

Fire shall be kept continually on the Altar; it shall not go out. (6:6)

In the standard calculation of the Jewish day, daytime follows night. We daven Maariv, the Evening Service, hence ushering in the new day. Shacharis, the Morning Service, is actually the second service of the day. In the Mikdash, Sanctuary, it was the reverse, with evening following daytime. The way of the world is that the symbolic evening precedes the symbolic day. This means, explains Horav Nissen Alpert, zl, that (most often), before man is privy to “light,” to see what becomes of his toil and labor, he must sit it out in “darkness,” wait in hope that his efforts will achieve positive fruition. Will the seed he planted take root and germinate properly? Will the seed produce delicious fruit – fruit from which he can take pride?

The waiting game is not easy. Many go through much tension waiting, counting the minutes, hours, days, and sometimes weeks and months to see if his investment will produce a profitable return. Waiting for tangible results places an enormous burden upon a person. Yaakov Avinu prayed to Hashem, V'nasan li lechem le'echol u'veged lilbosh, “And give me bread to eat and clothing to wear.” Anxiety overcomes us as we wait, pray and hope that we will, indeed, receive the gifts of “bread to eat and clothing to wear.” Furthermore, often, even once we have received our bread, we wonder if we will actually be able to consume it. Feelings of insecurity concerning one's physical well-being can impoverish the spirit as they take their toll on his emotions. Thus, it is not far-fetched to say that, in the realm of the physical, an inevitable “evening” seems to always precede the “day.” Ambiguity foreshadows the clarity that comes with resolution.

In the world of spirituality, we have the concept of bitachon, trust in the Almighty. With bitachon, one senses a feeling of security with regard to the future. He is no longer anxious; he is no longer afraid. Even when he hears a distant cry emanating from his own neighborhood, from his own block, he tells himself that the source of this crying is not his home. His trust in the Almighty is so profound and great that the “day” overpowers the “evening” of his life.

One who puts his trust in Hashem does so regardless of the clouds on the horizon. Even when things appear bleak, he tells himself that a new day is dawning; it is just around the corner. The above pasuk alludes to the concept concerning the fire on the Altar. The illuminating fire of the spirit burns constantly on our personal Altar: the mind and the heart.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains bitachon differently. He feels that it is a great fallacy to think that proper bitachon is to convince oneself – in the face of clear and present danger and adversity – that he has no problem, because Hashem will deal with it. That is not bitachon. In fact, proper bitachon dictates that man be fully cognizant of the danger he is facing, and that he should utilize that appropriate fear as a conduit for harnessing and channeling his trust in Hashem to help him manage the situation. We do not ignore adversity. We use it as a medium for prayer and to petition Hashem that He spare us from the harmful effects of our present challenge.

Therefore, one who minimizes the severity of the danger he is facing has unarmed himself, leaving himself unable to place his proper trust in Hashem. In other words, it is the very real fear of danger which can propel a person towards spiritual growth.

Rav Shimshon observes that the Brisker Rav was a constant worrier. (Not in the sense that we worry. He was acutely aware of all danger and all potential for danger.) During the Second World War, as he ran from the accursed Nazi beasts, he would constantly exclaim, "They are coming to kill us!"

Are we to suggest for a moment that the Brisker Rav was lacking in bitachon? That is ludicrous! On the contrary, the Brisker Rav was a realist who understood and appreciated the severity of the situation confronting him. He recognized the danger that he was in; he properly and purposefully experienced and used his fear as a springboard to greatness by never removing Hashem Yisborach from his mind – not even for an instant! The constant fear that he had protected him from falling into the abyss of complacency and worse – not thinking about Hashem – and that would be worse than anything. This is the epitome of bitachon in Hashem: never, even momentarily, lose sight of the Almighty.

The Brisker Rav's son, Rav Berel, was traveling with his father when the wagon they were traveling in was stopped by the Nazis. They were all ordered out of the wagon, and Rav Berel stepped out first. He was ordered to hand over his watch to the Nazi guard, who said, "Thank you for this gift." The Brisker Rav exited the wagon and was beheld by the Nazi, who was so overwhelmed by his angelic countenance that he exclaimed, Das is ein Getlicher mentch, "This is a G-d-like human being" (he does not appear to be human). He immediately returned the watch to Rav Berel and motioned them to continue their journey. During this entire time, the Brisker Rav's mind was elsewhere. He was connected to Hashem. This is why he merited salvation.