**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #23: Chassidic Service of God (continued)**

**The Difficulty in Achieving *Hitragshut* and *Hitlahavut***

Achieving *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* is not a simple matter. A person might try to arouse and inspire himself to pray with fervor, but with no success. R. Kalonymus explains that in this situation, a person should not try to force himself, since he will thereby cause the desired emotion to distance itself even further. A person will sometimes feel apathetic and indifferent while at prayer; even if he had stirred up some feeling beforehand, he might find himself unable to maintain it once he starts praying:

A person may find that while he prays and serves God, his prayer and his service fail to rise up in holy flames. He may wish to awaken himself so that he will feel some degree of fervor, and not pray in a cold, dry, unfeeling manner, but rather with vitality – but he cannot. In this situation, he should not force himself to spiritual arousal, for it is the nature of man that when he tries to force himself in some matter – for instance, to distance a bad thought, or to focus on a good thought – sometimes he achieves the opposite... And especially when he tries to force himself during prayer or Divine service to achieve *hitlahavut* and *hitragshut* – in most cases his heart becomes dulled to the point where he will sometimes wonder at himself: How is it that prior to my prayer and service I was already feeling sparks of awakening, and I imagined that flames of holy fire would burn inside, but now that I approach the prayer and the service of the commandments, it is as though everything inside me is extinguished?[[1]](#footnote-1)

There are some people who are not naturally inclined towards emotional involvement, even in their personal affairs, and for them it is more difficult to achieve *hitragshut*. For instance, there are some people who, when their business dealings are successful, do not feel any unusual joy or excitement; conversely, when things go less well, they do not become angry or depressed. Such a person is naturally detached; his emotions are not easily aroused. On the other hand, someone else may react with intense emotion to the slightest event, “fearful and anxious about the slightest worry that may arise, and rejoicing over anything that is good, or even just the remote prospect of something good.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this context, R. Kalonymus quotes a story from the Ba’al Shem Tov. A well-known figure lived in a certain city, and the students of the Ba’al Shem Tov wanted to know what sort of person he was. He told them, “Ask him if he has any advice for you as to how to rid yourselves completely of the foreign thoughts that disturb a person. If he tells you that he knows a completely effective solution, know that he is a fraud, for a person is required to struggle with foreign thoughts all his life.” In the same way, R. Kalonymus explains that he cannot offer the reader any completely effective solution for control over one’s emotional forces. A person has to know that he has to work on developing and molding these forces continuously, throughout his life.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Ways of Achieving *Hitragshut***

Following his introduction about the importance of a “revealed soul” and of passion and fervor in one’s Divine service, R. Kalonymus goes on to present some practical tips for achieving these states.

**Service Through Simplicity**

Instead of trying to force oneself into *hitragshut*, which will sometimes produce the opposite effect, it is better to serve God through “simplicity of thought”:

I am a servant of God, and the Torah, prayer, and commandments by which I serve God are parts of Divinity. It is not through intellect and the study of Torah alone that I may cleave to Him… The physical performance of commandments, as well as the words and letters of Torah and of prayer, the [Divine] Names, the *sefirot*, and the holy angels are likewise of supreme sanctity. And when I utter them… I must connect myself and cleave to that supreme sanctity, which becomes realized and is drawn into me. And when one believes and focuses on this, with simple faith and powerful concentration, then he receives vitality from this, too.[[4]](#footnote-4)

R. Kalonymus proposes that a person consider the great privilege that he has in serving God, to analyze this thought and separate it into smaller elements, and to really think about what it means to be a servant of God. By virtue of this effort, he will be filled with vitality, which will slowly turn into *hitragshut*: “Let him serve with simplicity, and the *hitlahavut* will come on its own.” R. Kalonymus relies in this regard on guidance that appears in the work *Beit Aharon*, written by R. Aharon of Karlin: “He should not seek *hitlahavut*, but rather simply try to put himself into the words and the service, and the *hitlahavut* will come on its own.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The principle of serving God with simplicity is fundamental to the teachings of R. Nachman of Breslov.[[6]](#footnote-6) In the following teaching, he describes a situation similar to that described by R. Kalonymus: A person stands in prayer and feels that he is simply performing a technical task, with no feeling. R. Nachman’s advice is to pray with simplicity, and that the *hitlahavut* will follow naturally – so long as the worshipper does not try to force this and does not make his prayer conditional upon it happening:

Everyone awakens and merits to pray with *kavana* for some portion of the prayer, in accordance with his qualities. Therefore, a person should not become disheartened if he sees that he has merited to pray some part of the prayer with some degree of *kavana*, but then it suddenly ends, and he can no longer pray properly, no matter what he does – for that is how it is. He should then try to pray the rest of the prayer with complete simplicity. And even if at times he tires himself out but is unable to pray at all – nevertheless, he should not be disheartened by this. For it is an important principle that he must not become disheartened no matter what, even if something comes over him, and even if he is unable to pray at all. He should simply force himself nevertheless to recite the words of the prayer in complete simplicity, exactly like a young schoolchild. And he should recite on and on, in complete simplicity. In most cases, he will merit, by God’s mercy, to awaken from this, until his heart is once again filled with fervor, and he suddenly begins to pray with passion. But one should not put this to the test.[[7]](#footnote-7)

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. *Mevo Ha-She’arim*, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Regarding R. Kalonymus's familiarity with R. Nachman's writings, see our discussion of R. Kalonymus’s sources and his connection with Polish *Chasidut*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Sichot Ha-Ran* (Jerusalem, 5745), p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)