

# *Pachad David*

*Paths  
to Perfection*

*With gratitude to Hashem*

*The servant of Hashem **David Chananya Pinto***

*Son of my master and teacher,*

*The tzaddik, Moreinu Rabbi **Moshe Aharon Pinto, Zatsal***

*Grandson of the holy tzaddik, Rabbi **Chaim Pinto, Zatsal***

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פני  
דוד





לאשתי נו"ב

מרת ויויאן אסתר מנב"ת

שבוכות מסירות נפשה לתורה זכיתי להגיע עד הלום  
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 ולכל המסייעים בהוצאה המפוארת של הספרים

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 ויראו רוב ברכה והצלחה בעמלם  
 ורוב נחת מכל יוצאי הלצם כל הימים, אכי"ר.

בברכת התורה ולומדיה  
 ע"ה דוד חנניה פינטו



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 זה"ר שתוכה לרוב נחת דקדושה מכל יוצאי דלציה,  
 כולם זרע ברך ה' ישלח לה הקב"ה רפואה שלימה

"עוד ינובון בשיבה דשנים ורעננים יהיו"



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# INTRODUCTION



I thank Hashem with a full heart for enabling me to publish the sefer *Pachad David – Paths to Perfection*, on improving one's Avodat Hashem and developing proper character traits and interpersonal relationships. I have found special *siyata di'Shemaya* in publishing this work specifically at this time. The eyes of all Jews are cast toward Tzion, our Holy City, praying for our ultimate salvation. Character improvement, together with Torah study, will hasten the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our day, Amen.

One who contemplates the matter will realize that working on one's *middot* requires much effort. It is extremely difficult to break one bad character trait, all the more so, all of one's negative traits. Let us try to understand the terrible effect of bad *middot*. Even if a person has many virtues and overcomes his trials, constantly attempting to reach great heights, he is liable to fall into the trap laid by his negative character traits, and may lose everything he has gained, *rachmana litzlan*.

We find this to be the case with the spies. They were sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to scout Eretz Canaan, as the pasuk states (*Bamidbar* 13:2), "Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan." These men were none other than the *Nesi'im* – heads of their tribes, men of significance. The pasuk attests to their righteousness (ibid. 13:3), "They were all [distinguished] men; heads of the Children of Israel were they." Rashi writes, "Every mention of the word *men* in Scripture is an expression of importance. Although the spies would later sin, at the time that they were sent, they were honorable." How can we understand that they suddenly sinned so drastically by degrading the Holy Land and

casting off the yoke of Hashem? They even denied Hashem, proclaiming (ibid. 13:31), “We cannot ascend to that people for it is stronger than us!” Rashi explains, “As if it were possible, they said this with respect to Him Who is Above.” With their slick tongues, they succeeded in winning over the hearts of the nation, initiating slander against the Land among them, as well. How was it possible for such elevated people to have sunk so low?

The Zohar states (*Shelach Lecha* 158) that the spies were thinking, “Up until now, as long as we were in the Wilderness, we were the *Nesi'im*, princes among the people. When Bnei Yisrael will enter the Land, Moshe Rabbeinu will appoint others in our stead.” They spoke derogatorily about the Land, so that the people would not want to enter it. They were worried about their own self-aggrandizement, and were therefore punished in a most gruesome way.

Their *middah* of arrogance inflated them to the bursting point, pushing them into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal teach us (*Avot* 4:28), “Jealousy, lust, and the desire for glory remove a man from this world.” Arrogance is the precursor of all bad *middot*. One who possesses this trait is in danger of losing all of his spiritual attainments. Even if he is a tzaddik and a *chassid*, his piety and devoutness have no stability, for they are not built on a solid foundation. He is like a dried-up plant in the desert, ready to snap at the slightest breeze. When such a person sees that his personal honor is at stake, he is willing to do anything in the world to preserve it, even rebelling against the Torah and mitzvot.

Notwithstanding their elevated status and their great holiness, the spies allowed this malodorous *middah* to take root in their hearts. This is what brought them to mock all things holy to our nation, as well as speak words of blasphemy against Hashem, *rachmana litzlan*. The only thing they kept sacred was their personal honor, their desire to remain in their positions as *Nesi'im* of the nation.

Two of the spies did preserve their righteousness. These were Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh. They spoke in praise of the

Land, convincing the nation that it is, indeed, a very good place. How were they protected from the evil plot of the rest of the spies? Regarding Yehoshua, the pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 13:16), “Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun ‘Yehoshua.’” Rashi expounds, “He prayed for him: May G-d save you from the plot of the spies.” Regarding Calev, the pasuk states, “He arrived at Chevron.” Rashi expounds, “Calev alone went there, and prostrated himself in prayer over the graves of the Avot, so that he should not be persuaded by his companions, to be party to their plan.”

I would like to suggest that Calev went to the graves of our forefathers in order to learn from their ways. This would empower him with the strength to withstand the wiles of his fellow spies. He contemplated those who were buried in Chevron. When studying the life of Adam, he remembered that Hashem had told him (*Bereishit* 3:19), “For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.” Man’s end is nothing but a pile of worms and bugs in the grave; of what value is the pursuit of honor? Calev learned a lesson in humility from Avraham Avinu, also interred there. Avraham had told Hashem (*ibid.* 18:27), “I am but dust and ash.” Calev recalled the tremendous love which Avraham displayed toward Eretz Yisrael, which Hashem had promised to him and his progeny after him. Calev thought to himself, “My holy ancestors cherished this Land; how dare I speak derogatorily about it? On the contrary, I will speak in its praise, revealing to all its true beauty.”

Calev learned love of the Land from Yitzchak Avinu, as well. He was told to never leave Eretz Yisrael, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 26:3), “Sojourn in this land.” In spite of being beset by enemies and wars, and even famine, Yitzchak was forbidden from leaving Eretz Yisrael. When Calev considered Yaakov, chosen of the Avot, he remembered his unyielding connection to the truth. Michah (7:20) states, “Grant truth to Yaakov.” Calev thought, “How can I do an injustice to my soul by speaking disparagingly of the Land?” He also contemplated Yaakov’s self-sacrifice for the Torah, as he was known as “a wholesome man, abiding in tents.” This gave Calev the powerful message that all of one’s aspirations should

be devoted solely to Torah and mitzvot. This is man's purpose in this world. Of what value is greatness and honor, that people should pursue them with a passion?

In this manner, Calev protected himself against the plot of the spies. He immunized himself against their wicked wiles. He realized that their inner arrogance would not allow them to speak well of the Land and was afraid of sinking in the dust of their disparagement. He preceded the malady with the remedy by visiting the ancestral graves, desiring to connect with our Avot and their wonderful ways. This would supply him with the spiritual artillery of good *middot*, capable of combating the spies' evil reports.

Every person is obligated to work on self-improvement, no matter what his level. One who is far from the top must make the effort to ascend. The *Yetzer Hara* sits in ambush, attempting to bring a person to his downfall, inhibiting his spiritual growth through inferior character traits.

Even after a person has acquired good character traits, he must make sure he uses them for Hashem's honor. This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Devarim* 12:13): "Beware for yourself lest you bring up your burnt-offerings in any place that you see." The Ben Ish Chai explains that "your burnt-offerings" (עולותיך) refer to a person's good *middot*, with which he ascends (מתעלה) above all other creatures. When a person crowns himself with good character traits, such as humility, bashfulness, and compassion, he becomes the crown of Creation. One must ensure that he employs these traits for their intended use and not in the wrong way. "Beware for yourself lest you bring up your burnt-offerings in any place that you see" teaches a person that he should use discretion with regard to his *middot*.

For instance, the trait of alacrity is commendable, but it should be used only for the sake of Hashem. One should rise like a lion to face the new day in service of Hashem. He should rush to the Beit Hamidrash. But he should be lazy to do something that is wrong. Bashfulness is

praiseworthy. But when one hears people scorning the Torah, mocking mitzvot, or condemning *talmidei chachamim*, he may not be silent. He must stand at the breach and protest their actions. He must be bold for Hashem's honor.

One must use his traits to bring glory to the Torah and mitzvot. The *Tanna* Yehudah ben Teima tells us (*Avot* 5:21), "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven." These character traits should be used only to do the will of Hashem, and not, *chalilah*, to do anything against it.

On the tombstone of the tzaddik, the miracle-worker, Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, zt"l, the following is engraved: "He was diligent in mitzvot." At every opportunity, he employed the *middah* of amazing alacrity, with which he was blessed by Hashem, to do His will wholeheartedly. He was the first to volunteer for any good cause. He was unique in this *middah*, which was noted by all who came in contact with him.

The pesukim continue (*Devarim* 12:6), "...and there shall you bring your burnt-offerings." The letters of the word שמה (there) can be transposed to spell שמה (Hashem). One must ensure that all of his *middot* are directed toward Hashem, to bring Him satisfaction.

In order to bring satisfaction to Hashem by means of Torah study, one must first prepare himself by acquiring positive character traits. Our Sages teach (*Avot* 3:21), "*Derech erez* precedes Torah." Good character paves the way to acquiring Torah. Who was greater than the twenty-four thousand disciples of Rabbi Akiva, holy and pure as the light of the sun, illuminating the world with their Torah teachings? Nevertheless, they died in an epidemic, *rachmana litzlan*. Chazal explain (*Yevamot* 62b) that the reason for their death was that they did not respect each other sufficiently. When Rabbi Akiva noticed this, he proclaimed (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4), "Love your fellow man as yourself – this is a fundamental principle of the Torah." Furthermore, we are taught (*Shabbat* 31a), "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the entire Torah."

Moshe Rabbeinu merited giving us the Torah, for he possessed exceptionally fine character traits. The Midrash states (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64) that Moshe is equal to all of Bnei Yisrael. Every person has a different perspective on the world. Our Sages say (*Berachot* 58a) that just as their faces differ, so do they have different opinions. Every Jew has his unique way of serving Hashem. Every *shevet* has its own path to tread. Moshe's *middot* were so refined that he was capable of dealing with each person according to that person's nature. He knew how to channel his own character to be "in tune" with everyone else. This is how he was equal to all of Bnei Yisrael. Good character is the key for attaining Torah wisdom.

Man is not an island. He is incapable of fulfilling all 613 mitzvot himself. There are mitzvot which are commanded only for the Kohanim, and others which are designated for the Levi'im. By each person performing that which is incumbent upon him, each one complements his fellow Jew's mitzvah performance. This is in fulfillment of the pasuk, "Each man would help his fellow." *Achdut* and peace are critical for perfecting a person in Torah and mitzvot. Where there is *achdut*, Hashem's Name is exalted (*Sotah* 40a). But when dissention and divisiveness take the place of peace and harmony, the mitzvot of one person cannot complement his friend's storehouse of mitzvot. When that is the case, one can never reach perfection, for he will never have the opportunity to perform all of the 613 mitzvot.

Chazal teach (*Avot* 6:6) that there are forty-eight ways to acquire Torah. Many of these are in areas concerning interpersonal relationships, e.g., empathizing with another's difficulties, giving the benefit of the doubt, and loving all of Hashem's creatures.

The Torah is so stringent regarding good character traits! The pasuk tells us (*Devarim* 23:4), "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem...for eternity." The most despicable nation in Hashem's eyes is Amalek, who cooled off our *emunah* after we left Egypt.

His progeny must be eradicated completely from the face of the earth. Nonetheless, were an Amalekite to state that he wished to convert to Judaism, he would be accepted. It is known that the offspring of Haman Harasha learned Torah in Bnei Brak. But one who comes to convert from the nations of Ammon or Moav is categorically rejected. He comes from the nations which have no right to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Why is this so? It is because of their repulsive *middot*, as the pasuk continues, “Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt.” One who is cruel toward others and does not feel compassion toward his fellow, is not worthy of joining our nation. He will never merit reaching perfection in Torah, whose foundation is the possession of positive character traits, for he lacks the all-important trait of compassion.

This is the reason why parashat *Yitro* is called by this name, as opposed to parashat “*Asseret Hadibrot*” or parashat “*Matan Torah*.” The Torah cherishes harmony. Converts are accepted with love and respect. This is why the Torah is so strict regarding paining a convert, and commands (*Shemot* 22:20), “You shall not taunt or oppress a stranger.” Further, the Torah states (*ibid.* 23:9), “Do not oppress a stranger; you know the feelings of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Love of one’s fellow man is the basis and foundation for the entire Torah. Without good character, it is impossible to attain Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

How severe it is to cause pain to one’s fellow man! Even if one caused pain to another Jew unwittingly, he is held liable. When Eisav came before his father with the food he had prepared, he found that Yaakov had preceded him, taking all of the *berachot*. The Torah describes what happened next (*Bereishit* 27:34): “When Eisav heard his father’s words, he cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry.” The Midrash expounds (*Bereishit Rabbah* 67), “When was he avenged? In Shushan Habirah, as the pasuk says (*Esther* 4:1), “And [Mordechai] cried a loud and bitter cry.” Eisav’s cry, all those generations back, was forceful enough to bring

devastation to the Jewish nation in the days of Mordechai and Esther. Why was Yaakov punished for Eisav's distress? The *berachot* were given to him lawfully, even approved by *ruach hakodesh*. Hashem had sent angels to help Yaakov attain the *berachot*. Chazal explain (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65) that when Yitzchak told Yaakov, "Come close, if you please, so I can feel you" (*Bereishit* 27:21), Yaakov was overcome with fear. His knees turned to gel and his heart became soft like molten wax. Hashem immediately dispatched two angels – one on his right, and one on his left. They held him by his elbows, so that he wouldn't fall. How was it Yaakov's fault that Eisav was in anguish?

The *berachot* were designated for Yaakov Avinu, and he was not worthy of blame. Nevertheless, he was the catalyst for the anguish of his brother, Eisav. When Eisav realized that the *berachot* had been taken, he felt bereft of all blessing. He cried from the innermost depths of his heart. As it is known, Hashem is punctilious with His righteous ones, to a hairsbreadth. Yaakov caused Eisav tremendous anguish; therefore, Yaakov's children were punished. We must take a lesson from this. If Hashem avenges a fellow man's suffering, even if the perpetrator of that suffering did not mean to cause it, all the more so will He take revenge on a person who purposely causes his friend to suffer.

Based on this concept we can explain the words of Chazal stating (*Bereishit Rabbah* 10) that the *resha'im* of Bnei Yisrael perished in the plague of darkness. The Egyptians suffered tremendously in this plague, petrified as stone, for three days and three nights, as the *pasuk* states (*Shemot* 10:23), "No man could see his brother nor could anyone rise from his place for a three-day period." The entire purpose of this plague was that Bnei Yisrael would witness Hashem's might and accept His dominion upon themselves. But the *resha'im* among Bnei Yisrael refused to take the message and come closer to Hashem through *teshuvah*. The anguish of the Egyptians, then, was for nothing, because no good resulted from it. Therefore, these *resha'im* were held accountable for the Egyptians' suffering and paid for it with their lives. Hashem is scrupulous with the

pain of the gentiles. How much more so will He exact punishment upon those who cause grief to His sons.

We have a sacred obligation to love our fellow Jews, and must constantly strive to increase peace and unity in our camp. If a person observes a fellow Jew in need of any form of assistance, he should immediately stretch out his hand to support him and not turn a blind eye, *chalilah*. It is through developing good *middot* that one properly prepares himself to acquire the Torah. It is through one's character traits that a person is measured as to whether or not he is worthy of containing the Torah within himself.

How wonderful will be the reward of one who shines his heart and polishes his *neshamah* with fine qualities and by these means, attains the level of learning Torah for its own sake. He will be an active partner in bringing the *geulah* closer, speedily in our day, Amen.



“Were our mouth as full of song as the sea...we still could not thank You sufficiently.” I would like to fill my mouth with song and praise to the Creator of the world, the One Who established heaven and earth. He has brought me to this time, and I pray that He continue allowing me to sanctify His Name. My sole objective and purpose is to promote service of Hashem, Torah study, *yirat Shamayim*, and to glorify Torah throughout the world.

With great kindness, Hashem has given me the *zechut* to have an *eishet chayil* at my side, the **Rabbanit, Viviane Esther, tichyeh**, a wife who is truly the crowning glory of her husband. She dedicates her life to support me. She takes upon herself all of the burden of the household, as well as education of our children, so that I can devote myself to continue my sacred task of bringing *zechut* to the public, and bringing the sound of Torah to all corners of the globe. There is no doubt that the fruits of my labor are all in her credit. It is fitting to quote the saying of the Gemara

about her (*Ketubot* 62a), concerning the pasuk (*Tehillim* 127:2), “He gives His beloved ones restful sleep.” The Gemara says that these are the wives of *talmidei chachamim*, who chase the sleep from their eyes in this world, thereby earning their rest in the World to Come. May Hashem grant us the merit to see much *nachat* from our work, and may we together see happiness from all our children, Amen.

I would like to deliver my heartfelt *berachot* to my dear sons, may they live long. First, to my eldest son, **Rabbi Refael Meir Amram, shlita**, who devotes himself to spreading the light of Torah. With *siyata di'Shemaya*, he heads notable kollelim, and he is dedicated with all his heart to bringing others closer to Hashem. May Hashem bless him to continue in his holy work, together with his wonderful wife, may she live, who assists him in all his endeavors. May they have much *nachat* from their fine family, their eldest being the wise son, **Chaim Gavriel Yonah**, may Hashem protect him.

Next, I would like to bless my dear son, **Rabbi Moshe Aharon Yoshiyahu, shlita**. He devotes his energies and skills to bringing closer wayward sons, giving them a taste of the sweetness of Judaism and Torah. Baruch Hashem, he merits seeing the results of his hard work. May Hashem bless him to continue to succeed in his undertakings, together with His wonderful wife, who always stands by his side. I would like to bless their dear son, **Chaim Sa'adyah Yehudah Yisrael**. May he live long and bring *nachat* to his parents and the entire family, Amen.

I would further like to bless my dear son, **Rabbi Yoel Yichyeh Shlomo, shlita**. With his words of wisdom and his pleasant ways, he brings those distant back to their Father, opening a window in their hearts to love Hashem and fear Him. May Hashem grant him *berachah* in his ventures. May Hashem bless him and his kallah **Orly Attar** with every blessing, Amen.

I would like to add a *berachah* to my dear son, **Rabbi Michael Yosef Alexander, shlita**, who studies Torah both day and night, with utmost

devotion. He sanctifies Heaven by his behavior, and strengthens others with his pure *yirat Shamayim*.

I would specifically like to bless my son-in-law, **Rabbi Yitzchak Saban, shlita**, and my dear daughter, **Mrs. Sarah Ruby Aisha**, who devote themselves to establish fortresses of Torah, and attempt to disseminate Torah throughout the world. May they derive much *nachat* from their wonderful children.

A special *berachah* is extended to my dear daughters **Julie Mamach Miriam Yehudit**, and **Arielle Chanani Mazal Leah**, may they live long lives. May we merit seeing them walking the path of righteousness, and marrying them off with joy, Amen.

I would like to extend the *berachot* of the Torah to the heads of the kollelim and the yeshivot, as well as the avrechim and the yeshiva students who study at *Orot Chaim U'Moshe* and *Peninei David* in Eretz Yisrael, France, the USA, and Argentina. May they continue to succeed in their Torah endeavors, for that is our life force.

I bless all those who contribute to our institutions, may Hashem preserve them. They generously offer of their wealth in order to promulgate the glory of Heaven. Their reward is great indeed, as the pasuk states, "Rejoice, O Zevulun, in your excursions, and Yissachar in your tents."

The *zechut* of this sanctified sefer, and the pure words of *mussar* which emanate from it, should stand by us forever. May we merit seeing the coming of the Redeemer and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash in all its glory, speedily in our day, Amen.

Signing for the Glory of the Torah,

The humble servant of Hashem, **David Chananya Pinto**

Son of the tzaddik Rabbi **Moshe Aharon Pinto**, zt"l, and grandson of the holy Rabbi **Chaim Pinto**, zy"a



# FAITH



## FAITH – THE FOUNDATION OF TORAH AND MITZVOT

Faith constitutes the foundation for every single aspect of serving Hashem. Without faith we have nothing. There are countless examples of this. We merited to be taken out of Egypt only through our belief in Hashem. Egypt was closed off from the whole world, and it was possible to leave there only through a miracle. For this reason, at the Splitting of the Sea the Torah states (*Shemot* 14:31), “And they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” It was in the merit of the Jews’ faith in Hashem that they left Egypt, and the sea was split before them.

Additionally, the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael because of their faith. Even before they knew what was written in the Torah, they said “*Na’aseh v’nishma* – We will do and we will hear.” Undertaking to accept the Torah’s authority without knowing what was involved, demonstrated their clear faith and trust in Hashem, the Giver of the Torah.

The prophet tells of Na’aman, the general of Aram, who was stricken with leprosy and wished to be cured. His cure only came about through his belief in the prophet and tzaddik, Elisha. Had he been lacking this belief, he certainly would never have been cured.

We see that faith is the foundation of everything. By strengthening his faith, a person can reach great spiritual heights. How can we strengthen our faith? By learning Torah. It is only the Torah which has the true capacity to strengthen one’s faith. When one fails to study, he runs the

risk of completely losing his faith; then nothing can help him. How will such a person be able to stand before Hashem, the King of Kings? Would he want to come before Him in such a manner? Immersing oneself in Torah day and night strengthens one's faith and helps him find favor in the eyes of Hashem.

How was it possible that despite Na'aman's faith in Hashem and in the prophet, he accepted upon himself only to refrain from *avodah zarah*, yet did not fully convert? This is because he lacked the in-depth study of Torah which is intrinsic in building one's foundation of belief in Hashem.

We often find that particularly those people who are distant from Torah and mitzvot exhibit tremendous faith in Hashem and in tzaddikim. How is it possible for one who does not learn or perform mitzvot to have such faith? When one studies and keeps the Torah, faith becomes a part of him. But from where did a person who was not raised with Torah values acquire such faith?

Additionally, these people, who have such firm belief despite their lack of Torah background, will often also be enthusiastic supporters of Torah institutions. From where do they acquire such a desire to support Torah, if they themselves do not live a Torah life?

We may explain as follows. Every single Jew was born with the attribute of kindness and the desire to help his fellow Jew. Kindness is the root of man's existence. Man's birth itself, and his life, are the expression of Hashem's tremendous kindness. Each person has the choice to reveal and magnify the inner spark of kindness that he has within him. When he does so, his life becomes filled with kindness, charity, and righteousness.

The pasuk states (*Mishlei* 3:18), "It (the Torah) is a tree of life to those who grasp it and those who support it are fortunate." This verse discusses two types of people: those who learn the Torah ("those who grasp it"), and those who support it. Both are capable of achieving happiness. How would we define the good fortune of one who supports

Torah, even though he has not yet merited studying it? “By acting for ulterior motives, one will come to act for the sake of Heaven” (*Pesachim* 50b; *Horayot* 10b). His good fortune is the very fact that he attains faith. Often, a person will give charity to religious causes even when he himself does not possess strong faith. This is a level of giving “for ulterior motives.” Yet, as time goes on, his actions on behalf of religious institutions will awaken within him true faith in Hashem and in tzaddikim, and he will then give “for the sake of Heaven.” This higher level of faith will eventually cause him to observe the Torah and mitzvot of his own volition.

Thus we see that the power of faith ultimately leads to Torah and mitzvah observance. Since this is the case, who wouldn’t want to increase his level of faith? It is our moral responsibility to constantly deepen our faith and heighten our religious awareness.

We can now explain the awesome events that took place in the Heavenly Assembly at the time of the giving of the Torah. Chazal teach (*Shabbat* 99) that angels do not experience jealousy. Why then did they oppose the creation of man when the world was created (*Sanhedrin* 38; *Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat* 12)? How could the angels oppose Hashem’s will?

Furthermore, we see that the angels were vehemently opposed to Bnei Yisrael receiving the Torah. Their objection was so strong that they were ready to burn Moshe Rabbeinu with the fire of their mouths, and Hashem had to tell him to grab hold of His own Throne for protection, and answer them. This is difficult to understand, since we know that angels cannot feel jealous. Additionally, if it was Hashem’s desire to create man and give him the Torah, what right did the angels have to oppose it?

When the angels voiced their objection to the creation of man, they had only Hashem’s honor in mind. They were very familiar with the *Yetzer Hara*, because he was one of them, an angel made of fire (*Zohar* 8b; 183b). Well aware of his destructive attributes, they realized how easily he could

succeed in preventing man from performing Hashem's will. In their zeal for Hashem's honor, they waged their campaign against the creation of man.

The angels had further reason to object to the giving of the Torah. They had witnessed the many miracles which Hashem had performed for Bnei Yisrael in Egypt and at the Splitting of the Sea. The purpose of these miracles was to instill eternal faith in Hashem deep within the hearts of the Jewish nation. Bnei Yisrael reached such a high level of faith that they were ready to receive the Torah even without knowing what it held in store for them! This was expressed by their declaration "*Na'aseh v'nishma* – We shall do and we shall hear!" Following this proclamation, their faith was so strong that the *Yetzer Hara* lost all hold on them (*Shabbat* 146a).

This explains why the angels were opposed to Bnei Yisrael receiving the Torah. The angels felt that the strong faith that Bnei Yisrael possessed was sufficient for their *Avodat Hashem*. They believed that since Bnei Yisrael recognized Hashem's presence in everything, they would not be influenced to sin. Thus giving Bnei Yisrael the Torah would be superfluous.

Avraham Avinu provided proof for this. He kept the entire Torah before it was given purely by virtue of his tremendous faith (*Yoma* 28b). He came to a recognition of Hashem by contemplating the wonders of the universe. This applied to all of our forefathers; faith alone was enough to show them how to serve Hashem. If Bnei Yisrael demonstrated that they also had such faith, what was the point of giving them the Torah? Why risk entrusting them with the Torah, which they might desecrate, if they could fulfill their mission through faith alone?

This was the argument of the angels. Yet Moshe Rabbeinu, holding onto Hashem's Throne, showed them their mistake. Recognizing Hashem's hand in running the world is certainly very important. Yet, a person is incapable of maintaining unblemished faith in Hashem if he does not learn Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* is conquered only through Torah study. (It was

only in the merit of the Jews' undertaking to study Torah that the *Yetzer Hara* left them when they said "*Na'aseh v'nishma.*") Bnei Yisrael were not on the level of our holy forefathers, who reached the pinnacle of faith on their own. Bnei Yisrael needed the Torah.

Furthermore, the Patriarchs' ability to keep the Torah even without it being given to them is not a level that everyone is capable of attaining. An ordinary person needs the Torah to strengthen his faith. This is another reason why the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael.

We acquire faith through Torah and mitzvot. However, our faith cannot remain at the level of lip-service. It must be deeply rooted in the mind and heart. We need to work hard to acquire it, and must hold on to it steadfastly at all times.

The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 28:18) that Yaakov Avinu erected a pillar and anointed it with oil. What was the significance of this action? I heard that the word *shemen* (oil) hints to the word *neshamah* (soul), and the word *matzeivah* (a stone pillar) hints to a man's heart, which is sometimes as hard as a stone. Yaakov Avinu wished to impart to his descendants that even when one's heart appears to be hard and impenetrable like a stone, we can affect it by means of *shemen*, alluding to our *neshamah* (soul). How does one put "soul" into a heart of stone? Through Torah and mitzvot, which can instill belief into the hardest of hearts, and into the most stubborn mind.

Regarding faith, our Sages teach, (*Avot* 2:4): "Do not trust in yourself until your dying day." In order to have faith in Hashem, do not rely on your own capabilities, because such self-confidence may lead you to stumble.

As proof of this, we see that when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was sentenced to death by the Romans, he escaped together with his son, Elazar, and hid in a cave for thirteen years (*Shabbat* 33b). Also Rabbi Meir, who enlightened the eyes of Israel with his Torah (*Eiruvin* 13b), escaped from the Romans and hid in a cave (*Avodah Zarah* 18b).

Why didn't Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Meir have confidence that their own merits would miraculously protect them from the Romans? The angels themselves were unable to harm them. Theoretically, they could have fought against the Romans and conquered them, thus causing a sanctification of Hashem's Name.

Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Meir were not afraid of the Romans at all. Yet, whenever there is a negative influence in the world, each person should be concerned that he might be unworthy of withstanding this force, and that he might fall from the spiritual level that he has reached. This is the reason that Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Meir fled from the Romans. They were afraid of falling prey to the Romans' influence. They acted on the words of our Sages, "Do not trust in yourself until your dying day." It is when a person trusts in his own abilities that he is liable to stumble.

The need to escape exists whenever there are negative influences in the world. However, under normal circumstances, a person should constantly strengthen his faith in Hashem through keeping Torah and mitzvot. When a person believes in Hashem and in the tzaddikim of the generation, he will surely witness Divine Providence at work and accomplish great things.

### ————— **In Summary** —————

- Faith is the foundation of everything. Bnei Yisrael both left Egypt in the merit of their faith, and received the Torah in the merit of the faith that they expressed by saying, "Na'aseh v'nishma," even before they knew what the Torah contained. Na'aman was cured of his leprosy in the merit of his faith. The only way to strengthen and maintain one's faith is by learning Torah and observing its mitzvot.
- We see that there are people who have strong faith, and even support religious causes, despite being far from keeping Torah and mitzvot. This is because every Jew has a spark of kindness within him, and his entire existence is based on faith. For this reason it says that "those who support it (the Torah) are fortunate."

Because by first “acting with ulterior motives,” a person will eventually “act for the sake of Heaven,” performing charity and kindness, which strengthen his faith, so that he will ultimately begin to perform mitzvot of his own volition. These few merits might now enable him to reach the level of learning Torah.

- The angels objected both to the creation of man and to the Torah being given to Bnei Yisrael, since they were aware of the *Yetzer Hara's* capacity to trap people in his net. They were afraid that man would sin and transgress the Torah, thus desecrating Hashem's honor. Therefore, the angels objected to Bnei Yisrael receiving the Torah, thinking that they could fulfill their destiny through faith alone. Moshe Rabbeinu explained to them that, on the contrary, only by learning Torah can man remove the *Yetzer Hara* from his heart. Faith alone is not enough; one must learn Torah.

## THE EXODUS – THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

It is well-known that observing Hashem's hand in running the world is an important means of acquiring faith, as well as motivating a person to come close to Hashem through Torah study. However, it is important to realize that spectacular, breathtaking miracles are not necessary in order to awaken this faith. For the thinking person, every aspect of Creation provides more than enough evidence of Hashem's guiding hand.

Amazing miracles can be found within nature itself. Hashem is the One Who created nature. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 1:31), “And G-d saw all that He made, and behold it was very good.” Chazal expound on this (*Zohar Chadash, Bereishit* 17), “That they may stand always, in the same manner in which they were created, and not ever change.” The word טבע (nature) has the same numerical value as the word אלוהים (*E-lohim*) (*Be'er Mayim Chaim, Va'etchanan* 83). This equation helps to constantly remind us that Divine Providence exists within nature. If a person does not recognize

this, he is liable to forget that Divine Providence is the life force behind everything.

Hashem has established two kinds of miracles. Regarding these, Eliyahu Hanavi praised Hashem by saying (in the First Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar*), “You are the Cause of all causes.” The first type of miracle is that which is openly revealed, transforming the most basic tenets of nature. The prime example of this is the Splitting of the Sea. Additional examples are when Hashem made the sun stand still in Givon (*Yehoshua* 10:12), and sent manna from the heavens (*Shemot* 16:15). These miracles revealed Hashem’s glory to the entire world, since they showed that (*Devarim* 4:35) “there is none beside Him!” They revealed that Hashem is above the confines of nature, and that He can change its laws at will.

Regarding this, the pasuk in *Tehillim* (34:17) states, “The face of Hashem is against evildoers.” Through Hashem’s vengeance against evildoers, He shows His “face” in the world. Hashem’s essence is never revealed; the only way we can hope to know Hashem is through His actions. “You are the Cause of all causes” – Hashem created all that exists in the heavens and the earth, from the most powerful forces of nature to the tiniest mosquito. Since He created them, He is able to do with them as He wills; He can split the sea and make the sun stand still in its orbit.

The second kind of miracle is that which is veiled in nature, and is not readily apparent as a miracle. An example of this is the Purim miracle, which involved unbelievable Divine orchestration. However, the sequence of occurrences which brought it about camouflaged the miracle as a mere remarkable coincidence. Our Sages note (*Midrash Abba Gurion* A) that Achashverosh killed his wife because of his friend, and then he killed his friend because of his wife. Achashverosh killed Vashti because of Haman’s counsel, but then he killed Haman when he discovered that he was plotting against Esther and her people. It says about Haman (*Megillah* 15b), “He envied the king; he envied the servants.” Hashem often runs the world with a “hidden face,” which means that He conceals Himself in

nature, not allowing people to perceive His greatness. Those who are non-observant can thus ascribe a whole sequence of events to coincidence, denying Hashem's involvement.

The name *Elokim* alludes to the trait of Divine Justice (*Zohar* III, 30b). Hashem embedded this Name within nature, to hint that if man forgets the Divine Providence which governs nature, he awakens Divine retribution against nature. Especially when one is deficient in his Torah study, he begins to see only the natural causes behind everything which occurs, failing to recognize Hashem's hand, which orchestrates everything. This makes it much easier for a person to fall prey to sin.

Sometimes we are witness to people who sin greatly, but at the same time perform mitzvot and believe in tzaddikim, even seeking to be close to them. This can be illustrated by the following story. A man came to me to request a *berachah* for a very important matter. However, this man was a thief, who had stolen a large sum of money from his friend. He saw no contradiction between believing in the efficacy of a rabbi's blessing and stealing.

How can such a thing happen? Chazal teach (*Avot* 4:2), "One mitzvah leads to another, and one aveirah leads to another." If so, how is it possible for this man to go from doing a mitzvah to doing a serious aveirah? It would make more sense that his mitzvah would inspire him to do another mitzvah, or at least prevent him from sinning!

It would seem that not every mitzvah has the capacity of bringing another mitzvah in its wake. Only mitzvot kept perfectly have this ability, as these mitzvot alone generate eternal life and great light. This light is what pulls a person to perform additional mitzvot. Yet, if a person's mitzvah performance is not wholehearted, or is done with pride or to impress other people, it fails to generate this life and light. It does not have this special capacity of elevating a person (*Zohar* I, 266b).

If the mitzvah was not done wholeheartedly, it certainly cannot spur a person on to further positive action. Conversely, if after performing such

a mitzvah, he does an aveirah, the aveirah will be able to lead him to further deteriorate, until he becomes accustomed to his improper ways. Chazal teach (*Yoma* 61b) that when one repeats a sin, he starts to think that it is in fact something permissible. It is when a person doesn't even realize that he has sinned that he is the furthest removed from repenting.

Sometimes, the *Yetzer Hara* is concerned that a person will catch hold of himself and do teshuvah. This is especially disconcerting to the *Yetzer Hara* when the person in question is distinguished. Therefore he convinces this person to do several small mitzvot, without much concentration, just to satisfy the hunger of his soul. Then, once the person has let down his guard, the *Yetzer Hara* will proceed to lure him to sin. This whole situation begins from failing to observe mitzvot properly, and then the Satan, or *Yetzer Hara* (*Zohar* 8, *Bereishit* 26a), is able to lead man astray. However, keeping mitzvot properly inspires one to perform additional mitzvot.

Chazal teach (*Pesachim* 50a) that we should always attempt to perform mitzvot, even with ulterior motives, since doing so will cause us to perform them wholeheartedly in the end. Yet, this is true only when there is a chance from the outset of eventually becoming wholehearted. When a person checks himself from time to time, there is a good chance of this eventuality. Yet, when a person does all his mitzvot totally by habit, the chances of his ever performing the mitzvot for their own sake are quite slim (*Yeshayahu* 29:13).

We are accustomed to seeing people who keep mitzvot all their lives, for ulterior motives, without their heart really being in it. These mitzvot are incapable of influencing them to perform more mitzvot. These people are even able to do aveirot interchangeably with mitzvot, despite the fact that they do truly believe in Hashem. A person should know that the essence of serving Hashem is to try to do every mitzvah for the sake of His holy Name. This prevents the *Yetzer Hara* from being able to sway him.

Once we make it our goal to perform Hashem's will properly, it is possible to perform mitzvot occasionally without the purest intentions. Eventually, through contemplation, we will be able to reach the level of doing a mitzvah *lishmah*, for its own sake. Our Sages say that once a person does teshuvah, his sins are converted to merits. Certainly if a person reaches the level of performing mitzvot *lishmah*, his former mitzvot will be further elevated.

A person should not refrain from doing mitzvot because he is unable to reach the optimal level of performing them *lishmah*. Even if his intentions are not entirely what they should be, the act is still a fulfillment of the will of his Creator. The *Zohar* (II, 93b) states that if one performs a mitzvah with pure intentions, he is considered a tzaddik. Even if one does a mitzvah without pure intentions, he is still considered a tzaddik, because he fulfills the will of his Creator. However, these mitzvot do not have the same value as those performed *lishmah*.

Thus we see how important it is for a person to reflect on everything that happens around him, so that he will recognize Divine Providence in every little thing, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 40:26), "Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these!" Consequently, he will do mitzvot in the correct way, which will influence him to do more mitzvot. The level of doing mitzvot *lishmah* will bring him close to Hashem, Who Himself is the essence of every mitzvah (*Zohar* III, 228b).

Contemplating the Exodus from Egypt is particularly instrumental in helping one reach this level. As it is written in *Alei Shur*: A person who is not satisfied with merely observing his daily quota of mitzvot will constantly derive inspiration from the great moments of the Jewish nation – both the Revelation at Sinai and the Exodus from Egypt.

It would seem that the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai was the most exalted event in our history, and the greatest proof of the reality of Hashem and His Torah. Indeed, we are commanded to remember this event throughout our life. Moreover, the tzaddikim in Am Yisrael, known

for their great belief, invested much effort in trying to relive and recapture the experience of leaving Egypt. In what way is the Exodus a greater revelation than the giving of the Torah? *Matan Torah* obligates us to fully believe in the Torah and mitzvot. Yet, one who makes the Exodus live in his mind becomes equal to those who actually left Egypt.

This is the reason that the Exodus is mentioned fifty times in the Torah. The Torah places greater stress on remembering the Exodus than on remembering the Revelation at Sinai, as the verse states (*Pesachim* 116b), “In every generation, one must view himself as having left Egypt.” A person who relives the experience of “having left Egypt” has begun the intensive preparation required for receiving the Torah. One should remove all materialism and impurity from within himself, just as Bnei Yisrael cleansed themselves from the forty-nine levels of impurity which contaminated them in Egypt, in order to purify themselves before receiving the Torah (*Zohar* II, 39a). This is the reason that they needed to wait a full fifty days before receiving the Torah.

We might add that the initial letters of the Hebrew term for the Exodus **יציאת מצרים** have the numerical value of fifty. This corresponds to the fifty times that the Exodus is mentioned in the Torah. The first and last letters of the words **יציאת מצרים** are **מ'** and **ת'**, which spell the word **מת** (dead). This teaches that by constantly remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we will be able to save ourselves from the *Yetzer Hara*, which seeks to kill a person and deprive him of eternal life. Had Bnei Yisrael remained in Egypt, they would have perished spiritually. In the Haggadah we say, “And He took us out of there.” Had we not been redeemed, we ourselves would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh and to his hedonistic culture to this day.

One additional moment in Egypt would have been enough to cause the Jewish nation to descend into the fiftieth level of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). For this reason, the Torah mentions the Exodus fifty times. This is in order to stress the great kindness that Hashem did in taking us

out of Egypt before it was too late. Moreover, He also gave us the Torah, which has the potential of elevating us through the forty-nine levels of holiness.

Only one who fully believes in the Exodus is capable of fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot perfectly. The Torah mentions the Exodus fifty times in order to teach us that only by remembering it constantly is it possible for man to rise to the pinnacle of holiness. This is accomplished through means of wholehearted Torah study and mitzvah observance.

### In Summary

- It is important to constantly contemplate what happens in the world around us, since doing so helps us reach an awareness of Hashem. Since nature itself is governed by Hashem, it is possible to recognize Him through its contemplation. This is the reason that the word טבע (nature) has the same numerical value as the Name אלוהים (E-lohim) – to demonstrate that nature is governed by Hashem. We find that there are people who both observe mitzvot and do aveirot interchangeably. This is because they do not stop to contemplate Hashem’s constant Providence in the world, therefore their mitzvot remain devoid of emotion and thought.
- Only mitzvot performed for the sake of Hashem have the potential of influencing a person to perform additional mitzvot. This is the level of “one mitzvah leads to another.” However, when a mitzvah is done for ulterior motives, even though it is still a mitzvah, since it is not accompanied by conscious awareness of Divine Providence, it lacks vitality and is unable to influence a person to perform additional mitzvot.
- When one does reach the awe-inspiring awareness of Divine Providence in the world, his previous mitzvot are raised to this higher level. The best way to achieve this awareness is through contemplating our Exodus from Egypt. The Torah mentions the Exodus fifty times since it is the prime means of instilling faith in a person, leading him out of the forty-nine levels of impurity into the fifty levels of holiness.

## BE A LEADER

The prophet Shmuel relates how Goliat taunted the Israelite camp when the Pelishtim waged war against Israel. For forty days, he went out to taunt the Israelites, both in the morning and at night. Rabbi Yochanan said (*Sota* 42a) that he did so in order to prevent them from reciting the morning and evening Shema.

The entire Jewish camp, including Shaul Hamelech, was terrified of Goliat. David approached Shaul and said, "Let no man lose heart because of him. Your servant will go forth and fight this Pelishti!" Shaul argued that he would not succeed, saying, "You are a lad, while he is a warrior from his youth." David replied (*Shmuel* I, 17), "Your servant has slain even a lion and a bear (animals which are ferocious from when they are very young), and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has disgraced the battalions of the Living G-d!"

How is it possible that the entire Jewish army was afraid of Goliat? They had amongst them Avner ben Ner, who was a mighty warrior (*Kohelet Rabbah* 9:11). Shaul Hamelech himself was very strong, and the entire army was well-trained in battle. Why were they so frightened of one person, fearsome as he was?

Furthermore, how was it possible that David, who had never been trained in battle, had the courage to face Goliat? Even if he himself was confident that he would vanquish Goliat, how could Shaul and his warriors put their faith in him? This could affect the fate of all Bnei Yisrael. Logically, there was a strong chance that David would lose the battle, and then everyone would become Goliat's servants (see *Shmuel* I, 17:9). This would cause a great desecration of Hashem's Name.

Perhaps we can answer these questions with the following idea. It seems that it was their initial lack of faith that caused Shaul and his army to be overcome with fear. Instead of immediately going out to fight Goliat and the Pelishtim, they remained passive and agreed to his proposal to

send one warrior to fight him. By doing so, they enabled Goliath to weaken their faith in Hashem, not fully trusting that He would assist them in their mission of conquering His enemies. They then became concerned about the ramifications of their initial sin of remaining silent, and as a result did not have the courage to go out and fight Goliath. Their fear of Goliath and the Pelishtim physically weakened them.

This point requires further explanation. At first, Bnei Yisrael were confident in their power to go out and fight Goliath themselves. Their fault was that because they did not want to endanger the whole Jewish nation in the quest to destroy their enemies, they sent just one man to fight against Goliath. Shaul was also at fault. Hashem had made him king in order to save Bnei Yisrael from their enemies, not to endanger them. Shaul was running the risk that Bnei Yisrael would become servants to the Pelishtim if the one warrior that he sent would be defeated by Goliath.

David acted in a different manner. Although he was afraid of fighting Goliath, as soon as he heard how Goliath was scoffing against the One Above, he was reminded that “one who blasphemes the Name of Hashem shall be put to death” (*Vayikra* 24:16). He did not wait around or question why no one else was going out to fight Goliath. He realized that it was his responsibility to “be a leader” where no one else was, as it states in *Avot* (2:5), “In a place where there are no leaders, be a leader.”

Since no one else was willing to fight against the wicked giant, despite the fact that there were many tzaddikim and mighty warriors in the camp, David realized that it was his job to “be a leader,” and to act. Although he was not trained for battle, he placed his trust in the Al-mighty. He realized that if he were to keep silent in the face of Goliath’s curses, he too would become ensnared in the fear which was paralyzing the rest of the nation.

The reason that David girded his loins for battle and requested to fight against Goliath was in order to avenge Hashem’s honor. Pinchas ben Elazar had acted similarly in the past (*Sanhedrin* 82a). When he saw a sin being committed, he recalled the law that the wrongdoer must be killed, and

endangered his life by going out to fight against the leader of the tribe of Shimon, and killing him. It states that ten miracles were wrought for Pinchas on that day. So, too, David followed his lead and fought the battle of Hashem.

This is the reason that David said to Shaul (*Shmuel I*, 17:36), “Your servant has slain even a lion and a bear.” One might ask why David endangered his life in order to save his sheep from the lion and the bear. He understood that if he would not exhibit bravery and kill them now, they would think that he was weak and continually try to kill his sheep, possibly even attacking him in the end.

Similarly, David told Shaul that if he would show fear by escaping, the Pelishtim would give him no rest. Even though David knew that he would be endangering his life, he understood that it was Hashem who had put him into this situation. Since he could not remain silent in the face of Goliat’s blasphemy, he knew that it was incumbent upon him to fight, and that Hashem would be on his side. In fact, Hashem had sent the lion and the bear earlier specifically in order to arm him with the necessary courage to go out and fight against Goliat.

Shaul and his warriors understood from David’s response that he wanted to fight in order to avenge Hashem’s honor, and that the fear they harbored stemmed from their error in delaying to fight against the Pelishtim. David also explained that they had no need to fear that Goliat might succeed due to the merits of his mother, Orpah. She was credited for accompanying her mother-in-law, Naomi, as it says (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:20), “Orpah accompanied her mother-in-law for a distance of forty steps.” However, it is clear that one who profanes Hashem’s Name cannot be helped by ancestral merit. Thereafter, Shaul and his men readily agreed to David’s offer, and blessed him that he should succeed. They were especially accommodating, since they saw that Shaul’s clothes fit David perfectly. This was a sign that it was Hashem’s will for David to fight against the evil giant, and he was confident that he would succeed.

We see how important it is to attempt to “be a leader” in avenging Hashem’s honor, even when people greater than us fail to take such an initiative. The pasuk tells us (*Tehillim* 119:126), “For it is a time to act for Hashem – they have voided Your Torah.” Feeling fear is a result of a lack of faith in the Al-mighty, (“they have voided Your Torah”). When the morale of the Jewish nation descends to such a level, every individual G-d-fearing person must himself act in accordance with “it is a time to act for Hashem,” and realize that there is nothing to fear, as in the example of David Hamelech.

David’s courage in fighting against the lion, the bear, and the Pelisitim can also teach us a lesson in how to combat our evil inclination. We should realize that the *Yetzer Hara* is no different from a lion or a bear. We must be extremely swift in opposing and fighting him, despite any danger involved. When one tries to escape from battling his *Yetzer Hara*, he places himself in great danger. By evading confrontation, the *Yetzer Hara* will see that he is weak and increase his efforts in fighting against him, eventually ensnaring him in his trap.

For this reason, it is necessary to fight against the *Yetzer Hara* without ceasing even for a moment, as it is written (*Devarim* 21:10), “When you will go out to war against your enemies, Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand.” This teaches that one must fight against the *Yetzer Hara* without hesitating. Then, he can be sure that “Hashem will deliver him into his hand,” as we know that “one who wishes to purify himself, receives Divine assistance” (*Shabbat* 104a).

From the account of David and Goliath we can also see the extent to which “the Satan prosecutes during a situation of danger,” seeking to take advantage of the situation in order to make us fall into his trap. During the very moments that Am Yisrael’s fate was at stake, and David was endangering himself to go out to battle against the wicked Goliath, when everyone else had despaired, people began to cast doubts over the purity of David’s lineage. They suggested that he might not even be allowed to

marry a Jewish woman, let alone the daughter of the king. Doeg the Edomite said, “Before you ask whether he is worthy of being king or not, ask if he is worthy of being part of the Jewish nation, since he is descended from Ruth the Moabite.” He dared to cast doubt on David, despite the fact that everyone saw how Shaul’s clothing miraculously fit him, even though Shaul was much taller. This is recorded in the pasuk, “Shaul dressed David with his own battle garments” (*Shmuel I*, 17:38). Chazal say (*Yevamot* 76b), “This teaches that they became his size.”

Why did this question about David’s ancestry surface now, when he was about to endanger his life to save the Jewish nation and defend the honor of Hashem? We don’t see anyone doubting the lineage of David’s father, Yishai, who was one of the great Torah scholars and leaders of the generation. The pasuk says (*ibid.* 17:12), “The man was old and would come among the elders.” Our Sages comment in the name of Rav and Rabbi Abba (*Yevamot* 76b), “This is Yishai, the father of David, whose lineage was impeccable.”

Neither do we find anyone questioning the lineage of David’s five brothers, who served in Shaul’s army. Only regarding David, who had the courage to fight against Goliath, did doubts surface. People were concerned that perhaps the union between Boaz and Ruth, David’s forbears, was prohibited, since Ruth was a convert of Moab, and Moabite converts are forbidden to marry into the Jewish nation. These doubts arose despite the fact that the court of Shmuel, who was equal to Moshe and Aharon (see *Rosh Hashanah* 25b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:7), had ruled that the prohibition applied only to male converts from Amon and Moab, but not to females. As such, the union between Boaz and Ruth was permitted. This ruling was certainly well-known. If so, the fact that people suddenly started slandering David stemmed purely from jealousy.

It seems to me that this sequence of events is actually an illustration of the concept that “one sin leads to another.” Bnei Yisrael’s first sin was their failure to go out immediately to fight against Goliath when he began

to curse Hashem's battalions. Goliath trapped them into hesitating by challenging them to send only one warrior to fight him. In their anxiety to find an appropriate warrior, Bnei Yisrael missed reciting the Shema. This caused an additional detraction from Hashem's honor.

This sin enabled the Satan to lure Bnei Yisrael to commit an additional sin: to slander David Hamelech and to question whether he was even worthy of being part of the Jewish nation. The Satan wanted to prevent David avenging Hashem's honor by fighting against Goliath, and tried to convince people that he was nothing but a descendant of Moab, unworthy of battling Goliath.

This slander caused Bnei Yisrael to feel even greater fear. They hesitated to let David fight, since they knew that if he would win, he would become the king's son-in-law and would be given an important position. Our Sages state that the slander they spoke caused Shaul's army to lose when they went out to battle. This continued even once David became their commander. How could these pious warriors believe the *lashon hara* about David? However, David himself was aware that "it is not the snake that kills, rather, sin kills" (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a). He realized that the sin of speaking and accepting *lashon hara* posed a far greater threat to the nation's safety than the threat of the enemy. Since he knew that he was free of sin, he had nothing to fear, but raised his eyes to the heavens, relying on Hashem, Who made his enemies fall.

As proof of this idea, we can bring a practical example which demonstrates the severity of *lashon hara*. Sometimes a Rosh Yeshivah asks a complex question, and one of his students suggests a wonderful answer, surpassing by far those offered by his friends. Unfortunately, instead of his friends rejoicing over their good fortune to hear such an answer, and being happy for their colleague, one boy will begin to denigrate him by saying, "The fact that he knows how to learn doesn't mean a thing; he's got a terrible temper, and he snores at night ..."

Does the boy who talks this way have any idea what damage he does with his words? The clever answer to the Rosh Yeshivah's question could have created a commotion in the Heavenly spheres, bringing great joy and causing the angels to praise Hashem for sharing His Divine wisdom with those who toil in Torah. However, this *lashon hara* changes the joy resulting from this insight to displeasure. The Attribute of Divine Justice is awakened against the one who slandered his friend, and the punishment for causing disgrace to the Torah is great.

What made this boy decide to mention his friend's snoring and short temper at that particular moment? The Satan, with his tireless schemes to shame the Torah does so through those who learn it so that his accusation will be even stronger. This is the power of *lashon hara*.

Previously, we explained that one of Goliat's intentions in taunting the Jewish soldiers was to make them miss reciting the Shema, thus causing doubts on Hashem's unity. I would like to add the following thought. As part of the procedure which the Torah prescribes before going out to battle, the *Kohen Mashiach* would encourage all the warriors to take heart. He would urge them to have no fear of the enemy since Hashem is the One Who is going with them to fight for them. The *shotrim*, those in charge of enforcing the law, would declare that whoever was afraid should leave the front and return home (*Devarim* 20:5-9). In this case, the soldiers' fear of Goliat was so great that even the *Kohen Mashiach* was unable to alleviate it. It was only because they feared humiliation that they did not collectively abandon the front.

The reason that the *Kohen Mashiach's* words of encouragement failed to have effect was that Goliat had preceded him by casting doubt on Hashem's oneness, which caused the warriors to miss saying the morning Shema with full devotion. In addition to being an expression of accepting Hashem's kingship, the Shema is an expression of brotherly love. There is a halachah that before reciting the Shema, one must resolve to love his brethren as himself. By not reciting the Shema, because of Goliat's

blasphemy of Hashem, Bnei Yisrael were lacking in this resolve and were thus led into slandering David during those critical moments when the fate of the Jewish people lay in his hands.

This teaches us a tremendous lesson. Accepting Hashem's kingship and loving our fellow Jew go hand in hand. Before we pray in the morning, we must be particularly careful not to speak or accept *lashon hara*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- It is surprising that Shaul Hamelech and his soldiers were all afraid of Goliat; after all, they themselves were warriors, trained in battle. It seems that their fear was caused by their initial reaction to Goliat. Instead of going out to fight him immediately, they accepted his challenge to send only one warrior to fight him. This concession instilled feelings of fear and defeat in their hearts. It was also held against them since it displayed their hesitance to combat and destroy Hashem's enemy.
- Shaul himself sinned in not fulfilling Hashem's will by opting to have the nation represented by a single warrior. The proof for this is that Bnei Yisrael did not begin fighting against Goliat right away. This led to further confrontation with Goliat, who proceeded to disgrace Hashem's army.
- The opposite is true about David, who fulfilled Chazal's instruction "In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader." He followed in the footsteps of Pinchas, who saw a disastrous situation and was reminded of the Torah's directive to take action. David reminded Shaul of his own conquest over the lion and the bear, implying that when one fails to fight the enemy immediately, he is liable to become even more threatening. His words convinced Shaul Hamelech, who subsequently gave David his blessing to fight Goliat.
- Yet, as is always the case, there were people who were jealous and began to speak negatively about David's ancestry. The proof that their words stemmed from jealousy rather than from authentic concern was that they spoke only about David, but not about his brothers or his father, Yishai.
- The reason that they spoke against him at that moment is because "one sin leads to another." Since the Satan succeeded in preventing Bnei Yisrael from fighting

Goliat, he also managed to convince them to slander David. The warriors' morale was low since they realized they had been wrong in not going out to battle immediately, and this is what caused them to slander David despite his piety.

- This incident teaches how important it is to be vigilant in the battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. Strength and assertiveness, rather than weakness and submission, are called for. We also see how important it is not to speak against our fellow Jew, unless we know that it is certainly permissible to do so.
- We learn from Goliat, who prevented the warriors from reciting the Shema, how important it is to avoid listening to *lashon hara* before praying, because it is diametrically opposed to the values of brotherly love and acceptance of Hashem's sole kingship, as represented and expressed in the words of the Shema.

# SERVICE OF HASHEM



## ENDEAVORING TO ASCEND IN OUR SERVICE OF HASHEM

The Zohar (I, 191b; III, 96a) extols those who spend their nights as their days, toiling (lit. endeavoring) in Torah. How fortunate they are, for in their merit Bnei Yisrael can raise their heads proudly in *galut*.

It is indeed noble for one to wake up early in the morning in order to serve Hashem. But there is a risk of one falling into the pitfall of routine, as he becomes habituated to arising and going to the Beit Hamidrash every day. Our Sages teach us (*Shvilei Emunah* 4:5) that habit becomes second nature. In this manner, one's entire Avodat Hashem may become ruled by force of habit, lacking intent or concentration. Then he will be deficient in his service of Hashem.

For this reason, the Zohar uses the words "One who **endeavors** in Torah." One who constantly expends effort in his Avodat Hashem warrants the aforementioned praise.

The *Sefat Emet* of Gur, zt"l, (*Parashat Lech Lecha*, year 5664) explains that man's inherent nature is not to be stationary. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 12:1), "Go for yourself from your land." The *Sefat Emet* explains that a person is called "one who goes" (מהלך), always going from level to level. He must make sure to go upwards, as habit becomes nature. Nature conceals the inner vibrancy which a person has. This happens even with Torah and mitzvot. Therefore, a person must always seek new ideas as to how to keep his Avodat Hashem alive and full of enthusiasm.

The words “go for yourself” come to teach us to keep on going. One who does not move on, constantly renewing his attitude toward Torah, immediately falls into the quagmire of habit. This is the natural course of things. Angels, who are above nature, are called “standing” (*Zohar* III, 260a). They are neither able to ascend in spirituality or fall from their current level. In order for us to raise our spiritual level, we must expend much effort so that our service of Hashem not become governed by rote, as the *Navi* laments (*Yeshayahu* 29:13). One should always strive to invigorate his Avodat Hashem with novelty.

The creation of nighttime is a kindness of Hashem. Those who spend their days involved in business can catch up on their Torah learning at night. The Gemara tells us (*Eiruvin* 65a) that the night was created for sleep. Had Hashem not made the night, people would work without letup, to the point of collapse. A person would be driven to work constantly since “one who loves money will never be satisfied with money” (*Kohelet* 2:9). This may cause him to spend less time in Torah study, which is the elixir of life (*Eiruvin* 54a; *Kiddushin* 30b). Every Jew must fix set times for Torah study and mitzvot.

The night has great value for Torah students as well, for then they can rest from their vigorous schedule of learning, “recharging their batteries” for another day of study. *Yeshayahu* (40:31) promises, “Those whose hope is in Hashem will have renewed strength.” If not for the night, they would continue in their quest for more Torah knowledge, without letup, knowing that this is their lifeblood.

Therefore, Hashem distinguished between the day and the night (*Bereishit* 1:4-5). The sunlight gives a person the strength to go on. As soon as the sun goes down and it begins to get dark, a person becomes tired, and he feels the need for sleep. One who desires to serve Hashem should rest at night, in order to refresh himself, as the pasuk states (*Eichah* 3:23), “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!”

The Ari Hakadosh, zt”l, writes that every morning, a person’s mind becomes revitalized, due to the enhancement which the *neshamah* receives at night, when he sleeps. This also enables one to rise like a lion in the middle of the night, to engage in Torah study until the light of day. The Gemara states (*Chagigah* 12b), “He who engages in Torah at night, merits a thread of kindness by day.”

One can spend his entire lifetime toiling in Torah, yet when he arrives at the Heavenly Court, he may find that he was involved in much *bitul* Torah. This is because he did not put enough effort into his learning. Effort brings a person to perfect Torah study. A person will not become rich just through wanting it. He has to work long and hard. So, too, one will only be able to toil in Torah in the most perfect way by expending much effort in doing so.

Aside from this constant exertion, one must have *yirat Shamayim*. Our Rabbis state (*Shabbat* 31a), “Rabba bar Rav Huna said, ‘Whoever has Torah without fear of Heaven, is likened to a treasurer who was given the inside keys, but not the outside keys.’” Rashi asks, “How can he enter to open the inner doors?” Furthermore, it is stated (*ibid.*) in the name of Rav Yehudah that Hashem created the world only so that people should fear Him, as it says (*Kohelet* 3:14), “Hashem has acted so that [man] should stand in awe of Him.”

We find people who learn Torah, yet fail to be meticulous in their mitzvah observance. This is because they are lacking in *yirat Shamayim*. This enables the *Yetzer Hara* to overpower them, encouraging them to slacken in their execution of mitzvot. He convinces them that their righteousness is guaranteed by Torah study alone. But true Torah study, that which breaks the spirit of the *Yetzer Hara*, is only achieved when one has fear of Heaven. *Yirat Shamayim* is like the cement that holds together the entire edifice of Torah which man builds. Without it, the structure will crumble, and the person may eventually leave Torah learning altogether.

True fear of Heaven is acquired only when one puts effort into Torah study both day and night. This is what our original pasuk teaches: that one should “endeavor” in Torah. Then one will possess the weapons with which to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, instilling *yirat Shamayim* in his heart. Tehillim (111:10) states, “The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem.” “Wisdom” is the effort put into Torah study. It is the prelude to *yirat Shamayim*.

If one fails to put effort into his Torah study, what justification will he have for his actions when he arrives in the World of Truth? There he will be asked, “Did you set aside times for Torah study?” (*Shabbat* 31b). He may try to excuse himself, by saying, “I was handsome and busy dealing with my *Yetzer Hara*.” They will ask him, “Were you better-looking than Yosef?” (*Yoma* 35a).

Instead of saying that his *Yetzer Hara* disturbed him, he claims that he was “busy dealing with his *Yetzer Hara*.” This is because when a person sins the Satan becomes his partner, so to speak, always telling him what to do. Therefore, one must put effort into his Avodat Hashem, by means of which he will gain true *yirat Shamayim*. He will then be able to answer in the affirmative when questioned regarding his fixed hours for Torah learning, thus emerging meritorious in judgment.

After writing this, I thank the Creator that I can learn at least a little bit at night. During the day, I am very involved in public matters. Baruch Hashem, people give me reprieve in the late hours of the night, so that I may learn and write words of Torah. For that, I am full of gratitude to Hashem Yitbarach.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The Zohar excessively praises those who toil in Torah and Avodat Hashem. They enable the rest of the nation to be proud Jews.
- Specific praise is awarded to those who spend their night hours in Torah learning.

- A true servant of Hashem must be careful never to allow his mitzvah performance to be done by rote. He should constantly seek ways to renew his service of Hashem. Arising early is a good example. Continuously adding sanctity to his actions will keep him from growing weary in his service of Hashem.
- This is the idea of renewal. Torah scholars utilize the night hours to revitalize their energies for the next day, gaining strength to reach ever higher in their Avodat Hashem.
- Those who work also have much to gain from nighttime learning, after a full day of work. One should strive to learn at least something before he goes to sleep.
- One should always endeavor to ascend in his service of Hashem. In that manner, his Avodat Hashem and his learning will be perfect before Hashem.

## THE RIGHT TYPE OF FEAR

When Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was informed that there was a poisonous snake in the neighborhood that had killed several people, he asked to be taken to its hole and placed his heel over it. The snake came out, bit Rabbi Chanina's heel, and died. Rabbi Chanina put it over his shoulder and brought it to the Beit Hamidrash. He told his students, "See, my sons, it is not the snake which kills; it is sin that kills" (*Berachot* 33a).

How could Rabbi Chanina have entered a cave where a dangerous snake was hiding without being afraid? Rabbi Chanina knew that a snake has no power to kill a person unless that person deserves to be punished. Rabbi Chanina had tremendous *emunah* in Hashem, and he knew that He was pleased with all of his actions. He knew that he had not sinned and thus could confront the snake without fear.

The Mishnah says (*Berachot* 5:1), "Even if a snake is wound around a person's heel, he should not interrupt his Shemoneh Esrei prayer." The *Bartenura* explains that this refers to a snake which usually doesn't bite.

This is puzzling; how can a person be obligated to remain standing in prayer when there is even a remote possibility of being bitten by a snake?

When a person stands in prayer before Hashem, he should concentrate and realize that he is standing before the King. One should try to the best of his ability to be entirely attached to Hashem while praying. This involves cleansing one's heart and preparing oneself appropriately before starting to pray. When a person does teshuvah in this way, he surely has no need to be afraid of snakes. He is filled with awe and fear of Hashem, as opposed to fear of the snake, which represents sin. As such, the snake has no power over him.

If one is afraid of the snake, particularly while praying, it is a sign that he is not yet cleansed of sin. How can he then help himself? By actually continuing to stand in the very same place and intensifying his prayer! He should “grab the moment” to repent thoroughly, and then he can be sure of being saved from harm. He will see that the snake was actually sent by Hashem to encourage him to repent.

I think that there are two different ways in which we can understand the meaning of the word פחד, fear.

The first meaning is that a person is always in awe of Hashem and afraid of His justice, constantly concerned lest he commit a sin. He is filled with fear and awe of Hashem at all times and wherever he goes. Tehillim states (51:5), “My sin is before me always.” The more a person increases his *yirat Shamayim*, the greater is his capacity to fear Hashem.

The second kind of fear results from a person's sins. They cause him to constantly worry about all kinds of things. The more he sins, the wider an opening he makes within himself for the forces of the *kelippah* to seep in.

The word פחד itself hints at these two types of fear. Its letters can be rearranged to read חף דלת (innocent, door). When a person is innocent

of sin, he increases the fear of Hashem within himself. He “opens the door” allowing fear of Hashem to enter his heart.

The word פחד can also be rearranged to read פח דלת (snare, door). When a person is full of sins, he “opens the door” for the impure forces of the *kelippah*, known as the פח, to enter his heart.

[This essay was written during the Gulf War, which explains the context of the following.]

This understanding is particularly pertinent to our present period, when the whole world is concerned over the Iraqi threat. Instead of being afraid of the enemy, we should be afraid and in awe of Hashem’s glory, and try our utmost to improve ourselves in whatever way we can. If we were free of all failings, we would have no fear of missiles, atom bombs or any other danger. Our fear would be directed only to fearing the Al-mighty.

In addition, when a person is afraid of war and the like, the *Yetzer Hara* is able to take advantage of this and cause him to slacken in his Torah learning. He starts listening to the news all day to know exactly what is going on, and his whole head becomes stuffed with nonsense. His entire spiritual existence may become endangered. Moreover, when a person listens to the radio and reads the news, he is liable to see and hear forbidden things, which he is careful to avoid under regular circumstances. These things can easily introduce foreign thoughts into his mind, and undermine the fear of Heaven which he has already acquired.

I heard of a certain Torah scholar living in Bnei Brak whose actions demonstrated his fear of Hashem to the exclusion of all else. One Erev Shabbat, a siren was heard throughout Eretz Yisrael, alerting the Jews of the swiftly approaching Iraqi scud missiles. Everyone went running into their sealed rooms to put on their gas masks, but this *talmid chacham* opened his window and kept on learning, as if nothing was happening

around him. He wasn't crazy; he simply knew that he had no sin for which to be afraid and thus fully trusted that Hashem would protect him from all harm. Hashem neither sleeps nor slumbers, and always watches over His people.

The Gemara, too, tells many stories of Jews who were filled with trust in Hashem and were unafraid of anything else. Once, the Roman government made a decree against wearing tefillin, saying that whoever would be caught with tefillin on his head would be put to death. Yet a man named Elisha went out to the marketplace with his tefillin. (It was customary at the time to wear tefillin all day.) When a Roman soldier began to chase him, Elisha tried to escape, but the soldier overtook him. Elisha removed the tefillin from his head and held them in his hands. When he opened his hands, they turned into two wings of a dove. Afterwards, he was known by all as "Elisha of the Wings."

We see that Elisha had no fear at all, as he left his house with tefillin despite the Roman decree. When he removed the tefillin from his head, he experienced an open miracle. He fully relied on Hashem's ability to save him; his fear was directed toward Hashem alone.

If Elisha was so sure of a miracle being performed, why did he even remove the tefillin when the Roman soldier caught him? If he had enough trust to go into the street with tefillin, didn't he have enough trust to leave them on his head once arrested? The answer is that even when a person relies on being saved by a miracle, he should attempt to minimize the miracle as much as possible. This is because being aided by open miracles in this world takes away from a person's reward in the World to Come. We see that Yaakov Avinu was afraid that all of the kindnesses which Hashem had constantly showered upon him would detract from the reward which awaited him in the World to Come.

Thus, we see that Elisha had no fear of the Romans when he put on tefillin. From this account, every person can learn that when he is in a

state of fear and danger, he should overcome his fear and strengthen his trust in Hashem, returning to Him with all his heart.

At the same time, one should try to make sure not to reach such a state of fear in the first place. One should weigh his actions so as not to stumble in sin, and then he will have no need to fear. Chazal teach (*Avot* 3:1), “Akavia ben Mehalelel said, ‘Consider three things and you will never sin. Know from whence you come, and to where you are headed, and before Whom you are to give your final reckoning.’” At first glance, this might seem hard to understand – after all, these three things are very elementary. There are plenty of people who know that they will be asked to give an accounting of their lives, believing in reward and punishment, yet they continue to sin.

The answer is that just knowing these truisms is not enough to prevent one from sinning. Their message needs to be deeply rooted in one’s consciousness. To achieve this, he should imagine the day that he will leave this world and stand before his Maker. He will be called upon to give an accounting of how he lived his life. The Vilna Gaon says that the Hebrew word for accounting, חשבון, implies that a person will give an explanation for every moment of his life. This means that he will be judged not only for any sins which he may have committed, but also for wasting time that could have been spent in positive ways. Every moment that could have been used for Torah study will have to be accounted for.

When a person takes these things to heart, he will certainly be afraid to sin. On the other hand, if he never gives any consideration to these ideas, he may find himself falling further every day. Merely giving a small amount of thought to these words of Chazal is enough to ensure that they will make an impression on him. When a person does allow his heart to be filled with the fear and awe of Hashem, he will be saved from any wrongdoing and will have no need to fear anything else in the world.

## ———— In Summary ————

- When Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was told that there was a venomous snake in the area, he went and placed his foot over its hole. The snake bit Rabbi Chanina, yet it died while Rabbi Chanina remained alive. From this incident, Rabbi Chanina proved that it is not the snake that kills, rather, sin kills. The reason that Rabbi Chanina was not afraid to approach the snake's hole was that he knew that he didn't need to be concerned about being punished for any sin. He realized that since his fear of Hashem was complete, He would protect him.
- This is the reason that even if a snake is wrapped around a person's heel, he is not allowed to interrupt his Shemoneh Esrei prayer. If a person is afraid of a snake, it is a sign that he has a specific sin to be afraid of. Yet if he is afraid only of Hashem, the snake is powerless over him. He should consider that the snake was sent to him in order to awaken him to repent, and to fear Hashem alone. When the world is threatened by war, one should also be afraid only of Hashem. Then, he will not need to be afraid of bombs and scuds.
- We find that "Elisha of the Wings" was not afraid of the Roman government. He merited miraculous deliverance because he was afraid only of Hashem. He did not leave the tefillin on his head after the soldier overtook him in order to minimize the miracle that had occurred, since it would detract from his reward in the World to Come. We can all learn from him to be afraid only of Hashem.
- Internalizing Chazal's message that we will in the future be required to give an accounting of our actions will help us attain the exalted level of fearing Hashem alone.

# TORAH



## TORAH BROADENS ONE'S OUTLOOK

Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Beit Hamikdash. One of them was that no man ever said to his fellow, “There is insufficient place (lit. it is too narrow) for me to stay overnight in Yerushalayim” (*Avot* 5:7).

What is the reason for noting this? Would the sanctity of the Beit Hamikdash, the heart of Yerushalayim, be decreased had someone mentioned to his friend that the space was tight in the city?

Moreover, why shouldn't someone complain about the crowdedness if, indeed, it was crowded? And if it wasn't crowded, why would a person make such a declaration? Also, what benefit would he gain by stating it was crowded; did he have an alternative place to bring sacrifices other than the Beit Hamikdash? And who was he, anyway, to be so bold as to speak this way about Yerushalayim and the Beit Hamikdash, the most sacred place for Am Yisrael? And, most puzzling of all: why was this considered a miracle?

Chazal are showing us how the *Yetzer Hara* tries to cause people to stumble and distance them from all forms of holiness. He tries to prevent one from rising spiritually, under the guise of claiming that “the space is insufficient for me.”

The Gemara (*Yerushalmi Ta'anit* 2:9) relates the following statement of Rabbi Abahu, “The pasuk in Tehillim (4:2) states, ‘When I call, answer me, O G-d of my vindication. You have relieved me in my distress.’ David

Hamelech told Hashem, ‘Master of the universe! You widened for me any narrow place in which I found myself. I found myself in a narrow place because of what happened with Batsheva; then You gave me Shlomo. I had problems with Am Yisrael; then You gave me the Beit Hamikdash.’”

Why do Chazal use the terms “narrow” and “wide” rather than saying that Hashem “saved” or “rescued” David?

Perhaps we can resolve this question with the following idea. One of the reasons why it is extremely difficult for the rasha to abandon his evil ways and wholeheartedly return to Hashem is the following. The *Yetzer Hara*, our arch enemy, makes people think that if they take upon themselves the “yoke” of Torah and mitzvot, life will become very restricted. He implies that they will have to give up their previous broadmindedness, and the freedom that they were used to having. What is the point of placing oneself in a world of prohibitions and limitations? Why should one keep Shabbat, for example? One is simply confining oneself in order not to transgress any of the prohibitions.

The *Yetzer Hara* is armed against the *ben Torah*, as well. He tells him, “Your desire to ascend to higher levels is an act of extra piety. If you reach elevated spiritual heights, you will have to forgo many things, even those halachically permitted. What do you need it for?” This narrow picture of a life of Torah and mitzvot that the *Yetzer Hara* paints for him prevents a person from moving forward in his spiritual *avodah*, and from doing teshuvah.

Chazal instruct us (*Yevamot* 20a): “Sanctify yourself by that which is permitted to you.” This is said to every Jew. Specifically in regard to the permitted, the *Yetzer Hara* widens a person’s heart to an exaggerated extent, in order to cause him to sin. “Sanctify yourself” means to narrow yourself and distance yourself from these pleasures, even though they are halachically permitted.

The *Yetzer Hara* is called יצר, from the root צר (narrow), as he causes one to have a narrow perspective and thus fall into the trap of

transgression. The only way to escape this is through Torah. Tehillim (19:9) states, “The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul.” This refers to learning Torah and keeping mitzvot happily and contentedly. David Hamelech states (ibid. 119:45), “And I will walk in broad pathways, for I have sought Your precepts.” David is saying, “How was it that I always escaped a confining situation, then enjoying an expansive one? By merit of the Torah, in which I was constantly involved.” In spite of the trials and tribulations which David Hamelech endured, whether because of his enemies, or the *Yetzer Hara*, he succeeded in fleeing them, in the *zechut* of Torah. Thus, he was able to escape his narrow straits and walk the broad, secure roads.

David Hamelech further states (ibid. 118:5), “From the straits did I call upon G-d; G-d answered me with expansiveness.” Whenever I entered a “narrow” place, I called out to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and He answered me with expansiveness. With His help, I managed to subdue my *Yetzer Hara*, walking always on the wide roads. I succeeded in rising spiritually, thanks to my *nisayon*, and not to fall in spirit.

We can now understand why the terms “narrow” and “wide” are used. The *nisayon* which the *Yetzer Hara* placed before David Hamelech was to put him into a situation of “narrowness.” Only by means of Torah study, which expands the mind of man, was he able to extract himself from his plight. He didn’t merely emerge; he ascended. For much good came out of his trials: Shlomo Hamelech and the Beit Hamikdash.

This is as Hashem has told us (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.” The inherent light of the Torah returns people to the proper path (*Yerushalmi Chagigah* 1:7). Instead of looking at the world of Torah as a tight, dark place (as, unfortunately, many of our lost brothers do), we must see the light in the Torah and perceive the Torah world as a bright one. “Light refers to Torah” (*Megillah* 16b). We should sense the innate beauty and freedom of a Torah life.

When one observes the world of Torah as spacious, he feels himself truly liberated. We learn this lesson from the *luchot*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 32:16) that the Ten Commandments were “חרות על הלוחות – Engraved on the tablets.” Our Sages expound (*Avot* 6:2), “Do not read חרות (engraved on the tablets), but חירות (freedom), for only one who engages in Torah is a truly free man.”

When one views Torah with this attitude, he will see Shabbat in a completely different light. Instead of perceiving it as a day spent in prison, when he is prohibited from working or smoking, one will see it as a day of radiance. He will discover it to be a day of liberation from labor, from smoking, and from all types of physical bondage. Shabbat is a day devoted completely to Hashem. One becomes a more spiritual being on Shabbat, for it is a day designated for Torah. One is capable of rising to great heights on Shabbat, and may even accept upon himself new stringencies in his quest for spirituality. He will be capable of reaching the ultimate expanse, in the vicinity of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This is truly wonderful, as one who has experienced will testify.

Let us consider another point concerning the statement “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.” Chazal state (*Devarim Rabbah* 7:10) that the Aron is analogous to Torah scholars. In the Wilderness, two sparks of fire emerged from between the poles on the sides of the Aron. They would scorch all snakes and scorpions that were in the way of our nation as they traveled. This was in the merit of the Torah which we accepted at Sinai.

This teaches that in the merit of pursuing Torah one walks on broad paths. It is the Torah itself which leads a person, removing all stumbling blocks which the *Yetzer Hara* places before those who learn it. The *zechut* of Torah protects man and rescues him even when he is not involved in learning (*Sotah* 21a). The Torah is implanted within us, and is the perfect antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*.

The potency of Torah is described in Mishlei (6:23), “For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light.” Chazal explain that just as a lamp is effective only for a limited time, so, too, the merit of a mitzvah protects a person for a limited time. On the other hand, just as the light of the sun protects the world eternally, so, too, does the *zechut* of Torah protect one forever. Torah releases man from his constraints.

Parenthetically, I would like to mention a phenomenon that we see today. Unfortunately, there has been a decrease in the spiritual status of North African Jewry. Children who have arrived from there to European countries have shaken off the traditional education which they had received from their parents. There is, regrettably, a large percentage of intermarriage among them, *rachmana litzlan*. Hashem should return them to their heritage. How did such a thing come about?

This can be explained according to the words of Chazal (*Sotah* 21). The main focus of their education was placed only on keeping mitzvot, and not on Torah study. This is referred to as “traditional Judaism.” It can be compared to the candle, which lights up a small area for a limited amount of time. Had Torah study been the central element of their education, the light of Torah would have illuminated them and their offspring after them, even when they were in an environment distant from Torah. I do not wish to blame anyone; I merely want to raise an awareness of the situation. Hashem should help us in this.

Once we realize that Torah shows a person the breadth of this world, and enables him to enjoy and utilize that breadth, we can return to our original question. Now we can appreciate the miracle that transpired at the time of the Beit Hamikdash that no one said to his fellow, “The space is insufficient for me to stay overnight in Yerushalayim.”

The *Yetzer Hara* never succeeded in placing a person in Yerushalayim into a situation of “narrowness,” meaning, a situation of dissatisfaction and confinement. This was surely a result of the wonderful feeling of elevation gained from the light which emanated from the Beit Hamikdash,

surrounding it and the entire Yerushalayim. Chazal tell us that the *Yetzer Hara* had no control in the Beit Hamikdash. A person, therefore, always had a feeling of freedom and spiritual expansion in Yerushalayim.

The fact that the *Yetzer Hara* had no influence over a person in the Beit Hamikdash was an open miracle. Had someone complained about the crowdedness, it would have damaged his spiritual level, for “narrowness” is a spiritual phenomenon. Even those who were in a location distant from the Beit Hamikdash felt the influence of the fires of spirituality that emanated from it. The *Yetzer Hara* had no control over them in their Avodat Hashem whatsoever.

Now we can better understand the pasuk (*Shemot* 23:17) “Three times during the year shall all your menfolk appear before the Lord, Hashem.” All those who ascended to Yerushalayim on the festivals to appear before Hashem, and wished to attain growth in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, certainly made prior preparations. They strengthened themselves in fear of Heaven. When they arrived in Yerushalayim, they were already perfect people, in body and spirit. This is hinted to by the words, “ראה כל זכורך” – Shall all your menfolk appear.” The word ראה (appear) is spelled the same as the word ראה (fear). The nation was enjoined to display fear of Heaven in the Beit Hamikdash. The *Yetzer Hara* had no sway on such people.

No one ever complained that the space was insufficient in Yerushalayim, because Hashem’s glory was present there. Hashem is called המקום (The Place). He is the “place” of the entire world (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:10). Before Hashem there is only broadness and wide space. Therefore, no one ever said, “צר לי המקום” – The place is too small.”

However, one could feel this way only if he made proper preparation before ascending to Yerushalayim. The *Yetzer Hara* wishes to portray a bleak picture of narrowness and misfortune, but this never happened in Yerushalayim. This, then, is the miracle that took place there.

We might explain the words “the place is insufficient or narrow” in the following manner. The *Yetzer Hara* constantly tries to put a person into a

situation of pressure and distress, leaving him no alternative but to sin. The Gemara states (*Shabbat* 105b), “Today he tells a person to do this...until he convinces him to worship idols.” Through the power of Torah study, a person can be saved from the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*, escaping his previous confinement. Torah broadens the path for man. An example of this is an incident that happened with Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir. The Satan disguised himself as a woman in order to entice them. However, they remained steadfast in their convictions, and were not seduced (*Kiddushin* 81a).

We see how our forefather, Yaakov, emerged from narrow straits. When he escaped from Eisav, he didn’t immediately flee to Charan. Rather, he spent fourteen years in the Beit Hamidrash of Shem and Ever (*Megillah* 17a). This intensive period of Torah learning freed him from the constraints imposed by the *Yetzer Hara*, enabling him to attain an expansive outlook. Now he was ready to face the trials of Lavan in Charan (see *Bereishit* 29:1). Hashem appeared to him, blessing him with eternal blessings.

Herein lies the power of Torah. When one ascends spiritually, he does not experience a feeling of constriction in keeping mitzvot. The Torah pulls him out of narrow places to wide paths. The Torah enables a person to have a broad perspective and feel peace of mind. This in turn enables him to learn Torah, thus fulfilling the will of Hashem, and saving himself from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. He can thus serve Hashem wholeheartedly, with all his heart and soul.

### ————— In Summary —————

- One of the miracles that took place in the Beit Hamikdash was that no one ever complained that there was insufficient place in Yerushalayim. The *Yetzer Hara* constantly endeavors to place a person in a situation of confinement. He claims that a life of Torah restricts one from pursuing physical pleasures. David Hamelech told Hashem that whenever he felt constrained, Hashem broadened his

path. How was this? With the power of Torah, which liberates a person. A person who lives a Torah way of life will view Shabbat as a day of light and joy. It is Torah that gives him this perspective.

- Torah protects a person even when he is not learning. This is in contrast to a mitzvah, whose power is limited. The miracle in the Beit Hamikdash was that no one felt constricted, because the *Yetzer Hara* had no control there. If a person would have stated that he felt constrained, it would have damaged his spiritual level. But those who came to the Beit Hamikdash on the holidays made extensive preparation, strengthening their *yirat Shamayim*. In this manner, they constantly enjoyed an expansive outlook. There is no sense of constriction when one connects to Hashem.
- The *Yetzer Hara* tries to lock a person into a narrow condition, so that he is unable to flee from sin. With the power of Torah, man can prevail. The Torah removes one from narrowness to broad expanses. The incident with Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir illustrates this. We find that Yaakov Avinu was able to achieve a feeling of expansiveness in his Avodat Hashem only after fourteen years of Torah study in the Beit Hamidrash of Shem and Ever.

## A Practical Lesson

The power of Torah always protects, even when one is not involved in its study. If we want our children to continue ascending spiritually and receive a pure education, they must be trained not only in mitzvot, which protect one for a short time, but also in Torah, whose power and effects are long-term. The Torah enables us to achieve expansiveness of mind and appreciate the existence of Hashem.

## TORAH PROTECTS AND SAVES

Chazal relate (*Yoma* 35b) that a pauper, a wealthy man, and a wicked person will arrive to be judged in the Heavenly Court. The pauper will be asked, “Why did you not learn Torah?” He will reply, “I was a poor person, constantly involved in earning a livelihood.” To which they will counter,

“Were you poorer than Hillel Hazakein?” Hillel gave up all of his money to be able to learn in the Beit Hamidrash of Shmayah and Avtalyon.

The rich man will be asked, “Why did you not learn Torah?” He will reply, “I was involved in my businesses, and had no time to study Torah.” To which they will counter, “Were you wealthier than Rabbi Elazar (ben Charsom)?” Despite his wealth, he would go from town to town, learning Torah.

Finally, they will ask the rasha, “Why did you not learn Torah?” He will reply, “I was exceptionally good-looking and involved with my *Yetzer Hara*.” To which they will counter, “Were you more handsome than Yosef (Hatzaddik)?” He was exceptionally good-looking, and the wife of Potiphar constantly tried to seduce him to sin. But he never sinned with her.

Hillel obligates the paupers, Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom obligates the wealthy, and Yosef Hatzaddik obligates the wicked.

Rabbi Rabinowitz, shlita, asks the following in his sefer, *Inyanei Teshuvah*, in the name of a certain tzaddik. Hillel and Rabbi Elazar learned Torah in poverty and wealth, and through the Torah were able to overcome their respective *nisyonot*. Whereas, the Gemara tells us that Yosef withstood the temptation of the wife of Potiphar, but does not mention that he learned Torah. Therefore, how can we bring him as an example of one who overcame his *Yetzer Hara* through Torah study?

It is known that the Torah protects and shields one from the *Yetzer Hara* and sin (*Sotah* 21a). Torah is described as the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b). This teaches that one who learns Torah can easily overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. If someone does not manage to withstand his *Yetzer Hara*, it is a sure sign that he is remiss in Torah study, and therefore, the Torah does not protect him.

The fact that Yosef Hatzaddik did not succumb to the *Yetzer Hara* by sinning with the wife of Potiphar indicates that he did learn. The Torah protected him, as it protects everyone from sinning.

Proof of this is that Yosef sent wagons (עגלות) to his father (*Bereishit* 45:27), hinting to the topic of the *eglah arufah* (עגלה ערופה) that they were learning together before his abduction (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3). He was, in essence, telling his father that even though he was sold as a slave, he continued studying Torah. In this merit, Yosef was guarded against the impure ploys of the wife of Potiphar.

Furthermore, the Torah states that Yosef came to the house “to do his work.” The Gemara explains that “his work” refers to the work of learning Torah. This is what protected Yosef from the evil wiles of Potiphar’s wife. Even those commentaries who claim that Yosef was ready to capitulate to her prolonged persuasions agree that he did not succumb, in the merit of the image of his father, which appeared before him, discouraging him from this act. Without the merit of Torah, it would have been nearly impossible for him to be spared from this sin.

Torah can also be described as the “image of his father,” as Torah can be compared to a person’s father, who teaches him. We call one who constantly learns Torah a *ben Torah*. Moreover, the *middah* of Yaakov, Yosef’s father, was Torah. The *Navi* states (*Michah* 7:20), “Grant truth to Yaakov.” Truth is Torah. When the image of Torah stood before Yosef, he was rescued from sinning. Therefore, he rightfully obligates the sinners.

As well as learning Torah, one must protect his eyes in order to evade the schemes of the *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal relate (*Yalkut Shimoni Vayechi* 49a, *remez* 161) a remarkable story regarding Rabbi Mattia ben Charash. He sat in the Beit Hamidrash, learning Torah. His face shone like the sun, and he never lifted his eyes to look at a woman. Once, the Satan passed by and became jealous of him. He asked, “Could it be that he never sinned?” He then asked Hashem for permission to entice him to sin. Hashem told the *Yetzer Hara* that he would never succeed, but gave him permission to try.

The Satan stood before Rabbi Mattia disguised as a woman. No woman had been more beautiful since the days of the sister of Tuval Cain. Rabbi

Mattia saw her and turned away. The Satan placed himself in Rabbi Mattia's line of vision, and once again he averted his gaze. The Satan did not give up, and stood before him in all different positions, until Rabbi Mattia cried out, "I am afraid that my *Yetzer Hara* will get the better of me, and cause me to sin." He immediately called for his attendant, and asked for a fire and nails. Rabbi Mattia heated up the nails and poked out his eyes with them. Upon seeing this, the Satan fell to the ground.

Hashem instructed the angel Refael to heal Rabbi Mattia. But Rabbi Mattia refused to be healed. He told the angel, "Leave me alone. Whatever was, was." Refael took his words up to heaven. Then Hashem told him, "Go and tell Rabbi Mattia that I guarantee that the *Yetzer Hara* will have no control over him." He was immediately healed. From here, our *Chachamim* teach that one who restrains himself from gazing at women, is liberated from the *Yetzer Hara*.

We see from this narrative that Torah learning by itself is not sufficient to protect one from the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*. Rabbi Mattia spent all his time learning, yet the Satan still endeavored to provoke him to sin. One must guard his eyes, in purity and holiness. Then, the *Yetzer Hara* will have no sway over him. Rather, he will overcome the *Yetzer Hara*.

However, we are still left with a question. Rabbi Mattia ben Charash was in very grave danger. The *Yetzer Hara* was trying its utmost to seduce him. What did he do? He ordered his attendant to bring him nails, which he heated up and thrust through his eyes. But a good few minutes passed until they became hot. The *Yetzer Hara*, meanwhile, was standing before him, enticing him to sin. How did Rabbi Mattia manage to repel him during that time?

In the few moments when the student went to heat up the nails, Rabbi Mattia certainly continued learning Torah. The Torah surely protected him. When he expressed his fervent desire to protect his eyes at all costs, being willing even to sacrifice his eyes, the merit of Torah saved him from falling into the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. It was known to all that he

wished to engage in Torah study, as well as guard his eyes. In the *zechut* of both, one overcomes the *Yetzer Hara*.

In the World to Come, a person will be asked whether or not he engaged in Torah study (*Shabbat* 31a). If he responds, “I was good-looking, and involved in feeding my *Yetzer Hara*,” they will answer that had he learned Torah, he could easily have gained victory over the *Yetzer Hara*. The fact that the *Yetzer Hara* overpowered him signifies that he did not learn Torah. Yosef Hatzaddik was involved in Torah study during his most difficult hour, and succeeded in subduing his *Yetzer Hara*.

This sheds light on Yirmeyahu Hanavi’s statement that Eretz Yisrael was laid waste because Bnei Yisrael forsook the Torah. The *Navi* is teaching that the nation could accrue so many aveirot, warranting the *churban*, only because the Torah was not uppermost in their minds. They were not sufficiently connected to the Torah. Had they been connected, they certainly would have overcome their *Yetzer Hara*, and not sinned, averting the destruction. Torah is the remedy for all of man’s organs; Torah protects and rescues.

When one is attached to Torah, he can prevail over the *Yetzer* both in times of wealth and in times of poverty. The Torah protects him. David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 40:9), “Your Torah is in my innards.” The Torah is literally inside of a person, and in its merit, one can conquer his *Yetzer Hara*.

Chazal say (*Berachot* 61b) that when Rabbi Akiva was taken to be put to death, it was the time to recite Kriyat Shema. The Romans were combing his flesh with iron combs, and he accepted the decree of Heaven with love. His disciples asked him, “Rebbi, to this extent?” He answered, “All my life, I longed to fulfill the passage, ‘You shall love Hashem...with all your soul.’ This means even when He is taking your soul. Now that I have the opportunity, shouldn’t I fulfill it?!” He recited the Shema, lengthening the word “*echad*,” until his soul expired.

There are two points here which demand clarification. The first is: Why were Rabbi Akiva's students so amazed by his self-sacrifice at the time of reciting Kriyat Shema? He was merely fulfilling the injunction of our Sages, who state that a person should love Hashem even at the moment of death, when He takes away our life. The second difficulty is: What, in essence, was Rabbi Akiva trying to transmit to his pupils? Everyone knows that one should fulfill this command to love Hashem at the moment of death. Why did he need to say it?

At the moment of death, the *Yetzer Hara* approaches a person and tries to convince him to deny Hashem, deceiving him into thinking that this will spare him from death. In reality, he brings a person terrible suffering and pain. Rabbi Akiva knew this. As long as he was learning with his pupils, the Torah protected him from the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*. But at the time that he was taken to be killed, he ceased learning. Immediately, the *Yetzer Hara* came to him, to persuade him to deny Hashem. Rabbi Akiva had no intention of heeding him.

The students were in awe of their master. Even in this trying time of torment and agony, their teacher refused to surrender. Therefore, they asked him, "This is Torah; we want to understand it. How can you override your *Yetzer Hara* to such a great extent, even in this difficult hour? From where do you derive such strength?"

To which Rabbi Akiva responded, "The Torah states, 'You shall love Hashem... with all your heart.' This means with the *Yetzer Hatov* as well as the *Yetzer Hara*. One must love Hashem even when at the brink of death, when the *Yetzer Hara* is doing its utmost to convince him to deny Hashem. Even then, one is enjoined to fortify himself against the *Yetzer Hara*, and love only Hashem."

How can someone attain such a level of love, and triumph over the *Yetzer Hara*? It is by means of fulfilling what is written further in the parashah (*Devarim* 6:7), "You shall speak of them (Torah statutes) while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way..." It is through

uninterrupted Torah study. If the Torah is engraved upon a person's heart, and in his soul, entering the very fiber of his being, the *Yetzer Hara* can have no hold over him. The Torah protects him even in the most difficult moments. Although the *Yetzer Hara* desires to ensnare a person, the Torah rises to his defense, and shelters him.

We find a hint to this in the words of our Sages (*Avot* 2:10): "Repent one day before your death." Why are we instructed to repent specifically one day before death, and not on the day of death itself? The answer is that since no one knows when he will die, maybe he will be disconnected from Torah at that time, and the *Yetzer Hara* will overwhelm him. To avoid that, one must always be connected to Torah. This will guarantee that also in his last moments he will be bound up with Torah, and will thus easily vanquish his *Yetzer Hara*.

The following account illustrates the exalted level of the person who engages in Torah all his life. Chazal (*Berachot* 28b) tell us that just before he died, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai told his pupils, "Remove the vessels because of the impurity [that will affect them once I die]. And prepare a seat for King Chizkiyahu who has arrived." Rashi explains that Chizkiyahu arrived to escort Rabbi Yochanan to the next world. What did Rabbi Yochanan do to merit this honor?

Rabbi Yochanan's insignia was Torah, as was Chizkiyahu's. Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 94b) that in the days of Chizkiyahu, they searched from Dan (in the north), to Beer Sheva (in the south), and found that there was not one child who wasn't well-versed in the halachot of *tumah* and *taharah*. Bnei Yisrael were replete with Torah as a pomegranate is full of seeds. At his death, a Sefer Torah was laid upon the bed of Chizkiyahu, and they stated, "This (Chizkiyahu) fulfilled what is written in this (the Torah)." Moreover, a yeshiva was established above his grave (*Bava Kama* 16b-17a), as his entire essence was Torah.

We see just how great is the reward of someone who is bound up with the Torah, and conducts himself in purity by always guarding his eyes.

The giants of our nation go out to greet him at his death, to take pleasure in his visage, since all his days, he labored to control his *Yetzer Hara*, triumphing over it in the merit of Torah.

We find that at Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's death, the Angel of Death did not come to seduce him to sin. On the contrary, the great King Chizkiyahu arrived to greet him. Rabbi Yochanan merited this due to his constant Torah study, up until his death. Learning Torah protects a person from fearing the Angel of Death. Furthermore, tzaddikim are sent to watch over him before his *neshamah* departs.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal tell us that Hillel the Elder obligates the paupers, Rabbi Elazar ben Charsum obligates the wealthy, and Yosef Hatzaddik obligates the resha'im to learn Torah. This is hard to understand. The Gemara connects only Hillel and Rabbi Elazar to Torah study. It does not mention that Yosef Hatzaddik learned Torah. We see only that he overcame his *Yetzer Hara*, and did not sin. Therefore, how does Yosef prove that Torah protects a person from sin, thereby obligating the resha'im?
- One can defeat the *Yetzer Hara* only by virtue of Torah study. If the *Yetzer Hara* gains control over a person it indicates that he was not sufficiently involved in learning Torah. The fact that Yosef overcame his *Yetzer Hara* and did not sin is a clear sign that even during his test he was involved in Torah study. This is hinted to by the fact that Yosef entered the house in order "to do his day's work," which signifies "working in Torah." Those who say that he entered the house in submission to the seductions of his master's wife maintain that the visage of Yaakov, whose *middah* was Torah, appeared to Yosef, saving him from sin. Both opinions agree that he was spared in the merit of Torah, which protected him.
- However, it is not sufficient to learn Torah, one must also guard his eyes. Rabbi Mattia feared sinning, to the extent that he poked out his eyes in order to avoid temptation. For this reason a person is asked, upon arriving at the Heavenly Court, "Did you engage in Torah study?" For, if he had been involved in Torah, he could easily have overcome his *Yetzer Hara*.

- We find this concept borne out by Rabbi Akiva. At the time of death, he recited the Shema, subduing his *Yetzer Hara*. The *Yetzer Hara* tries to induce a person to sin at the moment of death, yet, with the power of Torah one can conquer him.
- If a person engages in Torah all his life, and protects his eyes from improper sights, his reward is very great. Hashem sends Gedolei Torah to greet his *neshamah* upon its arrival in the next world. They are fitting escorts for such a person since his entire essence was Torah.

## FIXING TIMES FOR TORAH STUDY

In the Ma'ariv prayer, we say, "He alters periods (משנה עתים) and changes the seasons." David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 119:126), "עת' לה' לעשות – For it is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah." What is the connection between these two "times"?

The Rambam (*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 81:11) says that Hashem is above time and is not limited. Who can tell Him what to do? Only Hashem can alter periods and change seasons, since He is not bound by time.

But mortal man has only a limited number of years in this world, as it says (*Tehillim* 90:10), "The days of our years are but seventy years, and if with might, eighty years." One must set aside time for Torah study. Chazal state (*Shabbat* 31b) that when a person will be brought to justice, he will be asked whether or not he fixed times for learning Torah. For, if one does not set aside time for Torah study, he could violate the mitzvot, *chas v'shalom*.

For this reason, one should strive to maintain fixed times for Torah study. If he were to disregard his Torah learning, he would definitely fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. Moreover, he would be answerable for all those hours previously consecrated for Torah learning, which are now neglected. Therefore, a person should make sure to establish set times for

Torah, as a foundation for his life, according to the injunction “You shall choose life” (*Devarim* 30:19). Those times should be used only for Torah study.

It is wonderful to consider how much satisfaction one gives his Creator through his learning Torah, as Chazal say (*Berachot* 17a), “Fortunate is the one who grew in Torah, and his endeavors were in Torah, and he brings satisfaction to his Creator.” One’s entire life should revolve around Torah, even were he to live thousands of years. Not only must one pursue Torah knowledge during the daytime, but also at night, as our Sages say (*Eiruvin* 65a) that the nighttime was created specifically for Torah study.

One should not think that it is sufficient to keep the mitzvot. Yirmeyahu Hanavi (33:25) states, “If my covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth.” “My covenant” refers to Torah; it ensures the continued existence of the world. Furthermore, Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:6) that the entire world was created for Torah. Therefore, through doing mitzvot alone, man does not fulfill his obligation. [This subject had been discussed in *The Torah Broadens One’s Outlook*. The power of Torah is greater than that of mitzvot, because the Torah’s influence is eternal.]

We should take a lesson from our Avot Hakedoshim. Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 26b) that they fixed specific times for prayer. Avraham instituted tefillat Shacharit, as the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 19:27), “Avraham arose early in the morning to the place.” Yitzchak instituted tefillat Michah, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 24:65), “Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field toward evening.” Yaakov instituted Ma’ariv, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 28:11), “He encountered the place.” The word “encounter” refers to prayer.

Similarly, throughout the generations, our Sages also established fixed times for Kriyat Shema, tefillah, laying tefillin, and sanctifying the new moon. The Torah stipulates the times for holidays and festivals. However, the Torah is unlimited and there is no set time specified for its study.

Thus, each person should specify for himself fixed times for Torah study. By doing so, one will surely succeed in life.

The point of establishing fixed times for learning Torah and doing mitzvot teaches us the value of time, as our Sages say, (*Avot* 1:14), “If not now, when?” We should realize that time that has passed is gone forever; if one does not grasp the moment he can lose eternity. *Sefer Hachaim* (10:1) quotes the saying, “Man worries for money earned day by day, yet not for his life which fades away. Money helps not, he will learn, nor will his days return.” Furthermore, our Sages say (*Midrash Shmuel* 5:23) that there is no loss equivalent to the loss of time.

Because time is so precious, the *Yetzer Hara* tries to lead man astray by having him while away his time in idle pursuits. In this manner, he will lose time, never to retrieve it. Man’s days are like a fleeting shadow (*Tehillim* 144:4). What a shame to waste such a valuable gift, which will never return.

In light of the above, we can explain our original pasuk (*Tehillim* 119:126), “For it is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah.” One should ensure that he sets aside a fixed time to “act for Hashem.” This is through learning Torah. Otherwise, he will be considered as one who has “voided Your Torah.” As we have said, *bitul* Torah causes a person to violate the Torah and its mitzvot.

On the other hand, setting aside fixed times for Torah study causes one to feel true love for the Torah and its mitzvot. This is indicated by the pasuk in *Tehillim* which states (*ibid.* vs. 33), “הוריני ה' דרך חוקיך ואצרנה” – **עקב** – Teach me, O Hashem, the way of Your statutes, and I will cherish it to the utmost.” How does one learn the “ways of Hashem’s statutes?” By means of “cherishing them to the utmost,” by fixing set times for Torah study. This is alluded to by the word **עקב**, which comprises the initials of the words **קביעת עיתים בתורה** (fixing times for Torah study). In this manner, one is assured of fulfilling all the mitzvot.

Chazal teach (*Kiddushin* 39b), “The reward for mitzvot is not in this world.” Why can one not receive reward for his mitzvot in this world? Perhaps we can answer according to what we have explained above. Time is so very precious that it should be spent only in Torah study. If a person were to receive payment for his mitzvot in this world, it would cause *bitul* Torah, as he would be constantly involved in calculating how much reward is coming to him, and all the pleasures he is anticipating. For this reason, reward is stored away, prepared for him in the World to Come.

Chazal tell us (*Avodah Zarah* 2a), “In the future, Hashem will place a Torah scroll in His lap, and proclaim, ‘Whoever was involved in learning Torah, come and take your reward!’” He will not say, “Whoever was involved in fulfilling mitzvot, come and take your reward.” This is because the crucial aspect of Torah is setting time for learning. The main reward, therefore, will be for those who engaged in Torah study. Learning Torah brings one to keep mitzvot. One who learned Torah can anticipate receiving reward from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The sefer *Ilana D’chayei* states that tzaddikim build worlds even with their mundane speech. Chazal state (*Avodah Zarah* 19b), “The mundane speech of *talmidei chachamim* requires study, for the majority of people cannot fathom their holy words, clothed in simple garb.”

Let us explain. The tzaddik purposely speaks simply. This is in order to quiet the prosecutions of the Satan. For when the Satan sees a righteous person speaking about ordinary matters, he considers him lowly, and does not feel a need to find fault with him. This is because he doesn’t understand the underlying meanings of the tzaddik’s words, since they are covered up “in plain apparel.” Ordinary people may also fail to understand the holy speech of tzaddikim, and may wonder if the tzaddik is really so great. For this reason, Chazal said that their words need to be studied. With his words, the tzaddik builds worlds on High, called “Labor of Torah” (*Torat Kohanim, Vayikra* 26:3).

Therefore, it is forbidden to wonder about the actions of a tzaddik. Instead, let a person take himself in hand, evaluating his low spiritual level. He will thereby fix times for Torah study, meriting the tremendous good awaiting the tzaddikim in the World to Come. He will receive his just payment in the future directly from Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Only Hashem “alters periods, and changes the seasons.” But mortal man is confined by the dictates of time, and must therefore specify times for Torah study. He may never be lax in this area. By fixing set times for Torah study, he brings great satisfaction to his Creator. His mitzvah performance, and especially his Torah learning, gives tremendous satisfaction to Hashem. This is what Tehillim calls “a time to act for Hashem.” If one desists from fixing times for Torah, though, he will be considered as one who has “voided Your Torah,” *chas v’shalom*. One should therefore be diligent in fulfilling the words “and I will cherish it to the utmost (ואצרנה עקב).” The letters of the word עקב comprise the initials of בתורה עיתים קביעת (fixing times for Torah study).
- The mundane speech of *talmidei chachamim* requires study. For the tzaddik builds worlds even with his seemingly plain talk. It is forbidden to wonder about his spiritual level, for most people cannot understand his holy words. Involvement in Torah at all times guarantees a person reward in the World to Come, from the Master of the World.

## THE SEVERITY OF BITUL TORAH

David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 119:126), “For it is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah.” This teaches that one should establish set times for Torah study every single day. This period of time may not be cancelled. To our dismay, specifically at the time one appoints for Torah study, the *Yetzer Hara* arrives to weaken man’s resolve, and cause him to nullify the Torah completely, *chas v’shalom*. Man must arm himself against his evil inclination.

Torah learning is represented by the voice of Yaakov, as the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 27:22), “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” This can be explained in the following way. The *Yetzer Hara* allows a person to sit in tranquility, as long as he is not involved in Torah study. As soon as he decides to make the voice of Yaakov heard, the hands of Eisav interfere, weakening his Torah learning. The *Yetzer Hara* wants that man should violate the Torah. Therefore, one must strengthen himself mightily against the *Yetzer Hara*, and serve Hashem by laboring diligently during the time he set for himself.

With this in mind, we can venture to understand an account of Chazal (*Eiruvim* 53b). Rabbi Yossi Haglili once met Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir. He asked her, “Which way does one go to Lud?”

She answered him, “Glili is a fool. You should have asked, ‘Which way to Lud?’ That would have been sufficient. For our Sages teach (*Avot* 1:5), ‘Do not converse excessively with a woman.’”

This narrative is difficult to understand. Did Rabbi Yossi not know that it is forbidden to speak excessively with women, to the extent that a woman had to reprimand him for it? Furthermore, is it forbidden for a man to ask directions from a woman?

We can explain as follows. The pasuk states (*Devarim* 6:7), “You shall speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way...” This means that one must be involved in Torah without a break, even when traveling. This being the case, Rabbi Yossi was certainly engaged in Torah study on his way. So why did he stop learning in order to ask something from a woman? Not only that, but how could he have spoken with Beruriah in a way that was “excessive,” using too many words?

This, in essence, was Beruriah’s censure. “If you are involved in Torah study, how can you have the boldness to speak excessively with a woman? You should have spoken the minimum amount necessary. By failing to do so, you transgressed the prohibition of talking excessively

with a woman.” She condemned him for each moment wasted from Torah study, as well as for placing himself in a dangerous situation by speaking unnecessarily with a woman.

From here we see the tremendous power of the *Yetzer Hara*. When a person, even the giant of the generation, halts his Torah learning for personal reasons, even for something seemingly minor like asking for directions, the *Yetzer Hara* worms his way in. The *Yetzer Hara* then draws out the matter at hand, causing a greater loss of Torah study. The person himself doesn’t even realize what is happening. He thinks he merely stopped to ask a brief question. He is totally unaware that the Satan is behind this whole episode.

The Gedolei Yisrael warn us not to fall into the *Yetzer Hara*’s trap by wasting away time that could be spent learning Torah. “For it is a time to act for Hashem” means that one’s “time” in this world should be spent “acting for Hashem,” in fulfilling one’s spiritual *avodah*.

There are those who ask, “What is meant by ‘a time to act for Hashem’? Aren’t all ‘times’ meant to be consecrated to Hashem?”

True, at all times, one must act for the sake of Hashem, but there is a specific time when one must act on Hashem’s behalf even more than usual. This is the time preceding the arrival of Mashiach, when the *kelippah* is more powerful than ever. Then one must sacrifice his life for Hashem by learning Torah even more than ever before.

This is hinted to by the words of the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 60:22), who says referring to the *geulah*, “I am Hashem, in its time (בעתה) I will hasten it.” When one endeavors to fix times for learning (קובע עיתים) and learn more Torah, Hashem hastens the *geulah*, even if it is not the appointed time for it to arrive. From here we see just how important it is to set fixed times for Torah study, and not waste time that could have been spent in learning. Diligence in Torah hastens the *geulah*.

## ————— In Summary —————

- We are enjoined to set fixed times for Torah study, and not waste time from it, as the pasuk says, “For it is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah.” Specifically when a person aspires to learn Torah, the *Yetzer Hara* comes, trying to trip him up. The pasuk states, “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” Just when a person would like to use his voice in Torah learning, Eisav flexes his muscles, i.e., the Satan arrives to disturb him. Man’s duty is to defeat him.
- This is borne out by the story of Rabbi Yossi Haglili, who asked Beruriah, “Which way does one go to Lud?” She called him foolish, for he could have merely asked, “Which way to Lud?” Rabbi Yossi certainly spent his time on the road involved in Torah learning, yet Beruriah rebuked him for his extra words, which caused even a small amount of *bitul* Torah. The sin of *bitul* Torah is very severe. He should have spoken as briefly as possible.
- The words “for it is a time for Hashem” teach that there is a time especially fitting for learning Torah. This is the time preceding Mashiach’s arrival. The *kelippah* is strongest at this time. Therefore, we must increase our Torah learning in order to overpower it. In this manner, we will merit that the *geulah* will come before its appointed time.

## THE ETERNAL BATTLE BETWEEN YAAKOV AND EISAV

“The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands” (*Bereishit* 27:22). Yitzchak promised Yaakov that when the voice of Yaakov resounds in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, Eisav’s hands have no power (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). But if the sound of Torah were to cease, Eisav would have the upper hand, and be able to subjugate the Jewish nation. For this reason, we constantly find the progeny of Amalek, the descendant of Eisav, bent on eradicating Bnei Yisrael whenever they

weakened their Torah learning. Haman Harasha is a perfect example of this.

This is what took place at the battle with Amalek in the Wilderness. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:2), “וּיָסְעוּ מֵרִפְדִּים – They travelled from Refidim.” Chazal expound (*Sanhedrin* 106b), “שֵׂרָפּוּ יָדֵיהֶם מִדְּבַר תּוֹרָה – Their hands **were weakened** from words of Torah.” The vast amount of wealth Bnei Yisrael had acquired in Mitzrayim and at the Sea disturbed their Torah learning, inviting Amalek upon them. The sin of *bitul* Torah is so severe that it both brings harm and misfortune upon oneself, and calamity upon the world in general. Therefore, one must be steadfast and strengthen himself in Torah.

At the battle with Amalek, the pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:12) that Moshe’s hands were heavy. Why was this so? When Bnei Yisrael slackened in Torah study, this gave strength to the hands of Eisav to have control over the hands of Moshe. Thus his hands were literally weakened. Moshe Rabbeinu endeavored with all his might to subdue the power of Amalek. Since Moshe was fighting this battle by himself, due to the fact that Bnei Yisrael were weak in Torah, his hands became tired from the battle.

The pasuk states (*ibid.* 18:1), “Yitro heard.” Chazal ask (*Zevachim* 116a), “What did Yitro hear that caused him to come [and join Am Yisrael]? The Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek.” Let us try to understand. Bnei Yisrael experienced many other miracles. Why did Yitro come to join the Jewish nation only after hearing about these two? What was so unique about them, and what was their connection to each other?

Yitro had certainly heard of all the miracles that our nation experienced during and after the Exodus. But the miracles of the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek were most significant in his eyes, drawing him to the Jewish nation.

He heard that Bnei Yisrael became extremely wealthy from the spoils of Egypt and the Sea. Yet, they weren’t satisfied with what they had

already acquired, and wanted more. Moshe Rabbeinu had to literally pull them away from the Sea in order that they resume their travels (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* [2] 16). In spite of their great riches, they became weak in their Torah study, thus inviting Amalek to attack. They were deserving of death by the hands of Eisav, as the blessing of Yitzchak dictated.

Nevertheless, Bnei Yisrael overcame Amalek, in the merit of Moshe's prayers. This was a magnificent miracle. Yitro abandoned everything and joined Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness, after seeing the tremendous power of Torah, able to vanquish Amalek and his ilk. This is the connection between the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek. The spoils at the Sea caused a slackening in Torah study, thereby inviting Amalek. But through the tefillah of Moshe, and the strengthening of Torah, Bnei Yisrael were able to conquer them. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:2) that they travelled from Refidim. The Ohr Hachaim explains that they "drove themselves forward" in words of Torah. Originally, the nation "rested in Refidim," becoming lax in learning Torah. Now, after the war with Amalek, they corrected this breach, and left Refidim armed with Torah study (*ibid. Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*).

From here we see the gravity of *bitul* Torah and the harm it causes. For all the sins Bnei Yisrael transgressed at that time they did not deserve death, but for weakening their Torah study, they were held liable. They warranted murder by Amalek's hand.

In this light, we can explain what transpired with Amalek's progeny, Haman Harasha, and Achashveirosh. At that time, Bnei Yisrael were lax in Torah study both in the capital of Shushan and throughout all the provinces of Achashveirosh. That is why they partook of the feast of that rasha (*Megillah* 12a). Had they been involved in Torah, going in its ways, they would never have digressed from it by joining in the banquet of Achashveirosh.

Haman placed ten thousand silver pieces before Achashveirosh, intimating to him that the Jews were deserving of death for violating the Ten Commandments. For, if not for Torah, what is the purpose of Bnei Yisrael's existence?!

We find that Haman Harasha did not immediately eradicate the Jewish nation. First, he cast lots (*Esther* 3:7), which postponed the time set for the Jews' annihilation for a year. Why, didn't Haman begin exterminating the Jews immediately? At the very least, he should have killed out those closest to where he lived, and then moved on to other locations later.

Haman desired to injure the *neshamah* of the nation. For, if they would see that over the course of an entire year their salvation had not arrived, they would come to deny the power of Hashem. In this manner, Haman Harasha would destroy their bodies in this world, and prevent their souls from gaining a portion in the World to Come.

But Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah and corrected their faults, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 8:16), "The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor." Chazal explain (*Megillah* 16b) that "light" refers to Torah. They accepted upon themselves the Torah, through love. In this manner, they succeeded in overcoming Haman and his evil decrees.

Chazal state (*Ta'anit* 29a), "When the month of Adar arrives, joy is increased." True joy is the joy of Torah (*Midrash Shochar Tov* 117:1). Furthermore, we learn from the story of Purim to learn Torah in humility. The sign of the zodiac of Adar is a fish. Just as fish are hidden under the water, so must a person learn Torah with humility, hiding the extent of his knowledge (*Ta'anit* 7a).

Harsh decrees come upon the world as retribution for *bitul* Torah (*Shabbat* 32b). For that reason, it is incumbent upon us to strengthen ourselves and find pleasure and joy in the words of Torah. This will annul all evil decrees. We are reminded of this message by the lots which Haman drew. The word פּוּר (lots) has the same letters as רַפּוּ (they

weakened – in words of Torah). But if we fortify ourselves with Torah, we will be able to nullify all evil decrees, increasing joy among our nation.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Yitzchak told his son, Yaakov, that when the voice of Torah is stilled, the hands of Eisav gain control, and misfortune comes upon the world. This is exactly what happened at the battle with Amalek. Yitro heard that Bnei Yisrael had gained much wealth in Mitzrayim and at the Sea. This brought about a weakening in their Torah learning. Then Amalek appeared. But Moshe Rabbeinu conquered them with the power of Torah. This lesson is what drew Yitro to our nation.
- Similarly, in the times of Haman, Bnei Yisrael slackened in their Torah study, which led to them partaking in the feast of Achashveirosh. The word פֹּר (lots) has the same letters as רָפוּ (they weakened – in words of Torah). Haman desired to wipe out Am Yisrael over a prolonged period of time, so that they would deny Hashem when they saw that salvation was not coming, and their *neshamot* would be harmed forever after. However, Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah through love and joy. They remembered Haman's evil decree. They learned from the sign of the zodiac of Adar that just as fish are hidden under the water, one must learn Torah with humility. By learning Torah with joy we annul all harsh decrees, and increase joy among our people.

## THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YISSACHAR AND ZEVLUN

There are three opinions regarding the partnership of Yissachar, who represents those who spend their time learning Torah, and Zevulun, who represent those who support Torah learning.

1. Yissachar's reward does not decrease at all.
2. Yissachar forfeits half of his reward. Nevertheless, it is a praiseworthy partnership, and should not be annulled. One should,

ideally, learn *l'shem Shamayim*. Giving half of his reward to Zevulun should not affect his dedication to learning. Also, ideally, one should spend every moment learning Torah, even if this entails losing half of his reward.

3. Yissachar forfeits half of his reward. Therefore, one should avoid such a partnership. It is preferable to be involved in business for half a day. The one who learned Torah (as depicted by Yissachar) will regret this partnership, when he finds half of his reward confiscated, in the World to Come.

Torah scholars have difficulty understanding this third opinion. If this partnership is not recommended, why did the original Yissachar and Zevulun enter into it? The matter remains open to investigation.

Perhaps we can offer the following explanation. Yissachar wanted to learn Torah constantly, and therefore entered into a partnership with Zevulun in order to provide himself with a means of sustenance. Zevulun's reward is for the labor involved in working to support Yissachar, but not for his actual Torah learning. Thus, Yissachar does not lose any of this reward.

Both Yissachar and Zevulun benefit from each other's efforts. Furthermore, each ensures the other's dedication to his respective task, for his brother's welfare is in his hands.

This means that since Zevulun is aware that he must support Yissachar, who is sitting and learning, he obligates himself to work honestly, guaranteeing that the money he transfers to his brother is completely kosher. He will make sure that it has no taint of theft or any other prohibition. Conversely, Yissachar is cognizant of Zevulun's efforts to sustain him. This energizes him to learn Torah properly, and at all times, without any *bitul* Torah whatsoever. He certainly wouldn't want to cause Zevulun to waste his money. Thus this partnership ensures that each party aids the other in fulfilling his job. Yissachar helps Zevulun conduct

his business affairs correctly, and Zevulun encourages Yissachar to learn Torah in the best way possible.

In this case, even according to those who say that Yissachar does lose from his reward, we see that he ends up profiting. When Zevulun is involved in a business deal, he will remember that he is supporting Yissachar, and will refrain from any shady dealings. Supporting Yissachar from ill-gotten gains only abets the *kelippah*, who receives nourishment from this, damaging Yissachar's Torah learning. Yissachar, for his part, endeavors to learn Torah in the best way possible, in order not to take Zevulun's money undeservedly.

In this light, we can understand why there are those who condone this type of partnership. This is because each participant helps the other to do his part in the most perfect way possible. But those who contend that such a partnership is not recommended also have a legitimate reason. They fear that the parties will not fulfill their tasks appropriately. Either Yissachar won't learn as well as he should, or Zevulun won't be as honest as he should in his business transactions. Therefore, they state that it is preferable for Yissachar to learn for only half a day, and be involved in some sort of livelihood the other half.

The opinion which holds that this is a recommended partnership is supported by the following pasuk (*Mishlei* 3:18), "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." Those who support Torah benefit in the following two ways.

First, their alliance with Yissachar encourages them to deal honestly in business so that they should not harm their beneficiary's Torah study by nourishing the *kelippah* with illicit money.

Secondly, they cause those who learn Torah to be praiseworthy. Chazal state that the Angel of Eisav struck Yaakov on the thigh, which symbolizes those who uphold Torah, i.e., those who strengthen Torah scholars, encouraging them to increase their learning. Those who learn, for their

part, become obligated to learn without ceasing. For if they squander time from Torah study, it will be considered stealing on their part when they take their stipend from their supporters. This, in turn, profits the benefactors, as well.

### ————— In Summary —————

- There are three opinions regarding the alliance of Yissachar and Zevulun. The first maintains that Yissachar does not lose out on any reward at all. The second states that Yissachar submits half of his reward to Zevulun, yet this partnership is to be encouraged, for Yissachar should learn *l'shem Shamayim*, even if his reward will be reduced. The third opinion maintains that Yissachar loses half of his reward, and, therefore, is to be discouraged from entering into such a partnership. It is preferable that he should learn for only half a day, and be involved in business the other half in order to support himself.
- It is difficult to understand how Yissachar and Zevulun, the sons of Yaakov, were involved in such an agreement. The explanation is that Zevulun received reward only for the effort that he expended in supporting Yissachar, but not for the actual learning itself. The partnership had positive results, as each assisted the other in his respective field. Zevulun earned his money honestly, in order not to support Yissachar with tainted funds, which feed the *kelippah* and cause untold harm. Yissachar, for his part, engaged in learning Torah wholeheartedly, without ceasing, in order not to cheat Zevulun out of the reward for the Torah learning which he was sustaining. Thus both sides benefit from this type of partnership.
- The supporters of Torah are called “praiseworthy” for two reasons. Firstly, they themselves are happy, for they conduct their businesses faithfully, in order not to damage the Torah study of their beneficiaries. Secondly, they cause those who learn Torah to be praiseworthy. Eisav’s angel struck the thigh of Yaakov, alluding to those who support Torah. They enable the Torah scholars to engage in Torah study without stop. Thus they will learn with the requisite devotion, avoiding *bitul* Torah. Both sides are satisfied and benefit from this partnership.

## THE REVEALED TORAH

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 18a) relate a dreadful story. When Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma took ill, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon went to visit him. Rabbi Yossi turned to him, and said, “Chanina, my brother! Don’t you know that this empire [Rome] was decreed from Heaven to rule? For they destroyed His House, and burned down His Temple, and they are still in existence. I heard that you sit and learn Torah, teaching it to the public, with a Torah scroll in your lap.”

Rabbi Chanina responded, “May Heaven have mercy.”

To which Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma replied, “I am telling you sensible things, and you answer, ‘May Heaven have mercy.’ I wonder if they won’t burn you alive, with the Sefer Torah.”

Rabbi Chanina asked, “Rebbi, will I be worthy of a portion in the World to Come?”

Rabbi Yossi answered, “Did you do anything of special significance to deserve a portion in the World to Come?”

He told him, “I once had money for Purim expenses which became mingled with *tzedakah* money. I gave the entire sum to the poor.”

“If that is the case,” replied Rabbi Yossi, “then let my portion be with yours, and my lot be like yours.”

A short while later, Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma passed on, and all of the Roman noblemen joined in his burial and eulogy. On their return, they found Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon engaged in teaching Torah to the masses, with a Sefer Torah in his lap. They apprehended him, and wrapped him in the Sefer Torah. Then they surrounded him with ropes, which they ignited.

This narrative raises several difficulties.

1. It seems that Rabbi Yossi was not pleased with the fact that Rabbi Chanina taught Torah to groups of Jews in public. Instead of encouraging Rabbi Chanina for publicizing Torah study in the face of the Roman edicts, he discouraged him, by stating that the Roman Empire was Heavenly sent to antagonize our nation.

Furthermore, if, indeed, the Roman Empire was designated to uproot Torah learning, as we find that they destroyed the Beit Hamikdash on account of *bitul* Torah (*Nedarim* 81a), which led to baseless hatred, it would seem that the rectification for this would be a resurgence of Torah study. Why, then did Rabbi Yossi attempt to weaken Rabbi Chanina's resolve to teach Torah with his words of disapproval?

2. Rabbi Chanina said, "May Heaven have mercy." Meaning, the merit of Torah which I proliferate will protect me. Rabbi Yossi did not accept these words, and told him that he was not answering sensibly. He even wondered aloud whether they would burn him alive with the Sefer Torah he was so bent on propagating. These words are simply mind-boggling. Did Rabbi Yossi forget that one is enjoined to engage in Torah study even at a time of harsh decrees? Specifically at such a time, the Torah is what protects the nation.

Chazal (*Berachot* 63b; *Shabbat* 83b) teach that words of Torah endure only in one who kills himself over them. This is proof that one must learn Torah even in difficult times. Why, then, did Rabbi Yossi dissuade Rabbi Chanina from studying Torah at a time when he was ready to die for it?

This seems even more surprising in light of the account of Rabbi Yossi's self-sacrifice for Torah in *Avot* (7:9). He was offered one million *dinars* of gold if he would move to a certain location. He responded that he would live only in a place of Torah. If so, why was he so adamant that Rabbi Chanina not risk his life in order to teach Torah?

3. Upon what basis did Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma determine that Rabbi Chanina deserved the gruesome death of being burned alive with a Sefer Torah, for gathering groups to learn Torah?

4. How are we to understand the reaction of Rabbi Chanina to Rabbi Yossi's dire prediction? On the one hand, he was not upset, and even opposed Rabbi Yossi's way of thinking. On the other hand, it seems as though he did accept the words of Rabbi Yossi, for he asked, "Will I merit a portion in the World to Come?" This entire dialogue needs clarification.

5. Rabbi Yossi asked whether Rabbi Chanina had any special merit with which to deserve a portion in the World to Come, to which Rabbi Chanina answered that once he had given money to *tzedakah* which he might not have been required to. Then Rabbi Yossi stated, "May my lot be with yours." This is quite puzzling. Why did Rabbi Yossi discount the merit that Rabbi Chanina had of disseminating Torah to the masses and maintain that only in the merit of *tzedakah* would he warrant a portion in the World to Come?

6. Rabbi Yossi's funeral was a perplexing event. Why did the Roman noblemen see fit to attend, even eulogizing him excessively? This seems to indicate that they respected Torah scholars. Why, then, upon their return, did they accost Rabbi Chanina when they saw him learning Torah with the masses, in public? Why did they sentence him to such a severe punishment; didn't they revere Torah scholars?

7. It seems, from this account, that Rabbi Chanina did not attend Rabbi Yossi's funeral, for he was found immediately afterward, gathering groups for Torah study. Why didn't he attend the funeral?

The entire matter can be explained in a most elucidating manner. The Roman noblemen respected Rabbi Yossi and attended his funeral because he proclaimed, "This nation was appointed by Heaven to rule." Herein lay the disagreement between Rabbi Yossi and Rabbi Chanina.

Rabbi Yossi certainly concurred with Rabbi Chanina that Torah study must never cease, even during a time of persecution. Rome's entire aspiration was to uproot the Torah from Am Yisrael. It was the job of the Jews to overpower them by means of learning Torah. But, since the

Roman Empire was appointed from Above, Torah had to be studied in privacy, in order not to enrage the government. For if the Jews would learn in public, they would warrant the death penalty, and then who would be left to study Torah and merit the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash?

This was the opinion of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma. His grievance toward Rabbi Chanina was as follows, “It is forbidden to engage in Torah study in public. For if you do so, you not only endanger yourself, but the rest of us, as well. The Romans will kill us all! They have the upper hand at this time. And although it is true that Torah protects a person from harm, this is not a fitting time to learn in public, and one is forbidden from relying on a miracle.”

We find a similar situation with Shmuel Hanavi. The pesukim state (*Shmuel I*, 16:1-2), “Hashem said to Shmuel, ‘Fill your horn with oil and go forth – I shall send you to Yishai...for I have seen a king for Myself among his sons.’” But Shmuel countered, ‘How can I go? If Shaul finds out he will kill me.’” This is hard to understand. Hashem had instructed Shmuel to go to the house of Yishai and anoint David in public. What did he fear?

Shmuel was telling Hashem that it was not yet the right time to anoint David publicly. He said that this needed to be done in private. Hashem agreed. Hashem tests people to see if they really want to fulfill His will. In truth, it was the right thing for Shmuel to anoint David as king in private. The test was for Shmuel to come to this recognition himself and be unafraid of contradicting Hashem’s directive. Hashem wanted that Shmuel would demonstrate that he was not afraid to do the right thing.

We find that Bnot Tzelafchad overcame a similar test. They came before Moshe Rabbeinu, stating (*Bamidbar 27:4*), “Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family?” They wanted to inherit a portion in Eretz Yisrael, even though it seemed that they were not entitled to do so. Hashem recognized their claim, and said (*ibid. vs.7*), “The daughters of Tzelafchad spoke properly.”

We can further clarify Shmuel's words. He was afraid to rely on miracles, for he feared his own inner resistance. He himself had anointed Shaul as king, and now he was being instructed to nullify his own actions and anoint David in Shaul's stead. He feared lest he harbored a small measure of disagreement with this act in his subconscious, which would prevent him from anointing David completely *l'shem Shamayim*. Thus, he would be endangering himself, for if he were to act with imperfect motives, he would be subject to Shaul's wrath, warranting death. Hashem agreed with him about this matter, and allowed him to anoint David privately.

This was the charge of Rabbi Yossi against Rabbi Chanina. "You are learning Torah in public," he said, "But maybe you have some inner opposition against learning during a time of danger. Your actions may therefore not be *l'shem Shamayim*. You are, in effect, relying on a miracle, which might not happen, *chas v'shalom*. In this manner, you endanger not only yourself, but all who are in your vicinity, as well."

Rabbi Chanina was not of this opinion. He held that one must serve Hashem openly, and fear no one. He was sure that he was acting completely *l'shem Shamayim*. He said, "May Heaven have mercy," for he knew that if an external thought, not for the sake of Heaven, would creep in, his entire *avodah* would be jeopardized. Therefore, he asked for Hashem to guide him in his Torah study, as Torah protects and shields one from harm.

Rabbi Yossi replied, "I am telling you sensible things. It is forbidden to rely on miracles during a time of danger, and you are telling me the exact opposite. Who is to guarantee that a miracle will occur?"

Rabbi Chanina was of the opinion that especially at the time when there is an edict banning Torah study one should have no fear and learn Torah in public, through self-sacrifice. We find a similar idea at *Matan Torah*. The Torah was given publicly, even in the face of the wrath of the nations of the world. Har Sinai was called by this name (סיני), for with the giving of

the Torah hatred (שנאה) came down to the world (*Shabbat* 89a). “I, too,” said Rabbi Chanina, “am prepared to sacrifice my life for *kiddush Hashem*, and learn Torah overtly, with no fear. Heaven will watch over me.”

Rabbi Yossi agreed with him on this point, and encouraged him with the message, “Go forward with this inner resolve. Gather the masses, and teach Torah publicly. By doing this, you will clearly manifest that you fear only Hashem, and no nation or decree, and that you are ready to sacrifice yourself for the sake of Heaven. This being the case, your death will most probably reflect your ideals, and will be a form of self-sacrifice. You will likely die by fire, due to the fire of Torah which burns in your heart, together with a Sefer Torah, to which you dedicated your life.”

Rabbi Yossi did not weaken or dampen Rabbi Chanina’s resolve in any way. On the contrary, he energized him. For that reason, Rabbi Chanina asked if he was worthy of a portion in the World to Come. He was, in essence, asking, “Are my deeds truly desired by Hashem, granting me a portion in the World to Come?”

To which Rabbi Yossi responded, “Did you do any righteous act?” He did not want to depend on the exalted matter of learning Torah in public, for, as stated above, if Rabbi Chanina had any personal motivations, his actions would not be *l’shem Shamayim*. Thus, he would not warrant having a miracle performed to save him. For that reason, Rabbi Yossi asked if Rabbi Chanina had done any mitzvah solely for the sake of Heaven, with no personal motives involved whatsoever.

When Rabbi Chanina related to him that one time his monies were mixed up and he gave them all to charity, Rabbi Yossi understood that Rabbi Chanina was generous with his money, an indication that he was perfect in all areas. Money is as dear to a person as life itself, and if one distributes it to the poor, in a way that is above and beyond what is demanded of him, this indicates that all his actions are done *l’shem Shamayim*. Such a person is surely destined for a portion in the World to Come. From this incident, Rabbi Yossi learned that Rabbi Chanina’s

gathering of groups for Torah study was likewise *l'shem Shamayim*, and therefore, he was permitted to continue, acting as an example of *mesirut nefesh* for all to learn from. Rabbi Yossi desired to be with Rabbi Chanina in Gan Eden, for he truly admired his level of self-sacrifice.

Now we can understand what happened at Rabbi Yossi's funeral. Rabbi Chanina purposely did not participate in it, purposely learning Torah in public at the time. He heard that the Roman noblemen were attending the funeral, and feared that if they saw him there, they would think that he was in agreement with Rabbi Yossi's ruling regarding learning Torah in private during a time of persecution. This was not the case. He was of the opinion that Torah must be learned overtly. Therefore, this is exactly what he did at the time of Rabbi Yossi's funeral. He believed that if he were to be put to death for doing so, he would be fulfilling the verse (*Tehillim* 44:23), "Because for Your sake we are killed all the time." He did it to show the Romans that Torah is meant to be spread, and one must not fear evil decrees.

Conversely, the Romans went to the funeral since they revered Rabbi Yossi because he was dedicated to the policy of not teaching Torah in public. However, the moment they returned from his funeral, and witnessed Rabbi Chanina teaching Torah openly, they became enraged. Rabbi Chanina was a colleague of Rabbi Yossi, yet he didn't behave like him. He was learning in public, deriding them in front of everyone. They realized that Rabbi Yossi was probably behind this, and that he had advised Rabbi Chanina to behave this way. Thus, they immediately put Rabbi Chanina to death, together with the Sefer Torah, in order to eradicate any vestige of Rabbi Yossi. They were furious that there were still Torah scholars who continued to resist their authority. They poured upon Rabbi Chanina all the wrath they felt for their having previously given honor to Rabbi Yossi, at the very time that his colleague was gathering people for public Torah study.

Perhaps we can offer a completely different interpretation of these events. Rabbi Chanina opposed the position of Rabbi Yossi regarding

learning Torah in public. As soon as Rabbi Yossi passed away, Rabbi Chanina realized that his opinion no longer applied. Now, Torah need not be learned in private, for fear of the government. It was possible to learn in public. Therefore, Rabbi Chanina immediately set out to gather the masses and teach them Torah.

On the other hand, the Romans eulogized Rabbi Yossi in order to prove to the Jews that his opinion, that it was forbidden to learn Torah in public during a time of persecution, was still in effect. They, the Romans, were still the Divinely-appointed rulers over Bnei Yisrael and must be obeyed. It was specifically at this time that Rabbi Chanina set out to prove the exact opposite, by gathering groups of Jews together in public to learn Torah without fearing the government in any way. This was an open act of defiance toward the Romans and their world-view, thus, when they saw him doing this, they immediately bound him up with the Sefer Torah that he was teaching from and burnt him alive.

However, it was a great mistake to think that by appointing the Romans as rulers over Bnei Yisrael, Hashem intended that they should uproot the Torah, *chas v'shalom*. The pre-eminence of Torah is totally dependent on Bnei Yisrael, as Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16) that when the voice of Yaakov resounds in the Batei Midrashot, Eisav's hands are powerless. But if, *chas v'shalom*, the voice of Yaakov ceases to be heard, Eisav's hands gain control over us, and they can do with us as they please. Therefore, let us guarantee that the voice of Torah should always be heard loud and clear!

### ————— In Summary —————

- Rabbi Yossi chastised Rabbi Chanina for teaching Torah in public. He held the opinion that the Roman Empire had been designated to rule by Hashem, and one must follow their dictates. Rabbi Chanina replied, “May Heaven have mercy.” He believed that the Torah would protect him. Rabbi Yossi, though, did not agree with his words. He warned him that they would burn him alive. Rabbi Chanina

asked if he was deserving of a portion in the World to Come. When Rabbi Yossi heard that Rabbi Chanina had given certain monies to *tzedakah* even though he may not have been obligated to do so, he said that in this *zechut*, he would merit life in the World to Come.

- The Roman noblemen participated in the funeral of Rabbi Yossi, but Rabbi Chanina did not attend. When the Romans returned, they found him learning Torah publicly, and burned him together with the Sefer Torah.
- This incident raises many questions. It is difficult to understand how Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma could discourage Rabbi Chanina from learning Torah in public. Also, was Rome appointed to rule over the Jews in order to uproot the Torah from our nation? Didn't Rabbi Yossi realize that specifically at a time of persecution, one must strengthen himself in Torah, in order to save the nation? How did Rabbi Yossi know that Rabbi Chanina would be put to death by fire? Did Rabbi Chanina merit the World to Come merely in the merit of the charity which he had donated? Did the merit of Torah not guarantee him a portion in the World to Come? Furthermore, why did the Roman noblemen revere Rabbi Yossi to the extent that they attended his funeral and eulogized him? Why did they have no respect for Rabbi Chanina, another of the giants of the generation? Why didn't Rabbi Chanina attend Rabbi Yossi's funeral, preferring to learn Torah instead?
- The Romans admired Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma because he upheld their position. He agreed that they were Divinely appointed to rule. He held that at this difficult time, one should learn covertly, in order not to incur the wrath of the Romans. One should not rely on the miracle of the Torah's protection at such a time. Rabbi Chanina, on the other hand, was of the opinion that Torah must be learned in public. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yossi realized that Rabbi Chanina's deeds were desirable. He told him to act upon his convictions and teach Torah to the masses.
- When Rabbi Yossi heard that Rabbi Chanina was open-handed with his resources, giving generously to charity, he understood that all his actions were for the sake of Heaven, including his public teaching. Maybe in Rabbi Chanina's *zechut*, he conjectured, the Roman edict would be nullified. For that reason, Rabbi Chanina did not attend Rabbi Yossi's funeral, preferring to spread Torah among the masses instead. He intended to point out the fallacy in the Romans'

way of thinking. Moreover, after Rabbi Yossi's passing, Rabbi Chanina understood that Rabbi Yossi's opinion was no longer valid, and there was nothing to prevent Torah from being taught in public, through self-sacrifice. However, the Romans could not accept Rabbi Chanina's actions, and burnt him alive, together with the Sefer Torah.

### **A Practical Lesson**

Every person is obligated to learn Torah openly, with self-sacrifice. He should pay no heed to those who ridicule him, but do the will of Hashem and engage in Torah openly. In this manner, he will accept any suffering that comes upon him with love, and will cause a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* through his learning. However, he must ensure that he learns *l'shem Shamayim*, with no personal interests involved. One should learn Torah in order to increase Hashem's honor, and not his own.

## **TORAH – THE BLUEPRINT OF CREATION**

**[From a speech given in Caracas, Venezuela,  
at a *Hachnasat Sefer Torah*]**

“This is the day Hashem has made, let us rejoice and be glad on it (*Tehillim* 118:24).” This is the day, and this is the place. A place which, just a short while ago, was far removed from the world of Torah. Today, there are Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot which resound with Torah day and night. There are kollelim for young men, religious schools for children, and *mikvaot*. This day when a Sefer Torah is being brought in, with song and dance, before the eyes of the gentiles, who witness this holy sight, is, indeed, the day that Hashem has made for us, in which to rejoice and be glad.

The phenomenon that the light of Torah shines forth in this far-flung location, where the three cardinal sins of idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed run rampant, should not be taken for granted.

How is it possible that this has happened here? The first pasuk of the Torah states (*Bereishit* 1:1), “In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth.” The Zohar (*Parashat Terumah* 161b) tells us, “Hakadosh Baruch Hu looked into the Torah and created the world.” Since Hashem desired that a person should be able to sit and learn Torah in any given place in the world, He created the world through the power of Torah. Thus every location on the globe has been created with the inherent condition that it will accept each and every Jew who wishes to study Torah there.

