

perceptions

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The desert is an interesting place, though only if you're not stuck in one without food or drink. Deserts probably represent death better than anything else in the world since nothing really grows there, and plenty of people have died there.

In fact, according to *Kabbalah*, the deserts are the domain of the *Sitra Achra*:

“When they went into the desert, The Holy One, Blessed is He, took His splendid light from there. . . Rebi Shimon said: ‘When they came to the desert (immediately after they came to the desert) another domain was revealed to them of the rest of the nations which rules the desert (the *Sitra Achra*) and it was aroused against them (to mislead and draw them away through its tricks).” (*Zohar Shlach 60a*)

That would seem to be the opposite direction God should have led them, so fresh out of Egyptian slavery. But there was a plan:

“Moshe *Rabbeinu, a”b*, knew quite well that all of it was only to test them. Therefore he led them through the desert, the place of the *Sitra Achra* and his rule, as it says in [the *Zohar* in] *Parashas Tetzaveh* 184a: It was the place of the incriminating *Sitra Achra*, etc. [They were brought there] to battle with him and all his scheming, to break his power and strength, to smash its head and subjugate it, as we mentioned previously in Section 3, *Siman* 5. (*Drushei Olam HaTobu, Chelek* 2, *Drush* 5, *Anaf* 4, *Simanim* 3-5)

In other words, the Jewish people, fresh out of Egyptian slavery, were deliberately led into the desert (though it was the only way to *Eretz Canaan*) to do spiritual

battle against the greatest enemy of mankind, the *Sitra Achra*. But with what? It's one thing to battle the Egyptian army with weapons, it's another thing altogether to fight the *Sitra Achra*, and on its own turf. However:

“Had the Jewish people constantly strengthened themselves so their souls and hearts would be devoted to God, He, *may His name be blessed*, would have made sure that the revelation of the great light of *Atika Kadisha* would not leave them even while in the desert. They would not have had to look at the *Sitra Achra* and his schemes at all because all of it was just tests. This was at the time the actual *arousal from below* to draw down and maintain for them the revelation of the great light of *Arich Anpin* forever. Moshe *Rabbeinu, a”h*, knew all of this, that the matter was dependent upon them alone, on their strengthening their hearts in faith and trust in God.” (*Drushei Olam HaTobu, Cbelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Simanim 3-5*)

That was their weapon against the *Sitra Achra*, of which there was none better for the job, *bitachon*—trust in God. They didn't need swords or daggers or catapults or even a nuclear bomb. None of them would have worked against the *Sitra Achra*, only *bitachon*. So what went wrong?

Shabbos Day

THE JOKE IS, “In God we trust. Everyone else pays cash.” If only it were true, the trust in God part at least. It's easy to trust in God when you don't need His help, and you don't depend upon Him for success, or even your life. But what if you do? Then all of a sudden, even God has to pay cash, so to speak.

The truth is, like many things in life, *bitachon* is both extremely easy and difficult. How can anything be both at the same time? It can't. Rather, *bitachon* is extremely difficult to have without certain levels of spiritual growth, and very easy to have if you've made them.

True, you could simply decide to throw all caution to the wind and just abandon yourself to the will of God. But that is more a function of *emunah*, not *bitachon*, because whereas *emunah* may not seem logical though it is right, *bitachon* seems both logical and right.

The longer version of the explanation is the final chapter of a new book of mine, “*Happiness, Please,*” and yes, that was a plug for the book. But the shorter version is like this.

We all have one soul but it has five levels. The lowest level, *Nefesh*, keeps us going physically, and not much more. It depends upon the level of *Nefesh* that a person is

on, because it too has five levels. The next level up is *Ruach*, and most people never reach it. But you can be sure that if you did, you'd be very spiritual and probably uninterested in most material things. You'd eat to live only, and be drawn to Torah like bees are to honey.

More importantly, you'd feel the Presence of God a lot more. And you wouldn't wonder if you were being delusional, because you'd be sure that it was real. Without seeing or hearing God per se, you'd know that He is with you because, being more closely in touch with your soul, you'd really feel the connection. And that would only increase as you ascended the five levels of *Ruach*.

