint does not annul the debt and create an exemption, except that there is no punishment in the case where one could not discharge his duty.

It appears that he is not obligated even in a case when there is no danger to life (because danger to life exempts from performance of all *mitzvos* except for the three sins, about which it says that “one should let himself be killed and not transgress them”).

Still, one is never entirely free from his obligation to study Torah, but “Torah study is good together with an occupation.” This being so, this is the main measure for the amount [of time] one is obligated to study Torah — that one should engage in Torah study to the best of his ability.”<sup>3</sup>

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3. A similar statement is found in the work of Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer (*Even Ha'ezer*, part 4 on Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim*, chap. 3, secs. 5-6). The Rambam rules there that a king may not get drunk, “but he should toil day and night in Torah and in the needs of the Jewish nation.” Rambam similarly rules that a king should not be excessively involved with women, and even when he has only one wife, he should not be with her all the time, since the Torah was stringent about his neglect of Torah study “because his heart is the heart of the entire Jewish nation and hence the Torah commanded him to cling to Torah study more than an ordinary person.” Rabbi Meltzer has difficulty with this ruling since there is no reason why the king should be different from any other Jew, about whom Rambam also ruled in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (chap. 1, sec. 20) that he should study Torah at all times until the day of his death.

Rabbi Meltzer resolves his difficulty by stating that every Jew who is not a king is not obligated to be spiritual and separated from worldly pleasures, and he has the right to be involved in the life of this world without this being regarded as wasting time from Torah study.

Rabbi Meltzer additionally notes that “the common person is only prohibited to waste time from Torah study without a reason, since then, if he neglects this study he transgresses the prohibition of ‘and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life’ and other verses that obligate one to study Torah.” However, unlike the special *mitzvos* that

This means that, had the exemption from Torah study for the purpose of making a living stemmed from the fact that a person is compelled to work for a living, then the minute he no longer faces a life-threatening situation and he has bread to eat, then he is no longer facing any pressure to continue working and is obligated to study Torah. It is also obvious that if we were to require a person to balance between the need to make a living and the obligation to study Torah and other activities, then everything in the world would have to be disregarded as compared with the value of Torah study. However, the definition of the obligation of Torah study is different; and this conflict between the values is avoided because the obligation of Torah study does not require one to stop being involved with making a living, and therefore does not apply to the time that a person devotes to his sustenance.

If this is so, then each person may set times for Torah study and work for a living outside these times without contradicting the obligation of Torah study.<sup>4</sup>

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are incumbent upon a king, if an ordinary Jew wishes to enjoy worldly pleasures, this cannot be regarded as wasting time from Torah study.

4. Rabbi Kanievsky explains in his aforementioned work that fulfilling the statement of the Sages in *Pirkei Avos*, "Torah study is good together with an occupation," obligates a person in any case to study Torah to the extent that it cannot be regarded as being contradicted by the need to make a living. There is a measure of time that should be devoted to Torah study in order to fulfill the obligation. The minimum obligation is the study of "one chapter [of *Shema*] in the morning and one chapter in the evening," in order to fulfill the obligation of "you should contemplate it day and night." One is exempt from this obligation only under circumstances entirely beyond one's control. In this case, it does not mean that

An entirely different question arises as to how much should a person devote to attending to his personal affairs without contradicting his obligation to trust in God. It is obvious that a person should define for himself the limits of his pursuit of livelihood so that he should not be occupied solely with his sustenance and have no time for Torah study. We find this in the statement by Ramchal (*Mesillas Yesharim*, chap. 5), “A person must occupy himself to a certain extent to earn money for the sake of a livelihood, but not to the extent where his divine service would suffer. It is in respect to this that we are commanded to set times for Torah study.”

We have similarly seen the *Chofetz Chaim*'s statement in the *Mishnah Berurah* (156:2), “One should be aware of the evil inclination that persuades one that the entire day is needed for making an effort for this comfort. But the main thing is that a person should contemplate what is the absolute necessity, without which he cannot sustain himself, and then he may attain the status of one whose material toil is secondary and his Torah study primary.” This matter is discussed

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there is no obligation to begin with; we are dealing with a continual obligation, and a person who is constrained from fulfilling it is only exempt from punishment. Still, having devoted this minimum of time to Torah study, a person may go out to work with daybreak and return from his labors in the evening without this being regarded as wasting time from Torah study. Laboring for a livelihood is not regarded as a “constraint” that relieves one of his obligation to study Torah; rather, the obligation to study Torah does not apply to the time when a person is working for a living. Therefore, earning a living should not be regarded as something that sets aside the obligation of Torah study only for his minimal needs, which is regarded as avoiding a life-threatening situation, but as sustenance that includes also comfortable and dignified living.

more extensively in another work by the same author — (*Chofetz Chaim*, Introduction, positive commandment 12, in the footnote):

And the more he is blessed by God in increasing his wealth, and the more he will earn in his business, so will the evil inclination entice him and say that “now, according to your high financial standing that God accorded you, you must live in a nicer apartment, walk around in embroidered clothing, and conduct yourself like other wealthy people. Should you not do so, then you will be put to shame by those who know you, and hence you must now give up on the times that you set aside for Torah study and travel to such and such place to make a profit.” And then, when God will help him and he will become very successful, the evil inclination will entice him to increase the number of businesses that he is running. Should he then find that he cannot manage all his affairs on his own, the evil inclination will show him another urgent need to employ others to help him run the business... To make a long story short, whenever God will increase his success, the evil inclination will explain to him that he simply has to neglect his Torah study and prayer, to the point that he will not even have time for communal prayer... Therefore, a person must devote a great deal of thought to deciding what is the absolute necessity, without which it is entirely impossible, and the rest should be disregarded.