Every place in the universe knows it was created solely in the merit of Torah. For that reason, it is possible for the Torah Jew to learn Torah there, thereby sanctifying the place from the defilement of the idol worshippers. Our Sages decreed that in order for the Jews to endure in the exile, they must be exiled together with the Torah. By means of Torah, the place of exile will accept the Jew, for this was the precondition for its creation.

The Torah is alluded to three times in the pasuk, “בראשית ברא אלوه-ים”. The word בראשית itself is a reference to Torah, which is called “the first.” This is as Mishlei (8:22) states, “Hashem made me as the beginning of His way.” Also, the last letters of the words בראשית ברא אלוקים spell the word אמת (truth). This is also an allusion to Torah, which is called the “Torah of truth” (*Berachot* 5b). Another reference is in the words “את השמים,” for the Torah is called השמים (the heavens). The word השמים is made of the words שם מים (water is there) (*Chagigah* 12a). Torah is compared to water, as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 55:1) tells all who are thirsty to drink from the life-giving waters of Torah. Furthermore, the Torah endures only in one who humbles himself like water, which always flows to the lowest place (*Ta’anit* 7a).

The Zohar tells us that Hashem looked into the Torah, which is referred to by the three appellations: שמים, אמת, ראשית, and created the entire universe, called ארץ. This was so that in any given place, the Jew can engage in Torah study.

A person gains much benefit from the Torah. By learning constantly, wherever he is, one perfects himself. Whenever he learns Torah, it is a novelty for him, a “first,” as implied by the word ראשית. Chazal say (*Sifri Devarim* 33), “Every day, they (words of Torah) should be new in your eyes.” One should constantly review his learning, never feeling, “I learned this already; what’s the point of going over it?” If he has that attitude, he is liable to forget his learning.

This can be compared to a merchant who meets great success selling a specific item. He won’t say, “I had success with this item. Now let me try something else.” He will continue dealing with the item which was so successful. Torah is like that item. The Gemara (*Masechet Derech Eretz* 2:7, based on *Mishlei* 3:14) states, “For its commerce is better than any other commerce.” Keeping this in mind, one will never cease reviewing that which he learned.

Constant study and review enables a person to connect to Hashem. He will be attached to the spiritual, Heavenly spheres and disconnected from earthliness, and the vanities of this world. Such a person is aware that even the earth, physical as it may be, can always be transformed into a place of Torah and purity. For when Hashem created the world, Torah was primary in His thought. Moreover, He created the world with the Torah so that man can convert this world into a place of Torah and sanctity. Man can, essentially, transform the earth into the very heavens.

This is what we find here today. In this location, far removed from any vestige of Torah or holiness, where only defilement and depravity reign (as the place is consumed with the three cardinal sins, swarming with robbers and murderers and those who kidnap others for ransom, to the extent that it isn’t even safe to walk the streets in broad daylight), we see an upsurge of Torah institutions. Amidst the darkness, the light of Torah and holiness shines forth, illuminating the entire place.

Hundreds of Jews here have been convinced to accept upon themselves the mitzvot of tefillin, Shabbat, and *kashrut*. Hundreds of women have

taken upon themselves to go to *mikveh* and keep the laws of *taharat hamishpachah*, even if they are somewhat older or do not properly understand the concept behind it. Many women who have come to me to receive a *berachah* have been prepared to take on this mitzvah.

This can be compared to what transpired at Har Sinai. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 24:7) that our forefathers preceded “*Na’aseh*” (we will do) to “*Nishma*” (we will hear). They accepted the Torah before knowing exactly what was written in it. The same holds true here. This place has been prepared by Hashem since the time of Creation for every Jew who lives here. One just needs a little bit of willpower in order for the holiness of the Torah to influence him and awaken him to observe Torah and mitzvot.

This is due to the fact that the Torah is the blueprint for the entire world. Hashem created the world with the Torah so that when Jews would come to Caracas and desire to establish Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, they would have all the necessary means to do so. They are not hindered by the surrounding *tumah*, since the potential for learning Torah here was implanted before the Creation of the world. Indeed, Baruch Hashem, we see the beautiful fruits of Torah learning here and in other locales around the world.

This idea helps us understand what Chazal relate about Kimchit. All her seven sons served as Kohanim Gedolim in the Beit Hamikdash (*Yoma* 47b). Each of her sons had the opportunity to be Kohen Gadol, entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* on Yom Kippur to atone for Klal Yisrael. Surely, this is the sweet dream of every mother: To give birth, in holiness and purity, to a son worthy of being Kohen Gadol, entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* to atone for the nation with his tefillot and holy *avodah*. Kimchit merited seven sons worthy of this honor. The *Chachamim* asked her what she did to warrant this greatness. She responded, “The beams of my house never saw the hairs on my head. In the *zechut* of *tzeniut*, I merited this greatness.”

What was so great about Kimchit that she deserved such reward? Do the beams of the house have eyes that they can see what goes on therein? Furthermore, would her sons have been barred from serving as Kohanim Gedolim had she uncovered her hair in her private chambers?

The *kedushah* of Kimchit was of an elite nature. She perceived Hashem in every place and in every object, even in the beams of her home. Since Hashem created the world with the Torah, the beams of her home received a measure of *kedushah* from Torah. The *kedushah* of Torah and existence of Hashem are stamped upon every earthly object.

Since Kimchit sensed the presence of Hashem everywhere, even when she was alone in her innermost rooms, she was scrupulous about keeping her hair covered all the time. She feared Hashem, and always behaved with extraordinary *kedushah*. Her thoughts, too, were pure and holy, as we are enjoined to “know before Whom you stand.” She regarded her home in the following way (*Bereishit* 28:17), “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d and this is the gate of the heavens!” It is the location where the future “men of Hashem” and giants of the nation are conceived and born. A woman like this is worthy of having her seven sons serve as Kohanim Gedolim. Her sons were influenced by the intense *kedushah* in her house, and were inspired by the great honor she accorded the *Shechinah*.

Based on the above, we can understand the incident with Shlomo Hamelech and the gates of the Beit Hamikdash. Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 30a) that when Shlomo Hamelech wanted to bring the Aron Hakodesh into the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, after the building of the Beit Hamikdash, the gates were sealed shut, and refused him entry. He then began the prayer (*Tehillim* 24:7), “Raise up your heads, O gates, and be uplifted, you everlasting entrances, so that the King of Glory may enter.” Immediately the gates wanted to swallow him alive, thinking he was referring to himself when he said “King of Glory.” They asked him, “Who is this King of Glory?” They did not desist until he answered, “Hashem, the mighty and strong;

Hashem, the strong in battle...Master of Legions, He is the King of Glory, Selah!"

This conversation is puzzling. Do gates have a mind of their own, eyes to see, a mouth to speak? When did we ever see a person speaking to gates, fashioned by the hands of man? Can gates talk? How could they "think" of swallowing up Shlomo Hamelech, after being commanded to open for him?

As we said above, the presence of Hashem is in all places, and in everything in the world. Every single item has spiritual energy, which is aware that it was created solely for the glory of Hashem, by means of, and in merit of, the Torah. This energy sees and understands and knows. When a person behaves with awe and dread, cognizant of Hashem's presence in a specific place or item, that presence is revealed to him.

Hashem's presence was revealed in the Beit Hamikdash, as it had been designated from its inception to be a sanctuary for Him. The spiritual energy that emanated from it, and everything connected to it, was immediately felt. Therefore, the gates were also imbued with this energy, understanding the words of Shlomo Hamelech. Since the presence of Hashem and the spiritual energy was so apparent in the Beit Hamikdash, the gates literally pursued Shlomo Hamelech, bent on devouring him for not being careful with his words in this holy place, which had been erected exclusively for the glory of Hashem. They did not leave him until he said, "Hashem, the mighty and strong; Hashem, the strong in battle. Hashem, Master of Legions, He is the King of Glory, Selah!" When he mentioned the Name of Hashem, the gates realized that Shlomo was acting only for the glory of Hashem, and they opened wide before him.

This teaches us an important concept. In order to grow in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* one must learn Torah with humility and self-effacement. One should learn with self-sacrifice, and not, *chas v'shalom*, use the Torah as a means to gain personal honor or profit (*Avot* 4:7), for then the Torah itself will take revenge and punish him. Such Torah has no merit on High.

Shlomo Hamelech wanted to bring the Aron Hakodesh, containing the *luchot*, which is the Torah, into the Beit Hamikdash, and wanted to give honor to the Torah. But the gates felt that Shlomo wanted to gain honor for himself by doing this, and therefore wanted to swallow him up. For the Torah is not acquired by honor, rather, by humility and submission.

When Shlomo corrected his words, explaining that he was referring to the Master of Legions, and that he was asking that the gates open for the glory of Hashem and His Torah, since the purpose of the entire Creation is to honor Torah, the gates immediately opened wide as befit the honor of Torah.

The gates of Torah will not open for one who wishes to aggrandize himself by entering them. Chazal state (*Ta'anit* 7a) that Torah is like water, which always flows downward from a high place to a low place. Torah endures only in one who humbles himself like water. One-third of the surface of the earth is water; water is meant to constantly remind a person to acquire Torah through humility.

One who pursues honor, will have honor flee from him (see *Otzar Hamiddot* 247). But one who learns Torah in humility, seeking only to honor Hashem and His Torah, rather than himself, will be assisted by nature; it will not hold him back in any way. Eventually, he will be honored for his Torah knowledge also.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. This is so that every place should have the potential for Torah to be studied there, without disturbance. Every location knows that it was created only by strength of, and in the merit of, the Torah. This enables each person to engage in Torah study wherever he is, thus sanctifying that place. Wherever Jews have been exiled, the Torah has gone with them. Each place on the globe, prior to its creation, accepted the precondition that Torah would always have the potential to flourish there.

- We see this here, in Caracas. Even though it is physically far from the Torah world, the light of Torah and *kedushah* shines here. This is because the potential for Torah was instilled into this place at Creation. Hashem prepared this place for every Jew who would in the future live here. Even here, in Caracas, each Jew can embrace a life of Torah and mitzvot through the power and sanctity of the Torah.
- This concept, that Hashem’s presence is found everywhere, is illustrated by Kimchit, who merited that her seven sons became Kohanim Gedolim. She never allowed the beams of her house to see her hair. What would have been so terrible had they done so? Kimchit felt the presence of Hashem everywhere, even in the pillars of her home. For that reason, she merited seven sons who were Kohanim Gedolim, who also felt the presence of Hashem. They attained this exalted level since they were influenced by the tremendous honor and fear which she accorded Hashem.
- This explains the incident with Shlomo Hamelech and the gates of the Beit Hamikdash. When he wanted to bring the Aron to the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, he asked that the gates open for him. Instead, they wanted to swallow him alive, for they thought he was calling himself “the King of Glory.” They did not accede to his request until he stated that he was referring to “Hashem, the mighty and strong, etc.”
- The presence of Hashem breathes energy into every single object in the world. When a person contemplates the existence of Hashem, it immediately becomes revealed to him. In the Beit Hamikdash, the edifice specifically erected for the glory of Hashem, His presence could be felt even in the gates. When they assumed that Shlomo was referring to himself as king, they wished to consume him. They desisted in their pursuit of him only after he explained that he wanted to bring glory to Hashem and His Torah.

## WALKING IN THE WAYS OF THE TORAH

### From a speech given on Erev Shabbat Shuvah

After the incident with the false prophets at Har HaCarmel, the pasuk (*Melachim I*, 19:8) states that Eliyahu Hanavi “arose, and ate and drank; he then walked on the strength of that meal for forty days and forty nights, until the Mountain of G-d, Chorev.”

From this pasuk, we see that Eliyahu merited a tremendous miracle. The food he consumed did not digest in his innards; it remained intact for the duration of forty days and nights. In this manner, he was able to sustain himself for many days without food, until he arrived at the mountain of Hashem. Radak expounds on this.

This requires explanation. Why did Hashem choose to perform a miracle for Eliyahu, allowing the food to remain for forty days in his innards? Hashem could just as easily have shortened the trip for him, so that he could have reached Har Chorev in one day, without having to make a miracle with his sustenance.

Har HaElokim hints to the heights of Torah knowledge. One who desires to surmount its heights and cleave to Hashem must expend much effort in toiling in Torah and good deeds. One should not wait for miracles, because Hashem helps only the one who works on correcting his own deficiencies.

Perhaps we can add the following idea. Why did Hashem want Eliyahu to go specifically to the Wilderness, the location of Har Chorev, also known as Har HaElokim? He wanted to remind Eliyahu of the sin of the Generation of the Wilderness. They were punished for speaking *lashon hara* about Eretz Yisrael by dying in the Wilderness over the span of forty years. Hashem wanted Eliyahu to learn the following lesson. If Bnei Yisrael, who spoke merely about the Land were punished, all the more so

will one who speaks derogatorily about a fellow Jew receive retribution. Hashem wants us to speak only positively about His nation.

It is known that Eliyahu Hanavi acted zealously for the sake of Heaven. At times, he punished the people by asking Hashem to withhold rain, and at times by prosecuting them before Hashem. Hashem instructed him to walk in the desert for forty days, sustained by the food which remained intact inside him, in order to remind him of the forty-year journey that the Jews were punished with in the desert.

Eliyahu was a reincarnation of Pinchas, who avenged the honor of Hashem in the Wilderness, by killing Zimri and the Aramean woman (*Batei Midrashot*, Part 1). But when Hashem asked what he was doing in the Wilderness now, Eliyahu again prosecuted Bnei Yisrael. Then, Hashem told him, “You have been a prophet long enough.” He wanted to remove His prophecy from Eliyahu, as he had not learned the lesson from the forty days that he travelled in the desert. Hashem could have miraculously shortened Eliyahu’s journey to Har HaElokim, but ensured that it took forty days in order to teach him to judge Bnei Yisrael in a positive light.

This incident teaches us another invaluable lesson. It is not enough to learn Torah; one must toil in Torah. Torah is the only ammunition against the *Yetzer Hara*, as the Gemara says (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote. If you learn Torah, you will not fall into the hands of the *Yetzer Hara*, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 4:7), ‘Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven.’ But, if you do not engage in Torah study, you will be given over into his hand, as the continuation of the pasuk reads, ‘but if you do not improve yourself, sin rests at the door.’” Torah is the only thing which the *Yetzer Hara* fears. Chazal tell us (*Yerushalmi Berachot* 9:5) that David Hamelech killed the mighty *Yetzer Hara* in his heart through his Torah study, as he says (*Tehillim* 109:22), “And my heart has died within me.”

Furthermore, David Hamelech asks (ibid. 24:3), “Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity?” If one truly desires to perfect himself, he must free himself from the *Yetzer Hara* and be clean from sin. Likewise, he must free himself from any vestige of physicality. He must go, like Eliyahu, by “strength of the eating,” which is a metaphor for toiling in Torah. He should not rely on a miracle to shorten his way. Without toiling in Torah, one will not be able to understand it, and will not arrive at his desired spiritual destination.

It is only after one expends the requisite effort in his learning, without expecting the words of Torah to enter into his mind miraculously, that he will merit Heavenly assistance. His path will be straightened before him, so that he can delve deeper into understanding the Torah and knowing halachah. Through ceaseless exertion, a person can reach the peak of perfection, at the mountain of Hashem.

In a similar vein, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days and nights in heaven (*Shemot* 24:18), toiling tirelessly. Chazal recount (*Shemot Rabbah* 41:6) that for the duration of these forty days, he learned Torah and then forgot what he learned. At the end of the forty days, Moshe approached Hashem, complaining, “Master of the World! Forty days have elapsed, and I know nothing.” What did Hashem do? He gave him the Torah as a gift, as it says (*Shemot* 31:18), “When He finished speaking to him...He gave Moshe the two Tablets of Testimony.” Hashem also showed him every nuance in the Torah, and everything that future scholars would elucidate (*Megillah* 19b).

When one toils in Torah, he can be assured that Hashem will straighten out the path to spiritual heights before him. However, this is on condition that he does not stop on his journey for even a moment, but continually forges ahead, as we have explained. If one falters in this commitment, he may, *chas v’shalom*, fall off the track and into the abyss.

In order to be able to toil in Torah in the correct way, one must rid himself of all bad *middot*, and strive to acquire only good character traits.

This is the advice of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 34:15): “Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.” By doing so, he will “follow (lit. **go** in the way of) Hashem’s decrees” and will then have the strength to **go** for forty days and forty nights, like Eliyahu, sustained by the life-giving force of Torah. Through his own efforts and persistence in Torah, he will be able to attain new insights in the Torah, just like Moshe Rabbeinu was awarded with the *luchot* on Har HaElokim through his own endeavors, rather than relying on a miracle.

### **Raising our Level on Shabbat**

We find ourselves in the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*. A person is tired and weak from all the battles he fought with his *Yetzer Hara* during the past year. Especially so is the yeshiva *bachur*. He is more susceptible than others to the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to stop him from learning as he should. Nevertheless, in the merit of keeping Shabbat, a person can gain renewed strength to continue his battle, the fight for his very existence, against the *Yetzer Hara* for the rest of the days of the week (see *Zohar* I, 75b).

Let us further explain. Shabbat is equivalent to all the mitzvot (*Yerushalmi Berachot* 1:5; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16). One who keeps the Shabbat is considered as having kept the entire Torah (*Zohar* II, 47a). On Shabbat, man is given an additional *neshamah* (*Beitzah* 16a). This *neshamah yeteirah* revitalizes man’s ordinary *neshamah*, giving it the energy to withstand the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the rest of the week. If a person will but exert himself through utilizing his *neshamah yeteirah* on Shabbat, he will attain the level of “*talmid chacham*,” thus easing his battle against the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the week. Chazal tell us that *talmidei chachamim* receive the *neshamah yeteirah* of Shabbat during the rest of the week, as well (*Tikkunei Zohar* 21:46a).

It is known that sleeping on Shabbat is especially pleasurable. It is a mitzvah to rest then, for the *neshamah yeteirah* joins with one’s regular

*neshamah*, thereby purifying the person. For that reason, tzaddikim do not rush to end Shabbat, but, rather, lengthen it as much as possible. In this manner, the *neshamah yeteirah*, which has become integrated into the person on Shabbat, will “feel at home” within him also during the days of the week. Thus, tzaddikim retain their *neshamah yeteirah* throughout the days of the week, and bequeath its influence to those who cleave to them.

Another secret of sleeping on Shabbat is that when a person is relaxed and rested, he will more readily contemplate his actions, and do teshuvah. The word שבת is an acronym of the phrase (שבת בו תשוב) Shabbat is for teshuvah). If a person repents his sins, Shabbat has the power to atone for them. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 118b) states, “One who keeps Shabbat properly, even if he serves idols, like the generation of Enosh, is forgiven, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 56:2), “Praiseworthy is the man who does this and the person who grasps it tightly, who guards the Shabbat against desecrating it – שמר שבת מחללו. Do not read: מחללו (against desecrating it), but: מחול לו (he is forgiven).”

Unfortunately, one can misuse the restfulness of Shabbat, squandering the opportunity to ponder his actions and do teshuvah. Instead of taking advantage of the *kedushah* of Shabbat to help him fight his *Yetzer Hara*, a person sleeps away the day. Then, he certainly won’t get assistance. Chazal tell us (*Avodah Zarah* 50a), “One who does not toil on Erev Shabbat, what will he eat on Shabbat?”

Similarly, Hashem bestowed upon us Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in order that we should reflect on our actions and make a personal accounting. At least on those days, let us raise ourselves to the level of the angels (*Zohar* II, 185b; *Tur, Orach Chaim* 619). We can gather renewed strength with which to withstand the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the entire year. But in order to achieve this, we must begin our preparations on Rosh Chodesh Elul, which is considered “Erev Shabbat.” In this manner, we will merit “eating on Shabbat,” we will be able to gain the full measure

of spiritual sustenance that the holidays provide. To the degree that a person prepares himself from Rosh Chodesh Elul, he receives an abundance of holiness, abetting him in his battle against physical lusts (ibid.).

One should take full advantage of this propitious period and try, at least in the month of Elul, to prepare himself properly for the upcoming holidays, beginning the New Year on the right foot. This can be compared to an airplane flight. The main danger is during take-off. Once the plane is in mid-flight, the dangers are decreased. So, too, must one especially exert himself in the beginning of his spiritual ascent. When a person “takes off” wholeheartedly, in the month of Elul, when he reaches the High Holidays, he will already be as exalted as an angel, and the dangers of descent will be decreased.

A person must be vigilant to be continuously on the rise. He must take care not be negatively influenced by others. Likewise, when he is involved in mundane matters, he must keep in mind not to decline from his spiritual level. When one does not strive to soar to spiritual heights, he may plunge to the lowest pits.

This can be understood by the fact that our Sages call a person in this world a “הולך – goer.” Man “goes” from one level to the next. Chazal say (*Pesikta Zuta* and Rashi *Vayeishev* 37:1) that the tzaddikim have no repose, as it says (*Tehillim* 84:8), “They advance from strength to strength.” Zechariah Hanavi (3:7) said to Yehoshua ben Yehotzadok, “Then I will grant you strides (ונתתי לך מהלכים) among these [angels] who stand here.” There is no limit to the lofty levels which tzaddikim, who cleave to Hashem, and bask in His presence, can reach. Therefore, they are called “הולכים – goers.” Not so the angels, who are restricted in their scope of perception and are referred to as “standing” in a stationary position. A person who constantly moves upwards in level is greater than the angels.

One must continuously move forward, toiling in Torah without letup. The Rambam states (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:13) that although it is a

mitzvah to learn Torah by day as well as by night, the majority of one's Torah knowledge is gained at night. Therefore, one who wishes to merit the crown of Torah should dedicate his nighttime hours for Torah study. He should spend the minimum amount of time in eating, drinking, conversation, and sleep. His nights should be devoted to learning Torah. For, if one halts his advancement in Avodat Hashem, even at night, he immediately recedes in spiritual level.

Chazal hint to this when they state (*Avot* 3:7), "One who walks on the road (המהלך בדרך) while reviewing [a Torah lesson] but interrupts his review and exclaims, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field! – Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul.'" One must always be considered a "הולך – walker," taking heed not to stumble, for if he stumbles, it will be into the snare of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Perhaps we can add the following idea. Today, most of our currency is printed on paper. Bills, checks, and stocks are all printed on paper. Maybe Rabbi Shimon, in *Avot*, hinted to this, meaning: "One who learns Torah and stops in order to amass wealth, when he already has more than enough to live on, is as if stating, 'How beautiful is this ניר!'" The word ניר means "a plowed field," but by using a different vowel, or spelling it as נייר, it then means "paper." One who values money to excess and interrupts his Torah study in order to amass it is held to account.

This is because he treasures paper money, which has no intrinsic worth and will not escort him to the next world, rather than valuing the volumes of the Torah, which are also made of paper but will gain him eternal reward. This is cause for censure. Therefore, when it is time to rise from the Gemara, one should do so with a heavy heart, not like those who close it in relief and merrily escape to their mundane matters.

The meaning of the pasuk (*Devarim* 10:20) "You shall cleave to Him," means that one must, at any given moment, be attached to Hashem Yitbarach in thought and deed. One who does so leaves no opening for the *Yetzer Hara* to enter and disturb him. But if a person detaches himself

from Hashem even for one moment, the Satan, who waits in ambush, will pounce upon him, as it says (*Bereishit* 4:7), “Sin rests at the door.” The *Yetzer Hara* then enters his heart, disturbing his Avodat Hashem, and causing him to sin.

Maybe it is for this reason that Chazal established a short prayer to be said before using the washroom (*Berachot* 60b). For, as soon as one enters the washroom, he is disconnected from Hashem, for he may not meditate in words of Torah there (*Shabbat* 150a; *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 83). In those moments, the *Yetzer Hara* has the potential to control him. When the person cites this prayer beforehand, he is asking the angels who escort him to wait for him outside. They immediately return to him when he emerges.

When a person comes out, he washes his hands to remove any impurity which came upon him. He immediately says the *berachah* “*Asher yatzar*,” further removing any vestiges of impurity. Afterwards, he immerses in the waters of Torah, as the *Navi (Yeshayahu* 55:1) states, “Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.” Water is analogous to Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a). In this way he ensures that he remains pure, unaffected by the *Yetzer Hara*, and prepared to continue on his travels on the path of Torah to the heights of Har HaElokim.

### ———— In Summary ————

- Eliyahu Hanavi was sustained for a forty-day journey by the food he ate beforehand. Why didn’t Hashem just shorten his journey, circumventing the need for a miracle? This teaches that in order to arrive at Har HaElokim, which is Torah, learning by itself is not enough. One must toil in Torah. Torah is the only ammunition against the *Yetzer Hara*.
- Eliyahu, as it is known, was zealous for the Name of Hashem, and prosecuted Bnei Yisrael. It reached the point where Hashem took away prophecy from him. Eliyahu was the reincarnation of Pinchas. In the generation of the Wilderness, too, he acted zealously, killing Zimri and the Aramean woman. Hashem was

teaching Eliyahu, as well as future generations, that He wants people to find merit with His nation, not to speak disparagingly about them.

- Hashem gave His nation the Shabbat in order that one should contemplate his actions and repent, in preparation for the coming six weekdays. On Shabbat, the *neshamah yeteirah* enters him, assisting him in doing teshuvah, and coming closer to Hashem. Tzaddikim feel this even during the weekdays. They become sanctified on Shabbat. Their *neshamah yeteirah* integrates with their ordinary *neshamah*, and the *kedushah* they gain on Shabbat helps them advance spiritually during the rest of the week.
- Even if a person does not usually reflect upon his actions on Shabbat, he can come close to Hashem by contemplating his past deeds in the month of Elul, in preparation for the Yamim Noraim. On Yom Kippur, he can reach the level of the angels. He can gather strength to overcome his *Yetzer Hara* for the rest of the year. This is in order that he maintains his level of being a “הולך – goer/walker.” He will go from strength to strength, constantly cleaving to Hashem. However, as soon as he loosens his grip, the *Yetzer Hara* is able to get a foothold and disturb his Avodat Hashem. By cleaving to Hashem, one has the power to easily defeat the *Yetzer Hara*, for he is connected to the living G-d.

## THE SWEETNESS OF TOILING IN TORAH

Yirmeyahu Hanavi laments (9:11-12), “Who is the wise man who will understand this? For what reason did the land perish...?” None of the prophets or *Chachamim* knew the reason for the *churban*, until Hashem Himself revealed it to them, as it says, (ibid. 9:12), “Because they forsook My Torah that I put before them” (*Nedarim* 81a). Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, “Because they did not make a blessing upon learning Torah.”

This teaches that because of *bitul* Torah the people transgressed many commandments, warranting the destruction of Yerushalayim. Without Torah study, the world cannot exist (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25).

In fact, it was a great favor to our nation that Hashem cast His wrath upon wood and stone, instead of overturning the entire world on account of Bnei Yisrael's lack of Torah study (*Eichah Rabbah* 4:14). The Beit Hamikdash stood in the center of the world, thus earning the appellation "the entire world." When the world was marked for destruction, due to *bitul* Torah, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed instead.

When Bnei Yisrael mourned and did teshuvah, they returned to Torah study once again. They merited the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. The decree for destruction upon the world was nullified, for the Beit Hamikdash had already gone up in smoke. But nowadays, when there is *chillul Hashem* and *bitul* Torah, harsh decrees come upon us. Young children, as well as tzaddikim, who are also called "the entire world," are taken from us.

The author of *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* writes that not making the blessing before learning Torah means that they lacked pleasure in their study. They learned merely by rote, as lamented by Yeshayahu Hanavi (29:13). Learning Torah is genuine only when accompanied by a sense of sweetness and enjoyment in one's learning. David Hamelech enjoins us (*Tehillim* 34:9), "Contemplate and see that Hashem is good."

This can be compared to a man who is not especially hungry. If he is served a delectable dish, he will eat it, and definitely enjoy its good taste. But, if he is ravenously hungry, he would devour anything that comes his way, because of the hunger that is gnawing at him. If the food isn't especially tasty, he will eat only enough in order to satisfy his hunger.

But he is making a big mistake. For, although the food doesn't provide him with great pleasure, it is saving his life. Without the food he would starve. He should be extremely grateful for obtaining it. If someone would save him at the last minute from a life-threatening situation he would be deeply grateful. He would honor him greatly and be ready to give him anything in appreciation for saving his life. This is how he should regard this food.

The moral is self-understood. Although man often meets with difficulties in his Torah study, which render it, at times, a burden, he still must view it as his life's source. The pasuk states (*Devarim* 30:20), "For it is your life and the length of your days." Therefore, a person must literally sacrifice his life for Torah, for without it, he has no chance of existing. One should make a personal accounting to ensure that he toils in Torah, for by doing so he will eventually experience pleasure and sweetness in his learning.

One should also consider the following. Why should his Torah study be inferior to any other type of endeavor? Doesn't one ever suffer aggravation in business? How often do we find people who literally do not eat or sleep, living a life of privation, as long as in the end they will reach the goal of striking it rich? Obviously, when this happens, they have untold joy from the fruits of their labor. One should view toiling in Torah and the enormous reward that awaits him in the World to Come in exactly the same way.

We should take a lesson from David Hamelech, who says (*Tehillim* 84:3), "My soul yearns, indeed it pines, for the courtyards of Hashem; my heart and my flesh pray fervently to the Living G-d." A person craves wealth, even, at times, nearly expiring from this infatuation, due to the exorbitant pleasure he experiences by seeing his inflated bank account. In just such a manner should one yearn, to the point of death, to enjoy the spiritual pleasures contained within the "courtyards of Hashem."

Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 40b), "Great is study." This is study which brings to action. This means that when a person learns Torah and feels sweet satisfaction in it, he will also do mitzvot with joy and pleasure and with much zest. For the entire purpose of man's creation and existence in this world is in order to learn Torah and keep mitzvot. Conversely, when a person approaches Torah with a heavy heart, he will do mitzvot without joy and pleasure, like a body without a soul, for one is dependent on the other.

When a person lacks joy in performing mitzvot he is essentially stating that he has no satisfaction from keeping them, and that they are an encumbrance upon him. How can he expect Hashem not to be enraged by this attitude? The entire goal of the mitzvot is in order to increase our reward in the World to Come, as our Sages state (*Avot* 3:16), “Rabbi Chananiah ben Akashia says, ‘Hakadosh Baruch Hu wished to confer merit upon Israel, therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 42:21), ‘Hashem desired for the sake of its [Israel’s] righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious.’”

One who does not enjoy keeping the mitzvot indicates that he does not appreciate the goodness that Hashem has bestowed on him, *chas v’shalom*. The Torah warns against this (*Devarim* 28:47), describing the dire results and also their cause: “Because you did not serve Hashem, Your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.”

One who sees no purpose in his work, and feels no contentment from it, has simply wasted all the time which he has invested in it. *Bitul* Torah causes a person to feel a lack of satisfaction in his mitzvot. When this is the case, there is no merit for the world to endure. Without Torah, the world has no *zechut* to exist.

On the other hand, the Torah tells us (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them then I will provide your rains in their time.” This means that if one feels a sense of happiness and contentment when delving into the depths of Torah, he will also feel this when he does mitzvot. As a result, Hashem will shower upon him everything that is needed for the world’s existence.

This is measure for measure. A person brings down abundance of holiness by merit of his joy in Torah study. Hashem pours rain upon the world, which brings joy to mankind. If one, *chas v’shalom*, desists from learning, he demonstrates that he does not enjoy it, and warrants the

curses (*Devarim* 28:23), “Your heavens over your head will be copper and the land beneath you will be iron.” There will be total lack of rain.

The following story illustrates how love of Torah overrides everything else. I once received a large amount of money from certain people who unexpectedly came to see me. This was a wonderful surprise, because at the time, I greatly needed the money to support my Torah institutions. Naturally, I was overjoyed at this happy turn of events. Immediately afterward, I went to the Beit Hamidrash, and joined a study group there. We began debating an explanation of Rashi, and when the matter was settled we all felt tremendously happy, just like one who discovers a treasure. Shlomo Hamelech states (*Mishlei* 15:30), “Enlightened eyes will gladden the heart.” The *Metzudat David* explains that this refers to one who becomes enlightened concerning a doubt that he has, since “there is no joy in the world as great as settling a doubt.”

Due to the great joy and satisfaction we felt at understanding the words of Rashi, I completely forgot about the large amount of money that I had received that morning, which was still resting in my purse. This just proves that the pleasure of Torah overrides all other pleasures, rendering them worthless. Fortunate is the one who toils in Torah, and merits to taste its sweetness.

This is as David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 19:11), “They (words of Torah) are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold; and sweeter than honey.” Also, he tells us (*ibid.* 119:97), “O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation.” There are many more pesukim testifying to the greatness, importance, and sweetness of the holy Torah. Praiseworthy is the one who toils to understand Torah, for he experiences tremendous joy in it, as one who receives a great bounty.

## TOIL LEADS TO ENJOYMENT

If a person truly wishes to merit the sweet taste of Torah described above, it is not enough to merely learn Torah on a superficial level; he must labor in it, day and night. We are exhorted to do this (*Yehoshua* 1:8): “This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; rather you should contemplate it day and night.” The Gemara relates (*Berachot* 32b) that there are four things that need constant reinforcement. One of them is Torah, as the previous verse in *Yehoshua* says (ibid. vs. 7), “Only be very strong and courageous, to observe, to do, according to the entire Torah.”

However, one may learn Torah without feeling any pleasure or joy in it, regarding it as a burden, with no plan or purpose. There is no greater insult to Torah than this. Such a person loses out on all fronts, as his reward is outweighed by his losses (*Avot* 5:11). Had he learned Torah with enthusiasm and enjoyment, he would gain happiness both in this world as well as in the next, earning himself eternal life in the World to Come.

Chazal tell us (*Nedarim* 81a), “Beware of the children of the poor, for from them will come forth Torah.” This is based on the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 24:7), “זל מים מדליו” – Water shall flow from his wells.” The word מדליו (from his wells) can also be read “from his poor ones.” Torah will pour forth from those who are poor. This requires explanation. There have always been plenty of wealthy *talmidei chachamim*. Rabbeinu Hakadosh was fabulously wealthy. It is said about him (*Gittin* 59a) that “from the days of Moshe until Rebbi, we have not found Torah and greatness in one place.”

Similarly, despite Shlomo Hamelech’s incredible wealth, he engaged in Torah study. The Gemara states (*Eiruvin* 21b) that Rav Hamnuna asked, “What is meant by the verse (*Melachim* I, 5:12), ‘He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005?’ We learn from here that Shlomo said, on every piece of Torah, 3,000 proverbs, and on every piece of commentary, 1,005.”

Since the poor have no physical pleasures, when they are involved in learning Torah there is nothing to prevent them from delighting in its words. They have no interest whatsoever in renouncing that pleasure for all the wealth in the world. Even if they were offered to amass much money by using their Torah scholarship, they would shun the prospect as unthinkable. They prefer spiritual spoils to physical fortune.

Rabbeinu Hakadosh cannot be cited as an example of the possibility of Torah co-existing with wealth. Although he was so extremely wealthy that even non-seasonal produce was always on his table (*Avodah Zarah* 11a) he did not derive any pleasure from this world. His entire desire was to learn Torah and rejoice in it. Before his death, he testified about himself (*Ketubot* 104a), “Master of the World! It is known before You that I used my ten fingers to toil in Torah, and I received no physical pleasure, not even from my little finger.”

Likewise, there were many Torah Sages, such as Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkinus and Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma, who merited to become leaders of the generation by eschewing their fathers’ wealth, and instead, investing their lives in Torah. They lived as paupers, and thereby merited to feel the pleasure and sweetness in Torah. After tasting the sweet taste of Torah just once, they were unable to forsake it for even a moment. They believed that distancing themselves from the Torah, and not constantly drawing vitality from it, is like the *neshamah* departing from the body, as the Gemara states (*Kiddushin* 15b), “One who parts from you is parting from life itself.”

Thus we should endeavor to feel as much joy and satisfaction in our learning as a business man does from making a good deal. The more a person toils, the greater will be his reward, and the more pleasure he will gain in his learning. Conversely, learning Torah without proper effort leaves a bitter taste. This is akin to shaming the Torah.

Now, after Tishah b’Av, we stand at the threshold of the summer vacation. Certainly, after a full year of toiling in Torah with enthusiasm

and effort, one needs respite, in order to relax and gather strength for the upcoming month of Elul and the winter *zman*. The imminent *Yamim Noraim* demand a clear mind, in order that a person be able to make a personal accounting between himself and his Maker without outside distractions. In this manner, he will manage to rectify that which needs correction.

But each of us must be wary lest we lose the pleasure and sweetness which we felt in our Torah study, the fruits of our labor over the previous year. We must be vigilant not to forfeit all of our great achievements.

During vacation, one should be wary lest instead of correcting the mistake of our ancestors, who did not feel the requisite pleasure in learning Torah, which brought about the destruction, we further the sin by sitting idly and wasting time that could be spent in Torah study. By doing so, not only do we show lack of honor to the holy Torah, but also extend the *churban* instead of ending it. How can we expect to start the new *zman* and come to the *Yamim Noraim* after a period of complete severance from feeling joy in Torah and tefillah? Every bit of damage leaves its mark on the body and the soul (*Zohar* III, 113a).

Chazal state (*Avot* 6:2), “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, ‘Every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Har Chorev, proclaiming and saying, ‘Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah!’ For, as it is said, ‘Like a golden ring in a swine’s snout, etc.’ and it says (*Shemot* 32:16), ‘The Tablets are G-d’s handiwork and the script was G-d’s script חרות (engraved) on the Tablets.’ Do not read חרות (engraved) but חירות (freedom), for there is no freer man than one who engages in the study of the Torah.”

The Baal Shem Tov, zt”l, among other commentators, asks, “If no one hears this Heavenly Voice, what is the point of it?”

Perhaps we can answer in the following manner. When one feels the joy and sweetness of Torah study, this feeling itself is the Heavenly Voice,

proclaiming that Hashem is happy and has satisfaction from him. However, if one does not toil in Torah, sensing its sweetness and joy, but gains pleasure only from the physical and mundane, how can he expect to hear this voice?

This is a great insult to the Torah. Such a person is spoiling Hashem's world with his own hands. Hashem gave us a priceless gift, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 4:2), "For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah." By preferring the vanities of this world, a person scorns this good teaching of Hashem, the holy Torah. He follows the *Yetzer Hara*, which causes him to neglect Torah study, perpetuating the *churban*.

This is the idea of the Heavenly Voice at Har Chorev (הר חורב). If a person obeys the advice of his *Yetzer Hara*, called הר (mountain) (*Sukkah* 52a), he is told, "Woe to the people because of their insult to the Torah!" For he is devastating the world. The word Chorev (חורב) has the same root as the word destruction (חורבן).

If he "tasted" the flavor of Torah, but finds no goodness in it, it indicates that he has no desire to do so. For the sweetness of Torah is greater than any other. The pleasure of learning Torah cannot be compared to any worldly pleasure. Therefore, one should desire to feel the pleasantness in Torah, and in this manner, he will merit eternal goodness, in physical matters as well as spiritual ones.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Nobody knew the reason for the destruction, until Hashem Himself explained: "For they abandoned My Torah." They did not make a blessing prior to learning Torah. They felt no pleasure in Torah study. Hashem poured His wrath on wood and stone, destroying the Beit Hamikdash. The entire world was deserving of destruction, but since the Beit Hamikdash was the center of the world, it was destroyed instead. Unfortunately, today we are witness to the deaths of children and tzaddikim, as they are called "the entire world."

- “Study is great, for it brings to action.” To the degree that one finds pleasure in his Torah learning will he derive pleasure in doing mitzvot. When one learns with eagerness and enthusiasm, his mitzvot will reflect that attitude. The pasuk states, ““If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments.” This means that if one labors in Torah appropriately, he will merit fulfilling the mitzvot correctly. For the joy of Torah study dwarfs all physical pleasures. There is no joy like the joy of Torah study.
- For this reason, Torah will come forth from the children of the poor, for they are not accustomed to any other pleasure. As soon as they are given a taste of Torah, they refuse to ever forsake it.
- A Heavenly Voice emanates from Har Chorev proclaiming, “Woe to the people because of their insult to the Torah!” This refers to those who have no pleasure in the words of Torah, who heed the voice of the *Yetzer Hara* instead. But one who feels the sweetness of learning hears the Heavenly Voice, crying out from within him, due to the great pleasure he takes in Torah. He merits to be showered with an abundance of blessings.

## FOLLOWING HASHEM IN THE DESERT

At the time of the *churban*, Yirmeyahu Hanavi told Bnei Yisrael, “Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land” (*Yirmeyahu 2:2*). These words are astounding. At the time of the *churban*, Hashem remembered the kindness of Bnei Yisrael’s ancestors who followed Him in the desert, an unplowed land, even before receiving the Torah.

This teaches the tremendous benefit of *zechut avot*. At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bnei Yisrael were idol worshippers (*Shemot Rabbah 16:2*), yet Hashem showed them kindness at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. This was in order to awaken them to the following understanding: If He protects the children in the Wilderness in the merit of the fathers who walked in His

ways, all the more so will He guard them if they themselves go in His ways, fulfilling His mitzvot.

We must take this to heart and learn a lesson from it. Our fathers obeyed Hashem, and followed Him in the Wilderness even before receiving the Torah. This was no ordinary desert, for it was especially dangerous (see Malbim *ibid.*). The Wilderness also refers to the negative forces, which Bnei Yisrael were exposed to there (*Zohar I*, 178b). Yet, they feared nothing, in the merit of hearkening to the voice of Hashem and following Him into the desert.

All the more so, must we listen to the word of Hashem. We have the Torah, which protects us from the *Yetzer Hara*, as Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.” Certainly, we must heed the voice of Hashem, going in His ways. Moreover, Chazal teach (*Kiddushin* 31a; *Bava Kama* 38a, 87a) that “a person who is commanded and does is greater than a person who does without being commanded.” Now that we have the Torah we are doubly obligated to keep it.

If we behave this way, Hashem will certainly consider it a great kindness. Hashem surely sees our poverty and the travails of the time. The *Yetzer Hara* looms large. Nevertheless, we follow in the footsteps of our leaders, toiling in Torah in the Beit Hamidrash. We abandon the fleeting pleasures of this world, which everyone else is chasing, and pursue everlasting life. Hashem certainly regards this as a kindness.

One might ask how it is possible for young people to disconnect themselves from the pleasures of this world and connect themselves solely to the Torah. Everything depends on one’s education. Shlomo Hamelech instructs us (*Mishlei* 22:6), “Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old he will not swerve from it.” One who received a sound Torah education will, as a matter of course, choose good. He will have the wherewithal, even while yet young, to cut himself off from physical pleasures, and cleave only to the Torah.

However, even a person who received a proper education cannot neglect Torah study, for it is Torah that protects one from the *Yetzer Hara*. A person is constantly faced with *nisyonot*. Chazal teach (*Avot* 3:9), “One who walks on the road while reviewing [a Torah lesson] but interrupts his review and exclaims, ‘How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!’ – Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul.”

One who halts his Torah study for even a short time is putting himself in danger. This is exemplified by what happened to the Generation of the Wilderness. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 32:1), “For this man Moshe...we do not know what became of him!” Because Bnei Yisrael ceased learning Torah at that time, they eventually descended to the level of fashioning the Golden Calf, in spite of all the miracles they had observed with their own eyes.

This can be compared to a person walking in a fog. Although he carries a flashlight with him, he cannot find his way since the fog is so thick. He doesn’t know which direction to take. Only with a very strong beam will he be able to proceed on the correct path.

Today we live in a heavy fog, not knowing which is the right path. Only with the Torah can we find our way. The pasuk states (*Mishlei* 6:22-23), “As you go forth, it will guide you; as you recline, it will guard you; and when you awake, it will converse with you.” Torah is light; it shines the way for man.

Chazal teach that Hashem says (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.” This teaches that although the *Yetzer Hara* is indeed, very great, it can be conquered through toiling in Torah. One can attain the level of not even being affected by his *Yetzer Hara* at all. Even if one observes others who keep mitzvot and nevertheless suffer, he should not become discouraged. He should, instead, imagine how much he would suffer in the World to Come, were he to desist from Torah study.

But in order to merit the Torah, one must behave with humility (*Derech Eretz Zuta* 8). On the festival of Sukkot, we finish reading the Torah, and immediately start over again. It is known that the sukkah hints at humility. Through humility, one merits attaining Torah knowledge. A sign of humility is when one lowers his gaze. This can be interpreted as protecting one's eyes from unseemly sights. Haughtiness is also related to the eyes, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 101:5), "One with haughty eyes and an expansive heart, him I cannot bear." Most of the dissention that exists in the world results from the iniquities caused by misusing one's eyes, as our Sages say (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:2), "The eye sees and the heart desires."

We find an allusion to this in the pasuk (*Devarim* 34:12), "And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael." Because Bnei Yisrael lowered their eyes in humility, they merited witnessing the many miracles and wonders that Moshe Rabbeinu wrought. This is, in fact, the last pasuk of the Torah. Immediately afterward, we start the Torah again with the pasuk (*Bereishit* 1:1), "In the beginning of G-d's creating." The word ראשית (the beginning) can also mean "high in stature." This indicates that one will gain the high stature conferred upon a person who learns Torah if one guards his eyes and conducts himself with humility.

Woe to the person who fails to protect his eyes from seeing improper sights, instead following his heart's desires. This may lead to heresy, *rachmana litzlan*. The Satan tries to kill a person by testing him with his eyes.

It takes *mesirut nefesh* in order to protect one's eyes. It does not come easily, especially at the beginning. But we should remember that our entire being as Jews is based on self-sacrifice. This saves one from the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, who is bent on ruining a person, *chas v'chalilah*. Although we are faced with tremendous trials in our times, we should strive to do our utmost to elevate ourselves in this area.

All of the trials and tribulations that we face are a reminder from Above to mend our ways, so that we should not descend to the depths. We need only take the first step and then Hashem will come to our aid, as the Midrash says (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3), “Open for Me an opening of teshuvah the size of a needle hole, and I will open for you openings wide enough for wagons and coaches to enter.” Without Hashem’s help, it is impossible to do teshuvah, yet “if not for Hashem’s help, one would not be able to withstand him (the *Yetzer Hara*)” (*Kiddushin* 30b).

How valuable in the eyes of Hashem is the Jew who, with utmost self-sacrifice, battles his *Yetzer Hara*, which is bent on destroying him. He thereby brings hardship upon himself, forgoing the easy life to which he was accustomed. This is especially difficult for a person who never learned Torah before. One who has studied Torah in the past will easily come to recognize the Creator and do teshuvah. But one who never tasted the taste of Torah will find this journey ten times more challenging. Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 34b), “Perfect tzaddikim cannot stand in the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand.” Hashem remembers the trials a *ba’al teshuvah* had to undergo in order to return to his Creator, Whom he had never known before, and highly values this form of kindness. In this respect he is greater than a perfect tzaddik, who never went through this process, and will be rewarded accordingly.

When a person decides to begin learning Torah, he should realize that he will come across many difficulties. His task is to rise above them, and learn Torah. Eventually, he will see that he made the right decision. The important thing is to begin studying Torah, for then he will feel its benefits, as Tehillim (34:9) states, “Contemplate and see that Hashem is good.”

For this reason, Hashem tells us (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), “I recall for you the kindness of your youth...your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land.” Hashem remembers that we took pains, in spite of the difficulties, to accept the Torah, even before tasting its sweetness. The

*Yetzer Hara* in Mitzrayim was tremendous. Proof is that many of our nation perished in the plague of darkness. They listened to the voice of the Satan, who wanted them to remain in darkness, enslaved to their evil inclinations, and not experience the light of Torah that they were soon to receive. They were punished measure for measure, and were left in the darkness.

Hashem praises those who left Mitzrayim and followed Him into the desert in order to accept the Torah. In the end, they were amply gratified. Bnei Yisrael overcomes the *Yetzer Hara* with the Torah, the antidote given to them for this purpose. By defeating the *Yetzer Hara* in this way Bnei Yisrael increase the power of Torah in this world.

### ————— In Summary —————

- “Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness.” Hashem remembers the *zechut* of our ancestors, in order that the nation should learn from their example. If He protects the children in the merit of the fathers who fulfilled His word, how much more will He guard us if we ourselves are careful to heed His word! Our ancestors who left Egypt were not even commanded to keep the mitzvot at the time, for they had not yet received the Torah. Yet they still listened to Hashem’s voice. How much more so are we, who have received the Torah, obligated to keep it.
- How is it possible to demand of young people to abandon earthly pleasures in pursuit of Torah ideals? This can be done if they have received the correct Torah education from their youth. Then there is a good chance that they will go on the right path, clinging to the Torah. However, one must also toil in Torah, for the Torah lights our way in this dark exile, as the pasuk states, “A mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light.”
- In order to learn properly, one must work on the *middah* of humility, for pride is the mother of all sin. By humbling oneself and taking care to protect his eyes one merits to learn Torah in earnest.

- The beginning of the path of Torah is fraught with hardship. But when one fortifies himself against the challenges, they fall aside. He will then be able to taste the sweetness of Torah.
- Hashem praises His people for following Him into the desolate desert, for they sacrificed themselves for Him. Whoever was not on this level perished in the plague of darkness. Those who survived followed Hashem into the Wilderness, where the light of Torah shone upon them. Through the power of Torah one conquers his *Yetzer Hara*.

## STRENGTHENING ONESELF IN TORAH

Four items need reinforcement; Torah is one of them (*Berachot* 32b). Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that one must constantly fortify himself in these four areas. One strengthens oneself in Torah by learning *l'shem Shamayim*. Words of Torah learned *l'shem Shamayim* bring one to action. This is the meaning of “Great is study” (*Kiddushin* 40b), for it brings one to action.

The *Yetzer Hara* dreads this type of learning most of all. When he sees someone learning Torah which will then bring him to action, he does all kinds of tricks in order to disturb him. Therefore, one should always strengthen himself in his learning in order not to follow the wicked wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*. One’s purpose in learning should be to bring his knowledge to fruition, by keeping the mitzvot *l'shem Shamayim*.

When Chazal adjure us to strengthen ourselves in learning, they mean that one must literally toil in it, so that his learning will bring him to action, in purity of mind, without any personal motivation whatsoever. Likewise, man is enjoined to strengthen himself in good deeds, doing them happily even when he is tired.

The *Yetzer Hara* does not worry about the Torah study of one who uses his knowledge to belittle others and bring personal glory to himself or one who views it as just another form of wisdom. This type of Torah learning

does not bring one to action. The *Yetzer Hara* will not prevent a person from learning in this way.

The spies in the Wilderness teach us just how careful one must be in all his actions. They were all men of stature, as Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:5) testify on the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 13:3), “They were all distinguished men; heads of the Children of Israel were they.” The words “distinguished men” always refer to tzaddikim. At the time, they were all righteous. They should have used their Torah learning to become more righteous and not feel pride and pleasure in their exalted status as heads of the tribes. However, they failed to do so, and this was the beginning of their downfall.

Indeed, in this manner, they descended to the level of speaking evil about Eretz Yisrael. The pasuk states (ibid. 32), “They brought forth to the Children of Israel an evil report concerning the Land.” They wanted the nation to remain in the Wilderness so that they could retain their positions. Zohar states (III, 158a) that the spies were all tzaddikim and leaders of the nation. They feared that upon entry into the Land, they would be demoted from their posts, and others would be appointed in their stead. Therefore, they decided to prevent the entry of the nation into the Land.

This is truly astounding. On the one hand, they were true tzaddikim, yet, on the other hand, they were unable to sever themselves from their status and high positions. In the end, they sinned with their evil report, for they were not sufficiently armed with Torah learning. Torah study needs constant fortification, in order that one should not be ensnared in the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. One must create ways and means by which to outsmart the *Yetzer Hara*, avoiding his ploys.

Conversely, we find that Calev ben Yefuneh went to pray at the gravesites of the Avot and gain strength thereby. The pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 13:22), “And he arrived at Chevron.” Chazal state (*Sotah* 34b) that Calev separated himself from the plot of the spies, and visited the

graves of our ancestors. He beseeched them, “Pray for me that I be spared the plot of the spies.” He asked that his Torah study should only be a merit for him and not a stumbling block. Since he had been appointed head of his tribe because of his greatness in learning, he did not want to aggrandize himself because of his learning, which might cause him to join the other spies out of fear of losing his position.

Chazal state (*Avot* 2:5), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” Every person has highs and lows in Avodat Hashem, times when it is easier for him to do mitzvot enthusiastically, with love of Hashem, and more difficult times when he feels heavy and half-asleep, doing mitzvot without eagerness, as though they were a burden on him. Especially at times like these, one must strengthen himself through words of *mussar* and inspiration in order to overcome the trials that come his way. Otherwise, he is liable to fall prey to the *Yetzer Hara*.

We find that although Acher was a *Tanna*, the mentor of Rabbi Meir, extremely knowledgeable in the Torah, nevertheless, because he did not fortify himself when he was faced with a test, the merit of Torah did not stand by him, and he descended to the depths of doom (*Chagigah* 15a).

The *Yetzer Hara* is in fact a holy entity who serves Hashem in Gan Eden and the Upper Worlds. On the fourth day of the week it is his turn to attend to the legions of the firmament and to his Master (*Zohar* I, 169b). In the heavens the existence of Hashem is indisputable, and he cannot act contrary to the ultimate truth. He admits that the world would collapse without Torah. He confesses that man’s greatest tribute is to be engaged in Torah and mitzvot, going from strength to strength.

Evidence to this is the fact that the *Yetzer Hara* [also known as the Angel of Death] taught Moshe Rabbeinu. The pasuk says (*Tehillim* 68:19), “You ascended on High, You have taken captives, You took gifts of man.” Chazal expound (*Shabbat* 89a), “In the merit of being called *Man*, you took gifts.” Even the Angel of Death presented Moshe with a gift, as the pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 17:12), “He placed the incense and provided atonement

for the people. He stood between the dead and the living.” Rashi explains that the Angel of Death transmitted to Moshe the secret of sacrificing *ketoret* during an epidemic. The secret of *ketoret* is, essentially, contrary to the nature of the Angel of Death. He naturally desires to kill and destroy, yet he revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu the method of halting an epidemic and saving lives.

On the other hand, when the *Yetzer Hara* is in this world, the world of falsehood, he dons his physical garb, switching his powers of purity to profanity. Who can stand up to him without falling, *rachmana litzlan*? Rabbi Shimon ben Levi teaches (*Kiddushin* 30b), “Man’s inclination overpowers him every day, trying to kill him. If not for Hashem’s help, he wouldn’t be able to overcome him.” The Satan, *Yetzer Hara*, and the Angel of Death, are all one and the same (*Bava Batra* 16a).

The *Yetzer Hara* gradually influences a person to sin. Chazal say (*Shabbat* 105b), “This is the method of the *Yetzer Hara*. Today he tells a person, ‘Do this,’ ...until, eventually, he tells the person, ‘Worship idols.’” Since he contains a spark of holiness, when he approaches a person, he tells him, “You must certainly keep up your learning. But I see that you are somewhat tired right now. Go and rest a bit; you’ll continue learning later.” In this manner, he causes a person to postpone learning Torah, until he completely abandons it.

One needs constant reinforcement in order not to fall into the clutches of depression. If that were to happen, then all the Torah he learned won’t be of any help. Only one who clings to the Creator is able to withstand his tests and not fall, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 2:12), “Praiseworthy are all who trust in him.”

## Making the Effort

The best way to become strengthened in Torah is to strengthen oneself. A person must empower his heart to toil in Torah, and not wait for others to inspire him. Chazal state (*Nedarim* 81a), “Beware of the children of the

poor, for from them will come forth Torah.” Because they have nothing else in this world, they find their sole solace in words of Torah, and it provides them with untold joy.

When troubles and *nisyonot* beset the pauper, he tells himself, “Is it not enough that I live a life of poverty? My only source of comfort is the Torah. If I desert the Torah, the life of my soul, my suffering will merely increase sevenfold, as I will be devoid of Torah knowledge as well. From where will my solace come then?”

Such a person constantly strengthens himself, in order not to abandon the Torah, *chas v’shalom*. Since he strives to be constantly connected to the Torah, he merits that the Torah remains with him, and he deserves recognition for this. The majority of our Torah leaders, throughout the generations, were originally poor. They realized the saying, “Beware of the children of the poor, for from them will come forth Torah.”

Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem told Moshe the following (*Shemot* 19:3), “כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל” – So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and relate to the Children of Yisrael.” Rashi explains that “the House of Yaakov” refers to the women. They should be given the mitzvot in a gentle fashion, as indicated by the use of the word תאמר, which is a gentle way of speaking. Whereas “the Children of Israel” refers to the men, who need to be told of the intricacies of Torah and the punishment awaiting transgressors. They should be told about the mitzvot in a harsher way, as indicated by the word תגיד, which is a stricter way of talking.

The men needed to be spoken to in this more demanding way because it is so easy to learn Torah without acting upon what one learned. Therefore, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to strengthen the nation so that the words of Torah should enter their hearts and they should act upon them. However, this is exactly what the *Yetzer Hara* dreads. For he knows that one mitzvah leads to another (*Avot* 4:2).

Adam Harishon was given one positive commandment, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 2:16), “And Hashem G-d commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.’” And he had one negative commandment (*ibid.* 2:17), “But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you must not eat thereof.” Hashem warned Adam, “For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu fortified Adam with words of encouragement, saying that he didn’t need to acquire additional knowledge from the Tree of Knowledge, for he was sufficiently wise. Proof of this is that he named all of the creatures (*ibid.* 2:20). Once he could distinguish and see the good in all aspects of Creation, it would be a shame for him to pursue further wisdom, risking making a mistake.

My beloved student wrote to me that he heard in the name of the *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, an explanation of the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 85), “For what was the Land made desolate?” Commentaries explain that the people did not make a blessing prior to learning Torah. He expounds that they did not say the prayer “והערב נא – May the words of Your Torah be sweet in our mouths.” This is rather shocking. The entire *churban* took place simply because they found no pleasure in their Torah learning! They did not think that it was important to ask Hashem to make the words of Torah sweet for them. This was a mistake, for the more pleasure one derives from his study, the greater is the mitzvah.

In my opinion, this is what David Hamelech meant by the words (*Tehillim* 40:9), “And Your Torah is in my innards.” One should enjoy the words of Torah. Just as one enjoys a succulent, healthful dish, and suffers no negative side effects from it, so, too, should a person learn Torah and derive pleasure from it without experiencing any negative side effects. That is why we must strengthen ourselves so that the sweetness and pleasure we feel in learning Torah should not, chas *v’shalom*, cause us to engage in any form of negative behavior, such as feeling pride, pursuing honor, etc.

Let us illustrate this idea with the following analogy. An old house may look like new on the outside, but if it is not reinforced, the walls will begin to crack and crumble. In the same way, one must reinforce his spiritual edifice with words of Torah, in order to avoid the complete collapse of his learning.

We find an interesting story to support this idea. In the days of King Yoash, he ordered gold and silver in order to make repairs in the Beit Hamikdash (*Divrei Hayamim* II 24:4, 5). Why didn't Hashem see fit to perform a miracle, just as the fire was miraculously never extinguished on the Altar, and allow the place where His presence rested to remain constantly in perfect condition, without having to depend on repairs? This teaches that just as the House of Hashem required regular restoration, all the more so should one constantly improve himself with words of *mussar* and *chassidut*, and make frequent personal accountings in order to maintain his spiritual structure.

When a person ensures that his satisfaction in life comes from Torah learning, he will also perform mitzvot with enthusiasm. One attains this level only through self-sacrifice. This is really the secret of Torah, as it says (*Bamidbar* 19:14), "A man who would die in a tent." Chazal expound (*Berachot* 62b) that the words of Torah endure only in one who sacrifices himself for it.

Just as the thought of death brings one to teshuvah, so does it fortify a man against forsaking the Torah. How can one face his Creator, after death, with empty hands, *rachmana litzlan*? By strengthening himself in Torah, through toil and effort, he will merit the description (*Pesachim* 50a), "Fortunate is the man who arrives here with his learning in his hand."

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal emphasize that Torah is one of the four items which need steady fortification. Torah study *l'shem Shamayim* brings one to action, as Chazal say,

“Great is learning, for it brings to action.” This is the *Yetzer Hara*’s greatest fear, and therefore, he tries his best to prevent it. For that reason, one must strengthen himself in order that he should not learn with personal motives, or for self-aggrandizement, but solely for the sake of learning.

- Therefore, a person must constantly energize himself against the *Yetzer Hara*. If, *chalilah*, he is not vigilant, he may plummet to his doom. We find that the spies caused great devastation to themselves and the entire nation because they did not arm themselves sufficiently with words of Torah. On the other hand, Calev ben Yefuneh, who always reinvigorated himself when he felt himself waning spiritually, visited the graves of the Avot, and was spared from sin.
- By continuously strengthening oneself and cleaving to Hashem one is saved from the despair caused by a *nisayon*. This is what Chazal mean by their saying, “Beware of the children of the poor, for from them will come forth Torah.” Because the Torah is their only form of comfort, and they do not want to lose it, they always strengthen themselves in it, meriting that it constantly endures with them.
- One must reinforce himself spiritually, just as an old house must be constantly maintained. Even if it looks new on the outside, it must be reinforced, for otherwise it will eventually fall apart. So, too, our Torah learning needs constant fortification.
- Chazal tell us that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because the people did not say the prayer “והערב נא” – May the words of Your Torah be sweet.” They failed to taste the sweetness of Torah, for they did not strengthen themselves in it. We must learn with *mesirut nefesh*, in order that the Torah be sweet in our mouths, and not tainted with pride or other negative characteristics. One should be totally committed to his learning, fulfilling the pasuk, “A man who would die in the tent.” Then, after his death he will be able to come before Hashem with his learning in his hand.

## THERE IS NO VACATION FROM TORAH

Rav Yehudah asked in the name of Rav, “What is meant by the pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 9:11), ‘Who is the wise man who will understand this? Who is he to whom the mouth of Hashem speaks, that he may explain this? For what reason did the land perish?’” (*Nedarim* 81a; *Bava Metzia* 85a). The *Chachamim* and the prophets were asked this question, but none were able to reply. Hashem Himself answered (*ibid.* 12), “Because they forsook My Torah that I put before them.”

I thought of interpreting this in the following way. The numerical equivalent of the word אָבַדָּה (perish) is twelve. The pasuk is asking, “For what reason did the twelve tribes perish during the first Beit Hamikdash?” To this Hashem responded that they forsook His Torah. The Torah was given to Am Yisrael in order that all members of the nation should be accountable for each other, guaranteeing that each would keep the Torah properly. But, instead, they followed their hearts’ desires, neglecting the Torah. This caused dissension and many other serious sins, until, eventually, they themselves perished.

Later Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, through *Yirmeyahu* (16:11) “They forgot Me, and they did not fulfill My Torah.” This implies that by learning Torah, its light would bring them to do teshuvah, and they would return to Hashem. Severing oneself from the Torah has terrible consequences. It can ultimately lead to *churban* itself. The Gemara (*Yerushalmi Chagigah* 1:7a) explains that Hashem preferred that Bnei Yisrael would forsake Him, as long as they would cleave to the Torah. This would guarantee their return to Him.

The main part of the *churban* took place in the months of Tammuz and Av, which is a difficult time (*Sefer Yetzirah* 5.) This is our vacation time. Holidays can cause great devastation. The true purpose of these days of recreation is that a person should contemplate his actions, as the *Navi*

adjures us (*Eichah* 3:40), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.” Only the dead are “free” from Torah and mitzvot (*Tehillim* 88:6; *Shabbat* 30a).

Yirmeyahu Hanavi states that the *churban* was a result of the nation abandoning Torah. In our days, during the summertime, there is a greater lack of Torah study than at other times of the year. Instead of a person concerning himself with how he will serve Hashem, he wonders how he will occupy his time and amuse himself. Hashem forgoes His own honor by stating, “Would that they would desert me,” but stipulates, “and keep My Torah.” Even during these days of vacation one should fix times to learn Torah.

There are many incidents in our history that show that when people sat idly at rest the consequent lack of Torah study led to transgression. Chazal state (*Shemot Rabbah* 41:7; *Sifri, Balak* 1), “Wherever you find the word, “sitting” (or “settling”), you find mishap. We see that the brothers of Yosef sat down to eat food (*Bereishit* 37:25), and then sold him (*ibid.* 28). Chazal state (*Shochar Tov* 10; *Yalkut Shimoni Esther, remez* 1,056), “Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, ‘You sold your brother amidst food and drink, your children will be sold in Shushan amidst food and drink.’” This refers to the parties of Achashveirosh and Haman (*Esther* 1:3, 3:15).

Concerning the Golden Calf, the pasuk says (*Shemot* 32:6), “The people sat to eat and drink, and they got up to revel.” Because they ate and drank in an improper manner they began to revel. Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 53:11) that revelry is an allusion to immorality (as in *Bereishit* 39:17) and bloodshed (as in *Shmuel* II, 2:14).

In parashat *Balak* we are told that (*Bamidbar* 25:1) “Yisrael settled in the Shittim.” Immediately afterward “the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moav.” This caused a tremendous plague, in which many of the nation were killed.

Likewise, we find that the spies were sent to explore the Land

(*Bamidbar* 13:2). They were initially righteous (*Rashi*, *ibid.*). But, instead of seeking the spirituality of the Land, they sought the physical. The word לתור (to spy out) has the same root as תייר (tourist). They “toured” the Land. This led to their lack of faith in Hashem’s ability to help them conquer the Land, as it is evidenced by the disparaging words of their report (*ibid.* 13:32), “The land...is a land that devours its inhabitants.” Improper sightseeing can cause devastation for generations to come.

Even Yaakov Avinu was criticized for wanting to rest. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 37:1), “Yaakov settled.” The Midrash tells us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:1) that “Yaakov desired to sit in peace. Immediately, the incident concerning Yosef came upon him.” Chazal expound that, according to Yaakov’s high spiritual level, his desire to sit in peace indicated a slight weakening and deterioration in his Avodat Hashem. This brought about the incident with Yosef’s abduction.

These days of vacation, the days of *Bein Hameitzarim*, when we abstain from happiness (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 551:1), is the most appropriate time to make a personal accounting. But we find that this is the time when people forget everything, and go on vacation. How is it possible that after a vacation devoid of anything Jewish, one can properly prepare for the months of Elul and Tishrei and stand before his Creator on the *Yamim Noraim*?

The sin of forsaking the Torah is so great, that even if one learns Torah with ulterior motives, rather than as a commandment from Hashem, it is not considered Torah study. Chazal state (*Yoma* 9b), “During the times of the second Beit Hamikdash, the people were involved in Torah and mitzvot and acts of kindness; why was it destroyed? Because they acted with baseless hatred ...” They learned Torah in order to aggrandize themselves and boast about their greatness. This led to baseless hatred, and resulted in the *churban*. This was caused by a lack in the way they were educated as children.

A similar fault led to the death of the disciples of Rabbi Akiva (*Yevamot* 62b). He had twelve thousand pairs of students, from Givat to Antipras,

and they all perished in one period of time, because they failed to sufficiently respect one another. This stemmed from a flaw in their character. When one learns Torah *l'shem Shamayim*, without seeking to gain greater recognition than his fellow, he feels respect for his partner.

We see how great is the responsibility to respect one another, and certainly to refrain from hurting others, from the incident with Channah and Peninah. The pasuk states (*Shmuel I*, 1:6), “Her rival [Peninah] provoked her again and again in order to irritate her.” Chazal say (*Bava Batra* 16a) that Peninah acted *l'shem Shamayim*. She provoked Channah in order that she would turn to Hashem in supplication for a child.

Nevertheless, the *Navi* said about her (*ibid.* 2:5), “While the barren woman bears seven, the one with many children becomes bereft.” Rashi explains, “While the barren one bears seven children, the one with many children becomes bereft, and buries her children.” Whenever Channah gave birth, Peninah lost another child. Channah gave birth to seven children, as the pasuk (*ibid.* 21) says, “For Hashem had remembered Channah, and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.” Channah was considered to have borne seven children, even though she only gave birth to five, since she prayed for Peninah to be granted children. These extra children were attributed to her.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, zt”l, says that this teaches how careful we must be with another’s honor. Peninah acted *l'shem Shamayim*, but because she shamed Channah, she was severely punished.

Therefore, one must strengthen himself in Torah study and perfect his *middot*, especially in these days of *Bein Hameitzarim*. Then he will be influenced by the light of Torah for the good and approach the *Yamim Noraim* appropriately. We should merit the coming of Mashiach and the restoration of the Beit Hamikdash, speedily, in our days, Amen.

## — In Summary —

- Regarding the question of the *Navi*, “For what reason did the land perish?” Hashem responded, “For they forsook My Torah.” The numerical equivalent of the word אָבְדָה (perish) is twelve. Thus this question also means, “For what reason were the twelve tribes exiled?” The answer is that they forsook the Torah. Because they did not feel responsible for each other, they committed severe transgressions, which caused their downfall. This teaches the paramount importance of Torah study.
- A person should keep this in mind when going on vacation. One should never free himself from mitzvot, *chas v’chalilah*. Only after death is one absolved from keeping mitzvot. It is forbidden to sit idly, without learning Torah. Relaxing from Torah causes mishap. Yosef was sold after the brothers sat down to eat and drink. This was one of the reasons why the Jewish nation was sold into the hands of Haman in Shushan. Yaakov Avinu desired to sit in peace. Immediately he was afflicted with the incident of Yosef’s sale and disappearance. One may never slacken in his Torah study, not even for a moment.
- Likewise, one must be scrupulous in correcting his character traits. One should learn Torah *l’shem Shamayim* without respite, and with no ulterior motives. Twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiva died between Pesach and Shavuot because they failed to properly respect one another, but rather aggrandized themselves over their fellows because of their Torah knowledge. We find, also, that although Peninah acted *l’shem Shamayim*, she was severely punished because she caused Channah anguish.
- One must strengthen himself in Torah especially during the vacation in order to prepare properly for the upcoming *Yamim Noraim* and the New Year.

## REGAINING THE TORAH LEARNED IN THE WOMB

A fetus in its mother's womb has a candle burning above its head, and an angel teaches him the entire Torah, as the pasuk says (*Mishlei* 4:4), "He taught me, and said to me, 'Let my words sustain your heart; observe my commandments and live.'" As soon as he is born, arriving in this world, an angel smites him on the mouth, and he forgets all his Torah learning, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 4:7), "Sin rests at the door" (*Niddah* 30b).

This raises a question. What is the purpose of an angel teaching Torah to the unborn child, if he will forget everything after he is born?

The Zohar (I, 37b) expounds on the pasuk (*Bereishit* 5:1), "This is the account of the descendants of Adam." Rabbi Abba states that an actual book was given to Adam Harishon, which explained Divine wisdom. When Adam was exiled from Gan Eden, he was holding the book, and as soon as he left, it simply disappeared. He prayed and wept before his Creator, and the book was returned to him, intact.

This is what happens with a baby. When he is still in the uterus, an angel teaches him Torah from that very same book, so that after he is born, if he will so desire, he can ascend to levels higher than angels. He is taught from this book only while he is in his mother's womb. These are the best days of his existence (*Iyov* 29:2). But the moment he enters this world, he is forbidden to take these revelations with him. This is so that when he grows up, he will long to reconnect with the Torah that he learned in his mother's womb. He will beg and weep to be able to merit to learn Torah in earnest, and then he will regain all that he learned previously.

We are promised many blessings "if you will follow My decrees" (*Vayikra* 26:3). Chazal (*Torat Kohanim*, *ibid.*) explain that this means: "that you toil in Torah." Through toiling in Torah, one regains all that he learned as an embryo with the angel. This is described by the following verse (*Vayikra* 26:4), "Then I will provide your rains in their time." Rain

refers to Torah. “Your rain” refers to the specific Torah that you learned while yet in your mother’s womb.

A person must invest much effort in order to merit the revelations he experienced when he was in his mother’s womb, and recall all the greatness lost at birth. Chazal state (*Pesachim* 50a; *Kohelet Rabbah* 9:8), “Fortunate is he who arrives here with his learning in his hand.” Fortunate is the one who arrives in *Olam Haba*, the World of Truth, before his Creator, with the very same Torah learning which he learned with the angel before birth.

One should take heart that even if he does not merit to understand the many secrets of the Torah, if he will exert himself in Torah, to the best of his ability, Hashem considers it as though he regained all that he learned in his mother’s womb. Often, someone will learn a new subject, even proposing novel interpretations, yet, he has the feeling that he has learned this topic previously and at that time suggested the very same explanations. This is because he might very well have done so when he studied with the angel before he was born. By afterward exerting himself in Torah, this elucidation was revealed to him again.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal tell us that an angel teaches the fetus Torah while it is in its mother’s womb. At birth, an angel smites him on the mouth, causing him to forget everything he learned. This is difficult to understand. If the fetus will forget everything, why should the angel teach him in the first place?
- Just like Adam Harishon received a book of wisdom in Gan Eden, which was confiscated from him when he was exiled, so it is with every baby. His Torah knowledge is taken from him when he is born so that he should not reveal its secrets. He is taught by the angel before his birth so that he should always long to regain everything that he previously knew. This is indicated by the pasuk which states, “If you go in My ways, I will give your rains in their time.” By exerting yourselves in Torah study, you will get back “your rains.” This is the Torah which was yours when you were in your mother’s womb.

## THE ESSENCE OF A BEN TORAH

Our Sages call one who learns Torah a *ben Torah* (*Ta'anit* 19b; *Yerushalmi Berachot* 32b; *Bereishit Rabbah* 72:5). The Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, zt"l, in his sefer *Lev Eliyahu*, asks why. We don't find the term *ben* in reference to any other occupation. For example, a mathematician is not called a *ben cheshbon* (student of math).

Man is comprised of 248 organs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the positive commandments and negative prohibitions of the Torah (*Makkot* 23b; *Zohar* I, 170b). Only through learning Torah can one fulfill the mitzvot properly. This is as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 4:1), "Now, O Israel, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform." Ibn Ezra (ibid.) explains that the main purpose of study is to do mitzvot. This is what the Midrash tells us (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:9), "More important than the learning is the action."

The Chafetz Chaim writes (*Shemirat Halashon*, Part 2), "I come to arouse an awareness regarding that which we say every day in the parashah of *tzitzit* (*Bamidbar* 15:39), 'That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem.' Our Sages explain (*Menachot* 43b) that seeing brings to remembering, and remembering brings to doing. But this method can be effective only when one learns and knows the mitzvot, yet is afraid of forgetting them. The *tzitzit* are then effective in helping him keep his mind on the mitzvot and not forget them. Thus the *tzitzit* will help him to perform mitzvot. But if he doesn't know what the mitzvot are and how to keep them, how will his *tzitzit* help?"

Man's purpose in this world is to do mitzvot, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 10:13), "To observe the commandments of Hashem and His decrees, which I command you today, for your benefit."

Furthermore, by learning Torah one sanctifies his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, which correspond to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. Torah study sanctifies one's entire body, transforming it into a vessel of Torah. Then his actions, thoughts, and even his gait and nuances, will all be in accordance with the Torah. For this reason, he is called a *ben Torah*. It is as if the Torah has given birth to him, since the Torah teaches him how to behave and brings him to fulfill the will of his Creator. His whole body becomes sanctified, and he is truly an extension of the Torah, the Torah's "son."

This helps us understand Rava's statement (*Shabbat* 31a): "When a person is judged after death, he is asked if he set aside fixed times for Torah study." On the face of it, it seems fitting to ask this question to a person who spent the majority of his time earning a livelihood. It makes sense to ask if he put aside at least a small amount of time to learn Torah. But how is this connected to *talmidei chachamim*, whose Torah is their lifeblood, and who sit all day long learning Torah and serving Hashem? What is the point of asking them this question?

According to the words of the Chafetz Chaim quoted above, we can understand that even those who engage in Torah study all day long must know that learning alone is not enough. Time must be allotted to study practical halachah. The Chafetz Chaim (*Shem Olam* Part 2 Ch. 7) says, "One of the aspects of Torah study is the obligation to learn in order to know how to behave practically. For this reason, it is imperative to learn those laws which apply to us today. This subject matter takes priority over all else.

"The Torah clearly states this injunction in various places. For example: (*Bamidbar* 15:39), 'And remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them.' We are also told (*Devarim* 5:1), 'Learn them, and be careful to perform them.' Also (*Vayikra* 26:3), 'If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them.'

“The *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De’ah 246)* states that businessmen who learn only three or four hours a day should not spend all that time only on Gemara. Rather, they should devote time to the study of practical halachah so that they will learn the proper way to act. Chazal say (*Megillah 28b; Niddah 73a*), ‘Whoever reviews halachah every day is guaranteed a portion in the World to Come.’

“This is a basic concept, which one will easily understand once he realizes that the purpose of learning is to know how to act correctly, in accordance with halachah. Without this knowledge, a person will never come to do what’s right. Because of his lack of knowledge he is liable to transgress mitzvot of the Torah. For instance, he may not be aware of the laws of reciting *Kriyat Shema* on time and being punctilious in its pronunciation, accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven upon himself. Likewise concerning the laws of tefillin, etc.”

The entire world was created for the sake of Torah and Bnei Yisrael who would engage in its study (*Vayikra Rabbah 23:3*). The following statement of Zohar (II, 161b) is well-known. The Torah was the blueprint for the Creation of the world. This teaches that Hashem was “learning Torah” as He was creating the world. We are enjoined to cleave to Him (*Devarim 11:22*). Our Sages explain (*Sotah 14a*) that this means that we should cleave to Hashem’s ways. Therefore, just as He learns Torah, so should we.

We certainly have no concept of the ways of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Nevertheless, we are commanded to learn from them. We can learn from Him that it is possible to work while maintaining set times for Torah study. When one works, he is surely able to recite chapters of Tehillim or review sections of Mishnah without damaging his performance. Specifically in this day and age, when people spend vast amounts of time in transit, they can take advantage of this time and listen to recorded Torah *shiurim* instead of hearing foolishness from all kinds of dubious sources. Doing this can actually protect a person on the road.

Since Hashem looked into the Torah during the Creation of the world, there is nothing that does not derive from Torah. Moreover, just like the Creation of the world was contingent on Torah, one who is involved in Torah helps maintain the world's existence (*Zohar II*, 161b).

## **True Service of Hashem**

In order to serve Hashem properly and attain love and fear of Him, one must first and foremost love his fellow man. For, if he is not unified with others, he may sit and learn Torah all day long, but his learning will not remain with him. True mutual love is when each person humbles himself before the other and overcomes his natural inclinations. The Gemara states (*Yoma 23a*), "Whoever overcomes his natural tendencies, his transgressions are overlooked." And he even merits that his life is lengthened because of this (*Shemirat Halashon Part I*).

The enthusiasm displayed by Bnei Yisrael when Hashem wanted to give the Torah is described in several different pesukim. We find (*Shemot 19:8*) that "the entire people responded together and said, 'Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do.'" Also (*ibid. 24:3*), "And the entire people responded with one voice and they said, 'All the words that Hashem has spoken, we will do.'" Further (*ibid. 24:7*), "Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey!"

On the other hand, Chazal (*Shabbat 88a*) explain the words (*Shemot 19:17*), "And they stood at the bottom of the mountain" to mean that Hashem placed Har Sinai above their heads like a barrel, and told the people, "If you accept the Torah, fine. But if not, here will be your graves." This is extremely puzzling. Bnei Yisrael had already stated openly, a number of times, that they were willing to accept the Torah without hesitation. Why was it necessary to force them into acceptance, placing the mountain above their heads like a barrel?

Furthermore, in the merit of stating that they would accept the Torah without even knowing what it entailed, they were elevated to the level of

angels. Chazal state (*Shabbat* 88a): Rabbi Eliezer said, “At the time that Bnei Yisrael preceded, ‘We will do’ to the words, ‘We will obey,’ a Heavenly Voice emitted, crying out, ‘Who revealed this secret to My sons, that heavenly angels use?’ This is what is referred to by the pasuk (*Tehillim* 103:20), ‘Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word.’” If so, what was the purpose of forcing Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah?

After witnessing all that Hashem had done for them, Bnei Yisrael were ready to sacrifice themselves for His sake. But Hashem wasn’t satisfied with that. He wanted to teach them that accepting the Torah without love and unity is not a complete acceptance. Each person must be responsible for the other (*Shavuot* 39a). It is impossible to serve Hashem perfectly and in joy if deep within one’s heart hate and envy fester. All Jews are connected, for we all come from the same source.

For this reason, Hashem held the mountain over them like a barrel. It was to show them that just as they were one unit at that time, with no possibility of escape, they must always maintain this level of unity. The word כפה (He placed as a dome) hints to this. It has the same letters as the word הפך (turned over). Hashem turned over the mountain above them in order to hint to them that when there is no unity everything good is turned over to bad. Tragedy and danger will then ensue, just as the mountain was overturned to kill them.

The words נעשה ונשמע (We will do and we will obey) correspond to the words אהבה (love) and יראה (fear). The word נעשה (we will do) corresponds to אהבה, for we must do the mitzvot out of love of Hashem. Whereas ונשמע (and we will hear/obey) corresponds to יראה, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 31:12), “So that they will hear...and they shall fear Hashem.”

I read in the sefer *Meorei She’arim* (p. 14) the following passage regarding Torah study: There are those who learn out of love of Torah, and those who learn out of fear. One who learns Torah out of love is in

constant danger, lest he is faced with a *nisayon* of loving something else, and he fails to withstand the test. This is not the case concerning one who studies out of fear [for there is no concern that he will be attracted to a different love]. For this reason, Chazal state (*Shabbat* 31a) on the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 33:6), “Fear of Hashem – that is [man’s] treasure,” that Torah study must be founded on fear of Heaven.

Bnei Yisrael, of their own accord, came to the understanding that in order to serve Hashem perfectly, one must both love and fear Him. Likewise, one must learn Torah with both love and fear. Hashem hinted to the nation that these principles of love and fear are the foundations of human relations, as well. One must love his fellow Jew and also fear him in order to ensure that no other love comes to take its place. In this manner, man can withstand the *nisyonot* which come his way.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Our Sages call one who engages in Torah study a *ben Torah*. We don’t find this title used to describe any other profession. Man is composed of 248 organs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot. When a person learns Torah and performs mitzvot, he sanctifies his body, transforming it into a vessel of Torah. One should learn in order to keep the mitzvot. Then it is as if the Torah “gave birth to him”; he is literally a “son of the Torah.”
- One merits cleaving to Hashem by learning Torah. Hashem created the world by looking into the Torah. Thus when a person learns Torah, he upholds the world. This is pertinent to every person. Anyone can learn at any given time. Even while working, a person can say words of Tehillim or listen to Torah tapes. In this manner, he is supporting the world.
- In order to serve Hashem by perfecting his character one must love his fellow man, humble himself before his friend, and overcome his natural tendencies. In this manner, he will merit having his sins overlooked, and deserve increased years of life.

## TOIL IN TORAH

When troubles come upon a person, he must try to find their source. The Rambam writes (*Hilchot Ta'anit* 1:2), “This is one of the methods of teshuvah. When troubles befall the people, they will cry out and blow the trumpets. All will know that their suffering came because of their iniquities, as the pasuk says (*Yirmeyahu* 5:25), ‘Your sins have overturned these.’ Doing these acts will remove the troubles.” Moreover, Chazal state (*Berachot* 5a), “If a person sees suffering come upon him, he should search out his deeds, as the pasuk says (*Eichah* 3:40), ‘Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.’”

The purpose of trials and tribulations is for a person to open his eyes and his heart and ask himself (*Devarim* 29:23) “for what reason did Hashem do so...why this wrathfulness of great anger?” He should think: “Why did Hashem see fit to punish me in this manner? Hashem loves kindness and wants only good for His creatures. It must be in order to awaken me from my slumber, for I have forgotten to serve Him through love and fear. Therefore, He sent me this misfortune in order that I should return to Him in complete teshuvah and accept His service upon myself with greater intensity.”

The pasuk says (*Vayikra* 4:27), “If his sin that he committed becomes known to him.” The Zohar (III, 23b) explains that the *neshamah* itself reminds the person of his sin, in order that he is aroused to do teshuvah.

When a person takes this message to heart and repents his transgressions, all of his suffering is converted to goodness and blessing, for through it he becomes closer to his Creator. But, if a person does not learn this lesson, believing that his suffering is mere coincidence, something that just happened to befall him, his misfortunes will be multiplied, causing him tremendous anguish. He will receive no benefit from his sufferings; on the contrary, they will increase, because he failed to take the correct message from them.

It is possible that the whole reason that one came into this world is in order to repair a specific defect. If he does not fulfill this charge, he is sent intimations from on High that he should examine his ways. He will thereby find the area in which he is deficient, which is most likely the one he needs to rectify. If a person will examine his actions thoroughly, he will discover what it is that he needs to improve. Otherwise, he might need to return to this world in a reincarnation. If, after searching thoroughly, he believes that he corrected whatever he needs to correct, but still experiences suffering, he should attribute it to *bitul* Torah. One should understand that misfortune does not come upon a person unless he has sinned.

A person should know that even if he learns Torah day and night and corrects all his actions, to the extent that he believes he is worthy of a portion in the World to Come, if he does not toil in Torah as he should, he is liable to suffer misfortunes. For, without laboring in Torah, one can transgress small matters without even realizing.

Chazal tell us (*Avot* 2:1), “Be as scrupulous in performing a ‘minor’ mitzvah as in a ‘major’ one, for you do not know the reward given for the respective mitzvot. Calculate the cost of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a sin against its cost.” Even aveirot that may seem inconsequential in our eyes are scrutinized on High. Just as we don’t know the great reward for mitzvot, we don’t know the great punishment for aveirot. Hashem is particularly scrupulous with those closest to Him (*Yevamot* 121b).

Sometimes a person suffers misfortune in the realms of livelihood, health, or childrearing. He complains against Hashem, demanding to know what he did to deserve such treatment. He feels that the merit of his Torah study, mitzvah performance, and *tzedakah* do not warrant such suffering. His suffering may even lead him to utter words of heresy, *rachmana litzlan*.

However, the Rambam tells us not to blame Hashem, *chas v'chalilah*, for (*Tehillim* 125:9), “He is good to all, and His mercies are on all His works.” Hashem does not cause harm to anyone. Adversity comes upon a person to remind him to search out his ways in order to find whatever it is that he needs to correct. This may be the reason why he came into the world in the first place. Or else, this adversity is a consequence of a sin, which he will discover by examining his deeds.

When parents truly toil in Torah, they will certainly be meticulous with how they keep mitzvot, especially those mitzvot concerning educating their children. Then, the children themselves will be scrupulous in keeping all the details of the mitzvot.

What is true “toil in Torah?” According to Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, not everyone who spends his time in the Beit Hamidrash learning Torah is called one who toils in Torah. Only a person who engages in Torah with tremendous labor, even sweating over it, is called one who “toils in Torah.”

Rabbi Yisrael himself was an example of this. One time in the city of Salant, the Torah students were involved in a topic of Gemara, and found that the Rambam seemed to be self-contradictory. They didn't know how to settle the matter. Rabbi Yisrael sat and immersed himself in this topic, expending great effort to understand it. With *siyata di'Shemaya* he merited to clarify all the ambiguities. The next morning, he invited his disciples and the Rabbis of the town to share in his joy. He gave them a discourse, settling the previous evening's contradiction. They were all delighted that the Rambam's words were now clear.

However, in the midst of their joy, they discovered Rabbi Yisrael shedding tears. They asked him why he was crying when they were all celebrating. Rabbi Yisrael replied, “I am not weeping over what has happened, but for the great accusation which will now be leveled against me. I cry over the topics that I have still not clarified. Through great effort, I was able to resolve the question we had. This proves that if I were to

exert myself appropriately, I would be able to resolve all of my questions. The fact that I still have questions is proof that I have not expended enough effort in settling them. For that I cry.”

The more efforts one expends in his learning, the greater is the accusation against him. One is held liable for even one moment of time wasted from learning. For, in that moment he could have settled a difficult subject, had he just put in the effort. Every single person possesses tremendous potential with which to understand the Torah. One brings this potential to fruition only by toiling in Torah.

Therefore, one should try, as much as he is able, to put effort into his Torah study. This will prevent any accusation against him. His reward for this will be great. Shlomo Hamelech states (*Kohelet* 4:12), “A three-ply cord is not easily severed.” This means that when a person attaches himself to Hashem Yitbarach and to the Torah, he will merit long life, for Torah is life (*Mishlei* 4:13).

Chazal state (*Avot* 1:13), “One who seeks renown loses his reputation; one who does not increase [his Torah learning] decreases it; one who refuses to teach [Torah] deserves death.” This means that one who does not increase the effort that he expends in learning Torah deserves to die before his time. Man is called אָדָם for he comes from the אֲדָמָה (earth), a physical material. One is instructed to study Torah, increasing his knowledge. Torah is the antithesis of mundane matter, and the lifeblood of a person. Through Torah, a person connects himself to Hashem, the Source of all life.

This, then, is what is meant by the words, “One who does not increase [his Torah learning] decreases it.” One who does not put effort into his Torah study, thereby overriding his physical makeup with spirituality, warrants death. “One who refuses to teach [Torah] deserves death,” refers to a person who does not learn Torah at all. He deserves death, since by cutting himself off from Torah he is separating himself from the source of life. He merely returns to his original form – dust of the earth.

When a person labors in his Torah study, but on occasion slackens, Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings misfortune upon him in order to arouse him and remind him to quickly re-connect to Torah, his lifeblood. Therefore, one should be careful not to sever himself from learning. Then he will have no need for unpleasant reminders.

I thought of adding the following. It is not sufficient to learn and sweat over Torah all day, but one must delve into the depths of halachah, revealing the secrets and hints therein. Chazal state (*Avot* 5:27), “Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it.” One should not be satisfied with superficial study; he should seek to understand the very depths of its meaning.

This can be understood by a parable. A person may take great pains in order to obtain a bottle of very old wine, which has been sealed for many years. Everyone praises this type of wine. Yet, as long as the bottle remains sealed and he has not yet tasted of its contents, he cannot know its true value, and if it is actually as delicious as he believes. In order to know what the bottle contains, he must taste the wine. The same holds true with Torah. Even if a person spends much time and effort understanding its words, if he doesn’t succeed in getting to the core of the matter, this indicates that he has not exerted enough energy in his Torah study. He hasn’t yet tasted the wine.

A person lacking Torah is like a body lacking a *neshamah*. Although he may seem to be alive, true life is only that of the *neshamah*. David Hamelech exhorts us (*Tehillim* 34:9), “Contemplate (lit. taste) and see that Hashem is good.” Only by tasting the sweetness of Torah will one toil in Torah and truly live. This is man’s purpose in life, as the pasuk says (*Iyov* 2:7), “For man is born to toil.” Chazal expound (*Sanhedrin* 99b), “I do not know if this refers to the labor of the mouth or the labor of work. The pasuk in Mishlei (16:26) states, ‘When its mouth humbles itself to it.’ From this we see that a person was created to labor with his mouth. Does this

mean that one should speak in Torah or in conversation? The pasuk in Yehoshua (1:8) states, ‘This Book of the Torah shall not depart for your mouth.’ From here we see that man was created to labor in Torah.”

Perhaps we can explain this further. Man was created to connect all the worlds. Through him, the Creator can bring down abundance from one world to the next. For the existence of this world is contingent upon the bounty it receives from on High. But there has to be a conduit between the two worlds. Man is that conduit. His *nefesh* is from the world of *Assiah*, his *ruach* is from the world of *Yetzirah*, and his *neshamah* is from the world of *Beriah*. Therefore, a person is intrinsically connected with all the worlds, and has the capacity to influence each of them.

Thus man is responsible for bringing abundance down to this world, by connecting all the worlds. This is done by toiling in Torah. Man’s *raison d’être* is in order to engage in Torah. The Zohar states (I, 161b) that Hashem looked into the Torah and thereby created the world. By means of engaging in Torah, man bonds the worlds, ensuring their survival. Torah preceded this world, and is an integral part of every creation.

For this reason, one must see to it not to ruin the Creation through *bitul* Torah. He should resolve to uphold it constantly, thereby ensuring the connection between all the worlds. Through Torah study, he will discover the existence of Hashem and Torah in all of Creation. He will then be able to truly recognize the greatness of the Creator.

This is alluded to in a homiletical way. The word *עמל* (toil in Torah) is composed of the first letters of the words *על מנת ללמד* (for the sake of teaching). It is not enough for a person to study Torah alone; he must put much effort into his study, so that he may teach and bring merit to others. The Torah tells us (*Vayikra* 19:18), “You shall love your fellow as yourself.” The Gemara states (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4), “This is a great principle of Torah.” Just as you want to connect all the worlds and bring down blessing upon yourself, so should you teach others. Your *neshamah* and theirs have the same source. Therefore, you should teach them also

to connect all the worlds, so that they will be able to repair whatever they need to correct. This is true toil in Torah. One should expend much effort in his learning in order to teach others, so that they, too, may toil in it. One who does so will merit all good things in this world, as well as in the next, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The Rambam teaches that suffering befalls a person in order that he should do teshuvah. It prompts him to search out his ways and serve Hashem with greater intensity. The Zohar states that a person's *neshamah* informs him of his sin so that he may do complete teshuvah. When misfortune comes upon a person he should inspect his actions. The entire purpose of the misfortune is to remind him to correct his behavior. If, after thorough examination, one finds nothing that needs improvement, he should attribute his suffering to *bitul* Torah.
- The most important thing is to toil in Torah. For even if a person learns Torah, if he does not exert himself, he will find it difficult to be scrupulous in mitzvah observance. He is liable to transgress mitzvot which do not seem important in his eyes. In the eyes of Hashem, though, they are extremely important. Therefore, he should scrutinize his ways, as the Rambam instructs, for thus he will correct his deeds and be able to connect with his Creator.
- Toil in Torah means literally sweating over it. This is portrayed by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. If one is capable of uncovering the truth of Torah through his efforts in one area this obligates him to try his utmost in all other areas of Torah. When one exerts himself in his Torah study, he becomes capable of fulfilling his task of joining the upper and lower worlds together, and bringing down bounty from Hashem. He upholds the world and accrues much merit by doing so. He will merit seeing future generations following in his ways.

## A TASTE OF TORAH

Yeshayahu Hanavi (55:1) tells us, “Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.” Chazal tell us that water refers to Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a). If so, why are we told just to go to the water? Shouldn’t we be told to drink?

The following words of David Hamelech shed light on this question. He says (*Tehillim* 34:9), “Taste and see that Hashem is good.” The word “taste” indicates the following. A person who is on the verge of dehydration must not drink too much at once even though he is very thirsty, for he might choke, *chas v’chalilah*. He must take small sips of water, until his body returns to its former state and is able to handle liquids. Then, he can go to the springs and drink to satiation, revitalizing himself.

The same is true regarding Torah. A person will not understand a word if he never learned before. He must take baby steps, learning in small amounts, until he becomes used to it. He should also follow this advice in keeping mitzvot.

Whoever thirsts for Torah and wants to become close to Hashem should go to the Beit Hamidrash. His desire for learning will increase with time, and he will be able to quench his thirst with the waters of Torah.

One should begin with light topics, which can be easily understood, until he reaches the level where he can grasp more complex issues. For, if he starts his study with difficult subjects, he will understand nothing, and just give up. I have seen people who wanted to learn Torah, but since they began with complex topics, they gave up in no time.

One should approach the Torah just like the thirsty man approaches the water, and put effort into what he does understand. Only afterward, should he drink from the waters of Torah to his heart’s content. We find that Yaakov Avinu, who was mighty in Torah, succeeded in lifting the heavy stone from the well (*Bereishit* 29:10) like someone takes a cover off

of a bottle (*Rashi; Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*). He was able to uncover the wellsprings of Torah, which less learned people were unable to do. At first, one learns a little bit. Afterward, through toiling in his learning, he may delve into more complicated subjects.

If one learns something which is on too high a level for him, he may cause himself considerable anguish. First, one should taste a little bit of Torah. He is guaranteed to taste its sweetness. Then he will keep the mitzvot out of love, and he will enjoy endless delights, as Shlomo Hamelech states (*Mishlei 3:18*), "Its ways are ways of pleasantness."

The sweetness of Torah is sweeter than anything else in the world, as it says (*Tehillim 19:8*), "The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul...They are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold." This is not a matter of belief. A wonderful, sweet taste, which defies description, awaits those who immerse themselves in the waters of Torah. This is the highest form of pleasure in this world.

However, even the person who toils in Torah study should know that he is not immune to the *Yetzer Hara*. He must be especially cautious of him. Chazal state (*Kiddushin 30b; Sukkah 52b*), "Man's inclination overpowers him every day, desiring to kill him. If not for Hakadosh Baruch Hu's help, he wouldn't be able to withstand him."

Let us examine these words. Why is the *Yetzer Hara* bent on killing a person? His job, after all, is to prevent a person from serving Hashem, not to take his life. The Midrash tells us (*Bereishit Rabbah 91:9*), "The Satan prosecutes at a time of danger." What is the point of the Satan's prosecution? If the person is a rasha, it would be better not to prosecute him, and allow him to continue in his evil ways. And if he is a tzaddik, the Satan's prosecutions will not accomplish a thing. It would be better for the Satan to leave him alone, for, maybe in the future, he will manage to trip him up.

At a time of danger there is no differentiation between the tzaddik and the rasha. The pasuk in *Tehillim (109:7)* states, "When he is judged, may

he go out condemned.” The Gemara expounds (*Yerushalmi Shabbat 2:5*) that it does not say that he should go out righteous. The Satan doesn’t want to endanger himself, therefore he prosecutes the wicked so that he should have no opportunity to do teshuvah. The Satan prosecutes the righteous in order to prevent him from ascending in his Avodat Hashem.

The Satan prosecutes most vehemently when he himself is in danger. The *Imrei Emet* of Gur, zt”l, explains this (*Parashat Bamidbar*). When a person does teshuvah, he puts the Satan in danger, for others are likely to follow his example. The Satan dreads this. Moreover, the Gemara states (*Sukkah 52a*) that in the future, Hashem will slaughter the *Yetzer Hara*.

Whenever a Jew desires to do mitzvot or repent, the Satan tries to overpower him, even to kill him. This does not refer to physical death, rather, spiritual death. His ploy is to make the person depressed and lack self-confidence. Then, when the Satan tests him, he will not have the emotional ability to withstand these trials, and will fail them. When Hashem sees that these trials are too overwhelming, He steps in to help the person.

Hashem tests a person only according to his ability to withstand the trial. He does not give him a test which is too great for him to bear. But Hashem does grant the Satan tremendous power. The Satan tries with all his might to cause a person to stumble in tests. He knows that if the person would withstand them, he himself would be defeated. When a person overcomes the Satan’s ploys, the Satan states (*Esther 5:13*), “**וְכָל זֶה לִי אֵינְנו שׁוֹהַ** – Yet all this is worth nothing to me.” The last letters of the last four of these words spell the Name of Hashem (יהוה-וה). The Satan acknowledges that Hashem helps a person overcome his tests.

We find this to be the case with Iyov. Hashem told the Satan (*Iyov 2:6*), “Behold, he is in your hand, but preserve his soul [from death].” Hashem does not allow the Satan to bring upon a person tests that are above his ability to withstand. The sweet taste of Torah assists a person in

overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. It prevents him from prosecuting. Constant Torah study brings only good to a person.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Yeshayahu states, “Ho, all who are thirsty, go to the water.” Water is a metaphor for Torah. The reason it says “go to the water,” instead of “drink from the water” is the following. When one is distant from Torah, he cannot begin to learn all of it at once. If he were to do so, he would give up almost immediately. Rather, he should approach Torah learning in small increments, “tasting” the halachot little by little, until he becomes accustomed to them. Eventually, he will savor the sweet, pleasant taste of Torah.
- This is the meaning of the pasuk, “If you will follow My decrees.” One is enjoined to begin learning easy topics, and work his way up to more complicated subjects. Otherwise, he may fall into despair. He should first taste the sweetness of Torah, and only later on, toil in the more challenging parts. But he should never relax. He should always be on the lookout for the tests put in his path by the *Yetzer Hara*, who constantly seeks to capture his soul so that he should not ascend in his Avodat Hashem. One succeeds in defeating the Satan only when he toils in Torah, savoring its sweetness.

## FOR LOVE OF TORAH

**An excerpt from a letter to Rabbeinu from his disciple, Hagaon Rabbi  
Eliyahu Reisman, shlita**

Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of men, states in Mishlei (31:10), “An accomplished woman who can find?” He is lamenting the fact that it is difficult to find a woman of valor. It is even more difficult than discovering precious pearls, as the pasuk continues, “Far beyond pearls is her value.”

It seems as though Shlomo Hamelech’s words are self-contradictory, for, at the end of the chapter (ibid. 29), he states, “Many women have

amassed achievement.” This means that many women have, indeed, succeeded in reaching the status of a “woman of valor.” Therefore, it is not so difficult to find an accomplished woman, after all. Why, then, in the beginning of the chapter, does he ask who can find one?

Furthermore, this last statement leads us to understand that many women can be called accomplished, none of whom receives greater praise over her peers. Yet, he ends the verse, “but you surpassed them all.” In what way does she override her colleagues; weren’t they all fittingly called “woman of valor?”

### **Explanation of the Rav, shlita, in response**

I received your letter and was duly pleased by what you write, from the love of the Torah which you study in the Holy Land, desiring only to sit in peace and tranquility, in order to engage in Torah and enjoy its teachings. Gird yourself in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, for that is man’s true essence.

I suggest the following, in response to your questions on the words of Shlomo Hamelech. He is asking his questions in wonder, “An accomplished woman, who can find?” An “accomplished woman” refers to Torah. She is searching for the person who will always be connected to her, with all his heart and all his soul, and connected to nothing else.

Shlomo Hamelech is saying, “Can one find something more important than this accomplished woman, the Torah? Is there an exchange for Torah?” Shlomo Hamelech ends the chapter with the words, “Many women have amassed achievement,” meaning to say that although many have achieved greatness in their Torah learning in yeshiva, etc., “but you surpassed them all.” Only one who is completely devoted to Torah, never forsaking it, has surpassed the others.

All those who accomplished great things in their Torah learning, but eventually left Torah, do not receive the accolade of “woman of valor.”

Only one who persists and perseveres in his Torah studies, making it the essence of his life, is the true “woman of valor.”

I see that you, Rabbi Eliyahu, make Torah a priority; she is your “woman of valor.” The continuation of the verse, “who can find?” can be applied to your case. May it be the will of Hashem that you rise ever higher in Torah, always finding in it your calling, and never exchanging it for anything else. You should have success in all your endeavors, Amen.

## SELF-SACRIFICE FOR TORAH AND MITZVOT

The days of Tammuz and Av are particularly suited to correcting the faults that led to the *churban*, and thus hasten the *geulah*. Therefore, one should strive with *mesirut nefesh* to strengthen himself in his Avodat Hashem.

To our chagrin, the Satan fixed precisely these months as days of rest and recreation. People relax at the beach and, instead of learning Torah, may turn to immoral pursuits. This is extremely perplexing. Chazal state (*Shabbat* 62b) that the *churban* began because the Jewish daughters did not behave with the appropriate measure of *tzeniut*. They would put perfume on their legs and gaze at the young men. Yerushalayim was destroyed because women uncovered their necks and perfumed their legs! If so, what can we say for ourselves? Instead of using these months to repair such faults, we merely add to them, *rachmana litzlan*.

A woman approached me asking how young people will get married if boys and girls are forbidden to sit or dance together, let alone look at each other. To which I responded, “And how were marriages arranged in the olden days? How do Chassidim arrange matches? *Shidduchim* are accomplished through purity, and not through immoral means.”

These days of vacation are called “חופש” which has the same letters as the word חיפוש (searching out). Vacation is a time that should be used for seeking Hashem; a time to be especially careful to conduct oneself in purity.

The Steipler Gaon, zt”l, in his sefer *Kehillat Yaakov*, writes, “How many great men achieved their greatness by properly utilizing the days of *Bein Hazmanim*? People think that these are days of abandon. But specifically during vacation, when a person is relaxed, he can devote his time to meditate and make a personal accounting regarding the damage he wrought throughout the previous year. He also has more time for Torah study. There is no Torah study as great as the study of a person at leisure. It is similar to the Torah that one learns on Shabbat, when he is at rest, which is a very high level.”

When Moshe Rabbeinu repeated the commandments to Bnei Yisrael before his death, adjuring them to keep their covenant with Hashem, the pasuk says (*Devarim* 29:9), “You are standing (נצבים) today, all of you...” Afterward, we read (ibid. 11), “for you to pass into the covenant of Hashem.” These statements seem contradictory. For, if they are standing, they are not passing, and if they are passing, they are not standing. This means the following. When a person is standing on a stable (יציב) spiritual level, he is able to pass into the covenant, upholding the purity of his *brit kodesh*. However, if one merely relaxes during vacation, and desists from Torah study, he is liable to falter, apt to damage the holiness of the *brit*.

Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated *mesirut nefesh*. He was a shepherd. When one of the lambs escaped, in order to go to drink water, he ran after it and carried it back to the flock (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:2). He didn’t send a messenger to fetch the lamb, but went on his own, with *mesirut nefesh*. For this, he merited being the leader of Yisrael, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 24:13), “And Moshe ascended the mountain of G-d.”

Yitro also possessed this character trait. He reached his high level, and merited joining our nation through the *mesirut nefesh* of entering an empty

wilderness in order to hear the word of Hashem (*Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael, Yitro* 1). There, he recognized his Creator, adding to what he had heard previously. When a person hears the word of Hashem, he must use this as a springboard to learn more, going from strength to strength in his Avodat Hashem, pre-empting the *Yetzer Hara's* attack. Indeed, Yitro heard and came, doing what others refrained from doing. He was worthy of having children who continuously learned in the Beit HaMidrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Yitro, remez* 268).

Oftentimes, we hear, but we fail to take the message to heart. This is because we do not feel sufficient humility and are unwilling to defer to Hashem's will, as we are enjoined to do. Yitro, however, did this. His name even indicates this: יתרו connotes ויתור (yielding). By giving up his former status for the sake of Hashem, he merited joining Am Yisrael and having a parashah named after him. This is also alluded to in his name, for יתרו has the same root as the word יתר (additional). He merited this due to his humility and self-effacement.

After one submits himself to the word of Hashem, he is able to do teshuvah. This is what Yitro referred to in his statement (*Shemot* 18:11), "Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods." The use of the word "now" refers to teshuvah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 21:6). When one acts with *mesirut nefesh*, he lives constantly in teshuvah. Once a person sacrifices his all for a Higher cause, he becomes open to understanding the greatness of Hashem.

This was the greatness of Yitro. He could have sufficed with studying Torah in his native land. Instead, he preferred exile, fulfilling the words of the Mishnah (*Avot* 4:14), "Exile yourself to a place of Torah." For this reason, he left the comfort of his home for life in the Wilderness. Similarly, the Jewish nation learned Torah in the Wilderness before entering Eretz Yisrael, for once they would enter the Land, they would become involved in other matters. Exile is designated for toiling in Torah.

The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow My decrees.” Chazal explain (*Torat Kohanim*, *ibid.*), “That you toil in Torah.” For by means of laboring in Torah, a person does mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*. This is also referred to in the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 8:2), “When you kindle the lamps.” Lamps hint to mitzvot. One who sacrifices himself for the sake of Torah will surely sacrifice himself for the sake of mitzvot, as well.

Then he will keep mitzvot in an extremely elevated manner, like a pure offering which gives its life to Hashem. He overcomes physical temptations and everything becomes spiritual. The mundane holds no attraction for him, only the spiritual. In this way he recognizes his Creator. Conversely, one who is occupied with his desires distances himself from Hashem.

This is hinted to by the words “When you kindle the lamps.” The lamps refer to mitzvot. One literally sacrifices himself as an offering by nullifying his baser self in order to keep mitzvot, implied by the lamps. The pasuk continues, “Toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.” This teaches that the mitzvot done throughout the seven days of the week should shine toward the *Shechinah*, i.e. one should do mitzvot in order to make a *kiddush Hashem*.

This type of self-sacrifice was exhibited by Yehoshua and Calev, who did not join the plot of the spies, but displayed *mesirut nefesh* for their ideals. They were not included in the punishment of dying in the desert, and merited tremendous reward. (More on this subject is written in *Shaarei Teshuvah; Chok L’Yisrael, Parashat Shelach*, p.112.)

The entire world was created in the merit of Bnei Yisrael (*Zohar, Shelach* 161a). Just as the heart of a person is in the center of his body, connected to the brain above, so, too, each Jewish person is like the heart, through which the entire world is nourished. By doing the will of Hashem, he bonds with his Creator.

By acting with *mesirut nefesh* for Torah and mitzvot one merits many blessings. Previous generations merited this because they kept their

language, their distinct Jewish clothes, and their Jewish names. Their self-sacrifice in doing so saved them from assimilation. Until forty years ago, our people in the ghetto of Melach in Morocco, and in the ghettos of Germany, also lived with such *mesirut nefesh*. Nowadays, when we are not subject to such persecution and can live wherever we want, we have also dropped our distinctive names, language, and mode of dress. Assimilation is the result. Lack of *mesirut nefesh* leads to assimilation.

Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, also demonstrated a great level of *mesirut nefesh*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 2:5), “Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe by the River.” Chazal tell us (*Sotah* 12b) that she went in order to rid herself of the influence of her father’s idols. The pasuk continues, “And she sent her hand and she took it” (the basket). The question is asked: Why did she bother stretching out her hand to grasp the basket in which Moshe was lying? It was very far away from her, and she couldn’t possibly reach it.

Batya was inspired by the conduct of Am Yisrael. She saw that they did not intermingle with the gentiles in spite of the suffering that they endured. Bnei Yisrael are compared to the olive. Just as oil does not mix with water but always rises to the top, so too Bnei Yisrael did not mix with the nations, but maintained their elevated status (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:2). She also inferred that just as the olive is bitter at first, but afterwards tastes sweet, so too, although Bnei Yisrael were enduring bitter suffering in Mitzrayim, their future would also be sweet. She emulated their steadfast self-sacrifice and joined the Jewish people.

We can learn a tremendous lesson from Batya. In spite of the great distance between herself and the basket, she wanted to reach it. Hashem helped her, as we are taught (*Yoma* 38b), “He who comes to purify himself is assisted.” Additionally, she did this act of self-sacrifice in front of her maidservants and in front of Miriam Haneviah. She did not send a messenger to bring her the baby. Certainly, her maidservants jeered at her devotion to rescue the Jewish child. But she single-mindedly tried to

reach the box, and achieved her goal. In it, she discovered light, the light of Torah (*Megillah* 16b).

From here we see the power of *mesirut nefesh*. Batya went specifically to the Nile to bathe, and not anywhere else. The Nile was the god of the Egyptians, and she went there to wash off the influence of her father's home. She purposely went to the place where the *kelippah* was strongest in order to subdue it. After this, she merited becoming like a mother to Moshe Rabbeinu, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 2:10), "And he was a son to her."

Batya merited ascending to heaven with her soul and body intact. Although she was the daughter of Pharaoh, the epitome of the power of impurity, with determination, she was able to come close to Hashem. We see that Hashem helped her.

How much more so does Hashem help every Jew do teshuvah and come close to Him. We just need a little bit of determination. Just as Batya went on her own to rescue Moshe, and did not send a maidservant to check what was in the box, similarly, we find that Moshe himself went to find the wayward lamb (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:2), meriting to see the *Shechinah*.

However, we find that people also act with self-sacrifice for the wrong things. Korach is a prime example of this. He seemingly acted *l'shem Shamayim*, as he said (*Bamidbar* 16:3), "For the entire assembly – all of them – are holy and Hashem is among them." But there was a basic flaw in his reasoning. Hashem detests quarrels. Every person is born with a measure of arrogance, as the pasuk says (*Divrei Hayamim* II 17:6), "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem." This arrogance must be utilized for Hashem's service, not for arguing with the righteous.

Moshe Rabbeinu was free of sin and had been explicitly chosen by Hashem to be His prophet. Korach had the audacity to fight with *mesirut nefesh* against Moshe Rabbeinu, who had ascended to heaven. One who rebels against his mentor has transgressed, even if his intentions were

*l'shem Shamayim*. Nadav and Avihu, too, died for their brazenness in asking, "When will these two old men die?" (*Sanhedrin* 52a).

Nadav and Avihu had good intentions, yet they were punished, for they brought an alien fire. Their deeds were "alien," not commanded by Hashem. Although they acted inappropriately, nevertheless, Hashem commanded that Bnei Yisrael eulogize them.

Yeravam ben Nevat is another prime example of this. The Gemara states (*Sanhedrin* 102a) that Hashem told him that if he were to do teshuvah, he would walk with Him in Gan Eden together with David Hamelech. To which Yeravam responded, "Who will go first?" Hashem answered, "David will lead, and we will go after him." Yeravam did not agree to this.

This is astounding. How did Yeravam have the audacity to aggrandize his own honor above that of Hashem?! It was the influence of the Satan, who led him to believe that he was acting *l'shem Shamayim* in desiring to go first. This is the way of the Satan: he brings a person to believe he is acting for the sake of Hashem, when this is really not the case. In the end, the person realizes that he was duped by the Master of Duplicity.

One should be especially cautious of the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*, who seeks to mislead him by causing him to devote himself to a quarrel. Even if this matter seems to be *l'shem Shamayim*, he should beware. Such quarrels caused the downfall of such great men as Korach and Nadav and Avihu, who spoke improperly against Moshe and Aharon. One should use *mesirut nefesh* for Avodat Hashem, rising ever higher in Torah study. When one does so, Hashem will come to his assistance.

### ————— In Summary —————

- It is important to pay special attention to serve Hashem in the days of summer vacation. These are the months in which the *churban* took place; they should be utilized to make reparations. The *Yetzer Hara* influences us to use this period for recreation, resulting in all forms of sin. Man can become a *talmid chacham*

simply by making good use of *Bein Hazmanim* to learn Torah. It is a wonderful opportunity to meditate on one's past actions, and to learn Torah and keep mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*. This is the meaning of the words, "You are standing." When you are standing steady on the path to *kedushah*, you are able to pass through the covenant with Hashem, preserving the sign of the *brit kodesh*.

- Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated *mesirut nefesh* in the incident with the kid goat. He pursued it in order to help it reach the water, and in this merit, he became the leader of Hashem's flock. Yitro, too, was awarded greatness for the *mesirut nefesh* he displayed in following the nation in the Wilderness to hear the word of Hashem. His children became great Torah scholars, for he acted with humility and self-effacement.
- If one toils in Torah with self-sacrifice, he becomes a pure offering. This is the meaning of, "When you kindle the lamps." Lamps refer to the mitzvot. "Toward the face of the Menorah" means that one's mitzvot should be directed toward the *Shechinah*, i.e., should make a *kiddush Hashem*. Yehoshua and Calev acted with *mesirut nefesh*, which warranted their inheriting the Land.
- Lack of *mesirut nefesh* causes sin and assimilation. Batya sacrificed herself to withdraw the basket containing Moshe from the Nile, when she went there to bathe and rid herself of the impure influence of her father's idols. She wanted to become a part of Am Yisrael. All the more so, can each Jew come close to Hashem, by means of *mesirut nefesh*.

# MITZVOT



## BRIT MILAH – BABY STEPS TOWARD HASHEM

“The world stands on three things: On Torah study, on the service of G-d (prayer), and on good deeds” (*Avot* 1:2).

However, this seems to contradict Hashem’s own words, as quoted by the *Navi* (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25): “If My covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth...” *Brit milah* is referred to as the covenant between Hashem and Am Yisrael. Thus the *Maharal*, *zt”l*, asks (*Derech Hachaim* 1:2): Why do we say that the world depends specifically on the three pillars mentioned above and not on the mitzvah of *brit milah*?

Maybe we can explain with the following idea. The world indeed exists in the merit of the *brit* between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Yisrael. By means of removing the *orlah*, one manifests his recognition of the Creator, and his desire to enter into a covenant with Him. But this recognition, and its inherent feeling of subservience to Hashem, cannot endure long-term. One must bond with Hashem with his entire heart, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 11:22), “And to cleave to Him.” A person must be firmly connected to Hashem.

However, this raises a question. How can one cleave to the *Shechinah*? Doesn’t the Torah state (*ibid.* 4:24), “For Hashem, your G-d – He is a consuming fire”? Chazal teach that in order to cleave to Hashem we should emulate His attributes (*Sotah* 14a). Just as He is merciful, so

should we be, etc. Through embracing Hashem's ways, one is able to attach himself to Him. Man's purpose in this world is to appreciate that Hashem is kind and merciful, and, by acting in the same way, constantly elevate himself in his level of closeness to Hashem.

[Ed. Note: It is appropriate to mention the words of the *Sefer Chareidim* (chapter 9), "It is a positive commandment to cleave to Hashem, as it states (*Devarim* 10:20), 'To Him shall you cleave.' This means that one should constantly feel a strong degree of love toward Him. The pasuk (ibid. 30:20) says, 'To love Hashem, your G-d, to listen to His voice, and to cleave to Him.' *Chovot Halevavot* (introduction to *Sha'ar Ahavat Hashem*) explains that the idea of cleaving means wholehearted, loyal love. As *Mishlei* (18:24) tells us, 'Sometimes a friend is closer than a brother.'

"Ramban expounds the words (*Devarim* 11:22) 'And to cleave to Him' in the following way: 'A person should constantly remember Hashem, and not take his thoughts off Him, when he is at home and when he is traveling, when he sleeps and when he is awake. To the degree that even when he converses with others, his thoughts are solely upon Hashem.' It could be that people on this high level are bound with the *Shechinah* even during their lifetime, because they make themselves into a sanctuary in which the *Shechinah* resides."]

For this reason, Chazal say the world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut chassadim*. Through these means a person can cleave to Hashem and thus uphold the world.

1. **Torah:** By toiling in Torah a person comes to true recognition of Hashem Yitbarach, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 34:9) says, "Contemplate and see that Hashem is good." Through Torah study and its enlightening qualities, a person can recognize Hashem and become increasingly elevated. Conversely, if a person does not make the effort to raise himself spiritually through learning, despite his ability to do so, he shames the

Torah, as our Sages say (*Avot* 6:2; *Shemot Rabbah* 41:9), “Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah!”

2. **Avodah:** Chazal (*Ta’anit* 2a) ask, “What is called the service of the heart? This is prayer.” This means that Torah alone, without prayer, is insufficient to bring a person closer to Hashem. Without praying, one cannot properly know Him. We often find that Hashem sends misfortune upon a person for the express purpose that he pray to Him. The Gemara (*Yevamot* 64a) states, “Rabbi Yitzchak asked, ‘For what reason were our forefathers barren? Because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous.’” This is because, through prayer, a person becomes closer to Hashem.

We see how critical prayer is from the episode with Chizkiyahu Hamelech. Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 94a) that Hashem wanted to make Chizkiyahu the Mashiach, and that Sancheirev would be Gog and Magog. But the *Middat Hadin* claimed: “Master of the World! David Hamelech, who came before you in praise and song, wasn’t worthy of becoming Mashiach. You performed so many miracles for Chizkiyahu, yet he did not sing *shirah* (a form of prayer) to You. How can You make him the Mashiach?!” And so he was not chosen.

We find that even though Chizkiyahu’s generation was steeped in Torah learning, this was not enough to merit him becoming the Mashiach. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 94a) say, “They checked from Dan to Beer Sheva, and found not one ignoramus; from Givat to Antipras, and found not one child, man or woman, who was not knowledgeable in the laws of purity and impurity.” Yet, because Chizkiyahu did not say *shirah* to Hashem, all the Torah learning of his generation provided insufficient merit for him to become the Mashiach.

Conversely, when Chizkiyahu fell deathly ill, it was the tefillah which he prayed that saved him, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 38:2), “Chizkiyahu then turned his face to the wall and prayed to Hashem.”

3. **Gemilut Chassadim:** Man should strive to emulate Hashem in doing acts of kindness. The Gemara (*Sota* 14a) tells us, “Just as Hashem clothes the naked, so too should you clothe the naked. He visits the sick, so too should you visit the sick. He consoles mourners, so too should you console mourners. He buries the dead, so too should you bury the dead, etc.” Moreover, David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 89:3) teaches: “The world is built on kindness.” This means that only through acts of kindness can the world exist. When people below act with compassion toward each other, Hashem does likewise Above, and upholds the world through His bountiful benevolence.

In light of all that has been said, we can now understand that the act of performing a circumcision is only the preliminary step on the path of cleaving to Hashem. In truth, the newborn has no idea that he is involved in a mitzvah, as the Gemara says (*Ketubot* 11a; *Kiddushin* 23a), “We bring merit to a person without his knowledge.” Certainly, when he will mature, he will be happy that he was entered into the covenant with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But in order to be able to cleave to Hashem he must involve himself in Torah, prayer, and acts of loving-kindness. Having a *brit milah* does not prove that a person acknowledges Hashem. Only once he grows, do his actions verify that he wants to continue the covenant that he was entered into as a child. Then the *brit* becomes an enduring covenant between himself and Hashem.

We find that when Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness they did not perform *brit milah* for thirty-eight years. They performed circumcision only upon entering the Land since it was dangerous to do so beforehand. Moreover, if a person’s brothers died through having a *brit*, he is absolved from having one (*Avodah Zarah* 27a; *Chulin* 4b). But never do we find that a person is forbidden from performing kindness, praying, or learning Torah. We see from here that *brit milah* is not a basic principle upon which the world stands.

Perhaps we may also say that if a person does not occupy himself with Torah, prayer, and loving-kindness, he cannot properly acknowledge his

Creator, and, consequently, cannot connect to Him. Only by emulating Hashem in these three areas, will he come to an appreciation of Hashem and feel close to Him, as if bound with eternal bonds of love. He needs a combination of Torah, avodah, and *gemilut chassadim* to help him reach this goal.

### **Torah, Tefillah, and Gemilut Chassadim – The Foundations of the World**

What we see around us corroborates this fact. We frequently see people who have had *brit milah* and a pure Jewish education, some of whom even often visit tzaddikim to seek their blessings and advice, publicly desecrate Shabbat and many other mitzvot of the Torah, even though they know it is forbidden to do so. There is no greater insult than one who knows he is sinning, and continues nonetheless.

How can we explain this? A person can act in this way only if he does not study the Torah. The Torah guides a person and illuminates his way. If one is not involved in Torah, although he prays and is kind toward others, his actions have no true meaning. He does these things only to appease his conscience, by thinking that he will then merit a portion in the World to Come. However, by acting in this manner not only does he fail to ensure the world's continued existence, but he brings devastation upon it.

Similarly, we witness people who are involved only in Torah and tefillah, but delegate *gemilut chassadim* to others. This may eventually lead to disaster. Chazal (*Yevamot* 62b) tell us that twenty-four thousand of Rabbi Akiva's students perished in the span of a few weeks because they did not honor one another. A person who knows how to properly value another, will do kindness with him.

So, too, is it with the pillar of prayer. Some people learn Torah all day long and do a lot of *chessed*, but are lax in the area of prayer. This has negative repercussions. Chizkiyahu's abstention from *shirah* (prayer)

prevented him from becoming the Mashiach. As a result of this, we are still in *galut*.

Therefore, Chazal emphasized the combination of all three of these things as pillars upon which the world stands. Without even one of the three, the world would resemble a table that has only one or two legs, which will certainly topple (*Pesichta Rabbati* 5a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:12). Performing a *brit milah* indicates our desire to do Hashem's will. It is the introduction to Divine Service. The removal of the foreskin aids in fulfilling mitzvot. Thus *brit milah* provides the foundation for the three pillars upon which the world stands.

We see that regarding the *korban* Pesach the pasuk (*Shemot* 12:48) states, "No uncircumcised male may eat of it." Why is this so? Furthermore, why were Bnei Yisrael commanded to circumcise themselves specifically before leaving Mitzrayim, instead of waiting until they received the Torah? The *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 16:6) tells us that Hashem made Bnei Yisrael into a nation when "I passed over you and saw you wallowing in your blood, etc." Chazal (*Pesichta Rabbati* 17a; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shemot* 186a) explain that Bnei Yisrael had no mitzvot with which to merit the redemption from Egypt. Therefore, Hashem gave them two mitzvot to gain their salvation: *brit milah* and the *korban* Pesach.

The *korban* Pesach signifies submission to Hashem, and our belief in Him. One who is not circumcised cannot reach this level. Only by means of removing the foreskin can a person attain holiness and purity, which enable him to pray, learn Torah, and perform acts of kindness. One who does these things when uncircumcised is compared to "a person who immerses with an insect in his hand" (*Ta'anit* 16a), in which case the immersion has no effect. His inherent lack of purity impedes him from attaining his spiritual goals.

The Zohar (III, 72b-73a) writes that those who are uncircumcised do not belong to Hashem, and it is forbidden to discuss the words of Hakadosh Baruch Hu with them. For that reason, Bnei Yisrael were not permitted to

partake of the *korban* Pesach when they were uncircumcised. They could not perform this mitzvah when they were impure, since they were thus distanced from Hashem.

Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to pray to Him and perform many mitzvot after they left Mitzrayim. They were on the verge of receiving the Torah and becoming one nation “as one man with one heart” (*Mechilta Yitro* 19:2) because of acting with loving-kindness toward each other. Therefore, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to circumcise themselves before leaving Mitzrayim. Moreover, at the time of the Plague of the Firstborn, He remembered the merit of their *brit milah*, together with the merit of the *korban* Pesach. It was considered as though they had sacrificed themselves on the altar. Since they had already been circumcised, Bnei Yisrael were in a state of purity commensurate with learning Torah. They were thus able to learn the Torah immediately after they received it.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal tell us that the world rests upon three pillars: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut chassadim*. Yet, this seems to contradict Hashem’s own words that the world depends on *brit milah*: “If My covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth.” The performance of *brit milah* is a basis for the existence of the world, but without the three aforementioned pillars, the world cannot have everlasting endurance.
- **Torah:** Through learning Torah, a person arrives at true recognition of Hashem. By appreciating the goodness of Hashem he can elevate himself and connect to Him.
- **Avodah:** A person comes close to Hashem through prayer. Torah itself is not enough. Sometimes, a person is struck with suffering in order to induce him to pray. King Chizkiyahu serves as an example that Torah study without prayer leaves a person lacking in spiritual completion. His generation was fluent in all areas of Torah, yet, because he failed to sing *shirah*, he was unable to become the Mashiach. He rectified this mistake when he became ill, and prayed fervently

to Hashem for salvation. We need the combination of all three pillars in order to cleave to Hashem and uphold the world.

- **Gemilut Chassadim:** Through emulating the attributes of Hashem, one comes closer to Him and thus maintains the world's continued existence.
- *Brit milah* is only the beginning of a person's relationship with Hashem. The act of *brit milah* enters a baby into the covenant with Hashem, but he does not yet possess the intelligence with which to connect to Him. When he matures, by upholding the three pillars of Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut chassadim*, the connection which was forged with the *brit* is then continued. All three pillars are needed in order for our connection with Hashem to be complete. Some people keep only one or two of these pillars. They may give *tzedakah* or pray, yet they are not fully mitzvah observant because they lack the pillar of Torah study. Some engage in Torah and tefillah, but do not practice kindness with others.
- Because Hashem knew that Bnei Yisrael would be involved in Torah and mitzvot immediately upon their exodus from Mitzrayim, He commanded them to perform *brit milah* while they were still in Mitzrayim. The merit of *brit milah* combined with the merit of the *korban* Pesach to save Bnei Yisrael at the time of the plague of the firstborn. It was considered as if they had offered themselves as a *korban*. Since Bnei Yisrael had been circumcised before they left Mitzrayim, they were now intrinsically pure and were thus able to learn the Torah immediately after they received it, thereby upholding the world.

## BRIT MILAH – BECOMING A CHARIOT FOR THE SHECHINAH

Rabbi Heschel Reisman, shlita, of Bnei Brak, father of my dear friend, Rabbi Tzvi Reisman, shlita, posed the following questions regarding *brit milah*.

If the mitzvah of *brit milah* is, indeed, so important in the eyes of Hashem Yitbarach, that He calls it an eternal covenant between Himself and Bnei Yisrael (see *Bereishit* 17:10), why isn't a baby born already

circumcised? That way, he would be able to enter the covenant with Hashem immediately upon his birth. Furthermore, Chazal (*Nedarim* 3:11) state that thirteen covenants are mentioned in the parashah of *brit milah*. What is the significance of this number?

Maybe we can offer the following explanation. *Brit milah* is one of the 613 mitzvot. If baby boys would be born already circumcised there would be no mitzvah of *milah*, and we would be lacking one of the 613 mitzvot. However, maybe we could say that the mitzvah could be performed by just letting some blood, without doing a complete *milah*. Alternatively, maybe preserving the sanctity of the *oht brit kodesh* could be considered the mitzvah, as if the person is circumcising himself. So we come back to the original question. Why isn't a baby born circumcised?

The halachah is that a father circumcises his son (*Mishnah Eiruvin* 7:11), bringing merit to the baby boy without his knowledge. The Admor, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zt"l, author of the sefer *Ein Yaakov*, asks the following question. If the mitzvah of *milah* is, indeed, so precious in the eyes of Hashem, why is it that the father performs it upon his son? Wouldn't it be more fitting for the son to have himself circumcised when he grows older and becomes a thinking person? He would then get pleasure by doing the mitzvah.

This question is strengthened by the following thought. A person much prefers to do a mitzvah himself, expending his own effort and money to gain himself merit through the mitzvah, rather than have someone else do the mitzvah for him. Thus, why is the son not given the opportunity to do the mitzvah of *milah* himself? The answer to this is explained in the sefer.

I would like to answer as follows. We see that people are willing to put their lives and their money on the line for material pursuits. Yet, for the performance of one of the 613 mitzvot, they are not prepared to take the smallest risk. They certainly would not gamble losing their hard-earned cash for a mitzvah.

The performance of *brit milah* provides a tremendous lesson in serving Hashem. This mitzvah is like a *mussar* lesson for the father of the baby, as well as all the guests present. How so?

We see that some babies are, indeed, born circumcised, but in general, this is not the case. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tests us with this mitzvah. He wants to see how far one is willing to put his son's life in danger in order to bring him into the covenant between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His nation, by removing the foreskin.

Keeping the mitzvah of *brit milah* compels us to examine our commitment in fulfilling all the commandments. If we dedicate ourselves to perform a mitzvah to the extent that we are willing to place our son's life in danger, then certainly we should show similar commitment with less exacting mitzvot, which do not entail physical danger, such as tefillah, tefillin, and observing Shabbat. Certainly we should treat these mitzvot with similar dedication.

For this reason, the father and all those assembled are enjoined to examine their actions. When they gather to partake in the joy of the father in this mitzvah, they should reflect upon why it is that they may place little value in performing other, easier mitzvot, which require minimal financial or physical demands.

How great is the power of the mitzvah of *milah*! Avraham Avinu was not considered complete until he became circumcised (*Nedarim* 3:11). Furthermore, in the merit of *brit milah*, Avraham Avinu became a chariot for the *Shechinah*, at the age of one hundred. We see from here that Hashem wants the newborn to become a chariot for the *Shechinah*, from the eighth day of his life. The eighth day has special significance, as we see that the Mishkan was completed and the *Shechinah* came to dwell among Yisrael on the eighth day (*Vayikra* 9:1).

The newborn baby is considered a miniature Mishkan. The day we bring him into the covenant with the *Shechinah*, he becomes a chariot for

Hashem. For this reason, he is not born already circumcised. Hashem wants us to make a celebration inaugurating him into the legion of the bearers of the *Shechinah*. Hashem does not want the child to wait until he matures, and then have himself circumcised, because He wants him to enter into the covenant of Torah and mitzvot from the eighth day, since eight is a holy number in Judaism. Therefore, his father circumcises him.

In light of all the above we may say that the baby himself is happy that he is being circumcised already on the eighth day. It is for his benefit, since he now merits becoming a chariot for the *Shechinah*. Furthermore, it causes others to reflect when they see that he is under the protection of the *Shechinah*, whereas they may have lost out on that opportunity. This is because only for this mitzvah are they prepared to sacrifice their money, and risk the life of their child, who is an extension of their own lives. In the case of other mitzvot, which are much easier to do, they do not demonstrate the same self-sacrifice.

How painful it is to see people prepare festive meals, in honor of the *brit*, which include mixed dancing. How will they excuse themselves on the Day of Judgment? When a baby is given a *brit* he becomes a chariot for the *Shechinah*, and the Name, **יְהוָה** hovers above him, as stated by the Ben Ish Chai, zt"l. However, the guests drive away the *Shechinah* through mixed dancing, and damage the baby by making him hear such corrupting music. They may even cause the baby harm by kissing him after being involved in such actions. Whoever is able to warn others about this behavior should definitely do so. We should promote holy conduct during a *brit milah*, at the time when the baby becomes a chariot for the *Shechinah*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- If the mitzvah of *milah* is so important, why is it that a baby boy is not born already circumcised? If we say that without *milah* one of the 613 mitzvot would be lacking, then why wouldn't letting blood, or guarding the sanctity of the *oh*

*brit kodesh* be sufficient? Furthermore, why is it the father who is enjoined to ensure that his son has a *brit*, and not the son himself, when he becomes obligated in mitzvot? Is it not preferable that such a unique mitzvah be performed by the person himself?

- People are willing to endanger their health and their money for material gains, yet not for mitzvot. With the mitzvah of *milah*, the Torah is testing a person's commitment to mitzvot, since he even risks his child's life for the sake of a mitzvah. *Brit milah* compels a person to act with such self-sacrifice for other, less demanding, mitzvot.
- At the time of his *brit*, a baby becomes a chariot for the *Shechinah*. The baby is likened to a miniature Mishkan for Hakadosh Baruch Hu to dwell in. We learn from the mitzvah of *brit milah* to be careful in the performance of other mitzvot. We should discourage mixed dancing at a *brit*, for this drives away the *Shechinah*. On the contrary, we should be careful to celebrate a *brit milah* in holiness and purity, and refrain from any action that may damage the baby at this propitious moment when he becomes a chariot for the *Shechinah*.

## THE FRINGE BENEFITS OF TZITZIT

The maxim "I have set Hashem before me always" is an imperative of the Torah, and an elevated level of tzaddikim who walk before Hashem. This is because a person does not act when alone at home in the same way that he would act when standing before a mighty king. How he speaks before family and friends does not resemble how he would speak before a king. Certainly, when a person realizes that the great King, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Whose glory fills the entire world, is standing above him, watching his every act, he immediately becomes filled with fright and submissiveness (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:1, Hilchot Hanhagat Haboker*).

We see from here that one should constantly be aware that he is in the presence of Hashem. However, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* seems to imply that this is not always the case. The pasuk (*Bamidbar 15:39*) states, "That you

may see it (the *tzitzit*) and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them.” The purpose of *tzitzit* is to bring one’s thoughts back to his Creator.

We find that there are different levels in Avodat Hashem. The higher level is that of *tzaddikim*, who serve Hashem with their every action, and do not remove their thoughts from Him for even one minute. Their hearts are aflame with the burning desire to come constantly closer to Him. The Name of Hashem is emblazoned before their eyes. David Hamelech reached this exalted level, as he attests (*Tehillim* 16:8), “I have set Hashem before me always.”

There is another lofty level of service of Hashem. It is of those who truly wish to think about Hashem at all times, but because of their human nature, they sometimes forget before Whom they are standing. This is not an *aveirah*, *chas v’shalom*. Just that sometimes their minds wander from the correct track. As soon as they catch themselves, they immediately do *teshuvah*, and take precautions to prevent themselves from repeating this mishap. This is also a very high level.

The *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 32:2) says, “Praiseworthy is the man to whom Hashem does not ascribe iniquity.” The Ba’al Shem Tov explains: “Praiseworthy is the person who is on the level that when he does not think about Hashem, even for a short moment, he ascribes this as iniquity, and immediately repents.” About him the *pasuk* states (*ibid.* 139:5), “אחור וקדם צרתני” – Back and forth You have restricted me.” As soon as he feels “back,” i.e., distanced from Hashem, even for a short while, he immediately returns “forth” (קדם), reconnecting his bond with Hashem. The word קדם refers to Hashem, Who is called קדמונו של עולם (the One Who precedes the entire world) (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 38:7).

This can be compared to a greatly beloved son who leaves his father to travel a great distance. Certainly, the father misses his son tremendously while he is away. However, when the son returns, the father is not angry

with him for leaving him. On the contrary, he goes to meet him with drums and cymbals, and is delighted to have him back again.

This is the relationship that Hashem has with us. If a person tries to constantly think of Hashem, even if he sometimes forgets, but as soon as he remembers again regrets his misdeed and strives to come closer to Him, Hashem rejoices to have His son back once more.

These concepts may seem lofty, but it is within the grasp of each of us to realize them. Moreover, it is a level which we are obligated to constantly strive to attain, as the Shulchan Aruch teaches. In order to help us do this, Hashem has given us the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, in which His Names are hidden (*Zohar* III, 228a). Looking at the *tzitzit* reminds a person of Hashem and His mitzvot, as it says (*Bamidbar* 15:39), “That you may see it (the *tzitzit*) and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them.”

The *tzitzit* are located on the four corners of the garment, so that wherever one turns, he is reminded of Hashem and will fear to transgress His will. Furthermore, the *tzitzit* surrounding the person protect him from harm (*Tikkunei Zohar* 18:33; *Zohar* III, 163b). Even great tzaddikim who constantly think about Hashem are commanded to wear *tzitzit* since one can never be sure of himself until his dying day (*Avot* 2:5).

This is illustrated by the following parable. A king presents a beloved friend with his picture. His friend hangs the picture on the wall so that he can constantly gaze at the image of his king and remember him. So, too, whenever a Jew looks at his *tzitzit*, he is reminded of Hashem and His mitzvot.

There is no commandment to wear *tzitzit* at night (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 18:1). This is because the recital of Kriyat Shema, which contains the parashah of *tzitzit*, protects a person when he sleeps and chases away all negative thoughts (*Mishnah Berachot* 1:5). Rabbi Eliezer taught that one who is scrupulous with the mitzvot of *tzitzit*, tefillin, and

mezuzah is guaranteed never to sin, as it says (*Kohelet* 4:12), “A three-ply cord is not easily severed” (*Sefer Hachinuch*, mitzvah 386).

