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Emunah in the Face of Contradictions

One aspect of Avraham Avinu's *nisayon* of *Akeidas Yitzchak* was that he had to reconcile a direct contradiction of two statements made by Hashem (see *Rashi, Bereishis 22:12*). On the one hand, Hashem promised him *כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע*, his name will live on through the offspring Yitzchak would have. On the other hand, Hashem told him to bring Yitzchak as a *korban*. When they arrived at the mountain and Yitzchak's slaughter was imminent, Avraham's test increased. Even as he picked up the knife, he had to believe that Hashem's promise that Yitzchak would have children would still be fulfilled. Although that seemed impossible, Hashem wanted Avraham to believe it, nonetheless.

We, as well, are required to have *emunah* even when things seem contradictory. I recently gave a class to a group of young men on the *Shaar HaBitachon* of the *Chovos HaLevavos*. There it is written (Ch. 3) that when a person is choosing a career, he should have in mind the following criteria: The job should be one that fits his capabilities, something he will enjoy. It should not tax his body or occupy his mind, and it should give him the best opportunity to fulfill his halachic responsibilities, including ample time for learning Torah and *tefillah*. Then the *Chovos*

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HaLevavos writes, “We believe with *emunah sheleimah* that the means a person chooses to earn a livelihood will not add or detract from what Hashem decrees he should have.” Hashem decides how much money to give each person, and it is not dependent upon his job.

I then asked the class if they honestly had this *emunah*, and almost all of them said they did not. “How could a person with a prestigious, high-paying job earn the same as someone in a much lower position?” they asked. I told them, “First of all, *emunah* means that we believe although it may appear contradictory to what meets the eye.” Then I told them that Hashem will never interfere with a person’s free will, and therefore He works in hidden ways. It will never be obvious that money doesn’t have to do with a person’s job, but in reality, that is the absolute truth.

I know a man who decided to learn in kollel after he married. His wife worked, he tutored morning and night, and they were able to meet their expenses. This man’s friend had a very good position in a successful company and was earning somewhere between two and three hundred thousand dollars a year. For the first ten years of their respective marriages, they both lived in similar apartments, which fit their growing families. Then the man with a good job bought a home for close to \$2 million in Brooklyn. He had saved money for this over the previous ten years and used just about all of it to buy and furnish his new home.

At the same time, the *avreich* also purchased a similar home. How was that possible? He did not have anywhere near this sum in savings! His father made a major business deal and used some of the profits to buy him this house.

Looking at their lives now, we could say that in the bigger picture, both men were earning the same money for the past ten years. For one of them, Hashem allowed him to see it yearly and store it in his bank account. For

the other, Hashem gave it to him in one lump sum when he needed it.

Every dollar and every possession that goes to a person is a part of Hashem's calculation as to how much he will have. A person may have had seven straight years of poor earnings in his business and then inherit more money than his business would have earned in twenty years. For this man, Hashem wanted him to have the money that way rather than giving it to him steadily each year.

One day, every contradiction will be reconciled. Hashem will show a person how, perhaps, what he received at age forty-five was because of what he did when he was thirty — closing his store on Shabbos, for example — although at that time it may have seemed he was losing money by doing so. Hashem has a person's entire life revealed before Him at all times and takes everything into account when dealing with him.

To us, things may look contradictory, but everything is always perfectly planned exactly the way Hashem determines it should be. Having *emunah* until the contradictions are resolved will make us great.