

**PERSPECTIVES → GUESTLINES** *Issue 1128 · September 9, 2026*

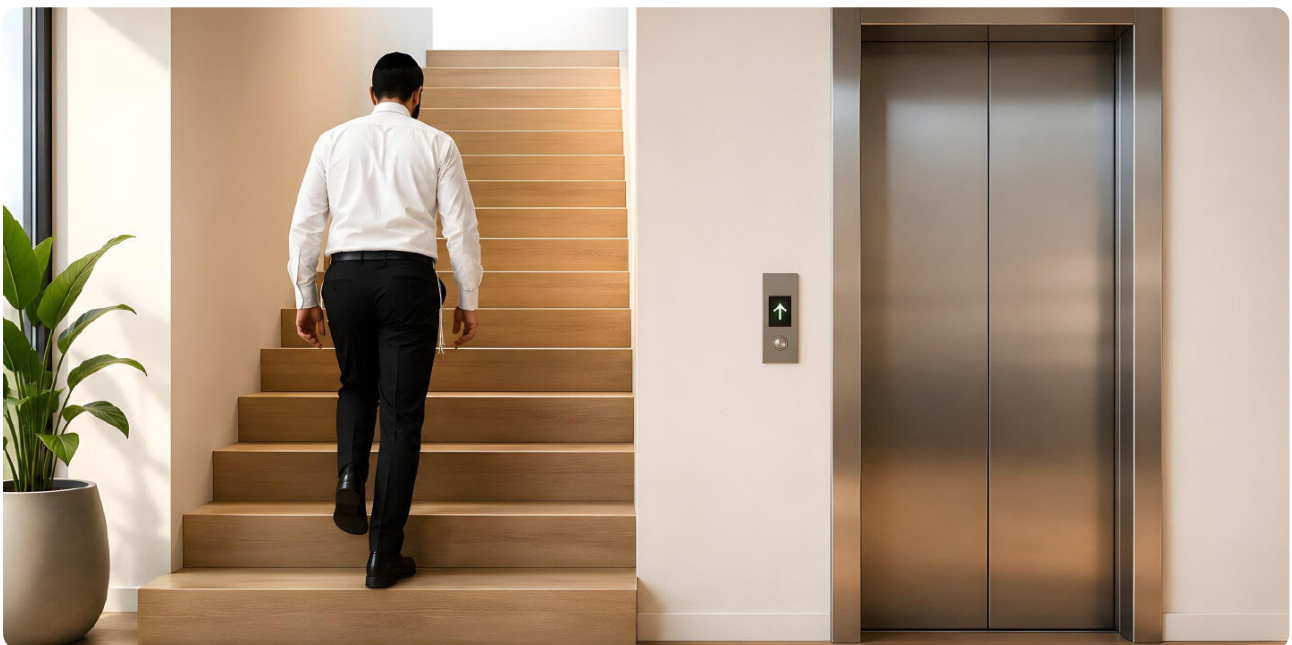
Deeds and Achievements

One of the most vexing and confounding issues in Torah is the relationship between hishtadlus and hashgachah

**By Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky**

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We have just about reached the three-year anniversary of the dreadful Shemini Atzeres massacre. We rebounded with ferocious will, vowing that this time will be different. We committed ourselves to finally destroying the menace that is Hamas-Hezbollah-Houthis-Iran, and — with the wisdom of hindsight — the budding Arab terror groups in Judea and Samaria.

Biden gave us a relatively free hand at the beginning of the crisis. Then, when Trump took office, it seemed that we not only had a free hand, but we actually had a like-minded partner in disarming and defanging the Islamist threats. We won victory after victory, destroyed many important defense systems, assassinated many evil leaders, and killed many of their soldiers. As of now, we directly control about half of Gaza, and in Lebanon, we control a huge swath of the land that has provided a staging ground for Hezbollah. Iran has been smashed in every way possible.