Rambam, in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (chap. 9, sec. 1), explains that the abundance that is granted to a Torah-true person in this world is not to be seen as “the final reward for performing

*mitzvos*”; rather, “God gave us this Torah, it is the tree of life, and everyone who does what is written in it and knows it fully and properly, merits life in the World to Come — the extent of this merit being commensurable with the extent of his actions and the magnitude of his knowledge. And we were promised by the Torah that if our thoughts are filled with Torah at all times and uphold it happily and in goodness of soul, He will remove all that prevents us from upholding it, such as sickness, war, famine, and the like. And He will grant us all that strengthens us in upholding the Torah, such as abundance, peace, and plentitude of silver and gold. All of this is so that we should not spend our life in service of our bodily needs, but we should be free to study wisdom and perform *mitzvos* to gain life in the World to Come.”

Thus, the purpose of the material abundance that God grants a person is to free him to increase his Torah knowledge and perform its *mitzvos*. According to this, it is possible to determine which activities provide a person with material comfort that enables him to study Torah with peace of mind and which activities disturb his peace of mind and lucidity that is needed for profound Torah study.

There exists a differentiation between one who works and believes that the resulting achievements are the fruits of his labor, and one who works in order to fulfill the obligation of making a natural effort, but knows that success or achievement do not stem from his actions, but from Heavenly assistance. A differentiation also exists between one who sees his material achievements as the main purpose of his life and one who regards material success only as a means of gaining livelihood and peace of mind necessary for Torah study.

A person who does not regard a life of Torah as the primary purpose of his life, and specifically, a person who thinks that his actions are what cause things to happen, is likely to be obsessive about his work. Every time he will be put to the test of having to decide between his work and studying Torah, he will choose his work.

In comparison, a person who has internalized that toil and effort are only meant to fulfill the divine decree, and success and achievements stem from Above and are not a direct result of his activity, will live an inspired life. A person whose goals are spiritual and whose material needs are intended to serve those goals, will understand that there are set times he must devote to Torah study. This cognition educates a person not to get carried away, not to become a slave to his work, and to devote his time to the spiritual and not the material.

This cognition obligates one to set up an order of priorities. The highest priority, preceding working for a living, should be the setting aside time for Torah study and performing good deeds. One must set time for the study of Torah without thinking that maybe this time is needed for material gains. This is because a person's achievements are not dependent on his effort in any case, but on Heavenly assistance that one merits precisely because he sets aside time for Torah study.

In conjunction with this, we shall examine below the clear delineation, which is halachically codified, that one who trusts in God should follow, knowing that he will not depart from the minimum study time that is needed to fulfill his obligation, even if he is in a situation where he can gain wealth

precisely at that time. The applicable halachic decisions are enumerated below.

The *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* (155:1) rules:

After leaving the synagogue (following the morning prayers), one should go to the *beis midrash* and sit down there to study Torah. And this time should be fixed and not be allocated to any other activity, even if one believes that he will be able to make a great profit.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning this, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Ha'kohen Kagan (the *Chofetz Chaim*) additionally notes in the *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid.), that a person who sets aside time for Torah study is regarded as a man of faith, because he believes and trusts in God that his livelihood will not suffer because of it. He presents in this regard the statement in *Maseches Sotah* from the *Talmud Yerushalmi* concerning who are the “men of faith.” These are the people who customers would call on to bring their merchandise to sell, and they would answer them, “You want to cause us not to study Torah. Whatever has been decided in Heaven that should come, will come anyway.” And the *Korban Ha'eidah* (one of the commentators) explains, “In other words, I shall not waste the time that I set for Torah study in order to make money. If I deserve to make a profit,

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5. Rabbi Yosef Karo, in his work *Maggid Meisharim (Parashas Ki Savo)*, additionally notes that before a person begins his Torah study, he should say ten times (*Tehillim* 119:49), “Remember Your words to Your servant, by which You gave me hope” and should be careful not to interrupt his studies during this time for any worldly affair, and on the strength of this he will remember all that he has studied during that time.



it will come by itself from God even after I shall complete my studies.”

In another of his works (*Shemiras Ha'lashon, Sha'ar Ha'tevunah*, chap. 9), the *Chofetz Chaim* notes:

This is something that is manifestly evident, because how is it possible that one should lose his sustenance that was allocated to him on *Rosh Hashanah*, only because he did not want to waste the time that he set aside for Torah study?

The *Mishnah Berurah* notes in conjunction with this that even if one should actually lose a business opportunity because he did not put his study aside for the purpose of a potential deal, “one should still not worry about it, because God has many ways to help him; if not today, He will assist him at a different time. One should be confident in the knowledge that he will be repaid from Heaven until the end of the time set for sustenance for the current year, which is *Rosh Hashanah*. He should recognize that all that has been decreed for him will not change — despite his diligence and effort. This is because nothing will be gained by having contravened God’s will and disturbing the time that was set aside for Torah study”...

Moreover, even after a person went about doing business (after having prayed and studied Torah during the time he set aside for this purpose), he should not behave compulsively, but should do things deliberately, knowing that it is God Who will help him, because anyway there is no consequence to the amount of his toil and investment.

This is the halachic ruling that appears in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim*, 156:1):

Then (after morning prayers and Torah study during the fixed time) one should go to attend to his affairs, because all Torah study that is not combined with work will ultimately cease and is sinful, because poverty will cause him to transgress his Maker's will. Nevertheless, one should not regard his labor as his primary occupation — it should be treated as something temporary — while the [study] of Torah should be regarded as something permanent, and then he will succeed in both (Torah study and making a living)<sup>6</sup> and he should deal honestly with people.”

This being so, there exists a specific practical aspect that stems from faith that there is no imperatively causative relationship between a person's effort to attain his needs and the results. The practical upshot from this faith is that a person should not use time that was allocated for Torah study for gaining his livelihood. It is not a permitted resorting to natural means and it contradicts one's trust in God.

