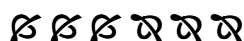


Foundations of Judaism Lesson 4 (Part 1): Balancing Trust in G-d with Human Effort

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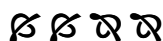
LESSON OUTLINE

- Part #1:** 1. Defining *Emunah* (Belief in G-d) & *Bitachon* (Trust in G-d)
2. Objective of Bitachon in G-d
- Part #2:** 3. Human Effort
A. Test man
B. Occupies man
C. Functioning in Nature
4. Balancing Bitachon with Human Effort



Introduction

What is "Trust in G-d"? How much should we rely on G-d to help us succeed in life? Is "Trust in G-d" an excuse for idleness? What does G-d expect from us?



Trust (Bitach) in G-d and do what is good; dwell on earth and nourish your belief in G-d (Emunah).

Rabbi David Kimchi and Rabbi Bachyai explain that this verse defines a balance between two apparent opposites: reliance on G-d and human efforts.

Rabbi David Kimchi [*Radak* commentary to Psalms]:

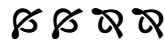
Trust (Bitach) in G-d and do good... – Before engaging in any good acts, trust in your heart that G-d alone controls the outcome; know that nothing we do can succeed unless G-d grants us success in our efforts. Without G-d's blessing, neither physical strength nor material wealth can guarantee that things will work out as we anticipate they will.

Rabbi Bachyai [*Collected Writings of Rabbi Bachyai*]:

...dwell on earth... – do not allow your trust in G-d's assistance to induce indolence. As long as you live on earth, combine your trust in G-d's support with your pursuit of a livelihood. Although you know that G-d is the true Manager of all our affairs, know that He expects you to put forth effort in meeting life's challenges.

...and nourish your belief in G-d (Emunah) – look upon the pursuit of your livelihood as one practical expression of your belief in G-d. Proceeding with this attitude, make sure that anything you do to earn your living be done with honesty; engage only in such business practices as are sanctioned by G-d.

On the one hand, we are to trust that it is only G-d Who determines the outcome of our efforts. While we have much leeway in planning for the future and in the actions we take to achieve results, the success or failure of those plans and actions lies in His Hands alone. On the other hand, our reliance on G-d should not breed inaction on our part. We must not allow ourselves to succumb to either laziness or despair. In this lesson, we will explore the terms and issues that relate to the delicate balance of human effort and reliance on G-d.



Defining *Emunah* (Belief in G-d) & *Bitachon* (Trust in G-d)

Rabbi Bachyai defines the two key terms that portray our understanding of G-d's involvement with this world, and with every individual. Since our ability to perceive G-d is necessarily limited, our relationship with Him is based upon our accepting certain essential concepts:

Rabbi Bachyai [*Collected Writings of Rabbi Bachyai*]

Emunah (belief) encompasses the conviction that there exists a single Creator of the Universe, Who oversees every action of every individual, both in a general and in a specific sense.

Bitachon (trust) is the recognition that G-d controls the outcome of every event that occurs in our lives. G-d is able to – and often does – override natural law at will, in any instance, even in seemingly hopeless, life-threatening situations.

Rabbi Avrohom Karelitz explores the similarities and differences between these two terms. *Emunah* defines our understanding of G-d's relationship with the world, and the extent of His involvement in our lives: Do we believe that G-d is the sole Creator of the world, and that He continues to manage events that takes place? To what extent does G-d take an interest in our moral behavior? What role does G-d play in reward and punishment for human actions? How much does Divine Providence overlap with the world's natural order? How far does Divine Providence determine the outcome of the activities of individuals and groups, whether that outcome seems to be favorable or unfavorable?

Emunah is the backdrop for all our attitudes vis-a-vis life in this world, and the extent and quality of our *emunah* become the raw materials of the moral decisions that we make. We will be called upon to put that *emunah* into practice in the ethical situations we face in life.

Bitachon embraces our practical responses to those life situations that require moral decisions. *Bitachon* guides us through the moral tests of life. Our *bitachon*-based actions are shaped by the beliefs that are rooted in our *emunah*.

Thus, *emunah* is a person's world view, while *bitachon* is a person's application of this world view to the various circumstances that confront him in life.

Rabbi Karelitz clarifies Rabbi Bachyai's definition of *bitachon*:

Rabbi Avrohom Karelitz [*The Book of Emunah & Bitachon*]:

There is a common misconception about what *bitachon* – absolute trust in G-d – demands of us. Many people mistakenly think that true *bitachon* means that in any situation, if we have absolute faith that G-d will bring about the result that we desire, He will accommodate our wishes and will make things turn out as we hoped. They feel that we must act with complete confidence that G-d will not allow anything "bad" to happen. According to this misguided approach, we have almost a magical ability to control the circumstances of our lives, through the power of our belief alone. To be less than totally confident is looked upon as inadequate *bitachon*.

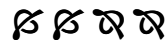
This understanding of *bitachon* is simply wrong. Unless G-d has communicated to someone through prophetic channels that the outcome of a given situation will be one that he/she considers favorable, there is never any assurance of a desired result. We cannot begin to fathom G-d's complex system of justice, and so we cannot make any assumptions about how He will direct our lives and the lives of those around us.

