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“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*”

-Steps 2 & 3 of Alcoholics Anonymous

Question: *I have a hard time doing steps 2 & 3 because of this fear-maybe Hashem feels I'm not doing the right thing, and therefore he will not be willing to help me stay sober, even if I believe in his power in step 2 and rely on him in step 3?*

Not only that, but even if I really am doing Hashem's will properly, perhaps Hashem still will not necessarily help me? Who says that by simply trusting in Hashem that he will help me stay sober-perhaps he has other plans for me?

-A. Nonymous

Answer: In Jewish law, when a Jew wants to know the practical final Halacha, we do not quote the rishonim but the achronim, who knew all of the rishonim and then decided what is considered the “Halacha li'maaseh”. Here too, in this practical question of “Hashkafa li'maaseh” let's quote the achronim to see what their final conclusion was on this topic.

The question here essentially is-even if a Jew in the 12 step program has faith in Hashem, does that necessarily mean that Hashem will help him to stay sober?

This question is excellent, and was actually asked by many of our Tzadikim. According to the Chazon Ish ¹ the fact that a Jew has faith in God does not necessarily mean that God will make events go as desired. In our case, just because the Jewish alcoholic, gambler, or sexaholic has faith that God will help him stay sober, this may not necessarily happen *as a result of his faith in God*.

Here are the words of the **Chazon Ish**:

“This term (bitachon)...has mistakenly become used to describe the obligation of a Jew in any situation he finds himself in to believe that surely *the good outcome will occur*...this understanding of trust is not correct, for as long as the future has not been revealed through prophecy, who really knows Hashem’s plans?...the correct concept of bitachon is believing that nothing ever happens by chance and that everything that occurs is the result of the decree of Hashem.”

However, as you are about to see, this is actually a matter of dispute. In fact, it seems like almost all contemporary opinions disagree with the Chazon Ish, so there is no need to worry-you certainly have who to rely upon.

Let’s see who differs from the Chazon Ish on this topic:

The **Alter of Navardhok**² writes “...even if a wicked Jew were to trust in God, good things will happen for him...”.

The classic Kabbalah Sefer **Leshem** by the grandfather of R’ Elyashiv zt”l writes³ “the Medrash in Tehilim 32 writes that even were a wicked Jew to trust in God, good will

¹ Chazon Ish in Sefer Emunah U’Bitachon, Bitachon 1

² Sefer Madreigos Ha’adam; quoted by Sefer Chovas Bitachon Vi’hishtadlus, p. 40 Shrem 2011

³ Leshem, volume 2, drush 5, anaf 4, chapter 5; quoted by Sefer Chovas Bitachon Vi’hishtadlus, p. 40

happen for him. *It is not correct for a Jew to hold back trusting in God due to sins that he may have done.*"

In a second place the **Leshem** writes ⁴ "nothing can stand in the way of trust in God".

R' Yisroel Salanter is quoted as saying ⁵ "if a person has bitachon, God will fulfill his request".

In a second place ⁶ **R' Yisroel Salanter** is quoted as saying that even if a thief would trust in God to help him complete his robbery successfully, he would be helped, because the nature of bitachon is such that it always helps for anything, no matter whether that thing is permitted or forbidden in halacha.

See **R' Chaim Friedlander** ⁷ who discusses how it is possible for a Jew to trust in God and simultaneously steal, which opposes God. This is in line with the several opinions found throughout this article who write how even a Jewish sinner can trust in God and see favorable results. See the opinions of R' Yisrael Salanter, the Vilna Gaon, R' Elchonon Wasserman, the Leshem, and the Shiurei Da'as mentioned throughout this paper.

The brother of R' Chaim Volozhin, **R' Itzele Volozhiner**, writes ⁸ "if a Jew trusts in God properly, he need not be worried that anything bad will happen to him, because his trust in God will save him from bad events..."

The **Chofetz Chaim** ⁹ never insured any of his property and he would say "if a person trusts in God, good things will happen for him, and nothing bad will happen to him".

R' Elchonon Wasserman writes ¹⁰ "even if a wicked Jew would put his trust in God, good things would happen for him...."