It thus turns out that the life of a person who trusts in God is not a life of renouncing material desires, but it is definitely an inspired life; a life that is richer in content and quality, when the person lifts himself a hand-span above his four physical cubits and knows that he does not lose anything

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6. See the *Mishnah Berurah* there (sec. 3), “Because nothing can prevent God from saving a person, in a minor or major way, and He will send a blessing in his handiwork.”

when he devotes his time to Torah study and good deeds. He knows that his toil is not just material, as is written (*Divrei Ha'yamim I* 29:14), “For all things come from You and of Your own we have given You.”

Wealth does not come from stinginess, but on the contrary, from opening one's hand to give charity to others. Rambam in *Hilchos Brachos* (chap. 10, sec. 22) rules that “a person who goes to measure his granary should say, ‘May it be the will of our God and the God of our ancestors, that He send a blessing in the work of my hands.’”

Rabbi Yosef Karo, in his work *Kesef Mishneh*, quotes the Ritva to the effect that this is a full blessing that is pronounced by mentioning His Name and His kingship (“Blessed are You God, King of the universe”). Ramban explains that this blessing pertains to one who is going to tithe the yield of his crops, for which reason it is not a blessing in vain, but rather a complete blessing on the abundance that will definitely be added in the granary to the crop that has already grown and was picked. This is because “God has promised His blessing over them, as it says (*Malachi* 3:9), ‘Bring all the tithes...and I will pour you out a blessing that will be overabundant.’ And on this basis the Sages instituted this blessing to say that God's promise stands and hence this is not a blessing in vain.

Trust in God also manifests itself in the fact that a person can be sure that once he has given charity to another, not only will his possessions not decrease because of this, but they will be blessed as in the wording of the verse “you shall truly tithe,” which our Sages interpret to mean that one should tithe in order to become wealthy. Hence the life of

a person who trusts in God is additionally enriched by the cognizance that he will gain all his desires precisely when he learns to give.

### **11(2). KIND OF ACTIONS THAT FULFILL THE OBLIGATION TO MAKE AN EFFORT**

The *Chazon Ish*, in his work *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 2), takes note of the mental aspect associated with trust in God that strengthens a person at the time of calamity.

One of the aspects of trust consists of being steadfast in one's faith even when one envisages the possibility of suffering. He should be aware in his heart that this is not a chance misfortune, for there are no happenstances in the world at all; everything is from Him, blessed be He.<sup>7</sup>

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7. The *Chazon Ish* brings as an example of this the following story related in the *Talmud* (*Chagigah* 18b): When Trajanus was about to kill the brothers Lulianus and Papus in Lud, he told them, "If you are from the nation of Chananyah, Misha'el, and Azaryah, let your God come and save you the way He saved them from Nebuchadnetzar." They told him, "Chananyah, Misha'el, and Azaryah were perfectly pious and deserving that a miracle should occur to them, and Nebuchadnetzar was a worthy king who deserved that a miracle should happen through him (because after Chananyah, Misha'el, and Azaryah were saved from the fiery furnace, he blessed God). But as for you, you are an evil commoner and not worthy of miracles happening through you. Moreover, we are deserving of death (because we committed a sin that carries a death penalty). Our Sages state (*Kesubos* 32b) that since the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the office of *Sanhedrin* has ceased to exist and the death sentence cannot be meted out by a Jewish court. A person who is culpable for a death sentence from God finds himself in the hands of the [non-

This means that if a calamity befalls a person, he may suffer a mental breakdown if he thinks that there is no divine “cause and effect,” but rather that it was blind “fate” that arbitrarily subjected him to this suffering. He might feel bad from assuming that if he had acted differently (undergone surgery or consulted a certain physician) or if he or others had refrained from a particular act, the calamity that befell him could have been prevented. As opposed to this, “a person who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness,” in the sense that he will be consoled and feel calm once he internalizes the cognizance that there are no happenstances and everything is from God, according to a precise and general Heavenly reckoning.

A calamity is indeed a time of crisis, during which a person’s outer mask is shed and his profound inner beliefs emerge without any external adornments. Therefore, one whose trust is shaky and riddled with doubts tends to abandon his faith at such a time, even though he does not have a better direction for his life. With a true believer, on the other hand, we will see him strengthening himself in his faith, knowing that the calamity is happening because it is the divine will. He will bow to this will with the recognition that God’s reason is infinitely great and unfathomable.

In addition to the above look at what happens to a person’s

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Jewish] government or falls into the hands of armed robbers. And if you will not kill us, God has many killers in the world (meaning that God has enough ‘natural’ causes that can kill a person). The reason why we have been handed over to you is because He wants to make you pay for our blood.”

thinking, the *Chazon Ish* notes that there are four practical consequences that come from the trait of trust:

### 1. Response to the Actions of Others Who Compete with Him

How should a person with a good livelihood respond when another person comes and wishes to compete with his business?

If that person regards his business as the source of his sustenance, rather than God, and competition will hurt his business, he will do everything possible to prevent this competition.<sup>8</sup>

In comparison, a person whose trust in God is indeed steadfast understands that his business is not in fact the source of his income, which really comes from God, Who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living creature. A person's business does not truly bring one income; it is only something to do to fulfill one's obligation to make an effort,

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8. The *Chazon Ish* said, "In life we see people such as Reuven, who is an ethical person and always proclaims his trust in God, who denounces excessive effort and expresses abhorrence concerning the constant pursuit of income. And indeed, he is a successful businessman, and does not lack customers in his store, and does not need to expend excessive effort. He is indeed a lover of trust, because trust affects him positively. But suddenly we are surprised to find Reuven, a person full of trust in God, deliberating quietly with his servants and advisers about how to prevent a potential rival from opening a store just like his. He is saddened by this...and implements overt steps to prevent the intentions of the potential rival from materializing...and concocts untrue reasons and arguments to justify his actions."

and once this is done, then the divine abundance that has been decreed for him by God comes to him. Therefore, if another business competes with his, this in no way detracts from his income, since it does not come from his business, but rather from the divine abundance, the measure of which fits his spiritual standing.

