



קונטרס

The Ways of My Heart



נתיבות לבי

Adapted from the shiurim of

R' Dovid Steiman shlit"א

If You Want to Get Anywhere in Life, the Key Is...



Determination · The Engine of Avodah



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THE WAYS OF MY HEART · WEEKLY SERIES

נתיבות לבי — The Ways of My Heart

A WEEKLY MAAMAR · ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF R' DOVID STEIMAN SHLIT" A

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Nesivos Libi — The Ways of My Heart is a weekly maamar on emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem, adapted from the shiurim of R' Dovid Steiman shlit" a in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R' Dovid Steiman shlit" a teaches emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*, and for nearly two decades has shared his Torah — in English and Russian — with talmidim and readers around the world. He taught at Ohr Somayach and today teaches at Yeshiva Toras Dovid, both in Monsey, New York. He is the author of the sefer *The Ways of My Heart* / נתיבות לבי.



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If You Want to Get Anywhere in Life, the Key Is...

Out of all the concepts in the Torah, there is one engine that pulls every wagon — and its name is determination

The Torah holds so many concepts, so much in mussar, so much to work on in avodas Hashem. The question is — what is that one thing, like the locomotive that pulls all the wagons, that we need to concentrate on, so that it will make us serve Hashem with complete dedication, fully involved in avodas Hashem?

Our sefarim teach that *bitachon* is the *ikkar* — to bring yourself to a point of fully relying on Hashem, not afraid of anyone and anything besides Him. But it seems so complicated, and looks like such a long way to get there, that just thinking about it makes us take it easy — hope for the best, that maybe one day I will get there, or give up completely.

And I think there is a quicker recipe for how to get anywhere, in anything — in

gashmius and in ruchnius. It is called, in one word: determination. We need to be determined. This is our main engine in life. Without being determined, we are not going to get anywhere. Every one of us has it inside — all of us.

..... **Determination is a crazy power**

Chazal tell a story. Rabbi Akiva was once walking near a cemetery, and he saw a man running — a man with skin burned black, carrying a load of wood on his back, running very fast. Rabbi Akiva called out to him, *stop*. The man kept running. *I told you to stop*. Now, this is Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest of the tanaim — when he tells you to stop, you stop. So the man stopped.

"Where are you running? What are you doing here in a cemetery with all this

wood?"

He said, *I am not alive anymore. In my life I was a tax collector. From the rich I would look away and take little; but the poor, who had no power, I squeezed out of them everything — including what I didn't take from the rich — and if they could not pay, I had them killed. For that I was punished here. Every single day I must run and gather this wood, and malachim burn me on it, and the next day it begins again. That is my punishment.*

Rabbi Akiva asked him, "Is there anything I can do to stop this?" The man said, *if I had a son, and my son would stand before the tzibbur and say Borchu, that would give me a kapparah and let me rest.* But he did not even know if he had a son — before he died, his wife was expecting. Rabbi Akiva asked him his name, and he said Akiva; and his wife's name, and he said Shmira. So Rabbi Akiva went out to find him.

He went from place to place, asking, until finally someone said, *Akiva? That Akiva? The wild rotzeach Akiva? Yes — his son lives over there.* Rabbi Akiva came to the boy, all excited — and found a child who was not interested in

anything. Not interested in anything at all.

So what did Rabbi Akiva do? He began to fast. He fasted until a bas kol came out of shamayim: *Rabbi Akiva, what are you trying to do? For whom are you killing yourself — for this one?* And he answered, *yes. I want the tikkun for that neshamah.* So from shamayim this boy was given *cheshek* — a will to serve Hashem. He taught the boy alef-beis, he taught him Mishnayos, he did not stop — until one day the boy stood before the amud and said *Borchu es Hashem hamevorach.* And the neshamah of his father came to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and told him that he had received his tikkun.

Now think about it. Who would do that today? Who would go out of his way like that — for a stranger, for the neshamah of a man who had done terrible things? Rabbi Akiva understood this neshamah needed a tikkun — but understanding is not everything. What made Rabbi Akiva actually do it? He was determined. He decided that since this neshamah needed its tikkun, and he was the one who found out about it, he must take care of it. And once he decid-

ed, he would do anything — even fast his life down — just to get this neshamah its tikkun. And this is the power of determination.

Determination is a power above nature: once a person decides *that's it, I have to get to this point*, he will do anything to get there. And *bitachon* is also a power above nature. And they work as one: someone who is determined to have bitachon lives a life above nature, and no nature can have control over him.

