



It's Not About Me

ביטול

אחד מהעילויים המפורסמים בעל כשרון גדול ועמקן נפלא בא לליאזנא ושקד בלימוד החסידות, ובגודל כשרונותיו רכש לו במשך זמן קצר ידיעה גדולה ורחבה בתורת החסידות.

ביחידות הראשונה שנכנס לרבינו הזקן שאל: רבי מה חסר לי? ויענהו רבינו הזקן: אין חסר לך מאומה, כי ירא אלקים אתה ולמדן, רק צריך אתה להוציא את החמץ שהוא הישות וגסות הרוח, ולהכניס מצה שהוא ביטול...

A brilliant and renowned scholar, exceptionally gifted and remarkably profound in his studies, came to Lyozna and threw himself into the study of Chassidus. With his powerful intellectual propensity he amassed—within a short time—a great and broad knowledge in Chassidus.

At his first yechidus with the Alter Rebbe, he asked: "Rebbe, what do I lack?" The Rebbe replied: "You lack nothing, for you are a yarei shamayim and a lamdan. You do need, however, to rid yourself of the chametz—which is awareness of self, and arrogance—and to bring in matzah, which is bittul..."

(היום יום כז תמוז)

לזכות החיילת בצבאות ה'
 חנה בת מושקא
 לרפואה שלימה וקרובה
 בכל אבריה וגידיה
 נדפס ע"י
 הרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק
 וזוגתו מרת שטערנא שרה
 ומשפחתם שיחיו
 לו



There is No “I”

One of the founding teachings of *toras haChassidus* is serving Hashem with *bittul*. Chassidus translates the *possuk* “אין עוד מלבדו” to mean there is actually no true existence other than Hashem. In order to properly serve Hashem, one must understand and feel this concept well. The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya, “אין הקב”ה שורה אלא על דבר, אין הקב”ה שורה אלא על דבר”—Hashem’s presence will only rest on something that is *bottul* to Him.

Explaining the mitzvah of *achdus Hashem*, the Tzemach Tzedek sums it up: “לא לומר אני, אלא לעשות”—One should not say “I” (אני), rather one should transform the “אני” into “אין” (nothing); there is no “I.”¹

“BITTUL GOES”

The Friediker Rebbe once related that a group of Chassidim were walking in the street and were asked by a Russian police officer, “*Kta idyiot?*” (“Who goes there?”) One of the Chassidim instantaneously responded, “*Bittul idyiot!*” (“*Bittul* goes!”)

The Rebbe repeated this story tens of times, each time emphasizing another nuance.

These Chassidim were coming back from a *farbrengen* where the subject of *bittul* to *Elokus* was discussed. The words had an effect on this particular Chossid to the extent that he truly felt that he was *bottul*. So when the officer asked him who he was, he was afraid to tell a lie; he had to say the truth as

he felt it. And at that moment, he really felt *bottul* to *Elokus*.

This story also teaches us that the world is ready to accept our message in spreading *Elokus*. Even back in Russia, when it was hard, a Chossid was able to clearly state that he is *bottul* to Hashem and have his words accepted by a police officer. Nowadays, when we live in the free world, our words will certainly be well-received.

(Sichos Yud-Tes Kislev 5698;

Yud-Tes Kislev 5716; Shabbos Korach 5751)

Get to the Root

Chassidus looks at the concept of “*yeshus*,” feeling oneself as an independent and important entity, as a serious problem that needs adequate treatment.

Like any sickness, the best way to do away with it is by getting to the root of the problem.

In spiritual ailment as well: merely acting, speaking, and thinking as if one is *bottul* will not take away the problem of feeling oneself as a *metzius*. The way to do it is by contemplating and understanding the greatness of Hashem, how He constantly creates everything, and drawing the conclusion that nothing else really exists. In doing so, a person will eventually begin to realize that he indeed is not a real *metzius* and he’ll live everyday in that manner.