We find in the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 38a) that Ben Azzai says, “You will be called by your name, and be seated in your place, and you will be given from what is yours.” In other words a person is called only by titles of honor that have been decreed in Heaven, sits only in a place prepared for him, and receives only his portion. Everyone is granted what is decreed from Heaven, be it honor or wealth, and no one can add or subtract from anything that is his.<sup>9</sup>

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9. In conjunction with this, see Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein’s work *Ohr Yechezkel (Emunah)*, pp. 100-102). He explains there that just as it is impossible to change the slightest detail of the natural conduct of the world and to create a new creation, so is it impossible to gain a place in the World to Come without following the path outlined by God, Who established how sacrifices are to be slaughtered and in what place. In contrast to this, affairs of this world allow one to have a choice (see *Chovos Ha’levavos*, chaps. 4 and 10, part 4) where a person tends to think that a causative relationship exists between his actions and what happens in the world. Concerning this our Sages said (*Berachos* 12b), “And do not inquire after your heart” refers to heresy, because the heart desires and tells the person that he can do whatever he wants and no one else has control over his actions. But the fact that one is obligated to perform *mitzvos* shows that a person is not free, and such is the statement of Ramban at the end of *Parashas Bo*: “A person does not have a share in the Torah given by Moshe unless he believes that all events and all occurrences are solely miracles. There is nothing natural or routine in them; whether pertaining to an individual or to a congregation, all is

This being so, a person who trusts in God will not quarrel with his competitors, will not conspire against them, and will not fear the fact that suddenly he has competition. On the contrary, he will understand that the more his conduct toward his competitors is according to *Halachah*, the more meritorious he will be. It is this merit on which his livelihood actually depends. This being so:

One should even make an effort to assist that person, to give him good advice. How much holiness is added to the world when we see a person who is kind to another who intends to compete with him; and he adds glory to those who fear God. Happy is he and happy is his generation!

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decreed by Heaven.” The entire purpose of the Torah is to recognize the existence of Divine Providence and to believe that even what one owns does not stem from his actions, but from God. The basis of faith is that everything is in God’s hands and nothing is in human hands. A person is obligated to feel as if he is an ax in the hands of a hewer, will the ax boast to its hewer? This is the meaning of the concept “*Elokim*” — “firm, capable, and all powerful.” The purpose of prayer is to believe that everything is in God’s hands, and this cognition is rewarded with the acceptance of prayer. This is the meaning of the statement of our Sages (*Berachos* 4b), “Everyone who says ‘He opens His hand...’ three times daily is accorded the World to Come.” Just saying this is insufficient, but when one says it, one should have in mind that God sustains everything, from the horns of *re'emim* to the eggs of lice, and everything is under His Providence. Then he indeed is accorded the World to Come — a world that is given to one who believes in Divine Providence concerning everything that happens in our world.



## 2. Actions to Which He Will Resort at a Time of Calamity

The *Chazon Ish* notes that:

The effort that people exert to save themselves is different in the case of one who trusts: instead of courting wealthy and influential people and searching for worthless schemes, a person who trusts will examine his deeds and dedicate himself to repentance, prayer, and charity in order to annul the evil decree that has been meted out to him.

This means that a person who encounters difficulty and danger may feel like a trapped animal, and run around and around in circles, losing his peace of mind. As opposed to this, one who is imbued with faith will understand that what is really important at a time like this is to deal with the source of the evil decree rather than with its outward manifestations.<sup>10</sup>

One who trusts God knows that a person's salvation stems from the internal emendation of his deeds and not from anything external. Therefore, at a time of calamity, he will check

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10. We find in the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 67a) a list of verses to be said as a *segulah* for being healed from a variety of maladies. The commentators ask why doing this is permissible, since we find in another place (*Shavuos* 15b) that it is prohibited to use verses of the Torah for healing purposes. However, the Maharsha resolves this question by saying that the prohibition to be healed by verses of the Torah only applies when one intends to heal his body. However, a person who recognizes that each corporeal illness stems from a spiritual defect is permitted to use such verses in order to heal his spiritual illness and to strengthen his faith in God. Then his corporeal illness will also be taken away.

his deeds and will consider how to improve them. He will try to act in the area that actually determines what happens to him, and he will direct his main effort to prayer, repentance, and charity by praying with more devotion rather than being subject to the distractions encountered by someone who is trapped in his calamity.

Indeed, he will resort to basic and vital deeds of human effort, but will not act out of despair. The feeling of confusion will give way to self-examination, which deepens faith and trust in God. These are the true emotional supports at times of calamity and, by themselves, serve as the source of salvation.

The *Chazon Ish* additionally notes that, actually, this is the true test of trust in God, since:

It is easy to trust at times when the need to trust does not play an essential role in one's life; but it is much more difficult to trust at a time when it is indeed called for. It is easy to speak of trust when its role is just theoretical rather than practical...

At such times a person just employs this trait to spin pleasurable dreams about the uncertain future.

The real test that can determine whether one actually practices what he is saying, whether he in fact places his trust in God or whether he has just trained himself to chirp trust, but has not internalized this trait, is when he encounters a situation which demands that he indeed trust in God. This is so since that trust is intended to guide him, heal him, and make him well. Does he turn to trust at that time and actually trust

in Him, or does he, particularly at that time, abandon trust and instead turn to the unreliable and untruthful, or to worthless and reprehensive schemes?

Thus, trust in God strengthens a person in times of trouble and makes it possible to deal with adversity. The calamity that befalls a person also serves as a test that strengthens one who truly trusts; he should work systematically and strenuously on his faith, and internalize these concepts deeply, systematically, and fundamentally, to the point that these will manifest themselves in his actions and thoughts. Only after a great deal of internal work will a person respond in a manner that is proper for one who trusts in God. One who is not fully imbued with this faith will be governed by his distress and will tend to feel helpless. On the other hand, a person who has properly internalized the trait of trust will find that it leads him to tranquil waters, even if he walks in the shadow of death.

### **3. Avoidance of Senseless and Futile Actions**

A clear, practical result of trusting in God is avoiding actions that are not likely to succeed, in the sense of “a drowning man grabbing at a straw.” Resorting to such actions characterizes a person in despair.