R' Yosef Bloch of Telz writes ¹¹ "...bitachon is a spiritual segulah that is innate within God's creation....If a man were to reach the level of bitachon in God but then use his

⁴ See above, siman 6

⁵ Sefer Kdosh Yisrael p. 75 from Sefer Yimei Shnosay

⁶ Sefer Kdosh Yisrael p. 77, said over from R' Moshe Shapiro from R' Dessler in the name of R' Yisrael Salanter

⁷ Sefer Sifsei Chaim, Midos & Avodas Hashem, p. 506

⁸ Sefer Peh Kadosh on Megilas Rus; quoted by Sefer Chovas Bitachon Vi'hishtadlus, p. 41

⁹ Sefer HaTzadik Rebbe Shlomo, Kest Leibowitz ed. p. 47, paragraph 76

¹⁰ Sefer Kobetz Ma'amarim; quoted by Sefer Chovas Bitachon Vi'hishtadlus, p. 41

¹¹ Sefer Shiurei Da'as 1, p. 29; quoted by Sefer Chovas Bitachon Vi'hishtadlus, p. 22

trust to commit a sin against God, he would be successful because the idea of bitachon working to produce successful outcomes is innate in creation no matter what”.

The **Shlah Hakadosh** writes¹² “If a Jew wants to do business and make a living he should say ‘I trust in Hashem that by doing this business deal Hashem *will* send me my food and living, and *Hashem will open up windows from heaven to lower down to me a bag full of money*’ ...”

The **Ba’al Shem Tov** says¹³ “...and he should trust in God that he *will* attain what he needs...”

R’ Nachman of Breslov writes in several places that he also holds like the above opinions. In one place R’ Nachman writes¹⁴ “even if a Jew knows that his actions aren’t good, he should not say to himself ‘*who am I to trust that Hashem will help me if my actions are so bad*’. Instead, he should trust in Hashem no matter what that Hashem’s kindness and mercy are endless...since Hashem is good to everybody”.

In a second place **R’ Nachman** writes¹⁵ “If a person has trust in God, God will save him from all bad events...”

Related to the concept of Jews who have sinned and whether they should feel reluctant or not to trust in God, the **Vilna Goan** teaches¹⁶ “a Jew who has trust in God, *despite the fact that he transgresses on very serious sins*, is still better than a Jew who has no trust in God. This is because a Jew who has no bitachon in God merely does all of the mitzvos and Torah study in order to impress others.” You can seemingly derive from this Vilna Goan two things-a) that a Jew who transgresses on very serious sins should certainly trust in God and that b) he is better in comparison than a Jew with no serious transgressions but with no trust in God!

Let’s finish off this discussion with my most favorite source for this, found in the teachings of **R’ Pinchas of Koritz**. R’ Pinchas once taught¹⁷ “It seems from some

¹² Sha’ar Haoseeyos, letter Alef, paragraph 46

¹³ Sefer Tzava’as Ha’Rivash 24 (Chabad K”has ed.)

¹⁴ Sefer Likutei Eitzos, Bitachon 4

¹⁵ Sefer Hamidos, Bitachon 7

¹⁶ Sefer Even Shleimah 3, 2

¹⁷ Sefer Imrei Pinchas, Sha’ar Emess Vi’emunah 8

Torah sources that if a person's faith in Hashem is not up to par with the level that his trust should be on, then his trust in God will not help him to produce the desired outcome-but I have advice for a person like this too. My advice is that even a Jew without such strong trust in God can have trust in God by saying "certainly, even though my level of trust in God is not so strong, even so, I have trust in God that he will help even a Jew like me!"

Conclusion: The above opinions are of the view that trusting in God works **a)** indefinitely **b)** even for somebody to commit a sin **c)** certainly for a person to perform a mitzvah, such as get sober from addiction **d)** even sinners should not be discouraged to trust in God, despite their previous actions **e)** Jewish sinners with bitachon are better than non-sinners with no bitachon and **f)** even if a Jew isn't holding by such a high level of bitachon, he can still have trust that God can help even people who don't have so much bitachon.

Aside from this intellectual discussion, let's talk from the heart for a second. Why wouldn't Hashem help a Jew who is trying to stay sober from addiction? The Talmud¹⁸ tells us "if a person approaches Hashem to become pure, heaven helps him". Certainly, by working the steps you are trying to do the right thing and straighten matters out between you and God as well as between you and your family and community; certainly, a person like this is worthy of help from Hashem. If you believe in a loving God like the one portrayed by our Tzadikim, there is no doubt that by trying to get sober, Hashem will help you, and he will appreciate every step you take as you go along your path to recovery.

This responsa and many others concerning recovery topics will God-willing be featured soon in a book by the author. If you have questions concerning your recovery, contact the author at avi@jnars.org

¹⁸ Yoma 38b