Furthermore, in the merit of reciting Kriyat Shema, a person becomes worthy of 310 worlds. This is alluded to in the initial letters and last letters of the words **שמע ישראל**. The letters **ע"ל** hint to the words **לעתיד לבא**. The letters **ש"י** have the *gematria* of 310. This indicates that one who says Kriyat Shema will merit 310 (ש"י) worlds in the World to Come. Moreover, the Gemara states, “In the future, Hashem will grant each tzaddik 310 worlds, as it says (*Mishlei* 8:21), “להנחיל אוהבי יש ואוצרותיהם אמלא – I have what to bequeath [to] those who love Me, and I shall fill their storehouses.” The word **יש** (I have) has the *gematria* of 310.

The following story illustrates how *tzitzit* protect a person from sin (*Menachot* 44a). There was a certain man who was scrupulous with the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. He heard about a harlot who dwelt across the sea, who charged four hundred gold pieces for her services. He dispatched the money to her, and set a time to meet. When the appointed time came, his four *tzitzit* struck him in the face. He collapsed on the ground, as did the woman.

She told him, “I swear by the life of the king that I will not let you go until you tell me what fault you saw in me.” To which he replied, “I promise that I have never seen a more beautiful woman, but Hashem has given us the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. When the Torah commands us to wear them, it states twice the words, ‘I am Hashem, your G-d’ (*Bamidbar* 15:41). This teaches us that G-d is the One Who will punish, and G-d is the One Who will give reward. Now my *tzitzit* slapped me as if to testify against me like four witnesses.”

The woman then said, “Please tell me your name, the name of your city, your Rabbi, and the Beit Hamidrash where you learn Torah.” He wrote down the information and gave it to her.

She proceeded to divide her possessions. She gave one third to the government, so that they should allow her to convert; she gave the

second portion to the poor; and she took the last portion for herself. She kept her linens for herself, as well, and brought them along with her.

She came to the Beit Hamidrash of Rabbi Chiya and asked him to convert her. He asked if she wished to convert in order to be able to marry one of the students. Whereupon, she took out the letter and presented it to him, relating the entire story as proof that she wanted to convert for altruistic reasons. Rabbi Chiya accepted her into the Jewish nation. She married the man who had come to her and spread before him the linens that she had brought with her; this time in a permitted manner.

Thus we see that *tzitzit* protects its wearer from sin in this world, and gains him reward in the World to Come. Conversely, one who is remiss in this mitzvah will be clothed in filthy garments in the next world (*Zohar* III, 174b).

The word *ציצית* is numerically equivalent to the word *הרת* (including the five letters of the word *ציצית*), as in the expression "הרת עולם," which we say on Rosh Hashanah, meaning that the world was created on that day. This alludes to the fact that by wearing *tzitzit* it is as if one becomes a new creation, without sin. *Tzitzit* help a person keep the mitzvot. Even if, G-d forbid, he sins, *tzitzit* help a person do teshuvah.

We find that when Yaakov struggled with the Angel of Eisav, the pasuk tells us (*Bereishit* 32:25), "A man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." It seems perplexing that Yaakov was unable to overcome the Angel throughout the night, and managed to subdue him only when morning came. Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. There is no mitzvah to wear *tzitzit* at night, thus his *tzitzit* could not protect Yaakov while he was struggling with the Angel during the nighttime. As soon as the morning came, and he recited Kriyat Shema, Yaakov became invigorated and the *kedushah* of his *tzitzit* awakened the spark of holiness within him. This aided him tremendously in combating the negative forces manifested by the Angel of Eisav.

This mitzvah has other “fringe benefits.” It provides merit for a person to have children. The purpose of *tzitzit* is that we should remember to perform the other mitzvot when we see them. The first letters of the words עשיה, זכירה, ראה (seeing, remembering, and doing) spell the word זרע (children).

Women also gain reward through *tzitzit*, although they are not explicitly commanded to wear them (*Rambam, Hilchot Tzitzit* 3:9). This is by educating their sons to do so. Chazal teach (*Berachot* 17a) that women merit long lives by bringing their sons to the Beit Hamidrash in order to learn Torah. Similarly, we find that by habituating their sons to wear *tzitzit*, they merit all the wonderful benefits inherent in the mitzvah.

*Tzitzit* hints to all the mitzvot of the Torah. The numerical value of the word ציצית is 600. When one adds the 8 strings and 5 knots that comprise the *tzitzit* to this number, this totals 613, alluding to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah (*Tanchuma, Korach* 12).

Therefore, one should be punctilious in the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. Through this mitzvah he remembers Hashem Yitbarach and all His mitzvot, and will thus be protected from all harm. The Chafetz Chaim (*Shemirat Halashon*, Introduction) explains this by saying the following. Each organ of a person’s body has a mitzvah which will revive it on the day of resurrection. For that reason, Chazal (*Berachot* 26a) adjure us not to make light of any mitzvah, since “a twisted thing cannot be made straight” (*Kohelet* 1:15). One should consider the mitzvah of *tzitzit* as a gift from the King, and treat it correspondingly.

However, the objective of the mitzvah of *tzitzit* is not merely to wear them. In order to fulfill the purpose of wearing *tzitzit* one must learn about the mitzvot, and how to perform them. Merely remembering that we have mitzvot is obviously not sufficient. This is as the Chafetz Chaim teaches (*Shemirat Halashon*, Part 2, chapter 3): “Furthermore, I have come to arouse people in a matter which we say every day in parashat *hatzitzit* (*Bamidbar* 15:39), ‘That you may see it and remember all the

commandments of Hashem.’ Our Sages say (*Menachot* 43b), ‘Seeing brings to remembering, and remembering brings to doing.’ When can seeing be effective? Only after one learns about the mitzvot. Even a person with *yirat Shamayim* is liable to forget. *Tzitzit* helps combat this. Upon seeing one’s *tzitzit*, he is reminded of the mitzvot, and comes to fulfill them. But if one never bothered finding out exactly what the mitzvot are, what good will his *tzitzit* do?! Therefore, one should learn about the mitzvot.”

*Tzitzit* can be compared to a shopping list. A shopping list helps a person when he goes shopping. He glances at the list from time to time, in order to make sure that he buys everything that he wants. But the list helps only when he is familiar with the items written on it. If he is not familiar with the name of something he wrote down, studying the list will not help him buy the product, even if he reads the list all day long. He will simply not know what he needs to buy. Likewise, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* has no value unless one familiarizes himself with the mitzvot that *tzitzit* come to remind him about.

May it be Hashem’s will that we cleave to Him and His mitzvot in this world, and we merit a portion among the righteous in the World to Come.

### ———— In Summary ————

- There are different levels in Avodat Hashem. Tzaddikim constantly think about Hashem; they never take their minds off Him, aspiring to continually come closer to Him. Although they do not need to be reminded of His Presence, they, too, are obligated to wear *tzitzit* since we are adjured, “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” Tzaddikim also benefit from the protective qualities that *tzitzit* provide.
- There are others, who intend to think only about Hashem, but are unable to always maintain this level. They do not *chas v’shalom* transgress any sin when this happens, it is just that their connection to Him is somewhat weakened. The mitzvah of *tzitzit* helps to remind them about Hashem and His commandments every time they look at them. Hashem delights in their return to Him and showers

them with blessings.

- Another benefit of *tzitzit* is that it protects one from sin and the negative forces in this world, as well as in the World to Come. At nighttime, when one does not have the mitzvah to wear *tzitzit*, by reciting Kriyat Shema, which contains the commandment of *tzitzit*, he draws its benefits upon him. In the *zechut* of wearing *tzitzit* one merits to have children, as is alluded to in the words, **רֵאיהּ, זְכוּרָהּ, עֲשֵׂיהָ** (seeing, remembering, and doing). The first letters of each word spell **זרע** (children).
- In order for *tzitzit* to be effective in reminding one of the mitzvot, it is imperative to first learn what the mitzvot are.

## TEFILLIN – BINDING ONESELF TO HASHEM AND HIS NATION

We bind tefillin on our arms almost every day, yet the connection we feel toward this mitzvah may be tenuous. So that we should not perform this mitzvah in a perfunctory manner, let us examine the different aspects of tefillin, and appreciate its significance.

An intrinsic part of this mitzvah lies in contemplating what is written inside the tefillin. The pasuk (*Shemot* 13:9) says, “And it shall be for you a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes – so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth – for with a strong hand Hashem took you out of Egypt.” The purpose of tefillin is to bind us to our Father in Heaven. Strapping them to our arms without understanding what we are doing, will not help us create this connection.

The above pasuk seems to indicate that the commandment to put on tefillin is in order for us to remember that Hashem took us out of Egypt. Why is it not sufficient for us just to mention the Exodus? Maybe we could answer that an action connected to something that we want to remember is more effective than merely a mental recognition. Thus the act of putting

on tefillin is a more effective way of recalling the Exodus, than merely stating that Hashem redeemed us.

However, the mitzvah of tefillin raises the following questions. Why do we need to place tefillin both on the arm and the head, and why specifically on the weaker arm? (*Menachot* 37a)

It is appropriate to mention that the mitzvah of tefillin is replete with hidden secrets which we cannot fathom (see *Zohar* I, 129a). This mitzvah is so great, that one who abstains from fulfilling it transgresses eighteen positive commandments (*Menachot* 44a) and is called a transgressor (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a). Nevertheless, let us offer some insights into this tremendous mitzvah.

The mitzvah of tefillin embodies the secret of the unity between Hashem and His nation (*Tikkunei Zohar*, Introduction 3a). We put tefillin upon our arm opposite the heart, which indicates that one should subjugate his desires and thoughts to Avodat Hashem. We put tefillin on our head to teach us that one should dedicate his *neshamah*, as well as all of his senses and abilities to the will of Hashem.

Likewise, tefillin connect a man to his fellow Jew. Bnei Yisrael were given this mitzvah immediately after they left Egypt (*Shemot* 13), when unity among the nation was of paramount importance. Although they did not yet put on tefillin, merely accepting to keep this mitzvah was considered as though they were, indeed, already fulfilling it.

When one binds tefillin to his body, he should reflect upon the negative effects of loosening the bonds of unity with others. One of the reasons why Bnei Yisrael descended to Egypt in the first place was because of the jealousy that existed between Yosef and his brothers (*Bereishit* 37:11). Although the brothers' intentions were for the sake of Heaven, they were held accountable for not trying to understand Yosef's position. Hashem judges the righteous to a hair's breadth. Breaking the bonds of unity between them eventually led to the nation's wearing the chains of Egyptian bondage.

Another cause for the slavery in Egypt was *lashon hara*. Chazal explain that Moshe had wondered why Bnei Yisrael, more than any other nation, deserved to suffer so terribly by being enslaved in Egypt. He understood that they must have committed some sin, but did not know which. When Moshe heard his fellow Jew denounce him as a murderer (*Shemot* 2:14), he understood that Bnei Yisrael spoke *lashon hara*, and that this was the cause of their slavery. Thus the nation was given the mitzvah of tefillin immediately after they were redeemed from Egypt to impress upon them the importance of maintaining unity amongst themselves.

This idea is alluded to in the words of Kriyat Shema. In the first paragraph, it states (*Devarim* 6:8), “Bind them (tefillin) as a sign upon your arm.” The word **יָדְךָ** (your arm) is written in the singular form. In the second paragraph of Shema (*ibid.* 11:18), we find the words, “You shall bind them for a sign upon your arm.” Here, the word **יָדְכֶם** (your arm) is written in the plural form. What is the significance of this difference?

In the first paragraph, the pasuk is describing a person’s relationship with Hashem, hence it is written in the singular form. The next paragraph refers to man’s relationship with his fellow man, hence, it is written in the plural form. Each person should strive to maintain unity amongst Bnei Yisrael by acting considerately toward others. He should create strong bonds of friendship with his fellow, encouraging him and lifting his spirits in every situation. For this reason, the second paragraph is written in the plural form.

Therefore, when a person lays tefillin upon his head, he should contemplate the Torah’s mandate that his connection to his fellow man not be mere lip service, but from a place deep within himself. He should wholeheartedly desire his friend’s good. We often find people who exhibit love toward others, yet, in their hearts, feel otherwise. Sometimes one does a favor for another in order to receive from him. This, too, is not the way to foster unity.

In order to create true unity, a person must first subordinate himself to others. This is alluded to in the pasuk (*Shemot* 13:17), “והיה לאות על ידכה” – And it shall be a sign upon your arm.” Chazal explain that the word “ידכה” can be read as “יד כהה” meaning, the weaker arm, usually the left one (*Menachot* 37a). One should realize that just as his arm is weak, so, too, his powers are limited and he is far from perfection. He should certainly not hold highly of himself, or aggrandize himself over others.

Just as we put on tefillin each day, so, too, does Hakadosh Baruch Hu (*Berachot* 6a). In Hashem’s tefillin it is written, “And who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation on earth” (*Divrei Hayamim* I 17:21). This reminds us that we are His handiwork which brings Him glory. Yeshayahu Hanavi says (49:3), “Israel, in whom I take glory.” The word “glory” refers to tefillin, as the *Navi* Yechezkel told the people (24:17), “פארך חבוש עליך” – Don your headgear.” The word פארך (your headgear) literally means “your glory.”

This is only the case as long as one is concerned for his fellow and has his best interests at heart. But if one hurts or insults his neighbor, *chas v’shalom*, Hashem is no longer glorified through him. Therefore, a person should examine his actions. He should understand that by harming another, he has not merely harmed one person, but has damaged the entire world, because the *Shechinah* is now distressed and cannot be fully glorified.

Conversely, if a person feels the ties of friendship, and extends a helping hand when necessary, his hand (יד) becomes joined with his friend’s hand (יד) in an everlasting bond. These two hands have the same *gematria* as the word כח (strength). This indicates that by creating unity between people one strengthens the power of *kedushah* in the world. Then Hashem glorifies in His nation when He lays tefillin, and *kedushah* is spread throughout all the Spheres.

## Tefillin – An Eternal Bond with the Creator

Let us now examine the significance of the tefillin being fashioned from the hide of an animal. The Zohar (III, 70b) states that this is to teach us to subject our base instincts to the service of Hashem. When a person nullifies his animal instincts, day in day out, by devoting himself to Avodat Hashem, he naturally comes closer to Hashem. He also forges the link between himself and his fellow Jew, Who is a creation of Hashem (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:15). He will then take the initiative to provide his friend with all his needs, not waiting for his friend to request them.

Fortunate is the person who behaves in such a manner. He demonstrates the same qualities as Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem tested Moshe, examining how he treated his flocks when he was a shepherd for his father-in-law Yitro. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:2) relates the following. One time a lamb escaped. Moshe chased it until it reached a clearing, where it discovered a pool of water and bent down to drink. When Moshe saw this, he took pity on the lamb, and realizing that it must now be exhausted after its long trek to the water, picked it up and carried it back to the flock. When Hashem saw how Moshe had acted with the flock of Yitro, He said, “Since you displayed compassion upon the flock of a mortal I promise that you will lead My flock, Yisrael.”

We find that David Hamelech was similarly tested (*ibid.*), and was also found worthy of leading the “flock of Hashem.” In fact Hashem “took him from the sheep corrals” (*Tehillim* 78:70). What does this mean? Surely David did not live in a sheep corral. The Midrash explains that David would take the young sheep out to graze on the soft grass, keeping the older ones inside the corrals. Only after the young ones had eaten did he allow the older sheep out to pasture, since they could eat the tougher grasses. Lastly, he would take out the strong ones, to pasture on the hard grasses. Hashem said, “One who knows how to shepherd the sheep, each according to its capabilities, will be chosen to shepherd My nation.” Thus David became king through his actions at the sheep corrals.

We see from here that one who displays humility and concerns himself with the needs of others, fosters unity among the nation, increasing the power of *kedushah*. This enables him to perfect himself.

The blessings that a person brings upon himself by connecting to Hashem through laying tefillin cannot be fully described. He unites the Upper Worlds, strengthening them incredibly. The mitzvah of tefillin is so valuable that even the nations of the world admit to feeling its inherent holiness. Chazal state that in the future, the nations of the world will put *tzitzit* on their clothing and tefillin on their arms, and will ask to convert to Judaism. They will then recognize the great value in these mitzvot. But it will be too late, and they will be rebuffed by Hashem, Who will state (*Tehillim* 2:1), “Why do nations gather, and governments talk in vain?”

A precondition for wearing tefillin is that the body be clean. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 49a) states, “Rabbi Yannai says that tefillin need a clean body, as with Elisha Ba’al Kenafayim.” Elisha was scrupulous regarding donning tefillin in utmost cleanliness. Cleanliness also means that one’s head and heart should be free of impure thoughts.

In order to preserve a clean heart and mind, one must protect his eyes. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:2) says, “The eye sees and the heart desires,” indicating that this is the cause of all aveirot. Thus Hashem requests (*Mishlei* 23:25) “My child, give your heart to me, and your eyes will desire my ways.” When one is careful to look only at what is appropriate, his heart will not come to desire the forbidden, and his mind, too, will remain pure. Then, when he lays tefillin on his head and his arm, he brings an abundance of *kedushah* upon himself and the entire world.

One may view this as a monumental task, but he should take to heart that “one who comes to purify himself is aided by Heaven” (*Shabbat* 104a; *Yoma* 38b). He will thus merit fulfilling the mitzvah of tefillin with all its intentions and nuances, without having any impure thoughts at all.

One who lays tefillin in sanctity and purity, and with love and fear of Hashem, merits many blessings. However, it is not enough merely to put

tefillin on his head; one must take care to absorb their lesson. Otherwise, he might as well put them on the wall or on the roof. One should not act like a robot, doing mitzvot mechanically. Only when one contemplates the words written inside the tefillin, realizing that by wearing tefillin Hashem's Name is unified, can he merit bringing down blessing for himself and the entire world.

By putting on tefillin we accept the yoke of Heaven, recognizing that Hashem alone is capable of doing as He wishes with His creatures, as He did in Egypt. We are nothing but dust and ashes and are obligated to humble ourselves before Him, sacrificing all we have to do His will. He commanded us to put tefillin on the arm opposite the heart, in order to subdue our desires and thoughts to His will. The tefillin upon the head teach us to subjugate the *neshamah*, with all our emotions and abilities, to Avodat Hashem. By keeping this mitzvah with purity of thought and sight, we draw an abundance of holiness down to the entire world.

May it be Hashem's will that we merit the promise (*Devarim* 28:10) that "all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you." Chazal (*Menachot* 35b) explain that this refers to tefillin of the head, meaning, tefillin whose message has entered the head. May we merit the coming of the Redeemer speedily in our days, Amen.

### ———— In Summary ————

- Upon the Exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael were commanded the mitzvah of tefillin, because it binds us to our Father in Heaven. One of the reasons for this mitzvah is to remind us of the Exodus. The mitzvah of tefillin is replete with hidden secrets. Why is it necessary to place the tefillin upon one's body in order to remember the Exodus? Wouldn't a verbal remembrance suffice? Moreover, why do we put tefillin both on the head and the forearm? Also, what is the significance of placing the tefillin on the weaker arm?

- Tefillin binds Bnei Yisrael to each other and to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Tefillin have the power to rectify the damage caused by jealousy and *lashon hara*, which was the root of the *galut* in Egypt. Tefillin teach us to subject our thoughts and our desires for the sake of Hashem. We should direct all our senses to His service. This brings about unity among the Jewish nation. For that reason, Bnei Yisrael received this mitzvah immediately upon leaving Egypt, in order to maintain harmony between them.
- In the first paragraph of Kriyat Shema, the pasuk states to tie the straps as a sign upon “your arm” written in the singular form. This refers to the bond between Bnei Yisrael and our Father in Heaven. In the second paragraph, the word “your arm” is in the plural form. This refers to fostering unity among the nation. One should concern himself with the needs of others. To create unity, one must first humble himself in his own eyes, realizing that his own powers are limited. This is indicated by the fact that tefillin are placed upon the weaker arm. Only by strengthening the bonds of unity among the nation can one attain personal perfection.
- Tefillin are made from the hide of an animal to teach us that man should subdue his animal instincts to Avodat Hashem. By extending his hand to others he empowers the forces of *kedushah*. This is alluded to by the fact that when one doubles the *gematria* of the word אר, hinting to both his hand and that of his friend, the total has the same *gematria* as the word כח (power). Thus he perfects himself, meriting an abundance of Heavenly blessings for himself and the entire world.

## ON THE WINGS OF A DOVE

Rabbi Yanai said, “One’s body must be clean in order to put on tefillin, as in the case of Elisha Ba’al Kenafayim (Elisha of the Wings).” Why was he called by this name? Once, the wicked Roman Caesar decreed that whoever put on tefillin would be put to death. To encourage the people, Elisha went out to the market-place, and put on tefillin in public. A Roman soldier saw him, and began chasing him. When the soldier reached him,

Elisha removed the tefillin from his head. The legionnaire demanded to know what he had in his hands. Elisha replied, "I am holding the wings of a dove." He opened his hands and there was a dove. For that reason, he is called *Elisha Ba'al Kenafayim* (*Shabbat* 49a, 130a).

Why did Elisha try to conceal the fact that he was holding tefillin in his hands by saying that they were a dove? What are the unique qualities of this bird?

Kenesset Yisrael is compared to a dove, as it says (*Tehillim* 68:14), "The wings of a dove that is coated with silver." Just as the dove is shielded by its wings, so too are Bnei Yisrael protected by the mitzvot that they do.

Let us suggest another answer. A person who spoke *lashon hara* brought a bird as a *korban* (*Arachin* 15b). The fact that Elisha's tefillin turned into the wings of a dove hints that one who puts on tefillin with the proper intention will not come to speak *lashon hara*.

Moreover, the word כנף (wing) is numerically equivalent to עף (flying). By putting on tefillin correctly, a person can soar to great spiritual heights. He merits the most wonderful blessings. Miracles may be wrought on his behalf, and even the order of Creation itself may be changed through this act.

This is what happened to Elisha Ba'al Kenafayim. He knew that Hashem is glorified properly among Bnei Yisrael only when they put on tefillin (*Zohar* II, 62a). Elisha understood that he needed the strong connection forged with Hakadosh Baruch Hu by putting on tefillin in order to receive Heavenly assistance to nullify the decree against Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, Elisha decided to sacrifice himself for the sake of wearing tefillin, in spite of the prohibition of the Romans and the severe punishment attached. For that reason, he merited a miracle, and the tefillin became the wings of a dove (see *Tikkunei Zohar* 142a).

Maybe we could add the following idea. When a man removes his tefillin from his head, and winds it up, it resembles a dove. The box is like the

body of the bird and the two straps are like the wings. Thus Elisha's tefillin automatically resembled a dove. Maybe he was also hinting to the fact that Bnei Yisrael are compared to the dove that coos in anguish over her suffering in *galut*.

The word תפילין can be divided into the two words תף - ילין. The word תף has the same *gematria* as the word לילית, the *kelippah* which is in control at night (*Zohar* III, 200a), which is hinted to by the word ילין, which depicts resting. Chazal say that sleep is one-sixtieth of death. Therefore, when a person sleeps, the לילית tries to attach itself to him in order to be able to influence him even in the daytime. Since this *kelippah* has dominion at nighttime one should not to go out alone at night.

When a person lays tefillin in the morning, he subdues the *kelippah*, eliminating its powers. Chazal explain that the pasuk (*Devarim* 28:10), "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you," refers to the tefillin *shel rosh*. When one dons tefillin, the *kelippah* is defeated, and the nations of the world see that the Name of Hashem is called upon him. This causes them to fear the Jewish people.

I once came across a picture of Nazis, may their name be obliterated, looking scornfully at a righteous, G-d fearing tzaddik, who dared to pray to Hashem wearing tallit and tefillin. It was amazing to see that despite the awful persecution of those times, a Jew was prepared to risk his life to merit another chance to wear tefillin. From where did he get the strength? How was he able to ignore the danger facing him and do this mitzvah, which might very well lead to his death? Furthermore, why didn't the pasuk, "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you," come to fruition? The Nazis surely ripped the tefillin off his head, and who knows what end this tzaddik met.

The essence of the mitzvah of tefillin is for a person to accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven. At the time that he does so, he has no

thoughts of anything else. He fears nothing except Hashem, and accepts all that befalls him with love. In the tefillin, we find the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5), “You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, and with all your soul.” Our Sages (*Berachot* 54a) teach that this means “Even if Hashem takes your soul.” When a person puts on tefillin, he focuses solely on the glory of Hashem Yitbarach; whatever is happening around him disappears from view.

David Hamelech referred to this lofty level of Avodat Hashem by saying (*Tehillim* 44:23), “Because for Your sake we are killed all the day.” Our Sages ask (*Sifri Va’etchanan Piska* 7) how it is possible to be killed “all the day.” Rather, Hashem considers that tzaddikim give up their lives for His sake every day, since they affirm their willingness to do so when they accept the yoke of Heaven in the words of Shema which are written in the tefillin. In this way, a person merits having Hashem’s Name called upon him at the time of death. Constant awareness of Hashem’s presence also subdues the *kelippah*, preventing it from exercising any control over a person in his final moments.

Let us explain this concept further. It is known that during a person’s final moments, the Angel of Death tries to make him deny Hashem. However, the Angel of Death can confuse only someone who was under the dominion of the *kelippah* during his lifetime. One who constantly annulled the power of the *kelippah* ensures that the Angel of Death will fear to harm him at the time of his passing.

Chazal (*Avot* 2:10) exhort us to “do teshuvah the day before you die.” But how does a person know when he will die? This indicates that one should do teshuvah every single day, lest he die tomorrow (*Shabbat* 153b; *Zohar* III, 33a). Thus he will be prepared for the day of death, and will be protected from the ploys of the Angel of Death.

## The Secret of Tefillin – For the Sake of His Name

It is a tremendous test for a person to perform a mitzvah when others ridicule him. He may even wonder why Hashem does not protect him from their gibes, since he is acting purely for His sake.

Perhaps we can answer with the explanation that we have given regarding tefillin. The mitzvah of tefillin teaches us to believe in the greatness of the Creator, even when faced with the most difficult circumstances. We previously mentioned that the pasuk (*Tehillim* 44:23) “Because for Your sake we are killed all the day” refers to the steadfast *emunah* of one who wears tefillin. This pasuk also refers to tefillin in the following way. The *Sefer Chassidim* (chapter 40) explains that it refers to “those who are insulted and shamed because of the mitzvot they do, such as *tzitzit* and tefillin. Embarrassment drains their faces of blood, which can be compared to a person being murdered.”

Moreover, our Sages (*Berachot* 12b) say, “Whoever is shamed by his sins, is forgiven for all his wrongdoings, as it states (*Yechezkel* 16:63), ‘In order that you remember and be ashamed, and so that you no longer have an excuse because of your humiliation, when I forgive you for all that you have done – the word of the L-rd Hashem/Elokim.’”

The Gemara (*Berachot* 61b) relates that when Rabbi Akiva was taken to be killed it was the time to say Kriyat Shema. The Romans combed his flesh with iron combs, yet he accepted the decree of Heaven with love. His disciples asked him, “Rabbeinu, to this extent?” To which he replied, “All my life I was concerned about fulfilling the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5), “You shall love Hashem...with all your soul,” which means to love Hashem even at the moment of death. I asked myself, ‘When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah?’ Now that the opportunity has presented itself should I not fulfill it?!”

Instead of wondering why Hashem does not mete out punishment to the enemies who torment him, one should return to Hashem in teshuvah.

Suffering is not arbitrary, but decreed by Heaven. As our Sages (*Chulin* 7b) state, “A person doesn’t bang his finger in this world unless it was so decreed in the Upper World.” This raises a question. Why does Hashem cause us to suffer? Surely we know that “Hashem is good to all, and his compassion is upon His creatures” (*Tehillim* 145:9).

Suffering is the tool that Hashem uses to induce a person to remember Him and return to His Torah and mitzvot. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 101a) tell us that Rabbi Akiva stated, “Beloved is affliction. I learn this from the pasuk (*Divreiy Hayamim* II 33:1), ‘Menashe was twelve years old when he became king, etc.’ Despite all the tribulations his father, Chizkiyahu, endured, and all the efforts he expended in raising Menashe correctly, he saw no success, but only suffering. It states (*ibid.* 11-12), ‘And they captured Menashe...bound him in chains and led him off to Bavel. But in his distress he beseeched Hashem, his G-d, and he humbled himself greatly before the G-d of his fathers.’”

We see that when a person who has experienced misfortune is aroused to teshuvah and humbles himself before Hashem, He will certainly exercise tremendous compassion toward him. Then the misfortune itself will be the catalyst for his receiving much blessing. This is because he rejoices in his suffering, understanding that it is a sign that Hashem has not given up on him, but on the contrary, wants to bestow good upon him, and has afflicted him with the sole purpose of bringing him closer to Him, just like a father rebukes a son. As the pasuk (*Mishlei* 3:12) says, “For Hashem admonishes the one He loves.”

The purpose of affliction is to induce one to return to Hashem. As soon as he expresses the desire to do so, the suffering has accomplished its goal, and is now converted to good and blessing. Even if one does not experience this benefit in this world, he should believe it does exist and is preserved for him in the World to Come.

It seems to me that the Nazis, may their names be obliterated, despite their mockery and gibes, deep inside themselves, were aware of the great

punishment awaiting them. However, their free will was taken from them, in order that they receive their full punishment in the World to Come. Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 7a) relate that a heretic approached Rabbi Safra and asked him, “What is the meaning of the pasuk (*Amos* 3:2) ‘You alone did I know from among all the families of the earth; therefore I will hold you to account for all your iniquities.’?” Rabbi Abahu explained with a parable. A man had two debtors. One was his friend and the other his enemy. From his friend he took payment in installments. But he allowed his enemy to postpone payment. When the time came for his enemy to pay back the loan, he took the entire amount at once.

Hashem acts similarly. He waits to punish a nation until He is ready to eradicate them from the world (*Rashi, Sotah* 9a). He waits until their cup is full of sin, and then rains retribution upon them. If He were to punish them little by little, they would endure longer. Instead, He maintains their existence until their iniquity has reached its maximum allotted amount, and only then (*Yeshayahu* 27:8) “according to its measure [of sin] He contended against her farmland,” He wipes them out completely. This is what happened to Pharaoh and his chariots, to Sancheirev, and to Sisra. Hashem waited till their sins reached their peak and then obliterated them in a single moment. “And when the wicked perish there is glad song” (*Mishlei* 11:10).

This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Iyov* 12:23), “He exalts nations and [then] destroys them.” Hashem deceives the wicked into believing there is no justice and there is no judge (*Vayikra Rabbah* 28:1). They do as they wish against the Jewish nation, saying (*Devarim* 32:37), “Where is their G-d, the rock in Whom they sought refuge?” He allows them to continue in their ways, even granting them good, until their measure has been met. It is at that point that they receive their dues, and they are eliminated from the world.

Our Sages say (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a) that the wicked of the nations descend to Gehinnom, where they are judged for twelve months. After

this time, their bodies are destroyed and their *neshamot* are burned. A wind brings them under the feet of the tzaddikim, as it says (*Malachi* 3:21), “And you will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet.”

At the very time that the Nazis scoffed at the Jews for wearing tefillin, they saw how the Jews ignored them, rising above their torment because of their steadfast pride in their Creator and His Torah. This *kiddush Hashem* certainly made a great impression in heaven. Such an act subdues the *kelippah*. The Zohar states that the straps of the tefillin *shel rosh* are like ropes with which to pull the horns of the negative forces, and the straps of the tefillin *shel yad* are like ropes with which to pull its legs (*Tikkunei Zohar* 158a).

May it be Hashem’s will that we merit the fulfillment of the words of the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 11:9), “They will neither injure nor destroy in all of My sacred mountain; for the earth will be as filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covering the sea bed.” The whole world will then witness Hashem Yitbarach’s salvation of Yisrael with the arrival of our Redeemer, may it be speedily in our days, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal teach that one’s body must be clean in order to wear tefillin. Elisha Ba’al Kenafayim was scrupulous in this matter. He merited a miracle and his tefillin turned into the wings of a dove. This is because Bnei Yisrael are compared to the dove, which cries over her suffering in the bitter *galut*. Furthermore, when tefillin are wrapped, they resemble a dove: the box itself resembles the body, and the straps resemble the wings.
- A person who spoke *lashon hara* brought a bird as a *korban*. This indicates that one who puts on tefillin with the proper thoughts will not come to speak *lashon hara*. The letters of תפילין spells תף ילין. The word תף has the same *gematria* as לילית, the negative force which is present during the night, alluded to by the word ילין, which means to rest. It has remarkable strength at this time, and

desires to ensnare the person in its trap, thus exerting its influence even during the day. But by wearing tefillin with correct intentions, one is able to subdue the *kelippah*.

- One should accept everything that befalls him with love. Instead of wondering why the wicked are allowed to endure, let him repent of his sins. In this manner, he will be spared the ploys of the Angel of Death, who tries to persuade him to deny Hashem at the time of his death. This is one of the secrets of tefillin. It nullifies the *kelippah*. Tefillin is often worn with great self-sacrifice, which causes tremendous *kiddush Hashem* in the world. This eliminates the negative forces and strengthens *kedushah* in this world.

## MIKVEH – CROSSING THE SEA TO PURITY

When Bnei Yisrael stood at the shores of the Yam Suf, “Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all night, and He turned the sea to dry land and the water split. The Children of Israel came within the sea on dry land; and the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left...Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, and the water will go back upon Egypt, upon its chariots and upon its horsemen’” (*Shemot* 14:21-22, 26).

Why did Hashem split the sea? He could have hardened the water so that Bnei Yisrael could have walked across it to safety, and then when the Egyptians would start to cross, the water could have returned to its previous state, drowning them. What was the purpose of splitting the sea and making Bnei Yisrael walk between two walls of water?

The account of the Splitting of the Sea teaches that Hashem makes miracles only in the merit of self-sacrifice. It was the self-sacrifice of Nachshon ben Aminadav which warranted this miracle. The Gemara relates (*Sotah* 37) that no one was prepared to enter the sea, until Nachshon jumped in. As the pasuk (*Hoshea* 12:1) states, ‘Ephraim has

surrounded Me with falsehood, and the House of Yisrael with deceit, but Yehudah still ruled with G-d.” Nachshon came from the house of Yehudah. When Bnei Yisrael saw Nachshon enter the water, they followed him. Then Hashem split the sea for them.

The account of the Splitting of the Sea hints at the tremendous purity gained by immersing in a *mikveh*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 14:29), “The water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left.” It was as if Bnei Yisrael were walking through a *mikveh*. In fact, Hashem caused them to enter the waters of the sea for the express purpose that they should emerge purified (*Makkot* 7b). Had they merely traversed the hardened waters of the sea, they would not have become spiritually cleansed and able to reach the great levels that they subsequently did.

This is alluded to in the word מקוה (*mikveh*), which can be divided to spell מה קו. The word מה is numerically equivalent to אדם (man) and קו refers to the channel from which the world was created. By immersing in a *mikveh*, a person who was impure and disconnected from *kedushah* becomes connected to Hashem once again.

A person raises his level through immersing in a *mikveh*. One who is on the level of “Yaakov,” a low level, can raise himself to the level of “Yisrael,” a high level of sanctity, through immersion. The pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 17:13) states, “מקוה ישראל ה’ – Hashem is the *mikveh*, or hope, of Yisrael.” Hashem Himself purifies us.

The benefit of *mikveh* is so great that it purifies a *niddah*. Chazal state that the most severe type of *tumah* is that of *niddah*. Three people drive the *Shechinah* from this world; one of them is a man who has relations with a *niddah* (*Zohar* II, 2b). The *tumah* of *niddah* defiles anyone who comes into physical contact with her. The *Sefer Hachinuch* (mitzvah 182) explains that one is affected by the *tumah* of a *niddah* according to the degree of closeness one has with her. Furthermore, the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) states, “There are three partners in the creation of a person: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, his father, and his mother.” That being the

case, one who has relations with a *niddah* causes immeasurable distress to the *Shechinah*, forcing it, as it were, to be involved in unacceptable behavior.

Because the impurity of *niddah* is so severe, the Torah forbids having relations with a woman who is *niddah*. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 18:19), “You shall not approach a woman in her time of unclean separation, to uncover her nakedness.” Chazal added “fences” to this mitzvah to include any type of closeness or touching. *Ba'al Haturim* (*Tur Yoreh De'ah*, chapter 194) states, “A man is obligated to distance himself from his wife in the days of her impurity until she counts and immerses. Not only is he forbidden from marital relations, but also from speaking in a way which is inappropriate for that time. Although he may be alone with her, he may not touch her, even with his small finger, and may not hand her anything, or take anything from her hand. He may not eat together with her at the table, needless to say from the same bowl, etc.”

Before Adam and Chava sinned, the *tumah* of *niddah* did not exist. It was only after they sinned by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and the Snake injected defilement into the woman, that Chava was decreed to suffer the impurity of *niddah* (*Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikkun* 69 118a). The Sages explain that Chava brought death upon Adam, as it says (*Bereishit* 3:6), “And she gave also to her husband with her and he ate.” Therefore, a woman should be vigilant concerning the blood of *niddah*, in order to atone for the blood which Chava spilled, as we are told (*Bereishit* 9:6), “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”

Since Chava sinned on the sixth day, and caused damage then, a woman’s rectification is to count seven clean days. She achieves purity by counting seven days, just like the seventh day of the week has the *kedushah* of Shabbat. Furthermore, just as the *zechut* of Shabbat protected Adam and Chava, so too is she protected by the *kedushah* she attains by counting seven days.

She immerses in the *mikveh* on the eighth day, since the number eight

signifies the level of *kedushah* that is beyond nature. The first seven days are under the laws of nature, correlating to the seven planets which rule the world. On the eighth day, she enters under the wings of the *Shechinah*, above nature.

In order to nullify the *tumah* caused by *niddah* and purify herself, a woman must immerse in water. Before the Creation of the world, only Hashem, water, and the *neshamot* existed. Therefore, when a woman comes out of the water of the *mikveh*, she is like a new creation. She lowers herself into the water in order to ascend in spirituality. This is truly a “descent for the sake of ascent” (*Makkot* 7b). Moreover, water hints at humility (*Ta’anit* 6a), since it always flows from a high place to a low point. Thus it has the power to nullify *tumah*. Conversely, something which is high hints at arrogance, and is unable to nullify *tumah*. Hashem refuses to connect Himself to a haughty person, as the Gemara says (*Sotah* 5a), “I and he cannot co-exist.”

Moreover, *mikveh* alludes to unity. This is seen from the pasuk (*Bereishit* 1:9), “יקוו המים מתחת לשמים” — Let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered.” Onkelos translates this as, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered to one place.” This indicates that by immersing and becoming purified, a woman renews her strong connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and returns to the same status as Chava before the sin.

The distance that a couple maintains during the *niddah* period is a good thing. The Gemara (*Niddah* 31b) states in the name of Rabbi Meir, “Why did the Torah forbid a *niddah* for seven days? In order that a man should not become habituated to his wife and take her for granted.” The Torah decreed that she will be unclean for seven days so that she will then be as beloved to her husband as she was on the day of her chuppah. Thus, immersion in the *mikveh* not only confers purity and sanctity upon a woman, but also brings unity between the couple and between Bnei Yisrael and their Father in Heaven.

The above ideas help us understand why Hashem had Bnei Yisrael enter the waters of the Yam Suf. The waters served as a *mikveh*, purifying the people of the forty-nine levels of *tumah* to which they had descended in Egypt. Even a maidservant merited seeing what the prophet Yechezkel ben Buzi did not (*Mechilta Beshalach* 15). The letters of the word מִקְוֵה allude to this. The letter ׀ (numerically equivalent to 40) hints to the Torah which was given after 40 days. The letter ׀ (numerically equivalent to 100) hints to the 100 blessings which one is instructed to say daily. The letters ׀-י (numerically equivalent to 11) hint to the nullification of the 11 *sefirot* of the *kelippah*, and the strengthening of *kedushah* in the world.

### ————— In Summary —————

- At the time of the Exodus, Hakadosh Baruch Hu did not have the waters of the Yam Suf harden, enabling Bnei Yisrael to walk upon them. Instead, He led Bnei Yisrael through the waters, which stood as walls to their right and left. Thus the waters of the sea served as a *mikveh* to purify the people from the spiritual defilement of Egypt. This was only made possible through the self-sacrifice displayed by Nachshon ben Aminadav, when he jumped into the water. He thus enabled Bnei Yisrael to become purified in the waters of the sea.
- In the merit of entering this “*mikveh*,” the nation reached exalted heights. So great is the power of *mikveh* that it purifies a woman who is *niddah*, which is a very strong impurity. This hints to the damage that Chava brought to the world with the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Only through immersion in the *mikveh* is a woman who is *niddah* permitted to her husband. The *mikveh* confers purity and sanctity upon her. This is the reason that Hashem had Bnei Yisrael enter the “*mikveh*” of the Yam Suf, to cleanse them of the forty-nine levels of *tumah* to which they had fallen, and raise them to *kedushah*.

## EIRUVIN AND NETILAT YADAYIM – THE SECRET OF UNITY

It is said about Shlomo Hamelech (*Kohelet* 12:9) that “besides being wise, he also imparted knowledge to the people; he listened, and sought out, and arranged many proverbs.” Rashi explains the word שָׁמַע (listened) to mean that Shlomo Hamelech made “ears” or “handles” for the Torah, which are both called אוָן. The Torah is compared to a box, which is difficult to hold, as it has no handles. The mitzvot may sometimes be hard to get a grip on. Shlomo got a handle on this by enacting certain ordinances, also compared to fences, which help prevent a person from transgressing Torah-mandated mitzvot. Examples of these are *eiruv*, which is a “fence” for the mitzvot of Shabbat, and *netilat yadayim*, which provides a “fence” for purity. Our Sages say that when Shlomo instituted these mitzvot, a Heavenly Voice emanated, proclaiming Hashem’s satisfaction.

This seems somewhat puzzling. If Hashem was, indeed, pleased with these ordinances, why did the Heavenly Voice speak out only after *netilat yadayim* was instituted, and not immediately upon the establishment of *eiruv*?

Our question is strengthened by the *Smag* (*Mitzvot Aseh, mitzvah 1 mi-d’Rabbanan*), who asks: “Why didn’t the Sages institute these ordinances before the days of King Shlomo? Why were they needed specifically in his time?”

Rabbi Hai Gaon (*Bayit Chadash, Orach Chaim* 366) explains that these ordinances were not enacted before the days of Shlomo Hamelech because the nation was constantly at war with the enemy. The Gemara (*Eiruv* 187a) states that washing the hands and building *eiruv* are not mandatory during wartime. However, in the days of Shlomo Hamelech, Hashem brought peace upon the Land, thus it was appropriate for him to enact these ordinances.

We know that the precondition for accepting the Torah is unity, as it says (*Shemot* 19:2), “And Yisrael encamped there (next to Har Sinai).” Rashi (*Mechilta* *ibid.*) explains that the word for “encamped” is written in the singular tense to signify “as one man with one heart.” Before *Matan Torah*, the nation was unified, each man feeling love and accountability for the other.

However, merely feeling unified was insufficient for the nation to merit receiving the Torah, therefore, Hashem raised Har Sinai above the people (*Shabbat* 88a). This forced them to be physically close to each other. It is not enough for hearts to be connected in harmony. One must feel so close to his friend, to the point that he feels the needs of the other as though they were his own. This is brought about by physical proximity.

Since unity is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah, one might think that this can be attained only during the six days of the week, when travel is allowed and people are able to be near each other in order to offer help and support. It seems that on Shabbat, unity is limited due to the prohibitions of *muktzeh* and carrying. Thus it seems that on Shabbat the precondition for accepting the Torah is only fulfilled with our emotions, but cannot be accomplished in practice. This could cause a weakening of Torah study.

Shlomo Hamelech, therefore, established *eiruv*. This way, also on Shabbat, people would be able to express the unity they felt through action. By means of an *eiruv*, the entire town and its contents are shared by all. Everyone can help each other and the optimum conditions for keeping and learning the Torah are fulfilled.

As we stated earlier, *eiruv* can be established only during peacetime. Thus Shlomo merited establishing this ordinance, since there was peace during his reign. Perhaps we can suggest that he had a specific objective in doing so. In times of war people are naturally drawn toward one another. Conversely, it is very easy to weaken our connection to others in times of tranquility, when everything is going well. By establishing

*eiruv*, Shlomo wanted to impress upon the nation the importance of maintaining unity at all times.

When Shlomo Hamelech discovered that there was still a lack of closeness amongst the people, he then instituted *netilat yadayim*. This ordinance hints to the harmony between all members of the Jewish nation at the time that they were most unified, at the Exodus from Egypt. The initials of the words נטילת ידיים have the combined *gematria* of 60, alluding to the 600,000 members of Bnei Yisrael that came out of Egypt.

*Netilat yadayim* fosters unity in another way. When one person washes another's hands or when one takes a person's hand and shakes it, either during the week or on Shabbat, he feels closer to him, and connects to him both physically and emotionally.

Shlomo Hamelech enacted these laws in order to enforce true peace among the people. He wasn't satisfied with mere lip service. The ordinances of *eiruv* and *netilat yadayim* bind all members of Bnei Yisrael to each other, on all seven days of the week, promoting the highest level of peace. Thus the unity and sanctity of Shabbat overflow upon the days of the week, positively influencing one's Torah study during all the weekdays.

When people are busy earning a living during the week, and have little free time, they settle for greeting others from afar, waving or calling out to one another. But on Shabbat, when a person is free from his business obligations, if one tries to connect to another without shaking his hand, he has not made any real connection at all. This will not forge the bonds of friendship and unity. When one physically connects to another, he touches his heart, promoting mutual harmony.

Hashem expressed His pleasure with Shlomo's enactment of these rulings. *Eiruv* and *netilat yadayim* foster harmony between fellow Jews, proving that they are on the level of "ערבין זה בזה – responsible for one another." In this way they merit receiving the words of the Torah in the

optimum state of unity. When Hashem sees this, He also joins His people, as the Zohar (III, 73a) states, “Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

The words *זה בזה* (one another) have the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem *יהוה-וה*. This hints that Hashem unites with Bnei Yisrael when they act *זה בזה* – with love and accountability toward one another. *Eiruv* helps us attain this level on Shabbat, which we might otherwise not be able to achieve. Moreover, the word *בזה* has the same *gematria* as the word *יד* (hand), alluding to *netilat yadayim*. When the nation demonstrates both physical and emotional unity, Hashem includes Himself in their unified congregation.

The Shulchan Aruch (*Yoreh De'ah* 285:2) states that when one enters and leaves his home, he should place his hand upon the mezuzah and kiss it. Likewise, we find that the Sages were accustomed to kiss their tefillin upon laying and removing them (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 28:3). What is the purpose of kissing them? Is it not enough to place the mezuzah upon the door and the tefillin upon one's arm and head? Why can we not just look at the letters of Hashem's Name written on the mezuzah?

Feelings are intangible; the touch of a kiss actualizes the emotion engendered by the mitzvah. It is not enough to merely love Hakadosh Baruch Hu in one's heart; one should express this emotion in a concrete way. This cements his connection to his Creator. By the actions of touching and kissing the mezuzah and tefillin he builds a bridge connecting him with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

This is what a person avows with the words of the Shema (*Devarim* 6:4): to love Hashem with all his heart, soul, and resources. One should be prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of Heaven. This can be done only when one's emotions are in consonance with his actions. The way to ensure that one's heart and body are united in Hashem's service is by doing specific actions, such as kissing the mezuzah and tefillin. He will then attain the lofty level of *mesirut nefesh* in Avodat Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Our Sages teach that when King Shlomo enacted *eiruvim* and *netilat yadayim*, a Heavenly Voice emanated, proclaiming Hashem's satisfaction with these ordinances. Why did this happen only after the second enactment, of *netilat yadayim*? Furthermore, why were these laws not in effect before the time of Shlomo?
- Shlomo established these enactments to increase unity amongst Bnei Yisrael. He wanted to ensure that there would be true peace amongst the nation, not just a superficial peace engendered by the absence of war and the abundance of material blessing. True peace is gained when there is unity. This is fostered by such mitzvot as *eiruvim* and *netilat yadayim*, which connect one person to the other. Moreover, the unity engendered by *eiruvim* on Shabbat affects the rest of the week, positively influencing one's Torah study from one Shabbat to the next.
- Shlomo instituted *eiruvim* to counter the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat so that people can physically help one another on Shabbat as well as the weekdays. Practical help and emotional support connect one to the other with body and soul.
- *Netilat yadayim* also fosters unity. Washing or shaking another's hand forges strong bonds between people, and is especially effective on Shabbat, when people are not mired in the materialism of the week. The unity fostered in this way enables us to grow in Torah, since unity is a prerequisite for its acquisition. By uniting "as one man with one heart," Hashem will join the congregation of His people, fulfilling the affirmation that Hashem, the Torah, and Bnei Yisrael are one.

## THERE IS NO REWARD FOR MITZVOT IN THIS WORLD

Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat was exceedingly poor, so he asked Hashem for sustenance. Hashem replied that in order to provide him with a livelihood, He would have to first destroy the world as it existed, and

maybe, in the new world that He would create, Rabbi Elazar would have sustenance. Rabbi Elazar then asked Hashem if he had already lived most of his years, to which Hashem responded in the affirmative. Rabbi Elazar finally stated that he did not want Hashem to destroy the world for him (*Ta'anit* 25).

One of our friends in London, Rabbi Stribel, asked the following. “Was it so difficult for Hashem to support the Sage to the extent that He needed to destroy the world in order to do so?!”

I answered with the maxim that “there is no reward for mitzvot in this world” (*Kiddushin* 39b). Specifically with tzaddikim: Hashem gives them neither reward nor merit for their mitzvot in this world. This is because He reserves their reward for the World to Come, and their merit protects them in their lifetime. Their entire purpose in this world is to serve Hashem sincerely; they are not here to enjoy the pleasures of this world.

We find that wealthy tzaddikim throughout the generations did not derive the slightest personal pleasure from their possessions. Rebbi was fantastically rich (*Ketubot* 104a). Yet, on his deathbed, he admitted that he did not take any pleasure from this world, not even a finger’s worth. Tzaddikim use their wealth in order to give *tzedakah* and help others, not for their personal benefit. Tzaddikim value their resources only as a means with which to perform good deeds. Moreover, the more money there is in the hands of the righteous, the less there is for the *kelippah* to tempt man to sin.

Hashem told Rabbi Elazar that there is no reward in this world for a mitzvah. Hashem explained to him that if he wanted money, he would have to endure tremendously difficult trials. Hashem would allow the *Yetzer Hara* to test him, and he would risk falling from his exalted level. For each mitzvah that he had done, he would then receive reward in this world, just like the wicked, who are remunerated for all their good deeds over here, in order to finish them off completely when they arrive in the

World to Come (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:1). Rabbi Elazar would gain riches only at a high rate of exchange.

When Hashem told Rabbi Elazar that He would have to destroy the world in order to change his *mazal*, He meant the following. The tzaddik is called the “world of Hashem.” If Rabbi Elazar would be tested by the *Yetzer Hara*, he might very well be ruined, thus destroying Hashem’s world. Rabbi Elazar refused to trade in true existence for wealth.

Some people are completely unaffected by riches. Others, however, exemplify the dictum that “an increase in possessions causes an increase of worry.” This increase in fact decreases their Torah study. For that reason, Hakadosh Baruch Hu takes pity on them, and withholds wealth from them. But He certainly gives everyone what he needs in order to live.

Rabbi Elazar’s name alludes to the tremendous care and concern that Hashem takes in allocating worldly riches to a person. The name פדת is related to the word לפדות (to redeem). This indicates that Hashem was, in fact, helping Rabbi Elazar by withholding riches from him, since He thus redeemed him from the trials and tribulations which accompany wealth.

### ———— In Summary ————

- The *Tanna*, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat was poverty-stricken. He asked Hashem for a livelihood. To which Hashem replied, “Do you want Me to destroy My world on your behalf, in order to change your *mazal*?” Rabbi Elazar did not agree to this. Is it difficult for Hashem to bestow riches upon a person?
- The answer is that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world. Hashem preserves the reward of tzaddikim for the World to Come. Even the wealthy *Tanna'im* of our nation attested to the fact that they enjoyed no physical benefit from this world. Furthermore, the more money tzaddikim have, the less spending power is granted to the *kelippah*, especially as this money is used for doing mitzvot.

- Hashem told Rabbi Elazar that if He would give him more money, the *Yetzer Hara* would be given the power to entice him. If he would fall into its snare, he would be ruined, thus destroying the “world of Hashem.” Rabbi Elazar did not agree to this.
- There are people who are not affected by wealth. But there are others whose money is a constant source of worry to them, as well as detracting from their Torah study. Hashem withholds money from such people in order to prevent this. This was the case with Rabbi Elazar. His name, פדת (Pedat) indicates that Hashem denied him wealth in order to spare, or redeem him (לפדות), from all tribulations, in order that he not fall into the trap of wealth.

## VALUE EVERY MITZVAH

Chazal tell us (*Avot* 2:1), “Be as scrupulous in performing a ‘minor’ mitzvah as a ‘major’ one, for you do not know the reward given for the respective mitzvot.” The Satan wages war against a person’s *emunah*. What are his tactics? He approaches a person in a moment of weakness and persuades him to do a small aveirah. He repeats this maneuver again and again, until he wins the war, capturing the person in his snare (*Shabbat* 105b).

After committing one sin, a person will easily do more, as “the consequence of a sin is a sin” (*Avot* 4:2). These seemingly small aveirot accumulate, becoming a large army of prosecutors, who accuse and bring suffering upon him. At that point, the Satan steps in, telling the person, “Look at all the troubles you have! Why, you didn’t even do anything wrong! You didn’t sin or transgress, and look at the problems Hashem has sent your way!”

In this manner, the Satan places more and more trials on the person’s path. He doesn’t rest for a moment, instilling words of heresy and atheism into his heart, as he tells him that there is really no reason for all the

difficulties which have befallen him. “It must be that there is no judge and no judgment,” the *Yetzer Hara* concludes.

Therefore, Chazal enjoin us to be scrupulous with even the smallest mitzvah. By being careful with the seemingly small things, one avoids being trapped into doing major aveirot. On the other hand, if one is remiss with the seemingly easy mitzvot, he will do small aveirot instead. Man was created to do. If he is not doing good deeds, he is doing the opposite.

As we have said, one aveirah leads to another. The aveirot will snowball until the person slips to a very low level, held captive in the clutches of the *kelippah*. Chazal tell us (*Sukkah* 52a), “The *Yetzer Hara* is at first called a guest, until, in the end, he is called the owner of the house.” One must constantly be on guard, and the way to avoid his influence is by not making light of small mitzvot.

The best means to do this is by learning Torah. Then, one will know what is right and what is wrong. One should be careful not to waste his time in meaningless pursuits. Although we are taught that one does not know the reward for any mitzvah (*ibid.* 2:1) and thus should be scrupulous with all mitzvot, the Satan particularly tries to trap him by causing him to denigrate seemingly small mitzvot. This is in order to convince him to do small aveirot, which will develop into huge sins.

The Mishnah continues: “for you do not know the reward given for the respective mitzvot.” When a person is about to do a small mitzvah, the Satan persuades him that it has no value and that he would be better off doing a bigger mitzvah instead. That way he will gain greater reward. But by merely accepting the Satan’s words, he has already transgressed! For by doing so, he is denying the fact that Hashem rewards those who do His commandments. How can a person evaluate the reward of any mitzvah?!

Instead of doing either mitzvah, he does an aveirah by listening to the blandishments of the *Yetzer Hara* and engaging in heretical thoughts, *chas*

*v'shalom*. Eventually, he will come to deny the reward of bigger mitzvot. For this reason, Chazal teach us that we do not know the reward of a mitzvah. They instructed us not to follow the advice of the *Yetzer Hara*, who would have us seek out only the seemingly difficult mitzvot, neglecting to do the lesser ones.

Chazal teach that the Satan prosecutes at a time of danger (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 1). This may be explained as being a time of danger for the Satan. When is this? When we perform mitzvot. The Satan feels threatened when a person is occupied with learning Torah or doing a mitzvah since he knows that once Bnei Yisrael fulfill all of the mitzvot, the *geulah* will arrive. Therefore, the Satan seeks to prosecute at the time when a person is about to do a mitzvah. He does this by attempting to prevent the person from completing the mitzvah or by enticing him to sin. Each mitzvah that a person does terrifies the Satan since it threatens his very existence.

The time of greatest danger is on Erev Shabbat. This is when the Satan dances his diabolical dance. One should be particularly careful about how he speaks on this day, since the Satan is waiting in the wings to create dissention between man and wife, and between friends. Then the Satan will gain the upper hand. The Satan even tries to cause one to desecrate Shabbat, knowing that if Bnei Yisrael would keep two Shabbatot, they will immediately be redeemed (*Shabbat* 118b). Furthermore, the Gemara (*Yerushalmi Ta'anit* 1:1) tells us, "Bnei Yisrael will be redeemed only in the merit of Shabbat."

Why is Erev Shabbat the scene for this battle? We may suggest that it is because Adam Harishon sinned on Erev Shabbat. He was subsequently banished from Gan Eden, and tremendous power was placed into his hands at that time. Therefore, he tries to ensnare mankind specifically on this day. The best way to combat him is to keep Shabbat, which will bring the *geulah*. Shabbat has a special power to defeat the Satan since it is a "taste of the World to Come," where the Satan does not exist and the *Yetzer Hara* has no authority. By keeping Shabbat the world will return to its pristine state, as it was before the sin of Adam Harishon.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The *Yetzer Hara* tries to push a person to do a seemingly small aveirah. After that, when troubles come upon him, the *Yetzer Hara* makes him despair by telling him that his actions do not warrant such suffering. Therefore, we should be very careful in the performance of small mitzvot.
- Man is not stagnant. If he is not doing mitzvot, he will start to do small aveirot. These will eventually snowball into more severe sins. Furthermore, the Satan persuades a person not to even bother with doing small mitzvot, telling him that they really have no reward. If a person believes this, he lacks true *emunah* in Hashem. Therefore, it is imperative to fulfill all of the mitzvot, the seemingly easy ones as well as the more difficult ones.
- The Satan prosecutes at a time of danger. This means a time of danger for the Satan, when a person is performing mitzvot and learning Torah. These mitzvot bring the *geulah*, when the Satan will be nullified. Therefore, he tries to cause a person to stumble, so that he himself should not lose his footing in the world. His attack is particularly powerful on Erev Shabbat, the time when Adam Harishon sinned. One can ward off his attack by keeping Shabbat properly, which will hasten the arrival of the *geulah*.

## GOOD DEEDS



### RABBI AKIVA AND BAR KOCHBA

During the period between Pesach and Shavuot, the time of the *hilulas* of the two great *Tanna'im*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes, it is appropriate to study the life of their great teacher, Rabbi Akiva (*Yevamot* 62b).

The Rambam (*Hilchot Melachim* I, 1:3) describes Rabbi Akiva as one of the great scholars of the Mishnah. He would carry the weapons of the king, Bar Kochba (Bar Kosiba). Rabbi Akiva proclaimed him the Mashiach, although many of his colleagues refused to do so. Rabbi Akiva brought a proof for doing so from the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 24:17), “דרך כוכב מיעקב – A star has issued from Yaakov,” which is translated in Aramaic as “דרך כוזבא – Kosiba has issued from Yaakov.” When Rabbi Akiva saw Bar Kochba, he would exclaim, “Here is the Mashiach!” (*Yerushalmi Ta’anit* 4:5; *Eichah Rabbah* 5:4).

This requires explanation. How could it be that Rabbi Akiva, who was greater than Moshe Rabbeinu (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6a; *Yalkut Shimoni, Chukat* 759), considered Bar Kochba to be the Mashiach? He saw that Bar Kochba did not behave properly, even denying Hashem’s supervision of the world. Nevertheless, Rabbi Akiva went so far as to carry his weapons for him and call him the Messianic king. Also, why did Rabbi Akiva “carry his weapons”? What is this teaching us about Bar Kochba?

Rabbi Akiva said (*Pesachim* 49b), “When I was an ignoramus, I asked for a *talmid chacham* to be brought before me, that I may bite him like a donkey.” His students responded, “Rebbi, say, ‘Like a dog.’” To which he

countered, “A donkey breaks the bone when it bites, whereas a dog does not.” When he was still ignorant of Torah, Rabbi Akiva felt such great animosity toward the *talmidei chachamim* that he wanted to bite them like a donkey, which leaves an impression long after it bites.

It seems that Rabbi Akiva blamed the *Chachamim* for his lack of Torah knowledge. He felt that they could have done more to bring him close to the Torah’s ways. This caused his tremendous animosity toward them. He believed that when people lack Torah knowledge and transgress the mitzvot the fault lies with the *talmidei chachamim*, who were not active enough in influencing the masses to come close to the Torah. This form of indifference leads to baseless hatred and dissension.

Therefore, after Rabbi Akiva married the daughter of Kalba Savua, and went to learn Torah, becoming a *talmid chacham* (*Nedarim* 50a), he did all in his power to help others and cause them to return to Hashem’s ways. This is illustrated by the following stories. Chazal (*Kallah Rabbati* 2) relate that Rabbi Akiva raised an orphan, who was the son of a *rasha*, and taught him Torah. When he matured, the son said Kaddish for his father, mitigating the harsh decree upon him. Similarly, when Rabbi Tarfon gave Rabbi Akiva four thousand *dinarim* of gold in order to purchase a city, he took the money and distributed it among the poor (*ibid.*), since he was the charity collector (*Yerushalmi Ma’aser Sheini* 5:4).

These actions illustrate the inherent love of charity and kindness that Rabbi Akiva possessed. He followed the example of Moshe Rabbeinu, who dedicated his entire life for Klal Yisrael. Moshe was constantly devoted to them, when they were enslaved in Egypt, during their wanderings in the Wilderness, and even when he ascended to the heavens, battling the angels who wanted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from receiving the Torah (*Shabbat* 88b). In fact, Rabbi Akiva was a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu. Instead of fighting against angels, he fought against the Romans who desired to uproot and eradicate Torah from our nation.

Rabbi Akiva noticed that Bar Kochba displayed similar qualities of concern for others. He saw how Bar Kochba tried to unify the people to fight against the enemy. By encouraging unconditional love among the people, Bar Kochba helped to rid the nation of the baseless hatred which had caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (*Yoma* 9b).

However, Rabbi Akiva did notice deficiencies in Bar Kochba. He saw that he failed to observe the mitzvot properly, and acted cruelly in cutting off the fingers of his soldiers to prove their bravery, thereby causing them to be blemished (*Eichah Rabbati* 2:4). Yet Rabbi Akiva fulfilled the dictum of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachiah (*Avot* 1:6), “Judge every person favorably.”

In this manner, Rabbi Akiva found merit in Bar Kochba. He asserted that Bar Kochba’s negative behavior was due to Roman influence. Rabbi Akiva felt it was incumbent upon the people to help Bar Kochba wage war against the Romans. Once the Romans would be subdued, their influence on Bnei Yisrael would surely be nullified. Bar Kochba himself would then repent from his ways, as “the consequence of a mitzvah is a mitzvah” (*ibid.* 4:2).

Rabbi Akiva believed that once Bar Kochba would return to the ways of the Torah, even in one small matter, he would merit Heavenly assistance to fully repent. As it says (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3), “When one makes an opening the size of a needle prick, Heaven opens before him a passageway large enough for wagons and chariots to pass through.” One must begin to return to Hashem by making a small improvement. Then, little by little, he will reach great heights, until he reaches the level of a “star,” which is an allusion to Yaakov Avinu.

This is the reason that Rabbi Akiva described Bar Kochba with the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 24:17), “**דָּרַךְ כּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב** – A star has issued from Yaakov.” Just as every Jew, from the seed of Yaakov, has the potential to climb and reach great heights, so, too, he believed that Bar Kochba could pave a path (דָּרַךְ) of ascent for himself. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva did not pay

attention to the fact that Bar Kochba was not righteous at the time. The main thing was that he was prepared to fight the Romans, who were bent on eradicating Torah learning from Yisrael. This was definitely a most notable undertaking, worthy of support. And this was Rabbi Akiva's intention in carrying Bar Kochba's weapons. He wanted to empower Bar Kochba not only against the physical, external enemy, but also against the internal enemy, the *Yetzer Hara*.

Let us suggest another reason why Rabbi Akiva carried Bar Kochba's weapons. When we see a *rasha* who is finding success in his endeavors, although he is far from the correct path, we should not scorn him. Rather, we should try to bring him close to us and the Torah's ways. We should "carry his weapons." This refers to removing the negative traits which he is accustomed to using, but which are external to his true nature. We should help him adopt new tools, so that he will return to the proper path. These are tools of Torah, tools which bring blessing. This was what Rabbi Akiva had in mind by supporting Bar Kochba. Rabbi Akiva wanted Bar Kochba to defeat the Romans and unite Am Yisrael, thereby returning the crown to its rightful owner, under the authority of Mashiach Tzidkeinu. Unfortunately, Rabbi Akiva was mistaken in this matter.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Meir inherited their mentor's qualities, continuing to fight the Romans with great self-sacrifice. Chazal (*Berachot* 61b) teach that when Rabbi Akiva was brought to be killed, it was time to recite Kriyat Shema. The Romans were combing his skin with iron combs, yet he accepted upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His disciples asked him, "Rabbeinu, even this far?" To which he replied, "All my life I have been concerned about the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5), 'You should love the L-rd your G-d with...all your soul.' A person is enjoined to love Hashem even at the time that his soul is being taken from him. I always wondered when I would be able to fulfill this mitzvah. Now that the opportunity has arrived, should I not fulfill it?!" He said Kriyat Shema, lengthening the word "*Echad*," until his soul expired. A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, "How fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul

expired at the word, ‘*Echad*.’” We find that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai exemplified similar self-sacrifice in the bitter battles that they waged against the Romans.

In fact, we find that the word שמע forms the acronym for their names שמעון מאיר עקיבא. Just as the fulfillment of Kriyat Shema requires self-sacrifice, so did these three *Tanna'im* display tremendous self-sacrifice for Hashem’s sake. Their example of self-dedication to Hashem throughout their lives, especially in mitzvot between man and his fellow, can inspire us to follow in their ways.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal teach that Rabbi Akiva believed that Bar Kochba was the Mashiach. He explained the pasuk “A star has issued from Yaakov” to mean that “Kosiba has issued from Yaakov.” How are we to understand this? Rabbi Akiva was greater than Moshe Rabbeinu. He knew that Bar Kochba did not keep Torah and mitzvot properly, nor did he fully believe in the Creator. Additionally, why did Rabbi Akiva purposely carry Bar Kochba’s weapons?
- When Rabbi Akiva was still ignorant of the Torah, he avowed that he would bite a *talmid chacham* like a donkey. He blamed the *Chachamim* for his lack of knowledge. He felt that they had not fulfilled their duty of reaching out to him to teach him the Torah’s ways. Rabbi Akiva was of the opinion that we must reach out to all Jews, just as his wife, the daughter of Kalba Savua, did when she married him. Thus he found merit in the actions of Bar Kochba, since he was fighting a war for his brothers against the Romans. One should never reject a fellow Jew.
- Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Meir, the disciples of Rabbi Akiva, inherited their teacher’s traits. They continued in his ways, fighting against the Romans with self-sacrifice, just as they had seen their mentor do. These three *Tanna'im* are alluded to in the word שמע, which forms the acronym of their initials – שמעון מאיר עקיבא. They devoted their lives to helping others come closer to Hashem, and acted with great self-sacrifice for His honor.

## A Practical Lesson

Rabbi Akiva found merit in Bar Kochba, despite the fact that he did not keep the Torah. Rabbi Akiva knew that one may not reject any Jew, for everyone has the potential to come close to Hashem. We should behave similarly; when we witness a Jew who is far from the proper path, we should not scorn him, but rather, bring him close. Then he will surely do teshuvah, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 104:35) says, “Sins will cease from the earth, and the wicked will be no more; Bless Hashem, O my soul.”

## A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN FINE OIL

When a person dies, Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells the angels, “See what people say about him. If they say, ‘He acted in accordance with the Torah, he feared Heaven,’ his bed immediately hovers aloft” (*Kohelet Rabbah* 12:14). This seems difficult to understand. Hashem, Who “examines innermost thoughts and feelings” (*Yirmeyahu* 11:20), certainly does not need the opinions of mortals. Moreover, even if Hashem does want to hear what people have to say about the *niftar*, why ask the angels to find out for Him? Hashem’s knowledge encompasses everything.

Maybe we can shed light on this with the following idea. Our Sages (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:37) say that the death of the righteous is more difficult to Hakadosh Baruch Hu than the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. A tzaddik is described as the foundation of the world (*Mishlei* 10:25). When he passes away, it is as if the very foundations of the world begin to crumble. Hashem has such great anguish at the death of a tzaddik that He wants to return the world to its primeval state of nothingness.

Upon witnessing this, the ministering angels ask Hashem to have mercy and set the world on firm foundations once more. Then Hashem tells them, “See what people say about the tzaddik who passed away. If they eulogize him properly, I will send them another tzaddik to take his place,

as it says (*Kohelet* 1:5), ‘And the sun rises and the sun sets.’ This will stabilize the world again.”

However, it is well-known that failure to properly eulogize the righteous leads to an indictment against Bnei Yisrael. Our Sages say (*Shabbat* 105a), “One who is lazy in eulogizing a *talmid chacham*, deserves to be buried alive, and does not merit length of days.” Rashi explains that his punishment is measure for measure for his actions: Since he did not grieve over the fact that the tzaddik’s life was cut short, so too, his life is held in limited esteem in heaven. To prevent the angels from bringing an accusation against Bnei Yisrael for failing to properly eulogize the dead, Hashem specifically requests that they should be the ones to bear witness that the requisite eulogies were said.

The sefer *Eitz Hada’at* by the Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital, disciple of the Ari Hakadosh, zt”l, states that when these angels, who are appointed to attest to the good name of the Jewish people, proclaim that a tzaddik passed away, this itself is proof that the *niftar* was indeed righteous. Eulogizing him properly also affirms this. Nevertheless, Hashem seeks other evidence to prove that the tzaddik’s good name left behind a positive influence.

*Kohelet* (7:1) states, “A good name is better than fine oil.” How can a good name, which is intangible, be compared to oil, which is a physical substance?

By means of the good deeds that he does, the tzaddik succeeds in transforming the concept of a “good name” into something concrete. We see that people respect those who are wealthy and of good standing more than *talmidei chachamim*. But after their deaths, these rich, influential individuals are completely forgotten. Whereas when a tzaddik dies, his body is respected even after his death. This is because he represents the Torah. By eulogizing the tzaddik we show respect for the Torah.

This sheds light on the statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 153a) that we see whether someone is worthy of the World to Come by how he is eulogized.

Rashi explains that if he was righteous, everyone bewails his death and speaks of his praises. This action also gives substance to the concept of a good name.

Chazal teach (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:3), “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that a good name is more beloved than the Aron Habrit.” This seems difficult to understand. Could anything be more precious than the Aron Brit Hashem, before which the entire world trembled, and through which Bnei Israel won their wars? (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 11)

The Aron Habrit protected the nation only when they were righteous and upheld what was written in it. But when Bnei Yisrael strayed from the correct path, they received no protection from the Aron, as evidenced by the battle with the Pelishtim (*Shmuel* I, 4), as well as by Chizkiyahu (*Yeshayahu* 39). Tzaddikim, though, have the power to nullify harsh decrees even when the nation isn’t up to par by means of transforming the *Middat Hadin* to *Middat Harachamim* (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 82). Therefore, when the tzaddik is alive, strict justice cannot prevail (*Zohar* I, 180a).

Why did Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai use the term “more beloved” rather than “greater”? The Aron was indeed great, and possessed inherent holiness. However, it is the good name of tzaddikim, the good deeds that they perform, that enabled the Aron to protect Am Yisrael wherever they were. This is most beloved in the eyes of Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- At the time of a person’s death, Hashem asks the ministering angels to find out what people have to say about the *niftar*. Does Hashem need the testimony of people? And if so, for what reason does He ask the angels to report it to Him? At the time of a tzaddik’s death, the foundations of the world begin to crumble. Hashem feels such great anguish over the death of the tzaddik that he wants to destroy the entire world. The angels then request mercy for the world, so that it should not be destroyed. Hashem asks them to see if the *niftar* had a good name,

in which case, He replaces him with another tzaddik, who in turn upholds the world.

- However, even though the tzaddik's good name has been verified, Hashem wants to know if he left an impression of goodness in the world, thereby fulfilling the pasuk "And the sun rises and the sun sets." This is the meaning of the verse "A good name is better than fine oil." Although a good name is not something tangible, the tzaddik transforms his good name into something physical through his worthy accomplishments. Even after his death, the Torah he taught resonates throughout the study halls, and his good deeds continue to positively influence this world.

## **GREAT IS STUDY THAT BRINGS TO ACTION**

Yeshayahu Hanavi rebukes Bnei Yisrael in very strong terms with the words of Hashem (1:11-15): "Why do I need your numerous sacrifices? says Hashem. I am sated with elevation-offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings; the blood of bulls, sheep and goats I do not desire. When you come to appear before Me, who sought this from your hand, to trample My courtyards? Bring your worthless meal-offering no longer, it is incense of abomination to Me. [As for] the New Moon and Shabbat, and your calling of convocation, I cannot abide mendacity with solemn assembly. My soul detests your New Moon and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me; I am weary of bearing [them]. Even if you were to intensify your prayer, I will not listen; your hands are replete with blood."

This is quite astounding. We know that Hashem has satisfaction from offerings. He is pleased when Bnei Yisrael come to the Beit Hamikdash, and is full of joy on Shabbat and holidays. He loves the prayers of His people. Here, we find that Hashem is disgusted by all this and it has become a burden to Him. How can we understand this?

The term with which the *Navi* addressed the people is also surprising. Yeshayahu (ibid. 1:10) compared Bnei Yisrael to Sodom and Ammorah. Were they really so wicked as to deserve such an appellation? And why were they compared specifically to these nations?

Perhaps we can answer by examining the rebuke itself. Hakadosh Baruch Hu spurned Bnei Yisrael's offerings, telling them instead to ensure justice for the orphan and widow. His message to them was that their devotion to Him, which they expressed by offering sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash, praying, and observing the Shabbat and holidays, gave Him no pleasure if they did not learn the Torah. This is because the Torah teaches how one should care for those who are downtrodden. By not helping the orphan and widow, who are easily recognizable as needing assistance, the people would surely fail to lend a hand to other members of the nation who might also need help.

For this reason, they were compared to the nations of Sodom and Ammorah. These people did terrible sins toward their fellow man. Bnei Yisrael were being warned that if they failed to learn the Torah properly, they would fail in interpersonal matters also.

The *Navi* is teaching that there is no benefit in lengthy prayers and observing Shabbat and the holidays if a person does not learn Torah. We need to know what Hashem expects of us, and heed His word. Only through Torah study can a person know how to behave, both in matters between man and Hashem, and in matters between man and his fellow.

Thus Yirmeyahu Hanavi (9:11-12) lamented, "For what reason did the Land perish? Because they forsook My Torah." By not learning Torah, one may easily transgress its laws, and stumble in areas between man and his fellow. One can fall so low as to reach the level of Sodom and Ammorah, who displayed no mercy upon the orphan and the widow. The Torah is the map with which to navigate one's way through the labyrinth of this world's trials.

The focus of one's learning should be to know the laws in order to keep them properly. Chazal (*Avot* 1:17) say, "Not study, but practice is the main thing." Moreover, our Sages teach (*Kiddushin* 40b; *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 2:5), "Great is [the study of] Talmud, that brings to action." We should not think that it is sufficient to gain knowledge in Torah; we are required to act upon our knowledge.

This is borne out by the statement of Chazal (*Yoma* 9b) regarding the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. At that time the people were involved in Torah, mitzvot, and acts of loving-kindness. If so, why was the Temple destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred amongst them. Their Torah learning didn't help the people at all. Although they brought sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash, and observed the Shabbat and festivals, the Temple was destroyed. How can this be understood? This is because rather than learning in order to observe the mitzvot and laws, they used their Torah learning for selfish reasons, in order to appear wise and knowledgeable. They were willing to perfect their relationship with Hashem, but paid no heed to their relationship with people. This caused the destruction.

The *Navi* therefore told them (*Yeshayahu* 1:17), "Learn to do good, seek justice, vindicate the victim, render justice to the orphan, take up the grievance of the widow." One must learn Torah with the correct intentions: not merely to become smart, or feel superior to others, rather in order to implement what one learns. In that way, one will be able to fulfill all the laws meticulously.

The Torah brings tremendous blessings. It also hastens the redemption. Yerushalayim, the seat of the *Shechinah*, is the symbol of the Torah. It is the focal point of the Land. It was destroyed because the people failed to learn Torah with the proper attitude, as Yirmeyahu had adjured them.

How can we return the *Shechinah* to Yerushalayim? The pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8) states, "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them." Our Sages stress that it does not say, "so that I may dwell

in it (the Sanctuary),” but rather, “so that I may dwell among them (the people).” When a person makes himself into a sanctuary of Torah learning, he merits having the *Shechinah* rest upon him. By means of their good deeds, Bnei Yisrael cause Hashem to reside in the Beit Hamikdash, from where all good and abundance come to the world, and specifically to Bnei Yisrael, among whom He resides.

Torah learning provides the conduit for the flow of Heavenly abundance to the world. The Jewish nation’s prime purpose is to be constantly involved in Torah study. This brings blessing from on High upon the Sanctuary, from where it flows to Am Yisrael, and then to the rest of the world.

But when Bnei Yisrael, *chas v’shalom*, are remiss in Torah study, or sin, the *Yetzer Hara* gains a foothold. Then the *Shechinah* is driven away from them, from the Beit Hamikdash, and from the entire world. It returns on High, where it remains, and all blessings cease to flow upon us.

In this vein, maybe we can interpret the words “the Land perished” in the following way. Why did abundance cease from the Land? Why did the *Shechinah* depart from Am Yisrael, taking all blessings with it? Because “Bnei Yisrael forsook My Torah.” Conversely, the *Shechinah* will return if we rebuild ourselves in Torah study. Today, when there is no Beit Hamikdash, a person should toil in Torah in the Beit Hamidrash, which is like a miniature Beit Hamikdash.

Our Sages (*Ta’anit* 30b) say, “Whoever mourns Yerushalayim merits seeing her glory.” This seems difficult to understand. How can we see the glory of Yerushalayim now, merely by mourning over the destruction? Surely it would be more appropriate to say “will merit seeing her glory” – in the future.

Yerushalayim is the symbol of the Torah, and all the blessings that it brings. The *Shechinah* resides in Yerushalayim. By contemplating the loss of the Beit Hamikdash, a person begins to consider the causes of its

destruction. When he realizes that lack of Torah study was the main cause, he will be encouraged to learn Torah with greater fervor. The Torah that he learns will affect his character traits for the good, and he will merit having the *Shechinah* rest on him. He may even be compared to a miniature Beit Hamikdash. Thus the positive effects of his mourning are felt by him right now.

Moreover, by rebuilding himself in this way, he is in effect laying the foundations for the reconstruction of the Beit Hamikdash. He will merit rejoicing in Hashem's final redemption, and be privileged to witness the glory of Yerushalayim when the Beit Hamikdash is rebuilt, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Yeshayahu Hanavi castigated the nation, telling them that Hashem did not need their offerings or prayer, their Shabbat or festivals. Why? We know that Hashem always has satisfaction from these things. Why did Hashem now say that they were a burden to Him? Furthermore, why does the prophet compare the Jews to the people of Sodom and Amorrhah?
- Our main purpose in life is to learn Torah. However, it is not enough to merely keep the commandments. Hashem desires that we fulfill the spirit, not just the letter, of the law. Otherwise, Bnei Yisrael may fall to the level of the people of Sodom and Amorrhah, who scorned matters between man and his fellow. When Chazal say that the Land perished because the people forsook the Torah, they are teaching that Bnei Yisrael forsook the inner aspects of Torah learning. They learned with their personal interests in mind, and not in order to benefit others.
- One should learn Torah to become familiar with its laws, not in order to become wise or respected. The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed despite the fact that the people learned Torah at that time. This was due to the baseless hatred which the people exhibited. But if one learns in order to know the commandments and fulfill them by exhibiting kindness, he brings an abundance of blessings down to this world. One who mourns Yerushalayim merits seeing its glory. By rebuilding himself, through learning and keeping the Torah's

commandments in the correct manner, he hastens the ultimate redemption.

## THE VALUE OF TIME

### An Open Letter to All

I pray on behalf of all who learn this letter, that they succeed this year (and every year) in all matters, physical and spiritual, in the merit of my holy ancestors, Amen.

### Prepare Yourself in the Vestibule in order to Enter the Banquet Hall

There are certain concepts we believe in. These include the existence of the Creator, in Torah and mitzvot, tzaddikim, reward and punishment, Gan Eden and Gehinnom, Mashiach, and the resurrection of the dead. We also believe in the everlasting life of the World to Come, after one hundred and twenty years. These beliefs obligate us to constantly make a personal accounting of our actions, in order that we should not fail in our day-to-day responsibilities.

It is possible for a person to believe in all of the above, but by failing to make the requisite effort to merit eternal happiness, he may lose out in all that he invested in life. This can happen if we don't make the effort to clarify **what it is that Hashem demands from us**.

Unfortunately, many people have the following aspirations in life, to which they devote themselves. They desire a beautiful, well-appointed home and steady work. Likewise, they want their sons to become doctors, lawyers or architects. They spend many hours planning their vacations. Yet, the main objective, the very purpose of their creation – to keep the Torah and mitzvot in all their details – is a minor feature of their lives. Why is this so?

When a person arrives in the World of Truth, after one hundred and twenty years, the first question he will be asked is: “Did you fix times for Torah learning? Did you perform mitzvot?” What will this person be able to reply? That he had a small apartment and was constantly involved in renovations? That he had a small business and was constantly involved in expanding it, in order to support his family and marry off his children?

Does he really think these answers will be accepted?! He found time to deal with many mundane matters, yet for Torah study he was never free, even though he always maintained that he believed in Torah and mitzvot.

Is it possible to claim this, without acting on this conviction, not learning and not doing mitzvot? This person does as his heart desires, scorning the Torah and mitzvot. This proves that his main intention in life is to bolster his own self-respect and enjoy the pleasures of this world. He fails to attribute all the bounty he is blessed with to its true Source. He displays a lack of gratitude to Hashem, failing to repay him for all the myriad kindnesses which He has done for him throughout his life. This is held against him.

Just today, a man came over to me in the yeshiva. Before he became wealthy, he would always come to the yeshiva to learn Torah. But the more his business blossomed, the less he cultivated the Tree of Life. When he came to visit me, I asked him how he was faring in his new life.

He replied, “Honorable Rav, please forgive me for not coming to the yeshiva to learn anymore, and for not having even made a donation to the yeshiva, to which I am greatly indebted. I am in terrible trouble. I am in a very bad financial position. This week, I lost nearly half of my assets, which I worked very hard to attain. I am afraid I will become poor, like I was in the past. Please give me a blessing, or some good advice, so that I should not lose more money.”

I told him, “You are concerned about all the physical assets which you lost. But don’t you care about all the days of Torah learning that you have

squandered? Aren't you worried about all the days you didn't lay tefillin, and didn't pray? You fret over money which you can't take with you to the grave (*Avot* 6:9), yet you feel no loss over the Torah and mitzvot you have forgone. It is these that light the way for a person to his place in Gan Eden, after one hundred and twenty years.

“Don't you think Hashem is pained by the fact that you deserted Him as soon as He gave you wealth? Instead of showing appreciation for all He has done for you, you have completely forgotten about Him. You act as if He doesn't even exist. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave you suffering because He wants you to remember Him. He has caused you financial loss, so that you should realize the deficit of deserting Him.

“You bemoan all the days of hard work that have now gone up in smoke. Why don't you bewail the days that you could have filled with the fire of Torah and mitzvot?! You have failed the test. If you had originally invested in living as a mitzvah-observant Jew, you would not have reached such a point, having lost both your material possessions as well as your spiritual inheritance. And all you are concerned about is the money...”

I am not telling people not to go out to work. I am not saying that people shouldn't try to succeed at business, but lock themselves away in yeshiva, learning Torah full time. Not at all. Not everyone is able to learn all day long. Not everyone can merit becoming the Torah leader of the next generation. Fortunate is the man who is counted among those who sit in the Beit Hamidrash. This is what David Hamelech prayed for when he said, (*Tehillim* 27:4), “One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek; Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem, etc.”

Nevertheless, every believing Jew, whose sole desire is to maintain his faith in Hashem and in Torah and mitzvot must know what his foremost ambition should be. That is to live in the way of Torah and mitzvot. He may work for a living, purchase a new house, and do business. He may go on vacation, as long as the guidelines of modesty are kept there. Vacation

should be a time of relaxation in order to “recharge one’s batteries” for further Avodat Hashem.

Furthermore, during vacation time, when a man returns in the evening, and his noble wife allows him to go out again to hear a *shiur* in Torah, her reward is even greater than that of her husband, as Hashem has promised (see *Berachot* 17a). For, aside from the housework and various tasks that this righteous woman performs, ensuring that her husband need not do them, she encourages him to go out to learn. Her reward for this is very great. We should not lose sight of our priorities.

### Treasured Moments

Let us examine the value of time. Even when a person is working for his living, he should aspire to live every single moment in the spirit of Torah and mitzvot.

Life is compared to gold. A *chatan* and *kallah* present each other with gold watches for good reason. This helps them remember that every moment should be treasured. Time has no exchange. A moment that passes will never return.

This idea can be illustrated with the following parable. Someone who wants to become a top doctor spends many years of study mastering the material. If he neglects his studies, he will fail his exams, thereby throwing all his money and efforts into the garbage. The same idea applies to matters of sanctity. With each and every word of Torah, one fulfills the positive commandment of “And you shall speak in it.” If a person wastes his time, he loses out on countless mitzvot.

The Vilna Gaon, zt”l, stated that he could have spent all his days reviewing only the first Mishnah of *masechet Berachot*, due to his great love for Torah. He learned much more than that because there is a mitzvah to be familiar with the entire Torah. He spent every moment toiling in Torah in order not to forego even one instant of eternal life.

I am not saying that one must spend his every waking moment toiling in Torah study. One who does so certainly has tremendous reward. I am referring to people who do not take advantage of the years of their youth to learn. They thereby fail to actualize their great potential. By squandering their time, they fritter away their lives, which eventually may lead to grave consequences.

Our Rabbis compared those who waste their time to a man who needs to earn money to support his family. He has not a cent to his name. His friends advise him to travel to the fair, where he should buy merchandise cheaply and sell it at a profit. Alas, this man travels to the fair, and spends all his time watching the activities there. He wastes the entire day and arrives home toward evening, none the richer.

So it is with us. We should toil in spiritual matters until the last day of our lives. “The day is short, the task is abundant...and the Master of the house is insistent.” But we waste our time viewing the vanities of this world. How will we arrive at the Heavenly Court lacking Torah, tefillah, and good deeds?!

### **The Precious Years of Youth**

The years of one’s youth fly by, gone forever. Therefore, one should make the most of his moments and toil in Torah while he is still young, day and night. This is the way that Torah is acquired. One should maximize his learning sessions, and strive to learn outside the standard hours.

One’s Torah study should be uppermost in his mind. An example of this is someone who goes out to work in the morning, but anxiously awaits the end of the day so that he may go to his fixed evening *shiur*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu considers it as though he has spent his entire day in the pursuit of Torah, because his aspirations were directed solely toward this end. Thus his whole life revolves around Torah.

However, the *Yetzer Hara* waits in ambush to make people stumble. Shlomo Hamelech described the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kohelet* 4:12) as “an old and foolish king.” Why is he “foolish”? Because he schemes to make people foolish. He does this by causing people to waste their time in frivolous pursuits, instead of engaging in Torah and mitzvot.

Let us examine this concept further. Is there anything more precious than one’s life? A person is prepared to forgo all his possessions to stay alive, yet a moment lost can never be retrieved. There is no one wealthy enough to buy a moment that has passed.

A person who wastes time is like someone who stands at the seashore with a pocket full of gold coins. Every minute, he removes a coin and casts it into the sea. This man has lost his wits, as well as his life, as Chazal (*Chagigah* 4a) say, “A fool loses what was given to him.”

We can explain this concept in another way. There are two types of yearly calendars. One opens like a book, displaying each day on a separate sheet. One turns the page to come to the next day’s entry; each page remains intact with his accomplishments recorded on it. A second type of calendar also has a separate page for each day, but is bound on a spiral. At the end of the day, that page is torn off and discarded. No record of his actions remains. So too, are the days of our lives. A person who comes to the end of the year with all his days filled with good things will be able to turn the pages and recall everything he accomplished throughout the course of the year. But one who rips out the pages, who has made no everlasting impressions with the days of his life, has no memory of them whatsoever. His days have no permanence. With what will he approach the New Year?

This is why Shlomo Hamelech beseeches us (*Kohelet* 12:1), “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and those years arrive of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’” He describes old age: One’s strength weakens, his eyesight is dulled, it is difficult to eat, etc. There is no guarantee how long a person will be

healthy and strong, in possession of all his faculties, able to serve Hashem like he did in his youth (see *Shabbat* 151b).

When one becomes old, and it becomes difficult to perform mitzvot, he will be greatly distressed that he wasted his time when he was young and strong. Then he will wring his hands in anguish, crying bitterly, “Where are the good old days of my childhood? Why did I wait till I became old to begin serving Hashem properly? Now it is difficult for me to learn Torah and pray properly. Why didn’t I strengthen myself when I was young?” However, “A twisted thing cannot be made straight” (*Kohelet* 1:15). There is no way whatsoever to regain the days of one’s youth, which he scorned and threw to the winds.

Therefore, when one is young he should contemplate what will come later, and not say, “When I am free I will study” (*Avot* 2:5), because, “Perhaps you will not become free.” Maybe he will be unable to study Torah in his later years. Therefore, he should not spend his time idly, but fill it with Torah and mitzvot. In this manner, he may be compared to Avraham Avinu, about whom it was said, “ואברהם זקן בא בימים” – Now Avraham was old, well on in years (lit. he came with his years).” He came to the end of his life with all the days of his years filled with spiritual accomplishments. He fulfilled the purpose of each one of them.

### **Fellow Jew, Prepare Yourself for the Future World**

It is vital for a person to prepare himself in this world so that he can come to the next world in a state of perfection. Every Jew aspires to gain a portion in the World to Come. Each one of us desires to sit with our Avot Hakedoshim and the great tzaddikim, who have guided us throughout the generations, and not feel ashamed in their presence. But he must ask himself if he truly desires this with all his heart. Does he do all in his power to merit this honor?

Sometimes a person indulges in gourmet foods and rich clothing, and goes on expensive vacations, yet meets his religious obligations in a

minimal way. He feels he fulfills his requirements with a donation to *tzedakah*. He visits the Beit Hakeneset only once a week, and even then, he hurries to complete his tefillot. However, at home he acts quite differently, taking time over his meals, savoring every bite. Do you honestly think that such a person will merit seeing our Avot, or sitting with the tzaddikim? He remembers the tzaddikim only in his hour of need, when he needs salvation.

Each person has the ability to gain entry into the World to Come, the most exalted place, which no human eye has ever seen. But entry is granted only to one who desires it with all his heart. He can obtain it only with great exertion, and has only a limited time to do so. After that time, it will be too late.

We can explain this concept with the following parable. A man had a dream. In his dream, a tzaddik appeared and told him, "If you fill out these numbers in the lottery, you are sure to win millions of dollars." When he awoke, he immediately wrote down the numbers. But instead of rushing out to buy a ticket, he arrived at the lotto station just as it was closing. He was very upset that he had missed the opportunity to purchase a ticket. But his anguish was many, many times greater the next morning, when he heard that he possessed the winning numbers, and he had lost millions of dollars. Can we imagine his distress?

Such is a person in this world. All his life, he is, so to speak, filling out his ticket for the World to Come through learning Torah and doing good deeds. These will earn him millions in the World to Come. But if he missed the boat and did not use his time for Torah and mitzvot, he will drown in a sea of sorrow upon realizing how much he could have gained. He will want to rectify the situation, but once a person is in the next world, it is too late.

Moreover, since he was aware, in this world, of the mandate to spend his time wisely to pay for his ticket to the next world, he will now feel

unbearable shame. What will he be able to answer on the great day of justice and rebuke?

## The Abundant Blessings of Torah Study

The means by which to arrive with the winning ticket in the World to Come is constant toil in Torah. Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 5b) exhort us that “a person should treat Torah learning as if he were an ox carrying a burden and like a donkey bearing a yoke.” These animals do not shirk their duty, but invest all their strength in their work, even while bearing heavy loads. So, too, should a person accept the yoke of Torah, and invest all his strength in learning and keeping the mitzvot.

We can take this analogy one step further. A person sometimes does not know how much he is capable of bearing. At times, it seems that too great a load is being placed upon his shoulders, and he will crumble. In such a case, he should make himself like an ox to the burden, as it says (*Devarim* 33:17), “Sovereignty is his ox-like one.” An ox has tremendous strength. Furthermore, if he accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, he will surely receive Heavenly assistance, as Chazal tell us (*Yoma* 38b), “He who comes to purify himself, is assisted from Above”.

There is a delightful allusion in our Sages’ words. One who learns Torah should delve deeply to uncover its contents, as well as aim to cover as much ground as possible. “Like an ox carrying a burden” means to dig deeply into the meaning of the words of Torah. “Like a donkey bearing a yoke” means to learn as much Torah as possible. Without fulfilling both of these conditions, one may come to disparage the Torah, and consequently its mitzvot, *chas v’shalom*.

This applies to all stages of a man’s life. When one is young, he should devote himself to Torah learning, day after day, ascending higher and higher on the ladder of Avodat Hashem. As the years pass and his children grow up and mature, he should continue to invest his energies

in spiritual pursuits as much as he is able. Of course, his obligations to home and family should not be ignored.

One might ask, “How can I sit and learn when the burden of supporting my family and raising my children rests on me?” Chazal tell us that the Torah which one studies when it is difficult for him is exceedingly precious in the eyes of Hashem. The Gemara (*Berachot* 62a; *Shabbat* 63b) states that words of Torah endure only in a person who “kills himself over them.” Furthermore, the Sages (*Yalkut Shimoni, Kohelet* 968) say, “The Torah I learned with difficulty is what stood by me.” This type of Torah study will also provide one with Heavenly assistance when times get easier.

Many people learn Torah, but are not drawn to it. When faced with a problem, either monetary or medical, they immediately forsake their learning and ask, “Why isn’t the Torah protecting me, why are all these tribulations coming upon me?” Eventually, these people fall into depression, with no way out.

There are many reasons why the Torah may not stand at one’s side to protect him from misfortune. Perhaps he has grievances against the Rabbis and against the Torah, or even against Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *chas v’shalom*. He may feel that they have not come to his aid in his time of need. But he has not put himself in the picture. Perhaps he should consider that maybe he himself bears the responsibility for his suffering.

When a person truly desires to succeed in his learning, he should cast aside all distractions and disturbances, and devote himself completely to Torah study.

A precondition for success in Torah learning is to maintain one’s learning sessions. Chazal (*Shabbat* 31a) say that “when a person arrives at the Heavenly Gates, he is asked, ‘Did you set aside fixed times for Torah learning?’” This indicates that not only the shopkeeper, who spends his days involved in business, but also the *talmid chacham*, whose Torah is

his occupation and who learns hour upon hour, must designate times for learning. He must fix a schedule for learning and not deviate from it.

By doing so, he not only benefits himself, but his study partner and all who learn in his study-group, as well. The ripple effect of his enthusiasm in learning spreads out to all around him. As the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 41:6) says, “Each man would help his fellow and to his brother he would say, ‘Be strong!’” Through his actions he empowers each member of the Beit Hamidrash in Torah learning.

However, it seems appropriate to add a word of caution to those who learn late into the night. This may cause them to come late to morning prayers with a minyan. Learning at night is a worthy activity, as Chazal (*Eiruvin* 65a) say, “The night was created only for Torah study.” But it may damage the congregation at large, if by doing so he sleeps late and fails to come on time to prayers.

Furthermore, one who does not adhere to his learning sessions weakens others. They take note of his actions and learn to behave in the same way. They may also fail to take the set times of learning seriously. He may be compared to a person who sins and causes others to sin, since he causes them to desist from learning.

The sefer *Tiferet Shlomo* (*Parashat Ki Teitzei*) says, “By means of Torah learning for its own sake, all are awakened to great heights, through which abundance of goodness, mercy, and salvation come upon Yisrael, as it says about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, that the entire world was sustained in his merit (*Berachot* 17b; *Ta’anit* 24b).”

This being the case, how great is the reward awaiting one who arrives on time at the Beit Hamidrash for the learning sessions. First and foremost he enlightens himself with his Torah study. His influence encompasses his study partner and his whole environment. Eventually, it extends to the entire world. He brings merit to the public through his Torah learning, since people observe his ways and become strengthened by them.

Fortunate is one who brings people under the shadow of the *Shechinah*. A person who spends his time going from place to place recruiting people into the army of Hashem is granted immeasurable reward. But one who sits in the Beit Hamidrash can also bring merit to the public at large. The spirit of the Torah within him spreads far and wide, imbuing the entire world with much blessing, as our Rabbis, z"l, have promised.

One who honestly contemplates this matter will certainly be affected positively. He will be inspired to invest concentration in his Torah studies, learning Torah for its own sake. In this manner, he will enter the World to Come with all his days intact. He will be meritorious, and bring merit to the entire world.

With this, I end my letter, a letter on behalf of Torah and all those who take my words to heart. All the ideas I have expressed are written in the sefarim of our Sages, and are not my own words, *chas v'shalom*.

May it be Hashem's will that the merit of Torah and the merit of the tzaddikim, who we have quoted, protect all who study this letter, Amen.

### ———— In Summary ————

- As Jews who believe in Torah and mitzvot, in Mashiach, in reward and punishment, and Heavenly justice after one hundred and twenty years, we must make personal accountings of our actions. This is so that we should not have any lack in our eternal life in the World to Come. What a shame that people fail to make this personal reckoning and ponder what it is that Hashem demands of us! Everyone aspires to do well in his mundane affairs. How much more so should one yearn to achieve spiritual greatness. How will we answer the question "Have you set aside fixed times for Torah?" How will we face the King? Can we ignore the Creator Who showers us with so much bounty? How dare we make light of Torah and mitzvot?!
- Not everyone is able to sit and learn in a yeshiva his entire life. Some people must go out to earn a living. But their main aspirations should be directed to spiritual gains, toward purity and holiness. One should remember that time is as

precious as gold, and not a moment should be wasted. For one who wastes time will arrive at the World to Come empty handed. Therefore, one should toil in Torah without respite. One who constantly awaits the times he has fixed for learning, even if he needs to work to gain a livelihood, is considered by Hashem as if he spends all his time learning Torah.

- A person who does not toil in Torah in his youth will bemoan the time that he wasted once he reaches his later years. Then, he will not possess the same strength to be able to learn. One who desires to sit in the Upper World with all the tzaddikim must prepare himself for this in this world.
- One should apply himself to Torah study like a beast of burden who willingly accepts the yoke. He should toil with all his might. Then he will see that he has the strength for it, and he will receive Heavenly assistance. He should learn in depth, and also cover much ground. He should learn while he is still young. When he needs to go out to work to support his family, he should endeavor to maintain a set time for Torah study. This will influence others to follow his example, and he will strengthen himself, his comrades, and the entire world.

## CHARACTER TRAITS



### MOSHE AND YEHOSHUA – LIKE THE SUN AND THE MOON

The pasuk (*Shoftim* 5:31) states, “And those who love Hashem are like the powerfully rising sun.” Our Rabbis (*Shabbat* 88b; *Gittin* 36b) explain that this refers to one who is insulted or shamed, yet does not respond but rejoices in his suffering out of love for Hashem.

The *Rishonim* ask why such a person is compared to the sun. Chazal explain this in the following manner (based on the Gemara in *Chulin* 60b). When the sun and the moon were created they were the same size. The moon came before Hashem and claimed, “Master of the Universe! Can two kings use one crown?” To which Hashem replied, “Go and make yourself small.” Why did Hashem command only the moon to humble itself, and not the sun? This is because the sun did not respond when the moon complained against her. We see this from the pasuk (*Yehoshua* 10:13), “The sun stood still.” The Hebrew word for “stood still” is וַיִּדּוּם, which also means to be silent. Since the sun remained silent and did not complain about the moon’s insult, it retained its original size. A person who acts with similar forbearance is thus compared to the sun.

The Gemara (*Bava Batra* 75a) states, “The face of Moshe was like the sun; the face of Yehoshua was like the moon.” Rabbi Shmuel, *Gav”ad* of Posen, explains that when Eldad and Meidad prophesied in the camp of Israel, Yehoshua became angry and immediately ran to Moshe requesting that Moshe incarcerate them (*Bamidbar* 11:28). Moshe, in his great humility, replied (*ibid.* 11:29), “Are you being zealous for my sake? If only

all of Hashem's nation were prophets!" Yehoshua was exceedingly humble, yet he had not attained the same level of humility as Moshe. Therefore, Moshe, who did not act stringently toward Eldad and Meidad, "shone like the sun," whereas Yehoshua, who did, was only as "bright as the moon."

Why did Yehoshua act stringently toward Eldad and Meidad? Maybe we can elucidate this matter with an explanation from the Maggid of Koznitz, in his sefer *Avodat Yisrael*. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 13:16) says, "Moshe called Hoshea, son of Nun, *Yehoshua*." The Targum Yonatan expounds that when Moshe saw how humble Yehoshua was, he changed his name from *Hoshea* to *Yehoshua*. This requires explanation.

Previously, we noted that when Eldad and Meidad prophesied in the camp Yehoshua responded by imploring Moshe to imprison them. Why did he react in this way? The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 17a) tells us that they prophesied that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would lead the nation into Eretz Yisrael. The fact that Yehoshua was upset about this teaches how humble he was. Had he sought honor for himself, he certainly would not have been upset that they were predicting his upcoming greatness. From the fact that he implored Moshe to imprison Eldad and Meidad, it is evident that he was exceedingly humble and eschewed honor, as is the way of the righteous. He preferred that Moshe would live forever to lead the people, and that he should remain his servant.

We still remain with our difficulty regarding Moshe's renaming Hoshea "Yehoshua (יהושע)." Rashi explains that Moshe prayed on his behalf: "May Hashem save you (י-ה יושיעך) from the plot of the spies" (*Bamidbar* 13:16). Would we ever imagine that the tzaddik Yehoshua, whose face shone like the moon, would be swayed to speak negatively about Eretz Yisrael, to the extent that he required the extra protection of having his name changed by Moshe Rabbeinu?!

Maybe we can explain this with the following idea. Because Yehoshua so greatly appreciated the humility and greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu, he

longed for Moshe to live as long as possible. However, they both knew that Moshe would die before Bnei Yisrael entered the Land, as Hashem had said (*Bamidbar* 20:12): “Therefore you will not bring the congregation to the Land...” Moshe was afraid that Yehoshua would join the plot of the spies in order to prevent Bnei Yisrael from entering the land, thus extending the lifetime and leadership of Moshe.

Moshe enjoined Yehoshua not to follow the plan of the spies, despite his reasoning. He warned him not to co-operate with sinners on any account. Targum Yonatan states that Moshe changed Yehoshua’s name when “he saw the humility of Yehoshua.” Moshe took note of Yehoshua’s seemingly exaggerated reaction to the prophecy of Eldad and Meidad and understood that this stemmed from Yehoshua’s humility in not wanting to take over the reins of leadership from Moshe. Therefore, he renamed him *Yehoshua*, praying that Hashem should save him.

However, our original question still remains unresolved. If Yehoshua was, indeed, very humble, why did his face shine merely like the moon? Furthermore, how can we understand that Yehoshua was ready to spread rumors about the Land, and thus deserve to be punished by death? By participating in the sin of the spies, he would cause great pain to his teacher, Moshe, as well as to the *Shechinah*. How can we fathom Yehoshua performing a mitzvah, to continue learning from his teacher, through committing such an aveirah?

Maybe we can offer the following explanation. Avot (1:1) says, “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua.” Why does the Mishnah tell us that Moshe received the Torah “from Sinai” instead of “from Hashem”?

When describing the transmission of the Torah, the Mishnah is stressing the way that the Torah is transmitted rather than historical facts. The Gemara (*Ta’anit* 7a) states: “The Torah endures only in one who is humble of spirit.” We find that Har Sinai exemplifies the *middah* of humility. The pasuk in Mishlei (29:23) says, “A lowly spirit will support

[his] honor.” Chazal say that this refers to Har Sinai, who humbled himself by saying that he was low, and thus merited that Hashem chose to give the Torah upon his summit. This teaches us that only one who humbles himself for the sake of Torah and Avodat Hashem like Har Sinai, will merit having the *Shechinah* rest upon him and that the Torah will endure through him (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 29:3).

Yehoshua emulated the humility of Moshe and deserved to become the leader of the nation after him, as the pasuk (*Mishlei* 27:18) says, “And the guardian of his master will be honored.” Yehoshua served Moshe Rabbeinu day and night, as the Midrash tells us (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:9): Yehoshua attended to Moshe’s needs, and honored him immensely. He arose early and remained late to help out in Moshe’s house of study. He would organize the benches, spread out the mats, etc. Since he inherited the *middah* of humility from Moshe his master (*Bamidbar* 12:3) to whom he was very close, he merited that the Torah was transmitted to the nation through him. He was humble, just like Har Sinai. Thus the *Tanna* stresses that “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai” and then transmitted it to Yehoshua. Yehoshua’s humility made him a fitting successor to Moshe as leader of the nation (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:14), as the pasuk (*Mishlei* 27:18) says: “The one who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit.”

However, Yehoshua’s sole desire was that Moshe, who had received the Torah at Sinai, should himself transmit it to the next generation of Klal Yisrael, and be the one to bring them into the Land. Moshe would then build the Beit Hamikdash, which would never be destroyed (*Sotah* 9a). Yehoshua would remain his faithful student.

When Yehoshua heard Eldad and Meidad prophesying in the camp that Moshe would die and he would be the one to bring the nation into the Land, he understood that his light would be as great as that of his teacher, Moshe. He would be the one to receive the Torah from him and transmit it to Klal Yisrael. For that reason, Yehoshua demanded that they be incarcerated. Two kings cannot wear the same crown. He knew that

Moshe, his teacher, was like the sun, while he was merely a talmid, like the moon, which receives all its light from the sun (*Sanhedrin* 17a).

This helps us understand why “Moshe’s face shone like the sun and Yehoshua’s like the moon.” Because Yehoshua sincerely desired to remain the faithful disciple of Moshe Rabbeinu, even after his death, and reflect his teachings, in the same way that the moon reflects the light of the sun, Hashem allowed him to do so. “A person is led in the direction he wishes to go” (*Makkot* 10a).

Yehoshua is a wonderful example of how careful we should be in perfecting our *middot*. We also learn from him the great love and dedication a pupil should have for his mentor. The true talmid exemplifies humility and utter subservience to his teacher. He should be willing to forgo honor and greatness while his teacher is still alive.

It is uncommon to see such utter self-negation regarding a teacher-pupil relationship. On the contrary, we sometimes witness the phenomenon of students who breathlessly await the time when they will take over their teacher’s position. Often, unfortunately, there are those who pounce upon the opportunity for fame and dominion, even at another’s expense. Not so Yehoshua. He preferred that his mentor should continue living, so that he could continue to serve him wholeheartedly.

Our original question of why Yehoshua is compared to the moon rather than the sun can also be explained as follows. Because Yehoshua fought for the honor of Moshe his teacher through anger, he was punished by having his light diminished. He was no longer worthy of resembling his teacher completely, but his greatness was lessened. In spite of his great love and devotion to Moshe Rabbeinu, he still should not have displayed such stringency in regard to Eldad and Meidad, when he heard their predictions. It would have been more fitting for him to disqualify their words in his heart, and feel embarrassment and shame when they likened him to Moshe, his teacher. If he would have withstood this trial of being insulted and not responding, Yehoshua would have been considered as

great as the sun, as the pasuk states (*Shoftim* 5:31), “And let those who love Him be like the powerfully rising sun”.

Eldad and Meidad were not to blame for publicizing their prophecy, as they were obligated to repeat what was told to them from on High. The Gemara states that one who withholds his prophecy is liable for death from Heaven (*Sanhedrin* 89a). But did they deserve to be imprisoned, as Yehoshua suggested? Even though their words did not find favor in his eyes, was that a justification for his great anger? Through demonstrating such stringency toward them, Yehoshua was compared to the moon which stated, “Two kings cannot wear the same crown.” He was judged as if he desired the crown of leadership for himself.

This helps elucidate why Moshe was wary of Yehoshua’s actions. He saw how attached Yehoshua was to him, to the point of feeling excessive anger at Eldad and Meidad for no justified reason. Moshe suspected that Yehoshua might do other inappropriate actions to detain Bnei Yisrael’s entry into the Land, motivated by his desire that Moshe should continue to lead the nation. For this reason, Moshe prayed for Yehoshua, “May Hashem save you from the plot of the spies.”

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal compare those who are insulted yet do not respond to the rising sun. Just like the sun did not react to the complaint of the moon that two kings cannot wear the same crown, so too the humble person shows forbearance when insulted. The light of one who is insulted and does not respond will not be diminished, just as the light of the sun remained in full strength. Because Yehoshua acted stringently with Eldad and Meidad when they prophesied in the camp, he is compared to the moon, which wanted the sun to be judged according to the strict letter of the law. Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, did not judge them strictly, and is therefore compared to the sun, which demonstrated the *middah* of forbearance when the moon insulted her.

- Why did Yehoshua act in this way toward Eldad and Meidad? They predicted that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would lead the nation into Eretz Yisrael. Yehoshua, however, wanted Moshe Rabbeinu to continue to lead the people. For that reason Moshe prayed: “May Hashem save you from the plot of the spies.” This was so that Yehoshua should not be influenced to co-operate with the spies in speaking negatively about the Land, thereby postponing Bnei Yisrael’s entry and extending Moshe’s leadership.
- Since Eldad and Meidad received their prophecy from Heaven, how can we understand Yehoshua’s anger? He was terribly disturbed by the content of their prophetic vision. Yehoshua wanted Moshe to remain the leader, and that is why he was so bothered by their statements. Moshe feared that Yehoshua would do other inappropriate actions to detain Bnei Yisrael’s entry into the Land, therefore he prayed for him: “May Hashem save you from the plot of the spies.”

### **A Practical Lesson**

We learn fidelity toward one’s teacher from Yehoshua. He revered his mentor, Moshe, and desired that he should lead the nation and transmit the Torah to the people. We should learn from Yehoshua not to run after a position of authority. One should certainly not desire his teacher’s demise in order to take over his position. Yehoshua did not want Moshe to die, so that he could continue learning from him. So too, we should value the lessons we gain from our teachers, and honor them accordingly.

## **UNITY – THE ROOT OF REDEMPTION**

R’ Yehoshua says in the name of R’ Levi, “The children who lived in the time of David Hamelech could give forty-nine explanations to prove that something was impure, and forty-nine explanations to prove that something was pure. This is because they were free of sin. However, despite this very high scholastic level, the nation fell in battle. Yet, the

generation of Achav worshipped idols, but because they refrained from evil speech, they emerged victorious in battle” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:2).

This demonstrates that when there is true unity among people, even if they do the worst sins, Hakadosh Baruch Hu still loves and protects them. This is because Hashem “sees what is inside a person’s heart” (*Mishlei* 17:3) – Hashem knows what a person’s true intentions are. Hashem understood that in the times of Achav the nation did not worship idols in order to rebel against Him, but had been trapped by the Satan into this sin. They could still do teshuvah. Furthermore, even though the people at that time were all idol worshippers, they still honored the Torah. This is illustrated by the following incident. The king of Aram sent Achav the following message (*Melachim* I, 20:6), “At this time tomorrow, I shall send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and it shall be that everything precious in your eyes, they will place in their hands and take [away].” Rashi explains that the object that was most precious to them was the Sefer Torah, which is described as “more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold” (*Tehillim* 19:11). Achav did not want to give up the Sefer Torah since he understood that it did not belong to him, but to the elders of the people, who learned and valued it.

What did Achav do? He called together all the elders. Although they also served idols, nevertheless they respected the Torah. Indeed, the elders and the entire nation exhorted him (*ibid.* 20:8), “Do not listen and do not consent!” They went into battle with Aram, although Aram was mightier than they. Even though they were idol worshippers, they retained pride in the Torah, which is the life force of the nation, and refused to surrender it.

Similarly, we find that after Achav killed Nevot Hayizraeli (*Melachim* I, 21:13), Eliyahu Hanavi approached him stating (*ibid.* 19) that his fate was sealed: “Thus said Hashem, ‘In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Navot, the dogs will lick up your blood as well.’” When Achav

heard these words, “he tore his clothes and placed sackcloth upon his skin and fasted; he slept in sackcloth, and walked about slowly.”

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *ibid.* 21:29, *remez* 222) teach us that Achaz called Yehoshaphat, King of Yehudah, to give him forty lashes, three times a day. He afflicted his body through fasting and arose morning and evening in prayer and supplication. His teshuvah was accepted. From here we see the great power of teshuvah. Even though Achav was an idol worshipper, when the moment of truth arrived and he saw that the decree against him was sealed, he believed wholeheartedly in the words of Hashem and did teshuvah. For this reason, the people were victorious in battle.

The Generation of the Dispersion provides another example of the tremendous power of unity. They were criminals and atheists, having the audacity to state, “We will ascend to the heavens and fight Hashem!” However, they were united, as it says (*Bereishit* 11:1), “The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose.” Therefore, Hashem did not destroy them, but merely “dispersed them over the face of the whole earth” (*ibid.* 8). Because they were unified, they were given the chance to do teshuvah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 38:6).

In contrast, the Generation of the Flood were wiped off the face of the earth. The people at that time were concerned only with their own best interests and stole and murdered. Unity was a foreign concept to them. Hashem told Noach (*Bereishit* 6:13) that He would wipe out the generation because “the earth is filled with robbery through them.” Stealing indicates the breakdown of the fabric of society. Hashem tolerates total disregard of His honor, but He cannot endure lack of unity. Rabbi Yochanan said (*Sanhedrin* 108a): “See how great is the offense of stealing. For the Generation of the Flood transgressed all the mitzvot, yet their fate was sealed only when they became involved in robbery, as it is written, ‘For the earth is filled with robbery through them.’”

Unity is of paramount importance to Hashem. He is willing to forgo His own honor, to the extent of ignoring atheism, as long as there is unity among the people. Why is this so? When one feels: “Only I, and none but me!” (*Yeshayahu* 47:8) his world-view encompasses only himself. In contrast, unity is the expression of the understanding that each person has inherent value. When one is able to see beyond his own interests and appreciate others, then even if he sins, he will eventually be able to appreciate the greatness of the Creator and return to him.

During the times of the first Beit Hamikdash, the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship was very great. It was only nullified in the days of Ezra (*Yoma* 69b). One who denies Hashem is compared to an idol worshipper. Even such a person may eventually come to the recognition of Hashem. Then the inclination for idol worship will be taken away from him.

But this is contingent upon harmony. Hashem protects people, whether they are righteous or not, only on condition that they act considerately toward one another. One who is concerned only with his own honor will never come to honor Hashem.

Chazal (*Avot* 6:6) state, “Whoever repeats something in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world, as it is said, ‘And Esther said to the king in the name of Mordechai.’” Conversely, “He who repeats something in his own name, brings curse to the world” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 6:938). This is difficult to understand. What is the connection between repeating something in the name of its original speaker and the redemption? Conversely, why does not repeating something in the name of its original speaker bring a curse?

Maybe we can explain this in the following way. A person is naturally biased in his own favor. He wants that everyone should think that he is smart and upright and has all good qualities. When someone is not afraid to repeat a statement in the name of another, he recognizes that this person is greater than himself in some respect, thus nullifying his own honor. He also fulfills the mitzvah of “You shall love your fellow as

yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:18), which is a fundamental principle of the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 99, *halachah* 4). Love of others hastens the redemption. The *geulah* is dependent on our crowning Hashem as King over the entire Creation, which can be done only through nullification of one’s self and feeling unity with others. As the *Navi* (*Zechariah* 14:9) tells us: “On that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.”

If a person is able to subordinate himself to others, he will be able to subordinate himself to Hashem. Just as baseless hatred destroyed the previous Beit Hamikdash, so, too, will unconditional love rebuild it (*Yoma* 9b). But one who does not repeat something in the name of the original speaker demonstrates that he desires honor that he does not deserve, denigrating his friend’s honor. He is unwilling to yield to others, puffed up with arrogance and honor-seeking. Such actions drive away the *Shechinah* and bring *churban* to the world. Attributing a statement to its original speaker demonstrates unity, and ultimately brings salvation to the world.

### ————— In Summary —————

- We find that although the generation of David Hamelech was righteous, they fell in battle because there were slanderers among them. On the other hand, the generation of Achav, who were idol worshippers, would emerge victorious from battle. This was because no one spoke evil among them. This teaches that even if people are evildoers, if they maintain unity amongst themselves, they have a chance of repenting. We see that Achav did, indeed, show respect for the Sefer Torah.
- When people appreciate the value of others, rather than considering only their own best interests, there is a good chance that they will eventually come to recognize Hashem Yitbarach. But, when there is no unity among people, and each worries only for his own self, at the expense of others, they will be unable to do so. Achav eventually returned to Hashem.
- “Whoever repeats something in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world.” By doing so he not only displays concern for his fellow man, but also recognizes that the other person is worthy of honor. By

acknowledging others he will surely come to acknowledge Hashem, thereby hastening the redemption.

## GRATITUDE AND UNITY – PREREQUISITES FOR TORAH

We find that one who does not acknowledge the good of others will eventually deny the good of Hashem (*Kohelet Rabbah* 6:7). Upon analysis, I came to the conclusion that we should feel *hakarat hatov* toward someone who benefits us, even if we do not know who this benefactor is. The mere fact that he is a fellow Jew is sufficient. The Gemara (*Shavuot* 39a) states: “ישראל ערבים זה בזה” – Yisrael are responsible for one another.” In this merit, the *Shechinah* resides amongst them. The words זה בזה have the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem יה-ו-ה. Similarly, the words אחד אחד (one and one) also have the same *gematria* as this Name. This indicates that when two people unite, Hashem’s *Shechinah* rests between them and bestows an abundance of all blessings upon them.

On the other hand, Chazal say, “One who denies the benefit that his friend does him, will ultimately deny the blessings of Hashem.” When his friend benefits him in some way, it is really Hashem Who is bestowing this good upon him. By failing to acknowledge his friend’s beneficence, he is, in essence, displaying lack of gratitude toward Hashem.

Consequently, we should appreciate all those who spend their time learning Torah. The generation is protected in the merit of their Torah study, and they cause an abundance of blessing to come to this world.

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) explains that Eretz Yisrael was destroyed in the times of the first Beit Hamikdash “because they forsook My Torah...” Chazal expound that people did not make a blessing prior to Torah study. The sefer *Siach Chaim* brings the following question from Rabbi Chaim

MiVolozhin, zt”l: How can we understand that merely because they failed to make a blessing prior to learning Torah they warranted the severe punishments of the destruction of Eretz Yisrael and the Beit Hamikdash, and the death of so many people? They kept mitzvot, and learned Torah; they were just lax in making a blessing on the Torah before they learned. Why was this so terrible?

Maybe we can answer this question with the statement by Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa (*Berachot* 35b): “Whoever benefits from this world without a blessing, is considered to be stealing from Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Keneset Yisrael.”

One is obligated to make a blessing prior to putting any food in his mouth, even if one does not particularly enjoy this food. If one does not make a blessing, it is considered as if he has stolen the food from Hashem, Who has provided it. Because the people of that generation did not feel satisfaction in their Torah learning, they did not make a blessing on it. Thus they were considered to have stolen from Hashem. Having fallen to the level of stealing, their spiritual descent spiraled downwards, to the extent that they desecrated Shabbat, did not keep *Shemittah*, etc., until ultimately the Land was destroyed, *rachmana litzlan*.

The fate of the Generation of the Flood was also sealed because of theft (*Bereishit Rabbah* 31:4). This is because stealing leads to immorality (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 18). Since they were so accustomed to stealing, they most likely also stole each others’ wives, thus committing adultery. Once this became permissible, they began to practice other forms of immorality.

Thus we see that a minor sin has tremendous ramifications. The generation of the *churban* fell to the level of being punished with exile by first committing the minor sin of failing to make a blessing on the Torah prior to its study. This minor sin led to the perpetration of more severe sins, which eventually brought about the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

Each person should strive to find pleasure and enjoyment in the words of the Torah, as the pasuk (*Vayikra* 18:5) says, “And by which he shall live.” One’s learning should be with vitality and zest. A person should feel gratitude toward the Torah, for it is his only true friend. As the pasuk in *Mishlei* (6:22) says, “As you go forth, it will guide you.” Chazal (*Avot* 6:9) describe how the Torah and mitzvot are man’s sole assets which escort him after death. All of his material possessions leave him upon his demise. One should acknowledge the tremendous blessings that the Torah bestows upon him. If one does not recognize these benefits, and fails to make a blessing before learning Torah, he will ultimately deny the good that Hashem bestows upon him.

In this vein, we will quote a statement by Chazal (*Berachot* 6b), “Rabbi Chilbo said in the name of Rav Huna, ‘Whoever establishes a fixed place for prayer is guaranteed that the G-d of Avraham will come to his aid.’ About Avraham it states (*Bereishit* 19:27), ‘Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem.’ The words “where he had stood” (אשר עמד) connote standing in prayer, as the pasuk in *Tehillim* (106:30) says, ‘And Pinchas arose (ויעמד) and executed judgment.’”

This requires explanation. By means of establishing a set place for prayer, the place itself becomes sanctified through the accumulation of the prayers said at that spot. Each additional prayer brings with it the sanctity of the previous ones said there, giving tremendous satisfaction to the Creator. For this reason, a person should appreciate the place where he prays, since this place helps him come closer to Hashem. By changing his place of prayer for no justified reason, he fails to acknowledge the benefits that Hashem has granted him because of the prayers that he offered there, and demonstrates ingratitude toward Him.

In light of the above, maybe we can now understand the statement “One who changes his place, changes his *mazal*.” It could be that he had no *mazal* in his former place because his prayers were in some way lacking

there. By changing where he prays he may be able to change his *mazal* because he will pray with renewed vigor there. Since he is in a new place, his prayers and deeds will be considered in a fresh light, and his former misdeeds will be forgotten. In this new state, he will merit a new judgment.

This dictum holds true in the area of Torah study, as well. The Gemara (*Berachot* 7b) states, “Whoever establishes a place for his Torah learning, his enemies will fall before him.” The reason for this is as we have explained above. A person should not leave his fixed place of Torah learning on a whim, but should consult a Torah authority before doing so.

We find that our Avot Hakedoshim instituted fixed places for their prayers and service of Hashem. As we mentioned earlier, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 19:27) states that “Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem.” This indicates that he always prayed in the same place. When he traveled, Avraham made it a point to frequent the same guest houses he had previously visited (*Arachin* 16b). The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 13:3) “He proceeded on his journeys...” Rashi explains that when he came back to Eretz Yisrael from Egypt, he returned to the same inns that he had visited when he had originally traveled there. What was the purpose of this? The Patriarchs acknowledged the good that was bestowed upon them in a specific place because of the Torah and mitzvot that they performed there. Thus, Avraham returned to where he had originally stayed in order to supplement the *kedushah* of the place by adding additional prayers and performing more mitzvot there.

Yaakov Avinu also recognized the value of praying in a place that had been consecrated by prayers previously said there (*Bereishit* 28:17). When Yaakov arrived at Charan and realized that he had forgotten to pray at Har Hamoriah, he was greatly distressed (*Rashi* quoting *Chulin* 91a). He cried out, “Could it be that I passed through a place where my ancestors prayed, and I didn’t offer a prayer there?!” He then decided to return and pray in the place where his fathers had prayed before him. The way was

shortened for him, and he slept there. He then prayed *tefillat Arvit* in that place.

In Vayikra (19:18) we are commanded, “You shall love your fellow as yourself.” Rabbi Akiva pronounced that this is a basic Torah precept (*Torat Kohanim*, *ibid.*). Why is this so? Because it is through his friend’s merit that the Name of Hashem resides inside a person. As previously mentioned “ישראל ערבים זה בזה” – Yisrael are responsible for one another.” The words *זה בזה* are numerically equivalent to the Name of Hashem *יהוה-והיה*. We see from here that Hashem dwells in the heart of each and every person who feels responsible for his fellow Jew.

The more a person loves his fellow Jew, the more he will merit Hashem’s blessings. By loving his friend he will come to love the Torah that his friend keeps. This is because a person has 248 organs and 365 sinews in his body, corresponding to the 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions in the Torah. Since a person is the embodiment of the entire Torah, whenever one shows true love for his fellow Jew, he is, in essence, observing all the mitzvot of the Torah! As long as he truly cares for his friend, he can be fulfilling mitzvot hundreds of thousands of times every day.

By loving his fellow Jew, a person automatically comes to love Hashem. One is dependent upon the other. “Yisrael, the Torah and Hakadosh Baruch Hu are one” (*Zohar* III, 73b). This is when Bnei Yisrael become united in their love for each other, and in their love for Hashem, through keeping Torah and mitzvot. Conversely, when one is deficient in his love of his fellow Jew, he will be deficient in loving Hashem. When one behaves as an individual, concerned only with his own interests, he may even come to deny Hashem’s existence.

Unity is the prerequisite for receiving the Torah, as the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:2) states, “ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר” – And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain.” The word *ויחן* (they encamped) is written in the singular

indicating that the people were unified, as one nation. We received the Torah in the merit of unity.

In this light, we can understand the concept of Sefirat Haomer. The means by which one merits attaining heights in Torah are the good attributes that he acquires for himself. Each day of the Sefirah has a different attribute. One works on himself to acquire that attribute. On the next day, he moves on to the next attribute. These attributes are like shining pearls strung together, each one beautifying the next. However, it is possible to attain perfection in only some of these attributes. Hashem, in his goodness, considers a good thought as a good deed (*Kiddushin* 40a). Hopefully, in the coming days, the person will rectify all his traits.

In the Wilderness, during the period of Sefirat Haomer, the entire nation worked on perfecting their character traits, day by day. They worked in unity, due to the great love they felt for each other. For if even one person had been remiss in correcting his traits, the entire nation would have suffered. Each person was dependent on the next in order to perfect himself. Any laxity in this matter would have prevented the nation from receiving the Torah, *chas v'shalom*.

This raises a question. We know that Hashem had already decided to give the Torah on the sixth of Sivan. Why did Bnei Yisrael have to perfect themselves in this unified manner in order to merit receiving the Torah? Maybe we can offer the following answer. If Hashem had given the Torah because it was designated to be given on that day, the element of Bnei Yisrael's unity would have been lacking. When Bnei Yisrael displayed true love for each other prior to the Giving of the Torah, by rectifying the flaws in their characters in this unified way, they became "as one man with one heart" (*Mechilta Yitro* 19), worthy of receiving the Torah by their own merit.

In light of the above, we can now understand the incident of the bitter waters at Marah. The pasuk (*Shemot* 15:25) says, "And Hashem showed [Moshe] a tree; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet."

This seems puzzling. We are told (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10) that Moshe refrained from smiting the Nile at the time of the plagues out of gratitude toward the water for saving him when he was a baby. When Moshe threw a piece of wood into these same waters, was he not demonstrating lack of gratitude toward them?

On the contrary, this act ultimately enhanced the waters. It sweetened the waters that had previously been bitter. The nation enjoyed these sweet waters and blessed Hashem, thereby sanctifying His Name. Throwing the stick into the water was an act of gratitude toward the Nile which had saved Moshe, since he thereby made its waters pleasant to drink. This teaches the far-reaching effects of the attribute of gratitude.

### ————— In Summary —————

- One should feel gratitude to each Jew for the mere fact that he is a Jew. The words **אחד אחד** (one and one) have the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem **א-ה-ו-ה**. This teaches that each person contains the Name of Hashem. Through our unity we sanctify the Name of Hashem. One who hates another Jew will come to deny the goodness of Hashem, for Hashem resides in each and every Jew.
- We find a similar matter regarding the *churban*. The Land was destroyed because the people failed to make a blessing on the Torah prior to its study. This was because they felt no pleasure in learning. Since they did not feel gratitude for the many benefits derived from the Torah, they were subsequently punished for the many iniquities that their ingratitude caused.
- The idea of making a set place for one's prayer is connected to this subject. Hashem comes to the aid of one who recognizes the *kedushah* of the place where many tefillot were previously prayed. If a person's prayers are not being answered he is instructed that "one who changes his place, changes his *mazal*." He has a chance to start anew. One should also learn Torah in a fixed place. Each act of spiritual elevation further sanctifies the place where it is performed. This brings a person closer to his Creator.

- One is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Love of one's friend brings love of Hashem in its wake. Observing this precept is equivalent to observing the entire Torah. This is an underlying theme of Sefirat Haomer. All of Bnei Yisrael worked on correcting a specific trait each day. After perfecting their characters in this unified way, they were worthy of receiving the Torah and were able to appreciate the goodness of Hashem in bestowing it upon them.

## THE POWER OF UNITY

Before his death, Yaakov Avinu turned to his sons emotionally and said (*Bereishit* 49:1-2), "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov, and listen to Yisrael your father." Rashi quotes Chazal, who say that Yaakov wished to reveal to them the date of the final redemption (*Pesachim* 56a; *Bereishit Rabbah* 96a).

Yaakov wanted to teach his children how they could hasten the redemption and bring Mashiach, so that they would not suffer needlessly in Egypt. How did he teach them this? In the words "assemble" and "gather." Yaakov indicated that by assembling together in unity, they could bring the redemption. Tehillim states (133:1), "How good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, moreover, in unity." When Bnei Yisrael display brotherly love and unity, no nation can control or harm them.

Indeed, when there was no brotherly love between them, they became enslaved to the Egyptians. This is taught by the pesukim (*Shemot* 2:13-14) "He (Moshe) went out the next day and behold! Two Hebrew men were fighting...and he thought, 'Indeed, the matter is known!'" Rashi quotes the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:30): Moshe said, "The matter that I was puzzled about has been clarified for me. I used to wonder: In what did Israel sin, more than all the seventy nations, that they should be punished with such crushing labor? But now I see that they are deserving of such

punishment.” Moshe understood that the lack of unity displayed by Bnei Yisrael, to the extent that they even fought amongst themselves, had caused them to be punished by being afflicted by the Egyptians.

Pharaoh himself was aware of the tremendous power of unity amongst Bnei Yisrael, which can even bring the redemption in its wake. He thus devised a devious plan to prevent Bnei Yisrael from being unified. The pasuk (*Shemot* 5:14) states, “The foremen of the Children of Israel...were beaten.” Rashi points out that the foremen were Jewish, and because they felt pity for their fellow Jews they refused to pressure them into fulfilling their quota of work. The Egyptian taskmasters smote the Jewish foremen for not pressuring their Jewish charges.

This raises a question. Why did Pharaoh appoint Jewish foremen to oversee the work of their fellow Jews in the first place? This was all part of his plan. When the Jewish overseers would pressure their fellow Jews into working harder, this would foster animosity among Bnei Yisrael, thereby destroying the unity among them. In this way Pharaoh hoped to prevent the redemption.

However, the Jewish foremen, aware of Pharaoh’s evil machinations, did not hurt their fellow Jews. This led to them being beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters. The foremen received great reward for their self-sacrifice, ultimately being appointed to the Sanhedrin (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:20a).

In this light we can understand the episode with Yitro. The pasuk (*Shemot* 18:1) says, “Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything.” What did he hear? Chazal (*Zevachim* 116a) explain that he heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek. This requires explanation. From the time of the Exodus from Egypt until the time of the battle with Amalek, Bnei Yisrael merited to witness wonders the likes of which had never been previously experienced. What stirred Yitro to join the nation in the Wilderness only

after hearing about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek? Why did he not come straight after the Exodus?

Yitro perceived in these two events fundamental principles in Avodat Hashem. This clarity brought him to forsake all his belongings, his family and his honor, and join the Jewish nation. What was it exactly that Yitro heard about these two events that made such a strong impression on him?

Before the sea actually split, Bnei Yisrael were in mortal fear (*Sotah* 37a; *Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach* 234). They were surrounded by danger on all sides, with the Egyptians in hot pursuit behind them, and the vast sea in front. They had no place to turn. Then Nachshon ben Aminadav, his heart brimming with *ahavat* Yisrael, volunteered to risk his life on their behalf, and jumped into the deep waters. When the waters reached his neck, they split in his merit.

Yitro realized that the sea had split in the merit of the self-sacrifice of Nachshon, who ran into the raging waters out of tremendous love for his fellow people. This demonstrated how unity has the power to effect miracles. Conversely, Amalek was only able to attack the nation because of their lack of unity [see *Tanchuma, Nitzavim* 1]. The tremendous power of unity is what drew Yitro to the Jewish people, rather than the miracles that had been wrought for them.

Bnei Yisrael's very existence is endangered when they lack unity. This is illustrated by the attack of Amalek. It is known that Amalek and his descendants always fight against the unity of Bnei Yisrael. Haman is an example of this. He realized that Bnei Yisrael's strength lay in their unity. Therefore, he told Achashveirosh (*Esther* 3:8), "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples..." He inferred that Bnei Yisrael are vulnerable only when they are scattered and dispersed, when they lack unity.

Amalek's method was to "cool off" the faith of the Jews in Hashem. Bnei Yisrael would thereby become embroiled in arguments, causing disunity,

and preventing them from receiving the Torah. Indeed, after the attack of Amalek, the nation started weakening in their level of Torah study. This caused a lack of unity among the people, as in the days of Haman the *rasha*, who was a descendant of Amalek. He used slander in order to create disunity and cause the nation to be obliterated.

David Hamelech teaches us the benefits of unity in (*Tehillim* 133:1), where it states: “הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד” – How **good** and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, moreover, in unity.” *Good* also refers to the Torah, as *Mishlei* tells us (4:2), “For I have given you a **good** teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” Chazal (*Bava Kama* 17a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:1a) expound: “There is no good except for the Torah. When people learn Torah in unity, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who is called יחד (united), joins them.”

Similarly, we learn (*Shavuot* 39a), “כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה” – All of Yisrael are responsible for each other.” The words זה בזה are numerically equivalent to the Name of Hashem יהוה-י. From this we learn that when Am Yisrael demonstrate responsibility and concern for one another, Hakadosh Baruch Hu joins them. We also know (*Sotah* 17a) that if a husband and wife are worthy, the *Shechinah* dwells among them. The word איש (man) contains the letter י, and the word אשה (woman) contains the letter ה. When man and wife live harmoniously together, the *Shechinah*, as portrayed by the Name of Hashem יהוה, resides in their midst. If they are not at peace with each other, the *Shechinah* departs, and they are left with אש, an all-consuming conflagration, as portrayed by the absence of the י and ה from their names.

The day of ט״ו בשבט (Tu biShevat) alludes to unity, as well. The word *Shevat* can also be read as *shevet*, a tribe. *Tehillim* states (122:4), “שבטי” – The tribes of G-d, a testimony for Israel.” ט״ו is the *gematria* of Hashem’s Name יהוה. This teaches that the *Shechinah* rests among Bnei Yisrael only when they are unified as one tribe.

In light of all the above, we see how vital unity is, and how important it is for us to strive to maintain it. Unity causes the *Shechinah* to dwell among us. It has the power to thwart punishment and even hasten the redemption.

Alas, this is no simple matter. The *Yetzer Hara*, that initiator of quarrel and dissension, cannot bear to witness Jews sitting and learning Torah in unity, drawing the *Shechinah* into their midst. He tries with all his might to disturb them by causing friction between them. If he succeeds, the *Shechinah* is driven away, *chas v'shalom*. It is therefore imperative to flee discord as one flees from a fire, and make all efforts to live peacefully with one another.

We can further appreciate how all-encompassing true unity is from the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:18) “ואהבת לרעך כמוך – You shall love your fellow as yourself.” Rabbi Akiva states that this is a fundamental principle of the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4). It is interesting to note that the word used for “your fellow” is not חברך, which is the usual word, but rather רעך, which can also mean, “he who does you harm (רע).” This teaches us that we should love our fellow man unconditionally, regardless of his actions toward us.

Chazal teach (*Rashbam; Zohar*) that if your friend wrongs you, yet you behave kindly toward him, you can change his behavior for the good. Returning tit for tat will only ignite the flames of dispute and dissension. We must be on the alert, for the *Yetzer Hara* is constantly looking for ways to prevent harmony between fellow Jews. He injects pride in man’s heart, convincing him that he is greater in Torah than his friend. Therefore, he sees no reason to love him as himself, and the unity amongst them is breached.

The *Yetzer Hara* constantly changes his tactics in order to destroy unity amongst Bnei Yisrael. Sometimes he does this by instilling arrogance in man’s heart, as explained previously, and sometimes by making a person feel overly humble. The following is an example of this. It is known that

every Jewish person contains a spark of Divinity within him. This is derived from the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.” The words “among them” are used to indicate that the *Shechinah* rests inside them, inside each and every Jew (see *Alshich*, *ibid.*). But the *Yetzer Hara* comes along and tells a person, “Who are you that you deem yourself worthy of Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s Presence within you?” The person gradually develops the notion that it is, indeed, unlikely for Hashem to find a dwelling place within him, and he imagines that he is a most humble man.

This humility has no basis whatsoever. On the contrary, it is nothing but a show of haughtiness. It is not in the merit of man that Hashem has chosen to dwell within him, but by His will alone. On the pasuk in *Shemot* (16:2) “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him” our Sages teach, “A maidservant witnessed at the sea what great prophets like Yechezkel ben Buzi and Yeshayahu did not merit seeing.” What they witnessed was through prophecy granted to them by Hashem. They would not have been able to see these things by means of the intellect alone.

However, the *Yetzer Hara* “cools off” a person. Bnei Yisrael began to doubt their worthiness of such a relationship with Hashem, as they expressed (*Shemot* 17:7): “ה' בְּקִרְבָּנוּ – Is Hashem among us or not?” The letters ה' (Hashem’s Name), found in the word ה'שׁ, are numerically equivalent to גְּאוּוֹה (pride). Pride belongs solely to Hashem, as *Tehillim* tells us (93:1), “Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur.” The remaining 'שׁ from the word ה'שׁ is numerically equivalent to the word קָר (cold). By means of insincere humility, which, in truth, is pure arrogance, the *Yetzer Hara* injects coldness into man’s Avodat Hashem.

