

"Trust" in Hebrew Thought



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It is hard to speak of trust in a world filled with deception. It is hard to trust when you have been misled and taken advantage of. Life experiences often drive us to put up walls and to hold back our trust. On a daily basis, we find things we cannot trust, but deep inside we want to trust. What is trust? Psalm 112 describes a person who has an amazing relationship with God and one of the facets of this relationship is trust.

מִשְׁמוּעָה רָעָה לֹא יִירָא נֶכֶחַ לִבּוֹ בְּטַח בִּיהוָה

(mishmuah raah lo yira nachon libo batach bAdonai)

He will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast,
trusting in the LORD. (Psalm 112:7 NASB).

No one enjoys receiving bad news (evil tidings), yet we all do sooner or later. The bad news comes to us in many varieties: a debilitating illness, a severe injury, the loss of a loved one, rejection, betrayal, etc. How we react to bad news affects our lives profoundly. The man described in this Psalm, “does not fear” לֹא יִירָא (*lo yira*), “his heart is steadfast” נֶכֶחַ לִבּוֹ (*nachon libo*) and, “he trusts in YHWH” בְּטַח בִּיהוָה (*batuach bAdonai*). The Hebrew verb בְּטַח (*batach*), often translated as “trust,” expresses an idea of hope, reliance, and confidence. In fact, the contemporary Hebrew noun בְּטָחוֹן (*bitachon*) is used to describe for the office of national security (משרד הבטחון) in modern Hebrew.

The rabbis often teach that our spiritual “reliance” on God בְּטָחוֹן (*bitachon*) is not necessarily based on our past life experiences. Rather, like one’s faith, this “confidence” בְּטָחוֹן (*bitachon*) shapes our experience and reality moving forward. Relying on God and His goodness, His involvement in our lives, and His protection when we receive “bad news” is what gives a person the ability to trust and move on. In Judaism, the story of the Binding of Isaac (which displays Abraham’s ultimate trust in God) is so central that it is literally read every morning before an observant Jew embarks on his day. Whether a person is a Jew, a Christian, both, or somewhere in between, one’s trust is an amazing attitude, a behavior of confidence, and an unshaken sense of security that can only come from knowing God and what He is like intimately.