And yet it all seems to have been to no avail. Hamas is waiting for the moment to spring up again, Hezbollah has to be kept constantly at bay, and Iran may be battered to smithereens, but it just keeps doing what it's always done. What are we to make of this?

One of the most vexing and confounding issues in Torah is the relationship between *hishtadlus* and hashgachah. They seem to be mutually exclusive concepts, yet we know that both are ongoing factors in the unfolding of events. At the philosophical level, there is no easy answer to this conundrum (see Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 5). But on the practical, experiential level, we do have a way to understand it.

When Yosef confronted his brothers, he told them that although they had planned to harm him, Hashem had directed their deeds toward a very positive result. He was telling them that while we have *bechirah* and can choose to do evil, Hashem's hashgachah directs the consequences of the evil we have done.

This gives us a new perspective on the relative roles of man and Hashem in all our affairs. We might fight battle after battle with tremendous heroism, sacrifice, brilliance, and cunning. Indeed, we might even win battle after

battle, as we have done. And yet no victory is in sight. Victory is a result, and results are under Hashem's control. Winning all the battles should not be a reason to reduce our tefillah, for winning battles is a different dynamic than winning the war.

This dynamic is true of so many activities in which we are engaged. A person works hard at his business and makes a great deal that will double his company's sales. He's on the road to becoming a member of the millionaires' club, and while he never fails to punctuate his tales of business savvy with "baruch Hashem," he feels deep inside that his know-how set him up for success.

However, the deal goes sour. A competitor steals the market. Although the businessman did everything right — he worked hard, he focused, he was aggressive and creative, and he davened three times a day — Hashem did not hand him the accomplishment he was reaching for. For His own good reason, which the businessman may or may not discover, Hashem wanted something different.

Or he may even accomplish the deal or deals he wanted. But making money is not an end unto itself. It is happiness that we're really pursuing. Are we happy? Well, we should and would be, but it just happened that so-and-so... or this and that...

Hashem gave us the power to *do* as we wish, whether or not our goals align with His will, but He never gave us the ability to *accomplish* as we wish. In that realm, only Hashem's desire becomes reality.

This concept can also help us understand the sharp distinction between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a day that deals with human actions and activities. We try to itemize our deeds as much as possible and focus on what we have done and neglected to do. It is a day that deals with our world — specifically, the aspect of the world that we control. Yom Kippur examines and evaluates our *hishtadlus*.

Rosh Hashanah, in contrast, is a day that deals with Hashem's world. Our *avodah* on this day is to impress upon ourselves that Hashem is the ultimate Master of the World, and that ultimately, it is as He wishes it to be. Rosh Hashanah teaches us to submit ourselves to Hashem's hashgachah, regardless of how it aligns with our *hishtadlus*.

The Gemara finds an allusion to Rosh Hashanah in the *pasuk* (Devarim 11:12) that says, “*mei'reishis shanah ad acharis shanah* — From the beginning of a year to its end.” (See *Rosh Hashanah* 16b.) This means that on Rosh Hashanah, we focus on the “big picture,” a sweeping view of the entire year, and acknowledge that it is all Hashem's world. Our efforts really have no effect on this, no matter how successful they appear to be. However, action is ours to perform. We are obligated to work as hard as possible to do what's right.

If we're successful, we will experience the joy and satisfaction of having our actions serve as the catalyst for the result Hashem seeks to accomplish. It can be our experiment that finds the cure, our army that destroys evil, our words that inspire someone to return to Hashem — but only if these are the results Hashem desires to accomplish.

Rav Ahron Lopiansky is the rosh yeshivah of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, and is renowned for his *shiurim* and seforim. Rabbi Lopiansky is the author of several Hebrew and English *seforim*, including the widely

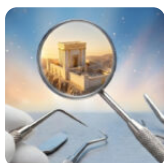
acclaimed *Ben Torah for Life*, *Ben Yeshiva*, *Ashlei Da'as*, and more published by Eshel Publications.

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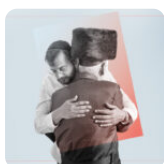
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