Hashem Himself stands up, as it were, against Amalek, and announces (*Shemot* 17:16), “For the hand is on the Throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.” Each and every person must do battle with Amalek, and not allow him to introduce conceit and coldness into his heart. He should take care to feel true

humility, and increase unity among his brethren. Unity has the potency to effect great miracles, and even hasten the redemption.

We might add another idea. The concept of being bar mitzvah is connected to loving one's fellow as himself. When a boy reaches adulthood, he receives his *Yetzer Hatov* (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 1:16). He is called, "a fellowman," and is enjoined to love his fellow Jews as himself, by utilizing the power of his *Yetzer Hatov*.

We should strive to ensure that we are observing the mitzvah of loving our fellow Jew correctly. True unity is attained only when we are united with everyone, not only the select few from our immediate circles. This is illustrated by the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students. Rabbi Akiva himself said that loving one's fellow is pivotal for the entire Torah. How could it be that all his own students, twelve thousand partners, died between Pesach and Shavuot because they did not act with sufficient respect for each other (*Ketubot* 62)?! The answer lies in the way they are described. They are not referred to as twenty-four thousand disciples, but, rather, twelve thousand partners. This indicates that they did, indeed, honor one another, but only their own partners. For this reason, they perished. We must be diligent in honoring all Jews, regardless of their "group."

### ———— In Summary ————

- The attribute of unity is tremendous, and can even bring the *geulah*. It can also prevent affliction. Yaakov alluded to this when he called his sons together before his death, saying, "Assemble...gather, etc." He actually wanted to reveal to them when the redeemer would arrive. Through the merit of their unity, the redemption would come, and there would be no need for them to suffer in Egypt. When Bnei Yisrael live in unity, no nation can gain control over them.
- Conversely, when Bnei Yisrael demonstrated lack of unity, the slavery in Egypt began. This is what Moshe realized when he saw two Jewish men fighting. It was then that he understood the reason why Bnei Yisrael were oppressed and had to serve the Egyptians. This was because there was no harmony among them.

Pharaoh himself was aware of this. For this reason, he appointed Jewish foremen to supervise the Jewish slaves, in order to cause disunity among the people. This would, in turn, prevent the Exodus.

- The power of unity is what impressed Yitro and caused him to convert. He heard about the Splitting of the sea and the battle with Amalek. He delved into the matter and discovered that the sea was split in the merit of one man, who was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of the nation. The battle of Amalek taught that unity among the people is a necessary prerequisite for Avodat Hashem. When *achdut* is lacking, Amalek arrives on the scene. Haman, a descendant of Amalek, knew this when he described the Jewish nation as “dispersed and scattered.” He was inferring to Achashveirosh that the Jews lacked the merit of unity, and were therefore vulnerable. Lack of unity also caused the deaths of the disciples of Rabbi Akiva. They are described as twelve thousand pairs of students, because each one exhibited respect only for his partner, and not for all of Klal Yisrael. We should be careful to maintain unity with all Jews, not only those in our immediate group.

## THE SWEET TASTE OF SUCCESS

When David was being pursued by Shaul Hamelech, he had the opportunity to kill him, when Shaul was sleeping surrounded by his men (*Shmuel I*, 26:8-11). However, he refrained from doing so. Avishai said to David, “G-d has delivered your enemy into your hand this day! Now let me strike him with the spear, [driving it] into the ground with a single thrust. I will not need [to strike] a second time!” But David replied, “Do not kill Shaul, for who can send forth his hand against the anointed one of Hashem and be absolved?” David added, “As Hashem lives, Hashem will strike him with illness, or his day will come and he will die, or he will go forth into battle and perish. It would be sacrilegious before Hashem for me to send forth my hand against Hashem’s anointed one.”

We see that David restrained himself from taking vengeance upon Shaul. However, Chazal teach that Hashem did hold David accountable for

cursing him (*Midrash Tehillim* 7:1). Hashem said to David, “Why do you curse my anointed one? You said (*Tehillim* 6:11), ‘Let all my foes be shamed and utterly confounded, they will regret and be shamed in an instant.’ Who are your enemies? Surely Shaul, about whom you said (*ibid.* 18:1), ‘On the day that Hashem delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Shaul.’ But one may not curse the king, as it says (*Kohelet* 10:20), ‘Even in your thoughts do not curse a king.’” David replied, “Master of the Universe! You are accusing me of willfully sinning! But that was not my intention, for “who can discern mistakes – שגיאות מי – יבין?” (*Tehillim* 19:13). David expressed his regret by saying (*Tehillim* 7:1), “... שגיון לדוד – A [song of the] *shiggayon*, by David.” The word שגיון (a type of musical instrument) is similar to the word שגיאות (mistakes).

The sefer *Ketzeit Hashemesh Bigvurato* explains that this incident illustrates how careful one should be to overcome his natural inclinations. Even at the time that his enemy was in hot pursuit, David was held accountable for demanding revenge. Although David displayed herculean self-restraint in not killing Shaul, he was blamed for cursing him. If even David was held accountable for this seeming lack of forbearance, how much more careful should we be.

David Hamelech had immense strength of character, always admitting his mistakes. He followed in the path of his ancestor, Yehudah, who immediately admitted to his mistake regarding the incident with Tamar (*Bereishit* 38:26).

This teaches us a tremendous lesson. Chazal (*Avot* 1:17) say that “not study, but practice is the main thing.” When one fulfills the Torah’s precepts willingly and happily, it is proof that he learns Torah in the correct way, feeling its pleasantness and sweetness. Conversely, if one does not take pleasure in his study, this will negatively affect the way that he puts into practice the lessons that he has learned.

On the one hand, David controlled himself and desisted from smiting the one who sought his harm. By doing so, he exhibited tremendous

self-control. He had the chance to be rid of his enemy, take the throne, and rule over Bnei Yisrael, yet he relinquished it all, preferring, instead, to remain an anonymous king with few followers. On the other hand, he cursed the king. Hashem criticized him for this since Shaul was still the king of Israel, and one may not curse a king.

This is somewhat difficult to understand. David seems to have acted above and beyond the letter of the law. He had himself been anointed king by Shmuel Hanavi (*Shmuel I*, 16:12-13), yet, as long as Shaul was alive, he referred to him as the anointed one of Hashem, and did not harm him in any way. This exalted level of behavior was self-imposed by David. Thus, when he cursed Shaul, Hashem acted stringently with him. When one obligates himself to act in a certain way, he is held accountable if he fails to do so.

What was Hashem's accusation against David? Shaul wanted to kill him. David could have fulfilled the teaching of Chazal to preempt a pursuer's plan and kill him first (*Sanhedrin* 72a). Only because Shaul was the anointed one of Hashem, did David control his desire for revenge, and merely cursed him, in order to mitigate the anger that swelled in his heart. What charge was there against David? Surely he had displayed tremendous self-control.

Maybe we can offer the following explanation. Hashem told David that when the time comes to take action, a person is tested to see if he learned correctly. David's actions prove that he wanted to fulfill the mitzvah of "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge" (*Vayikra* 19:18). However, not only would it have been wrong to kill Shaul, but it was wrong even to curse him. David failed to completely control his anger. When one is able to take revenge, and not only refrains from doing so, but also removes any feelings of resentment from his heart, this proves that he has both kept the mitzvah perfectly, and also that he learned about this mitzvah with enjoyment and appreciation.

Hashem was indicating to David that because he bore a grudge against Shaul this demonstrated that not only did he not feel pleasure in the performance of the mitzvah, but that there was a deficiency in his learning itself. This is an accusation which is way above our understanding. The performance of a mitzvah is contingent upon how one learns about it. In order for a mitzvah to be done wholeheartedly, one must study it in the right frame of mind. When one enjoys what he learns, tasting the sweetness of the Torah, he will then fulfill the mitzvot he has learned about with true pleasure.

But how can one be expected to restrain his anger when his fellowman desires to harm him, or even kill him?!

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (mitzvah 241) explains that one should understand that everything which happens to him, both good and bad, is preordained by Hashem. No one can do anything to him unless Hashem has decreed it. Therefore, when someone annoys him, one should realize that his sins have caused him this anguish, as the pasuk says (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a) “The snake does not kill; sin kills.” This realization should help a person remove all thoughts of revenge from his heart.

David Hamelech realized his mistake right away. He affirmed his great love of the Torah to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as he said (*Tehillim* 40:9), “To fulfill Your will, my God, do I desire, and Your Torah is in my innards.” David delved in the Torah day and night, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 119:97), “O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation.” In answer to Hashem’s accusation that he did not enjoy his learning sufficiently, proven by the fact that he had cursed Shaul, David replied (*ibid.* 19:13): “Hashem, you are accusing me of intentional sins! Who can discern mistakes?”

David Hamelech used this incident as a springboard for teshuvah. Subsequently, when a similar event took place, he did not lose control and display anger. This happened when Shimi ben Gera cursed him (*Shmuel* II, 16:5-13). David told his men, “Let him be; let him curse, for

Hashem has told him to.” David took responsibility for this occurrence, noting that his sins had brought it about, and did not cast blame upon Shimi ben Gera, nor seek revenge against him.

Chazal tell us that Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael are one (*Zohar* III, 73a). In order to be connected to Hashem, we must first be bound to the Torah. This is what we ask every morning, when we make the blessings on the Torah: “Please, Hashem, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth.” We are asking: “Help us and give us the strength for the Torah to be sweet in our mouths and the mouths of all Bnei Yisrael. Thereby, we and our children will all know Your Name, and study Your Torah for its own sake” (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 47:5).

Through the joy and sweetness (ערבות) which we feel when we learn Torah, we come to the state of “כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה – All Yisrael are responsible for one another” (*Shavuot* 39a). We are then able to properly love our fellow man as ourselves, which is a main tenet of the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4). This also brings us closer to Hashem. Conversely, if one tastes no sweetness in his Torah learning, this may damage his relationship with both Hashem and his fellow man.

Who is greater than David Hamelech? In spite of the fact that he controlled himself by not taking physical revenge upon Shaul, who sought his life, he was blamed for cursing Shaul. The fact that he could do so indicated that there was some deficiency in his enjoyment of Torah study. David feared lest this flaw would be manifested in his Avodat Hashem, as he said (*Tehillim* 19:13), “Who can discern mistakes?”

When David reached old age, his clothing could not warm him (*Melachim* I, 1:1). Chazal say (*Berachot* 62b) that this was a punishment for his disrespect of clothing, when he tore Shaul’s garment to prove that he had been able to kill him but had not done so. This raises a question. Surely David demonstrated tremendous self-restraint by not killing Shaul. Why was he punished for tearing his garment? Did this not prove his allegiance toward Shaul, the king? However, the rent he made in Shaul’s

garment may have been a sign of hidden revenge or a grudge which David had against Shaul. Maybe David should have instead left some sort of symbol for Shaul, such as his sword, to indicate that he had had the opportunity to harm him, but desisted from doing so.

Because David was on such a high level of Avodat Hashem he was punished even for merely tearing the coat of Shaul. Since he had demanded of himself not to harm the anointed one of Hashem in any way, he should have reigned in his impulses and not taken any action against Shaul. He was held accountable for failing to fulfill the self-imposed strictures that he had adopted.

Even a slight mistake can, *chas v'shalom*, cause a breakdown in the relationship between Yisrael, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and the Torah, which are all one. Fortunate is the man whom Hashem chastises so that he should immediately correct his failings before they become serious crimes. The greater a person's level in Avodat Hashem, the more stringently is he held accountable for his actions. Hashem is meticulous with the righteous, to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b; *Zohar* I, 185b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:24).

### ————— In Summary —————

- Although David displayed tremendous self-control by not killing Shaul, his pursuer, when he had the opportunity, he was held accountable for cursing him. This is because the Torah demands patience and forbearing. One should be aware that everything that happens to him comes from Hashem Yitbarach. No one so much as pricks his finger unless it is preordained on High.
- The way that one performs a mitzvah proves whether or not he learned about that mitzvah in a happy and enjoyable manner. The fact that David cursed Shaul demonstrated that there was some deficiency in how he had learned about the mitzvah of not taking revenge. He had not studied it with the appropriate desire and pleasure. David immediately admitted to his mistake, and requested that Hashem should consider this a minor error rather than an intentional offense.

David truly loved learning Torah, as he said: “I have desired to do Your will, Hashem, and Your Torah is in my innards.”

- David displayed disrespect for clothing when he tore the cloak of Shaul. For that reason, his own clothes were unable to warm him in his old age. He was punished for showing lack of respect for the king.
- When Bnei Yisrael feel the sweetness (עריבות) of their Torah learning and mitzvah observance, they truly fulfill the dictum that Klal Yisrael are responsible (ערבים) for one another. Tzaddikim should be especially mindful of this, as Hashem is scrupulous with his righteous ones, to a hairsbreadth.

## THE GLORY OF THE PRINCESS IS WITHIN

The daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon was sentenced by the Romans to sit in a house of ill repute (*Avodah Zarah* 18a). How did this happen? Rabbi Yochanan explains as follows. Rabbi Chanina’s daughter was walking among the Roman noblemen, when they noted her dignified carriage as she walked by, taking small, measured steps. Upon hearing them praise her, she improved her gait. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish asks what is meant by the statement (*Tehillim* 49:6), “The injunctions that I trod upon will surround me”? The sins which a man treads upon in this world will surround him on the Day of Judgment. The steps that she took paved the road to her punishment.

Chazal continue that Beruriah, another daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon and the wife of Rabbi Meir, could not bear that her sister should sit with harlots and asked her husband to gain her release. Rabbi Meir took some money and went on his way. He reasoned that if she had not sinned, she would merit a miracle, and he would manage to release her. But if she had sinned, he would be unable to do so. He disguised himself as a nobleman and approached her. She rejected his advances, stating that there were more beautiful women in that place. He thus inferred that she had not sinned while being there.

This story raises several questions.

1. How can we understand that the righteous daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon immediately improved her footsteps upon hearing a compliment about her gait from the Romans? Furthermore, why did her actions warrant such a severe punishment?

2. We have proof that this daughter of Rabbi Chanina was a *tzaddeket*. When her father was being burnt at the stake by the Romans (*Avodah Zarah* 18a) she asked, “Is this the reward one gets for keeping the Torah?!” To which her father replied, “If I were being burnt alone, I would have difficulty accepting my judgment. But since I am being burnt together with a Sefer Torah, I am certain that He Who demands the vengeance of the Sefer Torah will demand mine, as well.” His daughter accepted Hashem’s judgment and said no more. How can we fathom that such a devout woman would enhance her footsteps before the Roman noblemen, thereby further attracting their attention and most likely provoking sinful thoughts?

3. The fact that Rabbi Meir took money with him to redeem her further proves her righteousness. He expected that a miracle would happen for her, since she was surely free from sin. This strengthens our question concerning the incident with the Roman noblemen.

4. From the Romans’ words of praise, it seems that they intended to sin with her. Most probably, she tried to avoid their advances. If she was indeed acting for the sake of Heaven, how could she have brought them to thoughts of sin, to the extent that they placed her together with harlots?

Maybe we can explain this incident in the following way. Rabbi Chanina’s daughter was truly righteous, a fitting child of such a great tzaddik. Rabbi Chanina was engaged in a battle against the Romans over the Torah. The Romans forbade Torah learning. However, Rabbi Chanina publicly gathered together groups of students to learn and spread Torah.

He acted fearlessly, with total self-sacrifice. His intentions were totally for the sake of Heaven.

His daughter was imbued with the same ideals. When the Roman noblemen complimented her on her lovely footsteps, she began to improve the way she walked purely for the sake of Heaven. How so? She was trying to hint to them that the mannerisms and fine characteristics of the Jewish people are derived from their Torah learning. All blessings come from the Torah, as it says (*Vayikra* 26:3), “אם בחוקותי תלכו” – If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments.” The word תלכו literally means to walk. By improving her gait she was implying that if Bnei Yisrael possess such pleasant characteristics during a time of persecution, surely they would merit even finer qualities if they would be allowed to study Torah in peace and tranquility.

Her intent was to bring forth this message, not to incite the Romans to sin, *chas v’shalom*. Her actions also hinted that they should not look at the exterior trappings of a Jew, but at his inner characteristics, which are directly influenced by the Torah’s guidelines.

Nonetheless, she was punished. The Romans did not understand her intentions at all. They thought that she was of the same mindset as themselves, and was improving her gait for sinful reasons. They thought that Bnei Yisrael had a similar world-view as themselves, and that they would easily accept the Roman way of thinking in all areas. This caused a *chillul Hashem*, because this belief minimizes the veracity of the Torah in the eyes of the nations.

Maybe we can also explain the reason for her receiving such a stringent punishment in the following way. Even if she meant to act only for the sake of Heaven, she may have felt some slight honor when they praised her. This would render her action a mitzvah which comes by means of an aveirah (*Berachot* 47b; *Sukkah* 30a). She certainly did not intend to do an aveirah, *chas v’shalom*. Yet, Chazal tell us (*Yevamot* 121b; *Vayikra Rabbah*

27:1) that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is stringent with His righteous, to a hairsbreadth. Therefore she was punished.

Her punishment was to sit in a house of harlots. There, she abstained from committing any sin whatsoever, thus rectifying whatever wrong she had previously done. If a person truly desires to improve, he receives Divine assistance, as it says (*Shmuel I*, 2:9), “He guards the steps of His devout ones.” The fact that she did not sin was proven by the incident with Rabbi Meir.

It is appropriate to mention a phenomenon which unfortunately often occurs. Women arrive at the Beit Hakeneset, or at weddings, adorned in beautiful garments. When complimented, they feel a sense of pride. Instead, they should immediately banish all feelings of pride from their hearts and say, “Blessed is Hashem Who gave me this garment.”

This is even more important for a woman who overly beautifies herself in order to receive public acclaim. The more compliments she receives, the more elegantly she dresses. This causes men to look at her, and can bring them to sin. This situation is an example of the dictum (*Avot* 4:2), “The consequence of a sin is a sin.” Even if she doesn’t intend to cause men to stumble, and only wants to show off her beauty before other women, this is a severe sin. She instills in these women’s hearts feelings of jealousy, hatred, and competition. Once they go home they may then speak badly about this woman and quarrel with their husbands. Such a woman’s punishment is too great to bear.

Moreover, there are those women who dress very simply in their homes. Their attire does not display the self-respect a *bat Yisrael* should feel. When they go out amongst others, they dress in a beautiful manner, thus causing strangers to think forbidden thoughts. Conversely, they dress shabbily at home, which may bring about the breakdown of their marriages, *chas v’shalom*. Many very fine homes have unfortunately been destroyed for this very reason.

A woman should dress *l'shem Shamayim*, for the sake of the mitzvah of *shalom bayit*, not in order to glorify herself. In previous generations many righteous women would blacken their faces upon leaving their houses, in order to look ugly. Only upon returning home, they would beautify themselves in honor of their husbands.

The following narrative (*Ta'anit* 23b) supports this idea. The Sages came to the house of Abba Chilkiya in order to request that he pray for rain. When he arrived at his town, on his way home from work, his wife came out bedecked in all her finery. When he reached his house, his wife entered first. The *Chachamim* asked him, "Why did your wife come out to meet you so dressed up?" He replied "So that I should not look at another woman." We see that she acted entirely for her husband's sake, and not with anyone else in mind. When a woman has pure intentions and preserves her *kedushah*, she will then merit to be described by the pasuk (*Tehillim* 45:14) as an "honorable princess dwelling within, whose raiment is of golden settings."

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal tell us that the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon was destined to sit in a house of harlots because she improved her footsteps before the Roman noblemen. Rabbi Meir went to redeem her and saw that she had not sinned there. How could the righteous daughter of such a tzaddik be accused of trying to provoke the Roman noblemen? She had accepted the Heavenly judgment on her father when he was burned to death by the Romans. It is understood that she was a *tzaddeket* and did not intend to provoke the noblemen to sin. What did she do to warrant such disgrace?
- She certainly acted for the sake of Heaven. She wanted to show the noblemen that the footsteps – the good characteristics – of the Jewish nation are all connected to the Torah. Whatever pleasant characteristics we have are derived from our Torah study. She was indicating that if Bnei Yisrael would be able to live in peace and tranquility, they would certainly be able to learn more Torah and consequently possess even more beautiful characteristics. The Romans did

not understand this, and merely thought she wanted to sin. This brought about a *chillul Hashem*, for which she was punished.

- Furthermore, she may have felt a slight measure of pride in her appearance, and since she was a *tzaddeket*, Hashem judged her strictly, and punished her. Women should take her story to heart. A woman should not dress up for all to notice. This may cause a stumbling block for men who see her, for one sin leads to another. It also causes other women to become jealous of her rich adornments, which can lead to a lack of *shalom bayit* in their own homes. A woman should behave with purity and sanctity both in her home and on the street, and thereby she will merit many blessings both in this world and the next.

## GOOD ATTRIBUTES – FOR THE HONOR OF HASHEM

The pasuk says (*Devarim* 12:13), “Beware for yourself lest you bring up your burnt-offerings in any place that you see.” The Ben Ish Chai tells us that the word עולותיך (your burnt-offerings) are the good *middot* that a person has, by means of which he raises himself above all of Creation. When a person is crowned with good character traits, such as humility, shame, and mercy, they elevate him spiritually above all of Creation. He must ensure not to use these traits for forbidden acts. They must be employed solely in the service of Hashem. This pasuk is telling us that we should not utilize our good attributes wherever we see fit, but only to do Hashem’s will. For example, the quality of diligence is praiseworthy. One should arise like a lion in the morning in order to serve Hashem. He should rush to the Beit Hakeneset for tefillah. But he should never be quick to sin, *chalilah*.

Similarly, the trait of shame is commendable. But at times, one may not employ it. When one hears others blaspheming the Torah, degrading a mitzvah, or deriding a *talmid chacham*, he may not remain silent. It is his

sacred obligation to stand up for the glory of Hashem and protest such acts.

“Beware for yourself lest you bring up your burnt-offerings in any place that you see.” One may not use his *middot* wherever he thinks they should be used, but rather, for Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds. The *Tanna*, Yehudah ben Teima, states (*Avot* 5:21), “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven.” Man was invested with good qualities in order to channel them into doing Hashem’s will and not otherwise, *chalilah*.

On the tombstone of the tzaddik and miracle worker, Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, zt”l, the following is written: “He was quick to do mitzvot.” He used his *middah* of alacrity to do Hashem’s will in the best way possible. He was the first to do mitzvot. Whoever merited observing him during his lifetime, attests to the fact that his outstanding attribute was his swiftness in executing mitzvot.

I would like to add a hint to this in the continuation of the pesukim. The Torah states (*Devarim* 12:14), “There shall you bring your burnt-offerings.” The word שמה (there) contains the same letters as the word השם (Hashem). One must sacrifice his *middot* for the sake of Hashem, in order to bring Him pleasure and satisfaction.

One may not bring sacrifices wherever he pleases, but only in the place specified in the Beit Hamikdash, as the pasuk tells us, “Only in the place that Hashem will choose...there shall you bring up your burnt-offerings.” Why does the Torah forbid bringing an offering wherever one chooses? Isn’t the main purpose of the *korban* that a person should come close to Hashem? Why must it be done specifically in the Beit Hamikdash, invalidating any other location? Furthermore, why is the Beit Hamikdash called מקום (place), as in the following pesukim (ibid. 5), “Rather, only at the place,” (ibid. 14), “Only in the place,” and (ibid. 11), “It shall be that the place.” Why doesn’t the Torah tell us where this place is?

I would like to suggest the following. The Beit Hamikdash to which the Torah refers is not only the one on Har Hamoriah. It is also each person's internal sanctuary, which rests in his heart. A person's body is a miniature Mikdash and the Mishkan of Hashem. The Torah states (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them." Chazal, in the name of the Alshich, expound that Hashem rests inside of each and every Jew. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to sanctify our hearts and purify our souls, so that we become fitting vessels to house the *Shechinah*. The Beit Hamikdash is referred to as the "place," because wherever a person finds himself, he can become a Beit Hamikdash. The place is elevated through his spiritual powers. The more a person ascends in spiritual matters, the more elevated is his place. Chazal teach us (*Ta'anit* 21b), "It is not the place which brings honor to a person, but the person who brings honor to the place."

The Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash alludes to man's personal spiritual *avodah*. This is why the Torah specified that the Avodah should be done in one specific place, forbidding one from offering a sacrifice wherever he chooses. This would cause the offering of *korbanot* to become light in his eyes, subject to his own discretion. This should teach us a lesson in our Avodat Hashem. It should be fixed and absolute. One may not serve Hashem wherever and whenever he fancies. Extreme care must be taken that one should not vacillate in his Avodat Hashem, sometimes going on the right path, and other times veering from it. One should strive to cleave to Hashem and His Torah in a definite way all the days of his life, and resolve never to leave the "road of life."

One's tefillah, as well, should always be in the same place, as Chazal teach (*Berachot* 6a), "Whoever sets aside a specific place for his tefillah, the G-d of Avraham will come to his aid." When a person fixes a specific place of prayer, not just praying haphazardly wherever he happens to be, he is indicating that tefillah is important to him. Unfortunately, due to our sins, we no longer have the Beit Hamikdash and the service of the *korbanot*. Tefillah in a set place takes the place of *korbanot*, which were

offered in a specific place in the Beit Hamikdash. The *Navi* Hoshea states (14:3), “Let our lips substitute for bulls.” This establishment should be a cornerstone in one’s Avodat Hashem. One should be constant in his Avodat Hashem, constantly connected to the path he has chosen, following it all the days of his life.

A man once approached me for advice. But he didn’t accept my words whole-heartedly and therefore sought the counsel of other Rabbanim. I met him again after a short while, and he told me, “Believe me, Rabbeinu, that I just confused myself by going to all these Rabbis. I have no idea how to extricate myself from the maze I put myself into. Everyone gave me different advice, and I don’t know which one to accept.” I told him that this was all his fault. He should have chosen one Rav for himself, as the Mishnah in Avot states, “Make for yourself a teacher.” He would then accept this Rav’s ruling without questions, and follow it with blind faith.

This is the way one should view his Avodat Hashem. Just like the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash had to be done only there, and the Torah forbade offering sacrifices anywhere one pleased, so should man’s personal Avodat Hashem, in the innermost chambers of his heart, be consistent and conclusive, reflecting his unyielding desire to cleave to Hashem.

Concerning this, the Torah states that when a person desires to come close to Hashem, he must seek Him only in the place that He has designated, as it says (*Devarim* 12:5), “And come there.” As mentioned above, the word שמה (there) has the same letters as the word השם (Hashem). Hashem requests consistency in serving Him. By demonstrating constancy in Avodat Hashem, a person merits arriving “there.” This refers to Hashem Himself. One comes close to Him and attached to His Torah. Being steadfast in one’s service of Hashem increases his Torah knowledge and *yirat Shamayim*.

Until this very day, the images of my noble teachers stand before my eyes. In my mind’s eye, I see my mentors, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian,

zt”l; Harav Hagaon Rabbi Shammai Zohn, zt”l; and Rabbeinu Gershon Leibman, zy”a. I observed how their Avodat Hashem was consistent in every detail. They never veered from the path they chose, the path of *kedushah*. They remained constant in their daily schedules, replete with Torah and *kedushah*, for forty years straight. They steadfastly maintained their unique style, with enthusiasm and *yirat Shamayim*. They would arrive at tefillat Shacharit at a specific time, and never cancelled their *mussar* session. They always discussed matters of *emunah* in Hashem. Their lives were dedicated only to one subject – Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds. Such constancy is the right way to go for one who wants to travel the high road, leading to Hashem’s House, the palace of the King. But one who is not steadfast in his Avodat Hashem is being dishonest. He should know that he is light years away from the path of truth, going up a dead-end with no purpose in sight.

The parashah continues with a description of the three festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. We see that the only festivals on which one is commanded to be joyous are Shavuot and Sukkot. Regarding Shavuot, the pasuk says (*Devarim* 16:11), “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d.” And regarding Sukkot, we are told (*ibid.* 15), “And you will be completely joyous.” But the mitzvah to be joyous is not mentioned in regard to Pesach. This seems puzzling. Specifically on Pesach are our hearts full of joy. All are seated around the table like royalty. Each person feels a sense of liberation after the awful years of exile in Egypt. Shouldn’t Pesach be the most joyous holiday of all?

I would like to suggest the following. Shavuot is the time of *Matan Torah*. Who is the one who finds joy with the Torah? Only one who appreciates its greatness. Therefore, the command to be joyous on Shavuot is really the mitzvah of finding joy in the Torah. How does one do this? First and foremost, by tasting of its sweetness. Taking the step of coming to the Beit Hamidrash and opening a sefer, involving oneself in Torah study with diligence and desire, will bring one to feel the tremendous pleasure inherent in it. He will value its virtues, and become infused with its joy.

The Torah Sages of Yisrael always have a smile on their faces. Their hearts are constantly suffused with joy. One should not think they don't have their share of daily troubles and tribulations. They certainly do. Nonetheless, they are happy, for their portion is Torah, which lights up their lives and grants them ethereal bliss. David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 19:9), "The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart." The command to be joyous on Shavuot indicates that Torah study contains great measures of joy, and is capable of gladdening the heart. But in order to access this joy, one must cling to Torah constantly, and follow its paths, since "all its ways are pleasantness and all its paths are peace."

There is no joy like the joy of Torah. In contrast, all worldly pleasures are emptiness and void. They are fleeting fantasies with no permanence. But the delight in Torah study is true and eternal. Unfortunately, the *Yetzer Hara* seduces a person to pursue materialism. He foolishly feels that materialism will bring him true happiness. He thinks an inflated bank account will fill his heart with joy.

A man once asked me for a blessing that he should win the lotto. I made him the following offer, "Let us become partners in the lottery ticket. I will pay for half of it, and we will split the winnings." His face lit up, as he pictured the profits filling his pockets. I stopped him mid-dream, stating, "You have no idea how much satisfaction and happiness you would bring Hashem if you would only display such joy when you come to the Beit Hamidrash. What ethereal bliss would the hosts on High have from such a demonstration of love toward the Torah.

"You should know that real happiness can be found only in the portals of the Beit Hamidrash, not in money and not in lottery cards or any other physical pleasure. These are passing joys, which are here today and gone tomorrow."

On Sukkot, too, we have the mitzvah to be joyous. Sukkot suffuses one's heart with perfect faith in Hashem. Man leaves his permanent home, with its comfortable furnishings, to live in a simple, temporary dwelling. He

feels that he has no one to depend on besides for his Heavenly Father. This instills *emunah* in his heart. One who lives with faith in Hashem lives a happy life. He has no room in his heart for worry or sadness, for he believes fully that Hashem is running his life in the best way possible. For this reason, we are told on Sukkot “and you will be completely joyous.”

But on Pesach, the Torah has no need to emphasize joy, for one’s heart automatically fills with joy then. When he returns home from the Beit Hakeneset, and observes how the house is spotlessly clean and how the table is tastefully set with abundance, bliss bursts forth on its own, without any need to demand it.

Moreover, one can say that the joy commanded on Shavuot actually begins on Pesach, for that is the beginning of preparing for *Matan Torah*, when we start counting the Omer. Preparing for *Matan Torah* is an intrinsic aspect of accepting the Torah, for one who doesn’t prepare himself properly is not worthy of accepting the Torah. This is analogous to one who takes a trip. The excitement is evident already from the time he starts to prepare, as he is packing his bags and food for the way. As one is preparing himself to accept the Torah, beginning on Pesach, the joy of *Matan Torah* is obvious.

May it be Hashem’s will that we always find joy in our Torah study, and all our deeds should be for the sake of Heaven, bringing much satisfaction to our Creator, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- “Beware for yourself lest you bring up your burnt-offerings in any place that you see.” The burnt offerings hint to a person’s good *middot*. Man was invested with good qualities in order to channel them into doing Hashem’s will. One should use his good *middot* only to do Hashem’s will, not for whatever he thinks fit. The tzaddik, Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, zt”l, used his *middah* of alacrity to do Hashem’s will in the best way possible.

The pasuk continues, “There (שמה) shall you bring your burnt-offerings.” The word שמה (there) contains the same letters as the word שמה (Hashem). One must sacrifice his middot for the sake of Hashem, in order to bring Him pleasure and satisfaction.

- One may bring a *korban* only “in the place that Hashem will choose.” Why does the Torah not specify where this place is? This is because the Beit Hamikdash is not merely a physical entity, but resides in the inner sanctuary of each person’s heart. Wherever a person finds himself, he can become a Beit Hamikdash. One must sanctify his heart and purify his soul in order to become a fitting vessel to house the *Shechinah*.
- The Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash alludes to man’s personal spiritual *avodah*. Therefore, it must be done in a fixed and consistent manner. One should also have a fixed place for tefillah, since tefillah takes the place of the *korbanot* that were offered in the Beit Hamikdash. Having a fixed place for tefillah indicates that it is important to him.
- My teachers maintained consistency in their Avodat Hashem at all times. Their lives were dedicated to Hashem and his Torah.
- Concerning the three festivals, the Torah commands us to rejoice on Shavuot and Sukkot, but there is no command to rejoice on Pesach. This is difficult to understand since we were liberated from our exile in Egypt on Pesach. Shouldn’t this be the most joyful holiday of all?
- The command to be joyous on Shavuot is really the mitzvah of finding joy in the Torah. One does this by learning Torah, since there is no joy comparable to that of Torah study. On Sukkot, one strengthens his *emunah* in Hashem by leaving his permanent home with its comfortable furnishings, to live in a simple, temporary dwelling. One who lives with faith in Hashem lives a happy life. On Pesach, the Torah has no need to emphasize joy, for one’s heart automatically fills with joy then.
- Moreover, the joy felt on Shavuot begins on Pesach, for that is the beginning of preparing for *Matan Torah*, when we start counting the Omer. The preparation for *Matan Torah* and the joy it engenders is an intrinsic part of preparing to accept the Torah.

## ARROGANCE PREVENTS TESHUVAH

“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem...to eternity, because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt” (*Devarim* 23:4-5). This parashah is read in Elul, just a few days before Rosh Hashanah, the day all creatures pass before Hashem in judgment. The scales are standing, weighing one’s actions, for good or for bad. This demands excessive preparation. It is most worthwhile for one to improve his deeds and come to complete teshuvah, so that he merits being written and sealed in the book of life and peace.

The sefer *Sha’arei Teshuvah* states (*Sha’ar Sheini* 14), “One who fears Hashem will tremble at the thought that all his actions are recorded. The time will come when he will account for all of his actions, whether good or bad. Man is judged on Rosh Hashanah and his fate is sealed on Yom Kippur. If one had a court case with a human judge, he would be extremely worried and seek all types of advice to save himself. He would forsake everything he has in the quest for acquittal.

“How foolish are those who go about their business as usual, up until Erev Rosh Hashanah, the days of judgment. One who fears Heaven would do well to reduce his work hours and spend his days in meditation. He should search his ways and rise extra early to do teshuvah and perfect his deeds. He should increase his prayers, as this is a most auspicious time for coming closer to Hashem, as our *Chachamim* teach (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b), ‘Seek Hashem when He can be found; call to Him when He is near.’ This is referring to *Asseret Yemei Teshuvah*, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is a special mitzvah for one to arouse his spirit to do teshuvah on Yom Kippur, as the pasuk says (*Vayikra* 16:30), ‘From all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed.’ If we purify ourselves by doing teshuvah, Hashem will forgive us and purify us.”

These holy words of Rabbeinu Yonah are simple and clear to anyone with an ounce of sense. Starting from the beginning of Elul, one should

begin his preparations for the Day of Judgment by doing teshuvah, examining his actions and improving his deficiencies. This will prepare him for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. Regrettably, this is not the case. Not everyone prepares properly, and not everyone shivers at the prospect of judgment. What prevents a person from searching his deeds and coming to complete teshuvah, closer to Hashem? What keeps the heart hard and unmoved to do teshuvah?

The source of evil is rooted in the trait of arrogance which rests in man's heart. It is natural that a person does not see his own faults, for his haughtiness blinds him. He knows good and well how to rummage through his fellow man's traits and unearth all his faults, those that are revealed as well as those concealed from others. But he pats himself on the back, convincing himself that he is perfect, endowed with all virtues. Who can compare with him and his righteousness? With such arrogant thoughts, he certainly will never do teshuvah, because he feels he is flawless. Even when he beats his breast when saying the *viduy* prayer, confessing his sins, it is mere lip-service. He is really referring to his neighbors who sinned, for he is the peak of perfection in his eyes. In his utter blindness, he cannot see the truth for what it is. He is, in reality, covered with spiritual wounds of all sorts. Numerous sins entangle him. All of this is caused by his despicable pride, which veils his wrongdoings and conceals his sins. It does not allow him to examine his conscience and reveal his various deficiencies in order to correct them.

How pride can bring a person to the depths of the abyss! The pasuk states, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem...to eternity." The *Navi* relates (*Shmuel* I, 17) that after David fought Goliath the Pelishti, with supernal strength, killing him in a most miraculous manner, Shaul was very impressed. He asked Avner, his general, (*ibid.* 55), "Whose son is this lad?" Chazal tell us (*Yalkut Shimoni*) that at that time, Doeg Ha'adomi bore tremendous animosity toward David, for he feared that the kingdom would go to him. He approached Shaul and challenged him, "Before asking if he is worthy of ruling, find out

if he is worthy of being a part of the Jewish nation. David is descended from Ruth the Moabitess, from which nation Hashem forbade us to ever accept converts.”

Avner responded that the Mishnah makes a distinction in the wording. The pasuk states *Ammonite*, and not *Ammonitess*; *Moabite*, and not *Moabitess*. The reason for this is that the women of these nations did not sin, since it is not the way of women to greet people outdoors with food and drink, as men do.

Doeg doggedly carried on: “The men should have greeted the males; and the women, the females.” Avner did not know how to respond. Immediately thereafter, we find Shaul asking, “Whose son are you, young man?” At first, Shaul referred to David as a lad, and afterward, a young man. Shaul told Avner that he (Avner) had forgotten the halachah. He instructed him to seek guidance in the Beit Hamidrash. There they also ruled that David was kosher, for only the men of these nations were barred entry to Am Yisrael. But in his wickedness, Doeg continued finding fault with David’s lineage. Then Ammasah ben Yeter took his sword and proclaimed, “Whoever does not accept this halachic ruling, will be pierced by the sword! I have received by tradition from the Beit Din of Shmuel Haramati that the pasuk refers to Ammonite and Moabite men, and not women.”

Let us not fool ourselves by presuming that Doeg was some sort of fool. The Gemara states (*Sanhedrin* 106b) that he was a *talmid chacham* of the highest caliber, called, “the chief of Shaul’s shepherds (*Shmuel* I, 21:8).” He was the head of the Sanhedrin. How was it possible for him to behave so shamefully, as to distort a pasuk of the Torah, in order to degrade David’s good name, and disqualify him from becoming king? From where did these negative qualities sprout? It was his innate arrogance that brought him to this. Arrogance makes one blind to his own flaws, perceiving himself as perfect. He is incapable of seeing his iniquities. He always thinks that only others have much to improve. Therefore, Doeg

believed that David was the deficient one. He was prepared to distort a pasuk in the Torah in order to cast aspersion upon David. One who is arrogant will never own up to his mistakes and defects. On the contrary, he will loudly laud his perfection and good deeds.

We find a similar instance when David fled from Shaul, who wished to kill him. David was on the brink of dying from starvation. Achimelech the Kohen Gadol arrived and gave him bread to revive him. Doeg Ha'adomi took note of this and reported to Shaul that Achimelech had made a pact with David and joined his camp. Shaul immediately called together all of the Kohanim of Nov. Doeg convinced Shaul to have them all killed. Shaul called his strongmen – Avner and Ammasah. But they thought this was a twisted form of justice, and refused to carry out his order. They didn't dare lift their hands against the Kohanim. When Shaul saw this, he turned to Doeg and said, "Why do you stand there doing nothing? Doesn't it say, 'the hand of the witness will be first to kill him?' Draw your sword and kill the rebels yourself." Doeg did as he was told, cruelly killing eighty-five Kohanim, each worthy of being Kohen Gadol. He made sure not to leave any survivors or possessions, and killed out the entire city, save for one fugitive who managed to escape, called Evyatar ben Achituv.

"Pride comes before a fall." How powerful is pride that it can bring a person to the lowest level, both in this world and the next. An arrogant person always thinks he is in the right, and that he does not need to improve. He views others as the wrongdoers in need of character improvement. He does not see his own faults and refuses to admit to them.

When Hashem saw the terrible results that came from Doeg's twisting the meaning of the pesukim, He cried out, "You're using the Torah as a tool to rebel against Me? It will be through My Torah that I will take vengeance upon you!" Doeg's logic became obscured and he began to forget his learning. His students noticed that he was ruling the pure as impure, and the impure as pure. They realized that heresy and apostasy

filled his heart. They tied up his legs, and dragged him throughout the land, until he died of agony. This was most fitting for someone who had made so much trouble for Bnei Yisrael.

Similarly, when a person stands before the judgment of Rosh Hashanah, he knows that he will face the King of the world and give a detailed accounting for all his deeds, yet his heart knows no fear or trembling. His arrogance blinds him to his faults. In all innocence, he believes that he has nothing to straighten out. He considers himself ready to stand in judgment, and that his justice will become clear to all. He believes that his good deeds certainly outweigh his iniquities. But he isn't aware of the painful truth that he has a tremendous weight of sins. Woe to him that he appears in such a condition on the Day of Judgment! But his *Yetzer Hara* does not allow him reprieve from everyday routine, to take the time to make a personal accounting and confess his wrongdoings.

The correct way to utilize this month is to examine one's deeds. If he finds them wanting, he should confess his sins before Hashem, asking for forgiveness and atonement. He should do complete teshuvah. We are told, "One who confesses and forsakes his sin is forgiven." The Jewish people are called *Yehudim*, after the tribe Yehudah. Yehudah's characteristic was to examine his deeds and admit to his wrongdoings. Yaakov blessed him, stating (*Bereishit* 49:8), "Yehudah – you, your brothers shall acknowledge." The Targum explains that Yehudah knew how to admit his wrongdoings in public, as he demonstrated regarding the incident with Tamar, when he said, "She is more righteous than I." The Gemara tells us (*Sotah* 7b) that since Yehudah was not ashamed to admit the truth, he received a portion in the World to Come.

The sefer *Mesillat Yesharim* states (Chapter 2), "The idea of watchfulness is for a man to exercise caution in his actions and his undertakings: that is, to deliberate and watch over his actions and his accustomed ways to determine whether or not they are good, so as not to abandon his soul to the danger of destruction, *chas v'chalilah*, and not

to walk according to the promptings of habit as a blind man in pitch darkness.”

It is the obligation of every Jew to contemplate his actions and examine them. If he finds a deficiency, he should immediately admit to it, and correct it. He should not allow the trait of arrogance to stand in his way and control him, causing him to believe that he is perfect. This is all a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, whose way is to distort the harsh reality of a person’s spiritual position, ensuring that his iniquities remain hidden from him and preventing him from improving his character. Especially during these days of mercy and atonement, a person must awaken from his slumber and consider his spiritual condition, preparing himself appropriately for the upcoming Day of Judgment.

May we all be worthy of standing before Hashem on the Day of Judgment, and may He inscribe us in the book of the perfectly righteous ones, for good life and peace, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The following pasuk is read a few days before Rosh Hashanah, when we pass before Hashem in judgment: “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem...to eternity, because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt.” What is the connection between this pasuk and Elul and Rosh Hashanah?
- The days of Elul are propitious for introspection and teshuvah. Unfortunately, not everyone uses them properly. Why is this so? One answer is that the trait of arrogance blinds a person to his own faults and prevents him from doing teshuvah.
- The fault of pride was demonstrated by Doeg, who wanted to have David disqualified from becoming king. He called David’s lineage into question by stating that he was descended from Ruth the Moabitess. However, the halachah states that a Moabite man is prohibited from joining the Jewish people, not a Moabite woman. Doeg was the head of the Sanhedrin, how could he distort a

pasuk of the Torah for personal motives? His arrogance prevented him from seeing the truth.

- Similarly, Shaul had all the Kohanim of the city of Nov killed out because they had given David food. This was also due to his arrogance.
- When a person faces the judgment of Rosh Hashanah he may be swayed by his pride to feel that he has no faults that need correcting. This is a terrible mistake. The Jewish people are called *Yehudim*, after the tribe Yehudah. Our forefather Yehudah exemplified the *middah* of admitting to the truth, as he evidenced in his conduct with Tamar. We should emulate his behavior, especially during these days of mercy and atonement and prepare ourselves for the Day of Judgment.

## THE POWER OF NEGATIVE TRAITS

When the spies sent by Moshe Rabbeinu returned from touring Eretz Yisrael, “they brought forth to the Children of Israel an evil report of the Land that they had spied out” (*Bamidbar* 13:32). These spies were the *Nesi'im*, the most exalted of the entire nation, as the pasuk states (*ibid.* 13:3), “They were all distinguished men; heads of the Children of Israel were they.” Rashi expounds, “Whenever the word *men* is used, it denotes an expression of importance. At that time, they were honorable.” How could they take such a spiritual downturn and sin with their tongues as they did, blaspheming the Land and removing the yoke of Heaven from themselves? They had the audacity to state (*ibid.* 31), “We cannot ascend to that people for it is stronger than us!” Rashi says that they said this concerning Hashem. With their wily tongues, they succeeded in capturing the hearts of the nation, who joined the bandwagon of besmirching the Land. How could they fall from such heights to such depths?

The Zohar states (*Shelach Lecha* 158) that the spies had the following reasoning. Until now, as long as the nation resided in the Wilderness, they merited being the *Nesi'im* of the nation. They were the esteemed members of society. As soon as the people would enter Eretz Yisrael, the *Nesi'im*

would be demoted from their posts, and Moshe Rabbeinu would appoint others in their place. This is why they wished to degrade the Land. They wanted the people to feel an aversion toward it and dread entering it. Since they worried only about their own personal honor, they were punished with a most gruesome death.

The cause of their downfall was their arrogance. Chazal tell us (*Avot* 4:28), “Jealousy, lust, and [desire for] glory remove a man from this world.” Arrogance is the source of all negative character traits. One who possesses this bad *middah* should know that his entire spiritual status is in grave danger. His righteousness has no foundation to uphold it. He is like a dried up plant in the wilderness, which will snap at the merest wind. His piety is in peril of being uprooted at the slightest hint of sin. As soon as he realizes that his honor is at stake, he will do whatever is in his power to protect it. He is even capable of disregarding Torah and mitzvot, all in order to keep his glory intact.

This was the sad case with the spies. Their righteousness and piety notwithstanding, and despite their great status and sanctity, they allowed the ruinous trait of arrogance to rest in their hearts. In order to preserve their own dignity, they scorned all that was holy to Am Yisrael. They even denied Hashem’s powers, *rachmana litzlan*. All this was so that they should retain their status and honor, as they would keep their positions as *Nesi'im*.

However, two of them did maintain their loyalty to Hashem. These were Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh, who spoke glowingly of Eretz Yisrael, convincing the nation that it is, indeed, a very good land. They did not allow themselves to be swept up by the unsuitable speech of the rest of the spies. How, indeed, did Yehoshua and Calev succeed in standing up to the spies? Regarding Yehoshua, the pasuk states (*ibid.* 13:16), “Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun *Yehoshua* (יהושע).” Rashi comments, “He prayed for him, ‘May G-d save you (י-ה יושיעך) from the

plot of the spies.” And regarding Calev, we are told (ibid. 13:22), “And he arrived at Chevron.” Rashi comments, “Calev alone went there, and prostrated himself in prayer over the graves of the Patriarchs so that he should not be persuaded by his companions to be party to their plan.”

I would like to suggest that Calev went to the graves of the Avot as part of a plan. He wished to learn from their pure ways, and in this manner, be spared the evil designs of the spies. He contemplated those who rested there in the ground and learned from their *middot* and deeds. When he thought of Adam, he recalled the pasuk (*Bereishit* 3:19), “For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.” Man’s end is nothing but a pile of worms. How, then, could the spies feel conceit due to their positions?

When he studied Avraham’s life, Calev noted his *middah* of humility, as he had told Hashem (ibid. 18:27), “I am but dust and ash.” He recalled Avraham’s great love for Eretz Yisrael, which Hashem had promised to him and his sons. Calev thought to himself, “If the Avot had such love for the Land, how dare I speak negatively about it? On the contrary, I must speak in its praise, pointing out its beauty and splendor.”

When Calev thought of Yaakov Avinu, the chosen among the Avot, he remembered Yaakov’s *middah* of truth, as the pasuk states, “Give truth to Yaakov.” He said, “How can I be deceitful by speaking disparagingly of the Land?” He also contemplated Yaakov’s *mesirut nefesh* for the Torah, for he was always “a wholesome man, abiding in tents.” Calev understood that all of man’s aspirations should be directed solely to Torah and mitzvot. This is really man’s purpose in this world. What is the point of pursuing imaginary glory, which is nothing at all?

Calev tried, in this manner, to protect himself from the machinations of the spies. These thoughts would protect him against their wickedness. He knew that their inherent arrogance would not allow them to speak well of the Land, and he was afraid of being dragged in with them. He preceded the remedy to the malady and went to prostrate himself by the graves of

the Avot, equipping himself with spiritual armaments against their evil plot.

One who wishes to be spared from the negative character traits which rest within him, specifically from the trait of arrogance, which is a most shameful attribute, must cleave to Torah at all times and in all places. Torah is the only remedy against the *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal tell us (*Kiddushin* 30a), “Hashem said, ‘I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.’” Therefore, it is incumbent upon man to immerse himself in the world of Torah and not swerve from it ever. And even when he is occupied with business or other worldly ambitions, he should make herculean efforts to set aside time for Torah study every day. No one is exempt from Torah study as long as they live.

The Rambam states (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8, 10), “Every Jew is obligated to study Torah, whether rich or poor, whether healthy or sick, young or old, even a poor man who collects charity, and even a family man with a wife and children. All must fix times for Torah study during the day and during the night, as the pasuk says, ‘You shall delve in it day and night.’ Until when is one obligated to learn Torah? Until the day of his death, as we are told, ‘Lest you remove them (words of Torah) from your heart every day of your life.’”

The Midrash relates (*Yitro Rabbah* 29:9) that when Hashem gave the Torah, the entire world became silent. The birds did not chirp, the fowl did not fly, the cows did not moo, the heavenly angels did not move or sing praises, the waters stopped flowing, and the people did not speak. Then Hashem’s voice rang out, “I am Hashem, your G-d.”

What was the reason for silencing the entire world in order to give the Torah? The word silence (שתיקה) has the same root as paralyzed (משותק). This teaches that a person might be paralyzed financially, strapped of all funds, or he might be paralyzed physically, *rachmana litzlan*, but he must still learn Torah. Even if his body is broken, he is obliged to learn Torah, to the extent that he is capable.

This is why we are told (ibid. 14) that the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael left them at *Matan Torah*. This also alludes to the fact that a person is required to study Torah until his energy is spent. He should apply himself to Torah until his soul expires. One must learn Torah until the day he dies. Man's main mission in this world is to dedicate his life to Torah. One who follows this path will find himself free of negative attributes, and instead, will embrace positive traits. Calev visited the gravesites of the Avot in order to remember their sanctified ways. Their sole desire was to devote themselves to the Torah. They forfeited their personal glory for the sake of Hashem's honor. Their sole interest was to increase Heavenly honor, sanctifying Hashem's Name throughout the world.

This was how all Torah giants lived. They never concerned themselves with personal honor; they always conducted themselves with humility. When others mocked them, they paid no heed and forgave all insult. They never allowed a grudge to take hold of them. My dear brother, Rabbi Chaim Shimon Pinto, shlita, told me that our father was once invited to an acquaintance for Shabbat. Many people were there for the weekend, on account of a *brit* which was scheduled there. During the night, one of the guests woke up to take care of his needs. He didn't notice Father's figure there, sleeping in a corner of the house, and relieved himself on him. Father kept silent, realizing that the man would be mortified if he would notify him of his misdeed. Father decided to forego his personal honor and changed his clothing without uttering a word to anyone...

How did Father acquire such noble character traits? He knew that all worldly matters are empty vanities. Honor and pride did not speak to him. His entire life was dedicated only to Torah and mitzvot. His objective was to sanctify Hashem's Name in the world. Therefore, he had control over his *Yetzer Hara*. His respect for others was legendary.

May we, too, merit to be crowned with good *middot* and bring only satisfaction to our Creator, by doing His will, Amen.

### — In Summary —

- How could the spies, the most exalted members of the nation, bring back a negative report about the Land? The cause of their downfall was their arrogance. This is the source of all negative character traits. In order to preserve their honor and positions, the spies spoke *lashon hara* about the Land, and even denied Hashem's powers.
- Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev did maintain their loyalty to Hashem. Yehoshua was given extra protection by Moshe, who changed his name from Hoshea to Yehoshua, asking that "Hashem should save you (י-ה יושיעך) from the plot of the spies." Calev protected himself from the machinations of the spies by going to the graves of the Avot to learn from their good deeds and good *middot*.
- One who wishes to guard himself from negative character traits, especially the *middah* of pride, should cleave to Torah at all times and in all places. Torah is the only remedy against the *Yetzer Hara*. The Rambam states that no one is exempt from learning Torah. Therefore, one should set aside specific times for learning Torah, until the day he dies.
- The world was silenced at *Matan Torah* to teach that even if a person is "silenced," i.e., paralyzed monetarily or physically, he is obliged to learn Torah, to the extent that he is capable.
- Torah giants never concerned themselves with personal honor; they always conducted themselves with humility. They dedicated their lives to Torah and mitzvot in order to sanctify Hashem's Name in this world.

## PRIDE – PRECURSOR OF SIN

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rabba bar Zimona, "If the previous generations were like angels, we are but mortals. If the previous generations were like mortals, we are but donkeys. We are not even like the donkey of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, but like ordinary donkeys" (*Shabbat* 112b).

Furthermore, Rabbi Yochanan said, “The hearts of the previous ones are like the size of a palace, and the hearts of the later ones are like the size of a banquet room, and we are but the size of a needle hole” (*Eiruvin* 53a). Rashi comments that an example of “the previous ones” is Rabbi Akiva, and a “later one” is Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. Others say a “previous one” is Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, and a “later one” is Rabbi Ushia, the *Gadol Hador*. We ourselves are but the “size of a needle hole,” means the following: Just as a nail banged into the wall makes a slight hole in the wall, so, too, we understand what we are taught only with great difficulty.

When Chazal measure the difference between prior generations and our own, they conclude that the difference is not merely in levels. Rather, we are essentially different in makeup. It is like comparing angels to people, or people to donkeys. If the *Tanna'im* were so vastly different to the previous generations, to what can we compare ourselves? Nothing but worms.

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 9a) quote the *Tanna d'vei Eliyahu*, “The world will exist for six thousand years. Two thousand of desolation, two thousand of Torah, and two thousand of the days of Mashiach.” The Gra writes, “Torah ended and disappeared after four thousand years, as is known. Unfortunately, we have neither Torah nor Mashiach.”

The author of the sefer *Ma'arechet HaTorah* (chapter of Generations of Torah) is surprised by this statement. The two thousand years of Torah ended in the days of Rabbeinu Hakadosh. How can we say that since his times, there is no Torah? Is the Shas, and all the proliferation of Torah of later years, until the very last generation, including the Gra himself, not considered “Torah”?!

How are we to understand that these holy tzaddikim considered themselves like nothing in comparison to prior generations, when they themselves were so tremendously great? They were holy of holies.

Similarly, how could the Gra say that he contains no Torah? Many secrets of the Torah have been revealed to us only in the merit of his Torah study.

Perhaps we can explain with the following idea. When the tzaddikim note how the *Yetzer Hara* gains more and more control each day, testing people in order to distance them from Hashem, they try to place “fences” between the *Yetzer Hara* and themselves. They do this by humbling themselves, stating they have a long way to go in their service of Hashem. When a person feels that he has reached a perfect understanding of Torah, he is essentially opening a doorway for the Satan to disturb him in his Torah learning and other areas, to an extent which is impossible to describe.

This is a fundamental concept in a person’s Avodat Hashem. One should not regard himself highly in his mitzvah performance and relationship with Hashem. As they say, “Pride comes before a fall.” One is liable to fall from his imagined heights into the abyss of sin. On the contrary, one should serve Hashem humbly, with a broken heart, feeling that he has not yet begun serving Hashem properly at all. The more he breaks his spirit, the greater spiritual achievements he will attain.

Moshe Rabbeinu is a perfect example of this. Although he was the greatest prophet that ever lived (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra, remez* 429), before his death, he told Hashem (*Devarim* 3:24), “You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness, etc.” This is amazing. Moshe Rabbeinu, who ascended to the heavens twice, speaking to Hashem face-to-face, humbled himself to such an extent that he said that only now, just before his death, was he beginning to fathom the greatness of Hashem. We find that he said (*Shemot* 33:18), “Show me now Your glory.” And he was granted his request. Moshe Rabbeinu was able to perceive the glory of Hashem in a way that no other person ever did. Yet, at his death, he proclaimed that he was just beginning to understand the greatness of Hashem.

We find that David Hamelech also behaved with utmost humility concerning his Torah learning (*Mo'ed Katan* 16b). This was despite the fact that one night of his Torah study was worth more than one hundred years of the Torah learning of an experienced Torah student with his mentor (*Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel* I, *remez* 129). Nonetheless, he humbled himself. Similarly, Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of men, said about himself (*Kohelet* 7:23), "I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me."

We see from this that even the giants of our nation were tremendously self-effacing regarding their Torah knowledge. This behavior prevented the Satan from trying to test them. We, too, should behave in this manner; instead of feeling that we have reached great heights in Torah knowledge, we should constantly aspire to learn more until we attain true perfection in Torah.

The pasuk in Tehillim (48:15) says that Hashem "will guide us forever." The Ba'al Shem Tov explains this in the form of a parable. When we teach a child to walk, we do it gradually. First we stand close to him, so that it is easy for him to walk to us. As he gains more of a footing, we stand further and further away, encouraging him to cover more ground. By strengthening his muscles the child gets used to walking. Similarly, the more we analyze the greatness of Hashem, the more we realize that we understand nothing of His greatness at all. Thus we will constantly strive to come closer to Him. With this appreciation, we will be able to serve Him properly. By contemplating the magnitude of Hashem's greatness, we will become humble, realizing that we have a long way to go before reaching great and lofty levels in Avodat Hashem.

What was the purpose of the *Tanna'im*, and after them, the *Amora'im*, prior and later generations, in comparing themselves to those who came earlier, concluding that they had achieved nothing in comparison?

It is to teach us the great importance of the attribute of humility, so that we should take care not to become complacent. When a person is smug,

he can easily make mistakes. Not so when he is humble and self-effacing. Then, he will do everything carefully, in a thought-out manner. In this way, he will increase his good deeds both quantitatively, and more importantly, qualitatively. Our Sages teach (*Avodah Zarah* 20b) that cautiousness brings to alacrity, and so forth on the ladder of Avodat Hashem, until one attains the level of purity of thought.

### **The Obligation to Strengthen Oneself in the Trait of Humility**

Frequently, we see a person who studies Torah and cleaves to Hashem with all his might, but when suffering comes upon him, *chalilah*, he thinks, “I am constantly engrossed in Torah. Why is all this suffering coming my way?” He does not accept the Divine decree, as though there is no Judge running the affairs of this world (*Vayikra Rabbah* 28:1), *rachmana litzlan*. In this manner, he is likely to deteriorate even further. We find that the Satan prosecutes at a time of danger (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 1). One is particularly at risk when his mind becomes full of doubts regarding the Creator.

This happens when one forgets the words of Chazal (*Kiddushin* 39b; *Chulin* 142b) that the reward of mitzvot is not in this world. A person’s reward for toiling in Torah awaits him in the World to Come. This is as the pasuk says (*Devarim* 5:16), “So that your days will be lengthened and so that it will be good for you.” Chazal explain: “So that your days will be lengthened” – this means in the world which has no limits. And “that it will be good for you” – in the world which is completely good, i.e., the World to Come.

By taking a lesson from the Gra, zt”l, who stated, “I have no Torah,” one will be empowered to overcome his negative inclinations, and will understand that the hardships he experiences have come upon him as a result of *bitul* Torah. He will then accept them lovingly. Our Sages tell us (*Berachot* 5a), that if one experiences tribulations, he should examine his actions. If he does not find any fault, he should ascribe his misfortunes to *bitul* Torah.

Unfortunately, the decreasing level of spirituality of the generations causes great damage, *rachmana litzlan*. It is true that each generation has its Torah luminaries, perfectly suited to lead the people, as it states (*Rosh Hashanah* 25b), “Yiftach in his generation was [as great as] Shmuel in his generation.” They are like previous Torah giants; they are also geniuses and holy people. Nonetheless, the *nisyonot* which we face today are much greater than those faced by previous generations.

Therefore, in order to surmount our tests, we should feel that we have not yet arrived at our goal. If we honestly believe that we are nothing, it will be easier for us to overcome the obstacles in our path and to toil in Torah. Then we will have some chance of achieving our aspirations.

The Patriarchs strove to minimize their achievements. Avraham Avinu is a prime example of this. Few achieved as much as he. He sat in the yeshiva learning throughout his life (*Yoma* 28b), and was called the “father of many nations” (*Bereishit* 17:5). He withstood ten tests, each more difficult than the previous (*Avot* 5:4). He taught everyone that this world has a Leader (*Bereishit Rabbah* 39:16). The entire Jewish nation came forth from him and he poured forth words of Torah (*ibid.* 95:2). He fulfilled even the rabbinical mitzvot (*Yoma* 28b). Nevertheless, Avraham said that he was but “dust and ashes” (*Bereishit* 18:27). Whenever he tried to emulate his mentors, Shem and Ever, he immediately thought how much greater they were than he himself.

Moshe Rabbeinu acted with similar humility. Despite Hashem’s testimony (*Bamidbar* 12:8) that “mouth to mouth do I speak to him,” when he compared himself to the Avot, he immediately said, “What are we?” (*Shemot* 16:7).

Conversely, we see that Adam Harishon took pride in himself, the handiwork of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the first to be created (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:14). For that reason, he thought that he would never fall to the level of committing a sin, since he was greater than every other creation in the world. He was sorely mistaken. He should have taken note of the

fact that the reptiles and insects were created before him (*Sanhedrin* 38a). This would have caused him to be humble, precluding sin. David Hamelech behaved otherwise. He had the same *neshamah* as Adam Harishon (*Sha'ar Hagilgulim*, Introduction 38), in fact, his entire life was donated to him by Adam (*Zohar* I, 91b). He said about himself (*Tehillim* 22:7), “But I am a worm and not a man.” In this manner, he rectified the sin of Adam Harishon.

Certainly in later generations, specifically in our long, bitter exile, each person should strive to regard himself as nothing in comparison to his friend. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 25b; *Yoma* 82b) exhorts us not to consider our blood redder than our friend’s.

In this day and age, arrogance is prevalent and causes much turmoil, especially in yeshivot. One should strive to avoid its pitfalls. If one regards himself as inferior to everyone else, he will not become conceited. We are already in the sixth millennium. The Gra said there is no Torah. If that is how he spoke of himself, what should we say about ourselves?!

This is hinted at in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 21:1), “Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and tell them.” Our Sages expound (*Yevamot* 114a) that “the great ones should constantly view themselves as little.” Further on, the pasuk states (*ibid.* 2), “Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a [dead] person among his people; except for the relative who is closest to him.” The *Chessed L’Avraham* explains that “the relative who is closest to him” refers to the Torah.

This means that one should feel humility concerning his Torah learning, just like one who is contaminated to a dead person feels humbled. In this manner, the Torah will endure within him and he will not become arrogant. The Gemara explains (*Shabbat* 83b; *Gittin* 57b) that “words of Torah endure only in one who kills himself for their sake, as it says (*Bamidbar* 19:14), ‘This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent, etc.’” Clearly one is obligated to eliminate every trace of pride,

which is considered as if he had killed himself, in order that his Torah should endure.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Our Sages, throughout the generations, made themselves small in comparison to previous generations. They stated, “If the previous ones were likened to angels, etc., we are but donkeys.” They likened themselves to a fingerprint in wax compared to previous generations. Just as an imprint in wax is easily erased, they bemoaned that their Torah was easily forgotten by them, which would not have happened to previous generations.
- They were careful not to feel pride in their Torah knowledge, since this may cause one to make mistakes. On the other hand, humility enables a person to acknowledge the greatness of Hashem.
- Furthermore, when a person is arrogant, he does not behave with caution. He may easily fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. He may fail to accept the Divine justice for the difficulties which befall him, forgetting that reward for mitzvot is reserved for the World to Come.
- If a person questions why he is faced with hardships, it is a sign of arrogance. A humble person understands that he doesn’t deserve anything at all. Everything he has is a free gift from Hashem. It is incumbent upon him to thank Hashem for every single moment, and every breath of life.
- We find that although Moshe Rabbeinu reached unbelievable heights, he stated shortly before his death that he had only just begun to fathom Hashem’s greatness. David Hamelech, too, nullified the greatness of his Torah learning, although one night of his learning was worth more than one hundred years of the learning of an experienced Torah scholar. Similarly, Shlomo Hamelech stated, “I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me.” We should take a lesson from great people, who minimize their deeds and are thus able to attain exalted heights in Avodat Hashem.

## BETWEEN MAN AND HIS FELLOW MAN



### RESPECTING OTHERS INCREASES THE HONOR OF HASHEM

Regarding the importance of treating one another with respect, the *Mesilat Yesharim* (Chapter 11) writes as follows: One cannot be a devoted servant of his Creator if he is concerned with defending his own honor.

This belief reinforces the concept that one who is concerned about his own personal honor, and does not aim to preserve the honor of Hashem, cannot be considered a faithful servant of Hashem. Conversely, when one utilizes one's appreciation of self-worth in order to serve Hashem, he is able to reach great spiritual heights, and Hashem's honor is magnified.

Chazal say, "Praised is one who arrives here [in the World to Come] with his studies in his hand" (*Mo'ed Katan* 28a; *Ketubot* 77b; *Bava Batra* 10b). This can be understood in the following way: Fortunate is one who reaches the World to Come and is spiritually complete, since he has used all of his potential and talents to increase Hashem's honor in the world, and not for his own gratification.

#### **Moshe Rabbeinu, Who was Meritorious and Brought Merit to the Masses**

One who respects his fellow man is also respected in the eyes of Hashem (see *Avot* 3:10). People will listen to what he has to say, even if he rebukes them. Regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, we find that (*ibid.* 5:18), "He

was meritorious and caused the masses to be meritorious, so the merit of the masses was to his credit.” Moshe did not seek to achieve prominence for himself. The greater he became, the more he sought to help his generation grow. He expressed this by saying (*Bamidbar* 11:29), “If only the entire nation of Hashem could be prophets!”

Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem (*Shemot* 33:18), “Show me Your glory.” At first glance, this seems strange. How did Moshe have the audacity to request to see Hashem’s glory? The Torah (*ibid.* 3:6) praises Moshe Rabbeinu for his modesty in hiding his face when he saw the burning bush. Furthermore, how can we understand Hashem’s response to Moshe (*ibid.* 33:20), “You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see Me and live”?

Every man is created with a soul, with its inherent value and magnitude, carved from under the Heavenly Throne (see *Zohar* I, 113a; Part II 29b). Man’s task is to elevate his soul in this world through learning Torah and doing mitzvot. Only after a person’s passing can he see the outcome of his efforts in this world, and to what extent he succeeded in elevating his soul during his lifetime. By bringing merit to the masses, a person can broaden the bounds of his soul without limit. This is due to the great *kiddush Hashem* which he has caused. All the worlds revel in the man who expands the bounds of the *Shechinah* by broadening the bounds of his soul. Based on this, Moshe’s request could be understood as follows: “Show me Your honor – show me the extent of the *Shechinah* that was placed within me, so that I can strive to magnify its glory.”

Hashem’s response to this was (*Shemot* 33:20), “You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see me and live.” The soul is closely connected to Hashem’s own glory. If man were to witness the great honor attached to his soul, which is connected to the holy *Shechinah*, he would immediately die. At the same time, it is important to realize that when our soul comes down to this world, its potential is confined within it. We have the capacity to actualize its inherent greatness by utilizing every moment

for learning Torah, doing mitzvot, and reaching out to others. Thereby, the *Shechinah's* honor is elevated.

Hashem further explained to Moshe (ibid. vs. 23) “You will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” Each person has the ability to expand the *Shechinah's* boundaries by utilizing his potential to elevate Hashem’s honor. However, this is possible only if one is “behind Hashem,” that he enhances Hashem’s glory and does not appropriate honor for himself.

Man’s purpose in the world is to increase the *Shechinah's* honor to the best of his ability. Even when he himself is awarded honor, he should immediately refer that honor to Hashem by making it clear that all of his achievements are but a gift from Him. A faithful servant of Hashem seeks to acknowledge Hashem’s sovereignty and feel dependent on Him.

Similarly, the author of the *Chovot Halevavot* writes as follows (*Sha’ar Habitachon*, Chapter 4), “Man does not merit the reward of the World to Come through his good deeds alone, but only if he also teaches others to serve Hashem and do good.”

Therefore, when one is learning diligently in yeshivah on his own, if he sees another person in need of assistance, he is considered haughty if he fails to help him. The pasuk states (*Yirmeyahu* 50:36), “A sword against the sorcerers; let them be shown to be fools.” Chazal say that the word **בַּדִּים** (sorcerers) refers to Torah scholars who learn Torah all alone (**בַּד** **בַּבַּד**), and do not share their learning with others (*Berachot* 63b; *Ta’anit* 7a; *Makkot* 10a).

Rather, a Torah scholar should strive to help others who are learning and impart love of Torah to them. These people will then progress in their studies and eventually teach many more students, thereby increasing the Honor of Heaven.

### **Noach, Who “Believed, Yet Did Not Believe”**

One should avoid learning from the actions of Noach, who saved only his own family from the Flood, but not the rest of his generation. Chazal

fault him for lacking *emunah*. The pasuk says, (*Bereishit* 7:7), “Noach, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives with him, went into the Ark because of the waters of the Flood.” Chazal explain (*Bereishit Rabbah* 32:6; *Rashi* 7:7): “Noach was from those who had little faith. He believed in Hashem, yet he did not fully believe that the Flood would come. Therefore, he did not enter the Ark until the waters compelled him to.”

My Rebbi, Rav Gershon Leibman, questioned how it is possible to suspect Noach of a lack of faith. After all, hadn’t he spent 120 years building the Ark so that everyone would notice what he was doing and be given the opportunity to repent (*Rashi, Bereishit* 6:14)? The people who saw him in the midst of construction would ask what he was building, and he would reply that if they failed to repent, Hashem would bring a great flood. Only those who did repent would be protected by the Ark.

Now that his warnings were finally being realized, and it was clear to all that his words were true, since the rain had begun, how can we conclude that the waters forced him into the Ark, and that he was “a man of little faith”?

In order to answer this question, we must examine the essence of Noach’s piety. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 6:8), “Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.” Kabbalah teaches that “finding favor” is an allusion to the fact that a person does not violate the *brit kodesh* of his *milah*. We also find this concept of “finding favor” with Yosef (*ibid.* 39:21).

It is well known that the forces of impurity reign mainly at night (*Zohar* III, 200a, 206b; Part II, 173). Therefore, it is especially at night that violations of the *oht brit kodesh* occur, leaving their mark during the day as well. However, those who study Torah at night are protected from this violation. As Reish Lakish states, Hakadosh Baruch Hu weaves a special “thread of favor” around all those who are occupied with Torah at night, which lasts throughout the daytime. Our Sages state that one who fears Hashem finds favor in His eyes, as it says (*Tehillim* 103:17), “And the favor of Hashem is forever on those that are G-d fearing.” I have seen that this

“thread of favor” continues to grace one who remains pure by not violating his *oht brit kodesh* and by guarding his eyes.

This is what is meant by the statement (*Bereishit* 6:8), “But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.” The people of the generation could not possibly find favor in Hashem’s eyes, due to the impurity that enveloped them (*Bereishit Rabbah* 27:2). But Noach was able to receive the light of purity since he had not sinned with the *oht brit kodesh*, and had also guarded his eyes. Therefore, a special “thread of favor” graced him throughout the day and night, and protected him from the evil generation of the Flood.

The greatness of Noach is described by the pasuk (*Bereishit* 6:9), “Noach walked with G-d.” Hashem protected him because he did not violate the *oht brit kodesh* and occupied himself with studying Torah. Some Sages, however, interpret this negatively (*Sanhedrin* 108a), since his achievements were only for his own sake, and not for the sake of others.

It is not sufficient for one’s piety to be manifested in his personal matters alone, or for his faith to remain buried in his heart. Rather, one should seek to influence others with his righteousness. Otherwise, when presented with a trial, he himself will be liable to stumble. When one’s righteousness and faith stays within his heart and are not expressed, they will not be sufficiently powerful to protect him (as will be explained later on, in the case of Adam Harishon). It is essential to actualize our faith and teach it to others.

However, this seems to be contradicted by Chazal’s statement “Do not publicly reveal what is in your heart” (*Kohelet Rabbah* 12:9; *Shochar Tov* 9:2). This means that one should not reveal his inner feelings. It is man’s nature to keep his secrets and inner feelings within, rather than revealing them. Yet, when there is a need to influence others, to rebuke them and bring them closer to Torah, the opposite approach is required. Then one should reveal his inner thoughts and feelings to others. For only words that come from within one’s heart can enter the heart of another (see

*Berachot* 7). If one reproves another person without heartfelt emotion, his reproof will fail to have effect and he will be unable to influence anyone.

The Torah teaches us that it is not enough to be a tzaddik, adorned with good attributes, if this remains only in one's heart. These fine qualities need to be expressed and realized. This can be compared to a new printing machine. If it is not operated and used to print written material, it will eventually rust and become ruined.

This was Noach's failing. Even though he exhibited great faith by spending 120 years building the Ark and warning onlookers that Hashem would soon bring the Flood, yet because he was afraid of making a fool of himself he refrained from imparting reproof with heartfelt passion.

Proof of the fact that his words were not heartfelt is that "words which emanate from the heart enter the heart." The fact that no one was influenced by Noach to repent proves that he himself did not have heartfelt faith. This is the reason that he did not enter the Ark when it began to rain, but only once it became impossible to remain outside.

This is hinted in the words **מי המבול** (the waters of the Flood), which have the same numerical value (adding one for the words themselves) as the combination of the words **אמונה** and **לב** (faith, and heart). The reason that Noach was lacking faith on that critical day, despite his labor throughout the past 120 years, was that although he had inner faith, he did not use it to influence others. He did not utilize his own appreciation for the truth to try to change the world for the better. Even though he did warn the people, he did not put his heart and soul into trying to change them.

Therefore, Noach is considered to have labored only for his own sake, and not for the sake of others. That is why he is called "one of little faith." This is held against him, since his behavior also had a negative effect on his own inner faith, causing him to fail his spiritual test. This is also alluded to by his name: *Noach* means *rest, tranquility*. He would rebuke his contemporaries calmly, without any expression of inner passion.

Indeed, the Attribute of Justice prosecuted Noach at the time of the Flood. It was only because Hashem had compassion on His universe and did not want to eradicate all of humanity that Noach and his family were saved. He was worthy of this favor because he preserved the *oht brit kodesh*. Chazal teach (*Zohar* I, 4a) that one who does so is not affected by evil decrees.

This is amazing! On the one hand, a person can be a great tzaddik, to the extent that the Torah itself testifies to his righteousness, yet, if he fails to use his strengths to influence others, his righteousness remains deficient. Influencing others benefits the person himself, as well. It is well-known that a person is influenced by his actions (see *Sefer Hachinuch*, Mitzvah 15). If one does not concern himself with teaching others with heartfelt feeling and enthusiasm, even if he is a great tzaddik, he himself may easily find his faith wavering and failing when faced with a trial.

This is why our Sages enthusiastically praised Rabbi Chiya saying (*Bava Metzia* 85b), “Great are the deeds of Chiya.” Because he actively sought to bring merit to others, he himself was influenced for the better by his teachings, to the extent that no one could come close to him (*ibid.*). He followed in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu. The more they shared their spiritual achievements and benefited others from their self-improvement, the more success they themselves experienced in serving Hashem and withstanding the tests with which they were faced.

This explains how Avraham Avinu succeeded in withstanding his final test, *Akeidat Yitzchak*, which was the most difficult test. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 22:12), “For now I know that you are a G-d fearing man.” Avraham’s service of Hashem was complete internally as well as externally. He acted upon his beliefs, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 22:3-6), “Avraham woke up early in the morning ... and the two of them went together.” This is because his heart was at one with his actions. Avraham expressed his faith in Hashem through his actions. He exerted himself to

rise early and demonstrated his faith throughout his journey to the *Akeidah*. The Ramban writes (*ad loc.*): “Only now I know,” – at first, Avraham’s fear of Heaven was complete in potential, but it had not yet been translated into action. This great act proved that his merit was complete.

### **Ahavat Chinam as the Rectification for Sinat Chinam**

I was recently approached by a man whose children all learn in kollelim and yeshivot; he himself is a *talmid chacham*. He complained to me about his financial troubles, and grumbled about his bad luck. He questioned the reason for his difficulties, to the extent that he came close to complaining against Hashem.

At first, it seemed strange to me how a person who learns Torah, gives *tzedakah*, and educates his children in the ways of the Torah, even spending large sums for the best education, could voice anger against Hashem. However, I realized that he has an angry temperament, and it is well-known that a person who allows his anger to control him is incapable of having proper respect for his fellow man. Whenever his personal honor seems at stake, he loses his temper. Anger has the destructive power of weakening a person’s faith. Thus, when his faith is later tested, he will not be able to stand up to the test. This was evident with the man who approached me.

On the other hand, when one is sensitive to others, he does not easily lose his temper. This is how our faith dictates us to behave. Our Sages teach (*Avot* 3:14), “Man is beloved, for he is created in the image of Hashem.” When we recognize man’s innate value, we have respect for each other and don’t become angry. Then, our benefit is two-fold. First of all, our words will be readily accepted, without resorting to shouting and getting angry. In addition, when faced with a trial or challenge, we will be granted the strength to withstand it. Conversely, when a person has no regard for the intrinsic honor of his fellow man, his own faith and values

are liable to weaken and become corrupted. “The main thing is not one’s learning, but rather – one’s actions” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:9).

Each person can merit recognizing Hashem’s existence by instilling faith within his heart. Yet, this is not enough. One needs to act upon his belief and share his faith with others through bringing merit to the masses and by keeping the Torah and mitzvot with great faith.

Our Sages say (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that Mashiah will come “when not a single coin remains in a person’s pocket.” How can we explain this? The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b). It is our job, as we strive to build the third Beit Hamikdash, to rectify this sin. But first we need to understand what “baseless hatred” means. How is it possible to hate others for no reason?

It seems that one who loves himself and spends his whole day involved with his personal needs without considering others can be regarded as one who hates others without reason. A person may smile at his friend, wish him “Shabbat Shalom,” and even chat with him, but if he does not truly care about his friend’s well-being, then his behavior is in the category of baseless hatred.

This concept is illustrated by the death of the disciples of Rabbi Akiva during the period between Pesach and Shavuot. They died because they failed to treat one another with proper respect (*Yevamot* 62b). There is no doubt that they did love each other and related respectfully to one other. Yet, since they were so engrossed in their Torah study, they did not feel that others might need them. Moreover, since they were all such great and righteous people, each one of them felt that the other could not possibly lack anything. They erred in failing to find out whether their colleagues did, in fact, need something which they could provide.

One must realize that most people do not readily let others know when they need something. This is why each person should be concerned about his friend, and should talk to him, taking interest in his welfare. This

way, he will be aware if his friend is in need, and he will be able to help him.

The word כבוד (honor) has the same numerical value as the word לב (heart). The reason that the disciples of Rabbi Akiva failed to treat each other with respect was because each one humbly assumed that his contemporaries could not possibly need anything from him. They therefore failed to seek to fulfill their friends' spiritual and material deficiencies.

However, it only appeared that they did not need any form of assistance. Each thought: What could a great disciple of Rabbi Akiva be lacking? However, each one did have a need that his colleague could have fulfilled. By not approaching their friends with true, loving concern and being attentive to their inner needs, the students demonstrated an element of neglect. Particularly because of their great stature, they should have exhibited more concern and true love for one another. As we know – Hashem is most stringent with His close ones (*Yevamot* 121b; *Bava Kama* 50a). They were punished because they mistakenly assumed, “Who am I to offer help, when he doesn't show any sign of need?”

### **One Should Share the Worries of his Heart**

Our Sages teach, “When one harbors a worry in his heart, he should discuss it with others” (*Yoma* 72a; *Sota* 42b). However, this requires someone who is willing to listen. This is the true meaning of *ahavat Yisrael*. A person only gains by making himself available to listen to his friend's troubles, even if it initially seems that his friend does not need him.

A person who is concerned only for himself and not for his fellow man is guilty of baseless hatred, and holds back the redemption. He fails to exhibit the responsibility which the Torah expects each of us to have toward our fellow Jew. The Torah teaches (*Vayikra* 19:18), “You shall love

your fellow Jew as yourself,” and our Sages explain, “This is a central principle of the Torah” (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4*).

Ahavat chinam, loving our fellow Jew as ourselves, brings the redemption. This is what our Sages meant in the previous citation (*Sanhedrin 97a*): “Mashiach will not come, until there is not a single coin remaining in a person’s pocket.” I would like to explain this in the following way. Mashiach will come only once everyone has shared all his wealth and means with others, leaving his own pocket empty. Likewise in spiritual matters, every person who serves Hashem will share his spiritual strengths with others, raising them to new spiritual heights. This is a fundamental principle in serving Hashem. One must exhibit the same consideration and care for his friend as he would for himself. By behaving in this way, we will bring the redemption closer.

Our Sages repeatedly exhort us to protect the dignity of our friend and to care for him, as it is written (*Bereishit 1:27*), “In the image of G-d He created him.” Hashem bestowed upon man the outstanding honor to be able to resemble Him through his own deeds and attributes. How can we resemble Hashem? Hashem cares for every single one of the billions of creatures on earth, providing them with their every need. Even greater is the way He cares for man, who is called His “handiwork” (see *Bereishit Rabbah 24:5*). Despite the fact that He supervises the entire universe, He cares personally for every one of us.

We are commanded to follow in the ways of Hashem. Our Sages say (*Sota 14a*), “Just as Hashem clothes the naked, so you should clothe the naked. Just as Hashem visits the sick, so you should visit the sick. Just as Hashem consoles a mourner, so you should console a mourner, etc.” It therefore follows that we must make every effort not to slight our fellow man. Hillel said (*Shabbat 31a*) that the entire Torah is based on one foundation: “Whatever is despicable to you, do not do to your friend.”

If Hashem Himself ascribes such importance to honoring another person, surely we should too. The disciples of Rabbi Akiva, who were

tremendous tzaddikim, felt that the other talmidim could not possibly need their help since they were on such a high level. Nevertheless, they were punished for not personally involving themselves with their colleagues to see whether they really did need help in some way. The fact that such great people were punished helps us understand how we should behave.

Datan and Aviram were very close friends, caring so greatly for one another that the Torah (*Shemot* 2:13) awards them with the title “men” (אנשים), which implies honor. Yet, since one of them lifted his hand to smite the other, although this was an isolated incident, and he didn’t even hit his friend, Moshe Rabbeinu called him “a wicked man.” How careful we must be.

Therefore, it is important to realize that the honor bestowed on man was not given in order that he glorify himself, rather, he should utilize it to honor the Torah and *talmidei chachamim*. Honoring others brings honor to Hashem, since the honor that Hashem has bestowed upon man reflects His honor. By accustoming oneself to honoring Hashem, a person will attain true faith in Him.

This is emphasized in Tehillim (104:31), where it says, “May the glory of Hashem endure forever, let Hashem rejoice in His creations.” Hashem’s glory is eternal, and He has no need for us to glorify Him. Yet, Hashem has given us the privilege and ability to give Him honor, from the honor which He has bestowed upon man.

The numerical value of אדם (man), forty-five, is equal to the numerical value of Hashem’s name ה-ו-ה-י, when its letters are enunciated and spelled out as syllables (20=וּדִי=י 6=אֵה=ה ,12=וּוּ=ו ,6=אֵה=ה) (see *Zohar* I, 34b). This is what is meant by, “Let Hashem rejoice in His creations.” We can explain this as follows. Man should rejoice in Hashem’s creations because he sees the honor of Hashem reflected in them. Moreover, man should

utilize the honor which Hashem has granted him only for His service. By acting in this way, one attains both inner and outer joy.

Every man is a world unto himself. Learning Torah can “create worlds,” which refers to man (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 3). In my opinion, each person was created as an individual in order to help others and share his wisdom with them. When a person achieves the awareness that he is Hashem’s handiwork, filling his own heart with *emunah*, it is incumbent upon him to help others attain this self-awareness as well. By sharing his wisdom with them and helping them gain merit he is “creating worlds.” He also helps them gain a greater appreciation of being the “handiwork of Hashem.” For we know that Hashem is considered a partner in the formation of every human being (*Kiddushin Rabbah* 30b; *Kohelet Rabbah* 5:13).

### **Adam Harishon Failed in his Obligation to Give Reproof**

This obligation that we have toward each other can help us understand the sin of Adam Harishon. Adam was given one mitzvah only: Not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. He recognized the truth of the mitzvah and was careful to observe it. However, he failed to properly transmit this commandment to his wife. This ultimately caused him to stumble and eat from the tree himself.

Chazal teach (*Sanhedrin* 29a), “One who adds, subtracts.” Adam was commanded only to abstain from eating from the tree, as it says (*Bereishit* 2:17), “But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you should not eat.” Yet, when he heard Chava telling the Snake that not only had they been commanded not to eat from the tree, but that they were also forbidden to touch it, he failed to correct her (*ibid.* 3:3). This shows that he had not accurately transmitted the mitzvah, and this was his error.

It is hard to imagine that one who had been fashioned by Hashem Himself could make such a mistake, especially since he did not even possess a *Yetzer Hara* at the time. Yet, the reason Adam was created as

an individual was in order to transmit Hashem's commandments precisely, without adding or detracting anything. Even Chava's claim, that it was necessary to add prohibitions in order to safeguard the commandment (see *Avot* 1:1), was incorrect, since the *Yetzer Hara* was not yet internalized within man. By choosing to add to the prohibition on her own accord, Chava detracted from the precise fulfillment of Hashem's commandment. Likewise, since Adam chose not to correct her, he was faulted for relying on his personal calculation and not adhering to Hashem's will.

It is insufficient merely to know what the mitzvot are; we must ensure that others understand them as well. Instead of correcting his wife and explaining her mistake to her, Adam remained silent. In the end, he was punished measure for measure, since she caused him to sin (*Nedarim* 32a). Instead of remaining at the level of "and they were not ashamed" (*Bereishit* 2:25), Adam and Chava realized that they were naked and were ashamed of one another. Instead of continuing to walk with Hashem in Gan Eden, Adam found himself running away and hiding from Hashem's presence (*ibid.*3:8).

The reason for this was because Adam failed to share the deeper understanding that he possessed in his heart and remained silent. He did this because he believed that his wife was righteous and had good intentions. However, he should have corrected her immediately on realizing her mistake. It would have been relatively easy to rid themselves of the *Yetzer Hara*, which was still external to them.

Noach failed to learn from Adam's mistake. He also failed to adequately reprove the members of his generation, which might have saved many more people. He did not merit this. This is a tremendous lesson for all future generations: We should take responsibility for our friends' spiritual and material well-being by guiding them correctly. By doing so, we will increase Hashem's honor in the world.

### ———— In Summary ————

- One should not further his own honor at the expense of his friend's. One who does so cannot be considered a loyal servant of Hashem. It is stated, "Praised is one who arrives here [in the World to Come] with his learning in hand" only regarding one who cares about the honor of his friend. He is considered a meritorious person who also brings merit to others, just like Moshe Rabbeinu. This is the meaning of Hashem's statement to Moshe, "And you shall see My back." This means that one should not use honor for his own aggrandizement, rather only "behind Me," only to bring honor to Hashem. By doing so, one attains goodness in this world and the next.
- One should do all he can to assist others, unlike Noach who thought only about himself, failing to save the members of his generation. It is surprising that Chazal consider Noach to be "a man of little faith." After all, he spent 120 years building the Ark and warning the generation of the oncoming Flood. Why did he himself refrain from entering the Ark when it started to rain, as if he didn't believe that Hashem would actually bring the Flood?
- Noach was a tzaddik; he guarded his eyes from seeing improper sights and protected the holiness of the *oht brit kodesh*. This caused him to find favor in the eyes of Hashem. Yet, he is faulted for failing to save his generation and not being sufficiently concerned with the honor of others, thus detracting from Hashem's honor.
- A person who allows himself to get angry, showing that he is concerned only for his own honor, is in danger of ultimately complaining against Hashem. This destroys his *emunah*.
- The pasuk says, "When one has a worry in his heart, he should discuss it with others." This also obligates us to listen to the concerns of another. Failing to do so delays the redemption.
- Rabbi Akiva's disciples loved each other greatly, yet since each thought that the other was on such a high level that he did not require assistance in any way, they were all punished. If even they were punished, how careful must we be.
- Only by helping one another, can we hasten the redemption. Adam Harishon erred in not reproving his wife, which in turn caused him to sin. This is a lesson

for all generations: We must correct others and honor them properly. By doing this, we will increase the honor of Hashem in the world.

## TRULY CARING FOR YOUR FRIEND

“There was a certain man from Ramatayim-Tzofim, from Mount Efrayim, whose name was Elkanah...He had two wives; one’s name was Channah and the second’s name was Peninah. Peninah had children, but Channah had no children” (*Shmuel I*, 1:1). Later on, we are told that Channah merited a son.

The *Navi* also describes how Peninah used to provoke Channah in order to cause her to pray for a child from the depths of her heart, so that Hashem would answer her (*Bava Batra* 16a; *Rashi* on *Shmuel I*, 1:6). Chazal testify that Peninah’s intentions were for the sake of Heaven, as it is written (*Shmuel I*, 1:6), “And she angered her rival in order that she be incited,” which *Rashi* explains was to cause her to pray.

Peninah was punished, even though her intentions were pure, as it is written (*ibid.* 2:5), “While the barren woman bears seven, the woman with many children is bereft.” The Midrash says that for every child that Channah bore, Peninah buried two, until Channah had given birth to four, while Peninah had simultaneously buried eight. When Channah was expecting her fifth child, Peninah was afraid of losing her last two sons. Then Peninah finally went to Channah and asked her forgiveness. Channah prayed to Hashem, entreating Him not to take Peninah’s two remaining children. Hashem answered, “Although they deserve to die, since you prayed that they remain alive, I will let them live, and they will be considered like your children.” Thus it says, “Until a barren woman gave birth to seven” (*Pesikta Rabbati*, end of Perek 43).

Why was Peninah punished so harshly? After all, she did have Channah’s best interests in mind. The explanation is as follows. The

pasuk says that when Eli (the Kohen Gadol) saw Channah praying, he thought that she was inebriated. He asked her, “How long will you be intoxicated? Remove your wine from yourself!” To which Channah replied, “No, my lord, I am a woman of broken spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink” (*Shmuel I*, 1:13-16). Rashi interprets the words, “No, my lord” to mean “You are not a lord in this matter, because you have revealed that you do not have divine inspiration, since that would have enabled you to perceive that I am not inebriated.” Further on, it states that Eli blessed her and said, “Go in peace and Hashem will grant you what you requested of Him.” His blessing was fulfilled, and she gave birth to Shmuel in the following year.

Eli prayed for Channah and was answered. Why didn't Peninah pray for her? Why did she think that provoking Channah was the best way to achieve her goal?

Perhaps we can answer this question in the following way. When one's actions are influenced by a personal bias, he is unaware of the pain that he may be causing his friend, even without meaning to do so. On the contrary, he is convinced that he is acting purely for the other's benefit. However, we should never cause another pain, no matter how pure our intentions. Only Hashem and great tzaddikim are able to test a person, knowing the precise measure of pain that is necessary for their benefit. Only great tzaddikim are able to understand all the ramifications of their actions and guarantee that they are solely for the other's benefit.

Since Peninah and Channah were both Elkanah's wives, it is impossible that Peninah's intentions in provoking Channah were purely to benefit her. The Radak in his commentary (*Shmuel I*, 1:6) says that when a man has two wives they are always called “rivals.” Even though Peninah believed that she was acting correctly, the fact that Hashem punished her proved that she experienced some personal pleasure in taunting Channah, as the pasuk states (*ibid.* 16:7), “Hashem sees into the heart.”

Peninah should have realized that she was biased and refrained from provoking Channah. As Chazal say (*Eiruvin* 100a), “It is better to sit [be passive] and not take action.” Instead of goading Channah to pray with greater intensity, Peninah should have prayed for her, in a way that Channah would not notice. She was punished because she chose the former course of action.

Regarding this, the *Navi* mentions Channah before Peninah: “One’s name was Channah and the second’s name was Peninah.” This shows that despite Channah’s barrenness, Elkanah loved her more than Peninah, and Peninah obviously realized it. Hence, it would have been almost impossible for Peninah to act purely *l’shem Shamayim*. Elkanah told Channah, “I am better to you than ten sons,” implying that he would do more good to her than to Peninah with her ten sons. Given this reality, Peninah must have felt some degree of pleasure in paining Channah, although she thought she was acting for her benefit.

We find the opposite in the relationship between the sisters Rachel and Leah. They were both married to Yaakov, yet while Leah was blessed with many children, Rachel failed to conceive. However, each sought the good of the other. Even though Leah had married Yaakov first, since Rachel had wanted to save her sister from embarrassment, she did not treat Rachel as a “rival.” Moreover, although Rachel was barren, Leah never provoked her to cause her to pray.

Rachel acted with similar love and consideration. When she asked Leah to give her the *duda'im* that Reuven had brought her, Leah acquiesced. But because Rachel knew that Leah was upset about this, she allowed Leah to be with Yaakov that night in exchange for the *duda'im*. Leah merited conceiving her son Yissachar that night. This shows that Rachel was truly concerned with Leah’s good, as she wanted that Leah should conceive that night.

We also see Leah’s righteousness in refraining from causing Rachel pain. Had she given Rachel the *duda'im* without stipulating any

conditions, it would have been a form of flattery toward Rachel for being Yaakov's favorite wife. Instead, Leah expressed displeasure that Rachel had not only "taken away" her husband Yaakov, but also wished to take the *duda'im*. This demonstrates that she did show displeasure toward Rachel, but she certainly never caused her pain, and she surely prayed for Rachel to conceive.

We read the account of Channah and Peninah on Rosh Hashanah (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 13:10), in order to remember how careful we must be to refrain from hurting another person. Our Sages teach (*Yoma* 85b) that sins between man and his fellow cannot be atoned for, even on Yom Kippur, until one appeases his friend. This is the case even when one seemingly acted for his friend's benefit, but because of personal interests, ended up by causing his friend pain. As we see from the story of Peninah, the punishment for such an action is very severe.

Furthermore, giving a friend bad advice with our own personal interests in mind is very severely punished. The *Mesilat Yesharim* (Chapter 11) states: Regarding giving advice, we find in *Torat Kohanim (Vayikra 19:14)*, "You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind" – before a person who is ignorant in a certain matter. If he asks you advice [regarding that matter], do not give him advice that could harm him. For example, do not tell him to sell his field and buy a donkey, and then go (in a roundabout way) and take it (the field) from him (because your original intention was to wrest the field from him). And if you say, "But I gave him good advice," Hashem knows what you really intended, as the pasuk says (*Vayikra 19:14*), "And you shall fear your G-d."

The *Mesilat Yesharim* teaches that one should always be honest when giving advice to another person, even if he has a personal interest in this matter. The Torah understands the way swindlers think. The pasuk does not refer to foolish people, whose bad advice is immediately apparent, but to those who are cunning, who give advice which would appear to benefit their friend, but in the end actually harms them and benefits

themselves instead. Many people stumble in this sin each day, driven by lust for money. The Torah clearly states their punishment, as it says (*Devarim* 27:18), “Accursed is one who causes a blind person to go astray on the road.”

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the *haftarah* of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah, Perek* 13, *halachah* 10). The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 22:4), “Avraham raised his eyes and gazed at the place from afar.” Our Sages say (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:2) that Avraham saw a cloud resting on the top of the mountain. Yitzchak also saw it, but Yishmael and Eliezer did not. Avraham then told them, “Since the donkey does not see it, and neither do you, remain here with the donkey.” Chazal tell us that the nation of Yishmael is compared to a donkey.

Why did Avraham refrain from allowing Eliezer and Yishmael to ascend the mountain with him? Why did it matter that they could not see the cloud, which was the manifestation of the *Shechinah*? After all, they had come this far with Avraham and Yitzchak despite their resembling a donkey. They had also overcome all the trials which the Satan had placed in their way until that point, as it says (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit* 247:99) that the Satan made a huge river to deter them. What harm would be caused by their assisting Avraham with the *Akeidah*? On the contrary, their witnessing the tremendous self-sacrifice of Avraham in performing Hashem’s will would have caused a great *kiddush Hashem* in the future.

This question can be explained in the following way. The fact that Yishmael and Eliezer failed to see the *Shechinah* although Yitzchak did, caused them great distress. Moreover, when they would see Yitzchak’s greatness at the *Akeidah*, they would be doubly pained at failing to reach such heights. Yitzchak would probably see even more revelations at the *Akeidah*, which they would be incapable of seeing.

Moreover, Avraham Avinu was concerned that Yitzchak’s perfection at the time of the *Akeidah* would be flawed if he were to see the youths

(Yishmael and Eliezer) at that time. He might experience a slight feeling of pride over having surpassed them in his spiritual achievements. While it is good to take pride in one's spiritual achievements, if Yitzchak had felt even a trace of personal interest at the time of the *Akeidah*, it would not have been performed in the most perfect way. This is the reason why Avraham preferred that the youths should remain in their place. Additionally, this would cause them to reflect on why they were unworthy of seeing the *Shechinah*, influencing them to do teshuvah.

Avraham did not intend to offend the youths by making them stay behind. On the contrary, he acted both for their benefit and for the benefit of Yitzchak, in order that that his *korban* be readily accepted before Hashem, untainted by being the cause of pain to another person. Hashem does not want us to do good deeds at the cost of slighting someone else or causing him pain.

For this reason, Avraham decided to refrain from action, not taking the youths with him up the mountain, but instructing them to remain below with the donkey. This implied, "Just as the donkey is not offended by staying here, neither should you be offended by not coming along and observing the *Akeidah*. In this way, you are helping prevent Yitzchak from experiencing undue pride by seeing you."

Avraham was most careful how he spoke to the youths, in order not to offend them in any way. We see that the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 22:5), "I and the youth will go yonder." This indicates that Avraham and Yitzchak merited spiritual elevation specifically because Avraham spoke in a pleasant manner in order not to offend Yishmael and Eliezer. The only way to achieve spiritual elevation is by avoiding any offense to others.

We see that this course of action subsequently helped Avraham attain the pinnacle of *yirat Shamayim*, as it says (*ibid.* 22:12), "For I now know that you are a G-d-fearing man, since you have not withheld (חשכת) your son, your only son, from Me." The word חשכת implies, "Even when you overcame your fatherly mercy in binding your son and were prepared to

slaughter him, you were careful not to bring חושך (darkness), upon your son, Yitzchak.” Had Yitzchak experienced a tinge of pride, due to the presence of Yishmael and Eliezer (realizing that only he saw the *Shechinah* and was chosen to be bound, but not they), he would not have reached the spiritual perfection required for the *Akeidah*.

This example is evidence of Avraham Avinu’s tremendous presence of mind. Even though he was on his way to do an exceedingly great deed, he still had the clarity of mind to be careful of small details. His only desire was to perform Hashem’s commandment perfectly, so that his sacrifice would find favor in His eyes from beginning to end. This way, the Satan would not be able to claim that *Akeidat Yitzchak* had been done at the cost of damaging another’s self-esteem. This is a very deep concept. Praised and fortunate is one who guarantees that all his actions, both mundane and those related to the service of Hashem, be done perfectly, without causing any trace of pain to another person.

This is the reason that the Torah says (*Shemot 20:23*), “You shall not ascend my Altar on מעלות (steps).” This signifies that one must be very careful not to bring sacrifices which are tainted with מעלות – haughtiness and pride, or personal interest. We sometimes see that disputants in an argument claim that they are fighting for the Torah’s sake, in order to strengthen their own positions. Each claims that he only wants to protect the Torah’s honor, although he really wants to protect his own interests.

It is not difficult to distinguish between an argument that stems from pure motivations, and one that does not. A person who has pure intentions will behave in a moderate manner, using logic to defend his position and taking care not to slight his opponents, which the Torah forbids. Chazal teach (*Kohelet 9:17*), “The gentle words of the wise are heard...”

However, if a dispute is causing another person harm, and the one instigating it has some financial or other personal interest in the matter, it is a sign that it is not “for Hashem’s sake” at all. I have arbitrated many

disagreements where one disputant quoted the Torah to support his arguments, when in fact this was only a ruse by which he could gain money in a “kosher” manner. This is certainly not the Torah way, and Hashem does not condone such slandering.

Our Sages gave us a sign to differentiate between these two types of dispute. They say (*Avot* 5:17), “Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will endure, but every dispute which is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure. An example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven is that between Hillel and Shammai. An example of a dispute that was not for the sake of Hashem is the argument of Korach and his followers.” If the two sides remain true friends, as in the case of Hillel and Shammai, who respected and honored each other, this is a sign that their dispute is for the sake of Heaven. However, if the two sides are enemies and harbor ill will toward one another, as in the case of Korach, who was ready to stone Moshe, it is a sign that their intentions are not pure, and the Satan is instigating this dispute. This holds true in all cases.

This explains why Peninah was punished, despite the fact that she acted with almost completely pure intentions in provoking Channah. Peninah provoked and taunted her, but Channah could not reply; she only cried within her heart. She did not attempt to respond and explain the reason that she had not conceived. This certainly cannot be called “a dispute for the sake of Heaven” since there was only one party. Peninah taunted and teased, but Channah remained silent.

In fact, this was “a dispute that was not for the sake of Heaven,” which can neither endure, nor have a constructive outcome. Peninah’s punishment proved that she was at fault. It was only in Channah’s merit that Peninah’s last two sons remained alive. From here we learn how important it is to preserve peace and good relations at all times, as opposed to achieving our goals by causing pain to others.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Peninah and Channah were both Elkanah’s wives; Peninah had children while Channah did not. Peninah caused Channah pain, and was therefore punished with the death of almost all of her sons. Although her intentions to incite Channah to pray for children were pure, Peninah did hurt Channah, her “rival,” and this was unjustified. Instead of trying to induce Channah to pray, she herself should have prayed for Channah. When one hurts another person, no matter how pure his intentions, he deserves punishment. This is the case even if one just gives his friend advice that is tainted with his own subjectivity, without explicitly meaning to trip him up.
- We read the account of Channah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah in order to teach us how important it is not to cause another person pain, even if he had good intentions.
- On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the account of the *Akeidah*, in which we see how careful Avraham was with the honor of Eliezer and Yishmael. In asking them to remain with the donkey, he was careful to explain that he had no intention of slighting them; on the contrary, it was for their own good. Moreover, by remaining with the donkey, they were contributing to the perfection of the *Akeidah*.
- Even though Peninah’s intentions were mostly good, her conduct was considered “a dispute not for the sake of Heaven.” Peninah provoked Channah, but Channah did not attempt to respond, explaining why she had not borne children. There was only one party in this dispute. As proof that this was a dispute that would not endure, Peninah’s sons died, while only Channah was granted children. Peninah’s last two sons stayed alive only in Channah’s merit. This teaches that we should distance ourselves from conflict, pursue peace, and exhibit love for one another.

## AVOIDING PERSONAL INTERESTS

When Channah brought her son, Shmuel, to Eli Hakohen, she said, “This is the child that I prayed for” (*Shmuel I*, 1:27). Our Sages comment on this pasuk in the name of Rabbi Elazar (*Berachot* 31), “Shmuel decided the law in the presence of his teacher. Eli (the Kohen Gadol) had told the people to call a Kohen to slaughter an offering. Shmuel saw them looking for a Kohen, and asked them, ‘Why are you looking for a Kohen to slaughter [the offering]? Anyone may slaughter a sacrifice.’ They brought him to Eli.

“Eli asked Shmuel, ‘From where do you know that anyone is permitted to slaughter?’

“Shmuel replied, ‘Does it say: And the Kohen shall slaughter?’ It says: And the Kohanim...shall bring the blood... (*Vayikra* 1:5). The Kohen’s job begins when he receives the slaughtered animal, and as such, one who is not a Kohen may slaughter.’

“Eli said to Shmuel, ‘Indeed you have spoken well, yet, you decided the law in the presence of your teacher, and whoever does so is deserving of death.’

“Channah came and cried before Eli, ‘I am the woman who stood before you’ (*Shmuel I*, 1:26), and pleaded with Eli that he not kill Shmuel.

“He told her, ‘Let me punish him, and I will pray to Hashem that he grant you a son better than he.’

“She replied, ‘It is for this son that I prayed.’”

This exchange between Channah and Eli requires explanation. If Shmuel did indeed deserve to die, why did Channah persist in convincing Eli to exempt him from punishment? It is even more surprising that Eli agreed to forgo his honor and acquiesce to her request.

Our Sages say (*Midrash Shmuel* 3): Rabbi Yirmeyah said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak, “Each day, a Heavenly Voice would be

heard throughout the world, saying: *A tzaddik named Shmuel will soon arise.* Every woman who bore a son would name him Shmuel. At first, they would infer from his actions that he was the tzaddik referred to, but then they realized that he was not. When Channah's son Shmuel was born, people saw how he acted and understood that he was the tzaddik. This is the meaning of the phrase (*Shmuel* I, 1:23): 'But may Hashem fulfill His word.'"

Eli intended to punish Shmuel by death, because he had "decided the law in the presence of his teacher." Yet, after Channah told him, "It is this lad that I prayed for," and that this is the lad that the Heavenly Voice referred to, Eli could not have Shmuel put to death since that would have invalidated Hashem's intentions. Channah also added (*ibid.* 1.28), "Furthermore, I have dedicated him to Hashem; all the days that he lives he is dedicated to Hashem." Rashi comments on this, "You have no permission to punish him, since Hashem has the status of a borrower, because I 'lent him out' to Hashem, to be totally dedicated to His service, and He needs thereafter to return him to me."

Channah's arguments presented Eli with a great challenge. On the one hand, it seemed that there was no doubt that Shmuel deserved to die, since he had decided the law in the presence of his teacher. On the other hand, Eli realized that perhaps his judgment was tainted by personal interest. Perhaps his real intention was to have Shmuel put to death so that he would not succeed Eli as the next judge of Bnei Yisrael instead of his own sons, Chofni and Pinchas. If that indeed was his motivation, then he would have been wrong to have Shmuel put to death. Moreover, by doing so, he would be guilty of preventing the fruition of Hashem's plan, of having this boy become the prophet. Realizing this, Eli understood that he should refrain from punishing Shmuel and instead adopt the behavior of "be still and do not take action."

Eli demonstrated tremendous greatness in withstanding this difficult trial, which exhibited his integrity both in his interpersonal relationships,

as well as in his obligations to Hashem. We read this portion on Rosh Hashanah (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 13:10). The reason for this is to remind us to take stock of our conduct toward others. We may have made personal gains at the expense of others. Or we may have made a decision based on personal interests, but rationalized that this decision was supported by halachah. We should realize that we will be held accountable for these actions.

This idea is also illustrated by the following example. We see that even though Peninah had good intentions in provoking Channah, she was punished by the death of almost all of her sons. This is because she caused Channah pain. Since the two women were “rivals,” wives of the same husband, Peninah must have felt some measure of pleasure when provoking her to pray. Peninah should have been aware of that.

In contrast to this, Eli HaKohen demonstrated an incredible level of greatness. When Channah asked for a blessing that she be given a son through her husband Elkanah the prophet, she surely aspired to be granted that son which the Heavenly Voice was announcing daily, who would in the future lead the Jewish people.

Eli was surely disappointed at the thought that someone else would lead Bnei Yisrael and be the *Navi*, instead of himself or his sons. Yet he overcame his personal interests and prayed to Hashem with all his heart to grant Channah her request. The fact that his prayer was answered is proof that it was sincere and wholehearted.

This is the reason that Channah told him, “Just as you overcame your personal interests concerning your sons when I asked you to pray for me, please overcome your anger now as well, and do not punish the lad, who is destined to lead Israel. Please go beyond the letter of the law and forgive him. True, as an individual, he may be deserving of death, but how can you ignore Klal Yisrael’s need for him?”

Upon reflection, Eli’s second encounter with Channah posed a much greater trial than the first. The first time, although he overcame his

personal aspirations and prayed for her wholeheartedly, and was even sure that his heartfelt blessing would be realized, there was still room to doubt that this son would be the foreseen prophet.

However, the second time, it was already obvious that Shmuel was the son announced by the Heavenly Voice, because he had remembered the law when his teacher had not. Moreover, everyone recognized that he was holy. It must have been particularly difficult for Eli to overcome his anger and still the inner voice which urged him to give Shmuel the death penalty, thereby enabling his sons to become leaders after him. Yet, despite this, he managed to rise above all subjectivity, and refrained from doing so. This was because he suspected that his judgment might have been influenced by personal interests.

I was once faced with a similar test. A group of wealthy people asked for permission to give a *hechsher* with my name to their products in order to increase their sales. They offered me a considerable sum of money in exchange, adding that it would be a pity for me to pass up this opportunity for such a profitable income, and instead have a different *kashrut* organization benefit.

My first inclination was to agree. What could be wrong with giving a *hechsher* to these products? There would be reliable *kashrut* supervisors overseeing everything and I could use the money for the benefit of our institutions. Immediately, though, I changed my mind. Giving a *hechsher* could have negative and harmful repercussions. People might prefer my certification over the accepted certifications, causing a loss to those organizations. The Satan was confusing me with all kinds of arguments for each side. On the one hand, I was eager to use the money to help our institutions, but on the other hand, I understood that I might harm other *kashrut* organizations by giving this *hechsher*.

Finally, I made an honest accounting of the matter. Did I have pure intentions in wishing to give this *hechsher*, to ensure that the products'

*kashrut* status would indeed be superior, or did I have an ulterior motive, to use the money for my institutions, for my own benefit?

I came to the conclusion that the latter was true, and it was nothing but the Satan's ploy to create dissention within the Jewish people. An act can be called *l'shem Shamayim* only if there are no personal interests involved. In this case, not only would I be encroaching on the business of others, but I would also be involved in slander, jealousy, haughtiness, self-aggrandizement, and creating conflict. Such a decision certainly cannot be termed "for the sake of Heaven."

I declined the offer, since I did not feel that it would be right for me to benefit by harming others in such a way. I felt it was especially important not to discredit other *hechsherim* since there were many families who supported themselves through giving a *hechsher* to those products.

Baruch Hashem, I was extremely happy with my decision. I did not listen to the *Yetzer Hara*, who was making me visualize great *yeshivot* being built if only I were to accept this offer. I realized that building Torah institutions at another's expense can give no pleasure to Hashem.

One should be aware that he is obligated to carefully investigate each decision he makes, and the decisions of the community as a whole. He must ensure that such decisions do not harm other people. An act which seems worthy, but causes other people harm, is not in line with Hashem's will. We should strive to act purely *l'shem Shamayim*, and remain "innocent in the eyes of Hashem and Yisrael."

### ————— In Summary —————

- Eli HaKohen decreed to have Shmuel put to death since he had decided the law in the presence of his teacher, saying that a non-Kohen may slaughter sacrifices. It was only due to Channah's pleas that he agreed to exempt Shmuel from punishment. Yet, if Shmuel did indeed deserve the death penalty, what right did Channah have to request his pardon? Moreover, how could Eli consent to pardon him?

- Channah explained to Eli that Shmuel was the great prophet referred to by the Heavenly Voice. If this were the case, and Shmuel was indeed supposed to live, it was possible that Eli's decision to have Shmuel put to death stemmed from his self-interest in having his sons Chofni and Pinchas succeed him as leaders of Klal Yisrael, rather than Shmuel.
- It was for this reason that Eli suppressed his own desires. Even though Eli would have been acting correctly in giving Shmuel the death penalty, he realized that since he might be biased, he would be wise to refrain from punishing Shmuel and should instead forgive him. In doing so, he exhibited incomparable greatness, even more than when he had agreed to pray that Channah be given a son in the first place. At that time, it was still unclear if this son would be the prophet referred to by the Heavenly Voice or not. It seems that Eli prayed for Channah in order not to be tainted by any form of self-interest in the matter.
- We read this *haftarah* on Rosh Hashanah to remind each one of us to repair any damage that we may have caused during the course of the year in our interpersonal relationships. The penalty for inflicting pain on one's fellow Jew is extremely harsh. We learn the severity of this offense from the example of Peninah, who, despite her good intentions, inflicted pain on Channah, and was punished greatly by burying most of her sons in her lifetime.

## KAMTZA'S PART IN THE DESTRUCTION OF YERUSHALAYIM

The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (*Gittin* 55b). Chazal relate that there was a man who had a friend called Kamtza, and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a banquet and asked his servant to invite his friend Kamtza. Instead, the servant accidentally invited Bar Kamtza, his enemy!

When the man saw Bar Kamtza sitting at his banquet, he was infuriated. He exclaimed, "Aren't we enemies? What are you doing here? Leave the banquet immediately!" Bar Kamtza answered, "Since I'm here, please let

me stay, and I'll pay you for everything that I eat and drink." The host refused. Bar Kamtza offered to pay for half of the banquet, and even for the whole banquet, but the host still refused. He had Bar Kamtza evicted by force.

Bar Kamtza said, "Since the Sages were present but did not protest, I will go and inform on them to the emperor." He told the emperor that the Jews were rebelling against him, and to prove that this was so, Bar Kamtza advised him to send an animal to be offered as a sacrifice in the Beit Hamikdash and he would see that the Jews would refuse to offer it.

The emperor sent a choice calf with Bar Kamtza to be sacrificed. On the way back to Yerushalayim, Bar Kamtza made a blemish in its lip, or some say in its eyelid. These are both considered a blemish invalidating the sacrifice by Jews, but not by non-Jews. The Sages wished to sacrifice it anyway, in order not to antagonize the emperor, but Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas objected, saying that it would set a precedent for sacrificing blemished animals. The Sages then wished to kill Bar Kamtza, to prevent him from telling the emperor that his sacrifice had been rejected. Again, Rabbi Zechariah objected, saying that it would set a precedent to execute a person who makes a blemish on a consecrated animal.

Some say that both Kamtza and Bar Kamtza caused the destruction of Yerushalayim. Why both? At first glance it would seem that while Bar Kamtza was indeed at fault, as well as the host, Kamtza was entirely out of the picture. Kamtza was nothing but the host's good friend, whose only "sin" was that his name was similar to that of Bar Kamtza.

The answer lies in the setting of the story. "The host had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza." Had there only been the enemy Bar Kamtza, but not the friend Kamtza, the servant wouldn't have made any mistake. Even had he accidentally invited Bar Kamtza, it wouldn't have been in place of Kamtza. The host might not have gotten so angry and he might have even made up with him. The fact that the host saw Bar

Kamtza sitting in the place reserved for Kamtza is what really aroused his fury.

From this account, we should take note that whenever there is strife, no one can claim that he is blameless because he was not directly involved. This is because every argument has a cause. Even though a person might not be directly involved, it doesn't mean that he should not do anything about it. He should try to get to the root of the cause.

This we see from the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Even though Kamtza wasn't even present at the banquet, part of the blame for the disgraceful scene which took place there can still be placed on him. As a friend familiar with the nuances of the host's social life, he should have taken the initiative to intervene, and tried to make peace between Bar Kamtza and the host. He should have considered the possibility that the similarity between their names could cause negative repercussions. Therefore, he should have made the effort to attempt to negotiate peace between them, way before the banquet took place.

Particularly since Kamtza wasn't himself involved in the feud, he should have negotiated between them to establish peace. The host, because of his hostility toward Bar Kamtza, would never have taken the initiative in making peace, but Kamtza, who was impartial, could have effectively done so. Since Kamtza failed to do anything to end the fight, Chazal also blame him for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

Another lesson we learn from the tragic events which transpired at the banquet is the severity of the sin of flattery. Even though the Sages were present, they did not intervene or admonish the host for shaming his unwanted guest, who was even willing to pay for the banquet. They ignored the public humiliation of Bar Kamtza because they wanted to stay on good terms with the host. This showed that they did not really care that Bar Kamtza was being mercilessly shamed, nor did they care about the continuing hostility between the two parties. Had they cared, they

would have at least attempted to stop the argument. By remaining passive, they also are blamed for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

It is astounding to note the magnitude of the hatred that prevailed at that time. Although the Sages were in a position to reprove the host and stop him from shaming an innocent person in public, they chose to remain silent.

Hashem punished them measure for measure (*Sanhedrin* 90). He caused that their downfall should come about specifically through a Torah scholar of the stature of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas, who objected to bringing the sacrifice in opposition to his colleagues. This behavior contradicted their previous behavior. First, they behaved leniently by not defending and helping Bar Kamtza, yet afterwards they behaved stringently by not allowing the sacrifice to be brought. This led to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the ultimate cessation of sacrifices.

From here we learn that when there is an ongoing dispute between two parties, we should try to make peace between them. If we fail to do so, we will also be considered guilty of contributing to the argument and the resulting consequences.

## **Mourning the Destruction**

On the Shabbat after Tishah b'Av, we read the *haftarah* called “*Nachamu*” (*Yeshayahu* 40:1), “Take comfort, take comfort, My people” (see *Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 13:19). Someone who has experienced terrible hardships is in need of consolation. Therefore, if a person grieves and mourns over the destruction during the nine days preceding Tishah b'Av, he can be comforted afterwards. However, if he has not mourned, he does not require comforting, and has no need for Hashem’s consolation and promise of hope for the future.

The consolation itself reminds and obligates us to realize that we are still in *galut*. We are still in mourning, caused by baseless hatred and lack

of Torah study, and we have not yet merited true solace. If we feel no need for consolation, it is a sign that our mourning was superficial; we did not sufficiently grieve over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The damage caused by the destruction still exists, both in our interpersonal relationships and in our connection with Hashem.

We should realize that dissension between people may cause the destruction of whole cities. During this period of mourning, we should do our best to correct these faults and dispel all arguments, so that we will not be held accountable for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. As it is written (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1), “Every generation which has not merited the building of the Beit Hamikdash, is considered as if they themselves destroyed it.”

Unfortunately, sometimes we argue or instigate a fight with others, fortifying ourselves with all kinds of claims that the argument is really “for the sake of Heaven.” By rationalizing in this way, we fail to see that we should put an end to the dispute. We even add fuel to the fire by saying that it’s all for the sake of Heaven. Rather, we should heed our Sages who teach (*Avot* 1:13; 4:5), “One who utilizes the ‘Torah’s crown’ for his own purposes, forfeits his world.” How much more serious is the punishment of one who uses the Torah to cause strife and animosity between fellow Jews.

I am certainly not referring to great Torah scholars, who wage the Torah’s battle against those who seek to uproot all that our nation holds dear. I am talking about reckless people, who neither possess knowledge of Torah nor good manners, but use the Torah to promote their own interests. They stir up arguments and hatred between people, and no one attempts to make peace. Much damage befalls the world as a result.

As an example, imagine that Reuven has a friend called Shimon, and an enemy called Levi. Shimon does not intervene in the feud between them. Later, one might observe Shimon and Levi sitting side by side, lamenting the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash that was caused by Kamtza and Bar

Kamtza, while they themselves are guilty of the same sin. On the following Shabbat, when they hear the *haftarah* of *Nachamu* being read in the Beit Hakeneset, do they deserve to be comforted if they themselves continue to exhibit the same form of hatred?

Megillat Eichah (1:1) opens with the lament, “Alas, she sits in solitude! The city that was greatly populated...” We learn from this that each person sat in solitude, without caring for the next person, despite the fact that the city was full of people. This caused Yerushalayim to be ultimately destroyed and left barren. The land cannot tolerate disunity, as the *pasuk* states (*Vayikra* 18:25), “The land became contaminated and I recalled its iniquity upon it; and the land disgorged its inhabitants.”

Peace and unity are vital. Let us not stand idly by when we see two people estranged in bitter hatred against one another. By taking action to make peace and prevent animosity within our communities and the Jewish nation as a whole, we will surely merit the coming of Mashiach.

### ————— In Summary —————

- It is surprising that Chazal place the blame for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash on Kamtza as well as on Bar Kamtza. After all, Kamtza, the host’s good friend, seemed not to be involved in the story. The explanation is that when we see two people involved in an ongoing dispute, we should do whatever we can to make peace between them. Failure to mediate a fight can be considered tantamount to supporting it. Since Kamtza was the host’s close friend, he should have attempted to make peace between the host and Bar Kamtza, even before the banquet. By failing to do so, he is also blamed for causing the destruction. It was the fact that he was the host’s good friend that caused the host to get angry at Bar Kamtza when he saw him in the place that he had reserved for Kamtza.
- The Sages were also considered blameworthy by not protesting the host’s behavior. Their desire to flatter and stay on good terms with him, even at the cost of remaining silent in the face of terrible injustice, wrought tragedy and destruction.

- This teaches us the great importance of bringing peace between the members of a dispute. When one is in a position to make peace between others, but refrains from doing so, he is also held accountable for the argument and is deserving of punishment. If we succeed in learning this lesson, we will certainly merit witnessing the comfort of Zion and Yerushalayim.

## LESSONS FROM THE PE'OT OF THE HEAD AND THE FIELD

**THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN IN HONOR OF MY DEAR FRIEND, RABBI NISSIM BIGAOU, ZT”L, WHO WROTE A WONDERFUL VOLUME ON THE MISHNAIC TRACTATES WHICH DEAL WITH THE LAWS OF THE FIELD. YET BEFORE HIS WORK WAS PUBLISHED, RABBI NISSIM WAS SUMMONED TO THE HEAVENLY COURT. MAY HIS SOUL BE BOUND UP WITH THE LIVING, UNTIL MASHIACH COMES.**

In this essay, as per Rabbi Nissim’s request, I dealt with the sanctity of the *pe’ot* of the head, and also explained the mitzvah of leaving a portion of the field unharvested for poor people.

Hashem made man from the earth, as it says (*Bereishit* 2:7), “And Hashem Elokim formed man from the dust of the earth...” Rashi says in the name of Chazal (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 3) that Hashem gathered soil from all over the world to create man, so that wherever he would die, the earth would accept him for burial. Hashem infused man with a living soul, which the Kabbalists explain has a most lofty essence, because “when one blows, he blows from his own being.”

By endowing man with such a superior soul, a “part” of Hashem Himself, He made man the crown of Creation. Man is considered a partner of Hashem when he emulates Him through his deeds, as Chazal teach, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful. Just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate.” By emulating Hashem

man is able to be connected to Him, through his soul, which comes from Him. The soul enables man to resemble Hashem perfectly, just as a photograph taken by an expert photographer bears an exact likeness to the subject.

Hashem anticipated that man would sin and have to die. Therefore, he formed man from earth taken from the four corners of the globe, so that when he would die, the earth would inter him. Since Hashem knew that man would ultimately sin, He gave him a G-dly soul, which would guide him to always maintain his connection with Him, and seek to emulate His ways.

When man sinned in eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Hashem did him a great kindness in not taking away that Divine portion, the soul which He had placed within him. Had he done so, man would have died immediately. He allowed man to retain his Divine spark.

However, after man sinned, his situation changed. Before the sin, man could choose only good. After the sin, when the evil inclination entered him, he possessed free will to choose between good and evil. Therefore, it became incumbent upon him to fight the *Yetzer Hara*, which attempts, with great force, to distance him from Hashem. Above all, the *Yetzer Hara* attempts to lure man into sin so that he should lose his inherent G-dly image, and resemble an animal that has no G-dly soul, only a living spirit.

When man fails to maintain his connection with Hashem, he is in danger of going astray. When he is blessed with riches, he is liable to say, "My strength and the might of my hand brought me all this wealth!" (*Devarim* 8:17), forgetting that everything comes from Him.

Similarly, one may become engrossed in himself and in his own gratification, failing to emulate the G-dly attribute of compassion, as it says, "Just as I have compassion for the poor, so should you have compassion for the poor." The world exists only in the merit of the kindness and concern that man exhibits to his fellow, just as Hashem

conducts the world with kindness and compassion, as it says (*Tehillim* 89:3), “The world is established with kindness.”

To help man remember that Hashem created him in His image, so that he can emulate Him by behaving compassionately with others, we are commanded to leave *pe’ot* on our head. The numerical value of the word פאה is equal to that of Hashem’s Name אלהי-ם. Thus, when we see our friend’s *pe’ot*, we should remember that he was also created in Hashem’s image. Just as Hashem has great compassion for every person He created in His image, we should also have compassion for our fellow man.

It is this Divine image that elevates us to a higher level than all the other creatures on earth. The human race, if bereft of spiritual qualities, would be no different from animals, since both were created from the earth. We are superior to animals only because we possess a soul created in Hashem’s image, which gives us the ability to emulate Hashem and come close to Him.

Moreover, recognizing the G-dly image in which we were created, which is represented by the *pe’ot*, helps us eliminate any feelings of pride that we might have. This is because apart from the divine spark within us (our *neshamah*), we were created with a physical body, which was taken from the earth. When we contemplate that this physical body will return to the earth, upon our death, any feelings of pride will be stilled.

Furthermore, the word *Elokim* refers to the Attribute of Divine Justice. When we fail to appreciate and honor the Divine image which we and others possess, hinted to by the *pe’ot*, and fail to act kindly with one another, we arouse the Attribute of Divine Justice. This is hinted to by the fact that the *gematria* of the Name אלהי-ם is the same as the word פאה. Perhaps one reason that the *pe’ot* are at the sides of our head is so that they should be easily visible. This reminds us that we were created in Hashem’s image and should therefore emulate Him by helping others and supporting them in their time of need.

Chazal say (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4), “You shall love your fellow man as your own self – this is a major principle of the Torah.” A fundamental aspect of Judaism is the kindness that we show to one another. Thus we emulate Hashem’s attributes: just as He is merciful, so too should we be merciful. When we also realize that we were created from the earth, and will eventually need to stand in judgment before Hashem and account for all our deeds, we will be further motivated to keep the entire Torah.

These ideas help us understand how we can acquire greater *yirat Shamayim* just by looking at the *pe’ot*. *Pe’ot* help us to perceive Hashem’s existence and to realize the purpose of man’s creation.

### The Sanctity of the Pe’ot and Beard

We know that one needs to wash his hands after touching his hair. I would suggest the following reason: The word שער (hair) has the same letters as the word רשע (evil person). The *kelippah* desires to reside in a person’s head, in his mind, in order to confuse him and distract him from his service of Hashem. Therefore, in order to prevent the influence of the *kelippah* in our hair, we need to wash our hands after touching it.

This is the reason that many tzaddikim shave all of their hair except for the *pe’ot*. Both the *pe’ot* and the beard have tremendous sanctity. The *pe’ot* are similar to the beard, which the holy Zohar calls “*dikna kadisha* – a holy beard.” Tzaddikim try to prevent any hair falling from their beard, because all bounty from the celestial worlds comes to us in its merit.

The Zohar Hakadosh mentions that the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy are associated with the beard. The *pe’ot* of the head are placed next to the beard so that the Attribute of Divine Justice that they represent should be transformed to Mercy. Of course, this will occur only if one recalls his mission in life and reflects on what Hashem demands of him. This way, he will be reminded of his transience, and will not mistakenly attribute his success to his own abilities. Then he will not

follow the dictates of the *Yetzer Hara*, who wishes to make him lose his portion in the World to Come.

We should remember that man was created in the image of Hashem in order to emulate Him by showing compassion toward others. The world is sustained by man loving his fellow, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 99:3), “The world is established through kindness.”

But the very fact that Hashem made man in His image raises a question. Is it possible to say that Hashem has an image or likeness? When the Torah teaches that we are created in the “image of Hashem” it refers to the capacity which Hashem gave us to resemble Him through our actions. Hashem placed the *pe’ot* on either side of the head, so that we should see them and remember that *pe’ah* is linked to Elokim, hinting to the Divine image inherent within each one of us. It is incumbent upon us act with compassion to others in order to transform the Attribute of Divine Justice, signified by Elokim, to that of Compassion. Otherwise, justice will prevail in the world.

The word **כסף** also has the same numerical value as the word **זהב** (gold). The mitzvah of loving our fellow Jew should be as precious to us as gold. This also teaches that we should not fall prey to the pursuit of money and forget Who has given us all our wealth and success. Our *pe’ot* should help us remember Hashem, not money.

When one sees the *pe’ot* on another’s face, he recognizes his friend’s Divine image and humbles himself before it, extending him assistance and love. This explains the statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 127b) “Welcoming guests is greater than welcoming the *Shechinah*.” When we welcome a guest, we are in effect recognizing his Divine image represented by his *pe’ot*, and it is as if we have welcomed the Divine presence. Otherwise, it would be considered that we “turn our eyes away from beholding the *Shechinah*,” which disgraces the *Shechinah*.

Perhaps we can now explain why Hashem did not give us the Torah until we became unified as “one person with one heart.” This was

essential since the whole foundation of the Torah is the mitzvah of loving our neighbor (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4). This mitzvah enables us to have complete faith in Hashem (the first commandment given to us), and to fulfill the many mitzvot between man and his fellow (given in the second half of the Ten Commandments), such as not to murder, not to steal, etc.

For this reason, even before receiving the Torah, Hashem helped us recognize the G-dly image on the face of each and every Jew. The Torah helps us translate that recognition into concrete action through its mitzvot. It was only after the Jewish people understood the lessons of *pe'ot*, that they were able to become unified “as one man with one heart.” It was then that the *Yetzer Hara* was uprooted from their hearts, and they reached the level of Adam Harishon before the sin.

Only afterwards, did Hashem reveal Himself to us at Har Sinai. When people feel unity between themselves, they are spurred to exercise compassion toward one another, thus emulating Hashem. Then they will live with the recognition that “I am Hashem, your G-d,” which helps to prevent a person from transgressing interpersonal commandments, such as not to steal.

Additionally, by recognizing the Divine image in others, as represented by the *pe'ot*, we avoid feeling undue pride in our accomplishments. This helps us fulfill the commandment “You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence.” Unfortunately, there are people who devote their lives to the service of false gods.

Consequently, contemplating the *pe'ot* serves these two important purposes. First, *pe'ot* help us be aware of Hashem’s presence and strive to emulate Him. Second, by having the *pe'ot* lie next to the beard, which is the channel of abundance, the Attribute of Divine Justice is transformed to Mercy. In this way, the *pe'ot* serve as a medium for bringing great *kedushah* into the world.

We see that our entire faith, as well as the fulfillment of the commandments, is dependent on our unity. We become unified when we recognize the Divine image in others as hinted to by the *pe'ot*.

### **The Mitzvah of Pe'ah in the Field – Honoring Our Friend**

This leads us to the explanation of the mitzvah of leaving a *pe'ah* in the field. When a person enters his field and beholds his rich harvest, he is commanded to leave a portion that is not harvested in an obvious location for poor people to gather. This reminds him that it is Hashem Who gave him this bounty, and that he did not achieve it through his own accomplishments.

In order to be worthy of possessing this wealth, one must care for his fellow Jews, since they, too, were created in Hashem's image. After all, why should he be more deserving of Hashem's blessing than his friend? Maybe his friend is actually more deserving than he, and it is only his friend's misfortune which caused him to be poor. His friend was also created in Hashem's image, as hinted by the *pe'ot* on his head.

When a person designates a portion of his field for the poor, he fulfills the mitzvah of loving his fellow Jew as himself. He also remembers that he was created from the earth and in the future will return to the earth. He will eventually be held accountable by Hashem if he fails to fulfill his task in the world of emulating Hashem's compassion for others.

Similar to the *pe'ot* on the head, the *pe'ah* of the field also reminds us that the world is run by Elokim, Who metes out justice when we fail to fulfill His will. This punishment may be executed either in this world or in the World to Come. It also reminds us that Hashem is the Owner of the world, as it says (*Tehillim* 24:1), "To Hashem belongs the earth and all that is in it." Hashem gives us permission to use this world only according to His will, and forbids us to "steal" it from Him, so to speak, by misusing it for purposes other than demonstrating brotherly love and compassion.

Sometimes, a person receives abundance in this world purely for the purpose of being able to share it with others. Amazingly, he really owes a debt of gratitude to those dependent on him, for being the cause of his wealth. If one fails to leave a *pe'ah* in the field for the poor, he is demonstrating ingratitude toward them! One who is ungrateful toward his friend will eventually become ungrateful toward Hashem, claiming that he has become wealthy through his own efforts.

When Hashem created the world, He realized that it would require a special merit to allow it to continue existing despite man's sins. This special merit is the kindness and mutual respect that we show each other.

This is illustrated by the following. The warriors in King Shaul's legion were all righteous, yet they would fall in battle (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1; *Vayikra Rabbah* 26:2). In contrast, King Achav's soldiers were wicked idol worshipers, but were victorious. Chazal say that some of Shaul's men spoke *lashon hara*, and this is what led to their defeat. However, Achav's soldiers did not speak *lashon hara*, and this was the cause of their miraculous victories.

This teaches us a great lesson. *Lashon hara* causes jealousy and hatred. It also prevents people from acting with compassion toward each other. When this is the case, how can the world continue to exist? Therefore, Shaul's men were condemned to die. When there is a lack of unity, a person can become a heretic without realizing it.

Although he may continue to pray and learn Torah, all this is of no value if he does not emulate Hashem by doing good deeds. On the contrary, the *Yetzer Hara* might be exerting himself to help this person rise early for tefillah and to study Torah diligently, while simultaneously persuading him to loathe others and ignore the image of Hashem within them. He may even come to deny the existence of Hashem Himself.

It is important to remember that it is only possible to truly recognize Hashem and acquire Torah wisdom by acting compassionately toward

one another. This is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. Hashem gave our nation the Torah only when we were united “as one man with one heart.”

I wrote all of the above on the plane flying from Argentina to Paris, in honor of Harav Nissim Bigaoui, zt”l, who honored the Torah and toiled in it even in the most difficult days of his illness. He translated the most difficult Mishnayot in *Seder Zera'im*, and presented them clearly.

We know that Mishnayot can repair the blemishes of the *neshamah*. The word משנה (mishnah) has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul), as well as שמן (oil). This is because Bnei Yisrael are compared to pure virgin olive oil, used to bring an eternal light before Hashem.

The Torah has commanded us to leave a *pe'ah* in the field. This reminds us that there are people who have less than we, and that we must help them by rendering a portion of the field ownerless so that they will not be ashamed to take what they need. By leaving the *pe'ah* for the poor, man merits to be considered a partner of Hashem, the One who granted him his wealth.

Man gives pleasure to Hashem when he acts with submission. There is no greater submission than humbling oneself before another person, irrespective of his status, just by virtue of his being created in Hashem’s image, rather than harboring feelings of resentment or jealousy against him. Then, one resembles his Creator through the good deeds that he performs. May we all merit perfecting our souls to greet Mashiach speedily in our days.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Hashem created us from the earth, and endowed us with His image, enabling us to resemble His ways by being compassionate and merciful. When we sin, Hashem does not take away this Divine image, rather, He waits for us to repent. Yet a person is capable of causing irreparable damage. The reason that Hashem

gave us the opportunity to act kindly toward our fellow man is in order to help us become aware of the Divine image within each and every person, and the need to treat each other with respect.

- Hashem commanded us not to cut our *pe'ot*, since they share the same numerical value as the name Eloh-im. The *pe'ot* remind us to love our fellow Jew, and that by failing to do so, we disgrace the Attribute of Divine Justice which the name Elokim signifies. Our Sages state that to “love your fellow Jew as yourself” is a major principle in the Torah. The main thing is to love others.
- One should not touch his *pe'ot*, or his beard. If one does so, he is required to wash his hands, as the *kelippot* are found in the hair. On the other hand, the hairs of the beard and *pe'ot* are associated with the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy. It is important to remember our task in this world, because we were all created in the image of Hashem. Therefore, one should be careful to honor guests, recognizing the Divine image in which they were created, as indicated by their *pe'ot*. We will then be able to act with submission before Hashem.
- Hashem gave us the Torah only after He saw that we were unified as one person with one heart. This teaches how important love and unity are in Hashem’s eyes. Only once we were able to appreciate the Divine image of each person, were we able to receive the Torah, and cause Hashem to transform the Attribute of Divine Justice to that of Mercy, as expressed by the Thirteen Attributes.
- This is the reason for leaving a *pe'ah* at the corner of our field. It is to remind us that our success is not the result of our own might, but rather a gift from Hashem. Since this is the case, we will also share what we have with our neighbor, since he, too, was created in Hashem’s image.
- The world exists only in the merit of the kindness that we exhibit toward each another. We should refrain from speaking *lashon hara*. Shaul Hamelech’s soldiers fell in battle since they spoke *lashon hara*. *Lashon hara* causes jealousy and hatred, preventing people from seeing the Divine image in one another; it damages relationships, causing pain to Hashem Himself. When we are united, “as one man with one heart” we merit to acquire much Torah and perform many mitzvot.

# TZADDIKIM



## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF DAVID HAMELECH

There were four kings, each one of whom requested different levels of assistance from Hashem when they were faced by their enemies (*Eichah Rabbah* 4:16). They were: David, Assa, Yehoshafat, and Chizkiyahu. David stated (*Tehillim* 18:38), “I pursued my foes and overtook them.” Assa said, “I have no strength to kill my enemies; I will merely pursue them.” Yehoshafat said, “I have no strength to pursue or to kill; I will sing songs of praise, and You, Hashem, will do the work.” Then Chizkiyahu came along and said, “I will do nothing. I will sleep in bed and You, Hashem, will do everything.” Hashem answered, “I shall do everything,” as the pasuk states (*Melachim* II, 19:35), “And it was that [very] night: An angel of Hashem went out and struck down 185,000 men of the Assyrian camp.”