Rather, true *bitachon* means that one accepts the fact that there is no such thing as a random occurrence. Everything that happens in the world – whether we like it or not, whether we understand it or not – originates with G-d. Thus, an unfavorable or even a tragic outcome of any situation should not weaken a person's *bitachon* in G-d, for the essence of *bitachon* is to know that it is G-d Who determines everything that happens.

Rabbi Karelitz defines *bitachon* as the recognition that G-d – and no other force – controls the outcome of events. Our *bitachon* in G-d should never lead us to assume that we will be pleased with everything that happens in our

lives. In G-d's unfathomable omniscience, He determines the results of events, based on infinite considerations that only He can understand.

What then can we gain through the absolute trust in G-d that is *bitachon*? If there is no divine guarantee for success, what does reliance upon G-d yield?



Objective of *Bitachon* in G-d

Rabbi Bachyai Ibn Pakuda explains how *bitachon* influences our lives:

Rabbi Bachyai Ibn Pakuda [*Chovot Ha'levivot*/ Duties of the Heart – Chapter on *Bitachon*]:

Bitachon in G-d gives people peace of mind, for they can know that G-d is in complete control of the world, and everything that happens is a manifestation of His Will. Moreover, they can be sure that ultimately, all that G-d does is in their best interest.

Rabbi Karelitz describes vividly the reassurance one gains through one's *bitachon*, knowing that G-d never leaves anything to chance:

Rabbi Karelitz [*ibid.*]:

How does one apply *bitachon* to life's circumstances? When a person is faced with a dangerous situation, his instinctive reaction is typically one of fear. This can lead him to forget that it is only G-d Who determines the final outcome of the situation, and that the natural or logical order of events will not influence matters at all if G-d wishes it otherwise. His fear may also lead him to forget that G-d can turn the most dangerous situation into one of safety, for He suffers no lack of means by which to accomplish this.

If a person can keep his mind and heart focused under such distressing circumstances, his *bitachon* can effectively neutralize his fear of danger, for he can draw strength from the recognition that G-d alone will determine the outcome – be it pleasant or dreadful – of this situation. G-d can bring the event to a safe, happy conclusion as easily as He can bring it to a harmful end.

The Talmudic story of Lulinus and Poppus [Tractate *Taanit*] gives us a clear picture of the practical application of this concept in an extreme, life-threatening situation. [A Roman governor sentenced two righteous Jewish men, Lulinus and Poppus, to death. When the governor taunted them, declaring that G-d could not save them from his decree of death, they remained absolutely calm, responding that G-d possesses many agents to execute those people whom He has decreed must die. "If G-d wills that we should die," they said, "then you are only serving as His agent; nevertheless you will be punished for your evil act of killing us."] Lulinus and Poppus understood that there are no chance occurrences in the world, for everything is subject to G-d's providence.

Rabbi Bachyai Ibn Pakuda and Rabbi Karelitz describe a powerful sense of security that comes of knowing that we have not been abandoned to the whims of fate. No matter what the outcome of the situation, we can rest assured that it was not the result of pure happenstance, for it would not have turned out as it did if G-d had not allowed it to. We also find in the rabbis' words that there is never reason to despair, for even the most dangerous situations can come to a safe and happy resolution.

Rabbi Karelitz mentions an additional benefit that we gain from our awareness of G-d's involvement in human circumstances:

The knowledge that G-d is in control of all events likewise affects the manner in which we react to danger. While we need to take reasonable precautions, we do not need to invest *all* of our energies in formulating plans that may or may not prove beneficial, and in seeking the uncertain assurances of other people. We can also respond with prayer to G-d [in this way we demonstrate our dependence upon G-d]; introspection to make us aware of our own moral weaknesses [which may be related to the cause of the dangerous event]; and charitable acts [through which we can hope to come to deserve G-d's salvation]. All of these spiritually-oriented activities assume primary importance.

The other benefit of *bitachon* that Rabbi Karelitz identifies is that it aids us in strengthening our relationship with G-d. If through our *emunah* (belief) we acknowledge that G-d relates to us, and if through our *bitachon* (trust) we demonstrate that G-d determines the outcome of events, then our responses to dangerous situations should lead us closer to G-d. Although G-d expects us to put forth reasonable efforts to protect ourselves (as we will see in the upcoming section), we must not ignore the spiritual ramifications of troublesome situations, for if we do we are forfeiting the use of some of the most powerful tools in our possession for solving our most serious problems.

Anecdote: Causes of danger

A nonobservant man once tried to convince a rabbi that he did not need to improve his moral character. "You see rabbi," he began, "G-d and me are *this* close." With that, he held up two fingers wrapped together. "G-d makes miracles for me: Once I was driving along a mountain road when my car flew off the cliff. It rolled over and over, but when it stopped I walked away without a scratch. I must be doing something right to have been saved so miraculously." The rabbi responded, "Maybe G-d is trying to get your attention...since you did not improve yourself as a result of His first call, perhaps you need Him to send you another such message, a bit clearer this time?" The man was visibly shaken by the rabbi's words, and made some major changes in his life.

(Note: Review questions follow Part 2 of this lesson)