This is how the *Chazon Ish* explains our Sages’ criticism of Yosef Ha’tzaddik, when he asked the head butler to mention him to Pharaoh. At first, this seems like resorting to natural means, which is both permitted and even understandable for a person who is imprisoned in jail and has to do something in order to help himself. But as was discussed earlier

in this book, the *Chazon Ish* explains that since there was no real chance that a person like the head butler would remember Yosef after being released from jail or make an effort on his behalf in Pharaoh's palace, this makes Yosef's request an act of desperation — and a person who trusts in God does not resort to such acts.<sup>11</sup>

The *Chazon Ish* notes, "This action cannot be regarded as one that is obligatory, and such an action carries with it the connotation of something like spreading dust on the splendor of faith and trust. And since it is not obligatory, it is prohibited."

#### 4. Avoiding Wrongdoing

Trust entails the avoidance of any action that is not halachically proper or is unethical. The *Chazon Ish* explains in this context that the only criterion for testing whether a person's effort is permitted or prohibited is the pertinent halachic ruling.

Thus, for example, if a certain kind of business competition is halachically permitted, then it is prohibited to try to block the competitor, because, as above, this contradicts trust in God. But if that kind of competition is not permitted by *Halachah*, then one may make an effort to prevent it.

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11. The *Chazon Ish* wrote in *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 2, sec. 6), "But since it is not the nature of such people to remember and do good, such an act is one of desperation. A person who is desperate does everything that he can, even if his actions border on the futile. But one who trusts in God should not resort to such actions."

The *Chazon Ish* says, in his work *Emunah U'bitachon* (chap. 3, sec. 15), that the reason why a resident craftsman may prevent an out-of-towner from coming and practicing his craft in his town is not that the newcomer can indeed take away from the livelihood of the resident, since livelihood was fixed from *Rosh Hashanah* until *Yom Kippur* of the previous year; he [the local craftsman] will not be lacking anything from the fact that the out-of-town craftsman also plies his trade, and will not gain anything if the competing craftsman will not move in. However, if he is halachically permitted to prevent the other craftsman from taking up residence, then his action becomes part of the "obligation to make an effort on his part and to prevent damage to him by the other person."

And if it is not halachically permitted to prevent competition in the given case, then actions performed to prevent this competition cannot be regarded as permitted resorting to natural means, and his competitor is not to be regarded as someone causing damage. The logic of this is simple and we have discussed this before

The *Chofetz Chaim* emphasizes in his work *Shemiras Ha'lashon* (*Sha'ar Ha'tevunah*, chap. 9) that someone who has internalized that it is God's will that brings about blessing and not human actions will also avoid slanderous talk, because like any other sin, this is an activity that cannot bring about blessing.

A similar thought is expressed by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in his work *Igros Moshe* (*Orach Chaim*, part 2, sec. 111) regarding the decree of "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat

bread,” from which the obligation to make an effort stems.

It cannot apply to *Shabbos* and the holidays, or even to the times of weekday prayer, because God will not decree that people should perform forbidden acts; and it hence must follow that it applies to weekdays and not at the time of prayer.

In keeping with this, Rabbi Feinstein explains the statement of Rabbi Nehorai (at the end of *Maseches Kiddushin*), who said, “I put aside all of the world’s professions and I will teach my son only Torah.” The young years are the most suitable time for growing in Torah knowledge, and a person is obligated to devote all his time to Torah study in order to make the most of his abilities. Study of a profession in young years will detract from one’s ability to properly grow in Torah knowledge. We learn from this that the decree of “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread” does not apply to the study of a profession during those years.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, we have previously seen the *Chofetz Chaim’s* statement that a person who steals from another not only sins, but is also a fool and a faithless person, since by definition,

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12. To quote Rabbi Feinstein, “We were promised that God will give us bread and all our needs from work on weekdays and not during the time of prayer. Rabbi Nehorai is similarly of the opinion that this applies to study with one’s son in his youth, because it is impossible for one to be able to study Torah if his father also teaches him a profession during his young years. It follows from this, that he should not be taught a profession during these years and the need to learn a profession to fulfill the decree of ‘by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread’ does not apply to these years.”

stealing cannot bring divine abundance. The *Chofetz Chaim* adds that in exchange for his taking the abundance which has reached or was supposed to reach another person, the abundance that had been allotted to him on *Rosh Hashanah* will be taken away from him. In the end, the illicitly acquired wealth will disappear, and with it the kosher abundance that he was allotted previously. As our Sages (*Sukkah* 29b) said, “Rav said, ‘There are four reasons why people lose their property: for delaying paying the wages of a hired hand, for not paying the wages of a hired hand, and for divesting themselves of their obligations and imposing them on others...’”

The trait of trust assists a person in withstanding the test of acting improperly on the assumption that the ends justify the means, because one who has trust knows that the means do not lead to the ends, but the opposite.

### **11(3). THE MANNER AND WAY IN WHICH THE TRUSTING PERSON SHOULD CONDUCT HIMSELF**

Trust in God has an additional practical aspect pertaining to the manner in which a person acts in attaining his needs. A person who trusts in God is not overeager to exert his effort. We have seen in preceding chapters Rabbi Dessler’s quote in the name of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm that there exists a sign that can help a person determine whether or not he stands at the balance point. The rule is that if one feels panicky to invest more effort, this indicates that he should abandon this labor “because it is definite that it comes from the evil inclination.”

Knowing that it is not his action that brings about the result reduces the extent of a person's compulsion. This being so, there is no point for any urgency and for the worry that the results will be different if some action is not implemented. Things can be done deliberately and without distress, since after all, everything comes from Above.