Which of these kings was most praiseworthy in Hashem’s eyes? Was it David Hamelech, who was mighty and waged wars? But maybe his act of going out to war could be considered *bitul* Torah. Perhaps he should have acted like Chizkiyahu Hamelech, leaving everything up to Hashem. It might seem that Chizkiyahu exhibited greater faith in Hashem, by remaining secluded in the Beit Hamidrash and allowing Hashem to take care of his enemies. Or maybe the other two kings acted in the most praiseworthy way, taking some part in the warfare in conjunction with help from Hashem.

At the time that the nation would go out to war, the Kohen would approach the people, stating, “Hear, O Israel, you are coming near to the

battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, etc.” Then, the generals would say (*Devarim* 20:3-8), “Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house. And who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? Let him go and return to his house. And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go and return to his house. Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house.”

We see from the aforementioned, that anyone whose joy would be decreased by going out to war is forbidden from going. Building a house, betrothing a woman, etc., all cause a person to be joyful. If he does not feel happy, even though he may be a great tzaddik, he may not join the nation in battle. Lack of joy damages Avodat Hashem. Conversely, happiness is a major component in service of Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), “Serve Hashem with gladness.” A reduction in one’s level of joy can damage one’s prayer and overall service of Hashem. This may cause an accusation to be leveled against him during wartime.

We see that the fearful and fainthearted are also prohibited from fighting. Fearfulness is an indication of a lack of trust in Hashem, Who is the Ultimate Fighter, winning the battles for His people, who are merely pawns in His hands. Furthermore, fearfulness is a sign of sin. One is afraid that his sins will bring about defeat. Therefore, such a person is instructed to return home, and return to his Father in teshuvah.

For this reason, the Kohen called out before the entire nation, “Hear O Israel, you are coming near to the battle.” The intention of this announcement was to tell the people that they must be completely united and do teshuvah. If, after these words, a person feels his level of trust in Hashem is inadequate, or he is afraid of prior sins, he may not join the nation in battle. Sin kills. It is therefore preferable that he remain at home.

This sheds light on the account of the four kings, mentioned above. Although Assa, Yehoshafat, and Chizkiyahu were great tzaddikim and possessed firm belief in Hashem, fear of sin gnawed at their hearts. Proof of this is that they chose to stay home, rather than go out to battle. They didn't want to pursue the enemy or sing praises to Hashem after the battle; they desired only that Hashem fight the entire war on their behalf. They used the power of prayer as a means of defeating their enemies, because they knew Hashem was ultimately waging the war for them.

These kings did not want to go out to war, fearing that they themselves were not spiritually perfect and thus would not merit victory. Although Chizkiyahu wanted to remain in the Beit Hamidrash and not cause any *bitul* Torah, he did have one shortcoming in that he had never married. He had not fulfilled the first mitzvah of the Torah of having children. Without children, who would reveal the glory of Hashem in the world? Who would perpetuate Torah learning after his death?

Only David Hamelech feared nothing. His heart was full of faith in Hashem and was completely untainted by sin. Therefore, he agreed to chase his enemies and battle them. He maintained that going out to war to fight the enemies of Hashem is in itself an act of upholding Torah and learning it. We find that the very night when David was hunted by Shaul, he learned with Shmuel Hanavi vast amounts of Torah, that which an experienced Torah scholar would not be able to cover in one hundred years (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel I, 129*). David toiled in Torah despite the heavy fighting.

Evidently, David acted in the most praiseworthy way of the four kings. His faith in Hashem was strong and steadfast. That was why he could claim (*Tehillim 18:38*), "I pursued my foes and overtook them and did not return until they were destroyed." He knew that Hashem would be at his side, so he had nothing to fear from sin.

The account of the *Navi*, however, does seem to indicate that David was charged with having sinned concerning Batsheva. The *Navi* says (*Shmuel*

II, 12:9), “Why have you scorned the word of Hashem, doing that which is evil in My eyes? You have struck Uriah; his wife you have taken to yourself for a wife, while him you have killed by the sword of the Children of Amon!”

However, if we will examine the words of the *Navi*, we will see that David never sinned, as Chazal state (*Shabbat* 55b; *Zohar* II, 107), “Whoever claims that David sinned is mistaken.” Chazal expound on the words (*Shabbat* 56a) “doing that which is evil” that David didn’t do anything wrong at all. The words “his wife you have taken to yourself for a wife” imply that David was permitted to marry Batsheva. Rabbi Shmuel said that anyone who went out to war in the kingdom of David gave his wife a bill of divorce. “While him you have killed by the sword of the Children of Amon” tells us that just as David wasn’t held accountable for the death of his soldiers, who were killed by the enemy’s sword, neither was he held responsible for the death of Uriah, since Uriah had been a rebel.

We see from these expositions that David did not sin concerning Batsheva. Nevertheless, because the people did not know all of the fine points involved, Hashem considered it a sliver of a sin. For that reason, his first son died. Hashem deals with His righteous ones in a most exacting way.

Chazal state (*Shabbat* 30a) that Hashem forgave David. The Gemara narrates that Shlomo Hamelech, upon completion of the building of the Beit Hamikdash, was unable to fit the Aron into the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, for the gates were sealed shut. As soon as he said (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 6:42), “Hashem, G-d, do not turn back the request of Your anointed one; remember the righteousness of Your servant David,” he was answered. The entire nation then understood that Hashem had completely forgiven David.

It was also said about David Hamelech (*Avodah Zarah* 4b), “Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘That act was not befitting David. If so, why did he do it? It was a decree of the King, in order to encourage people to repent’” (as

explained by *Rashi*). Chazal ask (*Mo'ed Katan* 16b), “What is meant by the statement (*Shmuel* II, 23:1), ‘The words of David son of Yishai, and the words of the man who was established on high’? It means that these are the words of David who fixed a path for teshuvah.”

We can bring further proof that David never sinned. Batsheva had a second son, whom David called “Shlomo.” But Hashem sent a message through Natan Hanavi, stating (*ibid.* 12:25), “And he called his name *Yedidyah*, because of Hashem.” The name *Yedidyah* means “the beloved one of Hashem.” *Rashi* explains that this shows that Hashem loved him. If it were true that David sinned by taking Batsheva, *chalilah*, Hashem certainly would not have loved the son born to her. He would neither have allowed Shlomo to rule over the entire kingdom of Yisrael nor build the Beit Hamikdash. Moreover, it says (*Divrei Hayamim* I 29:23), “Shlomo sat upon the throne of Hashem.” Hashem coronated him even above the angels (*Megillah* 11a; *Sanhedrin* 20b). Obviously, Shlomo was a very holy person. This proves that David did not sin at all when he married Batsheva.

Nevertheless, David Hamelech said about himself (*Tehillim* 51:5-6), “And my sin is before me always...and that which is evil in Your eyes did I do.” He knew that the nation viewed him as a sinner. For this, he was constantly involved in repentance. He understood that it is the will of Hashem that one do teshuvah even for minute transgressions.

This is what helped David in all his battles. He was not like the other kings who abstained from war. The moment he did teshuvah, he was completely unafraid. He went out to war with a secure heart. This was because at the most critical moments of war, David girded himself with trust and faith in Hashem Yitbarach. He humbled himself completely, and did teshuvah. That is why he emerged victorious. As the *Navi* states (*Chavakuk* 2:5), “But the righteous person shall live through his faith.”

### ————— In Summary —————

- Bnei Yisrael had four kings, who each requested a different level of assistance when faced by their enemies. David asked to fight his enemies. Assa said he would only pursue them. Yehoshafat said he would sing songs of praise, and Hashem would fight his battles. Chizkiyahu stated he would go to sleep in bed, and Hashem would fight the war, from start to finish. Who was the greatest of them? Was it David, who had faith and trust in Hashem, and wanted to fight? Maybe it was Chizkiyahu, who didn't want to waste precious time from Torah study by going out to war? Perhaps it was the other two, who were willing to fight with the help of Hashem?
- Prior to battle, the Kohen approached the nation, stating that whoever had betrothed a woman or built a house or was fearful or fainthearted should not go out to war. We see that if going to war entails a decrease in one's joy, he is prohibited from going. Furthermore, one who was fearful and fainthearted due to his sins may also not go out to war. This indicates a lack of trust in Hashem, the Ultimate Warrior.
- Although the last three kings trusted in Hashem, and increased their tefillah, they showed that fear of sin lurked in their hearts. They were not completely secure in going out to war. But David was different. He felt sure that he was completely free of iniquity. He had no sin of which to be wary. Thus he can be considered the most praiseworthy of all the kings. He had no connection to sin, learning Torah into the night even in the worst of times. His faith in Hashem was rock-solid. Therefore, he could proclaim, "I pursued my foes and overtook them." About him it can be stated, "But the righteous person shall live through his faith."

## TZADDIKIM PROTECT THE GENERATION

We are adjured to "treat Hashem's will as if it were your own will, so that He will treat your will as if it were His will" (*Avot* 2:4). This means that when a tzaddik merits, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does his will, protecting and saving the generation.

We find a frightening episode in Midrash Yalkut Me'am Loez. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was walking along the road, when he encountered a great darkness descending upon the world. He told his son, Rabbi Elazar, "Come, and let us see what Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires to do in the world." They walked on and met an angel with thirty flames emanating from his mouth. Rabbi Shimon asked him, "What are you intending to do?" To which the angel replied, "I am going to destroy the world, for there are not even thirty righteous people in the generation."

Rabbi Shimon countered, "Please go up to Hashem and tell Him, "Bar Yochai is in the world." The angel gave the message, and Hashem answered, "Go and destroy the world and pay no heed to the words of Bar Yochai." The angel returned to destroy the world.

When he descended, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai saw him and said, "If you do not disappear, I will decree that you should never again ascend to *Shamayim*. Now, go back up and give Hashem the following message: If there are not thirty righteous people, let the world stand in the merit of twenty. If there are not twenty tzaddikim, let the world stand in the merit of ten, or in the merit of two, or in the merit of one – myself." A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, "Fortunate are you, Rabbi Shimon, for Hakadosh Baruch Hu decrees, and you annul."

It is difficult to understand this story. If Hashem intended to ultimately do what Rabbi Shimon was requesting, why did He reject his first plea to save the world, telling the angel not to pay attention to his words?

Perhaps we can explain with the following idea. Hashem wants each person to recognize where he stands in his Avodat Hashem, and how much effort he needs to expend in order to elevate himself spiritually. Hashem refused Rabbi Shimon's request the first time, in order that he should continue pleading to Hashem, through the angel. Rabbi Shimon then argued that the world should be saved from destruction in his merit. As a result of this give-and-take, all of the angels witnessed how Hashem

listens to the tefillot of the tzaddikim, doing their will. The tzaddikim are the ones who protect the generation.

Furthermore, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai understood that there was a purpose in him seeing the angel. He deduced from this that he should find a *zechut* for the generation. For that reason, he initially tried to access the *zechut* of future tzaddikim who would die *al Kiddush Hashem*. When none could be found, as he was told by the angel, he placed the merit for the entire world on his own shoulders.

It might seem that Rabbi Shimon displayed pride in taking credit for the survival of the entire world. But this is not so. It is known that sins abound in the world, and tzaddikim die to atone for the sins of the generation. It was an act of *mesirut nefesh* that Rabbi Shimon asked Hashem to uphold the world in his merit. This meant that he would die as atonement for the generation. This was not a display of pride. On the contrary, he can be compared to Moshe Rabbeinu, who said (*Shemot* 32:32), “But if not, erase me now from Your book.” Moshe desired to atone for the sin of the nation by dying for them.

### ————— In Summary —————

- When a tzaddik merits, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does his will, protecting and saving the generation. This is evidenced by the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.
- When he met an angel that was about to destroy the world, he told him to report to Hashem that he, Bar Yochai, was still present in the world, and thus the world should be saved in his merit. Why did Hashem not listen to the angel? Wasn't Rabbi Shimon demonstrating pride by making such a statement?
- Hashem wants a person to recognize his spiritual standing and expend the requisite effort in elevating himself. Hashem refused Rabbi Shimon's request the first time in order that he should continue praying to Hashem for the salvation of the world. He elevated himself by doing so.
- Hashem saved the world in his merit in order to demonstrate that he listens to the tefillot of tzaddikim and does their will. The tzaddikim protect the generation.

- Rabbi Shimon was not demonstrating pride by asking that Hashem uphold the world in his merit. Rather, this was an act of *mesirut nefesh*, since he was willing to die as atonement for the generation.

## IF THE PREVIOUS GENERATIONS ARE LIKE ANGELS

Being in the proximity of a tzaddik can affect a person tremendously. This is illustrated by the following incident (*Bereishit Rabbah* 60:8). The donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair fell into the hands of highwaymen. It remained three days in their cave, yet refused to taste a thing, since the food had been stolen. As they were afraid it would die and make the place smell, they freed it. It returned to Rabbi Pinchas. However, when the family members tried to feed it barley, it refused to eat, even though it had been fasting for three days.

They asked Rabbi Pinchas why his donkey refused to eat. He asked them if they had separated *terumot* and *ma'asrot*. They responded in the affirmative. He asked if they had separated *ma'aser d'mai*. To which they answered, "You taught us that produce of Eretz Yisrael which is used to feed animals is free from the obligation of *ma'aser d'mai*." He replied, "And what should I do if my animal is stringent?"

It is known that a donkey generally subjects itself to its master's will. Its head is bent downward, and the more it is struck, the more it lowers its head. It believes that if it was hit, it is a sign that it didn't behave properly. It therefore tries to improve itself as necessary. All it desires is to do its master's bidding. We find that although Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey had no sense or understanding, it knew to distinguish between that which was tithed and that which was not. It was ready to die rather than eat from the untithed grain.

This was due to the fact that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair influenced his surroundings with his holiness. Even his donkey became elevated by

contact with him. Because it so greatly wanted to please its owner, it elevated itself to such a degree that it was able even to emulate the conduct of its master.

This sheds light on the following statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 112b): “Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rabba bar Zimona, ‘If the previous ones are like angels, we are like people; if the previous ones are like people, we are like donkeys. And not like the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, but like ordinary donkeys.’” The earlier generations were compared to angels, the highest accolade possible. They were totally subservient to Hashem, and were prepared to carry out Hashem’s wishes even before being told, just like an angel. This was similar to the level of Bnei Yisrael at *Matan Torah*, when they said, “We will do and we will hear.” The angels are described in the following way: “Who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word.” They act according to Hashem’s will even prior to hearing it (*Tehillim* 103:20).

The Avot also subjected themselves to Hashem’s will. Avraham Avinu stated (*Bereishit* 18:27), “I am but dust and ashes.” We see that Yitzchak, too, was extremely humble, as the pasuk states (*ibid.* 24:63): “Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field.” The word *supplicate* denotes humility. The author of the sefer *Kol Simchah (Parashat Vayishlach)* explains that Yaakov was the paradigm of subservience and humility. This was how he merited being called “Yisrael.” Moshe Rabbeinu displayed tremendous self-effacement by stating, “What are we?” Likewise, David Hamelech proclaimed, “But I am a worm and not a man.”

If our ancestors, in spite of their great attributes which likened them to angels, did everything that was mandated upon them without hesitation and held so little of themselves, then what pride can we take in ourselves? We cannot even begin to compare ourselves to previous generations, since, through the accumulated years of *galut*, Torah knowledge has decreased (*Ye’arot Devash* Part I 17). This is as we state in Shacharit: “What are we? What is our life? What is our kindness? What is our

righteousness? What is our strength and power? The advantage of a person over an animal is nothing, for all is vanity.”

The advantage of a person over an animal is nothing, indeed, for the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair reached a level that we have not reached. Although it was not obligated in mitzvot, it refrained from eating untithed food, ready to sacrifice its life for this ideal. How often do we put into our mouths foods whose *kashrut* standard is questionable? We make the excuse that we need this specific food for our health. Moreover, sometimes we eat at an establishment without checking the level of *kashrut* of the food. We are far from the level of the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, which abstained from food that was not 100% kosher.

This is truly amazing. How was it that his donkey indeed reached the level of *ruach hakodesh*, refusing food which merely had a trace of prohibition? How did this simple creature know this?

We can explain this according to the idea expressed above. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair’s donkey was influenced by the sanctity of its master to such an extent that it knew what was permitted for its master to eat. This he would eat without compunction.

This line of reasoning helps us understand the following two topics mentioned in the Torah. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would cast lots upon two goats. One was destined to be brought as an offering to Hashem, and the other was destined for Azazel. Chazal tell us (see *Zohar* III, 102a) that the goat for Azazel would be taken with honor and comforted. It was difficult for it to accept the fate of being sent to the wilderness, to be cast from the cliffs to its death. This is difficult to understand. Does a goat really know what is being done to it? Why should it care to whom it is being sacrificed?

The goat can be compared to the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas. The goat itself became sanctified by absorbing the *kedushah* of the Kohen Gadol’s service in the Beit Hamikdash on the holy and awesome day of Yom

Kippur. It reached the level of being pained at the prospect of being thrown off the mountain. It could discern that it is Hakadosh Baruch Hu Who sustains all, and to Him are the power and the might. This goat wished to be brought as an offering before Hashem and not go to Azazel. The animal had reached a very high spiritual level and was able to feel the difference between the two.

The second scenario involved Eliyahu Hanavi on Har Hacarmel. It is known that the cow offered for *avodah zarah* refused to cooperate. Eliyahu had to console it by stating that the Name of Hashem would be sanctified through its act. When the false prophets would see that no Heavenly fire consumed their sacrifice, a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* would be made (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 23:9a; *Tanchuma, Mas'ei* 8). Only after it heard this did the cow agree to go with the prophets of Baal. We see from here how an animal can reach the level of knowing the will of Hashem.

These stories are just mind-boggling. Simple animals, with no knowledge or understanding, are able to sense *kedushah* and are influenced by it. Their entire makeup is changed. The cow destined to be brought for *avodah zarah* even asked Eliyahu, "I and my friend grew up in the same barn; she is going as a sacrifice to Hashem – how can I anger my Creator?!"

Yet we, who are supposed to be on a higher level than the animals, dare to raise our heads in rebellion against Hashem. We make light of easy and hard mitzvot alike. It is incumbent upon us to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* in order to recognize the truth. If we are not on this level, we are lower than the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. We certainly should also be influenced by *kedushah*, and reach great heights.

One who is fortunate to be in the proximity of a tzaddik, yet fails to absorb his holiness and emulate his actions will be held accountable. He should elevate himself together with the tzaddik. This level was reached even by a donkey. How much more so should we strive to elevate our own

behavior, so that we should be able to have some connection to our exalted forefathers.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair refused to eat for over three days from food that was not properly tithed. Concerning this, Chazal state that if the previous ones are like angels, we are like people. If the previous ones are like people, we are like donkeys. And not like the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, but like ordinary donkeys. For, although his donkey had no sense, it was influenced merely by being in his environs. This enabled it to differentiate between grains which were tithed and those which were not. It was even ready to die rather than eat food that had not been tithed.
- Similarly, we find that the goat that was destined for Azazel on Yom Kippur was affected by its environs. It needed to be comforted for its lot of being cast off the cliffs. It was pained at this prospect, as it was influenced by the tremendous *kedushah* of the Kohen Gadol's service in the Beit Hamikdash on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.
- So, too, the cow that Eliyahu Hanavi sent to go with the false prophets refused to join them. Eliyahu had to cajole it, by saying that it, too, was performing a *kiddush Hashem* by its act. The cow had been influenced by *kedushah* to such a great extent that it did not want to be involved in anything that was connected to *avodah zarah*.
- If these mere creatures were so influenced by the power of holiness that they were surrounded by, how much more so should we be. First of all, we must confirm that everything we eat is kosher beyond a shadow of a doubt. Moreover, we should endeavor to be influenced by the tzaddikim in our midst. We should cleave to their actions. In this way we will prove that people are, indeed, above the level of animals.

## RECOGNIZING HASHEM'S MIRACLES

There is a wonderful story related about Elisha the Prophet and the gentile general Naaman. In order to understand it well, we will summarize the words of the *Navi* (*Melachim* II, 5): Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram...was a great warrior, but he was a leper. Aram had gone out in raiding parties, and had captured a young girl from the Land of Israel, and she was serving before Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "My master's prayers should be brought before the prophet who is in Shomron; for then he will heal him from his *tzaraat*." The king of Aram said, "Go and approach him, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. I will send him six thousand pieces of gold and ten changes of clothes." He brought to the king of Israel the letter which said: Behold I have sent my servant Naaman to you, so that you should heal him from his *tzaraat*. When the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his garments and said, "Am I G-d that I can take and give life, that this person should send me instructions to heal a man of his *tzaraat*?" When Elisha, the man of G-d, heard that the king of Israel had rent his garments, he sent word to the king, saying, "Why did you rend your garments? Let him come to me now, and he will realize that there is a prophet in Israel!"

Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the doorway of Elisha's house. Elisha sent him a messenger, saying, "Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan; your flesh will become normal again and you will be cleansed." Naaman was enraged and left. He said, "Behold, I said to myself that he would surely come out to me, and stand and call in the Name of Hashem, his G-d, and wave his hand over the diseased area – and then I would be healed from my *tzaraat*! Are not Abana and Phapar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Do I not always bathe in them? Have I not become cleansed?" Then he turned and left in a fury.

But his servants approached him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you to do a difficult thing, would you not have done it?" So he went

down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, as the man of G-d had told him, and his flesh became like the flesh of a young boy and he became cleansed. He returned to the man of G-d with his entire retinue and said to him, “Behold, now I know that there is no G-d in the whole world except in Israel! And now, please accept a tribute from your servant.” He urged Elisha to accept this gift, but he refused.

However, Geichazi, the attendant of Elisha, said to himself, “Behold, my master has spared Naaman the Aramean by not accepting from his hand what he had brought. As Hashem lives, I swear that I shall run after him and take something from him.” He ran after Naaman and requested from him a talent of silver and two changes of clothing in the name of the prophet. When Elisha found out about this, he cursed Geichazi that Naaman’s *tzaraat* should cleave to him and his children forever!

Let us examine what took place between Naaman, the king of Israel, Elisha Hanavi, and Geichazi. There are many puzzling points to ponder.

1. Why, upon reading the letter from the king of Aram, did the king of Israel rend his clothes? Why didn’t he think of approaching the prophet, Elisha? He had inherited double the power of prophecy of his mentor, Eliyahu Hanavi, and might have had the ability to heal Naaman.

2. How was Elisha so sure that he had the ability to heal Naaman? Had he failed, he would have brought tragedy upon Am Yisrael.

3. Why didn’t Naaman enter Elisha’s house immediately upon arrival, waiting outside the door, instead?

4. Why did Naaman become enraged at the advice of Elisha, to immerse seven times in the Jordan? Elisha would not have told him to do something ineffective, lest he himself and the entire Jewish nation be punished.

5. When Naaman witnessed the open miracle that his *tzaraat* was healed, he became a *ger toshav*, accepting upon himself not to do *avodah*

*zarah* (Gittin 57b), although not committing himself to keep all the mitzvot. Why weren't his soldiers moved to act likewise, since they also witnessed this miracle? They weren't touched at all, and remained unchanged.

6. We must question the attitude of Bnei Yisrael, who were idol worshippers at that point. They should have been so impressed by the open miracle that had taken place, that they should have done teshuvah. Naaman, who was a gentile, forsook his idol worship, stating, "Behold, now I know that there is no G-d in the whole world except in Israel!"

7. How did Geichazi fall so low to make a *chillul Hashem*? He blatantly lied to Naaman, stating that he was requesting gifts in the name of the prophet. He was closer to the prophet than any other of his pupils. Did he think that Elisha would remain ignorant of his actions? Surely he realized that Elisha would punish him.

8. Above all, how was it possible that Elisha was unaware of what Geichazi was doing? He possessed *ruach hakodesh*. Why didn't he prevent Geichazi from acting so disgracefully, resulting in a *chillul Hashem*?

Naaman's *tzaraat* was caused by his undue arrogance. It was his personal pride which kept him waiting at the doorway of Elisha's house, refusing to enter. He felt that the prophet should come out to him because of his high rank. This explains why the king of Israel rent his garments upon reading the letter. He hesitated to send Naaman to Elisha Hanavi, knowing that Naaman was not capable of humbling himself before the prophet, like a servant before his master.

When Elisha saw Naaman standing at the entranceway, he deduced that he had been afflicted by *tzaraat* because of his pride in being an important general in the army. Elisha knew that by Naaman submitting himself to him, the *tzaraat* would disappear since its cause would have been eliminated. Elisha trusted that Hashem would cure Naaman of his *tzaraat* when he submitted himself to the prophet by immersing in the Jordan. This would cause a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*.

Elisha had learned the great value of submission to the prophet from Eliyahu Hanavi, his mentor. When Eliyahu brought *korbanot* in order to prove the false nature of the prophets of Baal, he stood beside Achav and brought down a Heavenly fire. To magnify the miracle, the sacrifice was first drenched with water. The waters poured over the sacrifice through a miracle (*Rashi, Melachim I, 18:34*). Elisha poured these waters over his hands, and his fingers became like wellsprings, filling up the trench around the altar with water. Thus, he himself had witnessed how deferring to the prophet effects miracles. This is why he specifically sent a message to Naaman to immerse in the Jordan, rather than speaking to him himself. Elisha knew that the remedy for Naaman's illness was to submit himself to the *Navi's* directives.

Elisha specifically told him to immerse in water, as water always flows to the lowest level possible. Torah, which is compared to water, is found only in one who humbles himself for its sake (*Ta'anit 7a*). One who submerges in water, descending into it, indicates that he is willing to submit himself to the will of Hashem.

The word טמא (impure) indicates how far a person can fall. The letters מ"ט have the *gematria* of forty-nine, hinting to the forty-nine levels of impurity. By descending further, one can, *chas v'shalom*, arrive at the fiftieth level (מ"ט plus 'א). The power of *tevilah*, which involves submission, since one has to go down into the water, is such that it can purify a person, elevating him from the status of impure to that of pure.

Someone who sins becomes defiled, reducing the power of *kedushah*. He elevates the strength of the *kelippah*. Therefore, he must rectify this by immersion in water, which has the power to subdue the *kelippah*. It is known that water softens all matters. Even a stone which sits in water for a long time becomes softened. When a person immerses in water, he is also "softened," removing the power of the *kelippah* from himself.

When Naaman noticed how the *Navi* did not pay attention to him, he became angered and left in a rage. This indicated his great arrogance,

which prevented him from humbling himself before the prophet by immersing in the Jordan. He claimed that the waters of Damascus were better.

For that reason, Naaman decided to return immediately to Aram. However, his men convinced him to try the Jordan waters, since he was already there. They suggested that he had nothing to lose and might as well try the advice of the prophet. Surely a little submission to the prophet was worthwhile if it would ensure his recovery from his *tzaraat*! They reasoned that Elisha would not have made such a recommendation if he had not been sure that it would be effective.

When Naaman considered the words of his men, he understood, deep inside, that it was honor and pride which had caused his disease. His atonement was to bathe seven times in the Jordan waters, before all his soldiers, who would see his body covered with *tzaraat*. This humbling experience would help free him of his arrogance, and thus free him from the *tzaraat*, as well.

Why is this lesson, of the negative effects of arrogance and its remedy of submitting oneself to the *Navi*, specifically taught by what happened to a gentile? Why didn't this episode happen to a Jewish general? Would we not have learned the same lesson regarding the pitfalls of arrogance?

Bnei Yisrael witnessed great miracles, yet they became used to them, even descending to the level of idol worship in the days of King Achav and his sons. A miracle like this would have made no impression upon the people, and no benefit would have been gained for generations to come.

Since the protagonist of this episode was a gentile who later renounced *avodah zarah* in recognition of Hashem, the story certainly made an impression on the entire world. It caused a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*. Naaman remained the general of Aram, fighting Bnei Yisrael after this incident, killing many of our people. This was because Bnei Yisrael did not

do teshuvah but continued serving *avodah zarah*. They failed to take a lesson from Naaman, who took note of his wrongdoings and corrected them.

This narrative teaches us an important principle. We see how a gentile, an idol worshipper, who did not have the benefit of Torah, was able to recognize the negative effects of arrogance and desire for honor, that nestled deep within his heart. After immersing in the Jordan and becoming purified, he immediately recognized just how great his sin was in the eyes of Hashem. Only in the merit of Elisha was he healed from his negative character traits. He felt that he must approach Elisha, like a servant before his master, and cling to him with humility. As soon as he recognized his sin, he regretted it, acknowledging the existence of Hashem.

The servants who had accompanied Naaman had no desire to come to the house of the *Navi*. All they wanted was to return home. They had laid out money as a gift for the king, as the pasuk states (*Melachim II, 5:5*), “I will send a letter to the king of Israel...six thousand [pieces of] gold and ten changes of clothes.” They assumed that it was the money, which symbolizes arrogance, that helped heal their master. They therefore did not do teshuvah.

Likewise, Bnei Yisrael did not do teshuvah as a result of this miracle, even though they knew of Naaman’s reaction of regret and submission. This was because they failed to contemplate the matter thoroughly, as Naaman had done.

This incident demonstrates that a person can witness miracles, but if he does not internalize what he sees, the miracle will not affect him in the slightest. His clear recognition of Hashem will last for only a little while. A short time afterward, he will return to his former negative traits. As long as he does not remove arrogance from within himself, he will not be able to achieve complete purity of heart.

The author of the sefer *Noam Elimelech (Parashat Tetzaveh)* explains that only by cleaving to the tzaddik can a person recognize miracles and cleave to Hashem. Even Naaman, to whom the miracle happened, might have forgotten about it, if not for the fact that he returned to Elisha and attached himself to him. This act strengthened his belief in Hashem. Bnei Yisrael also witnessed the miracle. But since they did not go to the *Navi* for guidance, they did not make a personal reckoning and do teshuvah. The tzaddik emits spiritual light only upon those who connect themselves to him.

We can learn a tremendous principle from the actions of Geichazi, the attendant of Elisha Hanavi. Specifically in the areas in which he was great, we find his shortcomings.

Instead of attaching himself to the tzaddik to be of service to him, and attain true recognition of Hashem, Geichazi fell into the trap of haughtiness. He would constantly prevent disciples from approaching Elisha, thinking that they were not worthy of serving him, like he was. Chazal point out (*Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 10:2) that when Elisha was lecturing, Geichazi would sit at the gate. Passing students would see him there, thinking that if he wasn't entering, they certainly were not permitted to either.

Geichazi had the perfect opportunity to learn from Naaman. Although Naaman was a gentile and held a high position, he humbled himself when he realized that money is not the main priority. Spiritual happiness is true wealth. For that reason, he decided to leave everything and connect himself to the *Navi*. He wanted to completely understand the intricacies of the miracle he had witnessed.

Likewise, Elisha showed Naaman that gold and silver are in the hands of Heaven, and he didn't have any use for them at all. Even though he could have accepted the money in order to use it to support Torah institutions, he refused it. He wanted to teach Naaman that Torah is acquired by sweat and labor, through self-effacement and submission.

Elisha wanted to impress upon him that it is specifically through toil in Torah that one attains true *emunah* in Hashem. If Bnei Yisrael cleave to Hashem as they should, they receive blessing from Heaven, without even asking. Then they can support their places of learning.

Notwithstanding all this, Geichazi continued in his wickedness and conceited ways, to the extent that he even denied the validity of the *Navi's* prophecy, *rachmana litzlan*. This was demonstrated by his request for money and clothing from Naaman in the name of the prophet, which was a complete lie. By maintaining that Elisha did not know what he was doing, Geichazi denied the efficacy of his prophecy.

Geichazi indicated that he wasn't interested in being connected to his teacher, or accepting his teachings, one of which was that a person must make efforts to secure funds for his Torah institutions. For that reason, he was cast away by Elisha, and the *tzaraat* of Naaman cleaved to him and his children after him.

Elisha Hanavi knew what was taking place in Geichazi's heart. He understood that he had chosen this path for himself, continuing his wicked ways even in the presence of his teacher. Elisha didn't chastise him at all, for, as the Gemara states (*Makkot* 10b): "In the way a man wishes to go, he is led." Geichazi's actions did not cause a *chillul Hashem*, as the entire world, including Naaman, knew that the curse of Elisha, transferring Naaman's *tzaraat* to Geichazi and his children, was caused by Geichazi's deceitful behavior when he requested money in the name of Elisha, who had neither asked for it nor wanted it.

The story of Naaman and Geichazi illustrates the detrimental effects of arrogance and honor-seeking. If one does not work to eradicate these attributes from his heart, they prevent him from attaining true recognition of Hashem, literally removing him from the world. One must expend much effort to nullify the pride within his heart. By submitting oneself and cleaving to a tzaddik, he is able to learn from him the *middah* of humility.

Only then can he attain the level of recognizing the miracles Hashem has made, which will help him acknowledge Hashem Himself.

### ————— In Summary —————

- There are many points to understand in the story of Elisha Hanavi and the gentile general Naaman. Why did the king of Israel rend his garments upon reading Naaman's letter? He knew that Elisha could probably cure Naaman of his *tzaraat*. How was Elisha sure of his abilities to cure Naaman? Why did Naaman remain outside Elisha's house when he arrived there? Why didn't he believe Elisha when he told him to immerse himself? Why weren't his men impressed at the miracle they witnessed? It is also difficult to understand why Bnei Yisrael were not influenced by this great miracle, and remained idol worshippers. How could Geichazi lie, in the name of the *Navi*, taking clothing and food? Why didn't Elisha stop him?
- Naaman's *tzaraat* was a result of his arrogance. This arrogance is what prevented him from entering Elisha's abode. When Elisha noticed this, he taught Naaman the path of submission. He did not come out to him. Rather, he sent a messenger to tell Naaman to immerse himself in the waters of Jordan. Naaman would have to suffer the humbling experience of having his men watch their diseased general immerse himself at the bidding of the *Navi*. Water was used in order to teach him the idea of subservience, as water always flows to the lowest level. Torah, which is compared to water, can be acquired only through humility.
- Naaman surrendered to the persuasions of his men, for he had nothing to lose. He came to the understanding that his *tzaraat* was caused by his great haughtiness. Therefore, he submitted himself to the *tzaddik*, cleaving to him immediately after immersing in the water. This enabled him to retain long-term appreciation for the miracle he had experienced, increasing his *emunah* in Hashem. On the other hand, Geichazi sinned by displaying arrogance in the house of Elisha. This caused him to lie in the name of the prophet, even though he understood that Elisha would eventually discover his lie.
- When Elisha realized that Geichazi would not accept advice regarding his arrogance, he refrained from discussing it with him. There was no *chillul Hashem* involved in the punishment of Geichazi, since it was obvious to all that

his *tzaraat* was a direct result of asking for resources in Elisha's name and against his will. We see from here that one must cleave to the tzaddik, and learn humility from him. This helps one appreciate the miracles that Hashem does, strengthening his *emunah*.

## RABBI MEIR – MASTER OF MIRACLES

During the period between Pesach and Shavuot, we celebrate the *hilulas* of two great *Tanna'im*. The *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes is on the 14th of Iyar, and that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is on the 18th of Iyar (Lag Ba'Omer).

Why was Rabbi Meir called “Baal Hanes – Master of miracles?” Although the Gemara and Zohar are replete with examples of miracles wrought by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and he was even miraculously saved from being put to death by the Caesar (*Shabbat* 33b), we do not find that he was called a “master of miracles,” like Rabbi Meir. This seems even more surprising since Rabbi Meir did not perform nearly as many miracles as Rabbi Shimon. Why was Rabbi Meir given the appellation “Baal Hanes?”

Furthermore, we find a surprising phrase in the Gemara referring to Rabbi Meir. The Gemara says (*Sanhedrin* 86a), “סתם משנה רבי מאיר.” This means that in cases where the Mishnah does not ascribe a teaching to a specific person, it is attributed to Rabbi Meir. Moreover, he was also called “Rabbi Nehorai” (light), for he enlightened the *Chachamim* in halachah (*Eiruvin* 13b). Why wasn't Rabbi Meir's name mentioned explicitly in the Mishnah, but only inferred by allusion?

This indicates the greatness of Rabbi Meir. Chazal recount (*Yerushalmi Beitzah* 5:2) that Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi) maintained that all the achievements that he attained in Torah, above those of his peers, were in the merit of seeing the back of Rabbi Meir, with his finger sticking out of

his sleeve. He maintained that had he seen the front of Rabbi Meir, he would have reached even greater levels. The Torah knowledge of Rabbi Meir was so pure and unadulterated that it affected not only those seated facing him, but also those behind him, who saw only his back.

Why did Rabbi Meir merit all this? Because of his humility. He did not hold highly of himself. He did not exalt himself with the accolade of “Rabbi Nehorai” (the one who enlightens us), as the *Chachamim* called him. He was extremely humble, aware that the anticipated end of mortal man is to be consumed by worms (*Avot* 4:4). He himself fulfilled what he stated in *Avot* (6:1), “Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake merits many things; furthermore, [the Creation of] the entire world is worthwhile for his sake alone. He is called, ‘friend, beloved.’ [The Torah] clothes him in humility and fear [of G-d]...[The Torah] makes him great...”

Let us try to understand these words. Rabbi Meir did not learn Torah to receive honor, or for any other personal benefit, *chas v’shalom* (*Avot* 4:5). He learned Torah purely for the sake of Heaven, to bring light to the *neshamah* that Hashem placed within him. He prepared for himself a “garment worn by the *Chachamim*.” He knew his goal in this world: to learn Torah for its own sake, in humility. This is the meaning of the words in the Gemara: רבי מאיר סתם משנה רבי מאיר. Rabbi Meir considered himself “סתם,” an ordinary person acting for the sake of his *neshamah*. He understood that Hashem gave him his *neshamah* in order to illuminate it with the light of Torah, the משנה (Mishnah) that he expounded on. This is indicated by the fact that the word משנה has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul).

Rabbi Meir merited that his Torah learning was so valued and pure that he influenced not only those who sat before him, but also those who sat behind him, as Rebbi testified. One can attain these great attributes only if he possesses humility. Chazal say (*Sotah* 5a) that a haughty person is excluded from the presence of Hashem.

There is no greater miracle than a person overcoming his natural desire for honor and his negative character traits, thus subduing his *Yetzer Hara*. Such a person acts with perfect humility and learns Torah for its own sake. This is not something that comes easily, but requires much effort. He certainly has Heavenly assistance, for if not for Hashem's help, he would never have been able to achieve what he did. Nevertheless, one who is able to change his inherent nature in such a way is truly worthy of being called "Master of miracles."

For this reason, Rabbi Meir was called "Baal Hanes." He demonstrated such qualities, to the extent that he even influenced those who sat behind him. He was so self-effacing that he allowed a woman to spit upon him seven times in order to preserve her *shalom bayit* (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:15). His deeds and attributes, were, indeed, both wondrous and miraculous. Whoever met Rabbi Meir, who made nothing of himself although he certainly had much to be proud of, would automatically be transformed. This is why he was called, "Rabbi Nehorai." He enlightened the world with his Torah study and his shining *middot*.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was not called after the miracles he performed. Everything he did was for the sake of increasing the glory of Hashem. Therefore, he was simply called "Rashbi," without any mention of these miracles being attached to his name.

We commemorate the passing of Rashbi and Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes in close proximity to each other. This is in order that all future generations should learn the lesson that these tzaddikim teach: to behave with humility. One should be small in his own eyes, considering himself an "ordinary" person, learning Torah for its own sake. These tzaddikim were exceedingly humble, despite the great levels that they attained. If one behaves in this manner, thus overcoming his natural tendencies, his actions will become "miraculous," serving as a practical lesson for future generations.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Why was Rabbi Meir named “Baal Hanes?” Why wasn’t Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai called by this name? Also, how do we understand the term: **סתם משנה רבי מאיר**? Why wasn’t Rabbi Meir’s name spelled out clearly in the Mishnah, like the rest of the *Tanna’im*?
- The Torah study of Rabbi Meir was pure and unadulterated, affecting all who sat before him and behind him. Rebbi himself testified to this. Rabbi Meir merited attaining this level because he learned Torah for its own sake, through humility and subservience. The words **סתם משנה רבי מאיר** teaches us that Rabbi Meir considered himself to be an ordinary person (**סתם איש**), who was acting for the sake of his *neshamah* (**נשמה** has the same letters as **משנה**). He desired to enlighten his *neshamah* with the light of Torah.
- He was called “Baal Hanes” for the following reason. It is impossible for a person to perform a miracle without Heavenly assistance. But when a person expends great effort to learn Torah with true humility, thus overcoming his *Yetzer Hara*, this is a real miracle, since he has overcome the bounds of nature.
- Even though Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was accustomed to miracles, he was not called the “Master of miracles” since he performed miracles only to increase the honor of Hashem. In his humility, he did not want such an appellation.
- The *hilulas* of both of these Tanna’im are celebrated a few days apart, indicating that the main objective of Avodat Hashem is toil in Torah for its own sake, through humility and subservience. There is no greater miracle than this.

## FAITH IN TZADDIKIM

### 14TH OF IYAR, ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF THE TANNA, RABBI MEIR BAAL HANESS, ZT”L

In honor of the *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, I would like to recount some wondrous events, the likes of which Am Yisrael has not seen in hundreds of years, which took place just this year. This is just the tip of

the iceberg, in order to prove to future generations that we are not orphaned of our Father in Heaven, and everything that transpires is in the merit of *emunah* in Hashem.

Last night, we celebrated in Paris the *hilula* in honor of the *Tanna*, Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. We spoke at length about the topic of faith in tzaddikim, which comes through the Torah which they learned. Torah is truth, and truth is self-evident. Falsehood has no validity. Since the majority of religions are based on lies, they cannot implant real belief in the hearts of their adherents.

The festival of Pesach supports this idea. Chazal tell us (*Pesachim* 116b), “In each generation, a person must view himself as though he left Egypt.” Had the Exodus from Egypt not taken place, how could a person be instructed to feel as though he were there? The fact that we are commanded to feel like we ourselves left Egypt is proof that the Exodus really happened. We also believe in the validity of the numerous miraculous events that have taken place in our history, as they have been etched into our hearts even before we were born.

The fact that we celebrate a *hilula* is evidence that we believe in the power of the tzaddik, since we bring to life the truth of the stories surrounding him. This is the essence of belief. We say, “אלקא דמאיר ענני” – The G-d of Meir, answer me.” We believe that we will be helped by Heaven in the merit of the tzaddik. The miracles that a tzaddik effects take place because of the power of the Torah that he learned. We know that the Torah is truth. Thus, when we mention the miracles that a tzaddik performed, they are validated by the Torah, due to its unequivocal truth.

This is in contrast to the giants of the nations of the world. They are here today and gone tomorrow. They lived in the past but are long forgotten, because they didn’t contribute anything of lasting value. They had no justification for their existence whatsoever. Not so the tzaddikim of Am Yisrael; faith in them sustains our past, our present, and our future.

Moreover, the power of the righteous is greater in their death than in their life (*Chulin* 7b). During their lifetimes, they hid their righteousness, concealing their good deeds. They lived as simple, ordinary people. But after they die, there is no one to cover up their notable actions, and all becomes revealed. Their true greatness is apparent to all. The purpose of this *hilula* for Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is to provide future generations with a picture of their greatness.

### **Self-Sacrifice for Torah through Humility**

Whenever I bring up this subject, I am in awe of the story which transpired with the *Chidushei Harim* of Gur, zt”l. At first, he travelled to Rabbi Moshe MiKoznitz, zt”l. Afterward, he left Koznitz and traveled to the holy Rebbi, Rabbi Simchah Bunim MiPeshischa, zt”l.

What happened to the *Chidushei Harim*? Each time that he traveled to Peshischa to spend Shabbat there, another child of his died. In this manner, he lost thirteen children; one each week that he traveled. When asked why he abandoned Koznitz in favor of Peshischa, he replied, “In Koznitz, they honor me, and I cannot learn Torah. But in Peshischa, they don’t honor me at all. Therefore, I can learn without disturbance, in humility.”

When we hear such a story, we must make a personal accounting. We must ask ourselves: Does such a tzaddik exist in our generation, who is willing to place himself in grave danger by spending Shabbat at a specific Rebbi’s home? This demonstrates the great self-sacrifice of these tzaddikim, who wanted to build themselves in Torah, no matter what, even if their families would suffer. Their sole objective was to rise in Torah. They sought only to increase the glory of Hashem, not their own personal honor.

Obviously, when tzaddikim of such stature pass on from this world, it leaves an impression. This is as Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:6), “The departure of a righteous person from a place makes an impression:

its magnificence, its splendor, and its grandeur depart from it also.” We see this clearly in the case of the *Chidushei Harim*, who left us a legacy of flowering Jewry. He taught us a great lesson in Avodat Hashem. In order to ascend in spirituality and be a perfect Jew, one must sacrifice himself for the sake of Hashem, not seeking glory and honor for oneself.

The *Chidushei Harim* could have learned Torah in Koznitz, but he did not want to receive the respect that he was afforded there for doing so. He did not want to be honored for the Torah he learned. He felt that this would detract from his learning. He wanted to learn as much as possible. He paid a heavy price; the lives of thirteen children. But, because of it, he was rewarded that his progeny were Torah leaders after him. This teaches us to have faith in Hashem and His tzaddikim, for faith sustains us.

On the other hand, faith alone is not enough. We must learn Torah. Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem instilled faith in Bnei Yisrael, as it states (*Shemot* 14:31), “And they had faith in Hashem, and in Moshe, His servant.” Only after they were filled with faith, were they worthy of receiving the Torah. This teaches us that there is no faith without Torah, and no Torah without faith. They are interdependent.

In our time, there are tzaddikim whose strength lies in the very point that they guard themselves from receiving honor in the merit of their Torah knowledge. These tzaddikim will certainly continue “living” even after they leave this world. Their actions, hidden from us during their lifetime, will finally be revealed after their passing.

## **The Light of Torah Effects Miracles**

Today is the *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness. His name raises some questions. What is the significance of his name “Meir,” and why was he called “Baal Haness – Master of Miracles?”

Rabbi Meir was the first to divulge the essence of the clothing which Hakadosh Baruch Hu fashioned for Adam and his wife, Chava. The pasuk

tells us (*Bereishit* 3:21), “And Hashem G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.” Chazal teach that Rabbi Meir spelled the word עור (skin) with an *aleph*, reading אור (light). What are these “garments of light” as Rabbi Meir would teach?

“Light,” it is known, refers to the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 6:23), “For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light.” After Adam and Chava sinned by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Hashem gave them the light of Torah by means of which they could overcome their *Yetzer Hara*, as Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as an antidote.” These are the garments of light that Rabbi Meir referred to. These garments indicated to Adam and Chava that if they would involve themselves in Torah, it would light up their path, preventing them from sinning. The garments also allude to the special clothing worn by the Sages in this world as well as in the World to Come, which protect them from sin. It seems appropriate that this explanation of the light of Torah was given by Rabbi Meir since his own name means light.

This explanation also sheds light on his appellation of “Baal Hanes.” By means of correctly utilizing the light of Torah, one becomes “Baal Hanes,” the “Master of miracles.” We can understand this by considering what goes on around us today. We live in the defiled city of Paris, whose streets are replete with abomination, surrounded by people who speak obscenities all day long. Yet, we don’t fall into this trap. We pray, study Torah, and fulfill mitzvot. We don’t stumble upon forbidden sights and prohibited speech. This is the greatest miracle that could possibly take place. It is all in the merit of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. In the merit of the light of Torah, Hashem makes miracles for us on all sides. The Torah lights up our way, as “garments of light.” We merit miracles, because the light of the Torah helps us avoid the *Yetzer Hara* and cling only to that which is good.

Before relating wondrous stories that have taken place this month, I will preface with the following. Let no one think I possess *ruach hakodesh*,

when I tell of stories which happened to me. So many people approach me; I hardly have time to see my children. The burden of caring for the public weighs heavily upon me, from morning till night. I constantly receive petitioners and telephone calls from all over the world. The number of supplicants continuously increases.

Many were the times that I considered leaving this field of work. On second thought, I told myself, "If I leave these people, where will they turn? To the ignoramuses, to the powers of impurity." Therefore, although it is difficult, and causes not a small amount of *bitul* Torah, I do not cease from doing my part. Baruch Hashem, I support a few kollelim where men learn Torah. I envy them that they are able to learn without disturbance. Here, people are sitting in wheelchairs, waiting for a blessing. I spend hours listening to their problems. No small feat at all.

I don't advise anyone to do what I do. I don't wish this type of lifestyle upon anyone. It is fraught with pain and problems. There is no set time for meals, and no set time for sleep. One doesn't see his wife or his children. One must travel from one airport to the next, from one train station to the next. One goes from one house to the next. No one has any reason whatsoever to envy my position.

The truth is that I always desired to sit and learn Torah. David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 118:92), "Had Your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." In my case this means that without writing short works of Torah, I would long ago have perished. I would certainly have had a heart attack because of all the troubles and crises I hear about daily. It is too much to bear. Baruch Hashem, faith and belief strengthen us. Torah and faith empower a person. The *zechut* of my fathers endures.

Therefore, I would like to state that I am not, *chas v'shalom*, coming to praise myself, for Mishlei tells us (27:2), "Let another praise you, not your own mouth." I merely want to record for future generations incidents that have happened. The tzaddikim of this generation have told me that such

miracles must be publicized specifically in this generation, when the *Yetzer Hara* is in control and there is such a dearth of faith. Exposing these stories can only strengthen a person's *emunah*.

I certainly do not want to reap personal acclaim. I know I have no Torah or mitzvot to my credit, which would warrant miracles. Anything I may have achieved is purely in the merit of my ancestors. I understand my own value. I do not seek honor, *chas v'shalom*. Honor belongs to Hashem, Who wears glory as a cloak (*Tehillim* 93:1). I tell these stories in order to strengthen others in their *emunah*, and so that they should believe that Hashem runs the world.

### **And for Your Miracles and Wonders at all Times**

A woman by the name of Dorit Malka, who lives in Morocco, would approach me whenever I was there, requesting a blessing to find her life's partner. This woman is a well-known travel agent. She often helps me with regard to airline tickets, never once refusing me a favor. She has great faith in the power of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt"l. I blessed her many times and prayed fervently that she find her marriage partner. But for ten years she remained single.

When I was in Casablanca, on the 16th of Cheshvan, 5760, at the *hilula* of my grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt"l, this woman came over to me. She told me that she had met someone eligible, but was afraid that nothing would come of it. So many times in the past, she had met potential life partners, and the connection ended in disappointment.

After she finished speaking, she pulled out a photograph of the man. Wonder of wonders! I thought he looked suspiciously similar to someone who had just recently been admitted to a hospital in France for surgery. I asked her where he was right then, and she answered that he was, indeed, in France. Then I told her, "He is in the hospital, undergoing surgery." She argued that this couldn't be the case, as she had just spoken to him that day. But I stood my ground, claiming, "You should know that

he is in the hospital undergoing surgery. *Be'ezrat Hashem*, if what I say is correct, he is your life partner.” The woman said that she would look into the matter.

Two days later, she called my host in Morocco, Mr. Mordechai Kanfo, and related to him the details of what had happened. “I tried to reach the man for two days, unsuccessfully. I reached him only today and asked where he had been all this time. He said he didn’t want to tell me.” The very day they met, he was admitted to the hospital, for surgery. Baruch Hashem, the operation was successful. She related to him what had happened with me, and he was very moved. In the end, they got married. How this all happened is a wonder to me. These are the details of the story, may Hashem’s Name be blessed forever.

This year alone, hundreds of women have been blessed with children, in Mexico, Europe, Eretz Yisrael, and Morocco. This is all in the merit of these women taking upon themselves to immerse in the *mikveh*. This is, as we said, in the *zechut* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. When a person accepts a mitzvah upon himself, Hashem does miracles for him. A person engaged in Torah and mitzvot makes his *neshamah* radiate, meriting that miracles are performed on his behalf.

At the *hilula* festivities honoring Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, many people took upon themselves the mitzvah of laying tefillin. How is it that people so distant from Torah and mitzvot become interested in laying tefillin? It must be that they felt the sanctity of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, whose holiness permeates the entire world. His spirit certainly affects people to this very day, helping them do teshuvah. Then Hashem does miracles for them.

My uncle, Prosper Alexlesi, lived in Marrakesh, and was a truck driver. He would purchase huge quantities of merchandise, and sell them at a profit. Once a week, he would come to our house in Casablanca, bearing a pouch filled with cash, in order to buy more goods. He would sleep over

at our house. Every time he entered our home, he would light a candle in memory of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt”l.

Once, when he was visiting and had already retired for the night, he realized that he had forgotten his money pouch in the truck. He was extremely nervous that someone would break into the truck and steal the large amount of money he had there. He immediately arose, lit a candle for the *neshamah* of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, offered a quick prayer to Hashem, and dashed outside.

When he reached his truck, imagine his surprise at finding a man in the driver’s seat, holding the money bag in his hand. My uncle asked him what he was doing there. The man replied, “I broke into your truck in order to take the cash, but as soon as I touched the purse, I became glued to the spot. I cannot move or leave the truck. But you should know that I didn’t take any of the money.” My uncle asked him to return the pouch and leave the truck. Once he put down the pouch, he was able to get out of the truck. This is how my uncle retained all his money.

This story shows that there was Someone watching over the money, as Tehillim states (121:4), “Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps, the Guardian of Israel.” When a person sleeps, there is Someone watching over him, so that he should not die. When this burglar burst into the truck, Hakadosh Baruch Hu was protecting my uncle in the merit of the tzaddik, paralyzing the would-be thief. [See the book *Men of Faith*, for a different version of this story.]

A Jew from Nazareth, named Nachmani, was childless. He had been paralyzed for many years. My father, zt”l, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, was his close friend, and would visit him often. When my father arrived at his home and saw him in his wheelchair, my father began to cry, wanting to bless him with a speedy recovery.

The man’s wife approached my father, begging him, “Rabbi Moshe, pray for me that I should have children.” My father asked her, “How can I pray

for you to have children when your husband sits in a wheelchair, completely paralyzed? First, I will pray that he should recover from his paralysis, and then I will pray that you merit children.”

The woman answered, “Honored Rabbi, why should you pray twice? One prayer is sufficient.”

When my father asked her to explain, she stated, “If you will pray that I have children, Hashem will first send my husband a complete recovery and then grant me children. This way, you will have given two blessings contained in one.”

My father looked at Mr. Nachmani and said to him, “In the merit of my holy fathers, Hakadosh Baruch Hu should give you strong children. In one year, you will have a son.”

That was exactly what happened. Within a few months, Mr. Nachmani arose from his bed, and began walking around like a regular person. His wife had a boy, and my father travelled to Nazareth to receive the honor of being *sandek*. This is the power of tzaddikim, as our Sages said, “Greater are tzaddikim in their deaths than in their lifetimes.”

When I was once in the States, my host, Mr. Yitzchak Abadi told me an astounding story. A few years beforehand, he needed to travel with me to a certain place, but his young daughter was in the car. His wife phoned to tell him to bring her home, but he was short on time, as we were in a big hurry. What did he do? He drove her home, but didn’t bring her into the house. He merely opened the door and instructed her to go into the house.

Sometime later, his wife called, asking him where the girl was, and why she hadn’t yet arrived home. He answered that he had brought her to the house. But his wife told him that she had not yet come home. Over three hours passed, and the girl still did not come home. The parents obviously became very worried. I was also worried, thinking that perhaps this incident had happened because of me.

Baruch Hashem, the girl arrived home hale and hearty. When she walked in the house, her mother asked her where she had been. She answered, "Father brought me till the house. Suddenly, another car stopped, and the driver took me into his car. He drove me around the streets of New York for three hours, until he brought me home, and told me to go into my house."

We don't know what happened here, whether this was an attempted kidnapping, or something else. We also don't know who the driver was, and what he wanted to do. One thing we do know is this: One who sets out to do a mitzvah is not harmed.

It seems appropriate here to relate a frightening story that happened to me. I have only told this story to a few friends, but now I am publicizing it as it teaches a tremendous lesson about Divine Providence.

The story took place over ten years ago, when the Intifada was raging in Eretz Yisrael. It was extremely dangerous to be seen on the streets, especially after dark, and specifically in the outlying areas near Arab neighborhoods. That day, I was in Yerushalayim, with my young daughter, Sara, who was three-and-a-half at the time. I had been visiting friends, as well as several of the tzaddikim and Gedolei Yisrael. In the evening, we went to pray at the *Kotel Hamaaravi*.

By the time we finished praying, nighttime had fallen, and I wanted to take a taxi to Ashdod. I went to the taxi station near the Kotel in the Old City, unaware that Arab drivers are also employed by this taxi company. I got into one of the taxis. When I looked at the driver, he seemed to stare back at me with the face of a murderer. By his name, which was printed on the side of the car, I was able to tell he wasn't one of ours.

Fear overcame me; I didn't know what to do. The taxi doors were locked; how could I escape? I began to fervently pray to Hashem. By that time, the taxi had already made its way up the Yerushalayim-Tel Aviv highway. Blackness engulfed us. We were completely alone on the road.

Suddenly, the driver stopped the car without explaining. Then, I became especially fearful. He was a muscular beast; who could fend him off? What should I do? I considered my options. I could say Kriyat Shema, or some other prayer. Meanwhile, the driver left the car, and went around it in order to open the trunk. I remained inside. I was thinking that there really was no place for me to turn at this hour of the night, in the middle of the highway, together with my little girl. I asked Hashem to perform a miracle for me. I said, "I came to the Holy Land to pray...I still have young children..."

While I was praying, the driver slammed the trunk shut and continued driving to Ashdod without a word. We arrived at our destination, Baruch Hashem. Why did the driver stop? What did he do by the trunk? What was he looking for? I don't know. Maybe he wanted to take out a knife or an axe...but he ended up doing nothing. For this, I thank Hashem, may His Name be blessed forever.

## APPRECIATING HASHEM'S MIRACLES

### SAID AT A DINNER FOR *ICHUD MOSDOT GUR* IN FRANCE

Last night, I spoke about the *mesirut nefesh* of the *Chidushei Harim*, zt"l, of Gur, which I mentioned before. He lost thirteen of his children when he left Koznitz and travelled to Peshischa, in order to learn Torah without gaining any personal glory. Why did so many people attend the dinner? Because they themselves have personally witnessed miracles. When a person wishes to thank Hashem for the miracles that he has experienced, it is not sufficient to thank Him orally, but one must thank Hashem also with action. One must accept upon himself to learn Torah and support those who learn. This is how we show appreciation to Hashem. Hashem is certainly pleased with such people, doing miracles for them at all times.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the miracle of the Splitting of the Sea was not a one-time affair, like we would think. Rather, every minute that Bnei Yisrael were passing on dry land through the water, the sea split for them. If so, the miracle happened moment by moment. That is tremendous, indeed. Bnei Yisrael could be compared to Nachshon ben Aminadav at every moment that they continued to walk through the waters; they continuously saw a wall of water before them splitting as they went.

This really happens to every person, throughout his life. From the moment he is born, every second, the waters are splitting before him. Every minute, Hashem is performing miracles for him. Unfortunately, many people died this year of heart failure. How many children went to bed, after being fed happily by their mothers, never to arise again? They died in their sleep. The waters didn't split before them. From this, we understand that one's entire lifetime is one big miracle. A person is blind and fails to take note of all the good which Hashem does for him. The more one increases his Avodat Hashem, the greater and more wonderful will be the miracles shown to him.

The people of the Generation of the Wilderness were called "warriors." It was possible for them to have fought their way into the Land and conquer it. But they did not merit this. Why? Because they constantly complained against Hashem. One who complains is called a "heretic," for he essentially denies all the good Hashem bestows upon him. Instead of thanking Hashem for His abundant miracles and kindnesses, he complains.

This is the lesson that Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes teaches us regarding the tunics of light that Hashem fashioned for Adam and Chava. When Hashem asked them why they had sinned, they began to complain. Chava blamed the Snake, who had enticed her to eat. When Hashem turned to Adam, asking for an explanation for his actions, he said that he wasn't to blame; his wife had given him to eat. They implied that had Hashem not created

the Snake, Chava wouldn't have eaten from the tree, and had Hashem not created Chava, Adam would not have eaten from the fruit. Each cast the blame on the other.

What did Hashem do? He made them tunics of light. He gave them the light of Torah, for Torah removes one's complaints against Hashem. By means of the light of Torah, a person can understand and justify all of Hashem's deeds toward him. Without Torah, a person can never comprehend the works of Hashem, and be able to say "Blessed be the True Judge." He will perpetually protest whatever comes his way. If we hear Jews complaining, it is because they lack Torah. Had they toiled in Torah, and felt the light of Torah, they would never be able to complain.

We see the great good that Hashem did for Adam and Chava. They spoiled the Creation by dimming the light Hashem had created. But Hashem reignited it. They spoiled the vegetation, but Hashem replanted. He produced clothes of light, so that Adam and Chava would be able to bring the spark of Torah into their lives (*Tanchuma* 58). This is the incredible lesson taught us by Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes.

## **Torah Study through Humility Saves from Impurity of Sin and Arrogance**

Let us examine the connection between the *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes and Pesach Sheini. When Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness, they sacrificed the *korban* Pesach on the 14th of Nisan. They ate matzah and maror. But some people were impure and were unable to partake of the offering in Nisan. They were very distressed by this, as they were like uncircumcised people, who are banned from bringing a sacrifice. When Hashem saw this, He gave them a second chance, allowing them to bring a sacrifice on Pesach Sheini, one month later.

*Tumah* is caused by lack of Torah, lack of light. Hashem provides a person with the light of Torah, that he merit seeing miracles and witnessing the water splitting before him constantly. He will then go from

strength to strength. Otherwise, if one does not go in the way of Torah, and succumbs to the *nisyonot* placed before him in his Torah learning, the great miracle that Hashem performed for him of protecting him from the *Yetzer Hara* ceases. He then falls into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, becoming mired in *tumah*. This is as Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 30b), “Unless Hashem helps a person, he is unable to withstand him (the *Yetzer Hara*). It is only with Heavenly assistance that he can subdue his *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to fire.

This is the idea behind Pesach Sheini. It teaches a person that he can return to Hashem even though he was defiled. Moreover, Hashem established Pesach Sheini before the holiday of Shavuot, the day of receiving the Torah, when one becomes re-sanctified. By reuniting with the Torah and mitzvot, Hashem comes to a person’s aid. Pesach Sheini gives us another opportunity to purify ourselves.

We can learn another lesson from Pesach Sheini. If a person who was defiled can become purified through Pesach Sheini, certainly a person who constantly behaves with humility will be helped by Hashem. He will miraculously prevent this person from sinning, and thereby becoming impure.

Perhaps we can add another amazing thought. Impurity comes upon a person when he sins and falls in his spiritual level. *Tumah* is a form of death. This is based on what I read in the sefer Kabbalah, of Rabbeinu David Dera Halevi, in the chapter on kingship. It is based on the pasuk (*Shemot* 12:20), “לא תאכלו – כל מחמצת לא תאכלו.” The word מחמצת (leavening) can be split into the two words חמצ מת meaning, *chametz – leavened bread*, and *dead*.

It is well-known that haughtiness is abominated by Hashem. He says about an arrogant person, “I cannot live together with him in this world” (*Sotah* 5a). Furthermore, pride is a form of glory which drives a person out of this world (*Avot* 4:21). Pride can actually bring death upon a

person, for a haughty man is compared to a dead person, as he denies Hashem, bringing nearer his own death.

On the other hand, the entire concept of Pesach is nullification of pride. Chametz symbolizes pride, since the dough becomes puffed up by the leavening in it. Certainly, there are many reasons why we are prohibited from eating chametz and are commanded to eat matzah, e.g. as a reminder of the bread of affliction, to remember the Exodus from Egypt, etc. However, the main lesson to learn is that pride must be subdued. It must be sought after in every crack and corner of our souls, in order that we should eradicate it. This is why the word **מחמצת**, contains the words **מת חמצ**. Chametz on Pesach is like arrogance, which puffs up a person, bringing him closer to death.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was exceedingly conceited. He said (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?” Furthermore, he claimed (*Yechezkel* 29:3), “Mine is the river, and I have made myself [powerful].” Certainly, Bnei Yisrael were affected by this attitude during the many years they spent in Egypt. Therefore, when Hashem desired to extricate them from there, He instructed them to completely nullify the trait of arrogance, and behave humbly. Hashem forgives a person for all the negative traits he has without becoming enraged at the sinner, if he does teshuvah. However, Hashem despises arrogance. For that reason, Hashem smote Pharaoh, who acted with arrogance and scorn toward Moshe Rabbeinu, until he ultimately scorned Hashem Himself.

Therefore, Hashem told Bnei Yisrael **“כל מחמצת לא תאכלו”** – Any leavened bread you may not eat.” They were forbidden to eat even the smallest morsel that had any connection to leavening, which puffs a person up with pride. Arrogance can remove one from this world. Once Bnei Yisrael would extirpate the *middah* of pride from themselves they would be able to overcome Pharaoh, who exemplified the force of impurity, and leave Egypt.

Now we can well understand why we eat matzah on Pesach. Matzah is round, perfectly even on all sides. There is no one side which is greater in length than another. Matzah is completely disconnected from the concept of pride. A person should take a lesson from matzah, to keep away from arrogance, and be humble of spirit. The idea of eating matzah together with the maror is to teach that even when things seem bitter, one must not weaken his mitzvah observance.

The reason Hashem saw fit to wipe out the firstborn of Egypt was because they were arrogant. Chazal teach (*Shemot Rabbah* 15:15a, 16) that the Egyptians worshipped the firstborn, idolizing them. By killing the firstborn, Hashem wiped out the last vestige of Egypt's pride, enabling Bnei Yisrael to leave and ultimately receive the Torah.

In order to receive the Torah one must possess true humility, for Torah endures only in one who lowers himself (*Ta'anit* 7a). Moshe received the Torah from Sinai (*Avot* 1:1). This teaches an important lesson. Moshe, the humblest of all men (*Bamidbar* 12:3), obtained the Torah from Har Sinai, who lowered itself in humility (*Sotah* 5a). Likewise, Bnei Yisrael merit to receive the Torah only when they display humility.

This line of reasoning sheds light on the statement of Chazal (*Yevamot* 62b) that the twenty-four thousand disciples of Rabbi Akiva perished because they did not treat each other with sufficient respect. Many explanations are given for this. However, it seems that we can attribute their deaths to the sin of pride. Each regarded himself on a higher level than his colleague. They didn't value their peers adequately. Because they didn't take to heart the lesson of chametz on Pesach, they were punished. Hashem judged them stringently, according to their great status as *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im* (*Bava Kama* 50a), with the strict hand of justice, and removed them from the world.

We must learn a practical lesson from this episode. If we want to merit Torah, we must avoid becoming puffed up with pride, like chametz. This

causes spiritual downfall and death. On the contrary, we must humble ourselves.

The pasuk states (*Mishlei* 3:18), “It (the Torah) is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” How does the tree stay alive? By drinking water, daily. So, too, can a person receive vitality daily, through Torah, as symbolized by water. Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:5) that the “tree of life” is Torah. A person himself is likened to Torah, as he has 248 organs and 365 sinews, parallel to the 613 mitzvot. If a person grasps the tree of life, supporting those who learn Torah, then he is truly alive, receiving vitality from the Torah. A tree without a source of water is worthless. It remains dried up, bearing no fruits. A person without Torah is the same; dry, without purpose or “produce.”

Moreover, without Torah, a person is liable to become arrogant, stating (*Devarim* 8:17), “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” But the power of Torah is such that it enables a person to bring light upon himself, helping to nullify the feeling of arrogance in his heart, for Torah is acquired by humility.

To support this idea, we can cite what Hashem told Moshe to tell Aharon Hakohen after the deaths of his two sons, Nadav and Avihu (*Vayikra* 16:2), “He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary.” Why was Aharon Hakohen one of the tzaddikim of the generation, prohibited from entering the Sanctuary? Chazal (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:12) explain that he was on the same level as Moshe, as it says (*Tehillim* 99:6), “Moshe and Aharon were among his priests, and Shmuel among those who invoke his name”. Why was he banned entry, whereas Moshe was permitted?

Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. The pasuk is not referring specifically to Aharon, who was holier than the rest of the Kohanim. Rather, this command applied to all future generations. Thus there was no differentiation made between Aharon and the other priests. This was in order that Aharon should not become proud. If he were permitted entry to the Sanctuary at all times he might become haughty.

This illustrates how despicable arrogance is in Hashem's eyes. He desires that Bnei Yisrael should behave with humility at all times.

When discussing the wonders of the tzaddikim, there is no end. Because today is the *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, I will relate an amazing story which happened to my mother, may she live and be well. We can learn from it the extent to which Hashem performs miracles in the merit of the righteous ones.

Morocco and Algeria were at war for many years. Whoever entered the area between the borders of the two countries was immediately apprehended. Once, my mother was in Morocco with my brother. She had gone with a few people in order to pray at the grave of the tzaddik Rabbi Yissachar Baal Hamaayan. He is one of the first tzaddikim to be buried in Morocco, on the border near Algeria. Despite the danger involved, my mother went there with my brother.

When they returned from their prayers, they were immediately arrested by the Moroccan army, who began interrogating them. Moreover, when they discovered that my brother had Israeli citizenship, they suspected him of espionage and imprisoned them for the time being. My mother and brother were understandably terribly afraid. They were in a deserted place, over two thousand kilometers away from Casablanca. If the army would torture them, or even kill them, who would know about it? Who was there to tell the army what they should do?

My mother and brother were brought to a side room, where a soldier sat and guarded them. Immediately, Mother began to pray to Hashem that the merit of the tzaddik should protect her. Suddenly, the phone in the room rang. The soldier picked up the receiver. The voice on the line asked him, "Is a Jewish woman by the name of Mazal Pinto there together with her son?"

The soldier answered, "And who are you?"

"I am the general of the army. I want to speak with the woman."

Mother immediately went to the phone. The voice told her, “I am Refael Hakohen. You have nothing to fear. I will speak with the army personnel regarding your release. And now, please return the receiver to the soldier.”

The soldier took the phone and Refael Hakohen told him, “I demand that you immediately release the woman and her son and also that you apologize to her. If you refuse, your end will be bitter, indeed.”

The soldiers became very afraid. They approached my mother and asked for her forgiveness. Then they released the captives, according to them great honor.

This was incredible. No one knew that my mother was in that desert, for she hadn’t informed anyone that she was going. The whole episode was surreal: That there was a soldier’s tent in the desert; that it had a telephone line in it; that someone should phone just at the time that she was incarcerated there, demanding her release... Furthermore, who was this Refael Hakohen? And how did he manage to get the soldiers so scared?

Because all these details seemed so unusual, my mother began to ask about the man all over Morocco. Who was this Refael Hakohen? Perhaps he was a general, or a supervisor in the army. But no one had heard his name before. We didn’t know who Refael Hakohen was.

One year after the terrible incident, a Jew approached my mother, and asked if she wished to visit the grave of Refael Hakohen who is buried in Marrakesh. Mother suddenly remembered the name, and asked how long he had been buried there. “Over nine hundred years,” was the reply. Mother then told me, “Maybe this is the same Refael Hakohen who rescued me. Perhaps he wants his name to be publicized after so many years, so that people will come and visit his grave.”

This story illustrates the precept mentioned above: Tzaddikim are called “living,” even after they die (*Berachot* 18b). Hashem reveals just

how great they were only after their deaths. In their merit, Hashem performs miracles for His nation, as in the case of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. Had the story concerning my mother taken place in a European country, perhaps we could have found a reasonable way to explain what happened. But it transpired in the primitive country of Morocco, in a desert two thousand miles from Casablanca, in some tent, where a phone call brought salvation. This can only be described as a miracle from Heaven.

### **Humility – Preparing Oneself in This World for the World to Come**

There is an important point to mention concerning the attribute of humility. Many tzaddikim served Hashem through *mesirut nefesh*, as we noted regarding the *Chidushei Harim*, who sacrificed his sons for the sake of Torah. He understood that the ultimate way to learn Torah is through humility and subservience. But it is difficult, in our day and age, to find this type of behavior. The *Yetzer Hara* has ways and means of tripping us up on all fronts.

Rabbi Meir likens this world to a narrow bridge overlooking a deep abyss, into which the *Yetzer Hara* would like to send us. What is the “narrow bridge” referring to? This is the “straight and narrow” path of our heritage. The *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to the leavening in the dough (*Berachot* 17a), convinces a person that life on the “freeway” is the more pleasurable way to live. He claims that if one remains on the “narrow bridge,” he is liable to fall into the chasm below. The person who heeds the voice of the *Yetzer Hara* does not realize that this is in truth what will cause his downfall.

Praiseworthy is the one who continues his careful way across the narrow bridge. Hashem will repay him in this world, as well as in the World to Come. Conversely, life on the “expressway” will rob him both of this world as well as the World to Come. Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:8), “The

more flesh, the more worms; the more possessions, the more worry.” What can one bring with him to the World to Come? David Hamelech tells us (*Tehillim* 119:45), “And I will walk in broad pathways.” When we see a person learning Torah and performing mitzvot with joy, the narrow bridge widens for him, like a broad highway. He then understands that this world is nothing but vanity; what is important is what he prepares spiritually for the World to Come.

To support this idea, I will repeat what I often say. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 1:1), “וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו” – He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him.” The letter 'א' of the word וַיִּקְרָא is written small in the Sefer Torah. The word וַיִּקְרָא (he called) denotes calling to someone out of endearment, whereas the word וַיְדַבֵּר (he spoke) is a harsher language. The two forms of speaking seem to contradict each other.

This can be understood in the following way. Moshe Rabbeinu, as is known, was exceedingly humble before Hashem. The more love Hashem showed him, as referred to in the word וַיִּקְרָא, the more self-effacing Moshe became, and the more he accepted Hashem’s words in a harsher way, as indicated by וַיְדַבֵּר. Thus, whenever Hashem displayed affection for him, Moshe Rabbeinu considered himself unworthy, hearing only words of rebuke.

Furthermore, the 'א' of וַיִּקְרָא is small in order to show that the word can also be read without it. It then forms the word וַיִּקְרַח, which means “chance, happening.” Moshe Rabbeinu nullified himself to such an extent that he believed Hashem spoke to him “by chance.” Specifically because of Moshe’s great humility, his light shines forth for all generations.

Let us learn a practical lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu. To the extent which a person humbles himself before Hashem Yitbarach, he is beloved by Him. He does the will of Hashem, and Hashem does his will. If not, וַיִּקְרַח – Woe to him and woe to his *neshamah*. If he will make light of the small mitzvot, he will eventually mock the more serious offenses. But if a person behaves with humility, as Moshe did, Hashem will love him. He

will come to *Olam Haba* with a suitcase overflowing with Torah and good deeds.

In a similar vein, we find that when Haman Harasha saw Mordechai sitting at the gates of the palace, not rising or prostrating himself before him, he was filled with rage (*Esther* 5:9). This is difficult to understand. Why should Haman, the prime minister, who was able to come and go before the king at his discretion, be angered by the actions of some simple person, sitting in sackcloth at the gates of the palace?

There is a deeper meaning to the entire episode. The “palace of the king” is a symbol of the yeshiva. One, who sits and learns Torah, is actually sitting at the entrance to the palace of the King of the world. “Haman” is a metaphor for the *Yetzer Hara*. Whenever he witnesses a Jew learning in the yeshiva, in humility and submission, and through hardship (as depicted by the sackcloth), he is infuriated. He wants to trip a person up by causing him to feel arrogant and thus permit himself all the pleasures of this world. Humility and subservience are foreign concepts to him.

However, man’s purpose in this world is the complete antithesis to the desires of the *Yetzer Hara*. One should learn Torah through self-negation, in humility and submission. He should view everything that comes from Hashem as great and important. This will make him beloved in Hashem’s eyes, as in the term *ויקרא*. On the other hand, if he capitulates to the *Yetzer Hara*, he will change the language of *ויקרא* to *ויקרא*. Woe to him, since he will be under the control of the *Middat Hadin*. Only by learning Torah with humility, by “enraging” the *Yetzer Hara*, will he merit to “sit at the gates of the King.”

### **“And your Righteousness will Precede You”**

I would like to present some ideas as to how one can prepare himself in this world, which is called “the lobby,” in order to arrive at “the great banquet hall,” which is the World to Come (*Avot* 4:15).

I heard from my host, Mr. Messinger, that when a person dies, he is clothed in shrouds that have no pockets. This transmits the message that a person carries no earthly possessions with him to the World to Come. He does not bring along his money, gold and silver, or jewelry. Only Torah and mitzvot accompany him, as the pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), “Your righteous deed will precede you.”

After the sin, Hashem fashioned tunics of light for Adam and his wife. This was the Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* entered man after the sin, convincing him to walk the wide highways, not the narrow path of Torah and mitzvot. This is how the *Yetzer Hara* causes a person to continue sinning. But Hashem tells the person, “After the sin of Adam, I gave you garments of light, the illumination of Torah. The Torah will protect you in this world, and secure for you a place in the World to Come. Then the narrow path will widen before you. Only Torah and mitzvot will be your baggage as you enter the next world.”

Once, when we were travelling from Marseille, where one has to pay a toll in order to enter the highway, Mr. Messinger said the following. “Even if a person is missing a penny, he will be detained on the side of the road and barred from continuing on his way. So it is in this world. A person wishes to travel on the highway, which is the fastest and most direct way to travel from place to place, just like the *Yetzer Hara* wants him to. But when his time is up, he will be apprehended and interrogated about everything that happened in his lifetime, both big and small. He will be questioned regarding how he performed mitzvot in this world, and if he doesn’t have the means of paying for all the good times he had here, he’ll be held back from entering Gan Eden.”

This thought is truly astounding. At a person’s death, all of his valuables will be worthless. Only Torah and mitzvot escort him on his eternal journey. If he has none, with what will he come to the next world? This is as Rabbi Meir Baal Haness explained. Hashem opens the gates of Torah before a person, through which he gains entry to the World to

Come, as it says (*Tehillim* 118:20), “This is the gate of Hashem; the righteous shall enter through it.”

This idea is expressed by the following. Why did Hashem set up the nation so that there are כהן לוי ישראל (Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael)? Their initials spell the word כלי (vessel). And their last letters are numerically equivalent to the word סל (basket). We can learn from this that whenever a Yisrael hears mention of a Kohen or Levi, he should make himself into a vessel, or basket, to accept the blessings of Torah and mitzvot. If not, G-d forbid, he will arrive at the World to Come with a torn basket, empty of everything. Man’s goal in this world is to fill his vessels with spirituality.

This thought helps us understand why the Yisrael would decorate his basket of *bikurim* before presenting it to the Kohen. It also explains why he cites the passage (*Devarim* 26:5), “An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather.” This is an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*, who is forever bent on causing people to stumble and fall into sin. It is known that with one sin of *lashon hara* a person can lose everything, since it is a very serious transgression (*Arachin* 15b). He may thus find himself carrying an empty basket to the World to Come.

Therefore, a person must constantly battle the *Yetzer Hara* and subdue him, so that he may appear before the Kohen with a basket laden with mitzvot and good deeds, which he acquired for himself in this world. He states before the Kohen that he overcame his *Yetzer Hara*, the Aramean who tries to seduce him in conniving ways. And here he has a basket full of good deeds. If he behaves this way, Hashem performs miracles for him. For without Heavenly assistance a person would not be able to withstand his *Yetzer Hara*. On the other hand, with Hashem’s help, he will arrive in the World to Come with his basket overflowing with the fruits of his labor.

To emphasize this point, I would like to relate what I saw, about a month ago, on my trip to Geneva. I arrived at the cemetery to participate in the memorial service of someone buried there. There, a man

approached me, pointing to a grave, and asked if I knew who was buried in that spot. “Who is it?” I asked him.

He replied, “The wealthy tycoon, Edmund Safra.”

“Why isn’t anyone visiting his grave?” I asked him.

The man answered, “I don’t know. Maybe it’s the custom not to visit a different grave when one comes to the cemetery for the memorial of another person.”

However, I did see people disperse to visit other graves, but not one soul went over to the plot of Edmund Safra.

I myself walked over to his grave, and this is what was inscribed on it. “Here rests the body of Mr. Edmund Safra, the great philanthropist. He distributed much charity, built yeshivot and schools, and helped orphans and widows.” I then said to myself, “Here we see what Chazal tell us, ‘Your righteousness will precede you.’ When a person dies, none of his money accompanies him, only Torah and mitzvot. When Mr. Safra was living, he did many acts of charity, and all clamored to have an audience with him. Now that he is no longer living, everyone has forgotten about him; no one needs him anymore. Only when he was alive was he worth anything to them. Now that he is gone, he is worthless. All that he has to his good name are the good deeds which he amassed.”

Shlomo Hamelech phrased it this way (*Kohelet* 9:4), “A live dog is better than a dead lion.” The lion, king of the animals, is worthless once it dies. So, too, is man. He has value in his lifetime, as he has the ability to perform mitzvot and learn Torah. He is likened to a king, a tzaddik (*Gittin* 62a). But after death, he is worthless, because he cannot perform good deeds any longer.

Edmund Safra, the millionaire, was valued while he was alive. Everyone approached him, asking for donations. But after his death, they all forgot about him. On his gravestone, it doesn’t say, “Here rests Edmund Safra,

the wealthy magnate, who owned banks in various countries, who had tremendous businesses, who was fabulously rich.” It mentions only his mitzvot and good deeds, for only these remain with him as merits in the World to Come. We should take a lesson from this and realize that true possessions are the spiritual riches one amasses in this world. Only they remain with him forever.

In summary, I will narrate a few stories, which demonstrate the greatness of having *emunah* in tzaddikim, since in their merit Hashem performs miracles with every type of person.

Last week, I was in New York. A Jew approached me by the name of Eli Kadi, who has always been ready to do whatever I asked of him. I needed to raise a huge amount of money for *tzedakah*, so I asked him for this large amount of money. Although it was a tremendous amount, because he had never refused me, and also wished to show appreciation for all the favors that I had done for him, he answered in the affirmative, stating he would bring the cash.

I prayed that he would give me the money wholeheartedly; not feeling compelled to do it, *chas v'shalom*. I asked Hashem to guide me on the right path. I was answered right away. This Jew began to speak to me about the house that he had just built, and requested my blessing that he should not be affected by an evil eye and that everything with the new house should work out well.

I told him not to enter the house immediately upon completion, but, rather, to check out all the gas lines first. He answered that he had already checked everything and all was in working order. But I remained adamant, “Do not go and live in the house. Dig down to the pipelines and check the gas.” Then Kadi finally relented and agreed to fulfill my instructions.

Not two days passed, when Kadi appeared before me, overcome with emotion. “Honored Rabbi,” he began, “I must thank you. Had I not checked the gas pipes again, the entire house would have exploded...I

had checked out everything in the beginning, and everything seemed to be in order, but after the Rav's entreaties I invited other architects to come with modern electronic equipment. They checked more thoroughly, and found a gas leak underground. The entire house was in danger."

I lifted my arms heavenward, proclaiming, "Master of the universe! How did I know this, without Hashem guiding me? He sees that we want to keep His mitzvot. Therefore, He gives us the tools with which to keep them. But we don't take enough advantage of the tools we are given. If we would only utilize all our resources to their full capacity, we would be capable of performing millions of mitzvot every day. Chazal tell us (*Yoma* 38b), 'One who comes to purify himself is aided.' Hashem helps whoever truly wants to do mitzvot."

On the same occasion, Eli Kadi reminded me of the following story. When I was in Mexico, he acted as my translator from Spanish to *lashon hakodesh*. This is what transpired.

A blind woman approached me with her mother, to ask for a blessing. I told her she must begin keeping Shabbat, since the reason for her blindness was her desecration of Shabbat. The mother argued it had nothing to do with that at all. But I stood my ground, stating that her blindness was a result of *chillul Shabbat*. Furthermore, I told her that the entire episode began on Shabbat.

Immediately, the mother took a calendar to check and, indeed, discovered that her daughter began losing her sight on a Shabbat. They both admitted to their sin. I explained what they needed to do to rectify the situation, and Baruch Hashem, her eyesight returned.

My student, Refael Amar, told me an astounding story. He once travelled to Morocco with his business partner, who was a pilot in the Israeli air force and was drawing closer to Judaism. There, they prayed at the grave of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt"l. The Arab watchman brought them to the burial plot and handed them books of Tehillim. The

pilot noticed a piece of paper in the Arab's hand and asked him about it. The Arab answered, "I am holding a picture of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, which I once got from his grandson."

Upon hearing this, the pilot began conversing with Refael Amar in *lashon hakodesh*, so that the Arab wouldn't understand. He told him, "Maybe we should try to buy the picture from him? Let's offer him a nice amount of money; maybe he'll agree." The pilot indeed, offered the Arab money, but he adamantly refused to part with the picture. The pilot raised the price to one thousand dollars, but the Arab did not budge. The pilot reached the sum of four thousand dollars...but the Arab would not listen at all. You should know that for four thousand dollars, one can purchase a home in Morocco.

Then the pilot turned to Refael Amar. "Look at how much faith in the tzaddik this Arab has. He certainly has faith, for the picture in his hand is old and torn. Yet, he refuses to part with it." This is because he witnessed miracles which took place in merit of this tzaddik. For him, this picture is his entire life. If an Arab can display such strong trust in the power of the tzaddik, all the more so, should we Jews firmly believe in his greatness.

These stories illustrate the tremendous importance of having faith in tzaddikim, since it brings a person to have faith in Hashem. As we already stated, Hashem does everything, and even performs miracles, for one who believes in the power of tzaddikim and Divine Providence. Certainly, faith without Torah is not faith at all. Both are connected.

Regarding this, Shlomo Hamelech prayed to Hashem that when a gentile comes to pray at the Beit Hamikdash, Hashem should accept his prayers immediately, but when a Jew comes to pray, Hashem should not accept his prayers right away. Why? Because a Jew needs time to work on himself, by means of the Torah, in order to merit wondrous things. On the other hand, the gentile has no connection to Torah. If he believes his salvation comes from Hashem that is sufficient for him to be answered. However, for a believing Jew, that is not enough. He must enlighten his

*neshamah* with the light of Torah and mitzvot. In this manner, he will merit miracles from Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The main aspect of faith in tzaddikim is because of the merit of the Torah which they learn. Torah is truth, and therefore something that we can perceive, just as we can perceive *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The Torah which the tzaddikim learned testifies to them after their deaths. For in their lifetime, they concealed their greatness. Only after they die, are their great deeds revealed. In their merit, Hashem performs miracles for Am Yisrael, as the tzaddikim performed in their lifetimes.
- We see the tremendous self-sacrifice that tzaddikim had for the sake of Torah. The *Chidushei HaRim* lost thirteen of his children, after leaving Koznitz for Peshischa, because of the *mesirut nefesh* he had in order to learn Torah without acclaim. When a tzaddik of this caliber leaves the world, it makes an impression. The Chiddushei HaRim left a legacy for generations. His progeny continue leading large congregations in our nation. Faith in Hashem energizes. But it must go hand in hand with Torah study; the two are interdependent. Through the Torah tzaddikim continue to live in future generations.
- This is the idea behind the *hilula* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. He was called, “Meir” which means “light,” as he maintained that the garments that Adam and Chava were given by Hashem were garments of light, referring to the light of Torah. Through illuminating his *neshamah* with the light of Torah, Rabbi Meir became “Baal Hanes” – the Master of Miracles.
- When I relate miraculous events which happened to me, I am not looking for honor. I merely want to prevent people from looking for their salvation in questionable places. My purpose is to strengthen people’s belief in Hashem. All of these miracles are only in the merit of my holy ancestors.
- It is insufficient to merely show appreciation to Hashem verbally. We must also take action, e.g., showing support of Torah scholars. In this manner, Hashem will perform miracles for us. Miracles abound, every moment. Just as the sea split, moment by moment, when the Jews walked through it, so, too, do we witness a similar miracle when a Jew arises in the morning, hale and hearty. Every instant

is a separate miracle for which to give thanks. If someone continually complains instead of showing gratitude, he is called a heretic.

- There is a connection between Rabbi Meir and Pesach Sheini, the date he was *niftar*. Without the light of Torah, personified by Rabbi Meir, there is *tumah*. Hashem removes this *tumah* from a person when he follows the ways of the Torah.
- Torah is a tree of life for those who grasp it. A tree grows near water. Man, who is compared to the tree, cannot live without the life-giving waters of Torah. Without Torah, one may become arrogant, remaining a dry tree without fruits.
- Hashem instructed Moshe to tell Aharon that he could not come to the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he desired, although he was just as righteous as his brother. This was in order that he should not aggrandize himself over his fellow Kohanim. Humility is a prerequisite for Torah.
- One must prepare himself in the lobby, this world, before entering the banquet hall, the World to Come. The way to prepare oneself is by learning Torah and keeping mitzvot.
- We find there are three groups in Am Yisrael: כהן לוי ישראל. Their initials spell the word כלי, which means a vessel, and their last letters denote סל, which means a basket. A person must be like a vessel in his lifetime, amassing Torah and mitzvot. In this manner, he will come to the next world with a basket full of spiritual riches. Hashem performs miracles for such a person.
- One must have faith in tzaddikim. But faith alone is insufficient; one must also be a *ben Torah*. One's prayers are accepted only when one exhibits true faith in Hashem, and involves himself in Torah. Only then will he merit to experience miracles and wonders.

## A Practical Lesson

The light of Torah effects wonders and miracles. This is by means of faith in Hashem and His tzaddikim. If someone sacrifices himself for the sake of Torah, as in the case of the *Chidushei Harim*, he merits open miracles. This is only when one is humble. If a person acquires Torah and mitzvot, he overcomes the *Yetzer Hara*, and will safely travel the

highroads. He will then arrive at the World to Come with baskets laden with the fruits of his labor in this world, and will receive the reward that is reserved for the tzaddikim.

## THE TZADDIK – ADVOCATE OF THE NATION

Rabbi Yishmael said, “One time, I entered the Inner Sanctuary, to offer *ketoret*. I saw an image of Hashem, so to speak, sitting upon His throne. He told me, ‘Yishmael, My son, bless Me.’ I answered, ‘May it be Your will that Your compassion overcomes Your anger, and overrides all other attributes. And behave toward Your children with the Attribute of Mercy, and treat them beyond the letter of the law.’ Hashem nodded His head” (*Berachot* 7a).

This narrative raises several difficulties. First of all, why does Hashem need the blessing of a mortal; isn’t He the source of all blessing (*Zohar* II, 135b)? Furthermore, what sort of blessing did Rabbi Yishmael give? It seems that he didn’t bless Hashem at all, but, rather, Bnei Yisrael.

Hashem is closely connected with Am Yisrael. He is our Father, and we are His children, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 4:22), “My firstborn Yisrael.” Furthermore, it says (*Devarim* 14:1), “You are children to Hashem, your G-d.” Hoshea calls us (2:1) “Children of the Living G-d.” We know relatives may not testify on behalf of each other in court (*Sanhedrin* 27b). Therefore, when there is, *chas v’shalom*, prosecution against Bnei Yisrael in the Upper Worlds, Hashem, so to speak, cannot defend them. For that reason, there are specific angels charged with advocating on behalf of Am Yisrael. Yet, at times, the accusations against the nation are so strong that we need the support of the tzaddikim.

We find that after all the suffering of Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, there was a great charge against them (*Midrash Tanchuma* 27:1a, 15:5). They were accused of being idol worshippers, just like the Egyptians.

Similarly, on that Yom Kippur, when Hashem appeared to Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, such was the case. When Hashem asked that Rabbi Yishmael bless Bnei Yisrael by blessing Him, He was, in essence, asking him to advocate their cause and silence their prosecutors by requesting that Hashem justify their actions. This is because Hashem Yitbarach, in his great mercy, wishes to cancel all of the debts of Am Yisrael on Yom Kippur. But, in order to do that, there needs to be someone who will defend the people, apart from Hashem, as stated above. This is hinted to in the word בִּרְכֵנִי (“Bless me”). Its numerical value equals that of סְלַחַן וּמַחֲלֵן (the One Who forgives and atones) – a description of Hashem. Hashem will forgive Bnei Yisrael once the prosecution against them is overturned by their human advocate.

Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha understood this well. Therefore, he said, “May it be Your will that Your compassion overcomes Your anger, and overrides all other attributes.” He asked that Hashem should not pay attention to those who would have Bnei Yisrael punished, measure for measure (*Shabbat* 105b). Rather, “Behave toward Your children with Your Attribute of Mercy, and treat them beyond the letter of the law.”

Rabbi Yishmael meant: “Although You are closely related to Yisrael, and relatives may not testify for each other, nevertheless, treat them beyond the letter of the law, ignoring the words of their prosecutors. Please speak in our defense, since there is such a great accusation against us. We cannot find any defense, in the Higher or Lower Worlds. That is why we turn to You, Hashem, to defend us.”

We learn from this that the greatest blessing that one can give Hashem, and from which He derives the most pleasure, is when one Jew blesses another. Hashem prefers that we should bless each other rather than bless Him. After all, we cannot bless Hashem; He is the Source of all blessing. However, if we ask Hashem to treat Am Yisrael better, that is an appropriate blessing. We find that although Achav was an idol worshipper, he emerged victorious from war because the nation was

unified and acted with love toward one another (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1). This is the most important thing in Hashem's eyes.

Furthermore, claimed Rabbi Yishmael, the Beit Hamikdash had already been destroyed because Bnei Yisrael judged each other according to the strict letter of the law (*Bava Metzia* 30b). This was sufficient punishment. Rabbi Yishmael requested that Hashem should not act likewise, and not be meticulous in judging them. If there was no one to speak in their defense, Rabbi Yishmael asked that Hashem cast aside His close relationship with Bnei Yisrael, which would normally prevent Him from advocating for them. He requested that Hashem, so to speak, go beyond the letter of the law, and judge them favorably so that they too should not be destroyed.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal relate that Hashem asked Rabbi Yishmael to bless Him when he entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* on Yom Kippur. This is difficult to understand. Hashem is the Source of all blessing; why did He need the blessing of Rabbi Yishmael? Moreover, from the blessing he gave, it seems as though Rabbi Yishmael blessed the nation, not Hashem at all!
- It seems that Hashem was not actually asking Rabbi Yishmael to bless Him, but to “enable” Him to defend Bnei Yisrael. This is because Hashem is so intimately connected to His nation, being our Father and Shepherd, that He is, so to speak, prevented from defending us in a time of prosecution. As we know, relatives may not bear testimony for each other.
- Often, though, the advocacy of the angels isn't enough to acquit us. We find, that when we left Egypt, the angels declared, “These (the Egyptians) are idol worshippers, and these (the Jewish people) are idol worshippers.” Therefore, Hashem asked Rabbi Yishmael to defend Am Yisrael. Hashem wants to wipe away our iniquities, but because of His close relationship to us, He is, so to speak, unable to do so without the advocacy of someone else.
- Rabbi Yishmael responded, “Treat them beyond the letter of the law.” Meaning to say: “Although You are closely connected to them, nevertheless, speak in their

defense, and go beyond the letter of the law. The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because Bnei Yisrael dealt with each other according to strict justice. Now, forget Your relationship with them, and treat them favorably, beyond what they actually deserve, so that they should not be destroyed.”

## THE TZADDIK VS. THE YETZER HARA

In the days preceding the coming of Mashiach, chutzpah will reach its peak; everything will be expensive; the government will be comprised of atheists; there will be no one to give rebuke; meeting places will be filled with adultery; the land in the Galil will dry up; the wisdom of the Sages will disappear; and those who fear sin will be despised. Truth will be non-existent; youth will insult the aged; older people will respect the young. Sons will shame fathers; daughters will rebel against their mothers; and daughters-in-law will rebel against their mothers-in-law. The members of one's household will become his enemies, and the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog. Sons will have no shame before their fathers. Upon whom can we rely? Only upon our Father in Heaven (*Sotah* 49b).

Everyone agrees that the days in which we find ourselves are called “The Footsteps of Mashiach.” All of the prophecies regarding the End of Days, as described in *Navi*, refer to our times. It is a difficult period both spiritually, as well as physically. It is hard to make ends meet. We see with our own eyes how all the details described by Chazal regarding the days of Mashiach are materializing. Atheism is raised like a banner in public. Harsh decrees are issued daily. No one can be sure of anything. Mighty countries are warring with each other.

Chutzpah has reached a peak. People are not ashamed to insult *talmidei chachamim*, denigrating them for “wasting” all their time in the Beit Hamidrash, instead of going out to work. They don't understand that without Torah the world cannot exist. Yirmeyahu Hanavi (33:25) states,

“If My covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth.” Chazal explain (*Pesachim* 68b) that this means that if not for the Torah, heaven and earth would cease to exist.

Chazal continue, saying that the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog. Children will not respect their elders. We see all of this taking place, but we keep quiet. We have no power to give rebuke. We don't possess the boldness of the previous Sages, to speak up against wrongdoing. Nowadays, wise people can talk all they want; no one listens. If people would only pay attention, there might be some hope that such words of wisdom would enter their hearts.

Although the realization of the *Navi's* words is painful, we can take heart. Let us compare it to the following incident involving Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva (*Makkot* 24b). They were going up to Yerushalayim. When they reached Har Habayit, they noticed a fox walking out of the place where the *Kodesh Hakodashim* had been. Then they began to weep, and Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They turned to him, asking, “Why do you laugh?”

He replied, “Why do you weep?”

They answered, “The place about which it is stated (*Bamidbar* 3:38), ‘Any alien who approaches shall die,’ is infested with foxes. Should we not weep?”

Rabbi Akiva countered, “That is exactly why I am laughing. The pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 8:2), ‘I appointed trusty witnesses for Myself: Uriah the Kohen and Zechariah son of Yeverechiah.’ What is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah prophesied about the first Beit Hamikdash and Zechariah about the second. The *Navi* connects Zechariah's prophecy to Uriah's. The vision of Uriah was (*Michah* 3:12): ‘Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed over like a field;

Yerushalayim will become heaps of rubble.’ Zechariah states (8:4): ‘Old men and old women will once again sit in the streets of Yerushalayim.’ As long as I didn’t see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Uriah, I was afraid that the prophecy of Zechariah wouldn’t take place. Now that I see the realization of Uriah’s words, I am assured that the happy tidings of Zechariah will also come to fruition.”

The other Sages said, “Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.”

We, too, should take comfort in the fact that the words of Chazal are coming true before our eyes. If their words of doom are taking place, then we can rest assured that their promise of the coming of Mashiach will not be long in transpiring.

Let us take comfort, too, in the fact that Yisrael is not widowed (*Yirmeyahu* 51:5). Even in such dark days, and in such difficult times, we have tzaddikim who stand staunchly in the breach. Their sole purpose is to strengthen our hearts through their self-sacrifice, guiding us in pleasant ways, so that we should not fall or stumble.

This is the case, even though it sometimes seems impossible for them to continue their holy work. It would be easier for them to cease disseminating Torah to the masses, for they are frequently shamed in public and denigrated by words of *lashon hara*. Yet these tzaddikim are not daunted; they do not fear their brazen-faced detractors, but accept the abuse heaped upon them happily, with love. They continue to strengthen themselves and others with *mesirut nefesh*, showing them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do (*Shemot* 18:20).

From where do the tzaddikim draw the strength to fight the heretics and inciters? Where do they find the might to oppose the scientists, who blatantly contradict the Torah? Even in our weak state, they manage to disseminate Torah in public, opening yeshivot where thousands of pupils study Torah and are involved in Avodat Hashem.

These tzaddikim certainly merit *siyata di'Shemaya*. Without that, they would get nowhere. We need Divine Providence in every step we take, as the Gemara states (*Chulin* 7b), “A person does not bang his finger down below if it was not decreed on High.” Yet, we also know that “everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven” (*Berachot* 33b; *Zohar* I, 59a). Our question remains. From where do our leaders generate the energy to begin their mission? Who revealed to them their mission of greatness? How do they know that their job is to educate and spread Torah to the masses in such difficult times?

Perhaps we can explain by saying that tzaddikim derive superhuman powers to stand up to the world of non-believers, inciters, and instigators only in the merit of the Torah. The Gemara states (*Yoma* 38b) that Rabbi Yochanan said, “Hashem saw that tzaddikim are few. Therefore, He planted them in each generation. This is as the pasuk says (*Shmuel* I, 2:8), ‘For Hashem’s are the pillars of the earth, and upon them He set the world.’ The world exists even in the merit of one tzaddik, as it says (*Mishlei* 10:25), “The tzaddik is the foundation of the world.”

Moreover, Chazal tell us (*Kiddushin* 30b; *Sifri, Eikev* 11:18), “My son, I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote. If you are involved in Torah, you will not fall into his hands, as it says (*Bereishit* 4:7), ‘Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven.’ If, however, you do not engage in Torah, you will fall into his clutches, as the continuation of the pasuk warns: ‘but if you do not improve yourself, sin rests at the door.’ Not only that, but the *Yetzer Hara*’s entire purpose is to ensnare you, as the pasuk tells us (*ibid.*), ‘Its desire is toward you.’ If you wish, you can overcome it, as the end of the pasuk says, ‘yet you can conquer it.’”

This teaches that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the *Yetzer Hara* in order to attract a person to sin. He is given the choice of whether to listen to the inner voice of the *Yetzer Hara* that distances him from Avodat Hashem, or alternatively, to hearken to the inner voice of the *Yetzer Hatov*, which adjures him to fulfill Hashem’s will and perform His mitzvot.

This seems to be an imbalanced choice. The body is made of dust (*Bereishit* 2:7), and the *Yetzer Hara* is made of fire (*Zohar* I, 80b). How could a measly body made of dust and ashes conquer the mighty *Yetzer Hara*, made of raging fire? Surely, it's a lost cause!

For that reason, Hashem created the Torah, which is also made of fire, as the pasuk says (*Devarim* 33:2), "From His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them." The Torah was created as an antidote for the *Yetzer Hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni Shemot* 284). Likewise, Hashem implanted within man a *neshamah* which is also made of fire, and is a part of Hashem, so to speak (*Zohar* III, 219b), as it says (*Mishlei* 20:27), "A man's soul is the lamp of Hashem." The combination of these forces provides Man with the upper hand in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara*.

However, in order to conquer his *Yetzer Hara* with these two weapons, one must have sufficient willpower. One tool he is armed with is the *neshamah*, which is more powerful than the *Yetzer Hara*. His second weapon is the fire of Torah. If a person arms himself with these forms of ammunition, he will be fighting the *Yetzer Hara* "two to one." With sufficient motivation, he will succeed in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara*, even in the most difficult circumstances.

The fact that the *Yetzer Hara* is an angel should not deter him in his battle. One can reach the level of an angel through toiling in Torah. Many tzaddikim and prophets were called "man of Hashem," which refers to an angel (based on *Devarim* 33:1; *Shoftim* 13:6). Furthermore, Chazal state that all the prophets were called "angels." Tzaddikim, we know, are on a loftier level than angels (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 427).

This being the case, one can easily surmount his *Yetzer Hara* through Torah study. His *neshamah*, which has been given to him by Hashem, and is so to speak a part of Him, connects with Hashem, helping him in the war against the *kelippah*. But without Torah and mitzvot, this part of him becomes ineffective, and he falls prey to the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara*.

This is what Chazal meant by stating that Torah is the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*. Without the fire of Torah, we would never overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, as we have discussed. Now we understand the reason why Hashem dispersed the tzaddikim among the generations. It is in order that there should always be someone present in each generation within whom the fire of Torah burns. The Torah hints to this when it says (*Vayikra* 6:6), “A permanent fire shall remain aflame on the Altar.” This fire, the tzaddik, protects the generation from the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*.

But why should the Torah be the antidote for the *Yetzer Hara*, rather than the *Yetzer Hatov*? That would seem more appropriate, since we generally find that equal forces counteract each other. For example, light dispels darkness, and heat neutralizes cold. However, in this case it seems that the two forces of the Torah and the *Yetzer Hara* are completely different.

We can explain by way of a parable. When we see two young children fighting, we wouldn’t send in a third to arbitrate and separate the two. We would send an older child, one who is stronger, whom they respect and fear. He is able to decide who is right and who is wrong and is strong enough to separate them. The situation here is similar. We don’t rely only on the power of the *Yetzer Hatov*, for that would pit two equal forces against each other. Sometimes, the *Yetzer Hatov* will be victorious, and other times, the *Yetzer Hara* will be victorious. Only Torah, which is more powerful than the *Yetzer Hara*, can tip the scales, indicating to man which of his inclinations is correct, and which is the proper path to follow.

To support this idea, we find (*Nedarim* 32b) that Rami bar Abba expounds on the parable given in Kohelet (9:14). There it describes a small town with few inhabitants that was besieged by a mighty king. There was a poor wise man in the town who saved its inhabitants through his wise counsel. Yet after the town had been liberated, no one remembered the poor man. Rami bar Abba explains the parable in the following way: “There was a small town” – this is the body of a person. “With only a few

inhabitants” – these are his organs. “And a mighty king came upon it and surrounded it” – this is the *Yetzer Hara*. “And built great siege works over it” – these are sins. “Present in the city was a poor wise man” – this is the *Yetzer Hatov*. “Who by his wisdom saved the town” – this is teshuvah and good deeds. “Yet no one remembered that poor man” – when the *Yetzer Hara* approaches man, he forgets his *Yetzer Hatov*.

The *Yetzer Hatov*, on its own, would not be strong enough to offset the power of the *Yetzer Hara*, as it is of equal force. Only when the *Yetzer Hatov* is joined with teshuvah and good deeds and Torah study, does he stand any chance of defeating the *Yetzer Hara*. The tzaddikim of every generation are able to easily crush the *Yetzer Hara* through the power of the Torah that they possess. In so doing, they hasten the *geulah*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- During these days of the “Footsteps of Mashiach,” suffering increases from without and within. All the difficulties and disasters that are described at the end of *masechet Sotah* are taking place before our eyes. Inside our camp, many of our brethren are publicly denying anything that even hints to belief in Hashem. And from without we are plagued by persecution and many harsh decrees. Indeed, all of the nations pursue Am Yisrael, like a sheep among seventy wolves.
- We can take solace in the fact that just as these prophecies of doom have come to fruition, so, too, will the prophecies of redemption come true, speedily, with the arrival of Mashiach. We see that Rabbi Akiva told the *Chachamim*, at the path to Har Habayit, that if the prophecy of Uriah took place, and foxes roamed freely on the very spot where the Holy of Holies was situated, then certainly the prophecy of Zechariah will also be actualized.
- Let us be comforted in the knowledge that we possess men who are remnants of the Great Assembly, waving the banner of Torah high, with pride, constantly endeavoring to establish more Torah institutions. From where do they get their fortitude, in such a weak generation as ours? Hashem has created Torah as an antidote against the *Yetzer Hara*. The driving force of the tzaddikim planted in each generation is the Torah, burning in their hearts, igniting the power to thwart the *Yetzer Hara*.

# WITHSTANDING TESTS



## STRENGTHENING ONESELF IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

### Accepting the Torah in all Places and at all Times

The Torah makes no outright mention that the festival of *Matan Torah* falls on the sixth day of Sivan. It merely specifies to celebrate the holiday at the end of the seven weeks of counting the Omer, as the pasuk says (*Vayikra* 23:16), “Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering, etc.” Further on, we read (*ibid.* 21), “You shall convoke on this very day – there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves, etc.”

It is quite surprising that the central theme of the day, that of receiving the Torah, is not mentioned at all. Furthermore, why don’t our Sages enjoin us to visit Har Sinai, the place of *Matan Torah*, where there were many revelations of the glory of Hashem?

The *Shechinah* rested upon the mountain just for a few days. As soon as the nation left, the *Shechinah* departed from there as well, leaving no *kedushah* behind.

We see from here that there is no set date, and no set place, for a person to begin his journey of Torah study. In every location, at any time, a person can begin to learn Torah. Wherever he learns will become a miniature Beit Hamikdash (see *Megillah* 29a). It will be likened to Har Sinai, where the Torah was originally given.

Had Hashem allowed Har Sinai to retain the *kedushah* of *Matan Torah*, people might erroneously assume that only there can one become holy and elevated in Torah matters. Therefore, the Torah let us know that the holiness of Har Sinai was temporary. In any place a Jew finds himself, he has the capacity to learn Torah, and bring holiness there. Moreover, he himself will become tremendously sanctified, just as his forefathers were at Har Sinai, when the Torah was given. He will constantly feel a renewal and freshness in his learning, just as if he were, at that very moment, receiving the Torah at Sinai.

For this reason, there is no set date recorded in the Torah for the holiday of the Giving of the Torah. Whenever a person desires to learn Torah, that day is considered the day of *Matan Torah*. Our Rabbis explain that the commandments should “be new in your eyes every day, as though today you received them at Har Sinai, the day they were commanded” (*Pesikta Zitri Va’etchanan* 6:6a; Rashi on *Ki Tavo* 26:16). Additionally, the Torah says (*Devarim* 27:9), “Be attentive and hear, O Israel; this day you have become a people.” Chazal ask, “Was it on that day that they received the Torah, and became the nation of Hashem? That day came after forty years spent in the Wilderness. Rather, this teaches that the Torah was as beloved to the people on that day, forty days later, as it was on the day that it was first given on Har Sinai.”

We find that Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkinus began to learn Torah only at the age of twenty-two (*Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 6), yet after a few short years of learning under the guidance of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, he merited to become one of his greatest disciples, receiving the praise that he was like “a cemented cistern that does not lose a drop” (*Avot* 2:11).

Who is greater than Rabbi Akiva (*Sanhedrin* 68a)? Until the age of forty he was an ignoramus (*Bereishit Rabbah* 100:11; *Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 6). He took a lesson from nature, saying the following: “Drops of water, which are liquid, have the ability to bore a hole in a stone, which is hard and strong. All the more so, will the words of Torah, which are strong as iron,

have the capacity to penetrate my heart of flesh.” Indeed, he became a great *talmid chacham*, a tremendous treasure-house of Torah (*Gittin* 16a). There are many examples which prove that the time and place have no relevance to a person’s ability to learn Torah.

Moreover, the Torah was engraved in stone (*Shemot* 34:1). This teaches that even a person whose head and heart are hard as stone, who is engaged all day in materialism, has the ability to learn Torah, which will enter his head and his heart, cleansing and purifying them.

We are taught (*Shabbat* 104a; *Megillah* 2b) that the letters ך and ם on the Tablets stood intact in a miraculous way. Since the letters were engraved in the stone of the *luchot*, these two letters miraculously stood without any support. The shape of the ך symbolizes that even if someone feels completely surrounded by trials and tribulations, with no escape in sight, if he will engage in Torah study, the Torah will act as a protective shield to help him overcome his difficulties.

The letter ם indicates that the Torah will be a סמיכה (support) for him. Even if a person is on the verge of despair and collapse, the Torah will sustain him and strengthen him. This is as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 119:116), “Support me according to Your promise that I may live, disgrace me not in my hope.” Further, it says (*ibid.* vs. 117), “Sustain me that I may be saved, and I will always be engrossed in Your statutes.” As long as a person is involved in Torah, he can rest assured that Hashem will support him.

### **One Should not Question the Suffering of the Righteous**

A wonderful thought came to mind on the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 8:13-14) “You shall stand the Levi’im before Aharon and before his sons, and wave them, as a wave-service for Hashem. So shall you separate the Levi’im from among the Children of Israel, etc.” The members of the Tribe of Levi needed to be lifted before Hashem, in front of the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, in order to consecrate them.

It seems somewhat degrading for them to be lifted and waved before the entire nation. Why was this act chosen to sanctify them? Couldn't Hashem have chosen another, more respectable act, like washing their hands and feet before the people? The pasuk states (ibid. 20), "Moshe, Aharon, and the entire assembly of the Children of Israel did to the Levi'im according to everything that Hashem had commanded, etc." Rashi comments, "This is stated to tell the praise of those who acted, and those who were acted upon, that not one of them resisted."

The act of lifting and waving the Levi'im teaches us an important lesson. It cannot have been an easy task for Moshe and Aharon to lift all the Levi'im; there were 22,000 of them! Nor was it easy for the Levi'im to allow themselves to be waved, since it was somewhat degrading. Nevertheless, everyone who was involved in this mitzvah wholeheartedly obeyed Hashem's command without question.

When we see a *talmid chacham* who fears Hashem and does His mitzvot, while enduring suffering, we should not question why he suffers so. This is the machination of the *Yetzer Hara*, trying to inject doubts in our belief and cause us to stumble. People wonder how such a perfect servant of Hashem can suffer so greatly. This may cause them, *chas v'shalom*, to deny Hashem, believing that "there is no judge and there is no justice" (*Vayikra Rabbah*, beginning of chapter 28). However, we should realize that the ways of Hashem are hidden from us and what seems to be bad is really good.

Let us not fall into the clutches of despair and despondency, as the *Yetzer Hara* would have us do. The tzaddik who endures such hardships certainly accepts them with love, knowing that Hashem is testing him and is eliminating his sins in this world in order to bring him blessing in the next world (*Pesikta Zuta*, beginning of *Re'eh*). Also, there are tzaddikim who suffer constant adversity in order to atone for the sins of the generation (*Zohar III*, 218b).

Chazal teach (ibid. 232b) that it is better for tzaddikim to suffer privation in this world than receive wealth and good. We see that there are tzaddikim who ask to experience difficulties, which they accept with love. We cannot understand the reasons behind a person's tribulations.

Therefore, even if difficulties come upon us, and threaten to cast us into despair, we should strengthen ourselves and realize that they are sent by Heaven to test our faith. This shows that Hashem loves us and desires to choose us.

The Levi'im were prepared to suffer temporary insult since they knew that this guaranteed them the ability to serve Hashem in the Mishkan. Had they been flung into the air, falling with a thud to the ground, they would have accepted their pain with love, happy to be doing the will of Hashem. They would have done anything necessary to acquire the privilege of serving in the House of Hashem.

We learn from the Levi'im to stand up to our tests, in the knowledge that our spiritual level is raised through them. This is a sign of Hashem's love for us. By withstanding the trials one is faced with and remaining steadfast in his love of Hashem, in good times as well as the times when things do not seem so good, he will eventually come to love Hashem with all his heart (*Zohar* III, 267a).

### **Temporary Happiness vs. Eternal Happiness**

Chazal teach (*Avot* 4:1), "Ben Zoma says, 'Who is wise? He who learns from every person, as it says (*Tehillim* 119:99): From all my teachers I grew wise, for Your testimonies are a conversation for me.'" One can learn even from the wicked, as we see that Rabbi Meir learned Torah from Acher (*Chagigah* 15b). But one must be careful not to learn from their evil ways.

We can learn even from the animals. Rabbi Yochanan taught (*Eiruvin* 100b), "Had the Torah not been given, we could have learned modesty

from the cat, not to steal from the ant, etc.” What does he want to tell us by this statement?

As I write these lines, the world-wide soccer championship has just come to a close. The streets are empty. Everyone wants to watch the French players in their victory. Of course, it is the doing of the Satan who made it come out on the seventeenth of Tamuz, the day we mourn as we commemorate the breach in the walls of Yerushalayim. On that day, people are rejoicing in their team’s victory in the World Cup!

I, too, wanted the French team to win. Not that I am a soccer fan. I have learned an important lesson, though, from how the nation does not go to sleep, celebrating all through the night. Here are people who are obsessed with kicking a ball, expending all their efforts in chasing it without stop. Their thoughts are consumed with how to prevent the players of the competing team from striking a goal. Meanwhile, they are trying to break through the other team’s defense to strike a goal themselves. When they are successful, their joy knows no bounds.

How much more so should a Jew who keeps Torah and mitzvot work without letup in order to prevent the *Yetzer Hara* from disturbing his Avodat Hashem. When he ignores the *Yetzer Hara*’s persuasions and succeeds in subduing it, keeping Torah and mitzvot as they are meant to be kept, then his reward in this world, as well as in the World to Come, is immense. Surely, his victory over his *Yetzer Hara* scores goals in the Heavenly spheres, bringing untold joy to the tzaddikim there. I wanted the French team to win so that I could observe how millions of people can exult in pure vanity and nothingness. This helps me picture the exultation that will be felt when Mashiach will come, when Hashem will return His people to Yerushalayim, and His glory will be revealed throughout the world (*Tehillim* 126:1). Certainly, our joy at that time will be much greater than this ephemeral jubilation. It will be an eternal happiness.

Indeed, after the French victory in the World Cup Championship, people did not close their eyes the entire night. They sang and danced in

the streets till morning. I thought to myself, “This is only a fleeting happiness. It will pass and be quickly forgotten. In another few days, everyone will return to his problems. The elation they experience now does not guarantee a better future. This is because it is a physical joy.”

But the joy that the whole world will feel at the coming of Mashiach will be entirely different. There will be no more wars. Only peace and harmony will reign in the world (*Yeshayahu* 2:4). The *Navi* states (ibid. 11:6), “The wolf will live with the sheep and the leopard will lie down with the kid.” All animals will live together in harmony. Certainly there will be true, eternal happiness in all the worlds, forever.

I pictured, further, how the players took the World Cup from the hands of the president, kissing him before millions of onlookers. As opposed to this, I imagined Hashem rewarding the tzaddik who succeeded in conquering his *Yetzer Hara*, granting him 310 worlds (*Mishnayot*, end of *Uktzin*). This will take place before the eyes of all the tzaddikim who lived since the time of the Creation of the world. There will be unparalleled joy at that time.

One hears loud voices coming from the street, and I sit in my house with a prayer on my lips. I ask Hashem, “Our Father and King, avenge the death of Your servants. Avenge the exile of the *Shechinah*. How long will Your presence be in *galuf*? Arise, Hashem, and have mercy on Tzion, that we may merit to rejoice with You in everlasting happiness.” In this way, the entire night passed, until it was time to pray Shacharit. I envisioned the coming of Mashiach, all of Am Yisrael greeting him with loud cheers, proclaiming the glory of Hashem.

## Learn From Everyone

Another point to be gleaned from the aforementioned game is as follows. Certainly, both teams that reached the last round were champions in their fields. They succeeded in winning all their previous matches. However, there can be only one final winner. This teaches us a

lesson for life. Even if a person usually overcomes the *Yetzer Hara*, he should never rest on his laurels. The adversary, his *Yetzer Hara*, is a champion at his profession, always seeking to triumph over him.

Therefore, a person should concentrate on mitzvah performance and Torah study without pause. This way, he will win the ultimate victory over the *Yetzer Hara*. Fortunate is the person who leaves this world complete in Torah. He will receive his entire reward in the World to Come. Woe to the person who spent all his days in mitzvot but on the last day of his life, transgressed a sin. What embarrassment and pain he will experience when he arrives at the next world, when he is shown that the *Yetzer Hara* gained victory over him.

This thought helps us understand the pasuk (*Tehillim* 119:99), “From all my teachers I grew wise.” There is something one can learn from everything in this world, even from the physical. This is as Kohelet teaches us (7:14), “G-d has made the one as well as the other.” Physical temptations which stand in man’s way can hinder his Avodat Hashem, as they attract him, promising wealth and honor. But, if utilized properly, they can be turned to his advantage.

A person chases materialism, which is here today and gone tomorrow. He may gain wealth and status in this world, but “he can’t take it with him.” On the other hand, a person who does not allow himself to be drawn after physical pleasures, but, rather, utilizes every moment of life for Avodat Hashem and doing mitzvot is guaranteed everlasting life, full of the pleasures of the World to Come. Surely Hashem will grant him much honor, and he will merit enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah*, with his crown upon his head (*Berachot* 17a).

This lesson was brought home to me again when I read the headlines the next day. They stated that the players of the winning team milled among the masses, and approximately one million people came out to cheer them and shake their hands. This intensified my feelings about the great honor reserved in the World to Come for one who succeeds in

beating the true opposition, the *Yetzer Hara*. He will be honored in front of millions of tzaddikim. Fortunate will he be when they will make way for him, announcing, "Make way for the tzaddik, open the gates for the righteous nation that upholds its beliefs."

### Competing Against the Yetzer Hara

A man approached me and asked if it was permitted to watch the game on television. I asked him, "Which team do you want to win?"

He answered, "France, of course. Only the French team deserves to win."

I continued, "How will you react each time your team gains a point?"

He answered, "What does the Rav think?"

I told him, "I am imagining to myself how you will look, sitting in front of that *avodah zarah*, called a television. Your nerves are taught, beads of sweat appear on your face. Your lips murmur a silent prayer that your team may win. When they eventually succeed in scoring a goal, you jump up from your seat and get hysterical like a madman, shouting and cheering in happiness, 'A goal, a goal...' Is that right?" He answered that that was exactly what would happen. I told him that if they won the World Cup, his joy would be tenfold. To which he responded, "If only that would happen. That is exactly how I would feel."

Then I said to him, "Listen here. If you truly love Hashem, be very careful. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is scrupulous with those near Him, to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b). Wasting your time in this way will only bring you negative results. When you are watching the game, you are definitely not thinking about Hashem or His Torah. You are merely being led astray, after foolishness and vanity. This is no way to win the game of life."

The tzaddik, Rabbi Chaikin, zt"l, asked, "How could it be that people love soccer, chasing the ball with all their energy, but when they finally reach it, they kick and pound it. Is this the way to show one's love?!"

We can learn an amazing idea from this. Hakadosh Baruch Hu constantly observes our actions. He takes note of the way we learn Torah and do mitzvot. He sees that we do not exhibit the same measure of eagerness as when we eat, or watch our team score a point. Where is our love and joy in performing mitzvot?! How can we enthuse over the vain pursuits of this world more than over Torah learning and mitzvah observance? What will we answer the Creator of the world when He asks us these questions?!

Therefore, I said to the man, “If you accept upon yourself to do mitzvot with the same zeal and fervor as you display when your team scores a goal, then I will allow you to watch the game.”

He told me, “That is impossible.”

I replied, “If so, forget the game and go back to the Gemara. This is merely a ploy of the Satan, who attempts to draw a person away from his eternal goal with his foul play. After it’s all over, the competition is forgotten, but the *Yetzer Hara* has won the game!”

Indeed, the Satan is successful in his schemes. We find that even among Bnei Torah, there are those who prefer to watch the game at the expense of Torah learning. By preferring the ephemeral pleasures of this world to life in the next world they grant victory to the Prosecutor. In fact, the very opposite is true. Avot (2:8) states, “The more study, the more wisdom.” It doesn’t matter when and where, or at what age a person begins learning. The important thing is that he tastes the sweet taste of Torah.

The *Yetzer Hara* is a champion in his field. He has tactics for the match that he plays. Only by being forearmed with a game plan of his own, is a person able to triumph over him.

The best way to defeat this opponent is by fixing set times for Torah study. This enables a person to ascend higher and higher each day in Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds. The more a person becomes elevated in Torah and positive attributes, the easier it is for him to weaken and

subdue his *Yetzer Hara*. This is as the Gemara states (*Sukkah* 52b, *Kiddushin* 30b), “If this degenerate one has encountered you, draw him to the Beit Hamidrash. If he is made of stone, he will crumble; if he is made of iron, he will shatter.” Learning Torah defeats the *Yetzer Hara* and helps us achieve our goals in life.

There is an additional point to ponder. Kabbalat HaTorah came at the end of fifty days. The word חמישים (fifty) is related to the word חמושים (armed). This hints that when a person learns Torah every day, it becomes his greatest weapon. The Torah is made up of five books, called חומשים, also alluding to this idea. This is the way to be rescued from the *Yetzer Hara*.

Maybe for this reason, the Torah hints only that a person must be armed with Torah ammunition, rather than directly stating that the festival of Shavuot commemorates the Giving of the Torah. This is because every moment a person spends involved in Torah is a personal holiday, a day of victory over the *Yetzer Hara*. Furthermore, he has pleasure and enjoyment from the Torah insights that he produces. The holiday reminds him that he must always be armed with Torah, in order to be spared from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The pasuk tells us (*Devarim* 32:47), “כי לא דבר ריק הוא מכם כי הוא חייכם” – For it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life.” From this we learn that a person obtains all his physical, as well as spiritual, sustenance from Torah and fear of Heaven. This pasuk also teaches us the following idea. The word דבר alludes to the *Yetzer Hara*, often called the בעל דבר. The Torah indicates that the *Yetzer Hara* is not weak, but rather very powerful, made of fire (*Zohar* I, 80b), and is tremendously cunning (*ibid.* 137a).

This being the case, only through toiling in Torah and living in accordance with its ideals can a person succeed in subduing the *Yetzer Hara*, extinguishing its flames. He can then expect to receive the abundance of goodness which awaits the tzaddikim in the World to Come. There they sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor

of the *Shechinah*. May Hashem help us to always aim for the correct goals, cleaving to Him as a member of the winning team, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The Torah does not mention the date of Shavuot (the Giving of the Torah) explicitly, but merely states that the festival is at the end of the fifty days of counting the Omer. Moreover, there is no instruction to go to the site of Har Sinai, where the Torah was given. We see that the *Shechinah* rested on Har Sinai only for the short time of *Matan Torah*. Afterwards, it left completely. Why didn't it remain there forever?
- There is no set time or place to learn Torah. The place where a person learns becomes a miniature Beit Hamikdash. There is no obligation to travel to Har Sinai. No one should think that only there can he be blessed and sanctified in Torah study. Rather, any place a person pursues Torah will be sanctified with holiness.
- The same holds true for the date of *Matan Torah*. There is no specific date when one should learn; it is always possible to learn Torah. Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkinus began learning Torah at the age of twenty-two, and Rabbi Akiva, his mentor, began his Torah career at the age of forty. Rabbi Akiva continued his studies until he became a treasure house of knowledge.
- The command to lift the Levi'im and wave them in the air seems quite degrading. Couldn't the Levi'im have been sanctified in a more respectable way? This teaches us the following idea. If we see a tzaddik, perfect in his actions, undergoing suffering, we should not question the matter. It is the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, who wants to put doubt into man's heart. We must believe that if Hashem "waves" the person and gives him trials, it is only for his own benefit, to purify him. There were tzaddikim who even asked for hardships, in order to become more sanctified. The Levi'im agreed to be lifted and waved up high, knowing that this enabled them to serve Hashem in the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, when we experience suffering and tests, let us not question the ways of Hashem. Rather, we should accept our trials with joy, because through them, we rise to greater spiritual heights, attaining true love of Hashem.

- "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." There is a lesson to be learned from everything in Creation, even the ant. Everyone wanted the French team to win the World Cup. If there was such exuberant joy over a petty matter, how much more exhilaration will be felt when Hashem redeems His people. Then Bnei Yisrael will experience the ultimate joy.
- The festival of Shavuot is celebrated at the end of fifty days. The word חמשים (fifty) has the same root as the word חמושים (armed). The Torah is our greatest weapon against the *Yetzer Hara*. One must endeavor to arm himself with Torah to fight his *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, the date of the Giving of the Torah is not explicitly stated. Each day of learning Torah is a festival. A person feels that it is his personal holiday when he overcomes his *Yetzer Hara*, and when he reveals insights in the Torah. Only by involving oneself in Torah study can a person withstand his trials, and merit the World to Come, with all its inherent blessings.

## RABBI AKIVA'S FINAL TEST

Rav stated, "When Moshe ascended to the Heavens, he found Hakadosh Baruch Hu sitting and adorning crowns on the letters of the Torah. He asked Him, 'Master of the world! What's preventing You from giving the Torah as it is?' Moshe Rabbeinu was asking why the crowns were necessary. To which Hashem replied, 'There is a man, who is destined to arrive after some generations, by the name of Akiva ben Yosef. He will derive many halachot from every point of the crown of each letter.' Moshe answered, 'Master of the world! You showed me his Torah teachings, now show me his reward.' Hashem told him, 'Go backward.' When he did, Moshe saw that they were combing Rabbi Akiva's flesh with iron combs. To which he cried out, 'Hashem, is this Torah and its reward?!' Then Hashem said, 'Keep quiet. This is what I have decided to do'" (*Menachot* 29b).

Did Moshe Rabbeinu, father of all prophets, have any doubt whatsoever regarding the decision of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *chas v'shalom*, that he should question Rabbi Akiva's fate?

It is known that at the time of death, the Angel of Death approaches a person and tries to persuade him to deny Hashem Yitbarach. Woe to the person who yields to him in those last moments of life. He is already near death; it would be a shame to lose so much in these final moments.

The kabbalists teach that in order to be spared the ploys of the Angel of Death at the time of death, there is a custom to recite the prayer *Gilui Da'at* on the eve of the Yamim Noraim. This annuls any words of heresy which a person might say due to the machinations of the Angel of Death, *chas v'shalom*. Hashem should consider it as though the person were forced into doing so by the pain caused by the Angel of Death, not that he is agreeing with him.

Therefore, when a person is in an elevated frame of mind before the Yamim Noraim, after doing teshuvah and crying over his transgressions, he reveals his true convictions: unshakeable belief in the Creator of the world. He doesn't pay attention to the Angel of Death. In this special prayer, he asks Hashem not to consider any words of heresy which he may utter in his final moments.

When Moshe Rabbeinu witnessed the tremendous holiness of Rabbi Akiva, and his tragic end at the hands of the Romans, he feared lest Rabbi Akiva would not be able to withstand the *nisayon* perfectly. Moshe thus questioned, "Is this Torah and its reward?" Meaning: "Is it fair that after learning such vast amounts of Torah, Rabbi Akiva should be 'rewarded' by having to face such a great test in his final moments?!"

Hashem replied, "Keep quiet. This is as I have decided." He was saying, "If this is as I have willed, there is no need to fear that Rabbi Akiva will not be able to withstand the test to perfection. On the contrary, he will attain even greater heights through it." Even under such dire circumstances, a person has the ability to overcome the most difficult trial.

Indeed, Rabbi Akiva withstood the test with fortitude. The Gemara states (*Berachot* 41b) that when Rabbi Akiva was taken out to be killed it

was the time to say Kriyat Shema. They combed his flesh with iron combs, and he accepted the Heavenly decree. His disciples asked him, “Our teacher, even to this extent?” To which he responded, “All my life I worried over the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5), ‘With all your soul,’ which means that we are commanded to love Hashem even at the time that He is taking away our soul. I asked myself, ‘When will I be able to fulfill this command?’” He said the Shema, extending the word *Echad* until his soul expired. A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul expired with the word *Echad*. Fortunate are you, for you are destined to life in the World to Come.”

We can add the following point to the response which Hashem gave Moshe. The holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, accepted the decree of death through tremendous suffering each and every day when he recited Kriyat Shema. This was how he fulfilled the command “You shall love Hashem, your G-d...with all your soul.”

The sefer *Chachmat Chaim* (concerning the meanings of Kriyat Shema) teaches that when a person cleaves to Hashem and accepts the four types of death by which a Beit Din punishes a person, in order to sanctify Hashem’s Name, he should use the power of his imagination to picture himself literally undergoing those punishments. In this manner, what he says in this prayer will match the way he actually feels. When he says, “You shall love Hashem...with all your soul,” he should accept all types of suffering necessary to love Hashem and bring glory to His Name.

Since Hashem knew what was in Rabbi Akiva’s heart, and that his desires certainly were in harmony with what he said (see *Pesachim* 63a), He wanted to reward him for every day that he yearned to give up his life for the sake of Heaven. In order to quiet the prosecuting angels, who doubted the veracity of Rabbi Akiva’s words, Hashem brought his potential to actuality. The Gemara (*Makkot* 10a) states, “A person is led in the way he wishes to go.”

This being the case, Rabbi Akiva was surely ecstatic at the moment of his death, as one who discovers great wealth. All his life, he had agonized over this point. Now his actions proved the sincerity of his thoughts. It was clear to all that he wished to undergo travail in order to make a *kiddush Hashem*. Thus he was worthy to be rewarded in the World to Come as if he had literally sacrificed his life anew each time he recited the Shema. His end proved that this was his true desire.

This is the meaning of Hashem's reply to Moshe: "This is as I have decided." He was telling him, "I know that Rabbi Akiva genuinely wishes to sacrifice his life for Me each and every time he says Kriyat Shema. For this reason, I will bring upon him a tragic death, which he will accept upon himself with love. This will silence the accusers. In this manner, he will attain the reward that he justly deserves."

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 44:23) states, "Because for your sake we are killed all the day." The tzaddikim, so to speak, kill themselves for the sake of Hashem's holy Name, every moment. This is very precious to Hashem, as it says (*ibid.* 116:15), "Dear in the eyes of Hashem is the death of His devout ones."

At the time of a person's death, Hashem tells the ministering angels (*Kohelet Rabbah* 12:14), "See what people say about him." If they say he was an honest, G-d fearing man, he immediately ascends heavenward. Why does Hashem want to know the opinions of others about this person? Isn't it sufficient that He knows what was going on in the person's heart?

It is specifically the angels who are sent down to hear what people say. The angels were the ones who opposed the creation of man. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 38b) states, "At the time that Hashem wanted to create man, He first created a group of ministering angels. He asked them, 'Would you like to create a person in our image?' They asked, 'Master of the world! What will he be like?' He told them, and they said (*Tehillim* 8:5), 'What is frail man that You should remember him, and the son of mortal man that

You should be mindful of him?’ Hashem, so to speak, stretched out His small finger and burned them.”

Similarly, at *Matan Torah*, the angels contested giving the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 88b), “When Moshe ascended to receive the Torah, the ministering angels approached Hashem, stating, ‘Master of the world! What is the son of man doing in our midst?!’ He replied, ‘He came to receive the Torah.’ The angels countered, ‘How can You give the prized possession, which You hid for 974 generations before the Creation of the world to a person of flesh and blood? What is frail man that You should remember him, and the son of mortal man that You should be mindful of him?’”

In order to silence their prosecution, Hashem sends the angels down to this world, so that they themselves hear how others praise the person who has just died. If they hear good reports, even the accusing angels must answer “Amen.” It is then clearly manifested that Hashem justly created mankind and gave him the Torah. He was correct in burning those angels who opposed man’s creation. It has been proven that the Torah truly belongs to Bnei Yisrael, the nation capable of overcoming tribulations and observing the mitzvot.

### In Summary

- When Moshe ascended to the heavens, he saw Hashem adorning the letters of the Torah with crown-like markings. Hashem told him that Rabbi Akiva was holding back the Giving of the Torah. When Moshe saw the death that would be decreed upon Rabbi Akiva, he cried out, “Is this the reward for learning Torah?!” How can we understand the fact that Moshe seemed to question the decision of Hashem?
- Before a person’s death, he is visited by the Angel of Death, who tries to persuade him to rebel against Hashem. For this reason, it is customary to recite the prayer *Gilui Da’at* before the Yamim Noraim. In it, one asks Hashem not to pay attention to this type of rebellion; it is a result of the pain inflicted by the

Angel of Death. The person himself wishes only to comply with the will of Hashem. Moshe feared that because of the horrible suffering at the time of his death, Rabbi Akiva would be unable to withstand the suggestions of the *Yetzer Hara*, and he would capitulate to its heretical designs. If that were to be the case, all his Torah learning would not be able to protect him.

- For this reason, Hashem told Moshe, “Keep quiet. This is as I have decided.” He was saying, “If I decided to put him to the test, it is a sign that he has the ability to withstand it and will not be harmed in any way. On the contrary, he will receive untold reward by passing this test.” This was proven by the fact that Rabbi Akiva, did, indeed, withstand the trials of his death, fulfilling the command to “love Hashem with all one’s soul.”

## WITHSTANDING THE TEST OF WEALTH

Rebbi used to honor the rich (*Eiruv* 86a). Why? I heard the following explanation. It is known that apart from being a tremendous *talmid chacham*, Rebbi was also fabulously wealthy (*Gittin* 59a). He didn’t want to derive personal benefit from the crown of Torah, as the Mishnah states (*Avot* 1:13), “He who exploits the crown of Torah shall fade away.” He feared lest he receive honor in the merit of his Torah learning. Therefore, he preferred to honor rich people so that others would learn from him, and also give respect to the wealthy. In this manner, they would show him honor in deference of his wealth, rather than because of his righteousness and Torah knowledge.

This concept is supported by the following idea. Chazal tell us (*Ketubot* 104a) that before his death, Rebbi stretched his ten fingers heavenward, proclaiming, “Master of the world! It is known and revealed to You that I labored with all ten fingers in Your Torah, and I derived no benefit from this world, not even as much as my little finger.” He admitted that despite his great wealth, he had not gained personal pleasure from any of it, notwithstanding the fact that he received great honor due to his riches

and distributed much charity (*Bava Batra* 8a). All the more so he did not take pleasure from the crown of Torah, which he wore.

Rebbi was a living Sefer Torah, the Teacher of all Yisrael, certainly deserving of respect. Why did he flee honor? If he had accepted honor for the vast amount of Torah which he represented, then this would have encouraged others to learn, increasing Torah study among the people (*ibid.* 21a). Furthermore, did Rebbi's explanation for honoring the rich justify the fact that all wealthy people, for all generations, should receive honor? Maybe they would be unable to withstand this test.

Chazal teach us that humility is a prerequisite for meriting Torah. As the Beraita states (*Derech Eretz Zuta* 7:8), "The Torah endures only in one who is of humble spirit." Moreover, "Just as waters leave high places and flow downward, so, too, do the words of Torah endure only in one who is humble" (*Ta'anit* 7a).

Furthermore, the Torah was given on Har Sinai specifically because it was humble, as Mishlei states (29:23), "But a lowly spirit will support [his] honor." This refers to Har Sinai who humbled itself, admitting its low stature. In that merit, Hashem revealed His glory upon it and gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah there. In order to merit Torah, a person must humble himself.

This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:17) "And they stood at the bottom of the mountain." When Bnei Yisrael came to accept the Torah, they humbled themselves, to the point that they felt as if they were "at the bottom of the mountain." Their humility was such that they felt they still had much to learn from the self-effacement of Har Sinai.

Likewise, Moshe Rabbeinu is described (*Bamidbar* 12:3) as being "exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth." He transmitted the Torah to the nation, and merited being their teacher, as the pasuk says (*Devarim* 34:10), "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face." Despite all

this, and his excessive wealth (*Nedarim* 37a), he remained humble of spirit.

Not only did Moshe not derive personal pleasure from his achievements in Torah, when he heard that Eldad and Meidad were prophesying among the nation, predicting that he would die and Yehoshua would lead Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael (*Sanhedrin* 17a), he stated (*Bamidbar* 11:29), “If only the entire people of Hashem could be prophets.”

The *Yetzer Hara* is very powerful and tries to implant arrogance in the hearts of those who learn Torah in order to take them away from their study. Therefore, one should be very careful to avoid using the crown of Torah in order to bring glory upon himself. Our Rabbis teach (*Tanchuma, Vayikra* 3), “Whoever flees a position of authority, will be chased by it.” Nevertheless, it is man’s obligation to evade personal honor. If people do insist upon honoring him, he should feel that this honor is not directed at him personally, rather, it is honor for the Torah wisdom that he embodies. He should consider himself to be nothing but dust and ashes.