The story is told about the Chossid Reb Chaim Moshe Alperovich, who was once sitting at a *farbrengen* where the topic of discussion was avoiding “*blitos*”—i.e. doing holy things in a manner that stands out and brings *yeshus*. Some participants at the *farbrengen* suggested that a person needs to

work on himself to do the right thing only because it's the right thing to do; not because others will see what he's doing.

Reb Chaim Moshe interrupted and said: "I think the way to deal with this is to set oneself a bit higher (שטעלן זיך א ביסעלע העכער)."

Then he explained:

A person might be concerned and avoid davening *be'arichus* in the shul, for fear that others might see him, so instead he davens at home. But he has not actually taken care of the problem at all. The problem of *blitos* is not the actual fact that others see him; the problem is that the davener feels himself too much. He feels good about himself that he's doing something so noble. If he'll go home and hide, he'll still feel the same way.

Why, for example, when someone puts on tefillin is he not concerned that people will see him? It's because he knows that he's merely doing something he has to do, something that everyone else also does, and there's nothing extraordinarily noble about it. If a person would realize that his davening is just something that needs to be done and stop thinking so much about himself, about the fact that he is so special for doing this, he won't have the problem of *blitos*.

That's why, Reb Chaim Moshe concluded, the best way to deal with it is to set oneself a bit higher. Instead of being engrossed in yourself, think about the davening and about Whom you are davening to. Forget about your own little pettiness.

What's the worth of a Dime?

On this note, there is a story told by Reb Yoel Kahn:

"In the earlier years of the Rebbe's *nesius*, the Rebbe used to walk home from 770 each night accompanied by Rabbi Hodakov. On nights when the Rebbe received people for *yechidus*, Rabbi Hodakov waited in his office until the Rebbe was finished and then he would accompany the Rebbe home.

"One day, Rabbi Hodakov summoned me and said that last night while he walked home with the Rebbe, the Rebbe related a conversation he had with an individual in *yechidus*. Seeing this conversation as an important lesson pertinent for the general public, the Rebbe wanted me to transcribe it and the Rebbe would edit it so others hear about it as well.

"The conversation was as follows:

"This individual had complained to the Rebbe that every time he does something good, he feels caught up in the personal gain he has from it.

"The Rebbe replied with a *mashal*: A person is involved in a business deal that can potentially bring in a million dollars. On the side, he'll also gain an additional ten cents. Obviously, the only thing occupying his mind is the gain of one million dollars; the dime in the story is irrelevant.

"The same is true in *avodas Hashem*. When a person learns Chassidus and understands the true value of a mitzvah, how it connects the Yid with Hashem—he will automatically think less of the personal gain or other ulterior motives. If one understands what it means for a finite being to connect with the infinite Creator, everything else becomes insignificant."²

Chassidim used a famous *mashal* to bring out this point very well:

There was once an argument between the sun and the wind, which one is more powerful. The wind, in attempt to display its strength, began blowing mercilessly hoping to make a man walking on the street take off his coat. Feeling the cold wind, the man only tightened his coat and closed all the buttons. The wind blew even harder, but the man kept on tightening his coat as much as he could. Seeing the results, the wind finally submitted to defeat and waited to see what the sun could do.

As soon as the sun began shining, the man slowly unbuttoned his coat. As the sun's rays grew stronger, the man took off his coat completely.

The same could be said about ridding oneself of *yeshus*:

Battling the feelings of *yeshus* and actively taking them on could embolden them and make them stronger. But once a person is illuminated with the light and warmth of Chassidus, and he truly begins to understand that everything in the world is of no real value—including his own existence—he will automatically think less about himself and more about what is expected of him.