A profound understanding of the principles of faith and trust leads to an orderly life in the manner established by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter:

- Truth — do not utter something that may be tinged with a lack of trust.
- Industry — do not to waste a minute of time; to do what has to be done.
- Diligence — do what should be done with industriousness and feeling.
- Honor — be mindful of the honor of others, even of those with whom one does not agree.
- Tranquility — have peace of mind without being hurried; do everything in a composed manner.
- Calmness — words of the wise are accepted when uttered calmly.
- Cleanliness — tend to your cleanliness and purity of body and clothing.
- Tolerance — quietly endure every event and every hardship in life.
- Order — do everything in an orderly and organized manner.



- Humility — recognize your shortcomings and disregard the flaws of others.
- Charity — waive what is yours.
- Frugality — do not spend even a penny unnecessarily.
- Silence — think about the purpose of your speaking before doing so.

#### **11(4). FROM THE THEORETICAL TO THE PRACTICAL — CONCERNING LIFE INSURANCE**

The question of whether it is permissible to purchase life insurance, since perhaps this can be detrimental to one's trust in God that He will take care of all the person's survivors without it, is a significant practical consideration in achieving a balance between making an effort and trusting. This question is discussed extensively by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, and it seems that their responses sum up the entire issue while subjecting it to comprehensive halachic analysis.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim*, vol. 2, sec. 111) decides that a person is permitted to buy life insurance, and that this is regarded as proper natural effort that does not infringe upon one's trust in God, since:

Insurance is similar to any other commercial matter that a person is not only permitted, but is required to be engaged in, and one is not permitted to say that, even if he will sit idle, God will provide him with his sustenance in some manner or another. This is because

a person lacks reason to believe that he is meritorious enough that this will happen to him. Additionally, it is prohibited to depend on miracles, something that applies even to those who are meritorious enough that this should happen. Therefore, it is definitely prohibited to assume that God will send him his sustenance without any work or business.

Rabbi Feinstein explains that a person is supposed to work for a living, but at the same time know that it should only be done because a person is under an obligation to do so. However, “all that he earns from his work or business is only what was decreed by God on *Rosh Hashanah*, but still God has decreed that He will send sustenance only by means of work or business, as it says, ‘By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.’” There is no sin at all to learn a profession that is easier and more convenient and brings about a greater income. This is so even though one has to believe that God can provide him with sustenance from whatever profession there is, because we find in the *Talmud (Kiddushin 82b)*, “Profession does not cause poverty and profession does not cause wealth, but everything is according to a person’s merits.” Still, a person should find a profession that gives him a better chance to make a profit, because a person does not know and it is quite possible that Hashem has decreed that he will profit specifically from this profession.

Therefore, Rabbi Feinstein rules that a person is allowed to involve himself in all kinds of effort and to select a profession with a potential of profit, while telling himself and knowing that all that he will earn, after everything is said and done, is only from God “Who gives one strength to make wealth,”

as interpreted by Onkelos that “He gives you advice to purchase properties,” and so is every other thing from which one makes a profit.

This being so, insurance is also similar to a business affair and similar to what a person does to provide sustenance for himself and his family. This is permissible, since this is a livelihood type of activity and also because perhaps this will lighten his burden and he will not have to work so hard to leave property from which he will be sustained in his old age and will bequeath to his children.

Since God has imparted to the late generation the wisdom of making insurance arrangements, so that one would have sustenance for one’s old age and for bequeathing his children in a natural manner, this is a good thing and is proper even for God fearing people who trust only in God, Who gives them the idea to buy property.

Rabbi Feinstein additionally emphasizes that trust in God when taking out an insurance policy manifests itself in the buyer’s feeling certain that God will assist him in “being able to pay the annual premium, and this is the trust that obligates us.”

For this reason Rabbi Feinstein rules that it is permitted to take out an insurance policy, and this applies also to “fire and theft insurance, as well as car insurance, because doing all this is not detrimental to trust, just as this is regarded as

permissible by all, even by the most pious.”<sup>13</sup>

A similar ruling was issued by Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef (in his responsa *Yechaveh Da'as*, part 3, sec. 85). He rules there that it is permitted to take out life insurance, and this is regarded as a permissible resorting to natural means that does not contradict the obligation to trust in God. The responsum of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef is based, among others, on the following considerations and sources:

A person is obligated to make an effort to attain his sustenance. But he must trust in God that He will provide him with sustenance on the basis of his effort. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef cites as the source for this ruling the statement in

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13. See in conjunction with this Rabbi Nebenzahl, in his work *Sichos L'sefer Shemos on Parashas Beshalach*, who notes that:

There are some who wrote in the name of the *Chofetz Chaim* that a person is not permitted to take out life insurance. The rationale behind this is that it is possible that it was decreed in heaven that the person should die, but the implementation of this decree is delayed because his family will then remain without sustenance and their spiritual status is such that they do not deserve such a punishment. It then comes out that one who has life insurance that ensures the livelihood of his family causes the death decree to be implemented. However, this calculation does not seem proper and many Torah authorities have stated the opposite and permitted taking out life insurance. (See the responsa *Igros Moshe*, part 4, *Orach Chaim*, sec. 111; and the responsa *Yechaveh Da'as*, part 3, sec. 85.) This is because a person whose level of trust is standard must worry that his wife and children should not become a burden upon the community in the case of a misfortune, God forbid. I am convinced that this statement is suitable for the ordinary person; since he does not have a promise that his family will be provided for, he must insure his life, provided, of course, that this is possible.

*Midrash Shocheh Tov* (*Tehillim* 23), “Rabbi Eliezer the son of Yaakov says, ‘So that God shall bless you in all your handiwork that you will do.’ So maybe one should sit idly? The verse says, ‘that you will do.’ If you do, it becomes blessed, and if you do not do, it does not become blessed.”

Rabbi Yosef notes that a differentiation should be made in conjunction with this between the trust of an ordinary person and that which is common among the pious and righteous, of which there are only a few. Rabbi Yosef also notes that what it says in the *Baraisa*, “Rabbi Eliezer Ha’gadol says, ‘The faith of a person who has bread to eat and says, ‘What will I eat tomorrow?’ is flawed.” However:

The Maharsha explains there that this is a doctrine that applies only to the pious, who believe that God feeds and sustains every creature from the horns of *re’emim* to the eggs of lice.