On the level of *Nesbamah*, you would physically be a part of this world, but not spiritually. To others around you, you would seem like them but just a lot more righteous. But in truth, you would have a difficult time fitting into the world around unless the people around you were on the same level as you. You just would not see the world the same way, but you wouldn't be lonely since your level of pleasure would be so much more profound.

As for the two higher levels, they are not relevant to access at this stage of history. But that's okay, because even on the level of *Ruach* and certainly on the level of *Nesbamah*, *bitachon* becomes the most natural thing in the world. In fact, you will wonder how anyone could ever trust in anything other than God.

You see, *bitachon* is only a struggle for someone struggling on the level of *Nefesh*. On this level, a person is not very much in touch with their soul, but very much in touch with their body, and what they can't touch they can't believe in. The only hope they have is a leap of faith, and though some people will make crazy physical leaps, they have a difficult time making smaller, spiritual ones.

So, if you want to strengthen your *bitachon*, you have to move up the soul ladder:

Seudas Shlishis

YOU CAN'T TELL someone who has never painted, "Just paint!" if they have come to learn how to do it. Success in any profession or art is an acquired skill, if you're born naturally talented. Some things just have to be learned and tried in order to be known. Likewise, you can't just tell someone, "You want to trust in God more? Just do it!" There is a process to acquiring and improving one's *bitachon*.

We can learn about it from a child. A child trusts in their parent to such an extent that as long as they feel their parent's presence, they feel secure against anything. It might not be true, but as long as they believe it is, they will feel safe.

It is no different with respect to God, and even more so. The more one feels the Presence of God with them, the safer they feel. On the level of *Asiyah*, which is the level of *Nefesh*, nature seems to run the world. The Presence of God is so weakly felt that people deny His existence, so it is felt as if your “parent” has abandoned you, making it difficult to rely upon them for security and success.

On the level of *Ruach*, you can feel the Presence of God so much that you’d have to be crazy to deny His existence. Atheists and even agnostics can only exist on the level of *Nefesh* because on that level, they are numb to the reality of God. God is there, but they can’t sense Him because of their own spiritual insensitivity. They misjudge their inability to sense God as His lack of existence, and think those who can sense God are just fooling themselves.

Then again, what can you expect from people who live without God and Torah? Living without Torah is like trying to get to the top of a ladder that has no lower rungs. The learning of Torah and the performance of *mitzvos* are what refine a person spiritually in order for them to ascend to high levels of soul.

As it says, “*The secrets of God to those who fear Him*” (*Tebillim* 25:16), and those secrets do not really include Quantum Physics. You don’t have to fear God to learn them, or anything else about the physical world. You just have to be smart enough and have the right opportunities.

But the secrets of Torah require a person to become more spiritually refined, because such secrets are, by definition, holy, and holy can only go to holy to avoid being profaned. And as they do, then a person’s spiritual capacity greatly increases, and with it, their capacity to sense and trust God.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 51

OF COURSE THIS is the essence of *bitachon*, and the entire reason God led the Jewish people through the deadly desert, to realize that there is only God. In a lively city there are many distractions and countless ways to find the means to survive. It is easy to lose the forest for the trees, and the hand of God for that hand of man.

Even in the desert it was like a whole city of people. There were millions of Jews and even more *Erev Rav*. But there were no stores or marketplaces. Food didn’t grow from the ground or from the trees. There were rich and poor people, but there was nowhere to use your wealth since there was nothing to spend it on. Everyone was in the same dependent position.

What we do not realize is that there is not much difference between a city and the

desert in this respect. The only reason why a city grows and prospers is because God tells it to, while telling deserts to do what they do. The Jewish people, for 40 years, had the prosperity of a city in a desert, because God gave it to them. It is His will that makes a city bloom and a desert remain barren, or makes a city become barren while making a desert bloom.

This is another layer of meaning in the following story:

One Friday night he noticed that his daughter was sad and asked her, “My daughter, why are you sad?” She answered, “My oil container got mixed up with my vinegar container and I lit *Shabbos* candles with it.” He told her, “My daughter, why should this trouble you? He Who had commanded the oil to burn will also command the vinegar to burn!” (*Ta’anis* 25a)

Oil, vinegar, city, desert, it’s all the same for God. It’s our perception, or rather misperception of them that makes them more, or less, than they really are.