The Rebbe often quoted the words of the Rambam in *hilchos mikva'os* that one needs to *toivel* in the מֵי הַדַּעַת הַטָּהוֹר—fully immerse in the purifying waters of Torah. Chassidus explains that טבילה has the same letters as the word הביטל. When immersing in the

mikveh, a person must be fully covered by the water. If even a small portion of his body is sticking out, his immersion is invalid. The same applies to the study of Chassidus: one needs to learn so much, both in quantity and in quality (i.e. the learning should be in-depth) until his entire being is “covered” by the words of Chassidus. Automatically, the silly *yeshus* of his *nefesh habehamis* is done away with.

RETURN TO DUST

The Gemara says that before *techiyas hameisim*, the body of each and every person will have to turn into dust, fulfilling the words of the *possuk* “עפר אתה” —ואל עפר תשוב —you are made of dust and you shall return to dust.

Nevertheless, the Rebbe often stated that we will all merit the *geulah* now, as *נשמות בגופים* —our souls still within our bodies.

The fact that each person must first return to dust, the Rebbe explained, can be accomplished through the *avodah* of *bittul*, with which we are likened to dust.

(*Shabbos parshas Bo* 5748)

What’s In it For Me?

“You are needed to illuminate your environment with Torah and *avodah shebilev* (davening). *Parnassa* and what you need—that, Hashem must provide for you. You do what you must, and Hashem will do what He must...”

This famous *vort* of the Alter Rebbe is quoted in *Hayom Yom* (5 Tammuz) and perhaps serves as a basis for so much of what the Rebbe teaches us about our mission in the world. We are taught to think not about ourselves and what we need and want, but about what is expected of us and what we are needed for in this world.

The Mishnah says *אני (לא) נבראתי (אלא) לשמש* —I was (only) created to serve my Master (Hashem). We are here for one purpose, and one purpose only: to do what Hashem expects of us. There is no time to think and get caught up about ourselves. This is the true *bittul* that the Rebbe spoke about and taught us so many times, ingraining it in this generation.

Reb Yoel Kahn relates that he once had a discussion with an elder Chossid who bemoaned the fact that today’s Chassidim are not like those of previous generations.

“Do you recall such dedication to doing the Rebbe’s will and fulfilling his *shlichus* in previous generations, the likes of which we see today?” Reb Yoel asked. “Chassidus is all about revealing Hashem’s oneness in the world. Do you ever recall a time when so many people were ready to put their own comfort on the side and dedicate their lives to fulfilling this mission—*לחתקן עולם במלכות שד-י*?”

The Chossid agreed with Reb Yoel that this phenomenon is unprecedented and added in his own personal story: The Frierdiker Rebbe had once asked him to do a small *shlichus*, and the Chossid asked, “Rebbe, what will I gain from this?” Hearing his response, the Frierdiker Rebbe changed the subject and did not ask him about the *shlichus* anymore. “Today,” concluded the Chossid, “if our Rebbe would ask me to do a *shlichus*, I would be embarrassed to speak that way!”

In other words: one generation ago, this man’s *yeshus* was so alert that he didn’t see anything wrong with questioning a *shlichus* given to him by the Frierdiker Rebbe. Nowadays, once the Rebbe educated a generation on the importance of totally submitting yourself to fulfilling Hashem’s Will, his *yeshus* was somewhat subdued and his focus would not have been on what his personal gain would be. Though he still may not have completely listened to the Rebbe, at least he realized and saw it embarrassing to say so explicitly.

But the proper approach would be, obviously, to let this *bittul* translate into action and actually listen to the Rebbe (not merely feeling the guilt of not doing it). For that to happen, we need to study more *maamarim* and *sichos* of the Rebbe; think about their content, and let the words take effect on us.

With that, we will truly dedicate ourselves to the *shlichus* happily and wholeheartedly, not allowing our *yeshus* to stand in the way.³ **T**

1. *Derech Mitzvosecha* p. 62a

2. See *Toras Menachem* vol. 15 p. 203

3. Many of the ideas in this article are based on B’Darkei HaChassidim by Reb Yoel Kahn, pp. 150-155; 188-190