This is why the *Mishnah* in *Sotah* (48b) says, “From the time of the destruction of the Holy Temple, there are no more men of faith,” as it says (*Tehillim* 12:2), “Save us God, for the pious are no more, for truthful men vanished from mankind.” But this does not apply to the pious, etc.

It appears that at least there is no actual prohibition when one endeavors to attain more than the food needed for that day. All this is provided that he does not abandon his trust in God and does not say, “My power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth.”

And this is what was stated by the Meiri in his

commentary on *Mishlei* (19:21), and see also in the commentary of the Meiri on *Tehillim* (128) — that a person should trust God in all his affairs and should not depend on his effort and diligence alone, to the point that he will say, “My power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth.” But one should not disregard making an effort while trusting in God.

Rabbi Yosef concludes that, in all matters, alacrity is laudable and laziness is lamentable. This also applies regarding a person’s obligation to resort to natural means. But alongside this effort one must trust in God and ascribe his success to Him, as it says, “Maybe you will say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me all this wealth.’ And you should remember your God, because it is He who gives you the power to make the wealth.”

In keeping with this, Rabbi Yosef concludes that “one who takes out an insurance policy need not be apprehensive that he may have sinned, because he believes that everything comes from Divine Providence.”

Rabbi Yosef notes that there are two conditions, which, if followed, ensure that a person’s effort is not regarded as detrimental to his trust in God:

1. That everything should be done according to *Halachah*, on the basis of the holy Torah, all of whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all of whose paths are peace. An act that deviates from *Halachah* cannot be regarded as the kind of effort that will bring about the divine blessing, and hence the general rule is that one should first analyze the

halachic aspects of his action to see whether it is perfectly pure of anything sinful. Only if the action is without any halachic blemish can it be regarded as permitted effort.

2. That while making an effort one clearly recognizes that it is not his action that brings about success, but it is only from God, Who assists him and decrees what should happen to him.

In conjunction with this, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef cites from the ruling of the *Shach* (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 159:2) concerning the halachic consent to lend money at interest to a non-Jew during the current era,<sup>14</sup> and concludes by say-

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14. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef quotes in his responsum the statement by *Tosafos* (*Bava Metzia* 70a) in the name of Rabbeinu Tam, that even though the Sages prohibited lending money with interest to non-Jews so that the Jew should not start copying the non-Jew's behavior, the current approach is to be lenient. This is because we are living among non-Jews and we cannot conduct any other business except if we deal with them; for this reason the prohibition on lending money to non-Jews out of fear of copying their behavior does not apply now. This is also ruled by the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah*, 159:1). It appears from the above that no apprehension exists that this may be regarded as lack of trust in God, since nothing can prevent God from saving one, in a minor or major way, but being that under natural circumstances we are forced to deal with them, lending to non-Jews with interest was also permitted. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef similarly quotes the ruling of Rabbi Eliezer Deutch, in his responsum *Pri Ha'sadeh* (part 2, sec. 44), to permit purchasing life insurance, and presents in support of this opinion the statement by *Tosafos* (*Kiddushin* 41a):

And nowadays we commonly betroth our daughters, even when they are minors, because the yoke of the exile increases daily, and if a person is able to provide his daughter with a dowry today, he may

ing, "I am in the habit of explaining that this is meant by the verse (*Yirmeyahu* 17:5), 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart is detached from God.' The one who makes an effort to earn a living and depends solely on the kindness of flesh and blood, detaching his trust from God, is included among those who are cursed. But a person who fully believes that God is the Cause of all causes, while he makes an effort to gain his livelihood, is not regarded as lacking in trust. Hence it is permitted to take out life insurance when one trusts in God, because that also is from Heaven, that people have been designated to be involved in this for the benefit of mankind, and it is known that nothing happens without Divine Providence."

### **11(5). SUMMARY**

It has been learned from all the above that a life of faith and trust in God consists of a lifestyle governed by a complete and orderly set of balances:

- 1) The balance between a profound cognizance of Divine Providence and the determination and

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not be able to do so later on, and his daughter could never marry.

It appears from this that such behavior is not contrary to trust and faith in God. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef explains further that the reason why this is so is that this action does not stem from the assumption that a person is able to help himself, but that he believes and recognizes the fact that this is only a kind of effort that a person must exert because of the decree of "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." Actually, however, the help will come from God, and His salvation comes in the blink of an eye.



diligence in resorting to natural means, with the person sorting his actions and classifying them in a manner so that he will only exert the amount of effort that is needed according to his personal spiritual standing, and will avoid activities that contradict the need to trust in God, while knowing that everything comes from Him.

- 2) The balance between work, as an all-powerful tool for self-fulfillment, and the cognizance that this should not serve as a reason for a person to strengthen his belief in himself. This is the balance between the feeling of self-fulfillment that is embedded in a person's toil and which gives him his identity and the cognizance that "this was from God" and he did not bring about his own wealth.
- 3) This integration manifests itself most perceptibly in prayer, because a person stands before God, asking for his needs while making the greatest possible effort to attain them, and at the same time knowing that everything is from God, and so he prays.

This balanced lifestyle of trust in God has obvious practical implications on a person's life in a number of aspects.

We have thus seen that the life of a person who trusts in God does not entail a renunciation of one's material desires, but is clearly an inspired and superior life, provided that the

person has the good sense to elevate himself above the material aspect of his life, devoting his time also to the realization of his spiritual aspirations — including Torah study and giving to others — as a way to enrich himself and his life.