..... **First, find the reason that is holding you back**

A friend of mine asked me today: the moment he sits down to learn, he falls asleep. I told him — you are not going to like what I am going to say. Every person has some kind of a reason, a higher reason, holding him back from doing what he needs to do. Something is standing in the way, and you may not even know what it is. Your job is to find that reason and get rid of it. If you are determined, you will push yourself until you find it.

And it is so true, so true — it is not easy. The Gemara is full of concepts your head is not even used to thinking, and it

takes time until you process them. You can push a whole life to find out what it is that holds you back. But if you are determined, the walls will break immediately. There is no question about it.

..... **The man at the mikveh**

There was a man who was desperate to have children — we should never know of such nisyonos, when a person wants a child and, for whatever reason, cannot have one. He went from tzaddik to tzaddik for a brachah, and nothing helped. Then he heard about the Ribnitzer Rebbe zt"l, who was known for his ability to be *poel yeshuos* — to bring salvation above nature — especially when he went to the mikveh. The Shtefaneshter Rebbe had taught him secrets of the mikveh; even during the World War, all the Ribnitzer asked was just to be brought to the water, and once he reached the water he could do the impossible.

So the man came and asked the Rebbe for a brachah. The Rebbe thought, and said, *unfortunately I cannot help you*. There was surely a higher reason we cannot see. The man came back the next day, and the next — and each time the

Rebbe told him the same thing: *I told you already, I cannot help you.* But the man would not give up.

One day the Ribnitzer came to the mikveh in the oldest shul in Monsey, in the middle of the day, when no one was there. He made himself ready to go down into the water — and suddenly the closet in the mikveh opens up, and this man steps out. Can you picture it? The Rebbe looked at him in shock. And the man said, *Rebbe, right now — I want the Rebbe should be poel for me a yeshuah, that I should be zoiche to have children.* The Rebbe saw he was overdoing it a little. So he said, *if you get into the water before me, you will have your yeshuah.* The man jumped, with all his clothing, over the gate of the mikveh into the water! The Ribnitzer started laughing — *where do you see such a thing?* — and he said, *Host gepoilet! Host gepoilet! You will have your yeshuah, you will have children.* And it is only because that man was determined.

..... **What the meraglim were really sent to check**

And this is exactly the idea of the parsha. When Hashem told Moshe

Rabbeinu שלח לך אנשים¹ — to send the men, the spies — what was Moshe looking for? The *Nesivos Shalom* explains it differently than we would think. The meraglim were not sent to check the gashmius of Eretz Yisrael — how the land looks, whether it is comfortable. Think about it: until now they had come out of Mitzrayim, the mann came from Shamayim for them, the Ananei HaKavod protected them, the Be'er of Miriam traveled with them — a well that travels, the first traveling well. There were no questions.

Why, all of a sudden, would they need to go inspect the land Hashem Himself promised to Avraham Avinu? Does that not sound a little strange? And why did Moshe send the Roshei HaShevatim, the heads of the tribes? If you want spies, you take the experts, the agents who know how to spy out a country. You do not send the government ministers! So it must be that Moshe was looking for the *ruchnius* part. He wanted to know: how strong is the yetzer hara in Eretz Yisrael? What would it take to be zocheh to live there?

Moshe Rabbeinu, understanding this, was surely determined to go where

Hashem was leading — the only question was the nature of the yetzer hara of that place. And the answer is: the only way to live in Eretz Yisrael is above nature. We have to believe, and we have to be determined. The meraglim were not; they went to *check it out*. That was the whole difference — and for that, forty years in the midbar, golus and golus.

..... **Everything holy is above nature**

This is why Eretz Yisrael is the one place where we see it openly. Hashem placed all the other lands under the malachim, but of Eretz Yisrael the pasuk says אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ² — the eyes of Hashem are on it always. I am in charge everywhere; but in Eretz Yisrael I am watching every second, and I am the only One in charge. And when the Ribono shel Olam is in charge, it is *l'malah min hateva*, above nature.

The whole Shabbos Kodesh is built on the same idea. We sing that all the work is done, everything is finished. What do you mean the work is done — there is still so much to do! But we do not live like that. On Shabbos, for now, it is all done; it is *l'malah min hateva*. And how do I get there? Only by being determined — that Shabbos is everything for me, that I will find a way to disconnect from this world and reach a place above nature.

Because being a Yid is not about making everything around us comfortable — it is about pushing ourselves toward where we need to reach, above nature. So this is our avodah: determination in our decision. Find the one reason holding you back, and get rid of it. Comfort will come after a hundred and twenty. For now — be determined, and the walls will break. May we be determined to bring Hashem into all that we do, and be zocheh to see ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ openly in Eretz Yisrael, bekarov beyomeinu!