Woe to the person who feels that he deserves glory. Glory belongs solely to Hashem, as He is called (*Tehillim* 24:7) “The King of Glory.” Rabbi Tzadok states (*Avot* 4:7), “Do not make the Torah a crown for self-glorification, nor a spade with which to dig.” Hillel told us, “He who exploits the crown of Torah shall fade away.” From this we learn that one who derives personal pleasure from the words of Torah places himself in danger.

Chazal tell us (*Nedarim* 81a), “Be careful with the children of the poor, because from them shall come forth Torah.” The reason for this is that poor people are not proud. People who learn Torah in dire poverty learn with humility and self-effacement. This is not the case with the well-to-do. Their wealth endangers their Torah study. They are constantly being tested in the area of money. Even if they overcome the various trials of wealth and become great *talmidei chachamim*, they are then faced with the test of honor which comes in its wake. People will respect them for

their riches as well as their Torah knowledge; how can they escape such honor?

We see that although Rebbi was a Torah scholar as well as being fabulously wealthy, he managed to eschew honor from either source. Nevertheless, he loathed entering into such a grave *nisayon*. He exemplified the statement (*Horayot* 14a), “In the place of his greatness, there you find his humbleness.” He preferred that, at the very least, he should not be respected due to his Torah knowledge. He allowed the people to honor him for his vast wealth, a trial which is easier to overcome. Indeed, he admitted that he derived no pleasure from this world, not even a finger’s worth.

What was the purpose of Rebbi respecting the wealthy? He wanted them to learn from his ways and behave likewise. Just as he didn’t let his riches go to his head, so, too, they should beware of chasing after wealth and honor. All the more so, should they flee honor given to them because of their Torah learning. Rebbi was the best example of this since he himself was both wealthy and a *talmid chacham*.

The following pesukim can help a person overcome the pride of being wealthy. *Tehillim* (49:17-18) states, “Fear not when a man grows rich, when he increases the glory of his house, for upon his death he will not take anything, his glory will not descend after him.” Furthermore, our Sages teach (*Avot* 6:9), “When a man departs from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls escort him, but only Torah study and good deeds.” Gold and silver are never a person’s acquisitions; they belong only to Hashem. The *Navi* (*Chagai* 2:8), states the following, “Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold – the word of Hashem.” Hashem merely deposits wealth in a person’s hands so that he should use it for good deeds. Hashem can take it from one person and pass it on to another. Being wealthy is nothing to be proud of.

Engaging in Torah learning helps a person realize that the entire earth and all that is in it belongs solely to Hashem (*Tehillim* 24:1). We see that

when Bnei Yisrael became weak in Torah study, they failed the test of wealth and descended to the level of fashioning the Golden Calf. This is as the *Navi* stated (*Hoshea* 2:10), “I lavished silver and gold upon her, [but] they used it for the Ba’al.” Conversely, we find that the Avot continued to behave with humility, following the path of the Torah even after they became exceedingly wealthy.

From all of the above we learn that it is easier to withstand the test of wealth than that of being honored for one’s Torah learning. Even a poor *talmid chacham* will be respected wherever he goes. He will be awarded glory and provided with a livelihood. This may cause him to feel proud due to his Torah study. Therefore, despite one’s obligation to pursue the study of Torah, he must flee the honor inherent therein. This is the path of Torah: to sacrifice oneself on its behalf, in utter humility.

Perhaps we can understand Rebbi’s respect of the wealthy in the following way. Wealthy people are often tight-fisted. The Midrash (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:34) states, “He who has one hundred, desires two hundred.” Also, it says (*ibid.* 5:9), “One who loves money will never be satisfied with money.” A wealthy person desires only to add more to his riches, not to distribute it among the needy. Our *sefarim* explain the idea of “never being satisfied with money” to mean that the rich don’t even enjoy their money, for they are always worried about losing it. Rebbi showed deference for the rich, influencing them to change the way they thought, and ultimately enabling them to share their riches with others.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Rebbi would honor the rich. He preferred to be honored for his wealth rather than his Torah learning. However, he disdained the honor he received due to his great riches. Proof of this is that prior to his death he stretched his ten fingers heavenward declaring that he had derived no pleasure from his wealth at all.
- Rebbi himself was capable of overcoming the test of self-glorification due to one’s Torah knowledge. However, because this is such a difficult test, which

many cannot pass, he wanted to set a personal example of how important it is to avoid it. When one is honored for his learning, he may at first feel pride, but eventually, it may take him away from Torah altogether. This is why Rebbi made an effort to show the nation how he eschewed such honor.

- The test of wealth is easier to overcome, by means of Torah study. The Torah teaches that one's wealth is given for a specific amount of time, and holds no value once he dies. Only Torah and mitzvot escort us to the next world.
- Furthermore, by honoring the wealthy, Rebbi enabled them to overcome their natural tendency of miserliness, instilling in them the desire to share their resources with others. This is how Rebbi himself acted, admitting at the end of his life that he had not personally benefitted from his tremendous wealth.

## DISTANCING ONESELF FROM TRIALS

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Bnei Yisrael, “My sons, I created the *Yetzer Hara*, and I created Torah as its antidote. If you learn Torah, you will not fall into the hands of the *Yetzer Hara*, as it says (*Bereishit* 4:7), ‘Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven.’ Yet, if you refrain from learning Torah, you will fall prey to it, as it says (*ibid.*), ‘Sin rests at the door’” (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Apparently, the *Yetzer Hara* was created at the same time as the Torah. The Torah was created 974 generations before the Creation of the world (*Zevachim* 116a; *Yalkut Shimoni, Noach, remez* 62). If so, the blame for the existence of the *Yetzer Hara* cannot be placed on the shoulders of Adam Harishon, because of whose sin all of mankind was punished. Had he not sinned, someone else would surely have sinned at a later stage. The kabbalists teach us that the *Yetzer Hara* existed, but it was dormant and inactive before Adam sinned.

Likewise, Adam cannot be blamed for bringing death upon the world, for when he sinned, Hashem told him (*Bereishit* 3:19), “For you are dust,

and to dust shall you return.” We see from this that the concept of death already existed.

From here we see the tremendous power of the *Yetzer Hara*. Adam Harishon was the handiwork of Hashem Himself (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:2), great in Torah and wisdom, as demonstrated by his naming all the animals, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 2:19), “And whatever the man called each living creature, that remained its name.” Furthermore, he gave Hashem His Name. Adam established the Name of Hashem (א-י-ו-ה), which, when each of its letters is spelled out (א=10, י=10, ו=6, ה=5), is numerically equivalent to אדם (man), when adding one for the word itself. Despite all this, he did not withstand the test he had been given, and ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, as it states (*ibid.* 3:6), “And she gave also to her husband with her and he ate.”

Further on, the pasuk states (*ibid.* vs. 7), “Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked.” Our Sages ask, “Were they blind? Even the one mitzvah which was given to them, they didn’t keep.” As soon as this happened, we are told (*ibid.*), “And they sewed together a fig leaf and made themselves aprons.” Immediately, they covered themselves, feeling that it was forbidden to view each other in an immodest state.

How could it be that Adam Harishon, a Torah giant, was unable to withstand the persuasions of the Serpent, the Satan incarnate, and sinned? Furthermore, how could he have heeded the words of Chava, who convinced him to transgress the command of Hashem? Why did his Torah learning not protect him?

Perhaps we can resolve this question with the following idea. The discussion between Adam and Chava caused *bitul* Torah. He should have immediately chastised her when she enticed him to eat. Since he began arguing with her, he fell into her trap. “One sin causes another” (*Avot* 4:2). Instead of rebuking and silencing her, he continued to debate with her, neglecting his Torah study.

We can add that perhaps Adam was afraid lest Chava die because of eating of the forbidden fruit, and he would remain alone. He therefore decided to eat from the fruit as well, reasoning that Hashem would take pity on them, and not kill them, in order to preserve mankind. The essence of the sin was that Adam was drawn into argument, until he finally succumbed to sin, just as Chava had.

This teaches the tremendous importance of avoiding arguing over something that is known to be forbidden. There are some subjects about which it is prohibited to debate. For example, one should never deliberate whether ingesting poison actually kills a person. Such debates are fatal.

One should realize that his job is to distance himself from the *Yetzer Hara* as much as he possibly can. This is possible only by learning Torah, which is the antidote for the *Yetzer Hara*. A person should not seek to be tested. Coming close to the *Yetzer Hara* is always dangerous. He is the master of persuasion, expert in ensnaring his victim into sin.

This lesson, of how careful one must be in all his actions, is illustrated by the *korban Pesach*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:46), “And you shall not break a bone in it.” Why is it forbidden to break a bone of the *korban Pesach*? The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains (*Mitzvah* 16), “It is not fitting for the sons of kings to break bones and chew them, like dogs. It is not honorable to do this; only the very poor, who are starving, eat in such a manner.”

I would like to add that the bone refers to the *Yetzer Hara*, which is hard like a bone (see *Tikkunei Zohar* 96a). It is forbidden to even approach it, since when one tries to “break” it one is likely to fall into its clutches. Rather, one should destroy it through a sacrifice. This means that one should sacrifice himself for Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He should not place himself into a situation of being tested by the *Yetzer Hara*.

David Hamelech requested (*Tehillim* 26:2), “Examine me, Hashem, and test me.” In the end, he gave in to temptation (*Sanhedrin* 107a). Whereas,

after the great test of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Avraham requested that Hashem should test him no more, as the Midrash relates (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:11).

We learn from this that a person must keep away from tests. Earlier Chassidim were always scrupulous, even in things which are permitted. They acted in accordance with the Gemara, which explains that the advice of Pirkei Avot to “sanctify yourself in that which is permitted to you” is so that you should not be tested in similar matters, which are forbidden (*Yevamot* 20a).

I saw something similar to this in the sefer *Nachlat Eliezer*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 13:17), “G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Pelishtim... Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt.” This is very difficult to understand. The people knew what awaited them if they returned to Egypt. The Egyptians would most likely pounce upon them, taking vengeance for the ten plagues that they suffered because of them. This being the case, why did Hashem worry that Bnei Yisrael would want to return to Egypt out of fear of the Pelishtim?

The Torah is revealing man’s weakness. He can see only what is in front of him. At the moment a person is being tested he is unable to think either about the past or the future; he is totally absorbed in the moment. In order to avoid the temptation of returning to Egypt, Hashem led the nation in a roundabout way through the Wilderness.

This is the concept of constructing fences around a mitzvah, thereby distancing oneself from *nisayon*, in order that he not come to transgress. This was how the earlier tzaddikim behaved. When one accepts upon himself to go the long way, and avoid the site of danger, he is guaranteed not to fall into “Mitzrayim” (an allusion to the forty-nine levels of impurity), at a time when he is tested.

Therefore, one should not place himself in a position of temptation, despite the fact that if he overcomes the *Yetzer Hara*, he will ascend to a

higher level of Avodat Hashem. There is always the risk that he won't succeed in withstanding the test, *chalilah*, in which case he will fall lower and lower. The *nisyonot* which befall him against his will should provide enough of a challenge. When one recites Kriyat Shema, one should have in mind the meaning of the words "with all your soul." He must be prepared to give up his very life if the situation calls for it, just as Rabbi Akiva, and the sons of Channah did (*Chareidim*, chapter 9). But it is forbidden to purposely put oneself into a situation of a *nisayon* which was not demanded of him. This is termed bringing "an alien fire that He had not commanded them" (*Vayikra* 10:1).

In light of the above, we can understand the following account of Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 52a). Moshe and Aharon were walking along, with Nadav and Avihu at their heels. All of Bnei Yisrael followed after them. Nadav said to Avihu, "When will these two old men die so that you and I can lead the nation?"

These words are quite perplexing. How could these two tzaddikim, whose righteousness outshone that of Moshe and Aharon (*Vayikra Rabbah* 12:2), speak so disparagingly about the leader of all prophets, who merited speaking with Hashem face to face (*Devarim* 34:10), something of which they were never worthy?

It seems that we can answer the following. The policy of Moshe and Aharon was to (*Shemot* 19:23) "make a border around the mountain and sanctify it." In order to prevent the people from inadvertently sinning, by either touching the mountain or ascending it in order to get closer to Hashem at the moment of revelation, Hashem commanded Moshe to ensure that barriers would be put up around the mountain. He also instructed the people (*Shemot* 19:12), "Guard yourself from ascending the mountain or touching its edge." Moshe even added an extra day of preparation before *Matan Torah* to the three days mandated by Hashem (*Shabbat* 87a), as a further caution in preventing the people from sinning.

All of the “fences” which Moshe erected before *Matan Torah* were in order to prevent transgression of Hashem’s word.

When Moshe himself spoke with Hashem he would hide his face, as it states (ibid. 3:6), “Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to gaze toward G-d.” He did not suffice with merely closing his eyes, but covered his face as well, lest he not withstand the *nisayon* to open his eyes and gaze at the *Shechinah*. Specifically by way of the “fences” which a person constructs for himself, he merits reaching great heights, eventually attaining the holiest level, meriting speaking with the *Shechinah*.

Not so Nadav and Avihu. Their policy was to approach the *nisayon* head on and withstand it. They maintained that this is the proper form of service of Hashem. When they said, “So that you and I can lead the nation,” they meant that they would show the people how to serve Hashem through seeking out temptation and surmounting it. They felt that since Hashem’s glory fills the entire world, there is no need to ascend on High, as Moshe Rabbeinu did, in order to come to the understanding that “His kingdom reigns over all” (*Tehillim* 103:19). They asserted that Hashem certainly comes to the aid of those who bring themselves into a situation of *nisayon* for the sake of His Name.

This was the essence of the “alien fire” which they brought in the Mishkan. Each and every Jew is considered a “miniature Beit Hamikdash.” They erred. Avraham Avinu asked Hashem not to test him. Moshe and Aharon, likewise, recoiled from *nisayon*, covering their faces when speaking with Hashem. How, then, could Nadav and Avihu have suggested that Bnei Yisrael should seek to undergo tests that they were not guaranteed to pass?

Moreover, they themselves were hardly fitting teachers. For on the fifth of Sivan, the day before the Giving of the Torah, after Moshe Rabbeinu had the nation circumcise and immerse themselves, it states (*Shemot* 24:11), “Against the great men of the Children of Israel, He did not stretch out His hand – they gazed at G-d, yet they ate and drank.” Our Rabbis

teach (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:1; *Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6) that this refers to Nadav and Avihu and the Elders, who deserved death for impudently gazing at the *Shechinah* while eating and drinking. Due to the delight which Hashem had at *Matan Torah*, He postponed their punishment for some time. Later, they were consumed by fire upon entering the Tent of Meeting.

Nadav and Avihu placed themselves into tremendous danger when they looked at the *Shechinah*. Although they seemed to have been worthy of a Divine revelation, they should have learned from Moshe their teacher, who made sure to cover his face in order to avoid being tested.

Moshe learned this from the incident at the burning bush. There, when he only approached the bush, Hashem commanded him (*Shemot* 3:5), “Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground.” Since Moshe Rabbeinu had to act with such care concerning the ground, which was only the site of revelation, how much more so did he need to be wary of gazing at the *Shechinah* itself.

But Nadav and Avihu behaved contrary to Moshe. They placed themselves in a position of temptation and couldn’t resist gazing at the *Shechinah*, even while eating and drinking. This was termed “an alien fire,” for even though their love for Hashem was as strong as death, they still were forbidden to put themselves into a situation of *nisayon*, endangering their very lives. This is not the way of the Torah, which teaches us to live by its commandments (*Vayikra* 18:5).

This is as David Hamelech stated (*Tehillim* 19:10), “The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever.” True fear of Hashem entails avoiding *nisyonot*. One should not pursue *nisyonot*, thinking that by overcoming them he will become elevated in Avodat Hashem. This is too risky. When one steers clear of unnecessary tests, he can rest assured that Hashem will assist him in successfully passing those tests that he cannot avoid.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Hashem said, “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as an antidote.” We see from here that the *Yetzer Hara* was created at the same time as the Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* was created 974 generations before the Creation of the world. The power of sin already existed, even if Adam Harishon had not sinned. Without Torah, one cannot stand up to the *Yetzer Hara*. Yet, even if one engages in the study of Torah, one should not place himself into a position of *nisayon*.
- Who was greater than Adam Harishon, the handiwork of Hashem Himself? Despite that, he didn’t withstand the temptation he was faced with and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. He had only one mitzvah, yet transgressed it. How did he come to heed his wife’s persuasions and eat of the fruit? He was, after all, a great Torah scholar.
- The debate with Chava caused *bitul* Torah. Adam should have ignored her entreaties and remained silent. He was also afraid that she would die, as punishment for eating the forbidden fruit, and he would remain alone. Therefore, he ate the fruit, reasoning that Hashem would not kill both of them, since that would effectively destroy the world. This is an example of the type of debate into which one is forbidden to enter. If something is known to be forbidden, one is best off refraining from discussing the issue at all.
- Now we can understand what Nadav said to Avihu: “When will these two old men die so that you and I can lead the nation?” Moshe and Aharon maintained the policy of “fencing off” the nation by distancing them from any form of *nisayon*. But Nadav and Avihu maintained that it is preferable for a person to put himself into a situation of temptation and overcome it, thereby meriting becoming closer to Hashem. They were proven wrong. Theirs was called an “alien fire.” One may not place himself into a situation of temptation. This is true fear of Hashem. When one behaves in this way, he merits Divine assistance in withstanding all the tests that he is given.

# THE GOOD AND EVIL INCLINATIONS



## THE HARP OF DAVID AND THE NORTH WIND

Chazal tell us that a violin hung over the bed of David Hamelech and at midnight a northerly wind would come and blow on it, producing a melody. Immediately, David would rise and engage in Torah study until sunrise (*Berachot* 3b; *Sanhedrin* 16a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:16; *Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 18).

Why do our Sages emphasize the fact that it was a northerly wind that aroused David? What is the significance of a northerly wind as opposed to a southerly or westerly wind?

Furthermore, we infer that the wind blew every single night to awaken David Hamelech. Yet, we know that in Eretz Yisrael, there are many nights with no wind at all. And if we propose that it was a miracle which brought the winds each night, then why did he need the violin? David could have awakened in a miraculous way without the melody of the violin. And why was it a northerly wind?

The Satan, who is also the *Yetzer Hara*, is called *Ba'al Tzafon*, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 1:14), “מצפון תפתח הרעה – From the north (*tzafon*) the evil will be released.” It also says (*Bereishit* 4:7), “לפתח חטאת רובץ – Sin rests at the door.” It seems that all evil emanates from the north and attempts to gain entry, which is alluded to by the word פתח (door).

The *Yetzer Hara* does not approach a man and immediately convince him to sin. He begins by “blowing a wind,” gradually pushing him into temptation, just as a wind pushes a person in a certain direction. First he convinces him to transgress something minor, which is not even categorized as a sin. Perhaps it will be only to transgress a custom, by persuading him that this is not a sin at all. However, once a man complies, and gets into the habit of transgressing, it becomes second nature to him. He doesn’t feel as though he has sinned at all. Then, the Satan encourages him to commit more severe crimes. Chazal (*Shabbat* 105b; *Niddah* 13b) warn, “This is the craft of the *Yetzer Hara*. Today he says, ‘Do this.’ The next day, he says, ‘Do this.’ Finally, he convinces him to worship idols.”

This is what transpired with David Hamelech. He was occupied throughout the day with governing his kingdom and did not retire until shortly before midnight. Yet immediately at midnight, he would arise to serve Hashem. He must have been overcome with fatigue, since he had barely slept. At that moment, the northerly wind, which is analogous to the Satan, would begin to blow in an attempt to convince him to go back to sleep.

But our Sages have taught (*Makkot* 10b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:11), “In the way a man desires to go, he is led.” Hashem recognized that David Hamelech’s desire was to serve Him at all times. Hashem, therefore, utilized the very wind with which the Satan wanted to tire him and had it awaken him by striking a melody on the violin, so that he should arise for the service of Hashem.

We learn from here that when Hashem sees that a person truly wishes to fulfill a specific mitzvah, He helps him succeed. In spite of the Satan’s endeavors to influence man to sin, Hashem gives the person the power to overcome these tactics. He is able to withstand his *Yetzer Hara* and not succumb.

Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 104a), “He who comes to purify himself, receives assistance.” This means that when a person truly attempts to draw closer

to Hashem and serve Him better, then Hashem helps him succeed, as long as his intentions are pure. This was David Hamelech's experience, when he retired extremely fatigued shortly before midnight. The Satan, called *Ba'al Tzafon*, who sees, but is not seen, very gently began to blow the north wind, to lull David to sleep. However, precisely at that moment, David rose to serve Hashem.

Actually, the super-human levels of David's service of Hashem, enabling him to rise despite his acute fatigue, stemmed from his intense fear of Heaven. If not for this, he certainly would not have awakened so early. He would have found many excuses to stay in bed. When we are tired, we excuse ourselves, saying, "I am compelled to stay in bed; it is impossible to arise. Therefore, I am free of obligation" (*Avodah Zarah* 54a). But when a man possesses fear of Heaven, he does not experience weariness. He does not reflect on his own considerations but seeks only to fulfill Hashem's will.

Therefore, if one desires to serve Hashem even in challenging situations, he must acquire fear of Heaven. Then he will succeed in overcoming all the temptations of the *Yetzer Hara*. But without fear of Heaven, he will invent excuses for his lack of conscientiousness, since the Satan is formidable. When a person oversleeps with the excuse of being compelled due to his fatigue, then the next day, the *Yetzer Hara* may introduce other leniencies, until he controls him completely.

The word כנור (violin) contains the letters כ-נ-ו-ר. The numerical value of the letter כ when spelled out (כך) is one hundred. This hints to the one hundred blessings we say each day, which David Hamelech initiated. The letters נ-ו-ר (which is similar to the word נר – a lamp), refers to the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 6:23), "For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light." The Torah and mitzvot were always foremost in David's mind, as he said (*Tehillim* 16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always." David lived his life each day with the inspiration of "Oh, how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation." The Torah was always the focal point of

David's life; he lived it when he slept, when he arose, when he ate, and when he drank. The Torah was always before his eyes, as a picture hanging on the wall.

Therefore, the Satan wanted to divert David's attention from the violin, the symbol of Torah. This violin constantly reminded him of his obligation in this world, to engage in Torah study and mitzvah observance. This is also the purpose of *tzitzit*: to constantly remind us of the mitzvot, as it says (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them."

Since the Satan failed to distract David Hamelech, he attempted to lull him into a deep sleep by tiring him, in order to minimize his involvement in Torah. This would have been a significant victory for the *Yetzer Hara*, as it states (*Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel* I, *remez* 129), "One night of Torah study of David Hamelech is worth more than one hundred years of the Torah study of another scholar." Therefore, every moment of David Hamelech's Torah study was the equivalent of a few months' worth of another scholar.

Had the Satan succeeded in convincing him to sleep a few seconds more, certainly for another few minutes or a whole hour, he would have scored a tremendous victory. But David Hamelech was not one to give in to the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*. With persistence and determination, despite the overwhelming temptation to rest, David arose to serve Hashem. His immense fortitude and strength were due to his great fear of Heaven, which was deeply embedded in his heart. His fear of Heaven helped him reach such exalted heights.

Regarding this, David Hamelech triumphantly proclaimed (*Tehillim* 119:62), "At midnight I arise to thank You for Your righteous ordinances." He was stating, "The Satan attempts to tire me at midnight, to prevent me from arising to serve Hashem. But You, Hashem, in Your great mercy, assist me. You send a northerly wind to blow upon my violin to rouse me, and I get up to thank and praise You."

This gives us an understanding of how greatly one must regret a lost moment of Torah study or a missed opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah. He should be aware of the tremendous loss he has incurred. The Satan invents an endless variety of excuses with the power to sway man, such as, “You are much too tired; you haven’t slept well these last few nights; you are surely exhausted...” A person need only make an effort to overcome this pessimism. When he demonstrates that he does not want to waste a moment from Torah study, he will receive Divine assistance, as we explained earlier (*Shabbat* 104a): “One who comes to purify himself, is aided by Heaven.” The most important thing is the initial, unconditional commitment to serve Hashem, which must be rooted in fear of Heaven.

This principle is hinted at by the following pesukim. It says (*Bereishit* 1:1), “In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth...” And in parashat *Noach* (6:8) it says, “But Noach found grace in the eyes of Hashem.” By putting together these two pesukim, we may conclude that the essence and purpose of Creation is to find favor in the eyes of Hashem. Man can achieve this only through acquiring fear of Heaven. As we see by Hashem’s favor of Noach, Hashem loves and blesses one who fears Him.

Therefore, the Torah began with its format of *Bereishit*, which demonstrates that the most important factor is the initial motivation. One can arrive at the wrong conclusion from the words (*Bereishit* 1:26), “נעשה אדם בצלמנו – Let us make man in Our image,” (as if there was a conference with another power) or (*ibid.* 1:1), “בראשית ברא אלוהים – In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and earth,” (lit. “*Bereishit* created Elokim”). Both of these pesukim can be misunderstood to mean there is a deity other than Hashem, G-d forbid.

Whoever wishes to err, will be able to arrive at the wrong conclusions. The Torah does not address itself to those who wish to deviate. This is because, if a person exerts himself to abstain from error, he will not fail. The same way a person will not err while calculating millions of dollars,

because of their value, all the more so will he come to the correct evaluation when contemplating the Creation of the world and his purpose in life. If one honestly searches, he will acknowledge the unity of Hashem. But if his initial motivation is to excuse himself from his obligations, he will go astray.

This is the reason that the Torah begins with the words, “בראשית ברא” אלוהים את השמים ואת הארץ.” The purpose of the entire Creation is that man find favor in the eyes of Hashem. This is possible only when he is aware of the basic principle: fear of Hashem. This must be his initial purpose and his final goal.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Every day, a northerly wind would blow on the violin of David Hamelech, which hung above his bed. This would awaken him to Avodat Hashem. What was the significance of a northerly wind? Furthermore, there are nights in Eretz Yisrael in which the wind doesn’t blow at all. If this was a miracle, then what was the purpose of the violin? Couldn’t David simply have awoken by himself?
- The Satan is referred to as *Ba’al Tzafon*. He does not make an outright attack on a person, but tries to cause him to stumble in a gradual manner, just as a gently blowing wind pushes a person in a certain direction. He begins by causing insignificant deviations, which eventually lead to serious transgressions. He employs the excuse that one is compelled to rest, and cannot possibly arise. The Satan attempted to tire David Hamelech, in order to prevent him from arising to serve Hashem. But in the path a man desires to take, so he is led. Therefore, it was specifically the same wind that the Satan was using to attempt to lull David into slumber that awakened him to Avodat Hashem. He arose like a lion to begin a day of Avodat Hashem, fully aware that the Satan was lying in ambush. Thus, he was able to overcome the Satan and the *kelippah* which attempted to prevent him from serving Hashem.
- Furthermore, the word **כָּנוּר** hints at the one hundred blessings we say each day, since the letter **כ** has the numerical value of one hundred; and to the Torah, since the letters **נ-ו-ר** hint at the word **נר** (lamp), which alludes to the Torah.

This is what the Satan tried to uproot from the heart of David Hamelech, through the weariness that he brought upon him. The Satan invested much effort into distracting David, because he realized the enormous power of David's Torah study. It was worth more than one hundred years' worth of the study of others. But David was not defeated by this. The more the *Yetzer Hara* tried to prevent him, the more David invested in learning Torah and serving Hashem faithfully.

### **A Practical Lesson**

A person should regret every lost moment of Torah study, and each lost opportunity to perform a mitzvah. He should realize that he has thereby incurred a great loss. The *Yetzer Hara* has many ploys, but if a person resists them, Hashem will help him, as it is taught, "He who comes to purify himself is assisted by Heaven."

## **THE WAR AGAINST THE YETZER HARA - A CONSTANT BATTLE**

Chazal (*Shabbat* 30a) state, in the name of Rabbi Yehudah, "Rav asks: What is meant by the pasuk (*Tehillim* 39:5) 'Let me know my end, O Hashem, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know when I will cease.' David told Hashem, 'Master of the universe! Let me know my end, when I will die.' Hashem responded, 'I have decreed that no person will know the end of his days.' David persisted, 'And the measure of my days, how many do I have?' Hashem responded, 'The day of your death is Shabbat.'

"Every Shabbat from then on, David engaged in constant Torah study, lest it be the day reckoned for his demise. The Angel of Death could not approach David, so he devised a plan. He went to the orchard which was behind David Hamelech's house and caused the trees to rustle loudly. Distracted, David looked around to see where the noise came from. In that

second, the Angel of Death grabbed hold of his soul, and succeeded in executing his death.”

How can we understand the concept that David Hamelech attempted to oppose the will of Hashem and undermine His decree? Hashem had declared that David would live for only seventy years and not any longer. Even these seventy years were a gift bestowed upon him by Adam Harishon (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 19; *Zohar* I, 91a). Additionally, why did the Angel of Death see fit to distract David specifically through making noise with a tree?

David suffered greatly from his many enemies, both from within his own camps, as well as from other nations. He accepted all of his tribulations with love and beseeched Hashem to grant him the stamina to withstand them all. The pasuk says (*Tehillim* 119:117), “Sustain me that I may be saved, and I will always be engrossed in Your statutes.” Our Sages have explained (*Midrash Shochar Tov*, *ibid.*) that David was requesting that Hashem give him the endurance to withstand all his difficulties and be rescued from them.

Despite his constant suffering and persecutions, David engaged in Torah study day and night, never allowing himself to succumb to a full night’s sleep (*Berachot* 3a). Until midnight, he would toil in Torah, and from midnight onward he would produce songs of praise and gratitude to his Creator. He did not suffice with simply learning the material, but invested absolute concentration, plunging into its infinite depths. Even while fleeing from King Shaul, when he was tormented and his life was at stake, David learned Torah from Shmuel Hanavi, more than an ordinary Torah student would be able to cover in a hundred years (*Midrash Shmuel* 22:4).

It is incredible how David succeeded in plumbing the depths of Torah despite his many difficulties and troubles. Furthermore, he waged a constant battle with his *Yetzer Hara*. He managed to defeat it, minimizing its potency to such an extent, that even after his death, when his son

Shlomo ruled, the Satan was still submissive. This enabled Shlomo to build the Beit Hamikdash in holiness and purity, without disturbance.

The greater one's potential, the greater are his challenges. Specifically because of David Hamelech's unusually holy soul, he was afflicted with much adversity and many ordeals (see *Shabbat* 135b). Our Sages state (*Sukkah* 52a), that whoever is greater than his friend possesses a greater *Yetzer Hara*. This is in order to increase his reward. Our Rabbis teach (*Avot; Makkot* 3b), "Rabbi Chananya ben Akashia says: The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon Yisrael; therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 42:21), 'Hashem desired, for the sake of its [Israel's] righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious.'"

David Hamelech knew that he would live for seventy years, the amount of years bequeathed to him by Adam Harishon (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 19). However, he wanted to know which day of the week was designated for his death, in order to prepare himself properly, so that he would not dread and fear it. For tzaddikim realize that after they die they will no longer be able to perform mitzvot, as it says (*Tehillim* 88:6), "Among the dead who are free." Our Sages explain (*Shabbat* 30a, 131b; *Yalkut Shimoni, Iyov* 896) that once a man dies, he cannot perform mitzvot anymore. Therefore, the tzaddik greatly values each moment that can be spent involved in Torah and mitzvot during his lifetime.

When David Hamelech was informed that he was destined to die on Shabbat, it presented a great challenge for him. Yet he refrained from bemoaning his fate. On the contrary, he endeavored to cleave to Hashem by studying Torah, which bonds man to his Creator, with greater intensity (*Zohar* III, 61a). He did not dwell on thoughts of his family, such as how to prepare them for his imminent passing, or on political matters, as he had no spare time to indulge in such matters.

David intended to show the Angel of Death that he did not fear him; nor did he fear the day of death. Even in his last moments, he did not panic.

His entire purpose in life was to engage in Torah study. Just as he came to this world for the purpose of Torah learning, he wished to leave it through Torah learning.

We should learn from David Hamelech the extent to which a person must sacrifice himself for Torah study, even when his life is hanging in the balance. Through involving oneself in Torah, he will be spared the terror that seizes a person upon meeting the Angel of Death (ibid. 77:20b). In this manner, he will be bonded with his Creator even in his very last moments.

Maybe we can now understand why the Angel of Death specifically chose a tree with which to create a disturbing noise. Sefer Mishlei states (3:18), “It (the Torah) is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” Torah is compared to a living tree which sustains man. Therefore, the Satan purposely used a tree, an allusion to the Torah, to bring about David’s death. The Satan rustled the leaves of the tree to give a message to Hashem. The word *בעץ* (in the tree) contains the same letters as the word *עצב* (sadness). The Satan was dismayed that David’s demise was delayed because he could not conquer him while he was involved in Torah, the “tree of life.” The Satan wanted Hashem to notice his dilemma and enable him to take David’s life, thus fulfilling Hashem’s original decree. Hashem caused David to lessen his intense concentration and to go down the stairs leading outside to see why the tree was rustling. A stair broke underneath him, making it possible to take his *neshamah*, causing his death. How fortunate are Am Yisrael who pass away while learning Torah!

## **I Considered My Ways and Returned My Feet to Your Testimonies**

There is another point which must be clarified. The pasuk says (*Melachim I*, 1:1), “David Hamelech was old, advanced in years. They covered him with garments, but he did not become warm.” Why didn’t

the garments warm him? Our Sages state (*Aggadot Bereishit 38*) that David Hamelech had seen the Angel of Death with a sword in his hand, when an epidemic had erupted in Klal Yisrael. This caused him to become very frightened, and his blood became cold, remaining so throughout his old age.

For this reason, David wanted to know the day of his death. He wished to oppose the cold fear of the Angel of Death specifically through warming himself by Torah study. This way, on the day of his death, he would be able to demonstrate to the Angel of Death that he had no fear of him. As proof of this accomplishment, the Angel of Death stood over him throughout Shabbat but could not overcome him, because of his complete immersion in Torah.

David Hamelech stated (*Tehillim 119:59*), “I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies.” The Sages tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah 35:1*) that David said the following: “Master of the Universe! Every day I would plan my schedule, saying, ‘To this certain (פלוני) place, and to that certain (פלוני) person, I shall go,’ but, invariably, my feet would bring me to the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot.”

This is puzzling. Why did David Hamelech even contemplate going anywhere other than the Beit Hamidrash when he knew that he would inevitably end up there? Even if we were to explain that it was in order to merit a reward for ultimately choosing the Beit Hamidrash, this too is difficult to understand. One should not put himself in a position where he might sin, even if he doesn’t intend to actually do so. Also, why does the pasuk omit the specific names of those places that he avoided?

Maybe we can explain the matter in the following way. The Gemara (*Berachot 5a; Zohar I, 22a*) tells us that a person should always arouse his *Yetzer Hatov* to overpower his *Yetzer Hara*. This is exactly what David did. Despite all the aggravation which he was subject to from his enemies in their campaign to weaken his Avodat Hashem, not only did he not succumb, but he strengthened himself and aroused his *Yetzer Hatov* to

overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. How did he manage this? He would promise his *Yetzer Hara* that tomorrow he would follow him in his evil ways. David spoke to the Satan so convincingly that he believed him. However, when it came to fulfilling his alleged plans, he would disappoint the Satan severely. In this way, he managed to outwit him.

This is what is meant by “I considered my ways.” David considered what to tell the *Yetzer Hara* regarding where he would go to commit “certain” transgressions. Both sin and the *Yetzer Hara* are termed פלוגי (certain), because they do not have a specific name (*Zohar* II, 249b).

By employing this strategy, David Hamelech proved his great love and affinity for Hashem. Although he deliberately placed himself in risky situations, through his great love for Hashem he always managed, at the last minute, to prevail over his *Yetzer Hara* and draw him to the Beit Hamidrash. He succeeded every time to arrive at the Beit Hamidrash, despite his alleged intention of going to certain questionable places.

It is from David’s behavior that our Sages conclude (*Sukkah 52b; Kiddushin 30b*), in the name of Rabbi Yishmael, “My son, if this degenerate one has encountered you, drag him to the Beit Hamidrash. If he is made of stone, he will soften; if of iron, he will shatter.” This is what is meant by, “I considered my ways.” David meant: “I considered transgressing, but when the *Yetzer Hara* attempted to overpower me, I would drag him to the Beit Hamidrash. This way, I was able to subdue him and even enlist his help in my Avodat Hashem.” This is what is meant by the words “and I returned my feet to your testimonies.” The very same energy that is expended in sinning, David utilized successfully for Hashem’s service. There is no other reality besides Hashem and His service.

David Hamelech succeeded in employing even the service of the *Yetzer Hara* to fulfill Hashem’s will. As a result, there was nothing that could prevent him from dedicating himself to Hashem. Day and night, he did not slacken in his service of Hashem, and he was constantly immersed in Torah study. He achieved total control over his natural instincts and

inclinations, and channeled them all toward Avodat Hashem. The burning desire to glorify Hashem blazed within him. Regarding this, the pasuk (*Mishlei* 16:7) says, “When Hashem favors a man’s ways; even his foes will make peace with him.” Our Sages tell us that this refers to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 54:1). Even David’s *Yetzer Hara* was enlisted in his service and aided him in accomplishing his heart’s desire.

This is what our Sages (*Berachot 5a*) teach, in the name of Rabbi Levi Bar Chama, who said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, “A person should always rouse his *Yetzer Hatov* to overpower his *Yetzer Hara*. If he subdues it (his *Yetzer Hara*), good. If not, he should recite *Kriyat Shema*. If he subdues it, good. If not, he should remember the day of death.” This is the explanation of, “I considered my ways.” When one perceives the *Yetzer Hara* inciting him, he should remember the day of death. There are always two opposing forces vying for dominion. The chances are that if one does not contemplate and consider his actions carefully, he will ultimately be subject to Gehinnom. Therefore, it is worthwhile to drag the *Yetzer Hara* to the Beit Hamidrash in order to merit *Olam Haba*.

We learn an important lesson from the many strategies that David Hamelech employed in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara*, and all the methods he used to outwit him. One who unexpectedly faced a challenge to sin and overcame his *Yetzer Hara* cannot be compared to one who is already in his clutches, anticipating the fulfillment of his passions, yet ultimately prevails with righteousness. The more one prepares to sin, the greater the urge burns within him to fulfill his desires. If, at the moment of transgression, he succeeds in suppressing the raging flame of desire and abstains, his reward is all the greater.

Chazal tell us (*Kiddushin* 39b), “One who abstains from sinning, is rewarded as one who performed a mitzvah.” Rashi explains that there is no greater mitzvah than that of withstanding the *Yetzer Hara* when he tries to seduce a person into sinning. Yet, he cannot be compared to someone who anticipated sinning, but ultimately abstained.

Chazal (*Menachot 44a*) relate a story about a man who was scrupulous in the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. He heard about a harlot who charged four hundred gold coins for her services. This man sent her the money and arranged a date. When he arrived at the appointed time, to fulfill his lust, his four *tzitziyot* slapped him in the face. He fell to the ground, as did the woman.

She asked him what fault he found with her. He responded, “I have found no fault with you; I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you. But there is one mitzvah which our G-d has commanded us, which is called *tzitzit*. In the pesukim regarding this mitzvah, the words, ‘I am Hashem, your G-d’ (*Bamidbar 15:41*) are written twice. This hints to the lesson Hashem is teaching us: ‘I am the One Who will punish, and I am the One Who will reward.’ And now my *tzitzit* are testifying to this, like four witnesses.”

The woman said, “I will not leave you until you reveal to me your name, the name of your town, the name of your Rabbi, and the name of the Beit Hamidrash where you study Torah.” He wrote down all the details and entrusted her with the information.

The woman went and distributed all her possessions; one third to the government, in order that they allow her to convert; one third to the poor; and one third she kept for herself. She did not sell the bedding, but brought it along with her. When she arrived at the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Chiya, she requested that he convert her. He asked if the purpose of her conversion was in order to marry one of the Talmudic students. She immediately handed him the paper with the details that the man had written for her. She told him all that had transpired and declared that she wished to convert *l’shem Shamayim*. He accepted her words. The same sheets that she had spread before the man in prohibition, she now spread in permitted conduct. This was his reward in this world for doing Hashem’s will. However, the reward in the World to Come is way beyond our comprehension.

We see how this man, in the peak of his passion, succeeded in subduing his *Yetzer Hara*, in the merit of the *tzitzit* which he was wearing. Thereby, he earned a great reward in this world and the next. The Torah says about Bilaam that he also desired to die the death of tzaddikim (*Bamidbar 23:10*): “May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!” Even he knew that everyone, except for the perfectly righteous, has what to fear upon his death.

### ————— In Summary —————

- David Hamelech asked that Hashem reveal to him the day of his death. Hashem refused this request, stating only that he would die on Shabbat. On the designated day, the Angel of Death appeared and caused a rustling in the trees. As soon as David ceased learning to see what the noise was about, the Angel of Death overcame him and took his soul. How did David Hamelech propose to change the decree from Above? And what was the significance of the Angel causing a disturbance specifically through a tree?
- Despite David Hamelech’s many difficulties and persecutions, he persisted in his Torah study. As we know, the greater one is, the more powerful is the *Yetzer Hara* that he faces. David did not intend to change the decree concerning his day of death. He only wanted to prepare properly for the transition from the temporal life in this world to the eternal life of the World to Come. The only loss he feared in dying was that of being unable to perform mitzvot and bring pleasure to his Creator, for in the World to Come there is no longer the opportunity to perform mitzvot.
- Therefore, the Satan distracted David specifically through a tree, as the Torah is called “a tree of life.” As long as David was immersed in Torah study, the Angel of Death could not overcome him. The word **בַּעַץ** (in the tree) and the word **עֵצָב** (sorrow) contain the same letters, alluding to the fact that the Satan was saddened at being unable to take David Hamelech’s life at the appointed time. He rustled the leaves of the tree as a means of signaling to Hashem to assist him in taking David Hamelech’s *neshamah*. Indeed, when David stopped learning to check out the source of the noise, he was detached from the tree of life and subject to the designs of the Angel of Death, who was waiting in ambush. David

merited passing away immersed in Torah study.

- Through great effort, David Hamelech succeeded in tricking his *Yetzer Hara* into submission by assuring him that he would go to a “certain” place (פלוני), and in the end, he would find himself in the Beit Hamidrash. He aroused his *Yetzer Hatov* to overpower his *Yetzer Hara* (also known as פלוני). He allowed the *Yetzer Hara* to believe that he was in his clutches, and then, at the last moment, outwitted him and continued performing mitzvot. In this way, David was able to weaken the power of the Satan in his generation. The Satan remained in this state well after David’s demise, until the times of King Shlomo, his son. The power of evil was diminished so that it would not interfere with the construction of the Beit Hamikdash.

## A Practical Lesson

We learn from David Hamelech how a person must involve himself in Torah and mitzvot with great self-sacrifice. By learning Torah he will be spared the fear which grips a person when he encounters the Angel of Death, and he will be attached to his Creator even in his last moments.

## BLINDING THE ANGEL OF DEATH

The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 20b) states, “The Angel of Death is full of eyes. At the moment of a sick person’s death, the Angel of Death stands poised, ready with his sword in hand, with a drop of poison dripping from it. Upon this sight, the sick person begins to tremble, and opens his mouth. Instantly, the Angel of Death drops the poison into his mouth, thereby killing him. Furthermore, the Gemara (*Bava Batra* 16a) states, “Reish Lakish said, ‘He is Satan, he is the *Yetzer Hara*, he is the Angel of Death.’ We learn that he is the one who descends to mislead man to sin. Then he ascends to heaven to prosecute against him. In the end, he is given permission to punish the person by taking his life.”

Is this true about all people? When facing death, will tzaddikim, who dedicated their lives to fulfilling mitzvot, denying themselves physical pleasures and subjecting themselves to much suffering, also meet their end in mortal fear of the Angel of Death? The pasuk in Tehillim (32:6) says, “For this let every devout one (חַסִּיד) pray to You at a time when You may be found (לַעֲת מִצָּא).” Chazal (*Berachot* 8a) explain that one of the explanations of “when You may be found” is that it refers to the time of death. The easiest form of death is death through a “kiss.” This is the form of death that the tzaddik longs for. We have heard about tzaddikim who passed away with a smile on their face, as evidence of this.

At the time that Ezra the Scribe desired to build the second Beit Hamikdash, he was concerned about the *Yetzer Hara* inciting Jews to serve idols and the *Yetzer Hara* for immorality. These two forces contributed to the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. He feared that they would likewise cause the second Beit Hamikdash to be destroyed. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 102a) relates that Rav Ashi asked the wicked king Menashe, “How could such a wise man as yourself have come to worship *avodah zarah*?” To which Menashe replied, “Had you been living in my times, you would have lifted the hem of your coat in order to run faster to worship idols.” This illustrates how obsessed the people were with idol worship.

Therefore, Ezra and the *Anshei Keneset Hagedolah* prayed for the elimination of the *Yetzer Hara* of *avodah zarah* and that of immorality. Their request was granted. They captured the *Yetzer Hara* of *avodah zarah*, putting it in a leaden pot. They dealt with the *Yetzer Hara* of immorality by poking out its eyes. In this way, they succeeded in weakening its potency (*Yoma* 69b).

It is known that when a person is constantly involved in Torah and mitzvot, if he just contemplates performing a mitzvah but was prevented due to mitigating circumstances, it is considered as if he actually did the mitzvah (*Berachot* 6a). This is because Hashem considers the intention of

doing a mitzvah, as a mitzvah itself (*Kiddushin* 40a; *Zohar* I, 28b). Through these actions, the person is throwing burning arrows in the eyes of the Satan, puncturing his eyes. Therefore, upon his death, he has nothing to fear, since the Satan no longer frightens him. On the contrary, when he beholds the Satan, joy fills his heart and a smile forms on his lips upon seeing the fruits of his labor. Since he succeeded in puncturing the Satan's eyes, thus destroying him through learning Torah and performing mitzvot throughout his lifetime, he does not fear him at the moment of his death.

In fact, had Bnei Yisrael done complete teshuvah for even just one day, they would have succeeded in puncturing all the eyes of the Satan, thereby subduing him permanently. The ultimate redemption would have immediately followed. Although a substantial victory over the Satan was effected by Ezra the Scribe, with the help of his Rabbinical court, he did not want to completely uproot it. He wanted Bnei Yisrael to finish the task, and eradicate the *Yetzer Hara*, through doing teshuvah.

One should realize that the strength of the Satan lies in the eyes. He leads people astray through misusing their eyes in various ways, as in straying after false gods and indulging in forbidden forms of entertainment. As a result, much time is wasted from Torah learning as well. The Torah exhorts us in the clearest terms (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "Do not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray." Our Sages tell us that the heart and the eyes are two agents employed by the *Yetzer Hara* to cause people to sin. He thereby accrues additional eyes (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:6).

However, Hashem recompenses good deeds in a far greater measure than He metes out punishment for transgression (*Yoma* 76). Through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, one is spared from the eyes of the Satan. Moreover, he even punctures the Satan's existing eyes, thereby considerably weakening him. Therefore, a tzaddik does not only gain protection for himself, but also achieves protection for his entire generation. When the Satan sees how the tzaddik is avenging him, he

takes flight, and leaves him, as well as his neighborhood. By preventing the Satan from inciting Bnei Yisrael to sin he may even merit to save his entire generation, as did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The tzaddik does not desire to save only his soul, but the souls of his entire generation. He accomplishes this through Torah and mitzvot. When he chastises people, they take heed, since words which emanate from the heart enter the heart. This is especially so if he fears Heaven, as our Sages (*Berachot* 6b) state, “Rabbi Chilbo said in the name of Rav Huna: Whoever fears Heaven, his words are heeded, as it says (*Kohelet* 12:13), ‘The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d, etc.’” Therefore, a person must be exceedingly careful lest he fall into the trap of the Satan. Through Torah and mitzvot, he can overpower him.

A person should remember the advice of our Sages (*Avot* 2:5), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” This is because the *Yetzer Hara* always waits for an opportunity to trap man, causing him to sin. Chazal (*Kiddushin* 30b) relate in the name of Rav Yitzchak, “Man’s evil inclination renews his attacks against him every single day, as it states (*Bereishit* 6:5), ‘Every product of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always.’” Rabbi Shimon ben Levi said, “Man’s evil inclination overcomes him every day and desires to kill him, as it says (*Tehillim* 37:32), ‘The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him.’ If not for Hashem’s help, he would not succeed in freeing himself, as it says (*ibid.* 37:33), ‘But Hashem will not forsake him to his hand.’”

The sefer *Nefesh Hachaim* (*Sha’ar* 3:88) expounds on this subject: And now I have shown you a small part of the ways of the *Yetzer Hara*, who seeks many different methods, always coming up with new ideas. He appears in all innocence and tells a person that all he learned, or the mitzvot he performed, is worth nothing at all. He claims that this person is engaged in transgressions all day long. The reason he tries to hinder the tzaddik in his service of Hashem is because the tzaddik prevents him from carrying out his evil plans upon the people in his environment.

Our Sages (*Kiddushin* 15a) relate the story of Yannai Hamelech to illustrate the wily ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*. Yannai was a Kohen from the family of the Chashmonaim. After achieving great victory, he was overjoyed. Elazar ben Po'eira, an evil man who was known for his mockery, told him, "King Yannai! The hearts of the *Perushim* are against you. They are your enemies and do not rejoice whatsoever in your success." Yannai asked how to verify the truth of these words. To which Elazar ben Po'eira replied, "Place the holy *tzitz* (one of the special clothes worn only by the Kohen Gadol) upon your forehead. All the people will arise in awe of the Holy Name written on it, and then they will protest against you for being the Kohen Gadol."

Yannai Hamelech did as advised. An elderly man named Yehudah ben Gedida was there. He told Yannai, "Yannai Hamelech, is it not enough for you that you have the crown of royalty, that you desire the crown of priesthood, which belongs only to the descendants of Aharon?!" It was common knowledge that Yannai's mother had been taken captive in Modi'in. (Therefore, the *Perushim* rebuked him. A woman who was captured may not marry a Kohen, lest she was defiled, yet his mother married a Kohen, therefore her son was invalid for priesthood, see Rashi *ad. loc.*). The matter was investigated, and it was confirmed that his mother had not been defiled by her captors. Nonetheless, it was ruled that Yannai was invalid for the priesthood, which aroused his anger against the Sages. Eventually, he became an apostate and ordered all the Sages killed. We see how corrupt a person can become, even though he once served as a Kohen.

Our *Chachamim* (*Berachot* 5a) exhort us to arouse our *Yetzer Hatov* over our *Yetzer Hara*, as it says (*Tehillim* 4:5), "Tremble, and sin not." This teaches that a person should always overcome his *Yetzer Hara* through Torah study and mitzvah performance. This weakens the power of the Satan, who depends on the misuse of one's eyes in order to tempt a person to sin. By remaining focused on Torah, one is saved from the Satan's devious tactics.

Our Sages (*Midrash Aggadah, Toldot 27a*) warn, “Anger causes the light to depart.” When a person overcomes his *Yetzer Hara*, he blinds him, so to speak, rendering the *Yetzer Hara* powerless over him. However, this is only if he perseveres in the battle against the *Yetzer Hara* without faltering, as many great and righteous people have done. But if, G-d forbid, he becomes lax in this war, he thereby returns the light to the Satan’s eyes. He then empowers the *kelippah* by supplying him with a source from which to draw strength. This is what is lengthening our *galut*, may Hashem have mercy.

One should realize that a person who gets angry is likened to one who worships idols (*Zohar I, 27b; Part II, 182b*). One must beware of losing his temper. After Ezra succeeded in weakening the temptation for *avodah zarah*, the Satan retained the ability to cause people to transgress this prohibition by inciting them with anger. The pasuk in Tehillim (81:10) states, “There shall be no strange god within you.” “Within you” refers to anger, which emanates from within. The Gemara (*Shabbat 105b*) states that Rabbi Avin said, “What is meant by the pasuk, ‘There shall be no strange god within you, nor shall you bow before an alien god’? What is the strange god that is found within a person? This is the *Yetzer Hara*.” We see from here that a person is punished measure for measure (*Shabbat 105b*): Since one who gets angry grants the *Yetzer Hara* power through multiplying its eyes, one who succumbs to anger is punished by his own vision being dimmed.

However, we find that there are people who constantly battle the *Yetzer Hara*, but at the end of their life still fear the Angel of Death. Why is this? Maybe we can answer this question with the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim 33:18-19*): “Behold, the eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him, upon those who await His kindness, to rescue their soul from death.” At the time of death, the Angel of Death tries to convince a person to deny Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s existence, promising to preserve him if he complies. For this reason, David Hamelech beseeched Hashem (*ibid. 86:2*), “Guard my soul, for I am devout.”

David Hamelech, who was righteous and devout, feared all his life lest he accede to the Angel of Death's suggestion to rebel against Hashem in his last moments. He therefore beseeched Hashem to protect him from this, in order that he should depart from this world without sin. The Torah (*Devarim* 28:6) states, "Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out." Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 107a) explain: "That your exit from this world should be without sin, just as your entry was."

Furthermore, David requested that Hashem reveal the date of his death, as it says (*Tehillim* 39:5), "Let me know my end, Hashem, and the measure of my days, what it is" (*Shabbat* 30a). He wished to engage in Torah study at the moment of his death and pass away while engrossed in learning Torah, without giving the Angel of Death the chance to tempt him in his final moments. In this manner, he would fulfill the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 19:14), "This is the teaching regarding a man who dies in a tent." "In a tent" refers to the tent of Torah. Just as man, moments prior to his birth, is engaged in learning Torah with an angel (*Niddah* 30b), so, too, when he exits the world, he should leave while engrossed in Torah study. In this manner, he will avoid falling into the clutches of the Satan during his final moments.

Most tzaddikim die while cleaving to Hashem, without seeing the Angel of Death coming to take their soul. Therefore, they do not fear him. In *Tehillim* (33:18), it states, "Behold, the eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him." The tzaddikim who cleave to Hashem see only His eyes at death. The pesukim (*ibid.* vs. 18-19) continue, "Upon those who await His kindness. To rescue their soul from death..." They are spared the sight of the Angel of Death, when he arrives to take their *neshamah*.

David Hamelech continues (*ibid.* vs. 19) "ולחיותם ברעב" – and to sustain them in famine," hinting that after tzaddikim die, Hashem revives them for the eternal life of the World to Come. They never succumb to the schemes of the Angel of Death, who wishes to cause them to deny Hashem, since

their entire lives are filled only with spirituality. They are capable of withstanding all challenges, especially that of their final days. The numerical value of the letters of the word ברעב (in hunger) is equal to that of רעד (trembling). Hashem aids tzaddikim, preventing them from trembling in fear of the Angel of Death. This is an elevated level that only great tzaddikim merit.

### ———— In Summary ————

- The Angel of Death is full of eyes. When a sick person on his death bed beholds him, he dies of fright. Do the tzaddikim, who valiantly fought the *Yetzer Hara* all their lives, also fear the Angel of Death? We know that many righteous people die by a kiss (i.e., in a pleasant way).
- We learn that Ezra diminished the desire to serve idol worship, as well as the desire to act immorally. He did this by puncturing the many eyes of the inflated *Yetzer Hara*. When Bnei Yisrael engage in Torah and mitzvot, they are literally throwing burning arrows into the eyes of the Satan, puncturing them. Therefore, those who in their lifetime battled the *Yetzer Hara*, thereby shooting burning arrows at his eyes, do not fear the Angel of Death upon their death. Not only are they unafraid, but they are able even to smile, upon contemplating the fruits of their labor. They observe the results of their constant involvement in Torah and mitzvot, and see the damage they caused the Satan.
- One who pursues a life of Torah and mitzvot merits rescuing not only himself, but his entire generation, from the eyes of the Satan. But one must avoid becoming complacent. The *Yetzer Hara* constantly waits for the opportunity to cause man to stumble. For this reason Chazal advise that “one should always arouse his *Yetzer Hatov* to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*.” Through Torah and mitzvot, one weakens the power of the Satan, and dims his eyes, so that he has no influence over him.
- This is what David Hamelech requested when he said, “Guard my soul, for I am devout.” He was afraid that in his last moments, he would accede to the enticement of the *Yetzer Hara* to deny Hashem. Therefore, he begged to know the date of his death, so that he would be involved in learning Torah at that moment, preventing the Angel of Death from swaying him. In fact, most

tzaddikim die while cleaving to Hashem, without fear of the Satan. Since they see only Hashem upon their death, and they are not tempted by the Angel of Death to deny their faith, they are led immediately to eternal life.

## LACK OF TORAH STUDY STRENGTHENS THE YETZER HARA

Chazal (*Yoma* 69b; *Sanhedrin* 64a) state that in the time of Ezra, Bnei Yisrael entreated Hashem regarding the *Yetzer Hara* of idol worship. They said, “This is what destroyed the Beit Hamikdash, burned the Temple, killed the tzaddikim, and exiled the Jewish nation from their land. He is still inciting us! The reason that You gave us this inclination is only that we may receive reward for overcoming it. If so, we do not wish to accept such a challenge and we relinquish its reward.” After they fasted for three days and nights, the *Yetzer Hara* of worshipping foreign gods was delivered into their hands. They placed it in a leaden vessel and sealed it with lead. Thus, the *Yetzer Hara* for *avodah zarah* was eliminated.

From this incident, we learn that the predominant *Yetzer Hara* in the times of the second Beit Hamikdash was that of idol worship. That is why the people begged to abolish it. But the *Yetzer Hara* for immorality and that of bloodshed were not as powerful. Therefore, the *churban* was not attributed to them. However, we see that in our days the *Yetzer Hara* for immorality and that of murder are overwhelming. What is the difference between our times and theirs?

Bnei Yisrael reached great heights in the Wilderness, as our Rabbis have stated (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:1; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:3) that the Generation of the Wilderness was full of wisdom. They acquired such lofty levels because they saw and heard of the wonders of the Creator at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, and at the Splitting of the Sea, and they witnessed the Giving of the Torah. Despite this, they caused a rift in the unity of the Creator when they fashioned the Golden Calf to serve as an

idol. This rift effected untold damage, by enabling the *Yetzer Hara* to harm them. The *Yetzer Hara* influenced them to worship idols even while engaged in Torah study.

Although from the moment the Torah was given the Jewish people were always involved in Torah, we still find that from the times of the *Shoftim* until the *churban*, there were almost always those who worshipped *avodah zarah*. There was an exception to this situation during the rule of the righteous kings who persuaded the nation to avoid idol worship, such as King Yehoshafat, King Asa, and King Chizkiyahu, among others. We see that the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship in the times of the first Beit Hamikdash was very powerful. In spite of the great level of Torah learning then, it was diminished only after Ezra and his colleagues implored Hashem to remove it.

The *Yetzer Hara* of idol worship cannot be defeated by Torah study alone. But the temptation for immorality and bloodshed are surmountable through the study of Torah, as it says (*Bamidbar* 15:39-40), “And do not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray. So that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your G-d.” This teaches that remembering and performing the mitzvot sanctifies a person and distances him from illicit relationships. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:2) says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Our Sages (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:6) have expounded that this means to “distance yourself from immorality.” Wherever there are precautions for immorality, there we discover sanctity.

The *Yetzer Hara* succeeded in enticing the Generation of the Wilderness, causing them to sin specifically through idolatry rather than immorality, because when they were in Egypt they had been scrupulous in the laws of family purity (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). However, they did practice idol worship in Egypt, as it says (*Shemot Rabbah* 16:2) that the Angel of the Sea did not want to allow the sea to split for Bnei Yisrael, saying, “These (the Jews) are idol worshippers, and these (the Egyptians)

are idol worshippers.” Because of this fault, as soon as the nation ceased learning Torah, even for a short time, they immediately fell into the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*, who influenced them to worship idols, as they had in Egypt.

When Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness, as well as when we had the Beit Hamikdash, the Satan could not cause them to stumble in acts of immorality or bloodshed. This was because they spent their days in the pursuit of Torah. Yet, he was successful in trapping them with idol worship. But in our days the situation is different. We are witness to a great laxity in Torah learning; subsequently, there is a profusion of immorality and bloodshed. Our Sages (*Niddah* 13b) warn that whoever wastes seed is considered to have shed blood. The rectification of this is through Torah learning.

So vigilant were Bnei Yisrael in guarding themselves against immorality during the time of the Beit Hamikdash that Nevuzaradan commanded his troops (*Eichah Rabbah* 5:12): “The G-d of these people abhors adultery; beware of any contact with a married woman.” As soon as the women heard this, they immediately got married before his soldiers entered the city in order to avoid being defiled by them. There were three girls who tarried in doing this, and they were defiled by the enemy. On this the pasuk says (*Eichah* 5:11), “They ravaged women in Tzion; maidens in the towns of Yehudah.”

### **Every Person Counts**

As we know, the Generation of the Wilderness was the “Generation of Wisdom” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:1). What caused them to stoop so low as to sin by worshipping the Golden Calf?

This transpired after Moshe Rabbeinu delayed in returning from Har Sinai. The pasuk says (*Shemot* 32:1), “The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain.” Our Rabbis (*Shemot Rabbah* 41:7a; *Tanchuma, Beha’alotcha* 14) explain that Moshe Rabbeinu promised the

nation that he would return after forty days. When the people saw that he delayed, they came before the Elders and cried, “Moshe stipulated that he would come back after forty days. It is already six hours after the fortieth day and we do not know what has happened to him.” Then they approached Aharon and told him (*Shemot* 32:1), “Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe who brought us up from the land of Egypt – we do not know what became of him!”

The doubt that they felt regarding Moshe’s whereabouts provided an opening for the Satan to confuse them by displaying a vision of Moshe’s casket above the mountain (*Shemot Rabbah* 41:7). When they saw this they exclaimed (*Shemot* 32), “For this man Moshe who brought us up from the land of Egypt – we do not know what became of him!” They reckoned that if Moshe had indeed died, then his prophecy must have come to an end. It is inevitable that when one doubts the prophecy of a true prophet, he will eventually come to doubt Hashem Himself, G-d forbid. It is this doubt that ultimately led them to the sin of idol worship.

Subsequently, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed that Hashem forgive Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem did forgive them. He brought back His *Shechinah* to rest among them, and they ascended to great heights. Nevertheless, Moshe Rabbeinu could not eliminate the power of the *Yetzer Hara* to persuade them to serve idols. Bnei Yisrael themselves had strengthened this *Yetzer Hara*’s hold over them through the sin of the Golden Calf. Why was Moshe Rabbeinu not successful in abolishing its appeal? Because this was not dependent on him; Bnei Yisrael themselves had to eradicate the *Yetzer Hara* from their midst. Each Jew must take responsibility for this conquest. Only through Avodat Hashem, toil in Torah, and total submission to Hashem can one subdue this inclination, as did the tzaddikim and righteous kings in their days.

Maybe we can add another dimension to this concept. When Bnei Yisrael spoke disparagingly about Eretz Yisrael, in the time of the spies, this compounded their vulnerability to the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The sin of slanderous speech is equivalent to the three cardinal sins: idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed (*Arachin* 15a). Sinning with their speech strengthened the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship. The remedy for this is specifically through fulfillment of the pasuk (*Tehillim* 119:97), “O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation.”

At the time of the sin of the Golden Calf, the *Yetzer Hara* for immorality and bloodshed was not strong. However, Bnei Yisrael did not practice self restraint, contrary to the advice of Chur, and as a result succumbed to immorality and murder, as *Avot* (4:2) states, “One sin leads to another.” The pasuk says that after they sinned with the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 32:6), “ויקומו לצחק – and they got up to revel.” Our Sages (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 20) explain that this refers to immoral behavior, as it says (*Bereishit* 39:17), “לצחק בי – to sport with me,” which refers to immorality. It refers also to bloodshed, as it says (*Shmuel* II, 2:14), “יקומו נא הנערים וישחקו – לפנינו – let the young soldiers arise and duel before us!” (This depicts an act of bloodshed.)

The rush to create the Golden Calf poses a question. What loss would Bnei Yisrael have incurred by waiting an additional day to verify Moshe’s whereabouts? Why did it not occur to them that Moshe might be delayed in heaven? What caused them to hurry to create the Calf?

Upon observing that according to their calculations, Moshe had not returned on time, they did not investigate the delay, but immediately suggested (*Shemot* 32:1): “Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us.” The fact that they were so impatient indicates that they were merely looking for an excuse to be freed from serving Hashem. This unworthy desire provided the *Yetzer Hara* with the ability to plant additional doubts in their minds, which ultimately led to idol worship. This same *Yetzer Hara* retained its potency until the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash, despite the fact that they were involved in Torah study. Therefore, it was necessary for Ezra and his colleagues to diminish it.

It is well-known that the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed due to the transgression of the three cardinal sins, as the Gemara states (*Yoma* 9b), “Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of three sins which were prevalent then: idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed.” However, the people succumbed mainly to idol worship, since it presented the greatest temptation in those times.

The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*. Although the three cardinal sins were not predominant in those times, our Sages reveal that Bnei Yisrael were not innocent of these transgressions. Chazal (ibid.; *Gittin* 55b) teach that *sinat chinam* is equivalent to the three cardinal sins of idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed. Moreover, the nation lacked sufficient Torah study, as the *Navi* laments (*Yirmeyahu* 9:11), “For what reason was the Land destroyed...Because of their forsaking My Torah.” By forsaking the Torah, the Jewish people were led to transgress the three cardinal sins as well.

It is understood that baseless hatred leads to murder, as Chazal teach (*Bava Metzia* 58b) that whoever embarrasses his friend in public is considered as having killed him. This is because when he suffers humiliation, the blood drains from his face and he turns pale. Our Sages add (ibid. 59a), “Misery and shame are more bitter than death. Therefore, one should jump into a blazing fire rather than shame his friend in public.” We learn this from Tamar. Even when she was taken to be burned, she did not disclose Yehudah’s involvement in her plight, in order not to humiliate him in public (*Bereishit Rabbah* 38: 25, cf. *Rashi*).

There is a connection between immorality and murder, as it says (*Niddah* 13b), “Whoever wastes his seed, is considered to have shed blood.” Since the people began to disregard the severity of the three cardinal sins, the temptation for immorality and murder intensified. Only the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship was weakened, due to Ezra’s efforts.

It is frightening to think how easily one can fall to the level of committing the most serious transgressions. By questioning why Moshe

had not yet returned from Har Sinai, instead of considering that perhaps Hashem was delaying him, Bnei Yisrael began to doubt Moshe's prophecy. This doubt led them to idol worship, and fortified the *kelippah* with the ability to completely confuse them. They succumbed to sin, despite their righteousness and wisdom in Torah.

The account of Yehu is another example of this. He was a righteous king who served Hashem and destroyed the house of King Achav, as the pasuk states (*Melachim* II, 10:11), "Yehu then struck down all those who remained of the house of Achav in Yizre'el, and all of his notables, acquaintances, and priests, until he left him not one survivor." But, in the end, he himself sinned by serving the calf, an idol of Yeravam, as it states (*ibid.* 31), "But Yehu did not watch to follow the Torah of Hashem, G-d of Yisrael, with all his heart; he did not turn away from the sins of Yeravam that he caused Yisrael to sin."

The episode concerning Moshe's delay at Har Sinai also teaches how severe is the sin of *bitul* Torah, and the devastating effects of wasting just one moment of Torah study. When Bnei Yisrael were in the desert awaiting Moshe's return from heaven, they were involved in learning Torah. However, because they paused for a moment to inquire about Moshe Rabbeinu's delay, they fell to the level of fashioning the Golden Calf. They enabled the *kelippah* to introduce the alluring *Yetzer Hara* for idolatry, which proceeded to corrupt them persistently for many generations, until the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

Since Bnei Yisrael were learning Torah when the idea of creating the Golden Calf arose, the *Yetzer Hara* for idolatry could never be defeated by Torah learning alone. Thus the temptation for serving idols remained strong throughout the entire period of the first Beit Hamikdash. Had they succeeded in abolishing it, they would have achieved their *tikkun*. Alas, in their iniquity, they continued learning Torah while pursuing idol worship at the same time.

King Achav illustrates this paradox. He was terribly wicked and served idols. Nonetheless, when the King of Aram demanded that the Jews deliver the Sefer Torah into his hands, he refused. The pasuk states that the King of Aram sent a message to King Achav (*Melachim I*, 20:6), “And it shall be that everything precious in your eyes, they will place in their hands.” Rashi explains that this refers to the precious Torah scrolls, as *Tehillim* states (19:11): “They are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold.” Achav and his ministers all refused to surrender the Sefer Torah (even though they served idols), and even waged war in order to preserve the esteem of the Sefer Torah. They went out to battle against the king of Aram with much self-sacrifice in order to uphold the glory of the Torah.

Nevertheless, Achav remained an idol worshipper. King Menashe also worshipped idols with much fervor, as he explained to Rav Ashi in a dream (*Sanhedrin* 102a), “Had you been living in my times, you would have run to serve idols.” Yeravam ben Nevat placed golden calves on the roads leading to Yerushalayim so that the tribes should not ascend for the festivals but worship idols instead (*Shabbat* 56a). This was possible because the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship was so strong in their days. The *Yetzer Hara* derived his tremendous power to influence later generations to serve false gods from the sin of the Golden Calf, which took place at the very time that Moshe Rabbeinu was bringing down the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

We can learn from this that a person must always cleave to Hashem and His holy Torah. In this way, he will be spared from the *Yetzer Hara*, as is hinted by the pasuk (*Devarim* 4:4), “But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d – you are all alive today.” This teaches that through cleaving to Hashem by studying Torah, which is referred to as “life” (*Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 34:10), a person merits the blissful life of eternity. Likewise, the opposite is true; if one interrupts his learning, he loses his eternal life, G-d forbid.

Concerning this matter, we beseech Hashem in our Morning Prayers, “Light up our eyes in Your Torah, and bind our hearts with Your mitzvot, and unite our hearts to love and fear Your Name.” This denotes that we acquire love and fear of Hashem by engaging in Torah learning and mitzvah observance, for this is the purpose and essence of our lives.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal relate that Ezra and his colleagues entreated Hashem that Bnei Yisrael should be spared from the *Yetzer Hara* of idol worship. They did not request to eliminate the *Yetzer Hara* for immorality nor that of bloodshed, since these inclinations were not so strong at the time. In our days, however, immorality and bloodshed are widespread. Why is this so, when we see an upsurge in Torah study? Isn’t Torah learning a defense against them?
- When Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, although they were the “Generation of Wisdom,” they did not desist from idol worship. This led to their eventual decline to the level of serving the Golden Calf. This gave the *Yetzer Hara* of idol worship the ability to dominate them throughout the generations. Despite being cleansed of this impurity at the Giving of the Torah, after they sinned with the Golden Calf, this negative force was able to take hold of them once more, and they were not diligent in eradicating it from within themselves. However, the sins of immorality and bloodshed were kept under check through diligence in Torah study.
- From here we learn the gravity of wasting time that could be used for learning Torah. One is held liable for every moment wasted. Therefore, one should always cleave to Hashem and His Torah. Only through continuous Torah study in purity, without distractions and breaks, can one gain power over the *Yetzer Hara*, and merit closeness to Hashem. Thus, he earns everlasting life in the World to Come.

### A Practical Lesson

Torah study in purity can remove all sins from a person, because the Torah is our shield and protection. One should be continuously occupied

in Torah study. It is prohibited to waste even one moment of learning. One should also be careful not to converse excessively with women, but use his time for learning. Without Torah study, a person can decline to the level of committing the three cardinal sins: idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed. One should toil in Torah every single moment. In this manner, he will emerge victorious over his *Yetzer Hara* and merit being attached to Hashem in eternal life.

## DRAGGING THE YETZER HARA AWAY

Chazal tell us (*Sukkah* 52b; *Zohar* I, 190a), “If this degenerate one encounters you, drag him to the Beit Hamidrash. If he is made of stone, he will soften; if he is made of iron, he will shatter.” Rashi explains that this is referring to the *Yetzer Hara*.

The mere fact that the *Yetzer Hara* encounters a person in the street is an indication that something is amiss. Had his thoughts been pure and constantly bound to Hashem, he would not have been faced with the *Yetzer Hara*. He would have had no need at all to draw him to the Beit Hamidrash. But now that the *Yetzer Hara* has encountered him, he is enjoined to bring him to the Beit Hamidrash in order to prevent the *Yetzer Hara* from causing irreparable harm.

An encounter with the *Yetzer Hara* can hurt even tzaddikim. If the tzaddik succeeds in overcoming him, he can reach great spiritual heights. The *Zohar* (II, 163a) states that tzaddikim merit the tremendous heavenly treasures which await them in the World to Come by means of battling with the *Yetzer Hara*. Still, it is preferable not to be tested by the Satan, because this type of encounter is always injurious.

The pasuk in Bamidbar (8:2) says, “When you kindle the lamps.” The lamps refer to the mitzvot, as Mishlei (6:23) explains: “For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light.” This teaches that

through the mitzvot which Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael, man can ascend to the level of “toward the face of the Menorah” (*Bamidbar* 8:2). The Menorah refers to the *Shechinah*, which a person can face, so to speak. He can reach such a high level of closeness to Hashem that the *Yetzer Hara* will be unable to exert any influence over him at all, even if he were to encounter him. However, in order to arrive at this level, one must exert himself tremendously in Torah and Avodat Hashem, becoming a complete tzaddik, over whom the *Yetzer Hara* has no control whatsoever (*Zohar* II, 117b).

However, “if this degenerate one encounters you,” know that the encounter is not at all by coincidence, but rather, it is an indication that you have some fault which needs to be rectified. Otherwise, the *Yetzer Hara* would not have met up with you. Since “the consequence of a sin is a sin” (*Avot* 4:2) you have brought upon yourself this meeting with the *Yetzer Hara*, who now wishes to entice you further.

In order to avoid further sin, you must bring him to the Beit Hamidrash. There, he certainly won’t be able to disturb you, in the merit of the fire of Torah which is found there. Chazal (*Mechilta*, *Yitro* 19:18) describe the Torah as fire that was given in fire, as it says (*Devarim* 33:2), “From His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them.” By means of the fire of the Torah learned within the Beit Hamidrash, you will succeed in weakening the *Yetzer Hara* once and for all.

Unfortunately, even if one did not previously sin, and even if one is a tzaddik, the *Yetzer Hara* can still appear to him. His goal is to disturb one’s Avodat Hashem. The pasuk (*Shmuel* II, 23:3) says, “A righteous one, who rules through the fear of G-d.” Chazal (*Mo’ed Katan* 16b) expound on this: Shmuel Hanavi said, “The Rock of Yisrael has spoken to me: I rule over men. Who rules over Me? A tzaddik rules over Me.”

We can also say that when a mitzvah is done without exertion, it indicates to the *Yetzer Hara* a measure of weakness in one’s Torah learning. The Satan comes to exploit this weakness. For this reason, he is

called “degenerate,” as he takes advantage of a person’s weakness. Only by means of dragging him to the Beit Hamidrash and toiling in Torah, can a person overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, as it says (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow My decrees.” Chazal expounded (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra, remez* 671), “That you may toil in Torah.” In this manner, you will receive renewed energies to fight the war of the *Yetzer Hara*, and he will have no dominion over you. You will overcome him and emerge victorious.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal state, “If this degenerate one encounters you, drag Him to the Beit Hamidrash.” They emphasize that the *Yetzer Hara* does not encounter a person by chance. Rather, it is a sign that one has previously transgressed a sin, and consequently another sin is awaiting him. Alternatively, he may have performed a mitzvah incompletely, and the *Yetzer Hara* detected signs of apathy which now invite further decline.
- The encounter with the *Yetzer Hara* is very real. He must be drawn to the Beit Hamidrash. This will reduce the damage wrought by this encounter. Through exerting oneself in Torah, *avodah*, and mitzvah observance, one can subdue his *Yetzer Hara*. Only by dragging the *Yetzer Hara* to the Beit Hamidrash, where the fire of Torah burns brightly, can one conquer him.

# AVEIROT



## LASHON HARA

“You shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Israel” (*Bamidbar* 32:22). Our Sages learn from here that one should ensure that he is blameless in the eyes of people, as well as in the eyes of Hashem. He should steer clear of being the topic of conversation and make sure to have a clean reputation, above all suspicion (*Mishnah Shekalim*).

If a person did all in his power to prove his innocence, yet people still insist on disparaging him, this is *lashon hara*. The Chafetz Chaim explains (*Hilchot Issurei Rechilut* 6) that *lashon hara* involves many transgressions, among them: “You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people” (*Vayikra* 19:16). Furthermore, people who speak *lashon hara* place themselves in danger, as we are taught that one who suspects the innocent is harmed (*Shabbat* 97a; *Yoma* 19b; *Tanchuma, Metzora* 4).

The world at large is not aware of the severity of the sin of *lashon hara*. Many communities have been destroyed in the wake of this evil, as it causes hatred and dissension. The Generation of the Flood illustrates the devastation caused by sins between man and his fellow. The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 6:11), “And the earth had become filled with robbery.” Chazal expound that “their decree was sealed only after they became involved in stealing” (*Sanhedrin* 108a; *Pesikta Zuta Bereishit* 6:5; *Zohar* I, 67a). The inhabitants of Sodom and Amorrhah were likewise wiped out due to interpersonal sins. The pasuk tells us (*Bereishit* 13:13): “Now the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful toward Hashem exceedingly.” Chazal explain (*Sanhedrin* 109a), “Wicked in body and sinful in money matters.”

Moreover, Chazal tell us (*Yevamot* 62b) that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students, from Givat until Antipras, and they all died within the same period of time. This was because they didn't honor each other sufficiently. Similarly, the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed on account of *sinat chinam* and *lashon hara*, which were prevalent at that time even though the people were tremendously knowledgeable in Torah knowledge and performed many mitzvot (*Yoma* 9b; *Yerushalmi*, *Yoma* 1:5).

*Sinat chinam* refers specifically to the sin of *lashon hara*, which is a result of hatred. The magnitude of the punishment of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash indicates that it came as a result of evil speech. This is as the Gemara (*Yoma* 9b) ends: "...This is in order to teach you that *sinat chinam* is equivalent to the three cardinal sins: idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed."

The source of the exile was the sin of the spies, which took place many generations previously. Tehillim states (106:26-27), "Then He lifted up His hand against them, to cast them...among the nations." Rashi explains, "At that time, the destruction of the second Temple was decreed upon them, as they cried on the eve of the ninth of Av. Hashem said, 'They cried for naught; I will establish a crying for generations.'" We know that the sin of the spies was their derogatory speech about Eretz Yisrael (*Arachin* 15a).

Not only were the spies themselves punished, but Bnei Yisrael, who listened and believed their report, were likewise punished, and were banned from entering the Land (*Bamidbar* 14:37, 29). It was at that time that the future exile was decreed upon them. According to this, we can understand the statement of Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:10), "*Lashon hara* kills three people: the speaker, the one who accepts the report, and the one spoken about." Therefore, the spies were punished, as well as Bnei Yisrael, who accepted their words. Eretz Yisrael, about which they spoke, was also punished, by being laid to waste in the times of the Babylonians and the Romans.

This teaches us an awesome lesson. If Eretz Yisrael, a piece of land comprised of trees and stones, was punished on account of the *lashon hara* spoken about it, how much more so is the damage caused when one speaks against one's fellow man. Sometimes, by one sentence of evil speech a person can bring havoc to an entire family. His punishment will certainly be extremely severe, in this world as well as the Next.

Despite being informed of the gravity of this sin in the eyes of Hashem, and knowing that it postpones the *geulah*, we still find that it is quite common. We see that particularly on Shabbat and the holidays, when women are at leisure, they meet with their friends and chat about all and varied topics. Without even realizing it, they transgress many laws of forbidden speech.

The *Navi* laments this state of affairs by saying (*Yeshayahu* 1:14), “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me.” Hashem detests the holidays, if, instead of being used as catalysts for love and unity, they become the means of advancing *lashon hara* and discord. The Vilna Gaon wrote in a letter to his wife and daughter that it was preferable for them to refrain from going to the synagogue, since they would see the women there dressed in all their finery, which naturally causes feelings of envy and jealousy. These are the precursors of *lashon hara*.

In our days, we see men in the Beit Hakeneset, who, instead of greeting one another with “Shabbat Shalom” look at each other with contempt, and speak *lashon hara* about each other. What would the Vilna Gaon say about them? That they should also refrain from coming to the synagogue?!

### **Unity: A Shield against Lashon Hara**

We have already mentioned the tremendous power of unity. An example is the generation of Achav, who were tremendously wicked, denying the G-d of Israel (*Sanhedrin* 102b). Yet, whenever they waged war, they emerged victorious because they had no slanderers among them

(*Devarim Rabbah* 5:6). Yirmeyahu laments (9:11-12), “For what reason did the Land perish? But Hashem has said, ‘Because they forsook My Torah.’” Chazal have difficulty understanding this. Prior to the destruction, Bnei Yisrael worshipped idols. How could the people keep the Torah if they did not believe in Hashem?” (*Yerushalmi Chagigah* 1:7a; *Kallah* 8)

The meaning is as follows. Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, “Know that the Torah symbolizes unity among the people. When they keep the Torah, there is harmony among them. In that case, I don’t mind that they forsake Me.” This is as Hoshea (4:17) states, “Ephraim is attached to idols; let him be.” Our Sages expound (*Kallah* 8) that as long as the people were attached to their idols, “unified” with them, they should be left alone and not punished. This was the case in the generation of Achav.

How did they attain such unity? By honoring the Torah. This is illustrated by the episode with Ben-hadad, king of Aram (*Melachim* I, 20:5-6), “Thus spoke Ben-hadad...because at this time tomorrow, I shall send my servants to you (Achav), and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and it shall be that everything precious in your eyes, they will place in their hands and take.” Rashi explains that “everything precious in your eyes” refers to the Sefer Torah. But after conferring with the Elders, Achav rejected this condition, although he denied Hashem’s presence! When it came to delivering the Sefer Torah into the hands of the enemy, he refused, even though it meant going out to battle and risking lives. In this merit, Hashem allowed Achav to gain victory over the king of Aram.

Chazal teach (*Pesachim* 50a), “A person should always engage in Torah study for ulterior motives, for ultimately he will study for its own sake.” Achav is an example of this. He learned Torah for personal reasons, yet the Torah was beloved to him, and he protected it. The Torah is what unified the nation. This was the greatness of Achav, king of Israel. Alas, the *Yetzer Hara* for *avodah zarah* was so very strong that he and his generation were unable to withstand it.

We find today that there are “rabbis” who view themselves as great scholars and *yirei Shamayim*. Woe to the one who dares to insult them! Yet, they do not hesitate to disparage others. On the contrary, they take pleasure in hearing of another’s shortcomings. Even if the story in circulation is merely a rumor, and one could judge the person favorably, these people refrain from doing so. They are unaware of how greatly they harm their Divine image by acting in this manner. They also bring untold harm to the world by their *lashon hara*. Furthermore, when simple people take note of an esteemed “rabbi” speaking derogatorily of others, they learn to behave similarly. These rabbis cause others to sin by their actions, *rachmana litzlan*, instead of teaching them proper behavior.

At a Torah *shiur*, someone may bring up a question regarding the deeds of another person. This initiates a discussion full of *lashon hara*. The reward the people could have received for coming to hear words of Torah has instead been exchanged for the punishment caused by speaking *lashon hara*.

A man approached me with the following question. He attends a weekly Torah *shiur*. Often, during the course of the lecture, he hears words of *lashon hara* about righteous, upright people. Furthermore, the owner of the house where the *shiur* takes place is a *ba’alat teshuvah*, who spouts words of scorn and hate. He told me that he had no interest in continuing to attend the *shiur*, but wanted to know whether it was correct for him to stop going.

I told him that he is forbidden from attending the *shiur*. I wondered how this woman could believe that her repentance would be accepted on High, when she herself judged others negatively, speaking *lashon hara* and causing others to sin. Instead of this *shiur* bringing an abundance of blessing to the world, the sin of the *lashon hara* spoken there causes great impurity and brings harsh decrees upon the world.

It is surprising to observe people who see themselves as *yirei Shamayim*, who spread Torah and bring others to teshuvah, themselves

transgressing the sin of *lashon hara*. When suffering befalls them, they cry out to Hashem to help them. Little do they realize that as long as they don't help themselves, asking forgiveness from those whom they have disparaged, Hashem is unable to help them. Sins between man and his fellow require that one obtain forgiveness of one's fellow before obtaining forgiveness from Hashem (*Yoma* 85b).

Chazal state (*Tikkunei Zohar* 5:142a) that a person dies before his time due to the sin of *lashon hara*. Furthermore, as soon as a person begins his diatribe, the spirit appointed to punish slanderers brings death and destruction in the world. Likewise, the tefillot of one who speaks *lashon hara* do not come before Hashem (ibid. III, 53a). If someone judges his fellow man negatively, he is judged that way on High. Conversely, if someone judges his fellow man favorably, he is judged favorably on High.

### **“You Shall not be a Gossipmonger among Your People”**

Dear brothers, prevent yourselves from speaking *lashon hara*, even things that are true, which also come under the category of *lashon hara* (*Chafetz Chaim, Hilchot Issurei Lashon Hara* 1:1). By speaking *lashon hara*, one habituates himself to telling lies, as well. One who speaks *lashon hara* does so in order that the listeners should hate the subject of his speech. This causes the antithesis of unity. Even if we observe Torah scholars disparaging one another, we are forbidden from participating in the feud. One who fears the word of Hashem will distance himself from speaking negatively about any of the Gedolei Yisrael.

The sefer *Likutei Moharan* states: Know that *lashon hara* damages the quality of humility. Because of the *lashon hara* that people speak, it is difficult for the righteous to maintain their humility. Derogatory speech separates humility from wisdom, and humility without wisdom is no humility at all, since there is no point in being humble about something foolish.

Humility is the great quality for which Moshe Rabbeinu was praised. He was so self-effacing that even *lashon hara* did not affect him. We find that

Miriam spoke negatively about her brother (*Bamidbar* 12:1), yet he was so humble that he remained oblivious to it. When simple people talk *lashon hara*, they affect even the tzaddikim. The solution to this ailment is for great people to make peace among themselves, and for others to be careful with their speech. In this way, unity will reign.

*Lashon hara* causes others to view the subject in a negative and scornful light. In this manner, the speaker of the *lashon hara* damages the Divine spark inherent in his fellow Jew, the handiwork of Hashem for which the world was created. The Gemara tells us that man was created single in order to teach us that one who sheds the blood of a Jew is considered to have destroyed the entire world (*Sanhedrin* 37a). One who speaks *lashon hara* must ask forgiveness before everyone to whom he said his disparaging words. If not, his sin will escort him to the grave. He will have to give an accounting for this, even if he is a great man.

Exile is a punishment for *lashon hara*, as seen in the case of Kayin (*Bereishit* 4:12). He was decreed to become “a vagrant and a wanderer on earth.” His previous question (*ibid.* 4:9), “Am I my brother’s keeper?” was *lashon hara*. His statement implied that he hated Hevel to such an extent that he could not bear his presence.

Although Kayin did repent his actions, he was decreed to be exiled. The sin of *lashon hara* is exceedingly severe. The pasuk states (*ibid.* 4:12), “נע, ונד תהיה בארץ”. The word נע (you shall wander) is composed of the last letters of the words לשון הרע. For the sin of evil speech, *galut* is decreed upon a person. This is measure for measure. Just as the slanderer wanted to belittle the subject of his speech in the eyes of people, so that they will neither give him his due respect nor trust him, so will he be treated. He will wander from place to place. No one will recognize him, and therefore no one will trust him. His words will not earn him respect, and he will be despised in the eyes of people.

In truth, *lashon hara* is one of the gravest sins. This is because it leads to other sins, as well. It causes dissention, *rechilus*, painning others with

words, embarrassing others, and blackening another's reputation. It may even cause bloodshed. Chazal teach (*Sifri, Shoftim* 44) that a person who transgressed the prohibition of "You shall not hate your brother" (*Vayikra* 19:17) will eventually transgress "You shall not kill" (*Shemot* 20:13).

This progression is described later in the Torah (*Devarim* 19:11): "But if there will be a man who hates his fellow, and ambushes him and rises up against him and strikes him mortally and he dies." Kayin killed Hevel because of the baseless hatred he harbored toward him. This indicates that all of the world's suffering comes as a result of baseless hatred. Let us gird ourselves with strength against this epidemic, abandoning hatred and envy, and abstain from speaking *lashon hara*. In this way, we will merit greeting Mashiach, speedily in our days, Amen.

### ———— In Summary ————

- "You shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Israel." One should try his best to be above suspicion. If he is suspected wrongly, this is a form of *lashon hara*.
- The sin of *lashon hara* is very grave, as it brings other sins in its wake. It causes dissention and hatred. We find that the Generation of the Flood was punished on account of stealing, because there was *lashon hara* and disunity among them. The people of Sodom were likewise punished for that reason. The disciples of Rabbi Akiva perished between Pesach and Shavuot, because they did not treat each other with enough respect. Moreover, the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed on account of *sinat chinam*, which is a precursor to *lashon hara*.
- The spies spoke negatively about Eretz Yisrael. They were punished, and the entire nation, who accepted their words, were prohibited from entering the Land. It was at that time that the ultimate decree of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash was passed. Eretz Yisrael itself, the subject of the slander, was punished by being laid to waste. *Lashon hara* kills three people: the one who spoke it, the one who accepted it, and the one spoken about. If the consequence for speaking against the Land, an inanimate object, was so great, how much more careful should we be to avoid speaking negatively about a person.

- The punishment for this sin is *galut*, as we see that Kayin, who spoke disparagingly about his brother, Hevel, was sent out of the Garden, to be a wanderer. Even his teshuvah was unable to prevent the consequence of the *lashon hara* that he spoke.

## THE SEVERITY OF SIN AND BENEFIT OF TESHUVAH

Chazal teach us that Adam Harishon was originally very great, able to see from one end of the world to the other. When he sinned, Hashem lessened his stature, limiting his vision (*Chagigah* 12a). Initially, he was as great as an angel; so much so that the angels themselves thought he was one of them (*Sanhedrin* 59b). They served him and even considered him to be as eminent as Hashem Himself. They wanted to call him “holy” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 8:9). This was because of his shining countenance, which lit up the entire world.

But after he sinned, Hashem decreased his status and removed his radiance. Kohelet says (8:1), “And the boldness of his face is transformed.” Furthermore, he was banished from Gan Eden, losing all prominence. This was all because of one “small mitzvah” which he was given and transgressed (*Tanchuma, Shemini* 8).

The commandment was called “small” because he had no *Yetzer Hara* prior to this sin (*Zohar* I, 36b). Surely, for someone who was the handiwork of Hashem Himself, this command was easy to keep (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:14).

This illustrates that just as one can attain his world in an instant (*Avodah Zarah* 17a), so, too, can a person lose his entire world in an instant. One may labor all his life in serving Hashem, yet in a mere moment, he can lose it all. This is because just like someone creates an advocate on High each time he does a mitzvah (*Zohar* II, 32b), so, too,

when he sins, he creates a prosecuting angel, who ascends and speaks accusingly about him (*Avot* 4:11).

One should take this message to heart. Before he is about to sin, he should picture how he will look in the World to Come. Would he like all of his representatives to be angels of prosecution, created by the myriad sins which he had committed?! In truth, a person who constantly sins has no right to exist in this world, as he is ruining the precious deposit granted him: his *neshamah*. However, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in His infinite mercy, waits patiently to see if the person will do teshuvah.

In the tefillah “He Who lights up the world and its inhabitants with compassion,” we emphasize this trait of Hashem. He, in His great mercy, uplifts the neglected *neshamot*, which are compared to light. The pasuk says, (*Bereishit* 1:3), “G-d said, ‘Let there be light.’” The Arizal comments that there are some *neshamot* that do not warrant survival either in this world or in the Next, yet, Hashem, in His mercy, continues to sustain them.

For this reason, one should distance himself from sin as from an arrow. After one transgresses, it becomes much more difficult to extricate himself from the net of sin, as our Sages teach, “The consequence of a sin is a sin” (*Avot* 4:2; *Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 1). If a person would just consider that it is Hashem Who gives him the strength to move his limbs, etc., he would not dare to contemplate sinning with the very gifts he was given! This thought should help one distance himself from sin.

In truth, our situation is much more serious than that of Adam Harishon after the sin. He sinned only once, and did teshuvah after he was punished (*Eiruvim* 18b; *Zohar* III, 76b). How many sins are we guilty of? How often do we need to be cast away from Hashem’s Presence in order to learn our lesson and repent properly?!

Chazal explain the pasuk (*Mishlei* 10:3) “Hashem will not bring hunger upon the souls of the righteous” to refer to Adam Harishon. All future

tzaddikim will confront him before their deaths, stating, “You brought the death sentence upon us!” To which he will respond, “I have one sin on my hands; among you there is no one who has less than four sins.”

Only by doing complete teshuvah can one merit to be saved and remain in the presence of Hashem Yitbarach. We find that when Bnei Yisrael were suffering in Mitzrayim, they returned to Hashem, and recited Tehillim. Only then does the pasuk state (*Shemot* 2:23), “Their outcry...went up to G-d.” they prayed from the depths of their hearts that they be spared the trials of Egypt. Certainly, without true repentance and words of Tehillim, they would not have merited salvation. Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:13; *Pesikta Rabbati* 1:3) that the chapter beginning “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day” (*Tehillim* 92) was originated by Adam Harishon after he sinned. It is likely that Bnei Yisrael prayed this chapter in Mitzrayim. This is hinted to by the fact that the last letters of the words (*Shemot* 1:1), “וּאלֹהֵי שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים – And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt” spell the word תהלים (Tehillim).

One should distance himself from sin in order to maintain his connection with Hashem. For at the time a person sins, he is prevented from entering into the domain of Hashem; he also causes the *Shechinah* to be exiled (*Tikkunei Zohar* 64:95b). The *Shechinah* stays with Bnei Yisrael wherever they are exiled, in order to protect them (*Megillah* 29a). But one who sins distances the *Shechinah* from the place where he is, which may cause many evil decrees to happen there, without anyone realizing why.

The true reason for these disasters is the sin of this specific individual. Others will eventually charge him with driving the *Shechinah* from their midst. Only by doing teshuvah can a person hope to fill the void created by the departure of the *Shechinah*. This awakening of repentance down below arouses an awakening Above to gain the person forgiveness and return to the presence of Hashem (*Zohar* I, 184a).

## — In Summary —

- Adam Harishon was tremendously great. So much so, that the angels served him, considering him a god. But because of a “small mitzvah” which he transgressed, he was demoted from his prominence. This teaches how important it is to be scrupulous in doing all mitzvot perfectly.
- Every sin creates a prosecuting angel. A person will receive a most unpleasant surprise upon his arrival at the Heavenly Court, to be greeted by an entourage of prosecuting angels.
- Hashem, in His great mercy, lights up the forgotten *neshamot*, when they do teshuvah. Adam Harishon sinned only once, but Bnei Yisrael have too many sins to count. Only by means of teshuvah and tefillah can one return to Hashem.
- One must make every effort not to sin, for sin he pushes away the *Shechinah*. By doing teshuvah one is once again accepted into the presence of Hashem.

## THE EXACTING MEASURE OF DIVINE JUSTICE

In the Selichot prayers of Erev Rosh Hashanah, we ask, “Do not bring us to justice, for no living being can be justified before You.”

This seems difficult to understand. How could a person sin and then demand not to be brought to justice? If he repented, there is nothing for him to worry about, for he will certainly emerge innocent. This is as Reish Lakish states (*Yoma* 86b), “Great is teshuvah, for sins committed purposely become merits.” And if he didn’t repent, how does he have the brazenness to ask for acquittal while he is still sinning?

Perhaps we can answer with the following thought. There are seven things which are hidden from mankind: The day of death, the day of the redemption, the depth of judgment, etc. (*Pesachim* 54b). Just as no one knows when he will die, so, too, no one knows the gravity of the judgment that Hashem will demand from people for the sins which they have no

recollection of committing. Since they do not remember having done these sins, they certainly will not remember to repent for them. The depth of punishment for such sins is one of the things which are hidden from man.

The significance of this judgment is tremendous. If, for example, a person did not take his Torah learning seriously, he may commit a minor offense without even realizing it. This minor offense brings another sin in its wake, as our Sages say (*Avot* 4:2), “The consequence of a sin is a sin.” This teaches that if a person finds himself sinning, it is an indication that the *Yetzer Hara* already “tripped him up” in the past, without his being aware of it. Obviously, he did not repent for that sin, since it was hidden from him. This brought about the present sin.

Thus, a person will do teshuvah only for the latter offense, of which he is aware. But he will never repent for the original sin, as he is totally oblivious to it. For this, he will be held responsible. He won’t even understand what is demanded of him. This is called the “depth of justice.”

David Hamelech, and other tzaddikim throughout the generations, prayed specifically to be spared this awesome level of justice. They beseeched Hashem not to confront them with previous sins of which they were completely unaware, due to their being so small.

Chazal tell us that Hashem is scrupulous with His righteous ones, to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b). Furthermore, we are told that whoever says that Hashem looks away, will have his life overlooked. Therefore, we pray that Hashem enlighten us so that we should be sensitive to the tiniest forms of sin, and thus refrain from doing them. If we did fall in such areas in the past, we ask to be made aware of these minute sins, so that we may do teshuvah for them.

Rabbi Eliezer the Great states (*Arachin* 17a), “If Hashem had brought Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov to justice, they would not have been able to withstand the rebuke, as it says (*Shmuel* I, 12:7), ‘And now, stand erect,

and I shall enter into judgment with you before Hashem, concerning all the righteous deeds of Hashem that He has done with you and with your forefathers.” Rashi (ibid.) explains that this refers to rebuke, for Shmuel was rebuking Bnei Yisrael for their deeds.

This statement is extremely surprising. How can we dare to say that the Avot, who withstood terrible trials, would not be able to face the day of rebuke, had Hashem brought them to judgment?! They literally vanquished their *Yetzer Hara*, as it states (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit, remez 106*), “There were seven people who were not under the control of the *Yetzer Hara*, the three Avot, etc.” Their *zechut* brings merit to Bnei Yisrael in every generation. This seems to contradict what Rabbi Eliezer says.

The lesson learned from this is astounding. Even if a person did a mitzvah completely for the sake of Heaven, but was capable of doing it more perfectly, he will be held responsible for not having done it to the best of his ability. He will not be held blameworthy if he tried his best. But if not, he will be shown an act that he did more perfectly, which will indict him for not acting in the best way possible in this case.

Therefore, one must weigh all his actions thoroughly before doing them, especially those related to mitzvot. One should familiarize himself with all the details of the halachot. Otherwise, he may easily be judged for not fulfilling the mitzvot to perfection.

## **Woe to Us on the Day of Judgment and the Day of Rebuke**

Rabbi Abahu asked in the name of Rabbi Elazar (*Nedarim 32a*), “Why was Avraham Avinu punished by having his children enslaved in Egypt for 210 years? Because he took *talmidei chachamim* and sent them to war instead of leaving them in the camp to learn Torah.”

This is quite astounding. Avraham Avinu was prepared to risk his life for the mitzvah of redeeming captives, in order to later bring them under the wings of the *Shechinah*. In order to succeed in this mission, he

enlisted the help of his disciples (*Bereishit* 14:14), who had been educated by him and were involved in Torah day and night. He hoped that the merit of their Torah study would protect them in war.

Although Avraham thought that he was involved in the great mitzvah of redeeming captives, making a *kiddush Hashem* in the world, Hashem judged him scrupulously and found him culpable. He should have enlisted others to do the fighting, allowing the Torah scholars to remain at their post. Avraham's great merit would have ensured that the captives would have been saved by miraculous means. Thus, Avraham was punished by having his children enslaved in Egypt for 210 years.

This is truly astounding. Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:10-11), "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment; woe to us from the day of rebuke." With every good deed that Avraham Avinu did, which in our day would be considered a tremendous mitzvah, Hashem was exacting as with a fine-toothed comb. Hashem had promised Avraham that He would provide him protection wherever he would be. Thus it was wrong for him to have taken Torah scholars with him to war, thereby causing a lack of Torah study.

Therefore, even though Avraham Avinu's intentions were for the sake of Heaven, he was punished. He specifically brought along his disciples to fight the war, in order to educate them and bring them closer to Hashem. Yet he was punished for this, and his children were enslaved in Egypt.

It is not difficult to imagine Avraham Avinu's anguish at hearing the depth of justice against him. A person should be extremely careful to avoid something that even merely resembles a sin. This is what we mean when we pray "Do not bring us to judgment." We ask that Hashem enlighten us so that we should do only good and not err, *chalilah*.

Every day we pray to Hashem, "to enlighten our eyes with Your Torah, attach our hearts to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name." After this, we say, "and may we not feel shame for

all eternity.” This is the way to fulfill the mitzvot perfectly. For when one loves and fears Hashem, and is enlightened through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, then he will keep each mitzvah in the most perfect way. We preface the words “and enlighten our eyes with Your Torah” to the words “attach our hearts to love and fear Your Name.” This is because when one is enlightened as to how to keep the mitzvot properly, then he will fulfill them with true love and fear of Hashem, unifying His holy Name.

In the future, Hashem will show a person all the deeds that he did in his lifetime, as it says (*Amos 4:13*), “And He will inform a person of every conversation.” Chazal explain (*Chagigah 8*) that this includes even the light banter that a man makes with his wife at the time of intimacy. This should encourage a person to be particularly careful about what he says at such a time. It may be difficult for a man to control himself when his wife becomes pure once again. He may have found the long wait difficult to bear, or he may have just returned from being away from home for a protracted period of time. Nevertheless, he should be careful not to let slip inappropriate expressions, so that he should not disconnect his thoughts from Hashem even at this time. Even though the *Yetzer Hara* is particularly strong at such a moment, he should endeavor to perform this mitzvah in purity according to its laws.

At the time of judgment, Hashem will not only show a person what he said to his wife, but also the underlying reason behind each inappropriate statement. He will also be shown the tremendous blessings that were showered upon himself and the whole world when he was able to maintain his connection to Hashem and direct his thoughts toward Him at that time. Woe unto us that we have sinned! How will we be able to greet our Master?

Chazal tell us that Rabbi Eliezer acted with tremendous fear of Heaven when he had marital relations with his wife. He tried his utmost to cleave to Hashem even then, not deriving any personal pleasure from the act (*Nedarim 20b*). Certainly, reaching such a high level demands much preparation. Without preparation, the danger of falling is very great.

## The Exacting Measure of Divine Justice for Every Moment and for Every Deed

The Chazon Ish writes (*Emunah U'Vitachon* 3:9) in the name of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, the following. People are careful to avoid eating meat which is *treif* or mixtures of milk and meat; such a thing would be disgusting to them. Yet, in matters between man and his fellow, people transgress without batting an eye. They have no fear of sin in such issues. They even try to evade litigations in these matters. But the sin of stealing is more severe than that of eating forbidden foods. Even Yom Kippur cannot atone for sins between man and his fellow man. Any item that one has in his possession that does not belong to him is considered stolen. Yet, because people are not accustomed to be meticulous in such matters, they fail to realize that they will be judged for them.

The main causes of sin are force of habit and the lack of knowledge of the severity of the act and its judgment. When one contemplates these points, he will surely be careful in all that he does. He will certainly ask for mercy on the Day of Judgment.

If a person did not learn Torah or failed to pray with proper *kavanah* for an entire day, he will surely repent for his wrongdoing. However, when he arrives at the Heavenly Court to give an accounting for all his deeds, he will be judged not only for the day as a whole, but for each and every moment that passed in *bitul* Torah, and for every letter of prayer that was not uttered with proper intent.

I have seen sefarim which state this idea. Each and every minute that one could have spent learning is accounted for. I thought of adding that people don't appreciate how severe the sin of *bitul* Torah really is. They don't realize that they could have spent this time writing Torah insights, which are now lost to the world forever.

These Torah insights stand up, as it were, and accuse him for not making them public knowledge. Because of his laziness, people cannot

enjoy these insights. They would have provided, so to speak, a crown for the Creator, through which the entire world would be sustained and protected. Instead, he brought death and destruction upon the world. Who knows? Maybe, because of him, Jewish lives were cut short. These thoughts are quite terrifying. Therefore, one must do teshuvah for each and every moment of time wasted, not just for the day as a whole.

How frightening it is to contemplate the all-encompassing breadth of justice. Great suffering comes upon a person just for the sin of *bitul* Torah. Chazal state (*Berachot* 5a), “If a person sees suffering come upon him, let him check his actions. If he checked, but did not find anything, he should ascribe his suffering to *bitul* Torah.” *Bitul* Torah, as stated, can mean deviating from Torah study for even a moment.

A person could be sitting all day long, engrossed in Torah study, yet despite this, have many hardships. When he examines his deeds, he finds no fault to which he could ascribe the suffering he is undergoing. However, he fails to realize that he may be culpable for a moment of digression from learning, when his mind wandered to a different topic. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is punctilious with him in this world, to a hairsbreadth.

Likewise, a yeshiva student should know that if he is capable of spending another few years, or even some extra months or days, in yeshiva, yet he does not take advantage of the opportunity to learn our holy Torah, he will be held responsible in *Shamayim* for the time that he could have spent learning, even for just a minute. How much more liable will he be held if he causes others to waste their time when they should be learning.

This happens when someone merely causes some type of disturbance that diverts the attention of those learning in the Beit Hamidrash. Such an action will be severely penalized. All the more so, if he causes a boy to leave the Beit Hamidrash, because he hurt him, etc., he will be accountable for all the Torah that he prevented his friend from mastering,

*rachmana litzlan*. Therefore, one should be mindful of his actions and should be careful not to endanger himself or his peers through *bitul Torah*.

As I passed by the yeshiva once, I heard raucous laughter emanating from the Beit Hamidrash. I went inside to investigate. Before my eyes, was a businessman telling jokes to the yeshiva students. Of course, everyone stopped his learning in order to hear the anecdotes and “wise sayings” of this man. I immediately reproached the boys, stating that the time for Torah learning must be sanctified only for that, and not *chalilah* for foolishness and lightheadedness.

I quoted the statement of Chazal (*Avodah Zarah 2a*) that in the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring a Sefer Torah, and place it in His lap. He will tell all who engaged in learning it to come and take their reward. “You will probably also come to receive your reward,” I said to the man. Even though you are involved in the business world, you always set aside time for Torah study. You also give *tzedakah*, parting generously with your *maaser* money for Torah institutions.

“But, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu will check whether or not you learned Torah, He will look at all that took place here. He will accuse you, ‘Is this what you called fixing times for Torah study?! Telling jokes and disturbing others from learning?!’ Even if you will repent for the lost time that you could have spent learning Torah, you will never be able to rectify the damage you did to others by disturbing their study. The embarrassment and shame on the Day of Judgment is without limit.”

### **The Exacting Measure of Divine Justice against Yaakov Avinu**

The pasuk (*Bereishit 32:23*) tells us that Yaakov Avinu “took his two wives, his two handmaids, etc.” Chazal ask (*Bereishit Rabbah 76:9*), “Where was Dinah? Yaakov placed her in a box, which he locked, stating, ‘I do not want the rasha (Eisav) to see her and take her from me.’ Since

Yaakov prevented Eisav from the opportunity of returning to Hashem by Dinah's merit, he was punished by her falling into the hands of Shechem."

This seems quite puzzling. Why should Yaakov have been punished for hiding Dinah from Eisav, who was the worst rasha? Chazal instruct us (*Pesachim* 49a), "A person should sell all his possessions, if necessary, in order to marry off his daughter to a *talmid chacham*." Furthermore, they warn (*ibid.* 49b) that whoever marries off his daughter to an ignoramus is as if he left her in front of a lion. Why was Yaakov so severely punished? His action was halachically correct.

The injunction to marry off one's daughter to a *talmid chacham*, and conversely, not to an *am ha'aretz*, is directed at ordinary people. But Dinah, the daughter of the righteous Yaakov, a *tzaddeket* in her own merit, certainly had the power to bring Eisav to teshuvah. The influence of the connection with Yaakov would surely have produced positive results in Eisav. After all, he was a son of Yitzchak Avinu, and had learned Torah for the first thirteen years of his life (*Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 4).

Had Eisav indeed married Dinah and done teshuvah, Bnei Yisrael would never have become enslaved to the wicked kingdom of Edom (the descendants of Eisav). The Kingdom of Hashem would have reigned supreme, and Bnei Yisrael would not have had to be exiled at all. Alas, when Yaakov sealed Dinah in the box, he indicated that he did not care enough if his brother would repent from his ways. Therefore, the strict measure of justice was brought against him, bringing about the abduction of Dinah by Shechem.

Furthermore, we find that Dinah became pregnant through Shechem and gave birth to Asnat (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 37). Bnei Yisrael wanted to have Asnat killed, because of the great shame she brought upon the house of Yaakov. Yaakov took a golden amulet, containing the Name of Hashem, which he placed around her neck, and sent her away. Hashem sent the angel, Michael, to bring her down to Mitzrayim, to the house of Potiphar. She married Yosef and gave birth to two sons, Ephraim, and

Menashe, from whom will come Mashiach ben Yosef (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:1), who will wage war with Edom (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:26).

In the final instance, Dinah brought rectification to the world. From her offspring, Mashiach ben Yosef will come forth, nullifying the kingdom of Edom. She was called דינה because she brought דין (justice) upon Edom. Nevertheless, the depth of Heavenly judgment was so great that Yaakov was punished for keeping Dinah away from Eisav by suffering the harsh blow of having his daughter abducted by a gentile. Had he not prevented Dinah from marrying Eisav, the kingdom of Edom would have been immediately obliterated, and Bnei Yisrael would not have had to go into exile.

### **All Your Deeds Should Be for the Sake of Heaven**

The depth of justice is illustrated by the well-known story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which brought about the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The Gemara (*Gittin* 55b) relates that there was a man who had a friend by the name of Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza. He made a feast and sent a messenger to invite Kamtza. Instead, the messenger mistakenly invited Bar Kamtza. Upon seeing his enemy at his feast, the host ordered him to leave. They argued, and ultimately the host threw Bar Kamtza out. Bar Kamtza then said, “Because there were *talmidei chachamim* present at the feast, and they did not chastise the host for his behavior, it did not bother them that I was humiliated. I will go and slander them to the king.”

Bar Kamtza came before the Caesar, stating, “The Jews are rebelling against you. To prove it, send an animal to be sacrificed and see if they offer it.” The Caesar sent a young calf to the Beit Hamikdash. On the way, Bar Kamtza maimed it on the lip. Others say he injured its eye. Both are blemishes that render an animal unfit for sacrifice by the Jews, but not for gentiles. The Sages wanted to offer the calf in order to keep peace with the Caesar. But Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas refused to do so, saying that

people would say that the Jews sacrifice blemished animals on their altar. They then suggested having Bar Kamtza killed, in order that he should not report to the Caesar that the animal had not been sacrificed. Rabbi Zechariah countered, “They will say that one who makes a wound on an offering deserves the death sentence.” Thus he refused to allow it. Concerning this, Rabbi Yochanan stated, “The humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas destroyed the Beit Hamikdash, burned our Temple, and exiled us from our Land.”

This seems difficult to understand. How could Rabbi Zechariah be blamed for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the exile? He acted according to Torah law. It is true that a person does not deserve to be put to death for blemishing a consecrated animal, or in order to prevent him from reporting negatively to the government.

The accusation against Rabbi Zechariah was the following. Although he was the greatest Torah Sage of the generation, he failed to distinguish when it was the proper time to behave with humility, and when not. The Sages suggested having Bar Kamtza killed as an emergency measure, because they realized that he would cause terrible things to happen to the nation. Bar Kamtza himself was aware that a blemished animal may not be sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash. The fact that he brought it anyway, indicated that he had malicious motives, bent on finding a reason to report them to the Caesar.

In such an instance, when the entire nation was in grave danger, Rabbi Zechariah was forbidden to behave in a manner that went beyond the letter of the law. He should have displayed more “cruelty” toward Bar Kamtza, who intended to bring calamity upon the nation. He erred to such an extent that the destruction is attributed to his humility. And if the Torah scholars found grievance with the actions of Rabbi Zechariah, how much more severe is Hashem’s charge against him. It was the sins of the generation that blinded the eyes of this Torah Sage from correctly assessing the situation.

From here we learn how carefully one should weigh his actions and words, keeping in mind the long-term and short-term benefit to Klal Yisrael. Certainly, one should not have only his own best interests in mind.

We see a similar incident with Shaul Hamelech. He was told by Shmuel (*Shmuel I*, 15:3), “Now go and strike down Amalek and destroy everything he has. Have no pity on him – kill man and woman alike, infant and suckling alike, etc.” Further on, we read (*ibid.* 5), “And he fought in the valley.” Chazal explain this as follows (*Yoma* 22b): Rabbi Mani said, “Concerning issues of the valley. At the time that Hashem told Shaul to wipe out Amalek, Shaul thought, ‘For the sake of one life, the Torah instructs us to bring an *eglah arufah*. Certainly the Torah has compassion on all these many lives. And if the people sinned, how did the animals sin? And if the adults sinned, how did the children sin?’ A Heavenly Voice came forth, saying, ‘Do not be overly righteous (*Kohelet* 7:16).’”

This teaches that even a great person must always consider what the will of Hashem is in each instance and behave accordingly. If not, he will face a strong charge against him in the future. He might need to pay a hefty price. Shaul Hamelech had all kinds of doubts regarding the command of Hashem. For this, he was punished and the kingship was taken from him. Who was he to make Heavenly calculations, deciding on his own what needed to be done? “Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Your judgments are like the vast deep waters” (*Tehillim* 36:7). There is no one who can understand the thoughts of Hakadosh Baruch Hu (see *Arachin* 8b).

The claim against Shaul, the chosen one of Hashem, was that he questioned the mitzvah of killing out Amalek specifically at this point. He was a great *talmid chacham*, and a prophet. He knew of the mitzvah (*Devarim* 25:19) “You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven – you shall not forget!” Why did he wait to pose his question specifically before going out to war, and not earlier? Why did he have these doubts just as he received the order to obliterate Amalek?

For this reason, a Heavenly Voice came out, telling him not to be overly righteous. At this point, the claim against him was very great. He should have asked all his questions before he was given the command. He should have posed them when still in the Beit Hamidrash, when the questions were theoretical, not now, when he had to put the command into practice. His actions are even more surprising considering the fact that he knew that the first mitzvah of the nation, upon appointing a king, is to wipe out the nation of Amalek (see *Sanhedrin* 20b).

This illustrates the depth of justice that there was against Shaul. In spite of his righteousness, he failed by asking this question. By questioning what sin the children of Amalek could have, he came to doubt the words of Hashem. Also, he allowed the sheep to live; contrary to what he was commanded. This was an act of the Satan, whose ploys are to cause a person to stumble when he is facing a test. One who fears Hashem should endeavor not to fall into his trap. One should weigh each and every deed thoroughly before acting. Then he will be spared the severity of justice on the Day of Judgment.

### ———— In Summary ————

- In the Selichot prayers, we recite, “Do not bring us to justice.” How can a person request not to be judged? If a person transgressed, he must be brought to justice. From here we see the depth of justice, which is concealed from people. The *Yetzer Hara* blinds a person, bringing one sin in the wake of another. Thus, one may repent the latter sin, but remain unaware of the former one; hence, one does not repent for it. We ask Hashem not to bring us to judgment for the sins of which we are unaware.
- For this reason, we pray, “Enlighten us with Your Torah,” and afterward, “and bring our hearts close to Your mitzvot, etc.” We pray that we should act only for the sake of Heaven. We ask that the severity of justice not be brought upon us. The gravity of judgment is so strong that even a light conversation between man and his wife will be repeated to a person after his death. For this reason, Rabbi Eliezer was exceedingly cautious in the matter of marital relations.

- The most common cause of stumbling is habit. People fail to pay proper attention to the way they spend their time. That is why a person will be judged not only for *bitul* Torah in general, but for each and every moment wasted from Torah study. Often, suffering comes upon a person, not because of any sin, but because of time not spent properly in Torah study. One is judged scrupulously, for minor acts as well as major ones. This is the meaning of the strict depth of justice. One who prevented his friend from learning as he should have will have to account for that as well.
- Yaakov was punished for not allowing Dinah to marry Eisav, since she might have influenced him to do teshuvah. As a result she was abducted by Shechem. Similarly, we find that Bar Kamtza slandered the Jews to the Caesar, ultimately causing the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. All of Bnei Yisrael were dealt with strict justice.
- This was also the sin of Shaul, who refrained from killing out all of Amalek. The monarchy was taken from him because he questioned the command of Hashem when he was ordered to wipe them out. The *Yetzer Hara* overcame him at the time of this test, and he was punished with the full measure of justice. Therefore, we should strive to be constantly involved in mitzvot and good deeds, in order to avoid the exacting measure of justice. Let us do teshuvah for every moment wasted in not serving Hashem properly.

## DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM SIN

Rav Ashi was learning about the lives of three kings with his students. He closed his lesson by stating, “Tomorrow, we will continue studying about our friends.” Rashi explains that this means “our peers (previous kings of Bnei Yisrael) who were *talmidei chachamim*, but lost their portion in the World to Come.” Menashe appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream and asked him, “What is the ruling regarding where one should cut bread when one has made a *berachah* on it?”

Rav Ashi replied that he didn’t know.

To which Menashe countered, “You don’t know where to cut the bread, yet you call us your peers?”

Rav Ashi responded, “Please tell me the answer, and tomorrow I will teach this halachah to my disciples in your name.” Menashe explained that the bread should be cut at the spot where it is most well-baked.

Then Rav Ashi continued, “Since you are such a *talmid chacham*, how could you have served idols?”

Menashe replied, “If you had lived in my days, you would have lifted the hem of your garment to run after *avodah zarah*, such was the power of the *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship in my day.”

The next day, Rav Ashi said to his students, “We will begin by learning from our Rabbis.” He did not call the previous generations his “peers” again. Moreover, he began by speaking disparagingly of Achav. He said that Achav was wicked and loved idol worship (*Sanhedrin* 102b).

This account is very puzzling. From his dream, Rav Ashi understood that the previous kings were deserving of honor, as they were more knowledgeable in halachah than he. The very next day, he referred to them as “our Rabbis.” However, he then immediately spoke disparagingly about Achav, saying that he was an evil idol worshiper. How can we understand this?

The sefer *Yalkut Meir* presents a further difficulty. Rav Ashi promised Menashe that if he would teach him the ruling regarding where one cuts bread, he would teach this ruling in his name the next day. Why didn’t Rav Ashi keep his word?

We can learn a practical lesson from this incident. When a person transgresses and then repents, he must distance himself as much as possible from the cause of his sin (*Rambam, Hilchot De’ot* 2:2). He should scrutinize his actions in order to ensure that he will not approach the thing which originally enticed him, and could do so again. He should also

be scrupulous not to visit the place where he originally sinned, because sometimes the place brings back memories of the pleasure one had in sinning. This causes one to forget the great loss he suffered through the transgression. We find that David Hamelech constantly bemoaned his actions concerning Batsheva, which looked like a sin in the eyes of people, even though it was not (*Tehillim* 51:5).

A person should inculcate his heart with such a great aversion to sin that he becomes utterly disgusted by it. When he is not in the thick of the temptation, he should make a personal reckoning, considering the loss that sin can cause. As he succeeds in being repulsed by wrongdoing, he will be habituated to this attitude, prepared for the *Yetzer Hara's* next appearance. On the other hand, one who does not train himself to find sin abhorrent will find warding off the *Yetzer Hara* to be an uphill battle. This idea is supported by the *Ohr Hachaim* on the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 25:17), "Harass the Midianites." He says, "Hashem advised us to harass the Midianites. This means to take the initiative of hating the evildoers, despising the bad as well as the good which comes from them, destroying even the trees and sweet springs, etc. because the Midianites brought bad upon our nation. Acting in this way fulfills the pasuk (*Tehillim* 159:23) 'For indeed those who hate You, O Hashem, I hate them.' 'Those who hate You' means those who cause others to hate You, by hating goodness. When one keeps this thought in mind, the lust for sin is easier to overcome. By implanting an aversion to sin in one's heart, one will gain a Divine spark, which helps him overcome his *nisyonot*. This is a proven method for arriving at true life." These words, and their continuation, are extremely enlightening.

In this vein, we can understand a most perplexing matter. Every year, at the approach of the Yamim Noraim, everyone does teshuvah, crying and begging Hashem for forgiveness. Yet, as soon as these days have passed, they return to their sins as previously. How is this possible?

This is exactly what we were referring to previously. When the person repented, he failed to completely uproot the sin, implanting in his heart

utter disgust for it, and contemplating the terrible consequences it brings. Therefore, when the effect of the Yamim Noraim wears off, the weed of poison sprouts forth once again (*Devarim* 29:17).

To cite one example of this: There are those who spend their summer vacations in places of leisure which are not approved of by our leaders. They make reservations for the following year. Then the month of Elul arrives, heralding the season of teshuvah. But they don't cancel their future plans. This proves that they have not uprooted the sin from within themselves.

When Bnei Yisrael traveled from the Yam Suf to Eretz Yisrael, the Torah teaches (*Shemot* 13:17) that "Hashem did not lead them by way of the land of the Pelishtim, because it was near." I heard, in the name of one of the *mussar* giants, the following explanation. The words "because it was near" hint that the behavior of the Pelishtim was similar to that of Bnei Yisrael when they were at the lowest level of *tumah* in Mitzrayim (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a). Had Bnei Yisrael been led near them, they may have, *chas v'shalom*, become aroused to sin, as they had been accustomed to do in the past, even falling to the fiftieth level of depravity. Then they would have been unable to merit receiving the Torah.

Furthermore, being near the Pelishtim might have had a most depressing effect on our nation. They may have observed the Pelishtim, whose conduct was similar to how they themselves had acted in Mitzrayim. They would have then compared themselves to the Pelishtim, stating, "They are forever sunk in the quagmire of evil. We, too, behaved that way until recently. Although we were extricated from that situation for the meantime, in the very near future, we are most likely to return to that state." This is the way of the *Yetzer Hara*. When it does not manage to entice a person to sin, it plants despair in his heart, telling him that he transgressed so many sins in the past that he is beyond hope. For instance, if one considered sinning, and then overcame his desire, the *Yetzer Hara* causes him to feel depressed, stating, "How did you dare

contemplate sinning in such a manner?! You are such a great, honorable person...you have proven just how despicable you really are!” Despair is the first step toward total decline.

With this in mind, let us return to our original questions concerning Rav Ashi. It seems puzzling that Rav Ashi did not know the ruling of where one cuts the bread, a simple everyday act. We must say that he was aware of it, but he wanted to hear how Menashe would respond. Therefore, the next day, when he explained the halachah, he did not repeat it in Menashe’s name, for he had known it on his own. However, since, in his dream, he had promised to call the kings “our Rabbis,” he opened the class the next day with those words.

But immediately, he changed the topic, discussing the disgrace of Achav. He did not want to mention the name of Menashe, in order to keep the thought of *avodah zarah* as distant as possible. Indeed, when Rav Ashi awoke from that dream, he was greatly agitated. He was one of the giants of the generation, the one who authored the *Shas* (*Bava Metzia* 86a). He was certain that he had no connection whatsoever to idol worship. Suddenly, he was told in this dream that had he been living in Menashe’s generation, he would, *chas v’shalom*, have been pulled after it. He put the entire episode out of his mind, in order not to be drawn after even a spark of the sin, and not to fall into despair as a result.

This narrative teaches an awesome lesson. Rav Ashi, who was the greatest Torah scholar of the generation, dissociated himself from the words of Menashe, even in thought. This was despite the fact that Menashe was already dead, and the tremendous temptation for idol worship had been uprooted with the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. How much more so should we, simple people, make sure to distance ourselves completely from even the slightest thought of idol worship and other improper thoughts.

Since Rav Ashi had promised to tell over the ruling in Menashe’s name, he called the previous kings “our Rabbis” without mentioning Menashe’s

name specifically. Immediately, he degraded Achav. Although Achav was a *talmid chacham*, he was also a great rasha who worshipped idols. In order to detach himself from Achav and all that he stood for, Rav Ashi did not repeat what he had heard from Menashe in his dream. For in the generation of Menashe there were tzaddikim and great prophets, who did not sin like Menashe. By thinking that maybe he would have been on their level, he prevented himself from becoming disheartened, which could have caused him to sin. Rav Ashi acted in this way in order to avoid any thought of *avodah zarah* or feeling of depression that might be engendered by the *Yetzer Hara*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Menashe appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream, because he had not treated the three kings whom he had discussed with the proper respect. Menashe rebuked him, stating that he didn't know a simple ruling regarding breaking bread for Hamotzi. Rav Ashi asked him to explain the halachah, stating that he would tell it over the next day in the Beit Hamidrash in Menashe's name.
- When Menashe explained the matter, Rav Ashi questioned how such a great *talmid chacham* could have committed *avodah zarah*. Menashe told him that if he had lived in those days, he would have been pulled to worship idols; such was the burning desire for this sin in his times. The next day, Rav Ashi honored the kings by calling them "our Rabbis." Nevertheless, he immediately denigrated Achav. This is puzzling. If he was showing the kings honor, why speak negatively of Achav? Also, he did not keep his word to Menashe; he did not teach the halachic ruling in his name.
- One should distance himself from sin and from its causes. One should also endeavor not to be tested and not to fall into despair. Only by separating himself from these matters, can he hope to gain freedom from the *Yetzer Hara*, surmounting it in his service of Hashem.
- Rav Ashi wanted to completely remove the thought of *avodah zarah* from his mind. For that reason, he erased the dream entirely from his memory. Moreover, he degraded Achav before his students in order to make the thought of idol

worship repulsive in his heart, as well as to prevent thoughts of despair from entering his mind. The *Yetzer Hara* uses despair as a tool to prevent growth by telling a person, “You think that you are so great, so how could you even entertain the thought of sin?!” Therefore, Rav Ashi took his mind completely off these matters. In order to fulfill his promise to Menashe he called the kings “our Rabbis.” But he did not dwell on the dream in order to prevent himself from falling into the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*.

## THE ZEALOUSNESS OF RABBI ELAZAR IN THE FACE OF SIN

Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai once chanced upon a policeman of the king, who was successful at catching robbers. Rabbi Elazar taught him how to distinguish between a thief and an honest person. When this reached the ears of the king, it was decided that Rabbi Elazar himself should be a policeman, responsible for seizing robbers. Indeed, he began doing this job (*Bava Metzia* 83b).

This raises a difficulty. How could Rabbi Elazar allow Jews to be reported to the gentile government, on charges of theft? Rabbi Elazar was a zealous man, as illustrated by the following incident. We find (*Shabbat* 33b) that when he emerged from the cave with his father, he observed people plowing and planting. He was angered by this sight, unable to comprehend how people could spend their time in worldly matters rather than pursuing Torah wisdom. Thus, whatever he looked at was consumed by fire. He returned to the cave.

When he emerged a second time, one year later, he saw an old man walking with two myrtle branches on Erev Shabbat. The man explained, “One branch is in honor of *zachor* (remember the Shabbat), and the other is in honor of *shamor* (protect the Shabbat).” Then, Rabbi Elazar was calmed. He saw them utilizing the physical for the higher, spiritual

purpose of fulfilling mitzvot. However, the sin of stealing he could not bear.

With this in mind, we can understand another statement of Chazal regarding Rabbi Elazar (*Ta'anit* 20b). Once, he was returning from learning Torah, riding a donkey. He met a most ugly man, who called to him, "Shalom upon you, Rebbi." Rabbi Elazar did not respond with "Shalom," saying, instead, "How ugly you are! Are all the people of your city as ugly as you?" It is difficult to understand how Rabbi Elazar could talk like that.

However, Rabbi Elazar realized that if this man was indeed ugly, this indicated that he lacked *yirat Shamayim*. Rabbi Elazar's intention when inquiring whether his townsmen were also ugly was the following: "If the people there are ugly, and have no fear of Heaven, you cannot learn from them how to serve Hashem." Rabbi Elazar was zealous for the honor of Hashem. He could not understand how people could sin and be mired in the physical and mundane.

It was for that reason that he reported criminals to the government. It is known that he never mistakenly caught a righteous individual. All whom he caught were hardened criminals.

# TESHUVAH



## THE TESHUVAH OF DAVID HAMELECH

The Gemara relates (*Pesachim* 119b) that in the future, Hashem will prepare a feast for the tzaddikim, on the day that He bestows kindness upon the progeny of Yitzchak. After they eat and drink, Avraham Avinu will receive the cup of blessing, but he will decline it, saying, "I cannot bless, for Yishmael came forth from me." Yitzchak will be given the cup and told to bless, but he, too, will decline, saying, "I cannot bless, for Eisav came forth from me." Then Yaakov will be given the cup and told to bless. He will respond, "I cannot make the blessing, for I married two sisters, an act which would later be forbidden by the Torah."

Moshe will be told to make the blessing. His answer will be, "I cannot bless, for I did not merit entering Eretz Yisrael, neither in my lifetime, nor after my death." Yehoshua will be told to bless. He will decline, stating that he never merited having a son. Then David will be told to bless. To which he will respond, "I will bless, for it is fitting for me to bless, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 116:13), 'I will raise the cup of salvations and I will invoke the Name of Hashem.'"

The commentators have difficulty understanding this. Why was David Hamelech more deserving than the Avot and the other tzaddikim? We find that David erred, as he testified about himself (*ibid.* 51:5-6), "For I recognize my transgressions, and my sin is before me always. Against You alone did I sin, and that which is evil in Your eyes did I do."

We might answer with the following thought. The deeds of the Avot were irreversible. Avraham and Yitzchak could not alter the fact that they

had fathered evil sons. Yaakov could not alter the fact that he had married sisters, nor Moshe that he had been denied entry into the Holy land.

Conversely, David, in spite of having sinned, was able to reverse his sin through the power of teshuvah. This is especially true since his sin was unintentional, rather than a premeditated sin, as he said (*Tehillim* 19:13), “Who can discern mistakes?” Rashi explains (*ibid.*), “I was careful regarding aveirot, but it is impossible not to fall at times.” David asked Hashem to cleanse him from all trace of this sin, since he hadn’t even realized that he was sinning. Since his sin was entirely unintentional, it was changed to become a merit (*Yoma* 86).

David’s teshuvah was so complete, that Chazal confirmed by stating (*Shabbat* 56a): “Whoever says that David sinned, is mistaken, as the pasuk states (*Shmuel* I, 18:14), ‘David was successful in all his ways, and Hashem was with him.’ Could it be that he sinned and the *Shechinah* remained with him? It must be that he repented completely from any vestige of sin, uprooting any damage.” We also find (*Shabbat* 30a; *Sanhedrin* 107b) that when Shlomo Hamelech built the Beit Hamikdash and wanted to bring the Aron into the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the gates remained sealed. He said twenty-four songs of prayer, but was unanswered. He said (*Tehillim* 24), “Raise up your heads, O gates, and be uplifted, you everlasting entrances, so that the King of Glory may enter. Who is this King of Glory? Hashem, the mighty and strong; Hashem, the strong in battle,” yet the gates remained closed.

Then he said (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 6:42), “Hashem, G-d, do not turn back the request of Your anointed one; remember the righteousness of Your servant David!” He was immediately answered. At that moment, David’s enemies became filled with shame. All of Yisrael then knew without a doubt that Hashem had forgiven David for his sin.

We see from the following just how great David actually was. Chazal say (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, remez* 840; *Bereishit Rabbah* 29:3) in the name

of Rabbi Simon: “There are three things that Hashem found. One is Avraham, as the pasuk states (*Nechemiah* 9:8), ‘You found his heart faithful before You.’ Another was David, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 89:21), ‘I have found David, My servant.’ The third was Yisrael, as it states (*Hoshea* 9:10), ‘I found Yisrael like grapes in the desert.’” The fact that David is considered a discovery in and of himself demonstrates his tremendous worth.

Avraham was considered a discovery since he was the only one who believed in Hashem in the face of the heresy of the entire world. He was called **העברי אברהם** (Avraham the Ivri) – the entire world was on one side, and he was on the other side (**מעבר לשני**) (*Piska Zuta Lech Lecha* 14:2; *Bereishit Rabbah* 42:13). For that reason, Hashem said about him, “The entire world exists in his merit” (*Zohar* I, 205b). Moreover, the Torah was given in Avraham’s *zechut* (*Zohar, Bereishit* 22a).

Similarly, Am Yisrael was discovered by Hashem, for they were the only ones prepared to accept the Torah, after all the nations refused it. The pasuk says (*Devarim* 33:2), “Hashem came from Sinai.” Chazal (*Tanchuma, Vezot Haberachah* 4) expound that Hashem offered the Torah to all of the nations, but they didn’t accept it, until Am Yisrael accepted it, as the pasuk continues (*Devarim* 33:2), “having shone forth to them from Seir.”

David Hamelech was considered to be a discovery after being tested by Hashem and found worthy to shepherd His flock, Am Yisrael. There are a few reasons for this, as will be explained.

1. Chazal state (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:2; *Tanchuma, Shemot* 7) that Hashem examined how David looked after His sheep, and found him favorable. First he would send the young ones to pasture so that they could eat the soft grass. Then, he would allow the old ones to go out and eat the tougher grasses. Only at the end, did he allow the strapping, strong sheep to feed off the hard grass. Also, he took them to graze in the wilderness, far from private property, to avoid theft. When Hashem witnessed this, He exclaimed, “You are faithful with the sheep! I appoint you to be

shepherd of My flock,” as it says (*Tehillim* 78:71), “From behind the nursing ewes He brought him; to tend to Yaakov, His nation, and to Yisrael, His inheritance.”

From here we see the tremendous compassion of David Hamelech. He understood the feelings of every creature. If he was able to provide animals with their every need, how much more so did he empathize with the needs of people, whether rich or poor. If a wealthy individual approached him, complaining that he was unsuccessful in amassing more wealth, David didn’t spurn him, but listened intently and counseled him accordingly. He would advise him as to what was the most lucrative way to increase his holdings.

Certainly, David did not repel the poor and simple, sending them off to others to deal with them. Rather, he himself listened to each one’s tale of woe and helped him to the best of his ability. He did all this despite being the king, whose time was very precious.

2. As well as acting with compassion toward all members of his nation, David was meticulous in ensuring that justice was upheld. The Gemara states (*Berachot* 4a) that David cried to Hashem, “Master of the world! Am I not devout? For all the kings of the east and west sit in their full glory, while I dirty my hands with blood in order to pronounce a woman pure to her husband. Not only that, but whenever I rule, I confer with my teacher, Mefiboshet, asking him, ‘Did I judge correctly? Did I convict the guilty? Did I vindicate the innocent? Did I pronounce purity upon the pure? Did I pronounce impurity upon the impure?’ And I was not ashamed.” How careful David was in matters that pertained to his fellow man!

3. David maintained his respect for others, even when his reputation was attacked. Chazal (*Shabbat* 105a) explain the pasuk (*Melachim* I, 2:8), “נמרצת והוא קללני קללה” – He cursed me with a powerful curse.” The word נמרצת is comprised of the initials of the following epithets: נואף (adulterer), מואבי (Moabite), רוצח (murderer), צורר (oppressor), תועבה

(abomination). David was describing to his son, Shlomo, the different curses heaped upon him by Shimi ben Geira. At the time, David did not respond at all, stating that Shimi was merely sent by Hashem to curse him. Although our Sages state (*Ketubot* 17a) that a king may not forgo his honor, with David there was simply no concept of honor, for he transcended his natural tendencies, believing that whatever came his way was a message from Hashem. Therefore, Chazal state (*Shochar Tov* 16:11) that since David kept quiet when he was so flagrantly attacked, he deserved the appellation of *chassid* (pious one).

4. David endured much suffering at the hands of his enemies, who degraded him, claiming that he was illegitimate and thus disqualified from joining the Jewish nation (he was descended from Ruth the Moabitess, and Moabites were prohibited from converting). Chazal state (*Yevamot* 76b) that Doeg Ha'adomi told Shaul, "Before considering whether or not he (David) is fitting to be king, consider whether or not he is fit to join the Jewish nation."

5. David was meticulous in keeping Hashem's command. The pasuk says (*Shmuel* II, 5:23), "So David inquired of Hashem, and He said, 'Do not go [directly] up.'" Chazal (*Shochar Tov* 27:2) explain that Hashem did not allow David to strike against the enemy, even if they were in close range, until he would see the treetops rustle. He had been told (5:24), "It shall be that when you hear a sound like marching at the tops of the mulberry trees you shall shout [your battle cry]." Why was the signal given specifically with the mulberry tree? It is a tree full of thorns. Hashem was intimating that when His nation is in distress, He, so to speak, suffers too, as it says (*Tehillim* 91:15), "I am with him in distress."

When the Pelishtim approached David's army, and were no more than eight *amot* away, his men asked what they were waiting for. David replied, "We have been commanded from on High not to strike until we see the treetops rustling. If we attack, we will be killed. It is preferable to die righteous and not guilty. Let us place our trust in Hashem."

Because they trusted wholeheartedly in Hashem, the trees began to rustle. David immediately struck the Pelishtim, as the pasuk says (*Shmuel* II, 5:25), “David did so, as Hashem had commanded him, and he struck the Pelishtim.” Hashem proclaimed to His ministering angels, “See the difference between Shaul and David.” What brought about David’s salvation? The fact that Hashem’s word was his guiding light, as David says (*Tehillim* 119:105), “Your word is a lamp for my feet.”

This sheds light on the ambiguous words of Chazal (*Yoma* 22b): “Shaul sinned once (regarding the incident with Agag in *Shmuel* I, 15:11), and the kingdom was confiscated from him. David sinned twice (once regarding Uriah, and once regarding counting the nation), yet the kingdom remained under his rulership.”

There are two types of commands of Hashem (see *Sefer Hamitzvot* of the *Rambam*). There are general mitzvot which were commanded to all of Klal Yisrael, such as the Ten Commandments. And there are specific mitzvot which were given to individual people. One who transgresses the latter type of mitzvah is immediately culpable, just as one who rebels against the king is punishable by death (*Sanhedrin* 101b).

Herein lay the difference between David and Shaul. David, although he sinned, transgressed global sins. Teshuvah is effective in correcting such aveirot. David did teshuvah immediately and was not punished. But the commands of Hashem which he was given individually, he guarded at all costs, as explained above (*Shochar Tov* 27:2).