The following, among others, stems from the cognition that there is no inevitable relationship between a person's effort to attain his needs and the actual results:

1. **Torah Study.** A person who believes that one does not become wealthy based on the strength of his wisdom and effort, will understand that the amount of time that he invests in material needs must be balanced, with priority given to fixing totally inviolate times for Torah study.
2. **Charity** (in the form of money and time). This cognition also educates a person to understand that wealth does not come from being tight-fisted, but rather from an open hand and from one's devoting himself and his wealth to others.
3. **Mental strengthening at a time of calamity.** A person who faces a disaster may break down mentally, if he thinks that he has been hurt by "blind fate." He may also develop feelings of guilt, by thinking that if he had done something, or had refrained from doing something, the calamity could have been prevented. In contrast, "a person who trusts in God is surrounded by kindness." A person will be comforted and calmed if he properly internalizes the cognition that there are no happenstances

in the world and everything comes to us from God, according to a precise and comprehensive Heavenly reckoning.

4. **Avoidance of desperate actions.** In times of danger to one's life, a person may feel like a trapped animal that runs around helplessly. He may lose his sense of judgment and peace of mind, and engage in acts of desperation that have very little chance of success. A person who trusts in God will not find himself in such a state, because he knows that things are decided on an entire different plane — above in the hands of Divine Providence!
5. **Peace of mind.** The mindset that it is not his actions that bring about the results reduces the extent of a person's obsession, panic, and worry that he must do something to get a different outcome. Indeed, even if there is a point in proceeding in a certain manner, there is no reason for obsession and panic, since anyway, everything comes from God and does not depend on a person's actions, which are nothing more than the fulfillment of the divine decree, "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread."
6. **Repentance.** A person who believes that everything that occurs in the world comes from God will understand that it is truly important, at the time of a calamity, to deal with the source of the evil decree and not with its external manifestations. Therefore the trusting person will, at such a time, devote his efforts to prayer, repentance, and charity. This does

not have to come at the expense of natural effort, but will prevent acts of desperation and the feeling of helplessness. He will conduct a comprehensive self-examination of his faith and trust in God; this will serve as a true support during difficult times.

7. **Fair attitude toward a competitor.** A person who trusts in God understands that a business that competes with him does not take away anything from his income, because his income does not come from the business, but from the divine abundance that is granted in conformance with his spiritual status. One who trusts in God will not conspire against business competitors and will not be afraid when all of a sudden he is faced with competition. On the contrary, the *Chazon Ish* notes that:

He will even make an effort to assist that person, to give him good advice. How much holiness does one add in the world to see a person who is kind with another who intends to compete with him; and he adds glory to those who fear God. Happy is he and happy is his generation!

8. **Refraining from inappropriate activities.** Every activity that is not halachically permitted is regarded by the *Chazon Ish* as an activity that cannot be regarded as a permitted natural effort, and is considered to be severely harmful to one's trust in God. In keeping with the same principle, we have seen the *Chofetz Chaim's* statement that a person who has internalized that it is God's will that brings about

blessing and not human actions, will necessarily avoid engaging in slanderous talk, stealing, or any other wrongdoing, since such actions, being sinful, cannot bring about blessing. Trust in God assists a person in avoiding improper, prohibited, or unethical acts, when it is obvious that such means do not lead to the goal, but are contrary to attaining what he wants to achieve.

9. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein rules that there is no sin whatsoever in making an effort to learn a profession that will make it easier for one to gain a profit. One has to believe that God can provide one's sustenance from whatever profession he has, and that one's "profession does not cause poverty and does not cause wealth, but everything is according to a person's merits." But it is still possible that it has been decreed from above that one should gain his livelihood precisely from a given profession that has better chances of success. Rabbi Feinstein also permitted one to take out insurance that is intended to assist with gaining sustenance at old age and for bequeathing to his family, and "this is a good thing and is proper even for God-fearing people, who trust God that He is the One who advises them to buy property." This is because one who purchases an insurance policy is also following divine advice, and one who trusts in God is certain that God will assist him in "being able to pay the annual premium, and this is the trust that obligates us."

## Trust as a Means for Shaping a Calm and Exalted Personality Whose Purpose Is in Its Very Existence

The commandment of trust is a practical *mitzvah* that envelops a person's entire life, touching upon almost all of his time and actions. Actually, the trait of trust is capable of guiding a person in all his activities and serves as the criterion according to which a person can shape his life. The trait of trust also shapes a personality that is different, calm, and composed. It can elevate a person above the sweeping torrent of his life and to imbue him with tranquility and hope, even during times of pressure and crisis. Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his work *Kad Ha'kemach* (entry: trust), explains that one who trusts God achieves a double gain, both because the trait of trust is a verified prescription for success<sup>15</sup> and also because

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15. In all that applies to trust as a prescription for success, we wish to note a case in which a person came to his Rav and asked for a blessing that he should succeed in a major business endeavor that was capable of instantly turning him into a very rich person. When the rabbi asked whether there were risks in this business, he explained to him in great detail that there was absolutely no possible risk. And, behold, the rabbi prohibited him from entering into this business, because in the end he would incur a major loss. When the same person came to consult about a business concerning which there were doubts and second thoughts, the rabbi gave him his blessing. His explanation for this strange behavior was: A person's sustenance and success are not dependent on his businesses, but in his trust in God. If he believes that he is dealing with a business that does not require any prayer for success because it will come "naturally," this means that he depends on himself and not on God, and there is nothing upon which God's blessing can be bestowed. On the other hand, when a person does not depend on himself and on his understanding, but prays for God's blessing, this itself draws down the yearned for blessing, and leads to his success.

even if one should not succeed, he will be rewarded by the very trust and belief in God. To quote him:

The true trust is that he should put his trust only in God, and that he should remember Him in every part of his actions and should bear in mind that he is not in control of this actions, as they depend on God's will. And he should take into account that he may possibly fail in a short time if he will lack God's protection. Then, even if he will not be successful in this action that he wishes to perform, and it will not work out, be it a major or minor matter, and he trusts in Him always, and does not abandon the trait of trust, then the reward of trust which he had reverts to a much greater benefit than that expected from his activity. And should he be successful and attain his desire, then he gains both, and both of them are good.