Conversely, Shaul, although extremely righteous and scrupulous in fulfilling all mitzvot, both large and small, transgressed a specific command which Shmuel had given him (*Shmuel* I, 15:3), “Now go and strike down Amalek and destroy everything he has. Have no pity on him.” But Shaul did not listen to the words of Shmuel. The pasuk says (*ibid.* 15:9), “Shaul, as well as the people, took pity on Agag, on the best of the sheep...and they were not willing to destroy them.” For this type of aveirah, teshuvah does not help. Therefore, Shaul lost his kingdom.

From all of the above, we see that Hashem discovered a true treasure in David. He is fitting to bless on the cup. The strict hand of justice did not strike against him as it did the others. Yet, in spite of his greatness, the moment he slackened in his Avodat Hashem, he was immediately punished, as the pasuk says (*Shmuel* II, 21:1), “In the days of David there was [once] a famine for three years, year after year. David inquired of Hashem, and Hashem said, ‘It is for Shaul.’” Chazal explain (*Yevamot* 28b) that David sinned in not properly eulogizing Shaul, since they hurried to bury him secretly.

This is puzzling. We find that the pasuk specifically states that David did eulogize Shaul, as it states (*Shmuel* II, 1:11-12), “David took hold of his garments and tore them, as did all the people who were with him. They lamented and wept and fasted until evening, over Shaul, over Yehonatan his son, etc.” Moreover, David composed a special dirge, which certainly gained publicity throughout the nation, as it says (*ibid.* vs. 17), “David lamented this dirge over Shaul.” Why is it considered that David did not eulogize Shaul properly, warranting that the nation was punished with a famine for three years?

Although David did eulogize Shaul and lamented his passing, this was insufficient in light of Shaul’s great stature. David should have made a more prominent gathering at the time and ensured that wherever Jews lived, they would eulogize Shaul as befitting the anointed one of Hashem. For that reason, David was punished with three years of famine. Hashem is scrupulous with His righteous ones, to a hairsbreadth.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal state that on the day of the final redemption, Hashem will prepare a feast for the tzaddikim. David Hamelech will take the cup of blessing. None of the Avot or other tzaddikim will be worthy of this, since each had a specific defect. On the surface, David also had a defect, as he stated, “My sin is before me always.” Why will he be found worthy of making the blessing on the cup?

- There was a basic difference between the defect of David and the others. While the others could not retract their actions, David was able to do teshuvah and rectify his, especially since he sinned unintentionally. Teshuvah brought him forgiveness and even changed his sins into merits. Chazal tell us that whoever thinks that David sinned is mistaken.
- David had outstanding qualities. Just as he was meticulous with the feelings of the animals he looked after, all the more so was he careful with the feelings of his fellow Jews, whether rich or poor. He rejected none and aided all. He did kindness and justice with each person, soiling his hands with blood in order to pronounce a woman pure to her husband. He also maintained respect for others. In spite of being cursed, he did not respond at all. He endured much suffering from his enemies, who cast aspersions upon his lineage, questioning his admission into the Jewish nation. Most of all, he was punctilious in upholding the word of Hashem. He would not transgress Hashem's command, even when his life was at stake in the war with the Pelishtim. He preferred to die righteous than violate the word of Hashem.

## THE GATES OF REPENTANCE ARE ALWAYS OPEN

The *Navi* tells us about Chizkiyahu Hamelech, “In those days Chizkiyahu became deathly ill. Yeshayahu son of Amotz, the prophet, came to him and said to him, ‘Thus said Hashem: Instruct your household, for you shall die; and you shall not live’” (*Melachim* II, 20:1). Chazal comment (*Berachot* 10a) that this means “You shall die in this world and you shall not live in the World to Come.” To which Chizkiyahu asked, “Why is this so?” Yeshayahu answered, “Because you did not marry and have children.” Chizkiyahu responded, “I saw in a Divine prophecy that I would beget a wicked son.” Yeshayahu countered, “Why do you mix into the affairs of Heaven? Your duty is to get married and have children; what becomes of them is up to Hashem.” At this, Chizkiyahu turned his face to the wall and prayed (*Yeshayahu* 38:2).

Why did Hashem see fit to punish Chizkiyahu in such a severe manner, not only being taken from this world but losing his portion in the World to Come, as well? After all, the only reason he desisted from marriage was in order to bring satisfaction to Hashem. He didn't want to produce progeny who would anger Him.

Furthermore, Chazal state (*Sanhedrin* 56b) that one does not punish without first giving a warning. If so, why didn't Yeshayahu warn Chizkiyahu that if he did not marry, he would lose both worlds? Why did he immediately inform him of his punishment? Also, why did Chizkiyahu turn his face to the wall in order to pray?

Chizkiyahu refrained from getting married, for he did not want to bring unworthy children into the world who would defile the Land. Even were they to do teshuvah, asking the earth to assist them in obtaining clemency, they would be denied, as was the case by Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya (*Avodah Zarah* 17a).

Yeshayahu Hanavi told Chizkiyahu that this line of reasoning was faulty: he was obligated to do the will of Hashem, which is to marry and produce offspring. Having children is both a mitzvah between man and Hashem, and man and his fellow man. When one guides his children in the ways of Hashem, he does a kindness with them. Even if they eventually turn out wicked, *chalilah*, and the Land rejects them, Hakadosh Baruch Hu can bring suffering upon them which will cause them to do teshuvah.

We see that suffering has the power to return the lost son to the folds of his father. For this reason Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu, "You are abstaining from bringing forth children and training them in the right path to do charity and justice. Your sin is very grave. You are preventing your sons from returning and coming close once again to Hashem.

"You yourself were the one who stabbed a sword into the entrance to the Beit Hamidrash, proclaiming, 'Whoever does not learn Torah, will be pierced by this sword.' They searched from Dan (in the north) to Be'er

Sheva (in the south), and found no ignoramus. They searched from Givat to Antipras, and found not one child, man or woman, who was not proficient in the halachot of *tumah* and *taharah*. At that time, you were sure that all who engaged in Torah would uphold it all the days of his life. You felt that you had done your utmost to ensure the continuation of Torah amongst the nation. All the more should you have brought children into the world and educated them in the path of righteousness without making calculations about the future.”

Chizkiyahu immediately recognized his mistake. He asked Yeshayahu (*Berachot* 10a), “Give me your daughter for a wife. Maybe, our combined merits will stand by our children to keep them on the proper path.” Since Chizkiyahu knew that a separation had been formed between him and Hashem, he desired to repair as much as he was able in the short amount of time left to him.

Because he literally saw the Angel of Death at his doorstep, Chizkiyahu was afraid that he wouldn’t be able to concentrate properly on his prayers. Therefore, he faced the wall to supplicate his Maker, and beg for his life and soul. The wall also alludes to the separation that was created between him and Hashem, which prevented his prayers from ascending. Chizkiyahu knew that a barrier existed, but relied on the limitless kindness of Hashem. Therefore, he confronted Yeshayahu, and called out, “Ben Amotz, cease your prophecies and leave! I have a tradition from the house of my father that even if a sharp sword is resting on a person’s neck he should not despair of Heavenly mercy.”

What a powerful lesson can be learnt from this exchange. Here was a great man, whose actions were *l’shem Shamayim*. Nevertheless, he was punished for not considering the matter from all angles, lest he misunderstand what Hashem’s will really was. Although all of his actions seemed to be correct, maybe there was some small fault in his reasoning that could lead to harm in the future. This is what caused the barrier between himself and his Creator. For this, he would be brought to justice, perhaps losing his portion in the World to Come.

A person's task is to do the will of Hashem without making personal calculations. For example, if one is involved in bringing others closer to Hashem, he should not contemplate whether all of his efforts will pay off and the people in whom he invests his energies will ultimately remain religious. One must merely do his job, endeavoring to bring others closer to Hashem, as it says (*Avot* 2:16), "You are not required to complete the task; yet you are not free to withdraw from it."

This was exactly the case with Chizkiyahu. He foresaw that he would have wicked progeny, yet he was still punished for desisting from getting married. The way his children would turn out was not his concern. Even if his sons would be evil, perhaps his grandchildren or their descendants would be righteous.

This is also the case with those who try to bring others back to Judaism. Even if one doesn't see immediate results, it is impossible to predict when his words of encouragement will permeate the other person's heart. It is quite likely that a few years down the road this person will come to teshuvah in merit of this discussion, or a similar one which he heard previously. And even if he himself does not have the strength to return to his Creator, perhaps he will educate his sons to Torah in the merit of the words he heard then. Maybe he will even send them to religious institutions.

Chazal state (*Shabbat* 104a), "He who comes to be purified, is assisted by Heaven." No effort invested in promulgating Torah goes to waste. We often don't see immediate results. Just as no prayer of a Jew is ever lost, sometimes taking many years to bear results, so, too, the exertion that one expends in Avodat Hashem never disappears completely, even if we do not merit witnessing its results.

Another lesson that we can learn from this incident is that even if a person sins, *chalilah*, and it seems to him that Hashem is extremely angry with him, to the extent that he does not have any chance at all of doing teshuvah, he should not despair. He must know that the matter depends

solely on him. If he takes upon himself to return wholeheartedly, Hashem will help him. It is not recommended to delay doing teshuvah, for then he may experience some form of suffering in the meantime, which is brought upon him in order to influence him to return to Hashem.

Hashem desires to bestow kindness upon His people and help them escape the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. For, without the help of Hashem, a person would not be able to withstand him (*Kiddushin* 30b). Specifically in the days of Menashe, the *Yetzer Hara* was especially strong. Chazal relate (*Sanhedrin* 102b) that Rav Ashi once asked Menashe in a dream, “How could it be that you worshipped idols?” To which Menashe replied, “If you had lived in my time, you would have lifted the hems of your robe in pursuit of *avodah zarah*.”

We can take a practical lesson from what happened with Chizkiyahu. Whenever someone does a good deed, he should examine it to confirm that it was done in the best way possible, without any taint of negativity. A person knows his own faults (*Nega'im* 5:2), and is thus able to scrutinize his deeds in order to find any fault in them, or ask others to help him do so. One should not make peace with his deficiencies, but should repair them.

This obligates us to a great extent. We often come across a teacher who refuses to learn with a specific child, maybe even expelling him from school. He thinks that this boy does not have a “good head” and will never succeed in Torah study. How many times have we found that precisely those who had no chance of success, after much toil and effort, emerged as the greatest Torah giants of our generation?! The masses seek them, drinking thirstily of their Torah.

It is a crime to expel a boy from yeshiva. Each child has the potential to become a Torah giant, maybe even the spiritual leader of the next generation. It is a terrible thing for a person in a position of authority to prevent this from transpiring, by sending a boy away from the Beit Hamidrash.

Who was greater than Rabbi Akiva? Until the age of forty, he was a complete ignoramus (*Pesachim* 49b). So much so, that he exclaimed, “Who can bring me a *talmid chacham* so that I may bite him like a donkey?” Ultimately, he returned home after many years of study, escorted by twenty-four thousand disciples. Who would have imagined that this shepherd, who didn’t even know the shape of a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, would later emerge as one of the greatest *Tanna'im*!?

All of this is referring to a pupil who has no especial talents, but desires to go in the right path. On the other hand, one who displays negative character traits is likely to influence his peers. There is no recourse but to expel him from the school in order that he should not negatively affect the rest of the children.

The Gemara (*Berachot* 10a) relates that there were ruffians who lived in the vicinity of Rabbi Meir, who would often harass him. He wanted to pray that they should die. His virtuous wife, Beruriah, disagreed with his opinion, stating the pasuk in Tehillim (104:35), “Sins will cease from the earth.” Instead of praying that they should die, she told him to pray that they should do teshuvah. He took her advice, and, indeed, they repented from their evil ways.

Beruriah saved her husband from being punished. If these ruffians would have died as a result of his tefillah, he would have been taken to task for not praying that they do teshuvah instead. He was saved due to the incisive reasoning of his wife, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 145:20), “Hashem protects all who love Him.” Hashem prevents them from stumbling, *chalilah*.

In light of this, we can understand the following incident that took place with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son, Rabbi Elazar (*Shabbat* 33b). Upon leaving the cave where they had lived for twelve years, they saw people plowing and planting the fields. They exclaimed, “They abandon eternal life and engage in temporary life?!” Wherever they looked, the place became scorched. A Heavenly Voice emanated, proclaiming, “Did

you emerge in order to destroy My world? Return to the cave!” They returned to the cave for another year.

Let us try to understand why they needed to remain in the cave for an extra year. Their intentions, after all, were good. They were of the opinion that if people learn Torah, the land itself produces fruits. If so, what is the purpose of working the land? According to them this constitutes *bitul* Torah. It is preferable to toil in Torah, occupying oneself in eternal life, and thereby merit gaining two worlds at once. They believed that one who acts otherwise deserves to be punished. They themselves experienced living by the word of Hashem for thirteen years in the cave. They completely engrossed themselves in learning Torah and were provided sustenance from Heaven.

Rabbi Shimon’s opinion is quoted by the Gemara (*Berachot* 35b), “If a person plows during the plowing season, plants during the planting season, cuts during the cutting season, threshes during the threshing season, and winnows during the winnowing season what will be with Torah? When Yisrael do the will of Hashem, their work is done by others, as the pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 61:5), ‘Foreigners will stand and tend your flocks.’ Yet, when Yisrael do not do the will of Hashem, they have to do all their work themselves, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 11:14), ‘That you may gather in your grain.’ Not only that, but they have to do the work of others, as it says (*ibid.* 28:48), ‘So you will serve your enemies.’”

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva stated (*Sanhedrin* 99b), “Prune every day; prune the field every day.” Rabbi Yitzchak bar Abdimi asked, “What is meant by the pasuk (*Mishlei* 16:26), ‘The working spirit works for itself, when its mouth humbles itself to it’? This means that when a person labors in Torah, the Torah labors on his behalf.”

Although Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar’s intentions were favorable, their actions were not. It was considered as though they were destroying the world, since every Jew is regarded as a complete world. They were promised that if they were to work the land and cultivate it as

necessary, they would not sin (*Berachot* 34b). The way of the world is that a person learns Torah and concurrently works the land, earning his living honestly. This is considered a mitzvah, since he is maintaining Creation. This is because there are many mitzvot associated with working the soil, e.g., *ma'aser*, *terumah*, *leket*, *shikchah*, *pe'ah*, and *bikurim*.

Thus, one who toils the ground is not transgressing at all. On the contrary, he is doing a mitzvah. Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar should have understood that not everyone could reach their elevated level. They themselves attained it only after they had spent considerable time in the cave. Proof is that they burned the people who worked the land only after they left the cave, with the holiness that they had attained there. Abaye says (*Berachot* 35b), “Many did as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and were not successful.” This teaches that as well as learning Torah, one has an obligation to engage in an occupation, as it says that *derech erez* precedes the Torah (*Avot*).

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chizkiyahu did not marry, since he saw in a Divine revelation that his offspring would not be righteous. For that reason, Yeshayahu told him that he would lose both this world and the Next. He was meant to do that which was incumbent upon him, without meddling with Heavenly accounts. Seemingly, Chizkiyahu was justified, for he didn't want to beget children who would transgress the word of Hashem. Furthermore, why didn't the *Navi* warn him before pronouncing punishment upon him? Why did Chizkiyahu turn his head to the wall in tefillah?
- Chizkiyahu should not have meddled in the accounts of Heaven. He should have had children and helped them do teshuvah, if need be. Man will be held accountable for every one of his actions. He must weigh every deed to ensure it is done according to the will of Hashem, without making calculations that are not in his realm.
- Chizkiyahu repented upon hearing the words of the prophet. He turned to the wall, a metaphor for the wall that had been erected between himself and Hakadosh Baruch Hu on account of his sin. He never despaired of Hashem's limitless mercy.

- When bringing others closer to Hashem, one should also not make calculations about the future. One should not reject anyone at all, for in the end maybe he will do teshuvah. If not he, maybe one of his children will return to Hashem. One should not question what will come from all of his efforts, for we don't see immediate results. Rabbi Akiva was originally an ignoramus, but eventually returned to his hometown with twenty-four thousand disciples. The results of his efforts were astounding. Each person can witness tremendous results, if he just puts in the effort. We must do our part and try to bring everyone close to our Father in Heaven; surely our efforts will be similarly blessed.

### **A Practical Lesson**

One who is engaged in *kiruv rechokim* should not calculate whether or not it is worthwhile investing in this venture, but, rather, make every effort necessary to bring others under the wings of the *Shechinah*. An educator should certainly never expel a boy from the yeshiva without good cause, for he may turn out to be a great Rosh Yeshiva or *talmid chacham*. Chizkiyahu foresaw that he would beget wicked offspring; nevertheless, he was punished for not marrying, since maybe his children or their progeny would do teshuvah in the future and become tzaddikim.

## **FORTUNATE IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN YOU**

### **FROM THE LETTER WRITTEN FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE SEFER DERECH CHAIM**

I pray to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that with His help the booklets soon to be published will be beneficial to the public. Likewise, all of the information contained therein should benefit and inspire every Jew to fortify himself in Avodat Hashem and *mesirut nefesh*. I don't, *chas v'chalilah*, envy those of greater stature than myself; on the contrary, I will try to learn from them how to improve my deeds.

How many miracles do I witness in my travels around the world! Every day, I see numerous wonders of Hashem, specifically how He tends to the needs of His creatures. The more kindness I discover, the stronger becomes my connection to Him and His Torah, bound with ropes of love.

“Master of Legions, praiseworthy is the man who trusts in You” (*Tehillim* 84:13). One who has full faith in Hashem overcomes all obstacles which the Satan places before him in order to distance him from the truth. The Satan allows a person to do many righteous acts, e.g., to contribute generously to charitable causes, which is especially important in our times, when so many people are beset with financial problems. But there is one area that the Satan particularly attacks. That is Torah study and listening to words of *mussar*. The Satan knows that as soon as words of Torah enter a person’s ears, he will lose a good “disciple.”

Torah lights up the eyes of a person, instilling in his heart love and fear of Hashem and love of mitzvot and tefillah. The problem is that a person finds it difficult to change his habits. It is challenging to switch one’s lifestyle from one extreme to the other. Therefore, he claims that he has plenty of time to listen to words of Torah and to do teshuvah. But he should honestly ask himself, “Who guarantees that I will live till the day I decide to do teshuvah?” Chazal state (*Yoma* 8:9), “One who says, ‘I will sin and I will repent, I will sin and I will repent,’ will never be given the chance to do teshuvah.”

The truth is that every Jew wishes to do teshuvah and to truly fear Hashem. But it is difficult to sever himself from the vanities of this world. A person is afraid he will become bored without the pleasures he is used to. This is a grave mistake. One who truly believes in Hashem understands that He gave us Torah to pursue with all our strength.

A person must believe in Hashem with complete faith, not partially. Likewise, one must constantly place his trust in Hashem, not just when he feels he needs Him, rejecting Him when he feels secure. The pasuk (*Devarim* 32:15) refers to this in the statement, “Yeshurun became fat and

kicked.” Similarly, one should not believe in only part of the Torah. Torah is a complete unit, given to us as an edict from the King at Har Sinai. Torah is our very life.

This is the Torah which Am Yisrael, in all their locations, throughout the generations, dances around on Simchat Torah, kissing it and holding it high, expressing their tremendous love for it. How is it possible to be happy, embracing and kissing a Sefer Torah, when at other times one may ignore the mitzvot it contains? One kisses something that he loves. How can we contradict ourselves on Simchat Torah, kissing and dancing with the Torah which we may have spurned throughout the year?!

The Rambam states (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:8), “There are three types of people who deny the Torah. The first is one who claims that any part of the Torah, even one pasuk, or one word, is not Divine, or says that Moshe originated it. The second is one who denies the Oral Torah and its commentaries on the Written Torah. Tzadok and Baytus were examples of such heretics. And the third type is the one who claims that Hashem exchanged one mitzvah for another.”

I am certain that in those moments when a person is dancing with the Sefer Torah, kissing it and holding it close to him, he is a true servant before his Master. The problem starts when the Sefer Torah is returned to the Ark, and he leaves the Beit Hakeneset. That is when the true war begins between man and his *Yetzer Hara*. On the one hand, his *Yetzer Hatov* pulls him to stay connected to the Sefer Torah; on the other hand, the *Yetzer Hara* draws him astray.

The outcome of this battle depends upon the person’s choice. Does he choose life or death? This choice is critical, for all of his future decisions and feelings, indeed, his very life, depend on the path he takes when leaving the synagogue on Simchat Torah.

Let us not forget that the exuberant days of Sukkot come after the Yamim Noraim. Man is in an elevated frame of spiritual joy. Certainly,

Simchat Torah is the time to actualize the potential of the previous Days of Awe.

For this reason, it is called חג העצרת – Chag Ha’atzeret (*Vayikra* 23:36). The word עצרת can mean “halt.” A person is enjoined to stop for a moment and think only of the Torah. Yes, to simply ponder Torah. This is a person’s true holiday. The word חג (holiday) means joy, as in the verse in Tehillim (107:27). Dancing is also a form of happiness, as the Gemara asks regarding the joy of a *chatan* and *kallah* (*Ketubot* 16b), “How do we dance before the bride?” Only on the festivals does one feel true joy, and there is no joy greater than that of Simchat Torah, receiving the Torah and fulfilling it.

The words חג העצרת have the same numerical value as עץ התורה (the tree of Torah). This refers to the pasuk (*Mishlei* 3:18), “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” Torah is compared to a tree which needs to be grasped. And, just as a tree has many roots and branches, so, too, is Torah full of many mitzvot.

The festival of Simchat Torah is called “Shemini Atzeret” (*Bamidbar* 29:35). After the body is secure in the knowledge that it obtained atonement on the Yamim Noraim, the holiday of Sukkot brings it pleasure in fine food and drink. On Simchat Torah, the physical delights are a means for sustaining the *neshamah*, a portion of Hashem.

Man’s task in this world is to return his *neshamah*, when the time comes, complete and clean. The body is merely a vessel in which to house the *neshamah*. In order that the *neshamah* return to its source under the Heavenly Throne complete and clean, and not need to return to this world in a reincarnation, or be banished to Gehinnom, one must live according to the Torah. This is the spiritual purpose of the day of שמני עצרת (Shemini Atzeret). The word שמני connected to נשמה (soul). The *neshamah* cannot accomplish its purpose without the help of the body, which toils in Torah, and thus enables the *neshamah* to cleave to the tree of life.

This is the meaning of the name of the holiday שמניי חג העצרת. The *neshamah* becomes fattened (שמן) through the joy and dancing and Torah learning. Most importantly, one should feel bound (עצור) to the *neshamah*. The joy of Simchat Torah starts on the festival and continues on to the next day's Torah study. This will set the tone for the entire year. The main aspect of joy in Torah is its study.

We should pray to the Creator to help us love Him and serve Him with a complete heart, and that we should be able to rectify everything that we have come down to this world to repair. The body and the soul become improved by means of Torah study. In this manner, we will merit the arrival of the Redeemer, speedily in our days, Amen.

### ———— In Summary ————

- A person must constantly make a personal accounting to see where he is holding spiritually regarding his Torah study and mitzvah performance. Often, the *Yetzer Hara* will convince a person to donate charity to Torah institutions, and even fulfill a number of mitzvot, in order to still his conscience. But this type of person is called a heretic. Torah is one unit, which no one is permitted to divide, picking and choosing which mitzvot meet his fancy and which are too difficult for him to keep.
- The *Yetzer Hara* particularly attacks Torah learning. He tries with all his might to prevent a person from learning Torah. For a little bit of light dispels much darkness.
- One should never delay his decision to do teshuvah, even though it may be difficult to follow through. It is difficult to break ingrained habits and also to change one's lifestyle, which is often required when doing teshuvah. However, no one knows when his end will be and if he postpones doing teshuvah, he may never manage to do so.
- If a person really wants to connect to the Torah, and feel the joy of dancing together with it on Simchat Torah, how can he act contrary to what is stated therein? Dancing and kissing the Torah is an indication of one's love for it. Indeed, every Jewish person has a love for Torah. The true test is when one

leaves the synagogue after Simchat Torah. Has he retained all that he resolved in his learning and mitzvah performance? If a person truly wants to do teshuvah, he must convert his desires to actions and return to his Creator.

## ACQUIRING THE WORLD TO COME IN ONE MOMENT

Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya visited every harlot that he heard of. Once, he heard about a certain woman who lived next to the sea, who charged a sack of *dinarim* for her services. He took a sack of *dinarim*, and crossed seven seas in order to reach her. At the time of the sin, she let out wind. She said, “Just like this wind will never return to its source, so, too, will Elazar ben Durdaya’s teshuvah never be accepted.”

He was so devastated at the thought that he could never do teshuvah that he went and sat between the mountains and the valleys, and asked them to request mercy for him. They replied, “Before we ask mercy for you, we must ask for ourselves.” He asked heaven and earth to beg for mercy on his behalf. They replied the same. He asked the sun and moon to beg for mercy for him, and they gave the same answer.

At that point, he said, “The matter depends only on me.” He placed his head between his knees, and let out a bitter cry, weeping until his soul departed. A Heavenly Voice emitted from on High, proclaiming, “Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for life in the World to Come!” Rebbi cried, upon hearing this, stating, “There is one who acquires his world (i.e. portion in the World to Come) in many years, and there is one who acquires it in one moment. Not only are those who do teshuvah accepted, but they are also called “Rabbi” (*Avodah Zarah* 17a).

This episode raises many questions.

1. How was it possible that a woman who spent all her days in sin managed to bring someone to teshuvah? She was in the category of one

who causes the masses to sin (*Sotah* 47a; *Sanhedrin* 107b). Why was he the only one who merited to do teshuvah through her recommendation?

2. Her statement “Just like this wind will never return, so, too, will Elazar ben Durdaya’s teshuvah never be accepted” is difficult to understand. How did she know that Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya’s teshuvah would not be accepted? Was she a prophetess?

3. Did Rabbi Elazar truly wish to do teshuvah, or did he merely wish to find out whether or not his teshuvah would be accepted?

4. If he intended to do teshuvah, how could he have thought to sin with this woman? Chazal say (*Yoma* 88b), “One who states he will sin and repent is not given the opportunity to repent.” Why was he given the opportunity to do teshuvah after he sinned, when he had realized the severity of the sin beforehand?

When a person displays *mesirut nefesh* for an aveirah, to the extent that he is willing to risk his life for it, Hashem arouses his heart to teshuvah, or influences him to teshuvah through someone else. This is in order to prevent him from sinning in the first place, since he stands to lose his eternal life on account of a momentary sin.

This is because Hashem does not desire the death of the wicked, but prefers that they repent and live, as the *Navi* says (*Yechezkel* 33:11). Hashem wants His people to live. It is only after He arouses the person to teshuvah that He leaves the choice in man’s hand. Man is the one to decide whether or not to listen to that inner voice telling him to repent. If he heeds it, it will be good for him in this world and in the Next. If, *chas v’chalilah*, he does not, his end will be bitter (*Bamidbar* 24:20).

The *Divrei Chaim* writes the following. Sometimes, Hashem takes away a person’s free choice. Instead of doing wrong, he is convinced to do good. This is a tremendous gift from Heaven.

This is what we happened with Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. His entire life was spent in wickedness; he risked his life to cross seven seas just in

order to fill his lusts. This was all the plan of the *Yetzer Hara*, who had him tightly tied in his trap.

The fact that Hashem was helping Rabbi Elazar by taking away his free will is hinted to by the following. He had to cross the seven seas two times, which adds up to fourteen; adding one for the value of the word itself equals fifteen, the numerical equivalent of Hashem's Name יה-י, which has the power to rescue a person from the *Yetzer Hara's* evil plots. Moshe Rabbeinu blessed Yehoshua (*Sotah* 34b; *Zohar* III, 158b), "May G-d (יה-י) save you from the conspiracy of the spies (מרגלים)." It is known that the *Yetzer Hara* is also called רגל (foot). The great *Tanna*, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (*Zohar* II) expounds on the pasuk in Mishlei (25:17), "Let your feet be scarce in your fellow's house" to mean, "Let your inclination be scarce in having control over you." The *Yetzer Hara* is called "foot" for he habituates (מרגל) a person to walk in the direction of sin.

Hashem took away the free will of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya specifically at the time he was sinning, and through the woman with whom he sinned. She herself was the one who rebuked him, reminding him of the ways of teshuvah. The words were put into her mouth from Heaven in order to arouse him to do teshuvah. He would literally be risking his life were he to return home after the sin, endeavoring to cross the seven seas once again.

The danger to his life was greater on his way home. For, en route to the harlot he was driven by the power of lust. His tremendous craving for sin surmounted the perils of the seas. But, on his way back, physically and emotionally spent, he would be taking his life in his hands by trying to cross the seas once again. Therefore, Hashem spared him from the plot of the Satan by means of the Name יה-י.

It seems that already on his way to sin, he had thoughts of teshuvah. He already thought that maybe it wasn't a good idea to place himself into danger to do this aveirah. This thought certainly wasn't considered actual teshuvah, yet it was enough to warrant *siyata di'Shemaya*, as it says (*Shir*

*Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3), “Open for me an opening in teshuvah the size of a needle’s hole.”

Perhaps, on his way to sin, the thought of regret was placed in his mind, or he was told to repent via a messenger. It is possible that his free will was removed. Proof is that he didn’t merely have thoughts of teshuvah; the woman herself was the messenger sent to bring him back onto the right path.

We find that he accepted the woman’s words, evidence that his heart was not blocked to receiving rebuke, because he had already considered the matter beforehand. She read his thoughts, as it were. She was sent from *Shamayim* to awaken him to do teshuvah. She was from the root of the *kelippah* and impurity. When he heard her speaking in this manner, the full Name of Hashem was aroused within him, delivering him from the wiles of the Satan.

Had he not been aroused by the Name of Hashem, and wished to sin, he would have responded, “Who appointed you as judge? I put myself in danger in order to sin with you, not to hear words of rebuke!” From the fact that he paid attention to her words and internalized them, we can deduce that the resolution to repent began brewing in his heart. At the time a person sins, there is an inner voice discouraging him from continuing. Unfortunately, a person often ignores this voice.

When we witness any person, a tzaddik or an ordinary man, who had the opportunity to sin, but resisted the temptation and did not sin, it is a sign from on High that he was helped by Heaven. He just needed to make a small effort to desist from the sin, and the rest of the work was done by Hashem, through the Name ה-י.

If, *chas v’chalilah*, after thinking over the matter and understanding its ramifications he still transgresses, he is classified as one who says “I will sin and I will repent.” Then he is not given the opportunity to do teshuvah (*Yoma* 88b; *Pesikta Rabbah* 45:1).

In Chazal's narration of the incident with Rabbi Elazar, what happened with the woman is not noted. Did she also do teshuvah after seeing what happened with him, or did she remain in her depraved state?

It seems fitting to say that the words "Just as the bad smell will never return to its source, so, too, will the teshuvah of Elazar ben Durdaya not be accepted" echoed in her ears, as well. Aveirot are termed "bad-smelling." They are not retractable, and there is no limit to the teshuvah necessary for forgiveness. Just as Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya accepted her words, she most likely also took them to heart, refraining from such behavior in the future.

### **Making Oneself into a Vessel to Retain Blessing**

The story continues with the heavens and earth, etc., refusing to accede to Rabbi Elazar's request to ask for mercy on his behalf. There is no value to tefillah without teshuvah. The core of our prayer is not that we ask Hashem for forgiveness, but, rather, confessions of the heart, regret for the past and resolutions for the future. In this manner, sin is completely erased.

The Rambam writes, regarding this matter (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2): "What is teshuvah? That the sinner leaves his sin, banishing it from his thoughts, and resolving never to return to it, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 55:7), 'Let the wicked one forsake his ways.' In this manner, he will regret his transgressions, as Yirmeyahu proclaims (31:18), 'For after my returning, I regretted.' Only Hashem, Who knows what is truly in a person's heart, can attest to the fact that he, indeed, will never return to that sin. One must specify the sins orally and state that he removes any vestige of them from his heart."

This is true repentance. But one who stops doing an aveirah for a certain amount of time, but then continues to do it, even though he is rewarded for refraining from committing that sin during that time, is not considered to have done teshuvah. He will not be forgiven for his

previous sins, since they still draw him to commit more sins of the same nature.

We find many people who, without any prior preparation, approach tzaddikim for their *berachah*, and to become affected by their *kedushah*. They hope Hashem will shower goodness upon them in the merit of the tzaddik. But however much the tzaddik wants to help this person, his blessing has no vessel to contain it. Instead he finds a broken one, incapable of holding anything.

Chazal tell us (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:1), “There is no vessel which contains blessing like peace, as it says (*Tehillim* 29:11), ‘Hashem will give might to His nation, Hashem will bless His nation with peace.’” This means that first one must reach perfection and only then, is he capable of accepting blessing and retaining it. The word “peace” (שלום) has the same root as the word “perfection” (שלימות).

The Ramban comments, “When a person experiences an awakening of love and fear for the Creator, he should ensure that he makes a container to confine it. This refers to a mitzvah, like giving *tzedakah* or learning Torah. For it is known that when a person is suddenly aroused to teshuvah, this inspiration is really light from Above, a type of *neshamah*. A person is enjoined to clothe this *neshamah* in a body, so that it may have vitality and support, and not disintegrate, *chas v’chalilah*.”

According to this, we can understand the following pasuk in Shir Hashirim (2:7) “If you dare provoke G-d to hate me or disturb His love for me while He still desires it.” The word for “desire” is חפץ. This can also refer to an item, or a vessel. When a person feels a surge of love for his Maker, he should encapsulate it in a mitzvah, which serves as the vessel to contain it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon one who approaches a tzaddik to do teshuvah beforehand, in order to make himself into a vessel able to contain the blessing he so desires.

Now we can understand the words of heaven and earth to Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya, stating that all their entreaties on his behalf would not

accomplish anything if he himself did not do teshuvah. For, if he did not make himself into a fitting vessel to accept the blessing from on High, which was awaiting him at the time of the woman's rebuke, their prayers would be ineffective. First, he must repent wholeheartedly, making himself into a vessel able to contain the bounty and blessing from Heaven. Only afterwards, could he ask others to help him find the right, true path, as the Gemara states (*Shabbat* 104a), "One who comes to be purified, is assisted."

Indeed, after he understood this message, thoughts of teshuvah entered his mind. Therefore, he came to the realization that "the matter is dependent upon me." He felt such tremendous regret for his actions that he died. A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating that he was destined for the World to Come.

Conversely, Acher (Elisha ben Avuyah) also heard a Voice from Heaven. But this one stated, "Return, you wayward sons, except for Acher" (*Chagigah* 15a). This meant that even if he would do teshuvah, it would not be accepted. Why?

There was an intrinsic difference between Acher and Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. For, when Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya was chastised by the woman and informed that his teshuvah would not be accepted, he immediately left her, going to pray for himself, and making himself into a worthy vessel to accept Heavenly blessing. He came to the conclusion that if he had been sent this arousal to teshuvah from Heaven, and no entity was willing to assist him, it must be that he had to do teshuvah himself, without any help.

But Acher behaved differently. He should have also understood that if he was given a message about teshuvah by Hashem, it was a sign that his repentance was desired. Otherwise, he would have been left to do as he wished without receiving this message. However, the purpose of the Heavenly Voice was to let him know that everyone receives Heavenly assistance in doing teshuvah, except for Acher. He had to come to

teshuvah through his own efforts. Then his teshuvah would certainly have been accepted. He should have taken to heart the fact that Hashem is all-merciful, and all of Yisrael have a portion in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 90:1). Even the most hardened criminal is able to mend his ways. However, he had to reach this level on his own, without relying on Heavenly assistance.

Instead of integrating this message, he took it simply at face value and thought he had no chance to do teshuvah. He fell to the depths of depravity. After assuming he was cut off from the World to Come, he decided to at least enjoy this world. He continued in his corrupt ways, continually distancing himself from truth.

On this, Rebbi cried, stating (*Avodah Zarah* 17a), “There is one who acquires his portion in the World to Come in many years, and there is one who acquires it in a moment.” Rebbi continued, “It is not sufficient that *ba’alei teshuvah* are accepted; they are called by the title ‘Rabbi.’” Rebbi naturally loved all of Yisrael. He was pained over the fact that the sinners among our nation seemingly have no hope to merit a portion in the World to Come.

Although they are so far from the truth, and they have no Heavenly assistance to return in teshuvah, Hashem’s Hand is always outstretched to accept returnees, if they will only do teshuvah of their own accord. Even though it is difficult to do so, they will certainly be accepted with open arms.

Especially when people think they have no hope, through expending great exertion in doing teshuvah on their own, they are able to attain great heights, earning life in the Hereafter, and even meriting the title “Rabbi.”

This is why Chazal state (*Berachot* 34b; *Zohar* I, 129b), “In a place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, perfectly righteous people are not permitted to stand.” The *ba’alei teshuvah* arrived at their level with much investment,

without *siyata di'Shemaya*. They are, therefore, closer to Hashem than others. They drew themselves to Hashem with wholehearted willingness and superhuman efforts.

We see that at times, a person is aroused from on High to do teshuvah, but pays no attention. He certainly does not prepare himself to receive the blessings which Heaven wishes to confer upon him. In this manner, he misses many opportunities to repent and come close to Hashem.

One should “listen to his messages” and pay attention to the signals he is given from *Shamayim*. He should strive to learn from the good character traits of his comrades. Everything that he is shown from Above is intended to teach him a lesson. If he is in the company of specific people, he is meant to learn from them. This will help him do teshuvah for his previous misdeeds. May Hashem help us go in His ways and have good *middot*, and thus we will fulfill the verse, “You shall choose life,” Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal relate that Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya traversed seven seas in order to sin with a specific woman. But she informed him that his teshuvah wouldn't be accepted. He beseeched the heaven and earth, the mountains and valleys, etc., to ask for Heavenly mercy, but all refused. Finally, he prayed for himself until his soul expired. A Heavenly Voice emanated, proclaiming that he was destined for a portion in the World to Come. Concerning this, Rebbi stated, “There are those who earn eternal life in a moment. Not only that, but they merit the distinction of being called “Rabbi.”
- How could this woman possibly have influenced Rabbi Elazar to mend his ways, when she herself was steeped in sin? Why didn't she influence other people to do teshuvah? And how did she know that his teshuvah wouldn't be accepted in heaven; was she a prophetess? What did Rabbi Elazar do with this information? Did he intend to repent, in which case, how could he have sinned with her? We know that one who says, “I will sin and I will repent” is prevented from doing teshuvah.

- This incident teaches that at times, when Heaven sees that a person is about to plummet to the depths, even risking his life in order to sin, he is warned about the gravity of the offense. At times, his free choice is removed in order that he not commit the crime. Sometimes, another person will approach him, recommending that he do teshuvah.
- One should listen to the inner voice that tells him to cease sinning and return to the proper path. If a person would heed this voice, utilizing the arousal he received from Heaven, he will merit to do complete teshuvah. This is what happened with Rabbi Elazar, who traversed seven seas in order to sin. The Name of Hashem, ה-י, helped him do teshuvah. For, if he had not wanted to repent, he would have repelled the woman. But he paid attention to her words, and did teshuvah.
- Tefillah alone cannot effect teshuvah. A person must also regret his actions and admit to them. He must desire to do teshuvah and return to the proper path. This is what the heavens and earth told Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. Their prayers on his behalf were ineffectual as long as he himself did not do teshuvah. He understood this message and realized that “the matter is dependent on me.” If a person ignores the voice warning him about the gravity of his situation, his teshuvah is not accepted. When someone receives an arousal to teshuvah from Heaven, he must immediately grasp the opportunity and return to his Creator.

## HOW GREAT IS TESHUVAH

In a place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim are not permitted to stand (*Berachot 34b*). How can we understand that *ba'alei teshuvah* are on a higher level than perfect tzaddikim, who dedicated their entire lives solely to the service of Hashem?

We can answer with the pasuk (*Yirmeyahu 2:2*), “I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness...” A person can arrive at true recognition of Hashem only by means of Torah study. For, without Torah, even if a person were to witness open miracles, their impression would eventually wear off. Bnei

Yisrael left Mitzrayim before they received the Torah, and thus did not have the means to fully recognize Hashem. In spite of this, they followed Him into the Wilderness, in an uncultivated land. This is the “kindness of your youth” that Hakadosh Baruch Hu remembers to our credit.

Similarly is it with every person. If a person decides to do teshuvah before he has ever learned Torah, he is acting with tremendous *mesirut nefesh*. It is extremely difficult to do teshuvah without having tasted the sweet taste of Torah. One who does so must invest great self-sacrifice in order to return to Hashem. It is as if he is traveling in the Wilderness to follow Hashem. This is why Chazal praise *ba’alei teshuvah* so excessively.

When Bnei Yisrael were about to leave Egypt, we find that on the one hand they had succeeded in keeping the fire of their Jewishness burning brightly, by means of preserving their Jewish names, mode of dress, and language (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 48a; *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). They merited salvation by means of these three things. On the other hand, we find that they had descended to the forty-ninth level of impurity (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a). How was this possible?

Without Torah, as stated previously, one is unable to remain steadfast in his faith. Therefore, because Bnei Yisrael were not involved in Torah they descended to the lowest level of impurity. For that reason, the tribe of Levi, who, as it is known, engaged in Torah study even while in Mitzrayim (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:20; *Tanchuma, Va’era* 6), was protected from idol worship while there (*Yoma* 66b; *Chagigah* 6b). Likewise, the Torah protected them from sinning with the Golden Calf (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 3:1).

We can take a practical lesson from this. Even if a person is in a yeshiva, but does not put effort into his learning, he can, *chalilah*, fall to the forty-ninth level of impurity. Specifically when he decides to leave the yeshiva is he in need of Heavenly assistance so that he should not fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, who always waits to ambush him. The best advice is for one to cling to Hashem, man’s Ultimate Help and Protector. This is borne out by the words Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shemot*

10:1), “Come to Pharaoh.” He was, so to speak, telling Moshe, “Come along with Me, and I will protect you from all those who wish you harm.”

But all of these promises of protection will be useless to a person who has not rid himself from the *middah* of mockery, which is especially pernicious. Mockery has the capacity to damage anything good, and even great men who fail to sufficiently shield themselves from this trait will find that they fail because of it. Yishmael is an example of this, as the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 21:9), “Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Avraham, mocking.” Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 53:16) that “mocking” is a reference to idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed. Therefore, Sarah immediately insisted that Avraham “drive out this slave woman with her son” (*Bereishit* 21:10). Mockery has the power to harm even a tzaddik as great as Yitzchak Avinu.

A person must be careful not only concerning major sins, but even in seemingly minor matters. We find that Avraham Avinu merited inheriting Eretz Yisrael in the *zechut* of the mitzvah of the Omer. The Midrash says (*Vayikra Rabbah* 28:6), “Let the mitzvah of the Omer not be light in your eyes, for by means of it, Avraham merited to inherit the Land of Canaan.”

We see from here that even a great person should not aspire to withstand only difficult tests. He should also be scrupulous in the small, seemingly insignificant matters. He will thus pre-empt the attack of the *Yetzer Hara*. At first, the Satan entices a person to transgress something trivial, and then lures him into the most serious sins (*Shabbat* 105b). When one is careful in more minor matters, he will not stoop to sin in more serious issues. On the contrary, this is how he will rise to greatness.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu entered a covenant with Bnei Yisrael in three areas: Shabbat, *milah*, and tefillin (*Tikkunei Zohar* 40a, 62b; *Zohar Chadash* III, 29a). How could Hashem make a covenant with Am Yisrael when they were still sunk in forty-nine levels of impurity? Who would deign to enter a covenant with a disloyal party?

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Mi'Berditchev, zt"l, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, in his sefer *Kedushat Levi* (on Pesach) states the following. When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, Hashem implanted a great light in their hearts, causing them to come to a clear acknowledgment of the Creator. As the Exodus unfolded, the light of Shabbat and tefillin became commensurately increased (*Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Parashat Bo*). Only afterward, did He withdraw it from them, so that each person then had the ability to arrive at this recognition through his own exertion, correcting, during each of the forty-nine days, that which they had damaged while still in Egypt.

When Hashem entered into the covenant with the nation, they still had that special light which illuminated for them the greatness of Hashem. They were able to understand the underlying aspects of Shabbat, tefillin, and *brit milah*, the components of this covenant. Even after this light was removed, they were able to rectify through their own efforts what they had previously damaged. This was in order to maintain the covenant. They were shown that *tumah* is worthless in the face of the greatness of *kedushah*.

These words of the *Kedushat Levi* can be applied to *ba'alei teshuvah*. The arousal experienced by the *ba'al teshuvah* comes from the power of the light which Hashem instills within him. After the *ba'al teshuvah* has been influenced by this light to recognize Hashem, He removes this light, so that the *ba'al teshuvah* must now elevate himself through his own efforts. This is the praise of the *ba'al teshuvah*. When Hashem helps him to do teshuvah in this way, even tzaddikim cannot stand in his presence.

According to this, we can understand how Pharaoh, in spite of the plagues which he endured, regretted allowing Bnei Yisrael to leave Mitzrayim. He said (*Shemot Rabbah* 20:5), "Woe is to me that I sent out Bnei Yisrael." He even pursued them, in order to retrieve them and bring them back with him to Egypt. He knew that Bnei Yisrael had reached the forty-ninth level of impurity. If they were to descend to the fiftieth level, they would be at the point of no return, *chalilah*. He, therefore, wanted

with all his heart to keep them in Egypt just a little bit longer, and thus, they would be his forever.

But this was not the will of Hashem. He gave Bnei Yisrael the mitzvot of *korban* Pesach and others, while yet in Mitzrayim, in order to forestall their descent to the fiftieth level. The light which He had shone upon them helped them recognize His existence. It also propelled them to enter into the covenant with Him.

When Pharaoh took note of the fact that this luminous light had been removed from Bnei Yisrael, enabling them to now climb out of the forty-nine levels of impurity in which they were entrenched, he immediately regretted banishing them and pursued them, endeavoring to encourage them to return to Mitzrayim while they were still rooted in *tumah*. If not for the kindness of Hashem, he would most likely have succeeded. Bnei Yisrael even complained to Moshe (*Shemot* 14:11), “What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt?” indicating to what level they had sunk.

The *sefer Divrei Chaim (Parashat Beshalach)* explains that this complaint led to Hashem telling Moshe to instruct Bnei Yisrael not to pray to Him at the shores of the Yam Suf with the Egyptians in hot pursuit, as it says (*Shemot* 14:14), “Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent.”

The reason Hashem preferred they remain silent rather than pray, was that their prayer was combined with the complaint regarding leaving Egypt. They would rather have remained there. Therefore, Hashem preferred that they should not pray. This type of prayer would have no prospect of being answered, since it was not said wholeheartedly. It would be better left unsaid. They were told to remain silent, in order to show them the might of Hashem’s salvation, which was not contingent upon their tefillah.

Perhaps this can be explained in the following way. Why did Hashem silence their prayers? Because He constantly wanted to remind them of

the “favor” they did for Him by following Him into the Wilderness, far away from civilization. Their complaint against Hashem negated that “favor.” Hashem wants to bestow reward on His people, even for following Him in the Wilderness before they received the Torah.

For that reason, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself implanted a great light into their hearts, so that they would recognize Him. They followed Him, inspired by this light, even after it was removed from them. Hashem caused them to follow Him so that He would always deem it a *chessed* on their part. If not for that illumination, they would have remained submerged in the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, incapable of following Him into the wasteland of the Wilderness. This is a kindness of Hashem. He creates light to illuminate man’s way in the darkness, in order to reward him afterward.

### ————— In Summary —————

- *Ba’alei teshuvah* reach a higher level than complete tzaddikim, for, while tzaddikim are empowered against their *Yetzer Hara* through the Torah that they learn, *ba’alei teshuvah* do not yet possess the tool of Torah. They must expend tremendous self-sacrifice to leave their mundane, earthly world and surmount the physical, without the aid of Torah.
- In order for a person to remain strong in his faith, he must be punctilious not to fall in seemingly small matters, *chalilah*. Bnei Yisrael nearly reached the abyss of the fiftieth level of impurity, because they were without Torah. When Bnei Yisrael were yet in Egypt, they needed Divine illumination in order to recognize Hashem. Because they endeavored, by their own efforts, to emerge from the forty-nine levels of *tumah*, they merited entering into a covenant with Hashem.
- This is the reason why Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in His great mercy, had compassion on His nation, fighting for them even without their praying to Him. He knew they would follow Him into the Wilderness. It is the way of Hashem to do good. For, even if someone is at the forty-ninth level of impurity, Hashem creates a great light for him. Hashem considers it a tremendous “favor” that the *ba’al teshuvah* serves Him with such *mesirut nefesh*.

## BRING US BACK TO YOU, HASHEM

Yirmeyahu Hanavi entreats Hashem (*Eichah* 5:21), “Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old.” What is the purpose of the words, “and we shall return”? Certainly, if Hashem brings us back to Him, we will return?!

Furthermore, why do we ask Hashem to “bring us back”? Chazal (*Berachot* 33b; *Zohar* I, 59a) tell us that everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven. If so, teshuvah is up to the person himself. He must return to Hashem; it is not Hashem’s responsibility to bring him back.

The true desire of a person’s *neshamah* is to be constantly connected with Hashem, as the pasuk says (*Devarim* 4:4), “But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d, you are all alive today.” It is the *Yetzer Hara* who would have us sever our connection with Hashem, through his corrupt counsel. Chazal proclaim (*Berachot* 17a), “Master of the World! It is known and revealed before You that we desire to do Your will. Who hinders us? The yeast in the dough (i.e., the *Yetzer Hara*), and subservience to the gentile kingdoms. May it be Your will to save us from them, and we will return to do Your commands with a complete heart.”

In these difficult days of exile, troubles increase from day to day, causing people to forget their purpose in this world. We see people, who, despite their belief in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, are not vigilant in mitzvah observance, transgressing Shabbat and other aveirot. But, in their heart of hearts, they do believe in Hashem and His tzaddikim. Likewise, they go to the Beit Hakeneset and do good deeds.

Evidence that they do believe is that when they hear words of inspiration, or are shaken up by bad tidings, they immediately turn to Hashem, supplicating Him to bring them back to Him through teshuvah. One could say that this is mere lip-service, and not service of the heart. But the fact that they speak this way is sufficient proof that deep in the

subconscious *neshamah* they desire to return to their source. It is only the *Yetzer Hara* that prevents them.

Often, due to a momentary arousal, a spark is ignited. Little by little, it turns into a flame, spurring them on to the right path. Their entreaty “Bring us back to You, Hashem” effects a Heavenly arousal (see *Zohar* I, 88a). Hashem does not wait for them to make the first move, which is nearly impossible, considering the state they are in. He Himself brings them closer to Him, by removing the *Yetzer Hara* from them. Only afterward, do they return of their own accord, having attained true recognition of Hashem.

The words “renew our days as of old,” refer to the days before the sin of Adam Harishon, days that were truly good. This was before the Serpent caused Man to become defiled by sin and there was no *Yetzer Hara* (*Zohar* I, 36b). Everyone prays to reach the level of that bygone era, to be cleansed of all sin.

Bnei Yisrael call out (*Eichah Rabbah* 5:21), “Bring us back to You.” Hashem responds, “The matter is in your hands, as the pasuk states (*Malachi* 3:7), ‘Return to Me and I will return to you!’” They counter, “Master of the world! It is up to You, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 85:5), ‘Return us, O G-d of our salvation.’” For this reason, we plead, “Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old (כקדם).” We wish to return to the level of Adam Harishon, about whom the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 3:24), “And having driven out the man, He stationed at the east (מקדם) of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim...” The word קדם means “as of old” as well as “at the east.”

A person always wants to return, and wants Hashem to “force” him to do teshuvah, bringing him back to Him. This is illustrated by the following case. If a man refuses to divorce his wife, he should be struck until he agrees to do so. How can a forced divorce be valid? Isn’t it a prerequisite that the person divorce his wife of his own desire?

The Rambam (*Hilchot Ishut, halachah 20*) explains that a person is called compelled only if he is forced to do something which he is not obligated by the Torah. But if his *Yetzer Hara* got the better of him, causing him to transgress a mitzvah or do an aveirah, and he is struck until he does the correct action, or refrains from the sin, it is not a form of coercion. He is the one who “coerced” himself into this negative behavior.

This is the case with a man who is refusing to give his wife a divorce. He truthfully does desire to remain a member of our nation and inherently wants to do mitzvot and keep away from aveirot, only, his *Yetzer Hara* bested him. Striking him weakens the resolve of this inclination, and he eventually acquiesces, stating, ‘I desire (to give her a divorce).’

This teaches us a fundamental concept. Every single Jew, regardless of his spiritual state, has an inner spark that cries out, “I am a Jew, and I want to keep mitzvot!” It is just that, at times, the *Yetzer Hara* gains control over him, preventing him from doing so. But when the *kelippah* of the *Yetzer Hara* is removed from his heart, the inner spark is revealed in its full glory, and he returns to Hashem Yitbarach with all his heart and soul.

### ———— In Summary ————

- Why does the *Navi* say both “Bring us back, Hashem” and “we will return”? If Hashem brings us back to Him, we will certainly return.
- Why should we ask Hashem to “bring us back?” Isn’t teshuvah dependent on us? We are taught that everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven.
- Hashem is always waiting for us to return in teshuvah, and only then do we get assistance. Indeed, a person truly desires to come back to Hashem, only, the *Yetzer Hara*, referred to as the “yeast in the dough,” prevents him from doing teshuvah. This is the reason we say “We will return.”
- There are times when it is difficult for a person to do teshuvah through his own efforts, even though he has perfect trust in Hashem. He is ensnared in the

clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*, who prevents him from taking the first bold step. In that case, Hashem is satisfied with one small entreaty that he makes, asking Him to bring him back. Then, He removes the *kelippah* of the *Yetzer Hara*, and the person immediately does teshuvah. His inner spark shines forth, bringing him close to Hashem.

## NATURE DEFENDS THE TZADDIK

Hashem wished to make Chizkiyahu the Mashiach, and Sancheirev Gog and Magog (the nation which will be defeated by Mashiach in the last war). However, the *Middat Hadin* said to Hashem, “Master of the world! David Hamelech, who said songs and praise before You was not chosen to be the Mashiach. How can Chizkiyahu, for whom You wrought all these miracles, yet did not sing songs of praise before You, be chosen to be the Mashiach?!” Hashem withheld His desire. Immediately, the earth opened its mouth, stating, “Master of the world! I will sing songs of praise in place of this tzaddik, and You make him the Mashiach!” and the earth then sang the following song (*Yeshayahu* 24:16), “From the edge of the earth we have heard songs, ‘Glory for the righteous’” (*Sanhedrin* 94a).

It is known that song is a type of tefillah (*Zohar* II, 178a). This is alluded to in the prayer of Moshe Rabbeinu, “ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא – I implored Hashem at that time” (*Devarim* 3:23). Chazal expound (*Yalkut Shimoni, Devarim, remez* 940) that he prayed 515 prayers, the numerical equivalent of the word ואתחנן. The word שירה (song) also has the numerical value of 515 [see *Baal Haturim*, *ibid.*].

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) relate an incident involving Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. He went to sin with a specific woman who took a pouch of *dinarim* as her fee. He took with him this amount, and crossed seven seas in order to reach her. At the time of the sin, she let out wind and proclaimed, “Just as this wind will never return to its source, so will Elazar ben Durdaya never be accepted in teshuvah.” When he heard this,

he wanted to do teshuvah. He stood up and beseeched the heavens and earth, asking them to plead for mercy on his behalf. They answered, “Before we ask for mercy upon you, we must ask for ourselves, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 51:6), ‘For the heavens will dissipate like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment.’”

This demands clarification. Why did the earth ask for compassion and merit for Chizkiyahu, even offering to sing praises on his behalf, yet refused to request Heavenly mercy for Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya, claiming that it must first beg for mercy on its own behalf?

Perhaps we can answer with the following thought. Man, as well as all the animals, was created from the earth, as the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 2:7), “And Hashem G-d formed the man of dust from the ground.” Chazal expound (*Sanhedrin* 38b; *Tanchuma, Pekudei* 3) that Hashem collected dust from the four corners of the world in order that wherever man would die the earth would accept him for burial, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 3:19), “For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.”

Conversely, the fact that the dust of the earth endures is solely in the merit of the Torah and mitzvot performed by the person who lives upon it. For, all of Creation, including the earth, was created only in the merit of the Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4). Who will be involved in Torah if not man? Hence, it is an honor to the earth that man, who came from it, sustains it by means of learning Torah.

Therefore, it is understandable that the earth is willing to bestow kindness upon a person who spent all his days involved in Torah and mitzvot, for he essentially helps to maintain its existence. And if he sometimes errs, the land is prepared to behave kindly toward him in the merit of his future Torah study. Through his worthy actions, man causes the *Shechinah* to be revealed on earth, thus drawing an abundance of holiness and purity upon it and contributing to its preservation. Therefore, since Chizkiyahu was a tzaddik (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:33), the earth prayed for him when he was rejected from becoming the Mashiach.

This is because the earth itself would benefit by the arrival of the *geulah*. For then the *Shechinah* will shine in its full glory, and the earth will rest securely, without the sin of man to defile it.

Conversely, although a rasha may desire to do teshuvah, the earth does not plead his case before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He must return to Hashem through his own efforts, for the matter is dependent solely upon him. This is as the *Navi* proclaims (*Hoshea* 14:2), “Return, Israel, unto Hashem Your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem.” Man has the obligation to pray and return to Hashem from the depths of his heart, uprooting his sin entirely.

The reason for this is clear and simple: What good will the prayers of others do, if the person himself makes no attempt to do teshuvah, and may even continue to sin? Only when we see him making the effort to do teshuvah, must we guide him and show him the correct path to take. We should also pray that he will receive Divine help, that Hashem should grant him a spirit of holiness which will lead him on the path of truth, so that he may overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. This is the meaning of the phrase (*Shabbat* 104b), “One who comes to purify himself, is assisted by Heaven.”

This was the accusation of the earth toward Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. “What will my prayers accomplish for you, and why should I bother myself on your behalf? I have no satisfaction from your existence on the face of the world. Even were I to supplicate for you, and Hashem would forgive you, what benefit would Creation derive from it? The root of evil still beats in your heart. As soon as you receive atonement, you will merely return to your wayward ways.

“In doing teshuvah, the matter rests solely in your hands. For my part, I am utterly disgusted by you. Your sins have defiled the earth, specifically the sin of wasting semen, which has spilled onto the ground, *rachmana litzlan*.” This is the reason the earth stated, “Before I beseech on your behalf, I must beseech for myself.” It did not draw any merit for

its continued existence from Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya and therefore refused to pray for him.

However, we are left with a difficulty. Why didn't heaven and earth succeed in their purpose of making Chizkiyahu the Mashiach by singing praises on his behalf? Moreover, why didn't Chizkiyahu himself, a tzaddik, sing songs of praise to Hashem at his salvation, after so many miracles had been done for him? This lack of praise caused the *Middat Hadin* to intervene, forestalling the *geulah*.

I thought of answering the following. Chizkiyahu faced strong opposition. On the one hand, Heaven desired that he sing and become the Mashiach. On the other hand, the *Middat Hadin* challenged this and sought to prevent it from happening. For that reason, Chizkiyahu received no Heavenly assistance. Only by his own self-arousal could he effect an arousal from on High.

We see from here how carefully a person should weigh his actions. If one fails to consider all the ramifications of his deeds, terrible things may result. All the more so, if he acts recklessly. He may have been destined for greatness, but, because he did one improper action, or refrained from doing a good deed, he may lose it all. Even if he would do complete teshuvah, this intended greatness will not be returned to him.

This was the case with Chizkiyahu. He thanked Hashem for the abundance of miracles He had wrought for him. But he failed to thank Him enough, according to his level of greatness. Even though he regretted this wholeheartedly, he did not merit becoming the Mashiach. The matter was completely up to him, especially since he was worthy to be the Mashiach and redeem the entire world, bringing it to its rectification and publicizing Hashem's glory.

Chizkiyahu should have understood that miracles of the caliber that he witnessed do not happen every day. Hashem smote all of his enemies, who ruled throughout the world and had exiled the Ten Tribes at the

gates of Yerushalayim, without Chizkiyahu having to go out to war. This took place on the night of Pesach, the festival of *geulah*. Chizkiyahu should have burst forth in joyous song, just as our fathers did in the Wilderness, as it says (*Shemot* 15:1), “Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang (ישיר) this song.” Chazal state (see *Sanhedrin* 91b) that the word ישיר (sang) is written in the future tense (will sing). This hints to the future, when Bnei Yisrael will once again sing songs of praise to Hashem. Chizkiyahu should have realized that the future had now come, and it was his duty to sing praises for the redemption he had just experienced. He should have completed the song that Moshe Rabbeinu and Bnei Yisrael began at the sea. By failing to do so, he was rejected from being the Mashiach.

### ————— In Summary —————

- When Chizkiyahu was about to become the Mashiach, the *Middat Hadin* prevented him from doing so. The earth pleaded his case, singing *shirah*, a form of tefillah, in his stead. It prayed on his behalf. On the other hand, we find that when Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya asked for the earth to beseech Hashem on his behalf, it refused, telling him that his teshuvah was dependent upon his own efforts alone. What was the difference between Chizkiyahu Hamelech and Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya?
- All of Creation, including the earth, exists in the merit of the person who fulfills the mitzvot of his Creator. The earth was prepared to speak up for Chizkiyahu since he was a tzaddik, whose actions ensured its continued existence, even if he slipped in a specific area. However, the earth refuses to plead the cause of a rasha, even if he wants to do teshuvah, since no benefit derives from teshuvah that is done without the person making his own efforts to return.
- This is what the earth responded to Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya’s entreaties that it pray for him. It needed to pray for itself. He himself never contributed to the upkeep of the world. On the contrary, his sins had defiled the earth. Only if he himself made the effort to return to Hashem, would his teshuvah be accepted. Chizkiyahu, on the other hand, increased the glory of Hashem through his

actions. He thanked Hashem for the miracles done for him, but not in the requisite manner for a person of his elevated and righteous stature. He was certainly worthy, for the earth wanted to advocate on his behalf before Hashem. However, because he failed to praise Hashem sufficiently for the many miracles done for him, he did not merit becoming the Mashiach.

## TESHUVAH OPENS THE GATES OF HEAVEN

On the day of Rebbi's death, a Heavenly Voice proclaimed, "Whoever participated in the eulogy of Rebbi is destined for life in the World to Come." A certain laundryman was always at the side of Rebbi, but hadn't arrived on that day. When he heard this announcement, he jumped from the roof and died. Another Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, "This laundryman is also destined for a portion in the World to Come" (*Ketubot* 103b).

The commentaries (*Shita Mekubetzet*, *ibid.*) have difficulty understanding this Gemara. What merit did this laundryman possess? He killed himself by jumping from the roof. Chazal teach (*Midrash Shochar Tov* 120) that a person who commits suicide has no share in the World to Come. From this incident, it seems that someone who kills himself because of his teacher's death does merit the World to Come. This is quite puzzling.

Perhaps we can resolve this difficulty by explaining the following pasuk (*Bereishit* 5:24): "And Chanoch walked with G-d; then he was no more, for G-d had taken him." Chazal expound (*Bereishit Rabbah* 25:1) that Hashem said, "I will take him from this world while he is still righteous, in order that he not become corrupt." This is the way of Hashem. When he sees a person beginning to decline, He removes him from this world before his time. This is an act of kindness, in order that the person should not become wicked and thus forfeit his share in this world, as well as in the World to Come.

Resha'im have no peace in this world (*Tanchuma, Vayikra* 17). This is because they prefer the pleasures of this world over eternal life in the World to Come, as Chazal say (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:34, 3:12), "A person dies without attaining half of his desires." One always feels that he is lacking. The righteous continually seek to attain greater heights in Avodat Hashem. There is nothing more blessed than this. The wicked, on the other hand, whose goal is to amass more and more earthly pleasures, are punished by Hashem in not being able to acquire even half of their desires. They are never satisfied with what they have, always striving for more. Even were they to earn a large amount of money, they would not be content.

What is the root of their dissatisfaction? The wicked are interested only in how to invest their money in order to increase it. This becomes a vicious cycle. They never actually enjoy their money since they are constantly worried about losing it. Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:7), "The more possessions, the more worry." Rather than worry over his earthly possessions, one should be consumed with worry regarding his future arrival at the Heavenly Court. He should be worried about the fact that he will be taken to task for choosing transient life over eternal life, which he could have gained by keeping Torah and mitzvot and pursuing kindness.

Hashem certainly does not desire the early demise of those who follow the path of the Torah. He does not want to take the rasha before his time if there is a chance that he will do teshuvah, as it says (*Yechezkel* 33:11), "I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather that he should return from his evil ways so that he may live." This being the case, it is impossible to say that the Torah justifies suicide. On the contrary, the punishment for one who takes his own life is extremely severe.

The incident with Rebbi's laundryman was intrinsically different from the usual suicide. He felt that everything that he had merited to attain in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* was due to his strong connection with Rebbi.

He must have been a great tzaddik to merit being part of Rebbi's household and, specifically, to have been so close to him. Therefore, when he was notified of Rebbi's passing, he felt he was unable to maintain his spiritual level without Rebbi, since the *Yetzer Hara* is so overwhelming.

Therefore, he preferred to die, risking losing his portion in the World to Come, and inheriting Gehinnom instead. He felt that this was better than continuing to live and possibly sin and anger Hashem, since he no longer had the influence of Rebbi. For the mentor who had shown him how to make the most of life had been taken to the House of Study on High. There was no one left to direct him in how to defeat the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Had the laundryman been present at the funeral of Rebbi and participated in his eulogy, he would have heard the Heavenly Voice which stated that all those present were destined for a portion in the World to Come. He would have had nothing to fear, resting assured that he would receive Heavenly assistance to defeat his *Yetzer Hara*, even without the guidance of Rebbi. He would merit doing teshuvah in his lifetime, earning a portion in the World to Come.

But, because he had not participated in Rebbi's funeral, he did not hear this message and thought that he did not have anything more to gain from this world. He believed that without the help of Rebbi, he would not succeed in fighting the *Yetzer Hara*. He did not want to anger his Creator.

Therefore, he decided that he preferred death over life. He recognized his own weaknesses and understood that without Rebbi helping him, he would never be able to overcome his *nisyonot*. He knew that Hashem sometimes takes a person's life in order to prevent him from slipping in the future, as in the case of Chanoch. He decided to take his life in his hands and threw himself from the roof to his death.

By doing so, he sacrificed his life in order not to anger Hashem. Indeed, Hashem, Who examines the heart of man (*Yirmeyahu* 11:2), saw his purity

of heart. He knew that this laundryman acted with good intentions, in order to prevent himself from transgressing in the future. He was ready to forfeit his portion in this world as well as the next. For that reason, a Heavenly Voice stated that he, too, deserved a portion in the World to Come.

We find a similar incident concerning Yakum Ish Tzrorot, the nephew of Yossi ben Yoezer Ish Tzreidah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:22; *Shochar Tov* 11). One Shabbat, he was riding a horse. The Greeks placed a beam before him, upon which to hang Yossi ben Yoezer. Yakum told his uncle, “See the horse upon which I ride, my master! And see the horse (i.e. the beam) upon which you are going to be lifted.” To which Yossi answered, “If one who angers Hashem is granted so much honor, then how much more honor will be accorded one who does His will.” Yakum continued, “Is there anyone as great as you who does the will of Hashem? See how you are being punished.” To which Yossi replied, “If this is the punishment meted out for one who does His will, how much greater will the punishment be for one who transgresses it!”

These words entered the heart of Yakum and gave him no rest. He decided to afflict himself with the four types of death conferred by Beit Din: stoning, burning, stabbing, and hanging. How did he accomplish this? He planted a beam in the ground, tied ropes around it, and surrounded it with a gate. He then lit a fire in front of himself. He stuck a sword into the ground. He climbed up the beam and became strangled by the rope. The sword struck him a moment before his death, and the burning gate burned him. Yossi ben Yoezer saw the bed of Yakum hovering overhead. He proclaimed, “Woe to me, for this one preceded me to Gan Eden by a short time.”

Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya acted similarly (see *Acquiring the World to Come in One Moment*). When he heard that his teshuvah would not be accepted, he wept until his *neshamah* departed (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). After his death, a Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, “Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for life in the World to Come.”

Just like Yakum, when he realized that he had angered his Creator, he was afraid to continue living. They both feared that they would be unable to withstand future *nisyonot*. Therefore, they preferred to die and inherit Gehinnom rather than live a life of sin and anger Hashem.

Concerning Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya, Rebbi said, “יש קונה עולמו בשעה” אחת – There is one who acquires his portion of the World to Come in a brief moment.” The letters of the word **ש** can be transposed to spell **שי** (gift), which has the numerical value of 310. This refers to the 310 worlds that Hashem reserves for the tzaddikim (*Uktzin* 3:12; *Zohar* II, 166b). This is alluded to in the pasuk in Mishlei (8:21), “להנחיל אוהבי **יש** ואוצרותיהם” אמלא – I have what to bequeath [to] those who love me, and I shall fill their storehouses.” Those who do teshuvah without ulterior motives also receive 310 worlds. This is in spite of the fact that they feel unable to continue living. They spurn life only because they are afraid of succumbing to the sinful snare of the Satan. They prefer ending their lives, even at the risk of warranting Gehinnom, in order to save themselves from rebelling against their Creator.

Certainly, no one may take an example from these people. Not everyone can attain such an exalted level of teshuvah. A person does not want to die in order to preserve his spiritual purity; he will suffice in doing teshuvah and beseeching Hashem to forgive him. It is difficult to find a person on the level of Rebbi’s laundryman, whose intentions in committing suicide were completely *l’shem Shamayim*.

Likewise, Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya was on an extremely exalted level, as was evidenced by the fact that he was able to converse with the heavens and earth. There is no doubt that the cases that we have described were exceptional and rare. Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself testified, through the Heavenly Voice, that these people acted *l’shem Shamayim*. However, it is a completely different case if a person would commit suicide because he has had enough of life, or due to mental instability, even if he thought that he was acting *l’shem Shamayim*.

It might be for this reason that Chazal emphasize that the man was a כובס (laundryman). The numerical equivalent of כובס is equal to that of אדם גדול (a great man). This hints that he was able to reach this elevated level, but others are unable to do so. Therefore, we should be happy that, *Baruch Hashem*, we are able to be connected to the tzaddikim of the generation; it is not for us to contemplate suicide, *rachmana litzlan*. For, even if, *chalilah v'chas*, one of the tzaddikim were to pass away, we need not feel orphaned. This is because we are assured by Chazal (*Yoma* 38b) that since “Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw that the tzaddikim are few; He planted them throughout the generations.” We need never feel like Rebbi’s laundryman upon Rebbi’s death; we will always have a tzaddik to guide us.

However, this comforting assurance also obligates us. For, instead of connecting ourselves to tzaddikim in order to learn methods of Avodat Hashem and *mussar*, which bring us closer to our Creator, we take advantage of them for mundane matters. We ask them for blessings of physical success, etc. Instead, we should strive to emulate the laundryman, who attained elevated spiritual heights through his connection to Rebbi. He claimed that only Rebbi recognized the root of his *neshamah* and only through him could he serve Hashem properly. For that reason, he threw himself off the roof after Rebbi’s death. He certainly would not have acted in such a bold manner if he had felt that he could continue living without falling into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. (There is a wonderful explanation regarding the laundryman, quoted in *Shita Mekubetzet* on *Ketubot* 103b, in the name of Rabbi Klonimus, zt”l, of Yerushalayim).

Although there are many tzaddikim in our day, our generation is called “orphaned.” Despite the abundance of tzaddikim in our times, we see that most people do not learn from them to fear the great Day of Justice. Instead of fearing Hashem, people fear human beings, whose end is to be food for the worms. We fail to use our connection to tzaddikim to inspire us to feel awe of Hashem in our lives, especially on Shabbatot and

festivals. Woe to us from the Day of Judgment; woe to us from the Day of Admonition (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:10; *Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, remez* 762). Rather, let us strive to heed the words of Yirmeyahu Hanavi (*Eichah* 3:40), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.”

### ————— In Summary —————

- Why did a Heavenly Voice proclaim that the laundryman, who threw himself from the roof at his absence from Rebbi’s funeral, was destined for a portion in the World to Come? It is known that a person who commits suicide loses his portion in the World to Come.
- This case was essentially different. He felt that his connection to Hashem was only through Rebbi. After Rebbi’s death, there was no one to guide him in combating the *Yetzer Hara*. He had no guarantee that he would receive Divine assistance to do teshuvah. He therefore jumped from the rooftop, prepared to lose both this world and eternity, in order not to anger Hashem for even one moment.
- Not everyone can reach this lofty level. It was fitting for that laundryman, who spent his days in the shadow of Rebbi. Yakum Ish Tzrorot and Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya also reached exalted levels in their deaths. Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya was even on the level of negotiating with the heavens and earth and the constellations. His intentions were purely *l’shem Shamayim*. He understood that he had no portion in the World to Come. Therefore, he took his life in his hands, even risking going to Gehinnom, in order to avoid angering his Creator. A Heavenly Voice testified that their actions were favorable.
- A person should never contemplate going in their ways. He has no guarantee that he is acting *l’shem Shamayim*. He may be seeking to take his life because he has had enough of this world. Every person should strive to do teshuvah and attach himself to one of the tzaddikim of the generation. One should not approach the tzaddikim only for *berachot* in mundane matters, but in order to learn from their ways in Avodat Hashem, and to connect to Hashem through them.

## THE LUCHOT INSIDE US

When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu seized the *luchot habrit*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to grab them from his hands, but Moshe Rabbeinu managed to hold on to them. When he saw the Golden Calf and the people dancing at the foot of the mountain, he immediately took the *luchot* and smashed them in front of the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, as related in the Torah (*Midrash Yilamdeinu on Parashat Ki Tisa*; see *Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, remez 391*).

This requires explanation. Why did Moshe fight with Hashem, so to speak, in order to retain the *luchot*? He knew while yet in *Shamayim* that Bnei Yisrael had fashioned a Calf and thus were not worthy of the Torah, as Hashem told him (*Shemot 32:7*), “Go, descend – for your people...has become corrupt.” Why, then, did he break the *luchot* only when he descended to earth and saw the Calf; why did he not break them while still in Heaven?

Perhaps we can offer the following explanation. Hashem engraved the Ten Commandments onto the *luchot*. They were His writing and contained the entire Torah within them. How would Bnei Yisrael accept the yoke of Torah and succeed in keeping the mitzvot when faced with the *Yetzer Hara*, who is constantly bent upon causing them to stumble? In order to make this possible, when Hashem engraved the Torah into the *luchot*, at the same time, He implanted firm faith in the Torah in the hearts of each and every Jew. Their hearts were, so to speak, engraved with *emunah* and love of Torah so that they would always be able to engage in Torah and triumph over the *Yetzer Hara*.

But, when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Calf, they transgressed the commandment “You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence.” It seemed as if they did not desire the Torah. Therefore, Hashem wanted to confiscate it from Moshe, so that he would not give it to Bnei Yisrael. What was Moshe’s intention in grabbing it back? He

believed that if Hashem would take back the Torah, then this special engraving, etched into the heart of each Jew, to have *emunah* in the Torah and to love and toil in it, would likewise be removed, *chas v'shalom*. What would become of Bnei Yisrael?

Therefore, Moshe held fast to the *luchot*, preventing Hashem from taking them back. This is referred to at the end of the Torah (*Devarim* 34:12), "And by the strong hand...that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel." Moshe literally held fast to the Torah with all his might, and Hashem allowed him to keep it. Since Moshe Rabbeinu was the emissary of the nation, by holding on to the Torah he was indicating to Hashem that the nation had done teshuvah and wanted to cleave to Torah once more, as Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 41b; *Bava Metzia* 96a), "A messenger of a person is like the person himself."

When Moshe Rabbeinu descended from the mountain and saw the Calf that Bnei Yisrael had fashioned, he broke the *luchot*. The broken *luchot* were housed in the Ark. This imparts an awesome message to us: Even if a person were to transgress the Torah, akin to breaking the *luchot*, he always retains segments of the Torah inside himself, just as the broken *luchot* always rested in the Ark. When a person does teshuvah, the pieces, as it were, come together. It is these pieces within him that arouse him to do teshuvah.

Now it is clear why Moshe did not break the *luchot* while still in *Shamayim* but when he descended from the mountain, before the eyes of the nation. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted the love and *emunah* in the Torah that Hashem had engraved in their hearts to remain within them in order that the broken pieces of the *luchot* would bring them to complete teshuvah. Had he smashed the *luchot*, *chas v'shalom*, while still in Heaven, and not brought them down to earth, Bnei Yisrael would have been faced with a terrible situation. No one would have been able to come close to the Torah and do teshuvah. Moshe Rabbeinu acted with great wisdom and foresight, enabling each Jewish person to reconnect the pieces of the

*luchot*, and return to Hashem and his Torah in truth, as it says “Torah, Hashem, and Yisrael are one” (*Zohar* III, 73b).

Moshe Rabbeinu displayed tremendous loyalty to Bnei Yisrael by doing this. This might be the reason that he is called the “Faithful Shepherd” (*Zohar* I, 106a; Part II 8b). Chazal even say that the spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu pervades all of the *neshamot* of Yisrael in every generation (*Zohar* III, *Raaya Meheimenah* 273a). This is because it is in his merit that *emunah* and love of Torah are permanently engraved in their hearts, enabling them to return to Hashem at all times.

This explains why Moshe, so to speak, prevented Hashem from taking the *luchot* back. But, once Bnei Yisrael sinned, he himself smashed them at the foot of the mountain, and not in Heaven, and hid them in the Aron Hakodesh. The broken *luchot* possessed tremendous *kedushah*, hinting to the fact that *ba’alei teshuvah*, even if they transgressed all the mitzvot, like King Menashe, are always able to return in teshuvah, to a place where perfect tzaddikim cannot stand (*Berachot* 34a).

Moreover, the Aron Hakodesh containing the broken *luchot* was taken out to war when the nation battled their enemies (*Sifri, Bamidbar* 2). It is *kedushah* that prevails over our enemies. Similarly, the broken pieces of the *luchot* inside a person help him fight the battle against his *Yetzer Hara*. For when a person does teshuvah, he reconnects the pieces of the *luchot* inside of him, making them whole and enabling him to receive Divine assistance in defeating the *Yetzer Hara* once again.

This sheds light on the words of the *Navi* (*Malachi* 3:22), “Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant.” Hashem did not say, “Remember My Torah.” For, had Moshe not insisted (so, to speak, in opposition to Hashem), that the Torah remains etched in the hearts of each and every Jew, no one would have been able to approach it, not to mention “pick up the pieces” and re-establish his relationship with Hashem after sinning.

Thus Hashem enjoins us to remember the Torah of Moshe: “Remember how Moshe Rabbeinu was stubborn on your behalf, so that you may

return to Me in truth, connecting the broken pieces of the *luchot* and engaging in Torah.” This is referred to by the Gemara when it says (*Berachot* 8b), “*Luchot* and pieces of *luchot* are placed in the Ark (a person’s body).” This is also the reason that the Torah is called “Torat Moshe” – the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. His spark is contained in each and every Jew, enabling each person, in every generation, to feel the effects of the *emunah* and love for Torah engraved in his heart with the engraving of the *luchot*.

This idea helps us understand another topic, demonstrating how Torah that is engraved in our hearts can bring us to the correct path. In our day, many people do not fear death at all. This matter needs clarification. Chazal instruct us to prevail over the *Yetzer Hara* (*Berachot* 5a). If one succeeds, good. If not, he should learn Torah. If he still is not successful, he should recite *Kriyat Shema*. As a last resort, he should remember the day of death. But if remembering death itself makes no impression upon a person, and frightens no one, how can one ever do teshuvah?!

The answer is straightforward. One who wishes to do teshuvah must learn Torah. If this does not still the *Yetzer Hara*, he is told to say *Kriyat Shema*. If this is not effective, he must remind himself of the day of death and thus overcome the *Yetzer's* suggestions. However, this is only effective if the person is helped by learning Torah and reciting *Kriyat Shema*, meaning that he learns Torah and prays. But if a person never opens a sefer and does not pray, he displays a lack of faith in Hashem; he lacks the most minimal commitment to the Jewish faith. How can remembering the day of death be effective for such a person?

Only one who fulfills the first two preconditions of learning Torah and praying to Hashem will find that imagining the day of death will help him do teshuvah. Such a person is like the Holy Ark. The *luchot* reside within him and his heart is engraved with love of Hashem and His Torah. The broken *luchot* inside him infuse him with the will to do teshuvah, once again connecting the pieces into one unit. Then the recital of *Kriyat Shema*

will help him come close to Hashem, loving Him and clinging to His mitzvot. By these means, he can easily overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. But one who has no Torah and tefillah certainly will not be affected by thoughts of the day of death.

In this month, there were unfortunately many deaths in Lyon. (These words were originally written by the Rav in the summer of 1999.) The entire holy congregation assembled numerous times in the cemetery. We saw the great sorrow and worry on everyone's face. Our eyes were sore from so much weeping. But this did not effect a lasting resolution to do teshuvah. Our hearts remained as hard and unyielding as stones. The fear of death did not affect us.

This is because it is possible to break one's heart of stone only by submitting our desires to Hashem's will through learning Torah and sincerely praying to Him. But if Torah and tefillah are not intrinsic parts of our lives, how can we fulfill the advice of our Sages, who state that in order to do teshuvah one must learn and pray, thus remembering the day of death and silencing the *Yetzer Hara*?! Chazal adjure us (*Avot* 3:10) to "return one day before your death." How is it possible to return without Torah and tefillah?

The Torah is so great and exalted that even Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, was unable to attain faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu; likewise other exceedingly intelligent people throughout the generations. How is it possible, then, to obligate a mere bar mitzvah boy, or even a young child who does not yet possess intelligence, to believe in Hashem and cleave to the Torah?!

It is quite simple. Klal Yisrael possess the Torah. Every simple Jew has the ability to attain faith in Hashem, through learning Torah and tefillah. This is because the Torah is implanted in the heart of the Jew. When he learns Torah and labors in it, the light of Torah immediately illuminates his eyes, instilling *emunah* in his heart.

This is not the case with the wise men and philosophers of the gentiles. They engage in superficial wisdom, believing only in what meets the eye. For this reason, they pursue science and the like, and suffice with that. However, the inner, spiritual essence of what they see around them escapes them, for they lack the light of Torah. Therefore, they can never attain faith in Hashem. The Midrash says (*Eichah Rabbah* 2:13), “One many believe there is wisdom among the gentiles; one may not believe there is Torah among the gentiles.” Torah is not engraved upon the heart of the gentiles, even the wise men among them. They possess wisdom without Torah, and they therefore cannot attain any level of faith in the Creator of the world.

According to this, we might understand what Chazal expound on the following pasuk (*Yechezkel* 34:31), “Now, you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Man.” They state (*Yevamot* 61a; *Bava Metzia* 114b), “You [Bnei Yisrael] are called Man, and the nations of the world are not called Man.” Only a Jew is “Man,” for he contains a part of Hashem within him, and the holy Torah is etched into his heart. The nations of the world are merely called “Son of Man,” for there is no other appellation for them. They are able to attain belief in Hashem only if they convert. Then they will be considered as part of the Jewish people and merit the light of Torah, for the broken fragments of the *luchot* are found only in Bnei Yisrael, illuminating their path. By learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, they come close to Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem wanted to take back the *luchot* from Moshe Rabbeinu, but Moshe held fast to them and retained them. Only upon descending the mountain did he break them. Why did he fight to keep the *luchot* if he was going to smash them on his return to earth? He could have smashed them while still in heaven.
- When Hashem engraved the Ten Commandments on the *luchot*, He also etched the Torah upon the hearts of each and every Jew, together with faith in Him.

When they sinned with the Golden Calf, He wanted to confiscate the *luchot*. Moshe was worried that the faith and love for Hashem and the Torah engraved on the hearts of the people would be removed as well.

- Therefore, Moshe held fast to the *luchot*, in order that the Torah would remain engraved on their hearts. Only upon descending the mountain did he break them, so that the broken pieces would remain with the nation, inside of each person. Their influence would constantly remind the people to return to Hashem and engage in Torah study. This is what Hashem meant by the statement, “Remember the Torah of My servant, Moshe.” Remember the battle he fought on your behalf, to keep the Torah, so that you always have the possibility to return to Hashem in teshuvah.
- Chazal advise us to combat the *Yetzer Hara* by learning Torah, saying *Kriyat Shema*, and remembering the day of death. Today, no one fears death. Even the death of others is not enough to inspire people to do teshuvah. This is because they lack the first two prerequisites of Torah and tefillah. However, if one strengthens himself in Torah and tefillah, he will be able to do teshuvah.

## NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED

One of the aspects of teshuvah is that when a trouble befalls the nation, they will cry out and blow trumpets. Everyone will know that this misfortune came about because of their misdeeds, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 5:25), “Your sins have overturned these.” By doing this, the trouble will be removed from them (*Rambam, Hilchot Ta’aniyot* 81:2).

It is understood from the Rambam’s words that when hardships befall a person, he must realize that there is a reason for them, as it says (*Kiddushin* 82b): Everything is in accordance with a person’s actions. Moreover, when one suffers, Hakadosh Baruch Hu suffers as well, as it says (*Tehillim* 91:15), “I am with him in distress.” Yeshayahu (63:9) proclaims, “In all their troubles, He was troubled.” Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 46a), “Rabbi Meir said that when a person has troubles, the *Shechinah* suffers with him.” This is referred to by the Gemara (*ibid.*), “May my head

be lightened from its heaviness, may my arms be lightened from their heaviness.”

Therefore, one must realize that whenever something bad happens it is a consequence of his misdeeds. Even if he himself doesn't remember what he did wrong, he must know that Hashem remembers everything. The pasuk says (*Devarim* 32:4), “The Rock! – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice...righteous and fair is He.” He should repent for his iniquities as soon as possible. The more time elapses, the more difficult it will be for him to do teshuvah. He may fall into the category of (*Eiruv* 19a), “If a person transgresses and repeats the transgression, it becomes permitted in his eyes.”

Chazal state (*Eiruv* 19a) that resha'im do not do teshuvah, even at the entrance to Gehinnom. This needs explanation. For, they have already returned their *neshamot* and are in the World of Truth. They see there is reward for tzaddikim and punishment for resha'im. There is justice and there is a Judge Who banished them to Gehinnom. However, they are still not prepared to admit to the truth and remain just as wicked as in their lifetimes. How is this possible?

While still in this world, the wicked both transgress and cause others to sin, so that even after they die, they remain influenced by the wicked ways of those whom they turned off the path of righteousness. This is what impacts them even at the entrance to Gehinnom. We see this phenomenon all the time. Despite being proven the truth of Torah with a thousand of pieces of evidence, there are people, who, deep down, are convinced of its veracity, yet cannot detach themselves from falsehood. They remain staunch in their position, arguing that this is, indeed, the truth.

The only rectification for them is that those whom they brought to sin do teshuvah. In this manner, the wicked in the World of Truth will finally be able to admit their sins and, after atoning for them, will be allowed to enter Gan Eden.

This applies only to the resha'im among Bnei Yisrael. But the wicked among the gentiles, who taught the nations to torment Am Yisrael, have no restitution. They are unable to do teshuvah as long as the nations follow their evil counsel and continue to torment the Jews. Michah (6:5) states, "My people, hear now what Balak, king of Moav did." The wicked plots of the resha'im of the gentiles are not forgotten in this world but are continually perpetrated, and, for that reason, the resha'im can never attain atonement on High.

The wicked actions of the resha'im, even if done in the past, are considered to be committed in the present, since there are always others to continue them. This is described by the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 66:24), "And they will go out and see the corpses of the men who rebel against Me, for their decay will not cease and their fire will not be extinguished and they will lie in disgrace before all mankind." Reish Lakish expounds (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu, remez* 514), "Even at the entranceway to Gehinnom they do not do teshuvah. It does not state, 'Who *rebelled* against me', but, rather, 'Who *rebel* against me.' They rebel and then perish forever. This is referring to the sinners of the nations of the world."

Chazal relate (*Gittin* 57b) that Nevuzaradan, during the period of the Second Beit Hamikdash, discovered the blood of Zechariah Hanavi bubbling out of the ground. He asked the Jews what this blood was. They answered that it was the blood from sacrifices. He ordered that sacrifices be brought before him, to see if their blood would also bubble. It did not. Then he threatened that if the people did not tell him the truth, he would have their flesh combed with iron combs. They relented, explaining that previously Bnei Yisrael had killed Zechariah Hanavi, since he constantly rebuked them, telling them to do the will of Hashem. His blood had not ceased to boil since his death.

Nevuzaradan announced, "I will appease him." He took all the members of the Upper and Lower Sanhedrin and put them to death over the blood, but the blood was not avenged. He brought young men and maidens and

killed them, but the blood still boiled. He took school children, and killed them upon the blood, and it still bubbled. Then Nevuzaradan said, “Zechariah, Zechariah, the best among them I killed. Do you want me to kill them all?” At that point, the blood ceased boiling.

Why did the blood of Zechariah boil for hundreds of years? Chizkiyahu reigned during that time. The entire nation learned Torah, and not one rainbow was sighted (*Ketubot* 77b). Hashem intended to crown Chizkiyahu as the Mashiach (*Sanhedrin* 94a). Why was that generation not worthy to quiet the blood of Zechariah?

It seems that the boiling blood served as a constant reproach for Bnei Yisrael. It demonstrated to them the power of sin. For, as long as Zechariah’s death had not been properly atoned for, his impression remained in the world. Had the people genuinely repented for killing Zechariah, a *Navi* and a Kohen, the blood would have cooled off. Its continued boiling was proof that they and their children had not yet done teshuvah for that sin.

Chazal relate (*Gittin* 57a) an incident involving Onkelos ben Klonimus, the nephew of the Roman Emperor Titus the Wicked, who desired to convert. He had Titus brought up from the dead through the powers of witchcraft. Onkelos asked him, “Who is important in the Upper World?” Titus answered, “Yisrael.” To which Onkelos asked, “Shall I convert to Judaism?” Titus told him, “They have many commandments; you will not be able to keep them all. Rather, go and torment them. Then you are guaranteed to become important, for everyone who inflicts the Jews is made important, as the pasuk says (*Eichah* 1:5), ‘Her adversaries have become [her] master.’”

How can we understand how Titus, even after seeing and admitting that Yisrael are the important ones in the World of Truth, still advised Onkelos to torment them rather than convert? According to our previous argument, this makes sense. As long as the nations of the world were

following in Titus' wicked ways, persecuting Bnei Yisrael, he was constantly judged for his part in this. He was never able to do teshuvah.

The *Yetzer Hara* does not let up in his attempts to convince people to sin, causing people to fall in their spiritual level. All of the arguments in the world cannot swerve them from their aberrant ways. People may even have the audacity to raise questions and complaints, stating that it is impossible to be a firm believer, for one reason or another.

For example, they might ask, "Where was Hashem during the Holocaust? How could He allow the Nazis, *yemach shemam*, to murder six million Jews with such cruelty?!" They speak as if otherwise they would be believers, but these are merely excuses. These people have certainly been influenced by the heretical beliefs of the wicked among the nations. For this, they surely continue to suffer in Gehinnom.

I once asked such a person, "If not for this excuse, would you believe wholeheartedly in the Ribbono Shel Olam?" He answered me openly that he still would not believe. He would surely find another reason for denying Hashem's presence. Woe to these people! Their souls cry out from the retribution that they receive.

On the other hand, Hashem apportions reward in much greater proportions than He punishes (*Sotah* 11a). The effect of a mitzvah has the power to influence the entire generation, and even future generations, for the good. As David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 112:9), "His righteousness endures forever."

### ————— In Summary —————

- The Rambam states that troubles do not befall a person randomly. Everything comes from Hashem, and is the result of one's actions. Hashem demands that a person do teshuvah for his iniquities. One who truly desires to return, is aided by Heaven. Not so the *resha'im*. Even at the entrance to Gehinnom they do not repent, even when they are already in the World of Truth. This is because those

who were influenced by them did not yet do teshuvah. The deeds of the resha'im are still being perpetuated in this world.

- There is an intrinsic difference between the resha'im of Yisrael and the resha'im of the nations of the world. The resha'im of the nations can never attain a complete rectification, for there will always be others who follow their example and plague our nation. They have no recourse from the doom of Gehinnom. On the other hand, those influenced to sin by the resha'im of Yisrael will surely do teshuvah. In this manner, the souls of these wicked people will receive their rectification.
- We find that many people who do not want to do teshuvah come with all sorts of accusations and questions, for example, "Why did Hashem bring the Holocaust?" They continue sinning even after seeing the truth. On the other hand, the effect of a good deed lasts for generations to come.

## RETURN TO ME AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU

The *Navi* adjures Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah (*Hoshea* 14:2): "Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d." Chazal (*Pesikta Rabbah* 44) tell the following parable. The son of a king was one hundred days' journey away from his father. His friends told him, "Return to your father." He answered, "I cannot." His father sent him this message, "Go as far as you are able, and I will come toward you." So said Hakadosh Baruch Hu (*Malachi* 3:7), "Return to Me and I will return to you."

The sefer *Chochmat Hamatzpun* asks the question: What is the meaning of the words "and I will return to you"? How is teshuvah applicable to Hashem? Surely, it is relevant only to someone who has transgressed. How are we to understand that Hashem will also return?

The entire concept of teshuvah is a tremendous kindness from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He has given his nation the mitzvah of teshuvah so that they may retract their misdeeds. Who is like Hashem, Who brings

infinite goodness upon His creatures, awaiting the teshuvah of the wicked? He does not want him to die before doing teshuvah. Yechezkel (18:23) states, “Do I desire at all the death of the wicked man? – the word of Hashem...Is it not rather that I desire that he should return from his ways, that he might live?” Hashem desires that none of His nation be banished from him (*Shmuel II*, 14:14).

The pasuk states, (*Bamidbar* 25:14), “The name of the slain Israelite man who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri...” The Ohr Hachaim explains this pasuk according to the *Mekubalim*, in line with what we have said above. None of the sparks of *kedushah* will be eternally lost, all eventually return to their source. And even though someone might behave in a most improper manner, he will, ultimately, return to his roots. The man who sinned (above) was still called an “Israelite” for he did not become uprooted from his source.

Even if a Jew sins, he is still a Jew (*Sanhedrin* 44a; *Zohar* III, 112a). Not only does Hashem withhold immediate punishment, but He awaits his return, giving him a chance to repent (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:17).

However, one should not refrain from doing teshuvah, thinking that this delay in punishment means that Hashem overlooks his deeds. This will also be regarded as a sin. He is expected to use this time allotted to him as an opportunity to do teshuvah. Chazal state (*Bava Kama* 50a; *Esther Rabbah* 7:25) that whoever says Hashem overlooks a person’s deeds, will have his own life overlooked, as it says (*Devarim* 32:4), “The Rock – perfect is His work, for all his paths are justice.”

In light of the above, we can understand Hashem’s statement “And I will return to you.” He is telling Bnei Yisrael that if they delay doing teshuvah, He will initiate the process, by not punishing the wrongdoers immediately upon sinning. He awaits their teshuvah, up until their day of death. He asks that we follow in His footsteps and return to Him.

The pasuk (*Hoshea* 14:2) “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d” means to say, “Return, Yisrael, in teshuvah, without procrastinating or feeling

embarrassed. For your Creator has preceded you, and come toward you. But don't translate this waiting as a waiver. For, if you don't return, you will be held accountable." By way of allusion, we find that the saying "שובו אלי ואשובה אליכם – Return to Me and I will return to you" is numerically equivalent to the words (*Kohelet* 11:9), "כי על כל אלה יביאך האלהים במשפט" – For all these things G-d will call you to account."

We actually find the concept of teshuvah in relation to Hashem. Chazal state (*Chulin* 60b) that the moon came before Hashem, claiming that two kings cannot wear the same crown; it did not want the sun to have equal importance. Upon which, Hashem responded, "Go and minimize yourself." Afterward, He commanded that a goat be sacrificed on Rosh Chodesh, as atonement, so to speak, for what He had told the moon.

This demonstrates the tremendous humility of Hashem. Asking for Bnei Yisrael to "help atone for Hashem" with this sacrifice, Hashem gives each person the opportunity to repent his sins and return to Him. A person realizes that if Hashem asks that we bring atonement on His behalf, all the more so must we recognize our shortcomings and return in teshuvah. Who is greater than Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Who seeks reparation for sins He didn't even commit?! In this manner, He Himself paves the path for us to do teshuvah.

This is reflected by the statement of Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 17b; *Yoma* 86b), "How great is teshuvah, for it reaches until the Throne of Glory." Hashem has given us the remedy before the malady (*Megillah* 13b). He, so to speak, carves out an aperture under His Throne to accept the teshuvah of sinners (*Sanhedrin* 150a). The reason for this is the following. When the angels see that the resha'im not only do not do teshuvah but continue to sin, they try to prosecute, hastening punishment and delaying teshuvah. They claim that even were the wicked to repent, it would only be due to the suffering they undergo, and not a genuine teshuvah. Therefore, Hashem brought the remedy first, by carving out an opening under His

Throne, a place where no angel may enter. From there, He accepts the teshuvah of the sinners.

From there, too, He approaches the sinners, calling to them to return. When this call enters the heart of the Jew, thoughts of teshuvah are aroused, thoughts that, if not squelched, have the capacity to awaken him to teshuvah. Certainly, all this is a tremendous kindness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu does with His people. May it be His will that we heed His call and merit returning quickly to Him, in complete teshuvah.

### ————— In Summary —————

- How can we understand the statement of Hashem “And I will return to you?” How is teshuvah applicable to Hashem? Teshuvah is seemingly relevant only for one who has sinned. Hashem performs a great kindness with Am Yisrael by bestowing upon them the mitzvah of teshuvah. He does not kill a sinner immediately, but, rather, waits for him to do teshuvah. Furthermore, even after a Jew sins, he is still called “Yisrael.” Hashem is extremely patient, awaiting the teshuvah of each and every person. However, one must not think that this means that Hashem overlooks his sin, and use this as an excuse not to repent. For, one who says that Hashem overlooks sin, will have his own life overlooked.
- The concept of teshuvah means that Hashem does not punish a person immediately upon sinning, but, rather, forestalls it during his life, waiting for him to do teshuvah. This is the meaning of “Return, Yisrael, until Hashem, your G-d.” Hashem comes toward the sinner, so to speak, by carving out an opening under His Throne of Glory. In this manner, He accepts the person who does teshuvah, not allowing the angels to prosecute him.
- Hashem Himself desires to receive atonement, for He minimized the size of the moon. For that reason, a sin-offering is brought every Rosh Chodesh. If Hashem, in His humility, seeks atonement, all the more so must we mortals repent of our misdeeds. In this manner, Hashem gives each person the opportunity to do teshuvah for any transgressions he may have done.

## TESHUVAH OUT OF LOVE

David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 119:59), “I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies.” This teaches that a person must constantly make personal accountings. Even if one previously did teshuvah, he should deem it incomplete. He should not feel secure that the matter will resolve itself, as we are taught (*Avot* 2:4; *Berachot* 29a), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” We find that Yochanan served as Kohen Gadol for eighty years, yet became a Sadducee at the end of his life (*ibid.*).

Many of our pious *Tanna'im*, even until their day of death, feared that their service of Hashem was insufficient. The Gemara relates (*Berachot* 28b) that when Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai took ill, his students went to visit him. When he saw them, he began crying. His disciples asked him, “Why are you crying?” He answered, “Two paths lie before me, one to Gan Eden and one to Gehinnom. I do not know on which one I will be led.”

This is terrifying! Could it be that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, in spite of his greatness, was not sure if he had the *zechut* to enter Gan Eden?! If he felt this way, how much more so should we worry! His holy disciples were standing beside him, yet he wasn’t ashamed to lower himself in their eyes. This was because he fulfilled the instruction of the *Tanna* (*Avot* 2:4), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.”

Rabbi Abahu reacted in a similar way (*Tanchuma, Bereishit* 1; *Bereishit Rabbah* 62:2). When he was on his deathbed, Hashem showed him thirteen rivers of persimmons. He was astonished and asked if this was all for him. Before he died, he told his students, “Fortunate are those who engage in Torah study.” They asked him, “Rabbeinu, what did you see?” He answered that Hashem gave him thirteen rivers of persimmons as reward for his Torah study. He said about himself (*Yeshayahu* 49:4), “But I said: I have toiled in vain and used up my strength for nothingness and naught.”

We see from the above just how much one must contemplate his actions, and ensure that they are pure and straight. One should constantly inspect his deeds and do teshuvah for any slight fault that he finds. One should calculate his every step, for it is impossible for us to fathom the punishment for sin. David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 119:59), “I considered my ways.” Chazal explain (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:1) that this means: “I considered the reward for mitzvot and the punishment for aveirot, and I returned my feet to Your testimonies. I found that the virtue of teshuvah is exceedingly great, as the Gemara states (*Berachot* 34b), ‘In the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim cannot stand.’”

Furthermore, Chazal tell us in the name of Reish Lakish (*Yoma* 86b), “How great is teshuvah, for intentional sins are converted to unintentional sins.” The Gemara asks, “But Reish Lakish said that teshuvah is great since unintentional sins are converted to merits.” The Gemara explains that this is not a contradiction, since teshuvah done out of love of Hashem changes intentional sins to merit; teshuvah done out of fear of Hashem only changes intentional sins to inadvertent ones.

The reason why teshuvah from love is preferable to teshuvah from fear is the following. One who returns to Hashem out of fear does so only because he is afraid of the punishment awaiting him for his sins and the suffering he will endure. Not so by teshuvah out of love. One who returns to Hashem from love does so from the depths of his heart. It comes from a recognition of the greatness of Hashem, and a feeling of being obliged to Him for providing his sustenance and fulfilling his every need.

One of the indications of true teshuvah is the tremendous joy which envelops the *ba'al teshuvah*. This is the joy felt when one does a mitzvah. The author of *Maor Vashemesh (Parashat Metzora)* writes, “One who literally breaks his heart in complete submission to his Creator, will certainly experience joy from this sadness. A person should serve Hashem with joy, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 100:2), ‘Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song.’” (See *Zohar* III, 8b.)

However, this raises the following question. How is it possible to serve Hashem with joy when one is steeped in daily worries? Similarly, we find tzaddikim, throughout the generations, who were involved in self-affliction. How does this concur with joy? The Gemara tells of tzaddikim who would never allow a smile to cross their lips; this seems to imply that they did not serve Hashem with joy (*Nedarim* 50b). Also, the Gemara states (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), “There is no laughter before Hashem.”

The explanation can be found in the continuation of the previously quoted verse in Tehillim (100:2-3). First David Hamelech says, “Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song.” Then he tells us, “Know that Hashem He is G-d.” First of all one must realize that Hashem is the true G-d. Then, he will be happy, even if he afflicts himself in his *avodah*, and despite his daily troubles. Knowledge that everything comes from Hashem is the ultimate joy.

This might be the definition of the pasuk (ibid. 16:8), “I have set Hashem before me always.” Ostensibly, it should have said, “Hashem is always with me.” Why does it specifically say “before me?” In every action a person takes, he has doubts as to whether or not he is doing the right thing, thinking that maybe he should be acting differently. This is true regarding both material and spiritual matters. But if a person is constantly cognizant of the fact that Hashem is G-d and that He creates and manages the entire Creation, down to the very last detail, he will realize that whatever happens is what was meant to be. He will not be plagued by any doubts. By continuously remembering Hashem, he will be able to make the correct choice in all of his decisions, since he will follow the will of Hashem in everything that he does. This is in line with the pasuk (*Devarim* 10:12), “What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you?”

But in order to do this, one must believe in Hashem and know Him. The pasuk states (ibid. 4:35), “You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is none beside Him!” If a person truly knows Hashem, he accepts his difficulties with joy, because he understands that

everything comes from Him. On the other hand, one who does not recognize Hashem will never accept suffering with joy. This is what is meant by the pasuk (ibid. 28:47), “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness...” Since you did not work on yourself to attain true recognition of Hashem, you were unable to accept your lot with joy. This can eventually lead to denying Hashem, *rachmana litzlan*.

Now we clearly see why it is preferable to do teshuvah out of love rather than out of fear. For teshuvah done out of love brings a person to true knowledge of Hashem and enables him to feel joy in every situation. Furthermore, teshuvah done out of love is a more permanent form of teshuvah than that done from fear. When one does teshuvah out of love for Hashem it indicates that he has a profound recognition of Him.

This is not the case with a person who does teshuvah out of fear. Such a person does teshuvah only when troubles beset him and he fears for his fate. He does teshuvah in order that Hashem should have mercy on him and remove his suffering. But, after a while, he is liable to forget or ignore his past afflictions and return to his previous bad behavior. This can be compared to a person who approaches a lion. As long as he is in its presence, his heart keeps thumping out of fear. As soon as he moves away from it and feels out of danger, he calms down, eventually forgetting how terrified he had been.

This sheds light on Chazal’s statement (*Shabbat* 88a) that at the time of *Kabbalat HaTorah*, Hashem placed the mountain above the heads of Bnei Yisrael, like a barrel. The people had already stated that they wished to accept the Torah, as the pasuk says (*Shemot* 19:8), “Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!” Why was it necessary to force them to accept the Torah?

Specifically at the time that Bnei Yisrael were prepared to accept the Torah willingly, and felt limitless love of Hashem, He wanted to instill in them the aspect of fear, as well. This was so that they would distinguish

between the two, and would appreciate the value of serving Hashem through love and recognizing His greatness, since this brings one to realize his obligations toward Him. This is preferable to serving Hashem through fear, as demonstrated by the mountain hovering above them. This type of service usually lasts only until the hardships abate, at which point, it dissipates.

Proof of this is that when Hashem overturned the mountain upon them, and they accepted the Torah out of fear, they were called “forced.” This was the case throughout the generations, until the time of Mordechai and Esther, when they accepted the Torah out of love (*Shabbat* 88a). Then, they saw the importance of loving Hashem, and serving him with love.

Therefore, one who does teshuvah should examine his motives carefully. He should not do teshuvah merely because he fears the suffering or troubles which are liable to come upon him because of his unworthy actions. Rather, he should reflect upon Hashem’s existence, thus attaining true recognition of Hashem and belief in Divine providence. Yeshayahu Hanavi (40:26) enjoins us to wonder at the handiwork of Hashem: “Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these.” He will then serve Hashem with true joy.

### ————— In Summary —————

- David Hamelech constantly made an accounting of his deeds, as he said, “I considered my ways.” One should always strive to make his teshuvah more complete, as we are told, “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai cried in fear lest his service of Hashem would be found unfavorable. This is most frightening. For if Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, in spite of his greatness, had doubts as to whether he would enter Gan Eden, humbling himself before his disciples in fear, how much more must we worry for ourselves. We should strive to return to Hashem in complete teshuvah, never trusting that we have perfected ourselves, even until the day of death.

- Teshuvah done out of love is greater than teshuvah done out of fear. This is because when one does teshuvah from love his intentional sins are converted to merits because he did teshuvah through recognizing the greatness of Hashem. Teshuvah out of fear, on the other hand, converts intentional sins to unintentional sins, since he did teshuvah merely out of fear of retribution.
- The most important aspect of teshuvah is to do it joyfully, as the pasuk enjoins us, “Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song.” One can achieve this level only by recognizing Hashem and acknowledging that everything comes from Him. This brings us to true happiness.
- Hashem held the mountain above the heads of Bnei Yisrael at *Matan Torah*, in spite of the fact that they had already said that they would willingly accept the Torah. This was in order that they would understand the preference of doing teshuvah out of love, recognizing Hashem’s greatness and appreciating our obligations toward Him, rather than through fear of the negative consequences of sin. Bnei Yisrael reached this level in the days of Mordechai and Esther, when they accepted the Torah out of love once again.

## ONE WHO COMES TO PURIFY HIMSELF IS HELPED BY HASHEM

We are taught that “one who comes to purify himself is helped by Hashem” (*Shabbat* 104a). This seems to indicate that it is the obligation of the person to first purify himself; only afterward, does he merit Heavenly assistance. The Midrash tells us (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3) that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yisrael, “My sons, open for Me an opening in teshuvah, the size of a needle hole, and I will open before you entranceways wide enough for wagons and carriages to enter.”

How can someone who is wallowing in *tumah*, *rachmana litzlan*, be expected to make the first move and purify himself, without having *siyata di’Shemaya*? How can we tell him that he need merely take the first step,

and then he will be assisted from Above? That first step is the most difficult one.

Chazal also teach us (*Berachot* 33b), “Everything is in the hand of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven.” Rashi explains that Hashem decrees whether a person will be tall or short, rich or poor, etc. But whether a person will be righteous or wicked is not pre-ordained by Hashem. This has been given into the hands of the person. Two paths are placed before him; he is enjoined to choose the path of *yirat Shamayim*. Choosing to fear Hashem is dependent completely upon the person himself; he is not given assistance from Above. However, this seems to contradict our opening statement that Hashem assists the person who comes to purify himself. This indicates that he does receive Heavenly help in doing teshuvah.

Let us answer with a parable. This can be compared to a person who suddenly receives a large amount of money, maybe from an unexpected inheritance, or by winning the lottery. Since he is not accustomed to having so much money, and does not know how to spend or invest it, he is liable to lose it all. This is especially true since it came so easily, without him putting in any effort to attain it. Most likely, he will waste all this money on trivial things and will soon find he has spent it all. As the saying goes, “Easy come, easy go.” This is not the case with an item that a person worked hard to attain. This he cherishes and guards with all his might, so that he should not lose it. When a person expends much effort to earn money, he undoubtedly values it appropriately.

This is also true regarding *yirat Shamayim*. If a person would suddenly see everything clearly and receive Heavenly assistance in his spiritual *avodah*, without any effort on his part, it is unlikely that he will appreciate this enlightenment fully, for he received it as a gift. Likewise, he will not know how to make proper use of it; its affect upon him will diminish and he will soon return to his former wayward ways. Then it will be doubly difficult for him to do teshuvah.

Why does Hashem refrain from helping a person at the very beginning of his journey of purification, and, instead, wait for him to make the first step? Hashem could help him from the start. As we have said, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, aside from fear of Heaven.” Rashi explains in the following way: “This (fear of Heaven) has been given over to the hands of man, in order that he himself prepares his heart to it. This is even though Hashem has the ability to prepare our hearts before Him, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 18:6), ‘Behold, just as clay is in the hand of the potter, so are you in My Hand, O House of Israel.’”

When a person begins serving Hashem of his own volition, without any help whatsoever, he feels the strain of the effort involved. Afterward, when he merits Heavenly assistance, he will appreciate it. He will strive to ensure that his actions merit this assistance, so that he should not lose it, but that he should feel its constant influence all the days of his life, enabling him to rise ever higher in his Avodat Hashem.

To strengthen this point: the Gemara (*Eiruvin* 19a; *Chagigah* 27a) states that the sinners of Bnei Yisrael are full of mitzvot, like a pomegranate is full of seeds. This is based on the pasuk (*Shir Hashirim* 4:3), “As many as a pomegranate’s seeds are your temples.” The Gemara tells us, “Do not read רקתך (your temples), but ריקתך (your empty ones). For, even the empty ones among you are full of mitzvot like the pomegranate is full of seeds.” Just as a pomegranate is bursting with seeds, so, too, there is no member of our nation who is completely devoid of mitzvot. There is no one in Bnei Yisrael who doesn’t occasionally perform a good deed, especially since he has a Divine spark within him that connects him with his Creator (*Zohar* III, 219b).

Thus, no one is really ever at the very beginning of his path in Avodat Hashem. Since he was born possessing this Heavenly spark, he is already at the stage of “one who comes to purify himself.” If he will only diligently adhere to this connection with Hashem, by means of doing mitzvot in holiness and purity, he will merit *siyata di’Shemaya* to constantly reach

higher levels. This is on condition that he subdues his physical desires, elevating them in the service of Hashem.

Conversely, one who is totally submerged in the frivolities of this world severs his bond with Hashem. A person like this is described by the *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 16:7), “But you were naked and bare.” Bare of Torah and mitzvot, which connect us to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This person loses his G-dly image and his spiritual vitality. He will certainly find it difficult to do teshuvah and purify himself, for he is held captive by the *Yetzer Hara*. Even were he to receive an arousal from Heaven, he would not want to sever his ties with the Satan after tasting all these worldly pleasures.

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu, may His Name be praised forever, in His great mercy, continues sustaining and nourishing him and does not cause him to die. He waits for him to do teshuvah, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 33:11), “I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather that he should return from his wicked ways, and live.” Only after a person awakens on his own accord, and begins the purification process, will Hashem return to him the Divine spark and assist him to completely cleanse himself.

Unfortunately, we find many people who are chained by the Satan. Even when misfortune befalls them, they do not wish to do teshuvah. Their salvation is to do the mitzvot that Hashem has given Bnei Yisrael. The *kedushah* of a mitzvah is so great that it has the power to unshackle a person from the ropes of the *Yetzer Hara* and bind him to Hashem.

This is true even if, at first, a person does mitzvot for ulterior motives and not *l'shem Shamayim*. With time, by continuing to do them, he will begin to become purified. He will then merit further assistance from Heaven, increasing his level of holiness and purity. The reason he does not feel this help is because he is entrenched in the vanities of this world and has erected a wall between himself and his Creator. Only after continually doing mitzvot, will he begin to sense the assistance that Hashem is giving him. With it, he will breach the wall of separation that he had previously built between himself and Hashem.

Chazal teach (*Avot* 4:11), “One who fulfills even a single mitzvah gains himself a single advocate.” This means that with every mitzvah that a person does, an angel is created, helping him do more mitzvot (see *Zohar* II, 32b). Since an angel is a spiritual entity, its sole desire is to do the will of its Maker. Therefore, these angels push a person to perform more mitzvot, thereby creating more angels to bring satisfaction to the Creator. Their existence testifies that a person has done many mitzvot, as it says (*Avot* 4:2), “One mitzvah leads to another.”

We can now reconcile the two teachings: “One who comes to be purified is assisted,” and: “All is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven.” When a person accepts to do mitzvot himself, without receiving any enlightenment from Above, and continues to do them, he merits Heavenly assistance. This gives him renewed energy and vigor to continue in his *avodah*. He must take the first step and begin the process; then Hashem will help him reach his goal (*Zohar* I, 86b).

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal state, “One who comes to purify himself is assisted.” One must make the first step in doing teshuvah. But how can a person, mired in *tumah*, be enjoined to begin this difficult task? Further, Chazal also tell us that “everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven.” This seems to imply that a person gets no Heavenly assistance whatsoever in fearing Hashem. How can we reconcile these two statements?
- When a person suddenly receives a large amount of money, he is most likely to lose it or waste it. Only something which one puts effort into attaining, and comes to him with difficulty, will last for any length of time, since the person wants to preserve it. This is the case with *yirat Shamayim*. If a person were to be given it as a gift, without him preparing himself for it, he would easily lose it, as it has little value in his eyes. Therefore, one must initially exert himself, investing energy to ascend in *yirat Shamayim*. Only afterward will he be assisted, and gain Heavenly illumination, lighting the path for his further elevation.

- Each mitzvah creates an advocating angel. These angels desire the creation of more angels like them, who will bring satisfaction to their Creator. One who is chained by the *Yetzer Hara* does not sense the Heavenly help he is given. But if a person truly desires it, and he takes the first step by doing mitzvot, he receives Divine assistance. This is what is meant by the saying, “One who comes to purify himself is assisted.”

## TESHUVAH – RECTIFICATION OF THE SOUL

Concerning teshuvah, the *sefer Kuntrus Hayesod* (Introduction) writes, “It is known that there is no righteous person in the world who does only good and never sins, either in this reincarnation or in other ones. Everyone must make some kind of rectification, to elevate the holy sparks that fell through his actions, or through the actions of others whose *neshamot* have the same root.

“It is known that aveirot create harmful, destructive spiritual forces. As long as no correction has been made, separating *kedushah* from the *kelippah*, the *kelippah* nourishes itself from one’s good deeds and mitzvot, eventually overpowering him, making him sin and transgress the mitzvot.

“The Ari Hakadosh established a system for correcting sins. A person is recommended to follow this, for, even though he might not have sinned in this area, maybe in previous reincarnations, he did. It might be that others who share the same source of his *neshamah* sinned in this aveirah, and it is up to him to rectify the matter, extracting the sparks of *kedushah* which fell away due to these aveirot. This is in order that they not hinder his Torah study and mitzvah performance.”

The rectification spoken about is that a person should do perfect teshuvah. This includes regretting the past and resolving never to commit the sin again in the future, as well as praying to the Creator that he should

not cause a defect in Torah and mitzvot ever again (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:2*).

The Rambam counts teshuvah as one of the 613 mitzvot (*Sefer Hamitzvot L'HaRambam, Mitzvat Aseh 73*). In his introduction to *Hilchot Teshuvah*, he writes, "It is a positive commandment for a sinner to repent his sin and admit it before Hashem." This presents a difficulty: it seems that teshuvah is a mitzvah which comes through doing an aveirah. For a person cannot do teshuvah without having first sinned. However, we know that it is forbidden to do a mitzvah if through doing so one commits an aveirah. For example, one may not steal money in order to give charity, or perform the mitzvah of sukkah with a stolen sukkah (*Tur, Orach Chaim 637*). How, then, can we call teshuvah a mitzvah if it can be done only after one has sinned?

Chazal say (*Berachot 19a*) that if one sees a *talmid chacham* who sinned by night, he should not suspect him in the day, for he certainly did teshuvah. The tzaddik, Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat, zt"l, a disciple of my holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, may his memory be a blessing, explains this statement in the following way. It may be that the *talmid chacham* sinned only in order that he could fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah.

This explanation is difficult to understand. How can one fathom that a *talmid chacham* would sin purposely, merely so that afterward, he would be able to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah? This is a clear example of a mitzvah that comes through doing an aveirah. Even were we to say that he did not explicitly sin but just contemplated doing so, it is still extremely surprising that a great Torah scholar would do such a thing.

The following are different answers to this question.

### **1. There is no Tzaddik in the World Who Does only Good and Never Sins**

It is clear that one is not expected to sin in order to repent. However, there is no righteous person who does only good and never sins (*Kohelet 7:20*), either knowingly or unwittingly. Hashem wanted to confer merit

upon His nation, and therefore bestowed upon them Torah and mitzvot in abundance (*Yeshayahu* 60:21). Hashem also gave Bnei Yisrael the mitzvah of teshuvah so that a person may always stand before Him clean of all transgression and iniquity, and clean even from the suspicion of a sin which he may have done without realizing. By doing teshuvah, his aveirot are converted to merits (*Yoma* 86b).

We are taught that “a person sins only after a spirit of foolishness entered him” (*Sotah* 3a) Therefore, when a person sins to satisfy his lusts, there is no doubt that he suddenly had a foolish thought, encouraging him to defy the will of his Creator. It is impossible to fathom that a person would rebel against his King. A person sins because he has, so to speak, lost his senses. When he regains them, and he is able to think clearly once again, he is obligated to do teshuvah.

Thus, if someone steals in order to repent, he is certainly fulfilling a mitzvah through doing an aveirah, for he premeditated this sin with clarity of mind. Regarding this type of thinking, Chazal state (*Yoma* 85b), “One who says, ‘I will sin and I will repent, I will sin and I will repent,’ will not be allowed to repent.” He sinned willingly, with a clear mind. On the other hand, one who sinned because he momentarily lost his senses, and afterward repented his actions, is not considered to have fulfilled the mitzvah of teshuvah by doing an aveirah, since he had no intention to first sin and then do teshuvah.

Now we can understand why we are forbidden to suspect a *talmid chacham* who committed a sin. It is impossible that he intended to anger his Creator; his sin is a “descent for the sake of ascent.” From Heaven, he was brought to do a small aveirah so that he should do teshuvah and become even more spiritually elevated. Perhaps he did it unintentionally, in which case, he will make a personal accounting and do teshuvah.

To perfect one’s Avodat Hashem, the holy Rav, Rabbi Elimelech Mi’Lizhensk, zt”l, in his sefer *Noam Elimelech*, states that one should do teshuvah before he fulfills a mitzvah, lest he previously transgressed a

sin, which prevents the mitzvah from rising before Hashem Yitbarach. In that case, it would be considered as though he had not done the mitzvah at all, *chas v'shalom*. As long as he has not done teshuvah, the mitzvah remains suspended in mid-air, as it were.

Therefore, even if one suspects that he sinned, it is recommended that he do teshuvah, repenting even in areas which seem not to apply to him. If someone does teshuvah for a sin which he ostensibly had not committed, it brings benefit to the world at large, for Hakadosh Baruch Hu utilizes this teshuvah to rectify His world under His Kingship. Through a person doing teshuvah, Hashem silences the *Middat Hadin*.

According to this, we might be able to explain the words of Rabbi Abahu (*Berachot* 34b; *Sanhedrin* 99a), “In the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim cannot stand.” A person possesses tremendous strengths, but he does not always manage to harness them into positive actions. This is because his *Yetzer Hatov* is not sufficiently powerful to arouse him to exploit his strengths positively. Conversely, the *Yetzer Hara* has tremendous force to awaken a person to unleash his powerful potential to do the forbidden.

Thus, when a person sins, it is almost as if he activated powerful motors, which had been lying latent within him. When he does teshuvah, he uses these motors, which had served him negatively in the past, for a positive purpose. (This is the concept of aveirot being converted to merits.) By doing so, he has the potential to perfect his actions and reach elevated heights that a perfect tzaddik can never reach. This is because the tzaddik never had access to these motors, since he had never used them; he was never driven by them to sin. An example of this is Rachav, who was originally a harlot. After she did teshuvah, she merited that eight *Nevi'im* and Kohanim were descended from her (*Sifri Beha'alotcha* 20).

## 2. The Mundane Speech of Talmidei Chachamim Disguises Their Holy Actions

We are told (*Avodah Zarah* 19b) that “even the mundane conversation of *talmidei chachamim* requires study.” While ordinary people consider that the mundane speech of *talmidei chachamim* is merely simple speech, or may even be a sin, in truth, it is forbidden to suspect a tzaddik in this way. The sefer *Likutei Moharan* explains that the simple speech of *talmidei chachamim* is merely “a garment” to clothe their holy intentions. Therefore, although ordinary people view this talk as mundane, it is an illusion. Tzaddikim purposely speak in this manner, in order to conceal their holiness. Their seemingly ordinary words are the means by which they accomplish great things. They ascend to great heights through their seemingly simple speech.

Furthermore, the tzaddik is so perfect that sometimes the generation is not worthy of him. Then, the Satan steps in, prosecuting against him that the generation does not deserve that he should live amongst them. Therefore, he speaks commonplace conversation, in order to fend off the Satan and connect with the nation. From on High, he is brought to speak in mundane matters, and perhaps even transgress a small thing, in order to seem on par with the people. In this manner, the Satan is silenced, thinking that he is on the same level as the rest of the generation.

In line with this, we can explain the pasuk (*Shemot* 32:7), “Go, descend – for your people...has become corrupt.” When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, a great accusation was leveled against the nation in general, and Moshe Rabbeinu in particular. The angels claimed that Bnei Yisrael were not worthy to have Moshe live among them, after he had reached the exalted level of being able to ascend to heaven.

For that reason, Hashem told Moshe, “Go – descend.” If Moshe would lower his level, he would be equal with those who sinned, and the accusations would cease, allowing him to pray on their behalf. This is a true, “descent for the purpose of ascent” (*Makkot* 7b).

This idea helps to resolve the following difficulty. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 32:19), “It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, that Moshe’s anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.” What purpose did Moshe have in bringing down the *luchot* after he had been told that the nation had fashioned the Golden Calf, transgressing the commandment “You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence.” Wouldn’t it have been preferable for him to have left the *luchot* in heaven, to be given to the people at a later date, after they repented?

According to what we have explained, Moshe surely intended that the act of breaking the *luchot* would be viewed by Bnei Yisrael, and also by the Satan, as a sin. Then, the Satan would not be able to prosecute against Moshe, demanding that he not remain with the nation. Moshe understood this from Hashem’s words, “Go – descend.” This meant that he should descend to the level of the people, and become equal with them. This descent ultimately resulted in Moshe’s ascent, as the pasuk (*ibid.* 34:29) testifies that his face shone. He could not have merited attaining this high level without previously descending.

This is evidenced by the words that Moshe Rabbeinu himself said (*Devarim* 3:26), “But Hashem became angry with me because of you.” Moshe was hinting to the people that he was punished by not being granted entry into the Holy Land in retribution for striking the stone. For, is it possible that Moshe Rabbeinu, father of all prophets, who took us out of Egypt, would hit the stone instead of speaking to it, as Hashem had commanded? What was the reason for Hashem’s anger? It was certainly due to the generation that he came to err and struck the stone (*Bamidbar* 20:11). It was in order that it be considered a slight misdeed, bringing him to teshuvah and tefillah, as the pasuk says (*Devarim* 3:23), “I implored Hashem at that time (בעת ההיא).” The word “time” (עת) refers to teshuvah, as it says (*ibid.* 10:12), “Now (ועתה), O Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you?” To love Hashem and do all the mitzvot.

We see from here, that at times, by Heavenly decree, a tzaddik is made to transgress a small thing, in order to silence the Satan's charges that he is too great to reside among the generation. It also brings him to higher levels through the teshuvah that he does. Moshe reached a level that no other person has ever merited, dwelling in the Sanctuary of Hashem in heaven for forty days.

All this came in the merit of Bnei Yisrael. By angering Moshe, they caused him to hit the rock. This was considered a sin, which prevented him from entering the Land. On the other hand, it brought him tremendous elevation. Because of it he fulfilled the mitzvah of teshuvah, and made a *kiddush Hashem* in the world.

The Torah records Moshe's sin and his consequent elevation in order to teach us that we may not suspect a *talmid chacham* who transgressed a small sin. He was brought to sin in order that he should become elevated. This is the case with Moshe Rabbeinu, who merited rising to an elevated state and even merited that in his *zechut* the ultimate *geulah* would come. Bnei Yisrael will search for his burial place, and when they pray there for the *geulah*, it will arrive.

### **3. The Example of Nadav and Avihu**

A similar incident happened concerning Nadav and Avihu. On the one hand they seem to have sinned, as the pasuk relates (*Bamidbar* 3:4), "Nadav and Avihu died...when they offered an alien fire before Hashem." On the other hand, we read (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people." Is it possible to imagine that these two tzaddikim intended, *chas v'chalilah*, to anger Hashem, by offering an inappropriate sacrifice?

This incident happened only because the generation did not deserve to have such holy tzaddikim in their midst. This is in line with the statement Moshe told Aharon (*Vayikra Rabbah* 12:2), "My brother, at Sinai, I was told that Hashem will sanctify this house (the Mishkan), by means of a great

man. I was certain it would be either through me or you that the Mishkan would be sanctified. Now I see that your two sons are greater than the two of us.” How, then, can their offering be viewed as a sin?

Certainly, when they brought an alien fire, they were on a most exalted level. They surely intended to use this sin as a springboard for further growth, elevating their *neshamot*. Since they were perfect to begin with, they had no higher level to aspire to. Therefore, they offered an inappropriate *korban*, which would be considered a slight transgression, and then they would do teshuvah. However, they were able to reach this most lofty level only by becoming the sacrifice themselves, dying in fulfilling their intention.

The purity of motive of these two tzaddikim was proven by the fact that Bnei Yisrael were commanded to mourn their deaths, as it says (*Vayikra* 10:6), “The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited.” The people were commanded not to suspect these two giants of the generation, who did not purposely sin, but acted *l’shem Shamayim*. They desired to perfect themselves through doing perfect teshuvah. For this reason, the pasuk says (*Vayikra* 16:1), “When they approached before Hashem, and they died.” They initially intended to sacrifice themselves to Hashem Yitbarach, not to sin, *chalilah*. They were prepared to descend for the sake of ascent.

Furthermore, in their case, an ordinary Kohen was permitted to light the fire under the offering, even though the fire came down from *Shamayim*, as it says (*Vayikra* 1:7), “The sons of Aharon the Kohen shall place fire on the Altar.” Rabbi Eliezer states (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra, remez* 844) that the only accusation against them was that they decided a halachic ruling in the presence of their teacher, Moshe.

Chazal teach that, in truth, Nadav and Avihu were the most important people in the entire nation. The Zohar (III, 56b) states that Nadav and Avihu were equal to the entire Sanhedrin which served Moshe, who were the most righteous members of the nation.

The above examples teach that one may not suspect great tzaddikim. Sometimes, they may do something which seems like a transgression or a mundane matter in the eyes of the onlooker, when, in reality, it is a truly lofty endeavor. They may be doing the action in order to elevate their spiritual level, or in order to atone for the nation.

#### **4. The Tzaddik's Teshuvah Rectifies all Neshamot Connected to Him**

The Arizal sheds light on our original question of how teshuvah can be considered a mitzvah since it can be fulfilled only after one has sinned. He states that one must rectify sins which he didn't even do, since either he may have sinned in previous incarnations, or because other people, whose *neshamot* are connected to the root of his *neshamah*, sinned in these areas. He must correct these things in order to gather the sparks of holiness which fell because of these aveirot.

This explains why tzaddikim say *tachanun*, admitting to the sins listed in *viduy*, even though they could never be suspected of having committed such sins. Their admission and regret is surely atonement for those who share the same *neshamah* root as themselves. These people are elevated by means of the tzaddik's teshuvah.

Similarly, the "everyday conversation" of tzaddikim atones for the improper speech of others. Thus, their mundane speech cannot be considered a mitzvah being fulfilled by doing an aveirah, since the tzaddik never actually sinned at all. He does teshuvah for this speech in order to atone for those who are connected to his *neshamah* and have sinned by speaking improperly.

The teshuvah of the tzaddik and the rectification he accomplishes for the sins of others, are considered descending for the purpose of ascending. He repents for sins which he had no connection with. This confers great merit upon the tzaddik, for by correcting the shortcomings of others, he himself becomes more elevated and sanctified. Thus, everyone profits. The tzaddik is credited with a mitzvah, and those who

actually need to repent are aroused to do so. The tzaddik both “merits and confers merit on others” (*Avot* 5:18).

This is the reason why Hashem decreed that each individual’s *neshamah* should have the same root as the *neshamot* of other Jews. Thus, when the tzaddik does teshuvah, he affects everyone whose *neshamah* has the same root as his own to do teshuvah with him. This is a tremendous merit for him. The tzaddik himself has not sinned in any way; it is those who are spiritually associated with him that need the rectification that he makes. His teshuvah is a totally positive act, rectifying all the sparks of *kedushah* that are connected to his *neshamah*.

When a tzaddik repairs matters that he was not responsible for, he becomes elevated, and a holy spirit is drawn upon him, disconnecting him from the negative forces of the *neshamot* which sinned. Immediately, those connected to him feel this, and it brings them to thoughts of regret and teshuvah. They are not even aware of the source of this arousal.

This idea may help us understand the following deep concept. How is it that at times, a person feels as though he is pushed into sinning, without even desiring to do so? According to what we have explained above, we see that it is due to the influence of others who possess the same soul root as he, who themselves are sinning at that time. He is enmeshed in that sin and is pulled in that direction, without having any intention to sin himself. It is as if he is coerced into sinning against his better judgment. This is due to the influence of those who share the same soul root.

Hashem has decreed that things should be this way. One who transgressed against his will finds it easier to repent and resolve to never repeat the offense, since he never habituated himself to such conduct in the past. Furthermore, because he does teshuvah, thoughts of repentance enter the mind of the real sinner.

Therefore, this type of teshuvah is not considered to be a mitzvah that is fulfilled by doing an aveirah, for this person would never have

entertained the thought of sinning in this area. His teshuvah is effective to nullify these sins, which were done in opposition to his inner desire.

To summarize our discussion: There are four reasons that explain why the Torah obligates one to repent for sins which he himself never committed and for sins that he did not intend to commit, but was pushed into doing so. In all these cases teshuvah is effective. 1. He lost his senses. 2. He was caused to do a slight misdemeanor from *Shamayim* in order to silence the Prosecutor. 3. He sinned in order to ascend by means of descending, and thus reach the pinnacle of perfection. 4. He was forced into the sin as a result of sharing the same soul root as others who did this sin.

### **The Impact of the Sin of Adam Harishon**

When Adam Harishon ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, all of the *neshamot* that were destined to descend to this world ate along with him. Chazal teach (*Shemot Rabbah* 40:3) that all of the *neshamot* are intertwined with Adam's sin. Thus, every *neshamah* needs rectification for this sin, since each became damaged through it. Each person must do teshuvah for this sin, since everyone "enjoyed" the forbidden fruit together with him. Therefore, when Iyov complained against the justness of his suffering, Hashem replied (*Iyov* 38:4), "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" Hashem was hinting to Iyov that his *neshamah* had also been involved in Adam's sin and thus needed rectification.

Even though Adam did the highest level of teshuvah possible, fasting and separating from his wife for 130 years (*Eiruvin* 18b), he did not have the ability to mend the damage done to the *neshamot* contained within him.

The *neshamah* of each person who enters this world has been affected by the sin of Adam even before he was born. Thus his teshuvah is not considered a mitzvah that is fulfilled by doing an aveirah. He certainly never intended to sin in order to do teshuvah, *chas v'chalilah*. A person's

purpose in this world is to attain spiritual perfection by learning Torah and keeping mitzvot. Included in this is that he should do teshuvah and thereby rectify the defect of Adam Harishon, caused by eating the forbidden fruit.

The word תשובה (teshuvah) comes from the root לשוב (to return). Teshuvah means to return to one's original status – pure and holy before the first sin. Therefore, from the moment of birth, a person is obligated to do teshuvah. It is not a mitzvah through doing an aveirah, but, rather, a means of perfecting the past.

What role did the *neshamot* contained within Adam Harishon play in the incident with the forbidden fruit? Could they really have prevented him from partaking of the fruit? For what must they do teshuvah? We must say that according to their elevated level and holiness, they need to do teshuvah since they did get pleasure in eating the fruit, even if this act was done against their will. This is the aspect of soul roots being connected, as mentioned above. Although all future *neshamot* did not actively sin, they still need to be separated from the sin of Adam Harishon. Teshuvah is this separation process.

Perhaps we can answer this difficulty in another way. The *neshamot* contained within Adam Harishon surely agreed to him eating of the Tree of Knowledge, for otherwise, they could have objected and removed themselves from him. Then, only he would have been punished. But, the *neshamot* apparently intended this sin to be the catalyst for reaching great heights. They did not wish to receive “free charity,” rather, to earn their reward by serving Hashem in the most difficult way possible, by distinguishing, through their own efforts, the good from the bad. In this way, they intended to bring the greatest satisfaction to their Creator.

From this, we learn that Adam Harishon, together with the *neshamot* contained within him, effected a method of teshuvah that cannot be opposed. This teshuvah is able even to reach the Heavenly Throne, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 86b; *Pesikta Rabbah* 45:9), “How great is teshuvah, for

it reaches up to the Heavenly Throne.” This is possible because Hashem has carved out a special place underneath His Throne of Glory. He accepts returnees via this route, circumventing the *Middat Hadin* and the prosecution of any accusing angel.

Through teshuvah, one can reach exalted heights, which no ordinary person can attain. In this manner, he brings satisfaction and pleasure to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when He observes his constant devotion to Torah and mitzvot.

Upon contemplation, it is obvious that Hashem yearns for the teshuvah of mankind, for the world cannot exist without it (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 3). Therefore, Hashem created teshuvah even before the world (*ibid.*). This is alluded to in the following pesukim (*Tehillim* 90:2-3), “Before the mountains were born and You had not yet fashioned the earth,” and, “You reduce man to pulp” (a reference to teshuvah). Teshuvah preceded Creation.

Adam Harishon knew full well that it is Hashem’s desire that people return in teshuvah. This was obvious to him from Hashem’s words (*Bereishit* 2:17), “For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” Hashem did not say that Adam would die *the moment* that he sinned and ate of the fruit, rather on the *day* that he did so. This indicated to Adam that he was being granted a window of opportunity to do teshuvah.

Furthermore, Adam and Chava were faced with a difficulty. Since there was no *Yetzer Hara* within them at that time, there was no urge to anger Hashem. That being the case, why was it necessary to create the concept of teshuvah even before the Creation of the world? By eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge they intended to sanctify Hashem’s Name and increase His glory because of the teshuvah that they would do afterwards. In this manner, they would arrive at Gan Eden through their own efforts and merit, rather than through the free kindness of Hashem.

Since the *neshamot* attached to Adam wanted only to act for the sake

of Heaven, they decided to abandon Adam Harishon and returned to their places under the Heavenly Throne. They effected a perfect teshuvah on the part of Adam, glorifying Hashem's Name. He merited reaching a higher level than a perfect tzaddik, as Chazal say (*Berachot* 34b), "At the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim cannot stand." This is because the *ba'al teshuvah* is constantly involved in fighting against his *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to trip him up in areas that he was used to transgressing previously. This is a form of "descent for the purpose of ascent." Therefore, Hashem was patient with them and withheld immediate punishment.

All of the *neshamot* contained within Adam Harishon are, essentially, the sources of future *neshamot*, each according to its level of greatness. Together, they form one unit. For that reason, every individual is obligated to rectify the deficiencies of the other, specifically because all the *neshamot* were involved in the sin of Adam Harishon, since they also derived pleasure from the sin. Their pleasure was a completely spiritual pleasure. They did the sin in order to be able to do teshuvah and increase the recognition of Hashem's Name in the world, bringing the world to its ultimate rectification under Hashem's Kingship. They certainly did not intend to gain physical enjoyment from it, but, rather, sinned in order to establish the concept of teshuvah in the world, for all future generations.

Proof of this is that Adam Harishon repented immediately, on Shabbat (*Pesikta D'Rabbi Eliezer* 19), and continued his teshuvah for 130 years (*Eiruvin* 18b). His teshuvah, was, indeed, accepted. From him, all the *neshamot* learned to do teshuvah. Through teshuvah these *neshamot* are able to reside in the place that is closest to Hashem, right under the Heavenly Throne, a place where no angel can reach. From there, the prayers of the *ba'alei teshuvah* ascend (*Rut Rabbah* 5:6) and are immediately accepted by the *neshamot* themselves, which revealed the power of repentance. These souls deliver the *neshamah* of the *ba'al teshuvah*, clean and pure, to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, bringing Him great satisfaction.

The assistance given to *ba'alei teshuvah* by these *neshamot* is hinted to by Chazal (*Shabbat* 104a): “One who comes to purify himself, is helped by them.” This is written in the plural form because it refers to the *neshamot* on High, who come to the aid of one who repents. Their job is to see to it that the prayers of *ba'alei teshuvah* traverse safely to the Heavenly Throne and are accepted without disturbance, since they are the ones who revealed the fact that teshuvah should be done *l'shem Shamayim*, in order to increase Hashem's glory in the world.

### **Moshe's Response to the Angels**

Now we can understand what transpired between Moshe Rabbeinu and the angels in Shamayim, when he ascended to receive the Torah for Bnei Yisrael (*Shabbat* 88b). The angels claimed that Bnei Yisrael have no rights to the Torah. It was a treasure that had been hidden for 974 generations before the Creation of the world. They were appalled at the thought that Hashem intended to deliver it into the hands of mere mortals, for perhaps they would transgress the word of Hashem. “What is frail man that You should remember him?” (*Tehillim* 8:5), they asked. Hashem commanded Moshe to answer them, using the words, “חזור להן תשובה.” This is an inference to teshuvah. Hashem was hinting that even if Bnei Yisrael would in the future sin, they always have the opportunity to do teshuvah, returning to their former status, pure and free of sin. This is called חזרה בתשובה (returning in teshuvah).

Moshe also told the angels that man's neshamah is sent to this world specifically in order to do teshuvah, and that the sins that he does while in the world are “a descent for the sake of ascent.” Hashem told Moshe, “Hold fast to My Throne of Glory, a place where no angels can reach.” Located there, are all of the *neshamot* that discovered the concept of descending in order to ascend and thus increase the glory of Hashem. Their teshuvah is not a mitzvah that is fulfilled by doing an aveirah, for their motivation was solely for the sake of Heaven. Thus Moshe silenced the prosecution of the angels.

However, this is true only if a person does not use teshuvah as an excuse to say, “I will sin and I will repent” (*Yoma* 85b). Such a person rationalizes his sin thinking that he can easily wipe it out with the teshuvah that he will afterwards do. He must act *l’shem Shamayim*. An example of this is Pinchas, who killed Zimri ben Salu and Kozbi bat Tzur, despite being a Kohen, who is prohibited from becoming defiled by contact with a dead body [according to the opinion that he was a Kohen prior to this incident] (*Bamidbar* 25). However, because he acted *l’shem Shamayim*, not only was his act not considered an aveirah, he received the blessing of peace for doing it (*ibid.* 12).

When he saw what took place, he remembered the halachah (*Sanhedrin* 82b) that one who cohabits with an Aramean woman should be put to death by zealots. He, therefore, decided that it was a time to act for Hashem’s honor and disregarded his status as a Kohen in order to right the wrong that he saw, as it says (*Tehillim* 119:126), “For it is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah.” Through his actions he sanctified the Name of Heaven. Moreover, in the *zechut* of his zealotry for Hashem and his pure, selfless motivations, he merited rising ever higher, becoming the advocate of Am Yisrael and arousing Heavenly mercy on their behalf. We are guaranteed that “Hashem guards the steps of His devout ones” (*Shmuel* I, 2:9). Pinchas received Heavenly assistance, and the sinners did not die immediately, but remained alive until he left, so that he was spared from becoming defiled by contact with a corpse.

Why was Pinchas specifically chosen to remember the halachah regarding a man who sins with an Aramean woman? All of Klal Yisrael had learned Torah from the mouth of Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem wanted that he should descend in order to ascend. By means of his teshuvah, he would rise ever higher. But this type of teshuvah is effective only on condition that no *chillul Hashem* results from it and that the person does not derive physical pleasure from the sin. Someone who says, “I will sin and I will repent,” premeditating a sin, will not be allowed to do teshuvah, and will fall lower and lower.

Similar to this is the case of the man who gathered wood on Shabbat. He was a great tzaddik, and acted *l'shem Shamayim* by desecrating Shabbat despite being aware of his punishment. He wanted to publicize the penalty for one who violates Shabbat, in order that the nation should not make light of this mitzvah. Chazal state (*Baba Batra* 119b), “The one who gathered acted for the sake of Heaven. There were those who said that when Yisrael was denied entry into the Land, due to the sin of the spies, they became absolved of all mitzvot. He stood up and desecrated Shabbat in order to be put to death, and thereby, set an example for others.”

The gatherer certainly repented before he was killed. That is why his daughters merited a portion in the Holy Land (*Bamidbar* 27:7). Moreover, their words were important to Hashem, to the extent that He justified their position, and stated (*ibid.*), “The daughters of Tzelafchad speak properly.”

An amazing story is written about Maran Harav Shach, zt”l, in the book *Manhig Hador*. Before his death, he had doubts regarding a halachah he had decided fifty years previously. He asked one of his great disciples to check the halachah, lest he had ruled incorrectly, *chas v’shalom*, in which case, he would do teshuvah.

What an awesome story! Harav Shach wanted to do teshuvah for something that was only doubtful. In spite of all the Torah he had amassed in his lifetime, and all of the Yom Kippur’s that he had gone through, which had certainly brought him atonement for any sins he may have committed, he was nevertheless concerned about a halachic decision that he had made fifty years earlier. If the leader of the generation was so careful to do teshuvah, how much more so must we be!

### ———— In Summary ————

- The opinion of the Rambam that teshuvah is included in the 613 mitzvot presents a difficulty. For, in order to perform this mitzvah, a person needs to first sin, and

only then is granted the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah. This being the case, teshuvah is considered a mitzvah that is fulfilled by doing an aveirah, which is despised by Hashem.

- Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat explains the Gemara that states that one should not suspect a *talmid chacham* who transgressed, for he surely repented. He did the sin merely to be able to perform the mitzvah of teshuvah. For, otherwise, how can one entertain the thought of a tzaddik sinning at all? His teshuvah would be considered a mitzvah done through an aveirah.
- We can settle the matter with the words of the Arizal, who states that everyone is obligated to do teshuvah, even for matters in which he never sinned. This is because he may have transgressed in a previous incarnation, or someone sharing his soul root may have sinned in this area. This might be the Torah's intention in commanding us to do teshuvah, since the Torah would never instruct us to do a mitzvah through doing an aveirah.
- "In a place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim may not stand." A *ba'al teshuvah* must put more effort into the concept of descending for the purpose of ascent *l'shem Shamayim*. He also has to constantly battle his *Yetzer Hara*, galvanizing his inner strength in order to do teshuvah, more than a perfect tzaddik has to. In this manner, the *ba'al teshuvah* is able to reach great heights.
- The everyday conversation of *talmidei chachamim* demands study. It is not merely idle talk, but, rather, a means of accomplishing lofty things. For all their discussions are "clothing" for their lofty deeds, concealing their greatness and holiness. Furthermore, the generation is not always worthy of having a tzaddik in their midst. The tzaddik speaks in a mundane manner in order to descend to the level of the generation, thereby silencing any prosecution against him.
- Nadav and Avihu yearned to become elevated above the level of their generation, and attain perfection. Therefore, they transgressed in a minor area, so that by doing teshuvah they would literally be offering themselves to Hashem. They were, indeed, successful, as the pasuk states, "Through My holy ones, I will become sanctified." It is forbidden to judge their actions, for they descended in order to reach exalted levels.
- According to the Arizal, one is enjoined to repent the sins done by those connected to him via the root of his soul. There are four reasons that explain

why a person sins. 1. He sinned because he “lost his senses.” 2. He was made to sin from *Shamayim* in order to silence the prosecution of the *Yetzer Hara*. 3. He sinned in order to descend for the purpose of ascending, and thus reach perfection. 4. He sinned as a result of sharing of the same soul root as others.

- Moshe defended Bnei Yisrael’s right to the Torah by explaining to the angels that teshuvah allows man to reach elevated heights. There is a special aperture under the Heavenly Throne for those who return in teshuvah. Those *neshamot* that were designated from the time of Adam Harishon, paved the path to teshuvah.
- However, one may not say, “I will sin and I will repent,” having the prior intent to sin. One must act *l’shem Shamayim*. An example of this is Pinchas, who risked becoming defiled by contact with a dead body, in order to make a *kiddush Hashem*.
- One should not cast suspicion upon tzaddikim. At times, they do things that may seem like a sin or a mundane act in the eyes of the onlooker, whereas, in reality, their intentions are beyond our simple understanding.

# THE NATION OF ISRAEL



## THE ADVANTAGE OF AM YISRAEL OVER THE NATIONS

In the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will take a Sefer Torah and proclaim, “Whoever was involved with Torah, come to receive your reward!” Immediately, all the idol worshippers will come en masse, as the *Navi* says (*Yeshayahu* 43:9), “Were all the nations gathered together, etc.” Hashem will then instruct them not to come all at once (*Avodah Zarah* 2a).

The Gemara continues (*ibid.* 3b), stating that the nations will place tefillin upon their heads and forearms. They will put *tzitzit* upon their garments and mezuzot on their doorposts. They will do all this out of fear of the War of *Gog U'Magog* (the last war against the nations, to be fought by Mashiach). When asked why they have come, they will reply, “For the sake of Hashem and His anointed one.” Then, each will remove his tefillin, going on his way. Hashem will mock them for this.

This account requires explanation. Why do the gentiles come before Hashem? Do they really believe they deserve reward? For what? For tormenting His people throughout the long *galut*!?

Furthermore, why will they put on tefillin and *tzitzit* on the Day of Judgment? Do they really believe that they can convince anyone of their piety? They never laid tefillin in their lives, and didn't fulfill any other mitzvah. Suddenly, on the great Day of Judgment, they try to prove how righteous they are and also demand reward. Who are they trying to fool?

Why will Hashem answer them at all? Are they worthy of a response? Shouldn't they simply be removed from before His presence for their brazen demand of reward? They claim that Bnei Yisrael also sinned, and are now coming to judgment dressed in tefillin and *tzitzit* expecting their reward. But there is no validity to this claim, since Bnei Yisrael would not have sinned were it not for the influence of the nations themselves, who forced them to transgress the words of the Torah.

Let us explain by examining Chazal's description of the World to Come (*Berachot* 17a). Tzaddikim will sit, with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah*. What is the purpose of these crowns? Would it not be possible to enjoy the glory of Hashem's presence without the aid of the crowns on their heads?

The essence of this matter is based on man's purpose in this world. It is well-known that before descending to this world, the *neshamah* refuses to come down. It prefers to remain in the Upper World, under the Heavenly Throne, basking in the glory of the *Shechinah* (*Shabbat* 152b; *Zohar* I, 113a). Life in this world is quite a risky business, involving constant transactions with the *Yetzer Hara*. But the *neshamah* is compelled to descend, as *Avot* states (4:29), "Against your will you were created; against your will you were born, etc."

Why is the *neshamah* forced to come down to this world? As long as it remains in heaven, under the Heavenly Throne, the *neshamah* becomes used to this wonderful existence and does not value it adequately. The soul needs to spend time in the physical world so that when it is time for it to return to the World of Truth it will truly be able to appreciate the real pleasures awaiting it there.

Moreover, one's portion in the next world must be earned. This is in fact a *chessed* on the part of Hashem. Instead of the *neshamah* receiving its reward as a gift, it is rewarded according to the effort it expended. The more exertion one invests in this world, the greater the reward one can expect to receive in the World to Come.

Thus, one is required to rule over his *Yetzer Hara*. This is hinted to in the words of the Torah. The pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 21:27), “Regarding this, the rulers would say, ‘Come to Cheshbon – let it be built and established as the city of Sichon.’” Chazal explain (*Bava Batra* 78b) that “rulers” refer to those who rule over their *Yetzer Hara*. “Come to Cheshbon” means that one should make a reckoning (*cheshbon*) of his actions in this world. He should reckon the loss incurred in doing a mitzvah as compared to its reward, and the pleasure gained by doing an aveirah, as compared to its punishment. If one does this then: “Let it be built and established” – he will be built in this world, and established in the World to Come.

However, if one follows his *Yetzer Hara*, he will be “as the city of Sichon” – like someone who behaves like a young ass who, driven by his desires, follows a beautiful young horse. Then (*ibid.* vs. 28) “a fire has come forth from Cheshbon” – a fire will emit from one who makes a personal accounting and will consume the one who does not do so.

This can be explained in a different way: “A flame from the city of Sichon” teaches that a flame will emit from the city of the tzaddikim, who are called Sichon (*Shoftim* 5:10) and “consume...the masters of Amon’s heights.” This refers to those who hold themselves high. We are taught that the haughty will fall into Gehinnom.

It is no mean feat to reach the level of ruling over one’s *Yetzer Hara*, controlling it like a master dominates his slave. Hashem bequeathed us the Torah, around which all of one’s thoughts and actions should revolve. One should strive to never leave a window of opportunity open for sin to creep in. Furthermore, by toiling in Torah, one drives away the *Yetzer Hara*, who is then unable to approach him. The Gemara (*Sukkah* 52b) instructs us to drag the *Yetzer Hara* to the Beit Hamidrash in order to vanquish him.

A man once told me that he suffers greatly when he is learning Torah. So much so, that he is unsure whether or not he really understood what he learned. For that reason, he finds himself reviewing the subject matter

over and over again. Despite constantly discovering new insights in his learning, this gives him no pleasure, for a short time later he discovers something contradictory to his original discovery.

I told him, “How fortunate you are for suffering for the sake of the Torah. This shows that you are plumbing the very depths of Torah. This is true learning, as Chazal teach (*Torat Kohanim Vayikra* 26:3) on the pasuk (ibid.), “If you will follow My decrees – That you toil in Torah.”

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zt”l, said that one must sweat over the Torah. The suffering involved is what chases away the *Yetzer Hara*. By means of true toil in Torah study, one will be capable of uncovering its secrets, as we are enjoined (*Avot* 5:25), “Delve in it (the Torah) and continue to delve in it for everything is in it.”

### **Every Jew is Privileged with a Portion in the World to Come**

Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree as to whether it is good for a person to have been born (*Eiruv* 13b). One answers this question in the positive, and one in the negative. However, they both agree that “now that he was born, let him scrutinize his actions.”

Let us try to understand this statement. If, in fact, it is preferable for a person not to have been born, why did Hashem create him? Did He merely want to cause him anguish? Certainly, Hashem, Who is the Ultimate Perfection, does everything in the most perfect way, and desires to bestow good upon His creatures in the most beneficial, true way. How is it possible to claim that Hashem created something which was best off not having been created at all?

Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel are referring only to this world. Because of the suffering and hardships that people go through on their journey through this world, it would seem that it would have been better for a person not to have been created in the first place.

However, in order to enjoy the World to Come, it is certainly better that a person was created. It is specifically through coming into this world that one can attain his ultimate purpose in the next world. Moreover, Chazal state (*Avot* 4:22): “Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come.” One is able to do teshuvah only in this world, thereby improving his eternal lot.

This indicates that man’s creation is certainly for his ultimate benefit. However, he must make a personal accounting to see that all his actions are in accordance with the Torah. He should learn Torah without letup. This will rectify the suffering the *neshamah* experiences upon descending to this world. As the Gemara states (*Berachot* 5a), “If a person sees suffering coming upon him, let him attribute it to *bitul* Torah.” In this manner, he will merit ruling over his desires, overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*.

Chazal state (*Avodah Zarah* 5b) that as long as tzaddikim are involved in Torah, their *Yetzer Hara* is under their control. This means that if one keeps a personal accounting of all his actions, as the Torah requires, he will merit ruling over his *Yetzer Hara*. One who does so is, in essence, coronating Hashem over the entire world. First and foremost, he crowns Hashem King over himself. He himself also deserves to be crowned.

However, such a person was so engrossed in crowning Hashem through his worthy actions that he never had a chance to notice the crown that was placed on his own head. Similarly, he was not aware of the great pleasure he was constantly bringing to his Creator. It is only when he arrives in the World of Truth that he finally merits feeling that glorious crown upon his head, and the ethereal pleasure from the splendor of the *Shechinah*. Then, he will be overjoyed at the satisfaction that he caused Hashem by the deeds which he performed in his lifetime. Conversely, he will be tremendously pained by the thought that he could have given Hashem even greater pleasure than he actually did.

Not so the nations of the world, who were not given the Torah. They waste their lives in pursuit of the vanities of this world, joining forces with

the *Yetzer Hara*. In the future, they will request reward for bringing the Jewish nation to teshuvah by causing them to suffer. They will claim that by bringing various *nisyonot* upon Bnei Yisrael, they have increased the reward that the Jews will gain in the World to Come. For that reason, they brazenly appear with *tzitzit* on their garments, wearing the “crown of glory,” which is the tefillin of the head, and holding a “golden staff,” which is the tefillin of the forearm.

Why, indeed, do the nations feel justified in doing this? It is because, in the future, they will see the resha'im of Bnei Yisrael also wearing *tzitzit* and tefillin, requesting reward. The gentiles will think to themselves, “How are we worse than they? They were commanded to keep the commandments, and didn't do so. We, who weren't even commanded, will certainly receive reward for keeping them.”

This is their justification for wearing *tzitzit* and tefillin at the time of judgment. They want to indict those members of the Jewish nation who did not keep Torah and mitzvot yet demand reward. They claim that if such Jews should be rewarded, then surely they deserve to be recompensed, since the survival of the Jews can be attributed to them.

But they have a major flaw in their reasoning. Chazal (*Berachot* 57a) expound on the pasuk (*Shir Hashirim* 4:3), “The merits of the least worthy within your modest veil are as numerous as a pomegranate's seeds.” Even though there were Jews who did not lay tefillin, and behaved according to their hearts' desires, they will eventually be purified of their sins, spotless as the fresh white snow. This is as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 1:18) prophesies, “If your sins are like scarlet, they will become [white] as snow.”

All of Bnei Yisrael deserve this because they are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who sacrificed themselves for the sake of Hashem. Our forefathers insure that none of their progeny will be eternally lost. Yitzchak particularly protects them, as he offered himself as a sacrifice to Hashem (*Shabbat* 89a). Even those who are stained with

sin will undergo a purification process in Gehinnom, and emerge spotless (*Zohar* Part III 124).

On the other hand, the nations of the world cannot trace any lineage which can offer them protection. At Har Sinai, Hashem told them, “Bring me your book of ancestry.” The gentiles envied Bnei Yisrael for receiving the Torah. Hashem silenced their complaint by proving that they were not qualified to receive the Torah; they did not merit it themselves, nor did they have ancestors in whose *zechut* they could claim it (*Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar, remez* 684).

Furthermore, the Torah is called a “sefer,” as it states (*Devarim* 31:26), “לקח את ספר התורה הזוה – Take this book of the Torah.” The one who received the Torah is the one who relates to it, and who is, in turn, protected by it. This is hinted to by the fact that the word ספר has the same root as the word ספירה (*sefirah*). Whoever engages in Torah study is connected, by means of the ten *sefirot*, to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But the nations of the world, who refused to accept the Torah (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Zuta* 11), certainly do not associate with it, relinquishing the protection that the Torah affords. They are thereby disconnected from the ten *sefirot*, remaining distanced from Hashem. This is the reason Hashem replies to them. He wants to show them exactly what it is that they forfeited, earning them great retribution.

Thus, the nations will receive no reward, despite their rationalizations. They harassed the Jews not in order to bring them to teshuvah, but out of their own wickedness. They desired to cause the Jewish people to assimilate among them in order to obliterate them completely from the face of the earth. For this, they deserve tremendous punishment, not any reward whatsoever.

It is a Jew’s special relationship with the Torah that causes him to feel anguish when he sins. The reason for this anguish is not always clear to him. If he will be honest with himself, he will hear the inner voice of his conscience crying out to him, “Why did you transgress this and this sin?”

Because of that, you will be held back from enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah*, and being crowned with the crown of the righteous.”

One should take this lesson to heart. He should bear in mind the great pain he will experience in the future, when he is refused return to his place of origin, the Heavenly Throne (*Zohar* III, 29a). He was thrust from there to this world of doing in order to prepare a rightful place for himself in the next world, which he will merit by his good deeds. When a person sins in this world, he not only negates the entire purpose for coming down to this world, but also denies himself reward in the World to Come.

Each person is obligated to utilize the great strengths hidden within him to pursue Avodat Hashem, rather than the vanities of this world. This is as Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 17a): “Fortunate is he who is great in Torah, and his endeavors are in Torah, and he brings satisfaction to his Creator.” This will enable him to do complete teshuvah and enjoy the splendor of the *Shechinah*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- In the future, the nations of the world will come to the Final Judgment wearing *tzitzit* and tefillin, requesting reward. What type of reward do they deserve? They did everything in their power to bring suffering upon Bnei Yisrael. Also, why do they wear tefillin? Do they expect to convince Hashem that they deserve reward for it; they never wore tefillin in this world at all?!
- Why does Hashem see fit to respond to their claims? After all, the sins committed by Bnei Yisrael in *galut* were due to the influence of the gentiles. What kind of merit do they expect to have?
- In the future, tzaddikim will sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah*. The crown refers to the *neshamah*, which sees how good it is to be in the presence of Hashem, which it has merited by toiling in Torah.
- The nations of the world come to judgment wearing *tzitzit* and tefillin to indicate that all the suffering that they inflicted on Bnei Yisrael was for the sole purpose

of bringing them to teshuvah. How are they worse, they demand to know, than those members of Bnei Yisrael who did not keep the laws of the Torah? The nations come wrapped up in mitzvot to prove that they acted for the sake of Bnei Yisrael, not in order to prevent them from keeping Torah and mitzvot.

- Hakadosh Baruch Hu pays them no heed. They have no merit whatsoever, as their intention was purely to cause the Jews to assimilate among the nations. They were bent on having the Jews lose their special identity.
- The reason that a *neshamah* comes down to this world is in order for it to return to its place under the Heavenly Throne by earning its reward, rather than receiving it as a free gift. According to the *neshamah's* efforts in this world is the greatness and honor that it will enjoy in the World to Come. The *neshamah* will then bask in the glory of the *Shechinah*, as it says, “Tzaddikim will sit with their crowns upon their heads.”

## AM YISRAEL – THE NATION ABOVE NATURE

There are many prophecies regarding Am Yisrael in the times of the redemption. Yeshayahu (27:13) states, “It shall be on that day that a great shofar will be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Ashur and those cast away in the land of Egypt will come [together], and they will prostrate themselves to Hashem on the holy mountain in Yerushalayim.” Further on (ibid. 65:25), he says, “Wolf and lamb will graze as one, a lion – like cattle – will eat straw, a snake’s food will be dirt; they will not inflict harm nor destruction in all My holy mountain, says Hashem.”

Similarly, Malachi (3:23) prophesied, “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem, etc.” However, the Gemara (*Berachot* 34a) tells us that Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “The prophets all foretold the days of Mashiach. But no eye ever saw the World to Come; only Hashem” (based on *Yeshayahu* 64:3). Rashi explains that this means that no

prophet ever received a prophecy regarding, or saw an image of, the World to Come.

When we contemplate the aforementioned predictions concerning the days of Mashiach, it is difficult for us to believe them. Why is this so? It is due to our lack of belief. If we truly believed in Hashem, we would have no trouble believing these awesome predictions.

This is illustrated by the Jews at *Matan Torah*. Before the Torah was given, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shemot* 19:11), “Let them (the people) be prepared for the third day, for on the third day Hashem shall descend...on Har Sinai.” Moshe thus instructed the nation to make preparations for receiving the Torah. Bnei Yisrael believed wholeheartedly that through the requisite preparation of purifying themselves they would merit receiving the Torah and speaking with Hashem. They merited this because of their steadfast faithfulness.

Unfortunately, there are people today who think that to speak with Hashem is an impossibility. This is because of their lack of faith. All the troubles which constantly befall us are because of our lack of total trust in Hashem.

The more we strengthen ourselves in faith, the closer we will bring ourselves to Hashem. In fact, then Hashem will draw us closer to Him. The Ba'al Shem Tov explains that this is the meaning of the pasuk (*Tehillim* 121:5) “Hashem is your protective Shade.” Hashem is like a person's shadow. If someone sticks out a finger, his shadow does, too. If someone stretches out his hand, his shadow does the same. The more we connect ourselves to Hashem, the more He connects Himself to us.

We see that the Torah foretells of retribution which has actually taken place. Devarim (28:15) states, “But it will be that if you do not hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe, to perform all His commandments and all His decrees...then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” Further on (*ibid.* 68), the pasuk states, “And there

you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maidservants – but there will be no buyer!”

We ourselves have seen how in Germany, there were wealthy Jews who tried to buy their freedom, offering tremendous amounts of money, and even offering themselves as slaves, in order to save their lives. Their efforts were to no avail; the accursed Germans sent them straight to the gas chambers.

We must gird ourselves with firm belief. Just as the ominous portents of punishment came true, so, too, will the good tidings promised in the Torah come to fruition. How so? We must understand that the Jewish nation is above nature. If we act above the laws of nature, Hashem will likewise treat us above the laws of nature.

For that reason, Hashem has given Bnei Yisrael laws and commandments which are above the natural order. This is so that their behavior should also rise above nature. Take Shabbat, for example. When a person keeps Shabbat, he is demonstrating that he has no connection to the world of nature, and his sole aspiration is to do the will of his Creator. The sefer *Anaf Yosef* explains the Midrash Rabbah (*Devarim* 1:18) regarding Shabbat as follows.

“The mitzvah of Shabbat demonstrates that there is a Creator Who created and renews the world constantly, with great wisdom. Only true believers will accept this as a fact, seeking no obvious miracles to prove it. This is what it means to accept the yoke of Heaven upon oneself.

“Shabbat also refers to *Olam Haba*, as Shabbat is described as a ‘taste of the World to Come.’ The sanctity of Shabbat is sample of the sanctity of *Olam Haba*. Therefore, Shabbat is a sign between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Similarly, *brit milah* is a sign between Hashem and His people. For this reason, if a gentile, who has not been circumcised, decides to keep Shabbat, it has no meaning. Since he has not entered the covenant of *brit milah* with Hashem, he is incapable of affirming his belief in Hashem in

the World to Come, as well as accepting upon himself the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. Keeping Shabbat for him is completely superficial. He rests on the seventh day, since he believes that it is a good idea to rest from working once a week.”

On the other hand, when a Jew keeps Shabbat, it demonstrates that he is above the laws of nature, and also proves that he truly cleaves to Hashem. Because Bnei Yisrael act above nature, they are able to withstand trials that are above the laws of nature.

Tzaddikim act in ways that go beyond the laws of nature. They therefore have the power to change these laws. Chazal relate many such cases. One example is Elisha Ba'al Kenafayim (Elisha of the Wings) (*Shabbat* 130a). The Roman government passed a law forbidding the laying of tefillin. Elisha disregarded this law and placed tefillin on his forearm and head. When a Roman legionnaire observed this, he began chasing him. Elisha removed his tefillin. In his hand, they became the wings of a dove. He was able to change the course of nature because he rose above his natural instincts, risking his life for the sake of the mitzvah of tefillin.

Why, indeed, are Bnei Yisrael above the laws of nature? Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4), “Yisrael were the first in His thought.” Why was this? In order that they should publicize Hashem’s Name throughout the entire world. Bnei Yisrael teach everyone that Hashem created the world from nothing and He sustains it each and every minute. If not for the Jewish nation, there would be no one to recognize this truth. Therefore, since the purpose of a Jew’s creation is to reveal Hashem’s existence in this world, he can never forsake his religion, and will always remain attached to Hashem. Since Hashem Himself is above nature, Bnei Yisrael are too.

I know of a Jew who became a Christian, *rachmana litzlan*. From time to time he regrets this step and contacts me, saying that he wants to return to his roots. He asks for guidance in Avodat Hashem. But then he goes

back to his abominable ways. After a while, he calls me again, in tears. This cycle repeats itself again and again. This indicates that he cannot sever himself completely from the Jewish nation, because a Jew will always remain a Jew, above the laws of nature.

### ————— In Summary —————

- There are many prophecies concerning what will take place in the days of Mashiach. At that time, the wolf will live peacefully with the lamb. All of the exiles of Ashur will return. But there is no *Navi* that saw what will happen in the World to Come.
- It is very difficult for us to believe that the predictions regarding the days of Mashiach will actually take place. This is because we are lacking true belief. At *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael believed that through requisite preparation it is possible to speak with Hashem. If one strengthens his *emunah*, a person will believe with a full heart that all future prophecies will indeed come to fruition.
- The more we connect ourselves to Hashem, the more He connects to us. This is compared to a shadow. Whatever the person does, the shadow copies.
- We must believe that all prophecies are true and will take place. The predictions of terror and doom materialized, to the last detail, in the horrors that took place in Germany. Just as those predictions came about, we must believe that the predictions of peace will also be realized.
- Hashem has given His nation mitzvot that are above nature, such as Shabbat, to indicate that, contrary to the existence of the nations of the world, the survival of Am Yisrael is above nature.

## AM YISRAEL – THE NATION DEDICATED TO HASHEM

At the End of Days, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will announce, “Whoever toiled in Torah, come and get your reward.” What will the nations of the world do? They will tell Hashem, “Master of the world! Give us mitzvot

now and we will fulfill them.” To which He will reply, “Fools! Whoever toiled on Erev Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. Whoever didn’t toil on Erev Shabbat, what will he eat on Shabbat? Still, I have an easy mitzvah called ‘sukkah.’ Go ahead and prepare one.” Sukkah is called an easy mitzvah because it does not entail great expense (*Avodah Zarah* 3).

Further on, it states that the gentiles indeed will build sukkot on the roofs of their houses. But then Hashem will bring out the sun in its full force. Each and every gentile will then forsake his sukkah in disgust, kicking it on his way out. Hashem will then mock them, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 2:4), “He Who sits in Heaven will laugh” (*Avodah Zarah* 3a).

The author of the sefer *Kedushat Tzion* has difficulty understanding this. How is it possible to call sukkah an “inexpensive” mitzvah? Don’t we see how Bnei Yisrael, who seek to glorify mitzvot, go to great expense to buy quality wood for the walls? People spend much money on *s’chach* and on decorations to beautify their sukkah. How can it possibly be said that this is a relatively cheap mitzvah?!

There seems to be a contradiction in the Gemara. On the one hand, it seems that Hashem does not want to give the nations of the world the chance to return to Him, as is evidenced by His statement that they cannot expect any reward in the World to Come because they have not prepared themselves for it. On the other hand, He instructs them to build sukkot, giving them a chance to prepare themselves for the next world.

The nations of the world know that they are facing the great Day of Judgment. Proof is that they request the chance to learn Torah. If so, how can they kick the sukkah when they leave it? Surely, their punishment will be doubled due to the scorn they displayed for this mitzvah.

Perhaps we can explain this with the following idea. At the birth of Yitzchak, we find the statement (*Bereishit* 21:6), “Sarah said, ‘G-d has made laughter for me; whoever hears will laugh for me.’” Yitzchak was

given his name based on this laughter. This is difficult to understand. Would people laugh when they heard that an elderly woman gave birth? On the contrary; they would be awestruck.

Moreover, Hashem Himself called the child “Yitzchak,” agreeing that all who would hear about his birth would be filled with mirth. Why?

The attribute of Yitzchak is *gevurah* (*Zohar* I, 135a). His service of Hashem was through *mesirut nefesh*, as we see at the *Akeidah*. We find that he accompanied Avraham, his father, with the same joy and desire to do Hashem’s will, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 22:6), “And the two of them went together.”

Hashem desires that the *middah* of Yitzchak should inculcate self-sacrifice within the Jewish people for all generations to come. His is a type of inner strength in the face of the laughter of the world. Indeed, we witness how boors and ignoramuses mock and scorn the Torah-true Jews. They ridicule the way they sit all day long “wasting away their time” instead of going out to work. Still, these stalwart *bnei Torah* keep up their studies, fulfilling the words of the *Tanna* (*Avot* 6:4) to “eat bread with salt...” They learn Torah with *mesirut nefesh*, overcoming the insults hurled at them by others.

This helps us understand our original question why the sukkah is called an “easy” mitzvah. Those who have a strong connection with Torah, whether by constant study both day and night, or by setting aside time for learning, do not feel that any mitzvah incurs a heavy expense. They perform every mitzvah, whether easy or hard, with self-sacrifice. There is no mitzvah that drains their financial or emotional resources.

The best example of this is the mitzvah of sukkah. The mitzvah teaches us *emunah*, nullification of the ego, and transience of material possessions. One leaves his home to enter a temporary hut. Nonetheless, he expends an incredible amount of money on the sukkah. The walls, the *s’chach*, and the decorations are expensive. And he also needs to buy the

four species, which cost a small fortune. Even so, Bnei Yisrael still call the sukkah “an easy mitzvah.” Because of their tremendous love for the mitzvah, they do not view the mitzvah of sukkah as causing them any expense at all. So it is with all of the mitzvot.

This is not the case with the gentiles. Throughout their entire lives, they did not perform even one mitzvah with self-sacrifice, as Bnei Yisrael did. They mocked, they slaughtered, all in order to prevent Bnei Yisrael from fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot. Therefore, when the End of Days arrives, and they see the vast reward accorded to tzaddikim, they suddenly desire the Torah; however, at that time, the *Yetzer Hara* will be gone. There will be no free choice at all. The entire concept of *mesirut nefesh* will be a thing of the past, as there will be no counter-force preventing them from fulfilling mitzvot.

That is why Hashem addresses them as fools. “Without effort or preparation, you expect to receive the Torah, in order to receive reward reserved for the tzaddikim?!” The End of Days is referred to as “Shabbat.” Only one who prepared on Erev Shabbat has what to eat on Shabbat. Only one who performed mitzvot in his lifetime, in this world, through *mesirut nefesh*, is worthy of reward in the World to Come. One who did not labor, what will he eat on Shabbat? What can he expect as reward in the World to Come? “You missed the boat. Now you are left with nothing.”

“Furthermore,” Hashem continues, “At the time of *Matan Torah*, I offered you the Torah, but you refused, asking what it contains (*Tanchuma, Berachah* 4). Now that you observe Bnei Yisrael receiving their just reward, you suddenly remember the Torah, and desire it. Now it is too late. The time for fulfilling Torah and mitzvot has expired.”

Moreover, the nations of the world scorned Bnei Yisrael for their mitzvah performance. For example, Chazal tell us (*Midrash Aggadah, Rashi*) that the nations of the world scoff at the Jewish nation, asking what the mitzvah of *parah adumah* is all about, and what is its reward. The nations torment the Jewish people, trying to prevent us from keeping

Torah and mitzvot. But Bnei Yisrael nevertheless perform the mitzvot through great self-sacrifice. This is how they prepare for Shabbat. Hashem tells them (*Beitzah* 15b), “Borrow [to honor the Shabbat], and I will repay you.” The nations of the world never displayed such *mesirut nefesh*. This contradicts their entire claim toward Hashem. They will have no further opportunity to return to Him.

What does Hashem tell the nations? “I have an easy mitzvah for you, which involves no expense. It is called ‘sukkah.’ Go and make it.” This means to say, “Now that there is no *Yetzer Hara*, and no free choice, there is no one to prevent you from keeping mitzvot. On the contrary, let us see if you can keep this small mitzvah. But it is a foregone conclusion that you won’t fulfill this mitzvah, because you have no faith at all.” Only one whose faith in Hashem is engraved in his heart can accept upon himself the fulfillment of mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*.

Hashem tells the nations: “What good to you is the Torah if you don’t possess faith? Only one who labored on Erev Shabbat, on strengthening his faith, will eat from the fruits of his labor on Shabbat.” At that time, Hashem will return the nations to their previous state, when they had a *Yetzer Hara*, and the concepts of free choice and self-sacrifice still existed. This is their last chance. However, the gentiles always hindered the Jews in their mitzvah fulfillment, and they themselves were never involved in mitzvot, constantly degrading them. Now, as well, they will degrade and deride the mitzvah of sukkah. This proves that the gentiles have no concept of *mesirut nefesh* for Torah and mitzvot, as the Jews can boast.

Parenthetically, we can add an explanation as to why sukkah is called an easy mitzvah, with no financial outlay. The entire idea of sukkah is a memorial to the Clouds of Glory with which Hashem surrounded Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 625). At that time, the Jews had no monetary expenses whatsoever. Just as all their needs were provided then, Bnei Yisrael should now feel that the expenses incurred in building a sukkah are not in their hands. This thought demands a great measure of faith, which the nations do not possess.

Why, indeed, is it stated that the sukkah involves no great expense? This is because the festival of Sukkot comes after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when a person is purified of all his sins, full of mitzvot like a pomegranate. Great and holy *ushpizin* come to visit in his sukkah. All of the expenses incurred are of no consequence compared to the vast treasury of merits he has recently accumulated.

If a person, *chas v'shalom*, does feel burdened by the holiday expenses, it is because he did not prepare himself properly on Yom Kippur. He is not yet on the level of feeling the Clouds of Glory that surrounded our nation in the Wilderness. If he will do teshuvah, he will certainly feel the power of the mitzvah, which will increase his faith in Hashem. He will not feel that the mitzvah has caused him any expense, since he performs it with total dedication to Hashem.

The holiday of Sukkot is actually the barometer to measure if one has truly repented on Yom Kippur. If he did not do proper teshuvah during the *Yamim Noraim*, especially on Yom Kippur, he will feel extremely burdened by the expenses involved in the Sukkot holiday. He will not feel the presence of the seven *ushpizin*. He may, *chas v'shalom*, weaken in his *emunah*. Conversely, if one does do complete teshuvah on the Yamim Noraim, he will experience a tremendous spiritual elevation during the Festival of Sukkot.

### ————— In Summary —————

- In the future, the gentiles will ask Hashem to allow them to fulfill the Torah. Hashem will respond that only one who labored on Erev Shabbat has what to eat on Shabbat. Nevertheless, Hashem will give them the “easy” mitzvah of sukkah, which the Gemara tells us has no monetary expense. But the gentiles will deride it and leave. Yet, we know that the mitzvah of sukkah can be very expensive. Besides, if Hashem does not want to give the nations a chance to do teshuvah, why will He give them the mitzvah of sukkah? How can they demonstrate such derision toward the mitzvah of sukkah on the Day of

Judgment? Don't they realize that they will be severely punished for this?

- Bnei Yisrael display *mesirut nefesh* for Torah. Hashem desires this self-sacrifice in all generations. For Bnei Yisrael, who are involved in Torah, no mitzvah is considered difficult. The monetary expense is peripheral. An example of this is the mitzvah of sukkah, which does involve monetary outlay. The love of Bnei Yisrael toward the mitzvah, though, surpasses any inconvenience involved. But the gentiles, who constantly tormented the Jews in regard to their commandments, have no connection to *mesirut nefesh*. Suddenly, in the World to Come, they will demand reward. Hashem will call them “fools,” for without self-sacrifice one cannot properly fulfill the Torah and gain reward.
- Then, Hashem will return the gentiles to bygone days, when the *Yetzer Hara* existed and there was a concept of *mesirut nefesh*. He will order them to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah. They will scorn it, as they previously scorned all the mitzvot. Without Torah, there is no faith. It is impossible for the gentiles to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah, which is the holiday of faith in Hashem. Only the Jewish nation has faith. This is depicted by the fact that the Clouds of Glory surrounded them in the Wilderness because of their *emunah*. Only Bnei Yisrael display true *mesirut nefesh* for the Torah, increasing their faith in Hashem.

## UNITY AT NIGHT

I was asked why in the tefillah of Ma'ariv it says that “Hashem brings on evenings – המעריב ערבים” in the plural form, instead of in the singular form “המעריב בלילה.” In Shacharit, we use the singular form, saying: “יוצר” אור ובורא חושך עושה שלום ובורא את הכל – Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates all.”

At nighttime, people are tired and want to rest, enjoying the company of their family. A person thinks of his own desires, effectively separating himself from the community. But this is a risky proposition, for maybe the community needs him. Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:4) “Do not separate yourself from the community.” Furthermore, the Gemara states (*Sanhedrin* 27b; *Shavuot* 39b), “כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה” – All of Yisrael are responsible for

each other.” The entire world was founded on this principle, as Chazal say (*Zohar* III, 73b), “Torah, Hashem, and Yisrael are one.” Each is interconnected with the other two.

It is known that the *kelippah* gains strength and causes more harm at night than during the day. For this reason, we express ourselves in our evening prayers, in the plural form. The word ערבים (evenings) is similar to ערבים (responsible, interconnected). This indicates that at night we should feel interconnected with our neighbor, and not ignore our responsibilities toward him. When one prays the evening prayers using the plural form ערבים, one indicates that he feels as if he were praying with the entire Jewish nation. This increases the love between us, silencing the *kelippah*.

Moreover, Bnei Yisrael can accomplish great things when they are unified. By praying Ma’ariv in the plural form, each Jew goes to sleep feeling at one with his fellows. We conclude the next blessing with the words “אוהב עמו ישראל.” When Hashem observes how we show love to each other, He reciprocates His love to us, silencing the harmful forces, and allowing the power of *kedushah* to prevail.

### ————— In Summary —————

- We pray Ma’ariv using the plural form ערבים (evenings) to indicate that we feel connected to the entire Jewish nation. This is hinted to by the fact that the word, ערבים is similar to ערבים responsible, interconnected.
- By demonstrating this unity, we both silence the *kelippah* and cause Hashem to show His love to us by allowing the power of *kedushah* to prevail.

## THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

After Eliyahu Hanavi had proven the existence of Hashem, exposing the ideology of the prophets of Ba'al, the wicked Izevel sent a messenger to him, vowing to kill him (*Malachim* I, 19:2-5). Then "Eliyahu arose and fled...He then went...into the wilderness; he went and sat under a solitary *retem* tree...He looked up and behold, near his head [were] a coal-baked cake and a cruse of water; he ate and drank, then went back and lay down. The Angel of Hashem returned to him a second time, and he touched him and said, 'Get up and eat [more], for there is a long way ahead of you.' So Eliyahu arose, and ate and drank; he then walked on the strength of that meal for forty days and forty nights, until Chorev, the Mountain of G-d."

The *Radak* notes that Eliyahu experienced a wondrous miracle. All the food that he ate remained intact inside him for forty days and nights, instead of being digested. He was thus able to continue on his way without food, until he reached Har Chorev.

Why did Hashem perform specifically this miracle for Eliyahu, that the small amount of food inside him should satiate him for the duration of his journey? Hashem could have simply shortened the way for him so that Eliyahu would have reached Chorev in one day.

This question is strengthened by the words of the *Radak*, who comments that Eliyahu merited another miracle. He went on his way, for forty days and nights, until he reached Har Chorev, and then the road miraculously straightened out for him, like it did for the Aron in the times of the Pelishtim. If the road was made shorter on Eliyahu's behalf, what was the purpose of the miracle with the food?

Moreover, why did the miracle occur only after he ate a second time, after the angel awoke him? Why didn't this miracle take place the first time that he ate? Then there would have been no necessity for the angel to wake him and tell him to eat again.

These events demonstrate how greatly Hashem favors one who seeks to defend Am Yisrael. Conversely, Hashem hinders one who seeks to prosecute Bnei Yisrael. Eliyahu fled from Izevel and requested that he should die by the hands of Heaven, saying, “It is enough! Now, Hashem, take my soul, for I am no better than my forefathers” (*Melachim I*, 19:4). Eliyahu was angry at Bnei Yisrael for not coming to his defense by dissuading Izevel from killing him. He further contended that after Bnei Yisrael had announced at Har Hacarmel (*ibid.* 18:39), “Hashem – He is G-d!” it was their obligation to rebel against Izevel. By refraining from doing so they demonstrated that they did not believe wholeheartedly in Hashem’s Kingship. This angered Eliyahu greatly and he awaited the moment he could speak disparagingly about them.

Hashem, Who looks into the inner recesses of man’s heart, knew what Eliyahu intended to do. He therefore made miracles for him so that Eliyahu should realize that just as Hashem was protecting him here, in the wilderness, so too, He would protect him if he would return to the city. Furthermore, Hashem was hinting that Eliyahu should not blame the Jewish people because of the anger of one woman that had been directed against him. Eliyahu had nothing and no one to fear.

Thus Hashem caused that Eliyahu found food right next to where he slept so that he should recognize that Hashem was guarding him. The miracle of the food remaining undigested did not take place immediately. Hashem was waiting to see if Eliyahu would have a change of heart and return to the city after experiencing His protection and concern for him. However, Eliyahu continued to sleep and stayed where he was.

Since Eliyahu ignored this message, Hashem sent the angel to try to prevent him from carrying out his plan of denigrating Bnei Yisrael by making him wary of travelling a long distance with no provisions. The angel told Eliyahu (*Melachim I*, 19:7), “Get up and eat [more], for there is a long way ahead of you.” Hashem did not shorten Eliyahu’s way at this point specifically so that he would change his mind about travelling and

return to the city when he would realize that he had a long journey ahead with few provisions. This was in order that Eliyahu would not come to speak disparagingly about Bnei Yisrael.

But Eliyahu did not change his mind. Despite all the hints, he continued on his way. However, Hashem prevented him from carrying out what was in his heart. We are taught (*Shmuel I*, 2:9), “Hashem guards the steps of His devout ones.” Finally, Hashem wrought the miracles of the food remaining intact inside him and the road straightening out for him. These were to teach Eliyahu that just as Hashem was watching over him in the desert, where there is normally no food or water and snakes and scorpions roam, so, too, He would protect him from Izevel when he returned to the city.

Nevertheless, Eliyahu refused to return to the city. He still harbored complaints against Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, although Eliyahu himself did not know where he was heading, Hashem purposely guided him in the direction of Har Chorev (*Melachim I*, 19:8). Why?

Bnei Yisrael witnessed countless miracles in Egypt and in the Wilderness. They experienced the Splitting of the Sea, the battle with Amalek, and the falling of the *Mann*. They reached such a high level of *emunah* that they were able to exclaim: “This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary” (*Shemot* 15:2). They merited the revelation of the *Shechinah* (*Mechilta* *ibid.*; *Zohar* II, 64b) and the Giving of the Torah. Yet, when Moshe Rabbeinu tarried for a few hours, they immediately fashioned the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 32:4).

Moshe Rabbeinu was understandably angry that Bnei Yisrael had sinned and broke the *luchot habrit* (*ibid.* 19). His anger notwithstanding, Moshe did not refrain from rising to their defense, even in this difficult moment. On the contrary, he increased his prayers on their behalf, beseeching Hashem to forgive them. He even told Hashem that he was willing to die as atonement, if Hashem would not otherwise forgive them (see *Ramban*, *Shemot* 32:32). Moshe would not leave the place where he

was praying until Hashem told him (*Bamidbar* 14:20), “I have forgiven [them] because of your word.”

By directing Eliyahu to Chorev, Hashem was reminding him about these things, in order that he should learn from Moshe Rabbeinu how a leader is supposed to behave. Bnei Yisrael tested Moshe many times, as in the cases of the manna, the *slav*, and the waters of Merivah. Yet Moshe Rabbeinu always defended Bnei Yisrael before Hashem. Hashem wanted Eliyahu to behave similarly.

Chazal state that Pinchas is Eliyahu (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 114b). When Pinchas took matters into his own hands and succeeded in stopping the epidemic that was killing out the nation, Hashem declared (*Bamidbar* 25:12): “Behold! I give him my covenant of peace.” This strengthens the criticism against Eliyahu. Instead of accusing Bnei Yisrael, he should have sought to defend them.

## **Hakadosh Baruch Hu Desires Our Good**

Why did Hashem try to prevent Eliyahu from criticizing Bnei Yisrael? It seems that Eliyahu was correct in his grievances against them, stating (*Melachim* I, 19:10), “I have acted with great zeal for Hashem, G-d of Legions, for the Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant; they have razed Your altars and have killed Your prophets by the sword, so [that] I alone have remained, and they now seek to take my life.”

Maybe we can explain with the following insight. Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires to do only good for His people. He knows that they are born with a *Yetzer Hara*. The way to combat it is by means of the Torah. The Torah brings one back to the proper path. Hashem gives everyone the opportunity to repent. If a person would have to die because of his sins, he would be unable to recognize Hashem Yitbarach and return to Him in teshuvah. The main purpose of man’s creation is for him to recognize the existence of Hashem while he is still alive, not after he dies, as it says (*Yechezkel* 33:11), “I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather

that he should return from his evil ways, so that he may live.” Hashem awaits man’s repentance until the day he dies.

This is what Hashem wanted to impress upon Eliyahu. Eliyahu had just chastised the people, and they had admitted that Hashem is the only G-d. He should have now taught them the right way, patiently instilling in them pure faith in the Creator until they reached a complete understanding of the existence of Hashem. Then they would have come to serve Him from love. Even the wicked Achav returned to his Maker (*Melachim I*, 21-29).

This being the case, there was no reason for Eliyahu to flee at this time. He had felt no trepidation upon killing the prophets of the Ba’al at Har Hacarmel (ibid. 18:40); certainly he had nothing to fear from a single woman. He should certainly not have felt anger toward Bnei Yisrael or desired to denounce them. Hashem wanted Eliyahu to learn from the actions of Moshe Rabbeinu, who always found merit in Bnei Yisrael. Hashem brought Eliyahu to Har Chorev to remind him that although the nation made the Golden Calf at this place, Moshe still defended them.

It was for this reason that Hakadosh Baruch Hu asked him, “Why are you here, Eliyahu?” Hashem was hinting that he should not be there, but rather in Eretz Yisrael, fulfilling his mission of bringing Bnei Yisrael to teshuvah. Instead of understanding this, Eliyahu began to denigrate the Jewish people, stating (ibid. 19:10), “They have razed Your altars and killed Your prophets, etc.,” criticizing them further.

When Eliyahu killed out the prophets of Ba’al, no one objected, not even Achav. On the contrary, everyone shouted, “Hashem – He is G-d!” At that time Eliyahu should have thanked Hashem for the many miracles that had happened, and found merit in Am Yisrael. For not only did they then accept upon themselves the yoke of Heavenly sovereignty, despite their low spiritual level, but they even helped to get rid of the false prophets. However, instead of doing so, he fled, and maligned the people before Hashem, stating that they had forsaken the covenant. Even after he was given respite to make amends for his harsh language, he arose and vilified

them further. It was then that Hashem told him (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:38), “I do not desire one who speaks evil about Yisrael.” Similarly, we find that Yeshayahu Hanavi was also punished for speaking critically of Am Yisrael (*Yevamot* 49b; *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:39).

This is astounding. Hashem does not want to hear Bnei Yisrael defamed, even when they sin and rebel against Him. This raises the question: Why didn’t the angel originally tell Eliyahu explicitly that Hashem did not want him to disparage His nation? Eliyahu would surely have acquiesced.

We know that at the time that Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he was given free choice to choose good or bad, as the pasuk (*Bereishit* 3:22) states, “Behold Man has become like the Unique One among us, knowing good and bad...” Since man has free choice, he is not told “Do this” or “Don’t do that.” Hashem only hints at what is the correct thing to do and what is not. Man must “get the hint” and act accordingly.

Chazal (*Berachot* 10a) relate that there were bullies who lived in the vicinity of Rabbi Meir and tormented him. They so vexed him that he prayed for their deaths. Beruriah, his wife, questioned him, “Why do you curse them so? Does it not say (*Tehillim* 104:35) ‘Sins will cease’ and not ‘Sinners will cease’? We learn from here that instead of praying that sinners should die, we should pray that they repent from their ways.” Rabbi Meir prayed that they should do teshuvah, and indeed, they did.

Hashem does not want anyone to denigrate His nation. Doing so prevents people from doing teshuvah. How so? Whenever we do a mitzvah or an aveirah an angel is created. The angel created when one person speaks against another constantly stands before Hashem Yitbarach, reminding Him of the sin that the other person committed. This in effect locks many gates of abundance before the person who sinned, especially the gate of teshuvah. Thus speaking negatively about someone prevents him from doing teshuvah.

Hashem, knowing how much power this angel has, and how far-reaching is the damage he can cause, wants that we should create good angels instead, angels who will speak well of His people. Even if they commit sins, this advocating angel comes to their defense, stating that they sin only because the *Yetzer Hara* entices them to do so (*Zohar* I, 80a). This angel opens for Bnei Yisrael the gates of wisdom, goodness, teshuvah, etc. Bnei Yisrael are influenced to do teshuvah through the positive power imbued in them by the angels who speak positively about them.

This explains why Beruriah exhorted Rabbi Meir to pray for his wayward neighbors. By praying and finding merit on their behalf, the gates of teshuvah would thus be opened before them. This is how Moshe Rabbeinu acted. By speaking in defense of Bnei Yisrael, he enabled them to repent, thereby becoming eligible to receive the second *luchot* (*Shemot* 34:29). Hashem performed miracles for Eliyahu and gave him many hints in order that he should not denigrate Bnei Yisrael and prevent them from doing teshuvah.

### **Judge Every Person Favorably**

The above concept sheds light on why Hashem commanded Moshe to ascend to the heavens and remain there for a second period of forty days after the sin of the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 34:28). Moshe had already been in heaven for forty days, learning Torah directly from Hashem (*ibid.* 24:18). Why didn't Hashem give him the second *luchot* immediately after He said that He had forgiven the nation?

Each day that Moshe spent in heaven, defending Bnei Yisrael, he became increasingly more elevated. Hashem had told him (*Shemot* 32:7), "Go, descend." Chazal (*Berachot* 32b) explain that Hashem meant that Moshe should "descend in stature," since He had only bestowed greatness on Moshe to benefit Bnei Yisrael. Although Hashem had already forgiven Bnei Yisrael, He did not reveal this to Moshe Rabbeinu for the duration of the forty days he spent in heaven. This was so that He could

hear Moshe's prayers and supplications on their behalf. Hashem desires that Bnei Yisrael should advocate on one another's behalf, and not criticize each other.

This is the reason for the institution of the special prayer that we say before going to sleep. Before reciting Kriyat Shema at night, one says: "I hereby forgive anyone who angered me or sinned against me..." By stating that he has no grievance against anyone and forgives him, he erases the negative judgment against a person who might have wronged him during the day. Apart from obviating the need for retribution upon the offender, this prayer creates an advocating angel on his behalf. This angel arouses the person to teshuvah, thus preventing him from sinning in the future.

This is why one asks forgiveness from others before Yom Kippur. By means of appeasing one's friend, he brings him joy, as well as causing himself to find favor in his friend's eyes. His friend, in turn, judges him favorably, and finds merit for him, creating advocating angels on his behalf. The Gemara (*Bava Kama* 92a) states, "One who asks for mercy on behalf of his friend and requires the same thing, is granted the object of his request first." The angel of compassion that is created by his prayers promotes his cause first, since it was in his merit that the angel was produced.

Furthermore, by asking forgiveness from one's fellow man before Yom Kippur, he brings his friend to teshuvah. His friend begins to ponder whether or not he himself sinned against anyone, in merit of the positive angel created by means of the first man's repentance. This angel opens gates of abundance before him, as mentioned above. Thus all of the good which accrues to his fellow is actually in the first man's credit.

Eliyahu Hanavi did not understand the hints that Hashem gave him to prevent him from finding fault with Bnei Yisrael. Conversely, we find that the *Navi* Hoshea, upon criticizing the people, immediately desisted when he was warned to stop. Instead, he blessed the nation, saying (Hoshea 14:2), "Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d, etc." With these words, he

established an opening by means of which Bnei Yisrael could arrive, through teshuvah, at the Heavenly Throne itself (*Yoma* 86), the very source of their souls (*Zohar* III, 29).

Chazal tell us that each Jew contains a Heavenly spark within him, as it says (*Devarim* 32:9), “For Hashem’s portion is His people.” The Zohar (I, 25a) explains that there is a portion of Hashem, so to speak, within each person, while the other portion remains under the Heavenly Throne. By means of teshuvah, the portion inherent in the person unites with the portion under the Heavenly Throne. This is accomplished when one judges his fellow Jews favorably and arouses them to repentance.

### ————— In Summary —————

- After Eliyahu Hanavi killed out the prophets of Ba’al, he fled from Izevel. He merited great miracles. One was that the food he ate remained intact in his system, thereby nourishing him for the next forty days of his journey. The other was that the road straightened out before him. Why did the miracle with the food occur only after the angel awoke him the second time, and not the first time he was given food?
- Hashem wants us to speak in defense of His nation, not to criticize them. Eliyahu was angry at the people for not trying to placate Izevel on his behalf, and also for not rebelling against her. He began denigrating the nation. That is why Hashem stalled him and did not originally shorten the road before him, even though this necessitated the miracle of the food remaining intact inside him. This was in order to prevent him from disparaging Hashem’s people and to hint to him that he should, instead, bring them to teshuvah. Man’s purpose in this world is to recognize Hashem during his lifetime. Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he should repent from his ways and live.
- Eliyahu did not heed these messages and continued traveling, without even knowing where he was headed. He wanted to speak ill of the people. Hashem led him to Har Chorev to remind him of the deeds of Moshe Rabbeinu. Despite experiencing the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt, the Giving of the Torah, and the Splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael fell to the level of fashioning the

Golden Calf. Even though Moshe Rabbeinu was enraged by this, he did not speak negatively about them. On the contrary, he found merit for Yisrael after the sin, and even wanted to die as atonement for them.

- Hashem desires that we should speak well of others. By criticizing another person all the gates of goodness are sealed, *chas v'shalom*. This is because the prosecution creates negative angels, *rachmana litzlan*. Conversely, finding merit in others opens the Heavenly gates of abundance, even for sinners. For this reason, Hashem instructed Moshe to ascend to the Heavens for another forty days, instead of giving him the Torah immediately after He had forgiven the Jewish people. Instead of Hashem's original command that Moshe descend in stature, due to the sin of the Golden Calf, he was told to ascend and receive the second *luchot*. In the merit of Moshe's finding favor on behalf of the nation, Bnei Yisrael would also ascend and repent. This teaches the great power of judging others favorably. By doing so, the gates of teshuvah are opened before us.

# THE MERIT OF OUR FOREFATHERS



## FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

We are all blessed with *zechut avot*. Every Jew possesses a *neshamah*, which has a Divine essence. Additionally, we are all descendants of holy ancestors: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Their very blood runs through our veins. This is what makes us worthy of receiving Hashem's abundant kindness and continual mercy. This merit, gained from our exalted forefathers extends to all future generations until the End of Days.

This awareness should inspire us to reach out to our as-of-yet uncommitted brethren, who are far from Torah and Judaism. They should be made aware of their inherent greatness, which is in the merit of their forefathers. This will bring them closer to their tradition. We should each seek ways to accomplish this.

Bringing a fellow Jew closer to Judaism causes one to feel intense satisfaction. One derives great pleasure in succeeding to arouse Jewish souls to connect to their Father in Heaven. The formerly uncommitted Jew will now be aware of his heritage and of the royal blood that flows through his veins, making him worthy of the same blessings bestowed upon his forefathers.

May it be Hashem's will that we become elevated and strengthened in Torah and mitzvot and fear of Heaven, and may we merit strengthening others as well. And may we all realize the awesome responsibility we have

as descendants of holy tzaddikim. When one follows in their footsteps, he connects himself to them, and their merit protects him. However, when a Jew does not follow in the ways of his forefathers, it is a great disgrace to them, and he tarnishes his illustrious lineage.

When a person follows in the ways of our holy fathers and serves Hashem with self-sacrifice, fortunate is he and fortunate is his lot. He brings merit upon himself and upon the public, and makes our fathers in the World of Truth proud that they bore a holy son who serves Hashem even in difficult times. Moreover, Hashem Himself praises the fathers for meriting such a son. If, G-d forbid, a Jew strays from this path, he brings humiliation to his forefathers for leaving behind such a son. He also shames Hashem and the Torah.

In the Shemoneh Esrei we say, “And He remembers the kindness of the fathers,” beseeching Hashem to provide for us in their merit, because we are sparks of our great ancestors. However, in order for our prayers to be accepted, we must prove ourselves worthy. Therefore, we must repent fully before we begin to pray.

Many people have told me, in the name of my father, that I contain a spark of my holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, may his memory protect us. I ask them, “Is it only I who has a spark of him? Doesn’t every Jew have a spark of our holy fathers? Why am I singled out?” However, when a person takes to heart that he is descended from a particular tzaddik, he is motivated to serve Hashem with greater enthusiasm. By strengthening our commitment, we merit incorporating their holiness into our very being. Thereafter, we merit greater Divine assistance, because we connect to our forefathers, becoming an extension of them, and reap the benefits that they were worthy of receiving.

Those who are not the sons of tzaddikim still enjoy the *zechut avot* of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. But they must exert more effort in order to enjoy their benefits. One who has the advantage of righteous ancestors receives greater assistance in their merit. This is stated in the Gemara

(*Yevamot* 64a), “One cannot compare the prayer of a tzaddik, the son of a tzaddik, to the prayer of a tzaddik whose father is not a tzaddik.” However, one who has righteous parents carries a greater responsibility. If he fails to emulate them, he is judged more harshly, because he is insulting his ancestors. He also arouses the *Middat Hadin*, because he had greater potential to succeed, but chose not to. Only if he follows in their ways can his ancestors in Gan Eden be proud of him.

Therefore, I bemoan being born into the illustrious dynasty of the holy and esteemed Pinto family. If only I had been born into a simple family, serving Hashem without the merit of my forefathers! Being a descendant of such great people obligates me tremendously to follow in their footsteps and not to shame them in the World of Truth. I am constantly afraid that perhaps, instead of improving their situation on High, I am causing them harm. This thought frightens me terribly. Therefore, I constantly examine my behavior. I hope to be comparable to my ancestors, in order not to embarrass them; I certainly don’t imagine being equal to them at all. Even attempting to remotely resemble them seems overwhelming.

As an example, I will relate a story that I heard from an elderly man in Morocco, named Nissim Abutzrir. My grandfather, the *kadosh*, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zya”a, would go by himself, every Friday, to collect money and provisions for the poor and distribute them before Shabbat. He was always thinking of others. When I heard this, I felt terribly ashamed of myself, and thought, “Do I behave in this way? Did I ever provide necessities for the poor?” My grandfather, who shook the heavens with his prayers and performed wonders, did not feel that it was beneath his dignity to go from door to door collecting food and money for the destitute. I am far from this level. Even if I would serve Hashem with self-sacrifice all the days of my life, I would never reach the level of my forefathers. Being their descendant carries with it great responsibility.

However, I was encouraged by the following incident. Harav Hatzaddik, Rabbi Binyamin Kaufman, shlita, came to visit me in my home in Lyon. I

had previously learned in his yeshivah in Sunderland. He told me that he came all the way to Lyon, just for one hour, in order to get *chizuk* from me in Avodat Hashem. Upon hearing this, I felt overwhelmed. He, who established institutions of Torah and produced many students, was approaching me, his inferior and humble pupil, to receive *chizuk* in Avodat Hashem!

Rav Kaufman explained himself. [I will relate this briefly, as the entire detailed story was already recounted in the book relating miracles of the Pinto dynasty, entitled במסילה נעלה – *Walking in Their Ways*.]

“When I see my disciples continuing to disseminate Torah, and drawing closer those distant from Avodat Hashem, this encourages me immensely. Hashem bestowed upon us a Torah which is so complex and difficult to fulfill. There are so many laws and prohibitions. Also, the mitzvot pose many challenges; how does Hashem expect us to persevere?”

Then Harav Kaufman explained: A vessel is designed to contain its contents so that they should not spill out. However, the vessel also has the capacity to pour its contents into other containers. So, too, is man. He is like a vessel, designed to absorb words of Torah and maintain them within him. Yet, he also has the capacity to pass his Torah on to others. Although it may at times be difficult to observe the Torah, Hashem expects us to do so. He implanted the Torah in every one of us, and we inherently possess the ability to fulfill its laws. Moreover, we can transmit of our Torah learning to others, bringing them closer to Torah and Avodat Hashem.

Upon hearing this, I replied that when we see someone who was estranged from Avodat Hashem, heeding the call (*Yeshayahu* 55:1) “Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water” beginning to dedicate his life to Torah, since Torah is compared to water, and proceeding to bring others back, as well, this obligates us tenfold.

We, the *bnei Torah*, who have been instilled with the appreciation of Avodat Hashem, are certainly required to dedicate ourselves to His

service and to continue drawing others closer to His Torah. Perhaps Hashem is beckoning them to teshuvah, and they are merely waiting for us to reach out and assist them, as it says (*Shir Hashirim* 1:4), “Upon perceiving a mere hint that You wished to draw me [near], we rushed with perfect faith after You into the Wilderness. The King brought me into His cloud chamber.” Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimoni, ibid., remez 582*), that this refers to “chambers of Torah.” Therefore, we carry an enormous responsibility.

This is encouraging. When I witness someone returning to his heritage by doing teshuvah, I am elated, and I aspire to be at least somewhat like him. It is certainly easier for me to serve Hashem, as I grew up in a house of tzaddikim. However, this unaffiliated Jew just recently began to discover the beauty of Torah. When he rejects the temptations of sin and returns completely to serving Hashem, he achieves a superior level of devotion than I. How I yearn to be like him! I crave serving Hashem with the same intensity and self-sacrifice as he does.

Therefore, I try to continue in this holy mission of bringing others under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Every Jew is like an entire world. There is great celebration in heaven when Hashem’s children return to Him. We may mistakenly expect those whom we influence to owe us a debt of gratitude. However, the opposite is the case, because *they* encourage *us* to significantly intensify our dedication in serving Hashem. We are imbued with the same sensation as Yitro expressed when Moshe Rabbeinu drew him under the wings of the *Shechinah*. He proclaimed (*Shemot* 18:11), “Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods,” for He allowed him the merit of coming closer to Him. We also appreciate the merit we have in drawing closer to our Creator.

Moreover, we learn many good things from *ba’alei teshuvah*. When we see their shining countenances, we are also inspired to abandon the falsity of this world and to strengthen ourselves in Torah and mitzvot. Seeing the devotion of such people encourages us to continue reaching

out, drawing others closer to the truth. We must proceed with our efforts, basking in the merits of our exalted ancestors.

In light of this, maybe we can explain the pasuk (*Shemot* 32:7) “Go, descend – for your people...has become corrupt.” What benefit was there in commanding Moshe Rabbeinu, who had risen to such elevated heights when he ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, to lower his standards, as expressed by the order “Descend”? Maybe this can be explained in light of what we have just mentioned. After reaching such lofty levels, it was difficult for Moshe Rabbeinu to descend to the inferior level of Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, Hashem had to instruct him to do so, because the ultimate effect would be a greater merit for him. It was a “descent for the sake of ascent” (cf. *Makkot* 7b). After Bnei Yisrael would repent and do complete teshuvah, they would attribute their recovery to the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, who reprimanded them. Chazal (*Avot* 5:21) state, “Moshe was meritorious and influenced the masses to be meritorious, so the merit of the masses was to his credit.”

Even future generations of Jews will always accredit their return to Hashem to the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, as it says (*Malachi* 3:22), “Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant.” It also states (*Devarim* 33:4), “The Torah that Moshe commanded us...” Hashem told Moshe, “In this manner, you will continue to ascend, and your soul will affect everyone, emitting its sparks and suffusing the six hundred thousand souls of Bnei Yisrael (*Zohar* III, 238b), because you restored Bnei Yisrael’s faith.” Every one of us has this potential, since we all possess *zechut avot*. We can all inspire errant Jews, bringing them back under the wings of the *Shechinah*, in order that they live a life of Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Every Jew who has *zechut avot* has an enormous responsibility. This is because the blood of his holy ancestors flows in his veins. He must follow in their footsteps in order not to shame them in the World of Truth. Since he has been

imbued with the lofty ideals of his ancestors and possesses a spark of their souls, it is easier for him to draw others under the wings of the *Shechinah*. He feels great joy when others do teshuvah in his merit, and his ancestors assist him in his efforts.

- When I was told that I contain a spark of my grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, זצ"א, I was very concerned. This obligates me with the great responsibility of not shaming my fathers by my actions. I don't claim to be as great as my fathers, who were truly exalted. One who is not descended from righteous fathers still has the merit of our Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, to stand by him. This helps him progress in his Avodat Hashem.
- I was somewhat mollified by what my teacher, Rav Kaufman, told me. He said that he is inspired by my efforts in drawing others to the service of Hashem. Furthermore, one who influences others is like a vessel, which has the capacity to pour of its contents, affecting many others. Indeed, I would like to be like those returning to Torah, from whose faces light shines forth. They benefit us, for through them, we become inspired to strengthen our dedication in our Avodat Hashem. The privilege of one who possesses *zechut avot* is to bring others close to Torah and mitzvot. In this way, he is also elevated, and the *zechut* of his holy fathers assists him in the present, as well as in the future.

# EDUCATION



## THE PURPOSE OF HAVING CHILDREN

### For the Sake of Heaven

It is known that Channah the Prophetess, mother of Shmuel Hanavi, was barren. Whenever she ascended to the Mishkan for the holidays, she prayed and beseeched Hashem profusely for a son. Her words of prayer were (*Shmuel* I, 1:11): “Hashem, Master of Legions, if You take note and remember the suffering of Your maidservant...and give Your maidservant male offspring, then I shall give him to Hashem all the days of his life, and a razor shall not come upon his head.”

Why did Channah use the double language of “ראה תראה – take note and remember”? Our *Chachamim* explain (*Berachot* 31a) that Channah said to Hashem, “If You see fit to give me a child, good; and if not, You will take note.” This requires some explanation.

Channah told Hashem that if He did not grant her a child in the normal manner, she would make Him “take note” of her in a different way. How so? She would have no recourse but to seclude herself with another man. When her husband, Elkanah, would discover this, he would bring her to the Kohen, who would give her the waters of the *sotah* to drink. Since she had never sinned, she would be worthy of the promise of the Torah, which states that a woman who secluded herself with a strange man but did not sin will be blessed by these waters, and if she was barren, would have children. In this way, she told Hashem, He would take note of her and would be obligated to give her children.

I saw that my brother, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, shlita, in his sefer *Siftei Chaim*, finds this very difficult to understand. How could Channah, the tzaddeket, try Hashem, so to speak, by secluding herself with a stranger in order to be given the *sotah* waters? Chazal state (*Ketubot* 13; *Chulin* 13a), “There is no guarantee against acts of immorality.” What if, G-d forbid, the stranger would persuade her to sin? By purposely secluding herself with a stranger in order to merit Hashem’s blessing, she would certainly have been punished. Then she would become forbidden to her husband. How could she guarantee that she would emerge from this “test” unscathed?

Moreover, we know that the holy Name of Hashem is erased by the *sotah* waters. Could a righteous woman like Channah be willing to allow that to happen just in order to force Hashem to give her a child?!

I didn’t have a chance to see the explanation of the *Siftei Chaim*, but I would like to offer my own explanation.

## **Performing Mitzvot for the Sake of Heaven**

The righteous serve Hashem purely for the sake of Heaven. When performing good deeds, they have no vested interest whatsoever. We find that Rabbi Eliezer, when having marital relations, did the mitzvah without deriving personal pleasure, completely out of fear of Heaven (*Nedarim* 20b).

This is quite shocking, as we know that there is no greater pleasure than that of a husband when he is with his wife. Hashem has decreed that man and wife derive pleasure from one another. This brings them to love each other, thereby causing the *Shechinah* to rest in their midst. Specifically by means of pleasure and love does a couple live in peace, and the Name of Hashem dwells among them in their home. Hashem will always be in their presence, as it states (*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.”

Despite this, we see that Rabbi Eliezer performed the mitzvah without any personal pleasure at all. He conquered his *Yetzer Hara* and endeavored with all his might not to derive any pleasure for himself. He did everything for the sake of Heaven, only for the purpose of the mitzvah, to bring pleasure to his wife.

Sometimes we find different people who do the same mitzvah, each for a completely different reason. For example, a person who has no livelihood in his hometown in the Diaspora decides to move to Eretz Yisrael because he thinks that he will be able to earn a respectable living there. Then there is one who lives in Eretz Yisrael because of the great rise in anti-Semitism in the Diaspora. Although both are, in effect, performing the mitzvah of inhabiting the Land, neither has the intention to do so for the mitzvah. The first man wants to earn a livelihood, because he did not succeed in his former location, whereas the second man is motivated to live in Israel out of fear of living among the gentiles. Their settlement of the Land is considered a “love which is dependent upon something else,” about which Chazal state (*Avot* 5:19), “Any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone.” Another example of this would be someone who comes to the synagogue to pray, when his entire purpose is to meet friends. This can hardly be called doing a mitzvah for the sake of Heaven.

The same applies to the mitzvah of marriage. Many people enter marriage for the purpose of building a home in order to produce offspring who will perpetuate their name. Others may have the intention to thwart the *Yetzer Hara*, which is forever plaguing them with thoughts of sin, and therefore marry, for a woman shields her husband from sin.

Indeed, people often go to tzaddikim to receive a blessing to merit having children. They want children in order to perpetuate their parents’ names. This deviates, though, from the true purpose of marriage, which is to have children who will serve Hashem all their life.

## For Hashem Alone

When we delve into the matter, we see that the father of our nation, Avraham Avinu, had a completely different perception. He fulfilled Hashem's will entirely for the sake of Heaven. Hashem gave him a child when he was one hundred years old. What can be more precious than a son one waited so long to have? Yet, as soon as Hashem told him (*Bereishit* 22:2), "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and...bring him up there as an offering," Avraham did not hesitate, but immediately went to bring Yitzchak as an offering on the altar.

This is quite amazing. Avraham had spent so many years praying to merit a son who would perpetuate his ideals. Indeed, Hashem granted him a son, and even promised him (*Bereishit* 21:12): "Through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours." Avraham also knew that the entire nation of Israel would exist only through Yitzchak. Suddenly, Hashem was requesting him to take his son and slaughter him on the altar as a sacrifice. Can we possibly imagine how Avraham felt at that time?!

Avraham's initial intention in asking Hashem for a child was not for his own benefit, but for the sake of Heaven. This child would be consecrated exclusively for Hashem's service. Avraham loved Yitzchak specifically because he realized that he belonged only to Hashem and not to himself at all.

Therefore, despite the fact that Hashem had told him, "Through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours," since Hashem now commanded him to take this son and slaughter him, Avraham concurred wholeheartedly and went to the *Akeidah* with a happy heart (cf. *Yerushalmi Ta'anit* 82, *halachah* 4). He was able to fulfill Hashem's will without question because he knew that Yitzchak belonged solely to Hashem.

Thus we see that Avraham's entire purpose in having a son was to teach him Torah and Avodat Hashem, not merely to love him in the

capacity of a father. Hashem praised him for this attitude, as we see in the following incident. Before Hashem destroyed Sodom and Amorrhah, He told Avraham what he was about to do. What reason does the Torah give for this? “For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice” (*Bereishit* 18:19).

Avraham’s single goal was to train his descendants to be servants of Hashem and keep His mitzvot. Avraham’s life mission was completely for the sake of Heaven, without any ulterior motive or personal benefit whatsoever. Toward that end, he craved a son, to increase Torah and mitzvot in this world and to sanctify Hashem’s Name throughout the entire world.

### **Shmuel Hanavi – Dedicated to Hashem**

Now we can better understand the actions of Channah in the Mishkan, when she asked for a son. Channah herself was not commanded to have children, as only a man has the mitzvah of bringing forth children (*Yevamot* 65b; *Kiddushin* 34a; *Rambam, Hilchot Ishut* 15:2). Elkanah already had children from his other wife, Peninah, so why did Channah plead for a child? Why was it so important for her to bear a child, to the extent that she was prepared to place herself in danger by secluding herself with a stranger in order to receive the blessing of the *sotah* waters?

Channah followed in the path of Avraham Avinu. She did not want a son merely for the purpose of merely bestowing her motherly affection upon him. She wanted a son in order to consecrate him for the service of Hashem. She wanted a son who would be equal to Moshe and Aharon. The Gemara states (*Berachot* 31b) that Channah heard a Heavenly Voice announce that a boy would be born who would be the equal of Moshe and Aharon, and she aspired to be the one to give birth to this child. All her aspirations were that this son be hers, so that she could consecrate him to Hashem all the days of his life.

In this matter, Channah distinguished herself from all other mothers, who love their children with a motherly instinct and raise children who reciprocate love. She desired a son who would be solely involved in the service of Hashem. He would sit in the House of Hashem all his life, and a razor would never touch his head.

Channah sacrificed all her motherly instincts for the sake of Hashem. From the depths of her broken heart, she beseeched Him, “If You take note of the suffering of Your maidservant.” She meant to say, “Because I sacrifice myself completely for You, I ask You to see my suffering, and that no mishap should occur, G-d forbid, through me. Even if I seclude myself with a strange man, the *sotah* waters should effect a blessing within me, and I should bear a child.”

Indeed, it was because she sincerely poured out her heart before Hashem with such fervent emotion, causing Eli the Kohen to think she was intoxicated, that Hashem immediately remembered her. Eli prayed on her behalf, in order that she should not, in desperation, isolate herself with a stranger in order to receive the blessing of a child.

We see proof of Channah’s pure intentions in the name that she gave her son – Shmuel. The name Shmuel is derived from the pasuk (*Shmuel I*, 1:20), “I requested him from Hashem.” This means that her son was considered by her as “borrowed” from Hashem for a short period of time. His entire being belonged to Hashem, and he was at home for only a short while. Thereafter, he would be brought to the House of Hashem, to remain there for the rest of his life.

Therefore, the pasuk which Channah sang in praise (*ibid.* 2:9) “He guards the steps of his devout ones,” was validated. Hashem heeded her prayers. He did not want any misfortune to occur to her, as our Sages have said (*Ketubot 28b; Chulin 7b*), “Hashem brings no misfortune through the hands of the righteous ones.” Hashem did not want Channah to stumble, even in thought, by planning to seclude herself with a strange man, thus arousing the jealousy of her husband. For that reason He saved

her, as it says (*Tehillim* 97:10), “He guards the lives of the devout ones, from the hand of the wicked He rescues them.” The chapter continues (*ibid.* 97:11), “Light is sown for the righteous.” Hashem blessed her with a great light, Shmuel Hatzaddik, a scion of the house of Korach, who is hinted at in the pasuk (*ibid.* 92:13) “צדיק כתמר יפרח – A righteous man will flourish like a date palm.” The last letters of these words spell the name קרח (Korach).

This proves that Channah was not afraid to seclude herself with a strange man. She knew that Hashem would surely protect her from sin, because her intentions were purely for the sake of Heaven. She wanted a son only in order to sanctify him for Hashem, and not so that she could lavish her motherly love upon him. Her trust in Hashem was so great that she knew no harm would result.

Hashem indeed saw her good intentions and immediately sent Eli the Kohen to pray for her to merit a son. This was in order that she should not endanger herself by being alone with a stranger. Hashem does not desire that we put ourselves in a challenging situation, even when our intentions are for His sake.

Channah was the first person to call Hashem “צבקות – Master of Legions” since the Creation of the world (*Berachot* 31b). Why did she use this term? Channah begged that Hashem should grant her just one member of all the many legions He had created in the world. She was ready to do anything in order to bear a son who would love Hashem as much as she did. Therefore, she did not fear being secluded with a stranger. She was willing to undergo humiliation in order to achieve her goal.

Conversely, Channah trusted in Hashem that He would neither forsake her nor bring misfortune through her. She believed that He would send her a son who would be righteous. Therefore, she was not concerned that the Heavenly Name would be erased by the *sotah* waters, because His Name would ultimately be sanctified by this act. For the Name dissolved

in the *sotah* waters would cause wonders inside of her, and bring the blessing of a child, who would sanctify Hashem's Name in public, glorifying it throughout the entire world.

Hashem saw Channah's plight and granted her request. He certainly did not want her to endanger herself by placing herself in a challenging situation.

We can learn a tremendous lesson from this. One should not request from Hashem something that might entail an act that even borders on immorality. Channah relied on Heavenly assistance, for she knew through prophecy that she would beget a son, but Hashem did not want her to carry out her plan. All women should take heed and strive to emulate Channah, by praying wholeheartedly for what they need from Hashem, and not put themselves in danger and then rely on a miracle to save them.

### **Not to Rely on Miracles**

I would like to add the following idea. Shmuel Hanavi himself rectified this error of putting oneself into a situation of *nisayon* and then relying on a miracle for salvation. When Hashem commanded Shmuel to go to Beit Lechem and anoint David as king, Shmuel asked Hashem (*Shmuel* 1, 17:2), "How can I go? If Shaul finds out about it, he will kill me." (Shmuel had previously informed Shaul that Hashem was going to take the kingship away from him.) Shmuel did not want to put himself in danger and rely on a miracle to save him. So Hashem told him to take a young calf and say that he was going to bring sacrifices to Hashem, and then He would direct him further.

This act of Shmuel served to correct the reasoning of his mother, Channah. She was prepared to rely on a miracle to save her from sinning while secluding herself with a stranger. Shmuel's caution teaches that it is incorrect to place oneself in a *nisayon* and then rely on Heavenly assistance for protection. One must follow the ways of Hashem entirely, without deviating. Even if we love Hashem as much as Channah did, we

should not place ourselves in a situation that might lead us to transgress. Also, we should not rely on having a miracle performed for us to protect us from sin.

Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 10a) that King Chizkiyahu never married. Yeshayahu Hanavi chastised him and said, “You shall die, and you shall not live.” Our Sages explain, “You shall die in this world, and you shall not live in the World to Come. Why? Because you did not get married.” Chizkiyahu replied, “I have not married, for I saw in Divine prophecy that I would beget wicked sons who do not walk in the ways of Hashem.” Yeshayahu responded, “Why do you meddle in the accounts of Heaven? You must do what is incumbent upon you, and Hashem will do as He sees fit.”

This is puzzling. Chizkiyahu was correct in not wishing to get married, because he didn’t want to bring forth children who would desecrate the Name of Hashem in this world. Why did he deserve such severe punishment?

Yeshayahu explained to him the following. “By abstaining from marriage and not fulfilling the commandment to be fruitful and multiply, you yourself are causing the obliteration of Hashem’s Name. It is your obligation to take a wife. Hashem may have mercy, and your sons may eventually repent of their evil ways. By their returning to the correct path, they will bring glory to His Name.”

Channah reasoned similarly. She said, “If I don’t bring forth children, the glory of Hashem will be deficient. If I have a son, he will sanctify Hashem’s Name and magnify His honor. Therefore, it is preferable that I erase the Name of Hashem (in the *sotah* waters), as long as I have a child who will bring glory to the Name of Hashem. If I refrain from action, the Name of Hashem will certainly be obscured from the world.” Channah never suspected that her son would go on the wrong path. She was certain he would be righteous, acting completely for the sake of Heaven. This was Chizkiyahu’s objective, as well. He also wanted sons who would

follow in the ways of Hashem and magnify His glory. He did not desire to have sons, as he saw prophetically, who would eventually be idol worshippers.

### **Spiritual Education, from Childhood**

Unfortunately, today we see people who send their sons to Torah institutions but their primary aspiration is that they should grow up to be doctors, businessmen, or lawyers. This implies that the parents value their sons' future in transient ambitions more than their eternal life. Although they study Torah, their main emphasis is on general studies.

These parents invert heaven and earth. They subordinate that which is of utmost importance to that which is secondary. This failure in the education of their children strikes roots at the beginning of their lives. These parents' first concern is with their children's future livelihood; they pay no heed whatsoever to their children's Torah learning, which is really the essence of our lives and our future.

Such people should take a lesson from King Chizkiyahu and from Channah. Chizkiyahu's main desire was that his sons be righteous people. When he foresaw that he would have wicked offspring, he preferred not to marry, in order to avoid the desecration of Hashem's Name. Yeshayahu Hanavi explained that he was obligated to fulfill the commandment, regardless, and ensure that his children were given a proper Torah education, as Hashem instructed.

Similarly, we see that Channah desired a righteous son, completely devoted to the service of Hashem. She had no personal motives, such as lavishing motherly love on him and anticipating reciprocation. She stated, "A razor will not be lifted on his head." The word for razor is מוֹרֵה, which can also refer to "fear" (since the letter 'ה' is interchangeable with the letter 'א'). She was asking for a son who would fear nothing other than Hashem. This teaches us a tremendous lesson in education.

I once wrote an essay on Nadav and Avihu, who were punished because “they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them” (*Vayikra* 10:1). This is difficult to understand. If they sinned, why were they referred to as tzaddikim, and why does it say about them (*ibid.* 6), “And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited”?

Nadav and Avihu intended to do a mitzvah for the sake of Heaven. This is what is meant by the words (*ibid.* 16:1) “when they approached before Hashem, and they died.” Their objective was to sacrifice their lives for Hashem. In this manner, they desired to teach all generations that one must be willing to sacrifice his life for each and every mitzvah. Since they had such holy intentions, Hashem completely forgave them and considered them tzaddikim. Their actions sanctified the Name of Hashem.

Yet, Hashem demonstrated with their demise that He does not overlook the iniquities of the righteous when they veer from the letter of the law in performing mitzvot. Moreover, Hashem does not want that one should die in the pursuit of mitzvot. On the contrary, it says concerning the mitzvot (*ibid.* 18:5), “...and by which he shall live,” which Chazal explain (*Sanhedrin* 74a): “and not that they should die by them.” However, in cases of *chillul Hashem* a person should die in order to sanctify Hashem’s Name.

We see that Nadav, Avihu, and Channah acted as they did in order to teach future generations how to serve Hashem. Their intentions were pure. Nadav and Avihu believed that one must be willing to sacrifice himself for each and every mitzvah, even to the point of death. Channah thought one could test Hashem, so to speak, and rely on a miracle, in order for one’s prayers to be accepted.

However, Hashem does not want us to behave in this way, because of the dangers it presents to future generations, who are unable to rise to such exalted levels. This approach can cause more damage than benefit, and therefore the actions of Nadav and Avihu were not accepted by

Heaven. However, since they intended to bring glory to the Name of Hashem (following the ways of Avraham Avinu), they received their due reward. We can learn from this to do everything for the sake of Heaven and to invest the effort in educating our children in the path of Torah and service of Hashem.

### ———— In Summary ————

- Channah, upon asking for a son, used the language “**ראה תראה** – If You take note and remember.” She was hinting to Hashem: “If You give me a son, good. If not, I will seclude myself with another man. You wrote in Your Torah that if the woman accused did not sin with the stranger, she would be blessed with children. I will thereby obtain the blessing of children.” This is difficult to understand. What if the stranger would sin with her? Then she would deserve to be punished. How could she rely on a miracle to save her from sin? And how could she test Hashem in this way? Furthermore, how could she take responsibility for erasing Hashem’s Name in the *sotah* waters?
- Tzaddikim act for the sake of Heaven without any ulterior motives. We see that Rabbi Eliezer performed the mitzvah of being with his wife with no personal desire. It is known that the essence of man and wife is to derive pleasure and love from one another, in order to assist in properly establishing a Jewish home. Rabbi Eliezer, however, performed this mitzvah entirely for the sake of Heaven. His intention was to achieve the purpose of building a home on the precepts of Torah, and to educate his children to Torah and mitzvot.
- Channah the Prophetess followed this path. She wanted a son who would be completely devoted to Hashem. He would be a tzaddik, equal in stature to Moshe and Aharon. She knew this, and therefore she figuratively tested Hashem and relied on a miracle. She believed that Hashem would not allow any harm to result but would grant her a son. Yet, Hashem did not want her to place herself in a challenging situation, or to be humiliated, since her intentions were pure. He arranged that Eli the Kohen would pray for her immediately. She merited a son whom she considered as merely “borrowed” by her, but belonging completely to Hashem.

## A Practical Lesson

Everyone has the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply. One must know that the purpose of having children is to raise them to serve Hashem through keeping Torah and mitzvot. One should not be influenced by personal interest or ulterior motives. It is forbidden to test Hashem, so to speak, and then rely on a miracle for salvation. We should do everything in the proper way. We learn this from Avraham Avinu, Chizkiyahu, Channah, and Nadav and Avihu, whose actions all demonstrated their main objective of acting for the sake of Hashem.

## LESSONS FROM THE BLASPHEMER

Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it (*Mishlei* 22:6). Our Sages (*Kiddushin* 30a) quote differing opinions as to what age a parent is obligated in educating his child: “Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemiah disagreed. One said that educating a child applies from the age of sixteen until twenty-two, and the other stated that is relevant from the ages of eighteen until twenty-four.” Rashi explains, “In these days, he should educate him in the way of *mussar*, which he will follow all his life. Chazal also state (*Ketubot* 50a), “In Usha, (where the Sanhedrin was located), they enacted a law wherein every father educated his son until the age of twelve, and from then on the son was responsible for himself.”

The truth is that parents need to invest much effort in their children’s education, in order that they should go on the right path. By nature, a child is born with negative traits. The pasuk states (*Iyov* 11:120), “Let the one who is [like] a wild ass be reborn as a man!” We also know (*Bereishit* 4:7), “Sin rests at the door.” The *Yetzer Hara* enters a person at birth. For this reason, the *Yetzer Hara* is called “an old man”; whereas the *Yetzer Hatov* enters a person only at the age of thirteen years (*Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 1:16).

Every child possesses negative qualities, with which he is born. The parents' job is to guide him, especially through personal example, in choosing the correct way to behave and refraining from anything negative. If he will, eventually, correct his inappropriate behavior, he will certainly be forgiven by Heaven for the transgressions he did as a youngster. As David Hamelech requested (*Tehillim* 25:7), "Remember not the sins of my youth."

But if parents fail to take this to heart, and do not educate their children properly, then the negative traits of their children will become strongly ingrained in them. It will then be much more difficult to help them change, because "the consequence of a sin is a sin" (*Avot* 4:2; *Sifri, Ki Teitzei* 22:13). It will be very difficult to break the offensive habits, as "even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it." Since he is now accustomed to yielding to his temptations, he will find it very difficult to free himself from them. A child needs his parents' guidance to teach him how to behave properly.

Moreover, it is the parents' obligation to accustom their children to learn Torah and keep its mitzvot. Our Sages explain (*Sanhedrin* 7a) that when a person arrives at the Heavenly Court, he will be judged in matters of Torah before anything else. They also teach us (*Pesachim* 50b) that a person should learn Torah even if he does so for ulterior motives, because he will eventually study it for its own sake. When a child is exposed to Torah study at a young age, the Torah refines his character and cleanses him of his negative traits. Thus, when he grows older, he will be capable of appreciating the sweetness that the Torah has to offer.

This may help us understand the incident of the man who blasphemed the Name of Hashem. The Torah says (*Vayikra* 24:10-11), "The son of an Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel; they fought in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and an Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed – so they brought him to Moshe;

the name of his mother was Shelomit daughter of Divri, of the Tribe of Dan.”

Chazal say (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:3; *Tanchuma, Emor* 24), “Rabbi Chiya learned that this man wanted to pitch his tent in the camp of Dan, and the people asked him, ‘Why are you pitching your tent here?’ He replied, ‘I am from the daughters of Dan.’ To which they said, ‘It states (*Bamidbar* 2:2): *The Children of Israel shall encamp each man by his banner according to the insignia of their fathers’ household.* From this we derive that they should not encamp according to the insignia of their mothers’ household.’ He took his case to the courthouse of Moshe Rabbeinu, but they ruled against him. He stood up and blasphemed the Holy Name.”

This seems a little puzzling. Here was someone who had witnessed all the wonders that Hashem performed in Egypt, took part in the Exodus, crossed the Sea, sang songs of praise to Hashem together with the entire Bnei Yisrael, heard the voice of Hashem when the Torah was given, ate of the manna, and saw the Mishkan in its glory. After experiencing all these wonders, how could he curse the Holy Name?! (*Sanhedrin* 56a)

Moreover, was it because of the disagreement that he had with members of the tribe that he stooped to blasphemy? What did he gain by cursing? And if it was mere coincidence that he cursed following this argument, why does the Midrash relate the chain of events concerning the argument as the cause for his grave iniquity?

Chazal state (*Rashi, ibid.*) that the reason the Torah reveals the name of his mother, and does not just relate the story, is to emphasize that his mother, through her actions, initiated the terrible sin which he committed. Her name *Shelomit* hints at her behavior. *Shelomit* is a derivative of the word *shalom* (*peace*, or the colloquial term for “Hello”). She would habitually begin conversing with everyone she met (including men), saying “Peace unto you, how are you?” She was called *בת דברי* (“Bat Divri” – “Daughter of Divri”); Divri is a name which connotes speech. She

would speak with all strangers. This was the cause of her eventual disgrace. The Torah specifies that he came from the tribe of Dan, which teaches that a wicked person brings degradation to himself, his family, and his entire tribe.

Although she knew it is forbidden to engage in excessive conversation with men, she was not careful in this matter and caused others to stumble as well. This is contrary to the exhortation of the Sages (*Avot* 1:5), “Do not converse excessively with a woman.” Consequently, she herself fell victim, and was defiled by an Egyptian (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:8). She begot an illegitimate child, and aside from his father’s innate impurity, he also inherited the negative attributes of his mother. Just as she spoke improperly, so, too, did her son. He eventually became entirely corrupt, by cursing and blaspheming the Name of Hashem.

It is for this reason that those who heard his blaspheming were the first to kill him. This was in order that they should always remember his death and be afraid to even contemplate the curses that he uttered. The *Yetzer Hara* might come and remind them of his terrible words, which could influence them negatively. His immediate death served to constantly remind them of the punishment due to one who blasphemes the Holy Name.

However, had the blasphemer been engaged in Torah study, he would have been cleansed of his father’s impurity and would not have fallen so low. Alas, he did not receive the proper education. Even though he resided among Bnei Yisrael, who are all holy, he did not wisely learn from their ways. He remained on the fringe, steeped in the contamination of his father and affected by the faults of his mother. This was the source of his corruption, which manifested itself in his blasphemy.

It is for this reason that the Torah relates the chain of events leading to his blasphemy. It shows us just how far a person can fall if he doesn’t receive the correct guidance in his youth. A mere argument can bring him

to blaspheme the Holy Name, G-d forbid. The root of evil is already planted within his essence. This is the meaning of “the son of an Egyptian man.” The Torah revealed the background of the blasphemer, because this was the source of his corruption. His sin was due to the rotten roots of his parents. He was blamed because, knowing that he had such a tainted background, he should have tried to distance himself as much as possible from any of the negativity that his parents had imparted to him. He should have clung to the Torah, which had recently been given, to protect him from wrong. Instead of improving himself, he brought upon himself increasingly more damage, until he reached the lowest level possible.

I would like to suggest that the mother was truly to blame for the death of her son. She was aware of his faulty origin. He was the son of an Egyptian, and he had every likelihood of inheriting his father’s evil tendencies, especially that of cursing. We see that Pharaoh denied the existence of Hashem, as it says (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?” The pasuk also tells us (*ibid.* 2:8), “A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Yosef.” He pretended that he did not know Yosef, even though Yosef had saved his country from famine and granted him unparalleled wealth. The Gemara states (*Sotah* 11a) that one who denies the good that his friend has done him will eventually deny the kindness of Hashem.

Instead of his mother educating him properly in Torah, she accentuated his evil characteristics by her poor actions, until he became totally corrupt. In the end, he was found guilty and was put to death.

The blasphemer illustrates that a child can be ruined if he is not given a pure Jewish education. Without proper guidance, children can come to degrade the Torah and its mitzvot. They will behave like the gentiles, eventually becoming guilty even of blasphemy. Therefore, we should be extremely careful in the education of our children. We must ensure that

they are not influenced negatively, and that they not acquire bad habits.

However, bad character traits that parents bequeath to their child can only be eliminated by the child himself. For even if parents do teshuvah, they can repair only their own blemishes, not those of the child. Those faults that affected their children prior to their own repentance are beyond their control. We should be aware that there is a constant danger that children may grow up spiritually damaged, and constantly pray that no negativity become part of our offspring, G-d forbid.

Regarding this, we are advised (*Mishlei* 22:6): “חֲנוּךְ לַנְעָר עַל פִּי דַרְכוֹ – Train the youth according to his way.” Parents must invest much effort in order that their children should not inherit their faults. “According to his way,” refers to the ways of Hashem. Parents should train their children to follow in the ways of Hashem, so that they should not be affected by the flaws of their parents. The numerical value of the words חֲנוּךְ לַנְעָר עַל פִּי דַרְכוֹ is equal to that of “לִמְעַן יִטֵּב לְךָ לְבַנִּיךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ עַד עוֹלָם” – In order that it will be well with you and your children after you forever” (*Devarim* 12:28). This should be a source of inspiration for us. Those who give their children a sound Torah education are promised much benefit for themselves and their children forever.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The importance of proper education is well-known. Everyone is born with negative qualities, and his job is to channel them properly. He is capable of doing this only if his parents guide him correctly. Moreover, it is mandatory that parents accustom their children to study Torah and ensure that they are in good company. Parents should provide a pure and holy education for their children. Only the Torah can refine their character and nurture good traits.
- This clarifies the incident regarding the blasphemer. How was someone who witnessed so many outstanding miracles able to descend to such corruption? What benefit did he gain by his actions? We must conclude that his education was faulty from the start. His mother was guilty for conversing excessively with

men; and his father, the Egyptian, certainly did not provide a good example. He also did not guard himself by learning Torah.

- From conception, parents must invest in educating their children and guiding them properly. If they do so, then when the children mature, they will not veer from the correct path. Parents should also pray that their children acquire worthy attributes. By doing so, the children will succeed, and bring honor to their parents.

# KEDUSHAH



## KEDUSHAH – THE KEY TO OUR SURVIVAL

When Hashem will, in His great mercy, redeem His nation, it will be similar to the Exodus from Egypt, as the *Navi* says, (*Michah* 7:15), “As in the days when you left the land of Egypt, I will show it wonders.” The Vilna Gaon explains that the slavery in Egypt became more and more unbearable as the salvation drew closer (*Shemot* 10:1). This is similar to a woman in labor, who experiences more intense pains as the birth becomes imminent. So too, Bnei Yisrael’s suffering will be greatest just before the final redemption.

As we undergo more and more suffering, we should realize that the *geulah* is just around the corner. Hoshea (14:10) states, “Who is wise and will understand these things; understanding and will know them? For the ways of Hashem are straight, etc.” A wise person understands that very soon the ultimate redemption will take place, and our affliction will finally come to an end. Meanwhile, “the wise person will seize good deeds” (*Mishlei*) in order to hasten the redemption.

It is well-known that there is a tremendous difference between our generation and generations past. Previously, the nations of the world were bent on exterminating Am Yisrael, physically and/or spiritually. They decreed death on anyone caught keeping Torah and mitzvot. Baruch Hashem, for the most part, they did not succeed.

Despite the annihilation of tens of millions of Jews since the time of the *churban* Beit Hamikdash “the Eternal One of Israel does not lie and does not relent” (*Shmuel* I, 15:29). Am Yisrael remain staunch in their faith.



A thinking Jew should shake himself from the sloth of moral slumber and awaken himself to the understanding that democracy allows things that are totally unacceptable. The force of habit has blinded people's eyes to the fact that certain behaviors do not befit one who has been created in the image of G-d (*Bereishit* 1:27). Every person possesses beastly instincts within him (*Zohar* II, 178a). Without the Torah to rein him in, he does as he sees fit, like an untamed animal without guidance. He, too, becomes animal-like, acting without sense. This is as Kohelet states (3:19), "Man has no superiority over beast, for all is futile."

Only Torah distinguishes man from animal. Torah shows man how to behave, guiding him to act with *derech erez*. It gives him hope and happiness (*Avot* 6:7). It guards and protects him (*Sotah* 221a). By keeping the Torah, one attains indescribable pleasure. Tehillim states (36:7), "You save both man and beast, O Hashem." The Zohar explains (III, 147a) that "if they are meritorious, they are man, if not, they are beast."

According to this, we can understand the statement (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d." Chazal expound (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:4) that this means that one should "distance oneself from immorality." This seems puzzling. What does immorality have to do with being holy? How is sanctity expressed in this way?

A person naturally emulates his Creator, since his intelligence dictates that he should do good deeds. Likewise, common sense dictates that a person should establish future generations, in order that the world should remain populated. For that reason, the first mitzvah that Hashem commanded man is to be fruitful and multiply (*Bereishit* 1:28). This guarantees the continuity of the world. Hashem has great pleasure when He sees the world operate in accordance with the Torah, since the Torah is the whole purpose of Creation (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4).

As we have said, the entire Torah is dependent upon the first mitzvah, since it ensures the existence of future generations, who will learn Torah and perform mitzvot in holiness and purity. However, since the mitzvah

of procreation involves pleasure, one might forget his Creator when performing it. Thus, the very fact that it is a mitzvah, commanded by Hashem, teaches that it must be done as such, and not in forbidden ways.

Since the future of Torah and *emunah* are contingent on the mitzvah of reproduction, we were warned that in order to be sanctified and holy, we must separate ourselves from immorality. Only through chuppah and *kiddushin* can a person perform this mitzvah correctly and ensure that the world will endure through his children, who themselves will engage in Torah and mitzvot. But if a person does not go in this way, not only does he fail to maintain the world but he is liable to ruin it. The lust for immorality is tremendous, capable of dragging a person and his offspring to the grave.

Moreover, the continued existence of man depends on the mitzvah of reproduction. If there would be more animals than people, they would consume the few humans inhabiting the land. Since this mitzvah ensures the world's continuation, it is specifically in this area that the *Yetzer Hara* is extremely strong. This is evidenced by the behavior of the gentiles. They have no bounds. Therefore, the Torah instructed us to be holy. The Jewish nation must be removed from any form of immorality, so that the mitzvah of reproduction should be performed in sanctity and holiness, and a child should be holy from its mother's womb. In this manner, Jewish offspring will sanctify the world from the defilement of the gentiles.

Unfortunately, there is tremendous assimilation among our brothers, who desire to emulate the nations of the world and their cultures. No one speaks up against this. There are even those who endorse the forbidden, deeming it permissible. There is hardly one family immune to this syndrome, *rachmana litzlan*. Only after tragedy strikes a member of the family, do the parents remember to cry and plead, begging for a blessing and advice from the Rabbanim, complaining about why such calamity struck. They ask how it could be that their child, the apple of their eye, would marry a gentile. Haven't they, the parents, sacrificed their lives for

mitzvot? How is it possible that their offspring will be gentiles, *rachmana litzlan*? The answer is simple. If a child is born in transgression of halachah, one can only expect such tragedies to happen.

Therefore, we must examine our ways, as it says, (*Eichah* 3:40), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.” He distinguished us from the nations of the world and gave us His Torah (*Berachot* 11b). When we distance ourselves from the Torah, all types of harsh decrees plague us. Then, even righteous and innocent people pay for the iniquities of the generation, *rachmana litzlan* (*Zohar* III, 218a).

As the summer vacation draws near, many families make plans for recreation and relaxation. Some travel to Israel, others to Greece, the United States, or other locations. Only Hashem knows how many young people will meet their deaths during these vacations. Some may be victims of road accidents, and others may drown or meet their deaths in other tragic circumstances, may we be spared. But the greatest tragedy of all is assimilation with the gentiles. Year after year, many families come to me after the summer vacation, weeping inconsolably about a child who went off to live with a gentile. They request a blessing that their child return to the fold.

According to halachah, there is nothing wrong with going on vacation. It is a way to gather strength for serving Hashem in the upcoming year. It is healthy for both the body and the soul. But we must guarantee that the trip does not become grounds for revelry and wildness, shaking off all that is holy and dear to us. For then, it becomes dangerous.

Therefore, before setting out, a person should know where he is headed. He should clarify whether the place is appropriate for Jews, and who will be his companions. Will there be people there whose influence may be damaging either to himself or to his children?

Conversely, vacation can be beneficial, for once he is on vacation, his time is his own; he is not tied down to his work schedule and business

dealings. He has time to ponder which of his character traits needs repair. The word חופש (vacation) has the same root as the word חיפוש (search), as it says (*Eichah* 3:40), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.”

### ————— In Summary —————

- The ultimate redemption will be like *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Just as the servitude and suffering of Bnei Yisrael intensified immediately before the Exodus, so, too, will our suffering increase prior to the final redemption. However, we should realize that this will cease with the arrival of Mashiach. The wise person will grab as many mitzvot as possible, in order to hasten the *geulah*.
- Our generation is different from previous generations. In the past, the nations of the world coerced Bnei Yisrael to convert. The Jews, for their part, strengthened themselves in Torah. In this way, they prevailed and did not forsake their faith. But in our generation, we are not forced to abandon our religion. The existence of democracy and the abundance of physical pleasures available nowadays influence us to affiliate ourselves with society at large, causing assimilation.
- For this reason, the Torah commands us to be holy. Chazal say that the main point of this mandate is to detach oneself from immorality. The world was created for Torah and for life that is conducted according to the Torah. Therefore, the mitzvah of reproduction must be done for the sake of Heaven, and not in a forbidden way. Furthermore, Chazal state that the command to be removed from immorality is specifically why the *Yetzer Hara* is so strong in this area. This mitzvah is what upholds the world. The nations conduct themselves without limits in this matter. We are commanded to be holy in order to produce pure children, who will make a *kiddush Hashem* in the world, and sanctify it from the defilement of the gentiles. When one lives a life of Torah he attains true wealth and happiness.

## THE SANCTITY OF THE JEWISH HOME

Sanctity and abstinence are crucial to Am Yisrael, especially in one's personal life. Man's foundation must always be established on the pillars of holiness and purity. The words of Chazal are replete with proofs to support this concept. I will present but a few brief ideas, indicating how greatly we must strengthen ourselves in holiness and self-restraint, and how our ancestors toiled in this area. From these individual examples, one can learn what his general conduct should be.

When Hashem created Adam, He created Chava, his wife, as a helpmate for him. He received only one wife, although it was permitted for one man to have two wives (before the ban of Rabbeinu Gershom). This teaches that only when a man has one wife can there be true marital harmony, and the Name of Hashem can rest upon the couple. Having two wives may cause immorality and impurity, *rachmana litzlan*.

Chazal relate (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:7) that twin girls were born together with Hevel. Cain, his brother, was terribly jealous of him, and ultimately killed him (*Bereishit* 4:7). He thought Hevel would inherit the entire world. For this reason, it is preferable that man marry only one woman, living with her in peace and harmony. This will bring the *Shechinah* to rest among them always. Chazal state (*Avot* 2:8), "The more wives, the more witchcraft." Witchcraft chases holiness from the home, *rachmana litzlan*.

In my previous work, *Pachad David (Chumash)*, I expounded on what Chazal relate (*Shabbat* 146a) regarding the Serpent. He injected impurity into Chava when he saw her have relations with Adam Harishon. He intended to kill Adam and take Chava as a wife. From this contamination, Cain came forth, intending to, and ultimately succeeding, in killing his brother. He killed Hevel because of a woman, similar to the Snake, who wanted to kill Adam because of his wife.

We find that although Avraham Avinu had been married for ten years without having children, he did not seek another wife or divorce Sarah

when he saw that she couldn't conceive. This was despite the fact that Chazal teach (*Mishnah Yebamot* 6:6) that a man may divorce his wife if they did not merit having children after being married for ten years. Avraham married Hagar only upon the advice of Sarah, and he sent away Hagar and Yishmael only with her permission. This was in order that the *Shechinah* should never part from him and his wife, *chas v'shalom*.

Moreover, when Avraham arrived in Egypt, he placed Sarah in a container, in order that the Egyptians should not lay eyes upon her (*Bereishit Rabbah* 40:1). It is known that Egypt has a very hot climate. Wasn't Avraham concerned about her comfort?

Avraham was fulfilling a mitzvah, going to Egypt by Heavenly decree. He knew that neither he nor Sarah would be harmed, as those sent to perform a mitzvah are protected from harm (*Pesachim* 8a). He was not worried in the least lest she suffer in the box. But if Avraham and Sarah, indeed, had nothing to fear, why did Avraham deem it necessary to put his wife inside a box in the first place?

Avraham had no intention of relying on the "honesty" of the depraved Egyptians. He wanted to prevent them from observing Sarah's beauty and sinning on account of it. Furthermore, he feared that if they would abduct her, they would be severely punished. Avraham did not want any harm to be caused either through himself or Sarah. Therefore, he hid her from the public. He wanted to continue living in purity and holiness, as previously, with the Name of Hashem resting upon them.

We find a similar situation with Yaakov Avinu. He married two sisters, and added two handmaids to his wives, with their permission. All lived together. He married them according to halachah, and the *Shechinah* dwelt among them. Nevertheless, in the future, a specific honor (reciting the blessing upon the cup) will be withheld from Yaakov, because he married two sisters (*Pesachim* 119b).

When Reuven removed Yaakov's bed from the tent of Bilhah, he placed

it instead in the tent of his mother, Leah. Yaakov became incensed (*Bereishit* 35:22). He even mentioned this incident in his blessing to Reuven before his passing (*ibid.* 49:4). What was the reason for Yaakov's anger? He was afraid lest Bilhah be disturbed by the moving of the bed. This would cause the Name of Hashem to depart from between Yaakov and Bilhah. Yaakov desired to instill the *middah* of *kedushah* into every single one of his actions, without any flaw whatsoever.

We find a similar incident regarding Yosef Hatzaddik. When Eisav came to meet Yaakov, he placed his wives and their children before Eisav. Then, Yosef put himself in front of his mother, Rachel. She was a beautiful woman (*ibid.* 29:17) and Yosef didn't want Eisav to lay eyes on her, perhaps desiring to take her for a wife (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:10).

Originally, Rachel was predestined to marry Yaakov, and Leah was meant to marry Eisav, as the Gemara says (*Bava Batra* 123a), "The younger one (Rachel) was to marry the younger son (Yaakov), and the older one (Leah) was to marry the older son (Eisav)." Leah cried bitter tears over her fate, until her eyes became weakened from weeping. As soon as Yaakov married Leah, Rachel became destined for Eisav. Yaakov wanted to prevent Rachel from being taken by Eisav, so he worked another seven years in order to marry her.

Eisav, for his part, heard about Leah's crying and her weak eyes, and probably had no interest in her. But he had never met Rachel before and wanted to see what she looked like, even many years later. Yosef understood this, and therefore, when Eisav came to meet them, Yosef stood before her, in order to hide her from his eyes. By merely gazing at Rachel, Eisav might have defiled her because of the *tumah* and *kelippah* that emanated from his eyes. Yosef protected his mother's sanctity by blocking her from Eisav's line of vision.

It is well-known that the *kelippah* is nourished by *kedushah*. In the end of days, Eisav will fall into the hands of Yosef, as Chazal relate (*Bereishit*

*Rabbah* 73:7). If Eisav were to take pleasure in the beauty of Rachel, the mother of Yosef, the *kelippah* would have been strengthened. Yosef subdued Eisav's power by preventing him from laying eyes on his mother. We see from this to what extent Yosef endeavored to fortify *kedushah*, annulling the potency of *tumah*.

Now we can better understand the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:2) "You shall be holy." Rashi cites the words of Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:6), "Be removed from sexual immorality, for wherever you find restriction of sexual immorality [mentioned in the Torah], you find holiness [juxtaposed with it.]" Acts of immorality produce destruction and devastation, *chas v'shalom*. Only marriage as mandated by the Torah, with chuppah and *kiddushin*, done with sanctity and purity, has the ability to bring peace to the world. Then, the Name of Hashem becomes more and more elevated in the world.

To illustrate just how far one must go to maintain holiness and create barriers to prevent immorality, Chazal mention the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah* celebration in the days of the Beit Hamikdash (*Sukkah* 51b). A great rectification was made there: A partition was placed between the men and women, to prevent intermingling.

We see from here how important are the qualities of holiness and abstinence. Chazal teach (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 741) that the people drew *ruach hakodesh* from the celebration of the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah*. The nation merited to attain this lofty level specifically because of the sanctity that they were imbued with due to the barrier. When there is separation, there is holiness. "You shall be holy" is an injunction to remove oneself from all situations of immorality, which brings holiness in its wake.

In the future, there will be a great eulogy in Yerushalayim, the likes of the eulogy of Hadad Rimon ben Tverimon (*Zechariah* 12:11), who killed Achav. Each family will be mourned individually (ibid. 12:12). Chazal (*Sukkah* 52:1) explain that this means that the men will stand off to one

side, and the women to the other. This is for reasons of *tzeniut*, as *Radak* clarifies.

There is a tremendous lesson to be learnt here. The Gemara continues (ibid.) that if, in the future, when the *Yetzer Hara* will no longer wield power, there will be absolute separation between men and women, all the more so must there be division between the genders in our day, when the *Yetzer Hara* reigns. This is in order to avoid sin, *chas v'shalom*.

Perhaps we can also add the following. All the destruction which took place, and all the suffering which our nation endured in the years of *galut*, were in retribution for transgressing the three cardinal sins: immorality, idol worship, and bloodshed. In the future, there will be a great eulogy, explaining the cause of all the hardships we suffered. This is because Bnei Yisrael did not concern themselves with the Name  $\eta\text{-}^{\text{ג}}$ , which is numerically equivalent to the word *Hod*, one of the *sefirot* (*Zohar* III, *Raayah Meheimenah* 243a). This is the power which unites man and wife. Its lack resulted in the fulfillment of the words of the *Navi* (*Eichah* 1:13, 1:4), “[He made me] sick throughout the day... And she herself is embittered.”

Had the nation been sufficiently concerned to separate between men and women, keeping distant from immorality, the power of *hod* would not have been placed in the hands of impure forces, and the Name of Hashem,  $\eta\text{-}^{\text{ג}}$ , its numerical equivalent, would have illuminated the entire world.

The eulogy, therefore, is extremely important since it restores the glory of Hashem's Name. The eulogy reinstates the *sefirah* of *hod*, which had come under the control of the impure forces, and rectifies the tremendous *chillul Hashem* made by the nations of the world. Each person must do his utmost to be holy and pure, both in his marriage and in all other matters. We see that our fathers, throughout the generations, were extremely careful to separate themselves from sin and continually elevated themselves to higher levels of *kedushah*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The foundation of everything is to behave with sanctity and restraint. There are many examples to prove this point; we will mention just a few. We find that Adam Harishon was created with just one wife, for an increase in wives increases witchcraft. Cain killed his brother, Hevel, because he was jealous of his two sisters. Avraham Avinu did not take Hagar for a wife, and, later, did not send her away without the permission of Sarah. He wanted the Name of Hashem to dwell in his abode through sanctity.
- Yaakov Avinu married two sisters, and then two handmaidens, halachically, in order to increase the power of *kedushah*. When Reuven removed Yaakov's bed from the tent of Bilhah, Yaakov became enraged. He suspected that Reuven had damaged the Name of Hashem residing in Bilhah's tent.
- Yosef stood in front of his mother, Rachel, at the time when they met Eisav. He wanted to prevent Eisav from laying eyes on his mother, damaging her with impure forces. Yosef knew that the power of *kedushah*, to nullify the evil forces transmitted by Eisav, was in his control. For this reason, he blocked his mother from Eisav's vision. This is the meaning of, "You shall be holy." When one is separate from immorality, holiness reigns.

# MARRIAGE



## FINDING A WIFE – FINDING GOOD

Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of men, stated regarding marriage (*Mishlei* 18:21), “One who has found a wife has found goodness, and he has brought forth favor from Hashem.” This raises several questions. Firstly, why is the opposite not also true, that “one who has found a husband has found goodness”? After all, a woman prays a great deal to find a husband who is a Torah scholar. This isn’t always a simple matter, since many families are hesitant to have a son-in-law who plans to dedicate his life to Torah study.

Moreover, when a woman marries, she leaves her parents’ home and starts a new life with her husband, often far away. This presents a much greater challenge for the woman than the man, since she has to make more adjustments than he. Thus it would seem that Shlomo Hamelech should also have stressed the importance of finding a good husband, since the wife is dependent on him.

Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 2b), “It is a man’s way to seek a wife, while it is not a woman’s way to seek a husband – just as one looks for an object which he misplaced.” It is the man who is responsible for finding a wife, not the other way around, even though it seems that a woman should need to expend more efforts in this regard.

In order for a *shidduch* to be successful, several conditions must be met.

First, the couple needs to feel mutual attraction. If not, marriage is out of the question.

Second, the woman must realize and accept that her husband is going to be the one in charge. The Torah states this clearly (*Bereishit* 3:16), “And he will rule over you.” As we know, “two kings cannot wear one crown.” A wife should listen to her husband. Recognizing their respective positions in the marriage fosters true harmony.

The third condition is that the husband undertakes to be responsible to provide for his wife and care for her even more than for himself. Chazal say (*Yevamot* 62b), “When a person loves his wife as much as himself, and respects her even more than his own self...he merits the fulfillment of the verse (*Iyov* 5:24) ‘You will know that your tent is at peace.’” Why is honoring one’s wife so important? Rashi explains, “Treating a woman lightly is worse than treating a man lightly.” Treating one’s wife lightly or causing her pain is no simple matter.

Furthermore, a man’s goal should be to do good to his wife and honor her, in order to fulfill the obligation (*Yeshayahu* 58:7) “Do not ignore your own flesh.” He should realize that it is his wife who enables him to earn his share in Torah, as the Gemara says (*Yebamot* 62b), “Whoever does not have a wife lacks goodness, joy, Torah, etc.” Above all, she is the mainstay of the home, responsible for the children’s daily care, upbringing, and Torah education (see *Berachot* 17a). All these things should make her extremely precious in his eyes.

A new couple will benefit greatly by understanding that the direction of their future life depends on how they start off. If the husband resolves at his wedding to always conduct himself with *kedushah*, and build his family in a way befitting a loyal servant to his Maker, Hashem will grant him much success in his marriage and *nachat* from his children.

After making such resolutions, the couple must be prepared to keep them. Failing to do so is an injustice to their children as well, as they will learn from their example. It is much more difficult to induce one’s children to return to the correct path than to do so himself. By resolving under the chuppah to perform Hashem’s will and conduct themselves with

purity and holiness, they will surely find themselves blessed when building their new home.

The goal of marriage is for man and wife to include Hakadosh Baruch Hu in all aspects of their lives. When they do so, they merit having the *Shechinah* dwell within their home. Rabbi Akiva said, “If man (שׂא) and his wife (השא) are meritorious, the *Shechinah* dwells between them” (*Sota* 17a). Rashi explains that “meritorious” means that they both conduct themselves decently. The words שׂא and השא are similar, differing only in two letters, the ך and ה, which constitute the Name of Hashem (יה-י). When joined together as husband and wife, the union of marriage brings the ך from the man and the ה from the woman to build a sanctuary within which the *Shechinah* rests. Yet if they fail to “be meritorious,” acting in an improper manner, Hashem removes the letters of His Name from their names, so to speak, leaving only the letters ך and ש – which spell שא (fire). This indicates that when a couple fails to bring Hashem into their lives, choosing to live as they please, their relationship will be consumed by the fire of contention.

While a man is obligated to perform all of the mitzvot and to study Torah, a woman is only obligated to keep the positive mitzvot which are not bound by time (see *Kiddushin* 29a). Since the woman is responsible for her household, she cannot be expected to perform mitzvot which have a time limit.

When a man looks for a wife, he should concentrate on trying to find someone who will be a true helpmate to him, enabling him to study Torah and perform all of his various mitzvah obligations undisturbed. Studying Torah protects one from the *Yetzer Hara*, thus enabling the *Shechinah* to dwell between them. Moreover, when a wife facilitates her husband’s learning and mitzvah observance, she is also credited with the merit of his Torah and mitzvot. Thus, even though she is unable to perform all the mitzvot herself, through her husband’s performance of them the woman herself gains credit as if she had done so.

This helps us understand the statement that “one who has found a wife has found goodness.” Shlomo Hamelech uses the word “found” twice, in order to stress the efforts man needs to make to find a good wife to stand at his side. When they both strive to do Hashem’s will, they merit having Hashem’s blessing rest upon them from the very start of their marriage.

Returning to our original question of why Shlomo Hamelech exhorts a man rather than a woman to search for a worthy helpmate, perhaps we can suggest the following answer. When looking for a husband, a woman naturally has material goals in mind as well as spiritual ones, even when her intentions are for the sake of Heaven. Therefore, if she were the one responsible for finding her helpmate, she may lose sight of her primary goal and be drawn after the material instead. This might prevent her from seeking to marry a *ben Torah* and build her home on the strongest Torah foundations.

This idea is alluded to in the pasuk itself. “One who has found a wife has found goodness.” When a man finds a good wife, he has also found goodness – as the Torah is called “good – טוב” (*Berachot* 5a). There are several correlations between the goodness of a wife and the goodness of the Torah. Chazal say that the Jewish nation was redeemed from Egypt and received the Torah in the merit of the righteous women (*Sotah* 11b; *Shemot Rabbah* 1:12). Furthermore, by enabling their husbands to study Torah, women merit the resurrection of the dead (*Berachot* 17a). Certainly, then, finding a wife constitutes “finding good,” since women increase the number of *bonei Torah* in this world, as well as enabling them to receive reward in the World to Come.

This correlation is also hinted to by the *gematria* of the words in the pasuk. The *gematria* of the word טוב is seventeen. As we explained above, Hashem incorporates the letters of His Name (יהי) in the names of איש and אישה when they are worthy. The *gematria* of Hashem’s Name is fifteen. When we add two for the couple themselves we reach the total of seventeen, the same as the word טוב. Indeed, “One who has found a wife

has found goodness.” This is dependent upon them both conducting themselves according to halachah from the very start. Then they will merit much success for many generations to come.

At a wedding, the words “שהשמחה במעונו – joy is in His abode” are incorporated into the *zimun* before Birkat Hamazon. We do not find this expression used at any other time of joy or celebration – even on Sukkot, which is called “the time of our happiness.” This phrase is unique to the wedding celebrations. Why is the joy of a wedding so great as to be considered “a joy in Hashem’s abode”?

Perhaps we can suggest that this is because the union between the bride and groom is the foundation of the world. It is what enables Torah learning to flourish and ensures the continuation of mankind. Hashem can be a King only if He has subjects! The joy of a new union is considered to be “in Hashem’s abode” since the couple are now beginning their partnership with Hashem in perpetuating the Jewish nation and ensuring the continuation of the Torah. Because of this, Hashem and His Heavenly entourage come to rejoice at every Torah-true wedding.

Chazal instituted that at each of the *sheva berachot* celebrations there must be פנים חדשות – someone who was not present at any of the previous celebrations. The first and last letters of פנים חדשות spell out the words פח מת. The *kelippah*, which is called both פח and מת, is very disconcerted by the wedding celebration. A wedding causes greater joy in the Upper Worlds than any other festival – it is “joy in Hashem’s abode.” The *kelippah* tries to prevent this joy from coming to fruition.

We make sure to have a “new face” at every *sheva berachot* celebration, in order to confuse the *kelippah*. By not seeing the same people gathered together every day, the Satan may fail to realize what is happening. Moreover, the fact that a new guest is present encourages everyone to be on their best behavior, preventing arguments and bickering. This allows no leeway for the Satan, who is unable to hinder the celebrations. This is

contingent upon a man and wife marrying in accordance with Torah, with fear of Heaven and *kedushah* as their goals.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Why does Shlomo Hamelech state that a man who finds a wife finds goodness, yet he does not say the same concerning a woman? The Torah gives the man the responsibility of finding a wife, rather than the other way around. Why is this so? A woman needs to invest many prayers to merit marrying a *talmid chacham*, for her whole future life depends on her husband! Should she not also be responsible to search for a good husband?
- Several conditions are necessary for marriage. The couple should feel mutual attraction, the woman should accept her husband's authority, and the husband should recognize his responsibility to care for his wife even more than he cares for himself. It is the wife's job to help educate the children and to assist her husband in studying Torah.
- When a couple strives to base their marriage on Torah values, keeping the laws of *taharat hamishpachah*, they will surely be blessed with success in raising their children in the ways of the Torah. The letters ך and ך in the words אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה hint at the Divine Presence which dwells between the couple.
- The woman earns spiritual completion through her husband's Torah study and mitzvah performance. Since the man has the responsibility of building a Torah home, whereas the wife has additional considerations in getting married, the job of finding a spouse was given to him. "One who has found a wife has found goodness" – through marriage, man can attain the goodness of Torah.
- We make sure to invite פְּנִימֵי הַדְּשׁוֹת, a new guest, to every *sheva berachot* celebration, since the first and last letters of פְּנִימֵי הַדְּשׁוֹת spell מַתְּנָה, a name for the *kelippah*, who tries to spoil the celebration and prevent Hashem from deriving pleasure from it. By bringing a new guest every day, the *kelippah* becomes confused, and loses its power. Then the joy of "being in Hashem's abode" can truly overflow. All this holds true when the marriage is established in accordance with Torah and halachah.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE JEWISH HOME

According to the *Shulchan Aruch* “it is the custom in some communities to break a glass after saying the *sheva berachot*. The custom in our country is that the groom breaks the vessel over which the *Bircat Eirusin* is said.” This is also written by the Ben Ish Chai (*Hilchot Shanah Rishonah, Parashat Shoftim* 11). He says, “After the *kiddushin*, the *chatan* breaks a glass in memory of Yerushalayim, as it says (*Tehillim* 137:6-7), ‘If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill...if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy.’”

Why, on the happiest day of his life, does the groom need to break a glass in memory of the *churban*? Couldn’t a more appropriate time be found to focus on remembering Yerushalayim? Chazal say (*Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezel* 65a) that it is a great mitzvah to gladden the *chatan* and *kallah*. We certainly do not want to dampen their joy.

Furthermore, we find that the groom is exempted from several mitzvot. The Rambam states (*Hilchot Kriyat Shema* 4:1) that one who is occupied with one mitzvah is absolved from all others, including Kriyat Shema. Therefore, a *chatan* is not obligated to pray until he lives with his wife. It would seem strange that he has the mitzvah to remember the *churban* right under the chuppah, when it seems that it is not directly related to the marriage itself.

Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b), “In the time of the second Beit Hamikdash, the people learned Torah, performed mitzvot, and did acts of kindness. Why, then, was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred. This teaches that baseless hatred is tantamount to the three cardinal sins – idol worship, adultery, and murder.”

When a bride and groom are married according to Jewish law, they become as one, united forever (*Zohar* III, 296a). Yet their married life depends on the relationship the couple build with each other. Its foundations are the ability to value and respect one another. If this mutual

respect is lacking, and animosity creeps in, the cornerstone of their marriage is shaken out of place, and the whole edifice may falter and crumble. Thus, Chazal compare divorce to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred and the lack of respect that people felt for one another. When a couple reflects on this, it should encourage them to make greater efforts to honor each other appropriately. Otherwise, they themselves are further delaying the *geulah*. Therefore, it is particularly at this happiest moment of his life, when standing under the chuppah, that the groom should remember what caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash in order to rectify the root of destruction.

Our Sages say, “If man and his wife are meritorious, the *Shechinah* resides between them, and if not, they are consumed by fire” (*Sota* 17a; *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 12). If they merit, Hashem will help them, and they will build a beautiful home. They will hasten the redemption and the building of the Beit Hamikdash. Yet if not, destruction will inevitably ensue.

This can be compared to a poor person, who suddenly won a large amount of money. When he came to tell all his friends and relatives the good news, they told him about a different poor person who once won a lottery, yet since he didn’t know how to guard his gains wisely, he gained nothing at all.

Similarly, when the bride and groom stand under the chuppah, we tell them, “Look how we were given such a treasure, the Beit Hamikdash, yet it was lost because of *sinat chinam*. Today, you are being given the greatest gift. You are beginning to build your own home, your own miniature Beit Hamikdash. Guard your treasure dearly; don’t let it be damaged by contention or disrespect.”

Chazal teach (*Gittin* 90a; *Sanhedrin* 22a), “Rabbi Eliezer said, when a person divorces his wife, even the Altar sheds tears over him, as it says

(*Malachi* 2:13), ‘And this is a second sin that you commit, covering the Altar of Hashem with tears, crying and moaning...’” Why should the Altar cry over a man divorcing his wife?

To answer, let us pose an additional question: Chazal say (*Yevamot* 62b) that an unmarried person cannot be considered as “possessing Torah.” Yet we know that there are many Torah scholars, some of them very great, who were not married. One of the greatest *Tanna'im*, Ben Azzai, refrained from marrying since he wished to devote himself fully to Torah study (ibid. 63b). Can we say that these sages did not “possess Torah”?

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk writes in his work *Noam Elimelech* that one who learns Torah “without purity” and without having first corrected his sins, may be able to learn very well, however, when a mitzvah comes his way, he is still very much in danger of not performing it properly.

Based on this, we can explain that before a person is married, he is liable to have improper thoughts. This can lead him to perform mitzvot while in a state of impurity. As such, the Torah that he does possess cannot be considered complete. This is the meaning of Chazal. Therefore, when a man divorces his wife, he is also susceptible to learning Torah “without purity.” He might transgress prohibitions which would require bringing a sacrifice on the Altar, and this is why the Altar cries.

We can also explain that the Altar hints at man himself (*Zohar* II, 162b). The Altar was filled with earth (*Shemot* 20:21) in order to resemble man, who was created from earth, as indicated by the name אָדָם (which comes from the word אֲדָמָה – earth). The Ramban writes (*Vayikra* 1:9) that the sacrifices offered on the Altar are meant to teach man to humble himself like an offering. When he sees an animal’s blood being spilled, and its body being cut into pieces and burned on the Altar, he will feel that the same should have been done to him. Only due to Hashem’s kindness was the animal taken in his place. These thoughts are indeed humbling. The Torah continues (*Shemot* 20:23), “You shall not ascend My Altar on steps,”

which hints at the fact that a sacrifice cannot be offered with a proud heart.

Many divorces can be attributed to pride. The husband and wife are unwilling to yield to one another. When a person gets divorced because of his pride, he sullies himself and even damages the Altar, to which he is compared. This is another reason that “the Altar cries.”

When discussing the Altar, the Torah also writes (*Shemot* 20:22), “And when you will make an Altar of stones for Me, do not build them hewn, lest you wave your sword over it and defile it.” Rashi comments as follows, “Iron defiles the stones since the Altar makes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven. Therefore, that which cuts and injures should not come over it. Now, if in the case of stones, which neither see nor hear nor speak, because they make peace (since they form the Altar which makes peace between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael), the Torah said, ‘You shall not wave iron over them,’ then in the case of a person who makes peace between man and his wife, how much more so will punishments not befall him.”

It is well-known that arrogance is the cause of most wars. Each side wants to show that he can conquer his enemy. This brings destruction to the world. Only when a couple is willing to be considerate of one another, to listen to each other, and even to give in for the sake of one another, can they expect to live together peacefully. Then they will not sin and will have no need to bring sacrifices for atonement. Their lives will be full of joy and Torah fulfillment.

By conducting themselves in this way, it will even be considered as if the Beit Hamikdash was built in their time. After all, when a Jewish home is guided by Torah values and laws, it becomes a “miniature Beit Hamikdash.” By breaking the glass under the chuppah, the bride and groom are actually given extra encouragement to strive for this goal.

Hashem’s Name ה-י has the same numerical value as the word גאווה (pride). Pride is the sole possession of Hashem. When people display

pride, anger, and contention, Hashem removes His presence from them. When husband and wife express care toward each another and yield to one another, they merit that Hashem will dwell among them always, and they will know only joy and happiness.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Why did Chazal institute the custom of breaking a glass under the wedding canopy, thus bringing an element of sadness into an occasion of great joy? This question is strengthened by the fact that the groom is absolved of the obligation to perform other mitzvot due to the festivities.
- Breaking the glass reminds everyone of the Beit Hamikdash, which was destroyed because of baseless hatred. It gives the bride and groom the impetus to build their own home in harmony. By doing so, their union will be everlasting, and they will know only good.
- When a person is unmarried, he is considered as being “without Torah,” since he is faced with temptations in the area of immorality. A person who divorces his wife is also faced with these temptations, which can lead him to sin. This is why the Altar sheds tears over him.
- When a couple lives together in harmony and submissiveness, the Altar rejoices and they will lead a life of spiritual joy and contentment. By making their home into a “miniature Beit Hamikdash” it is considered as if they merit actually rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash, thus hastening the *geulah*.

## GLADDENING THE BRIDE AND GROOM

“It is forbidden to glorify two brides in one city, unless there are adequate means to glorify both of them. Rabbi Shimon said that it is still forbidden since this could cause animosity...It is forbidden to eulogize two people in one city, unless there are adequate means to eulogize both of them...It is forbidden to comfort two mourners as one, unless their status is equal” (*Semachot* 11:5).

Additionally, Chazal say (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan, nuscha 2, 88*), “Once, Rabbi Tarfon was sitting and teaching his students when a bride passed before him. He had her brought into his home, and told his mother and wife, ‘Wash her and adorn her and dance in front of her, until she goes to her husband’s house.’”

Rabbi Chaim Zeichik, in his work *Ohr Chadash*, points out how important the bride’s honor was to Rabbi Tarfon. “The extent to which Rabbi Tarfon honored his mother is well-known. Our Sages say (*Kiddushin 31b*) that his mother was elderly, and whenever she wished to get into bed, Rabbi Tarfon would bend down so that she could climb on his back to reach the bed. Yet here, we see that he asked his mother to wash and adorn the bride! This shows us how important honoring the bride was to Rabbi Tarfon.” Why?

When we acquire or experience something new and special we make the blessing *Shehecheyanu*. Yet the groom does not make this blessing when he betroths and actually “acquires” his wife, under the wedding canopy. Isn’t this the most fitting opportunity to say *Shehecheyanu*?

Moreover, a man has a greater obligation to marry than a woman, as he is the one with the obligation to “be fruitful and multiply.” Until he marries, he is only “half a person” and cannot be fully joyous. When he marries, he actually “gains back” the other half of himself which he was previously missing (*Zohar III, 7b*). It seems that the *berachah* of *Shehecheyanu* could never be more appropriate!

This hints that a wife should seek to always be “new” in her husband’s eyes. A wife is fundamentally different from any other good thing that a man might acquire. One may feel great enjoyment over a new possession, but after a time, this feeling of excitement will wane. We get used to having this new thing and start to take it for granted. Eventually, we don’t even appreciate it any more. Conversely, the relationship between husband and wife should never become stale! A wife should always be

new in her husband's eyes. She herself is a source of renewal since she constantly helps her husband renew his Avodat Hashem.

Everything that warrants the blessing *Shehecheyanu* loses its freshness and novelty at some point. We say this blessing when the object is brand new, and we have a heightened appreciation for it. For example, the first fruits of the season taste particularly delicious. We can't wait to bite into them and savor their fresh flavor. Yet after being in the refrigerator for too long, or at the end of the season, they have less appeal.

A wife is different. A husband and wife should always rejoice in each other as much as they did on the day of their marriage. The fact that Hashem dwells between them makes their relationship something alive and growing, as opposed to a finite object which grows old. Therefore, if the groom were to make *Shehecheyanu*, but later offend his wife, or vice versa, the blessing would be incomplete.

This concept of constant renewal helps us to understand what the joy of a wedding is all about, and why it is so important to gladden the bride and groom. By bringing them joy, we actually make it possible for Hashem's presence to reside between them! The Name ה-י, which is incorporated in אש and אשה, is brought down to reside between them at the wedding ceremony. What greater cause for joy can there be than bringing Hashem's presence into the world? It's no wonder, then, that we are so happy at a wedding.

Before the bride and groom are married, they are full of fiery passions, hinted by the letters 'א and 'ש from their names, which form the word אש (fire). Yet when they marry, they become receptacles capable of containing Hashem's presence, as explained above. The letters of the word מתחתנים (they marry) also spell נ' מים (under – fifty – water). This implies that under the influence of Torah, which is compared to water (*Bava Kamma* 17a), the bride and groom are able to “enter the fifty Gates of Purity.” Then the letters ה-י from Hashem's Name can become intertwined with theirs, and they become whole.

Now Rabbi Tarfon's actions are easily understood. Even though his honor and respect for his mother were exemplary, he felt it was appropriate to request that she take the trouble to dance for the bride and adorn her. He realized that the bride's happiness when she begins to build her home is fundamental to everything that she and her husband hope to build together. Furthermore, it is through the woman that Hashem's own Name becomes complete. The pasuk in Kohelet says, "A three-ply cord is not easily severed" (4:12). Hashem's Name ה-י, when spelled out (היה=ה יוד=י), has the numerical value of thirty. This is symbolic of the "three-ply cord," which "is not easily severed."

I would like to explain this concept further. Chazal say that Hashem was the usher at Adam and Chava's wedding, and He gladdened them. But why did they even need to be gladdened? Was there any reason for them not to be happy on their own? Had there been any previous animosity between them? Moreover, they undoubtedly felt great joy at the very fact that they had been created. Did they also need to be gladdened as a bride and groom? Overflowing joy is valuable as a safeguard against sin, but they were not in danger of sinning, as the *Yetzer Hara* had not yet entered them. Why did they need this excessive gladness?

The Torah itself sheds light on these questions. The pasuk relates (*Bereishit* 2:22-24), "Then Hashem G-d fashioned the side...and He brought her to the man. And the man said, 'This time it is bone of my bones...This shall be called Woman...Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, etc.'"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself was the matchmaker between Adam and Chava. He plaited Chava's hair and presented her to Adam (*Berachot* 61a; *Shabbat* 95a). Chava was beautiful and wise. Chazal explain (*Niddah* 45b) that the word ויבן (Hashem built) denotes בינה (insight). This teaches that woman was granted an extra aspect of wisdom than man.

Before Chava was created, Hashem had given Adam a different partner, called 'Lilit.' The Name of Hashem ה-י did not rest between them, and they

quarreled. Each wanted to rule. In the end, she ran away. Until today, she endeavors to bring people to stumble in sins of immorality and haughtiness (*Otzar Hamidrashim*, p. 35).

After the creation of Chava, Adam stated (*Bereishit* 2:23), “This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” When Hashem created Chava, He implanted within her an added measure of wisdom to receive from and be influenced by her husband. In this manner, marital harmony would reign, and Hashem’s Name would rest between them. “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother” can refer to the vanities of this world, which are like a father and mother to him. Man and wife are enjoined to abandon these vanities and cleave to each other. This is in order to complete the Name of ה-י, which opens the channels of blessing for the entire world.

Therefore, the joy was indeed very great at the time that Hashem brought Chava before Adam. For then the Name of Hashem, ה-י became complete (הי=ה , יי=י). The extent of the blessings that came down to the world was proportionate to their great joy. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Adam, and Chava will always be intertwined, as three partners, and “the three-ply cord will not easily be severed.”

This is the purpose of gladdening the hearts of the bride and groom. When a *chatan* and *kallah* marry, they accept upon themselves the influence of water, which is Torah. At that point, all their sins are forgiven. By means of the Name ה-י, impure forces leave them. One assists the other, and the *Shechinah* dwells among them. Just as Hashem gladdened the original *chatan* and *kallah*, bringing His Name to dwell among them, so, too, are we obligated to bring joy to the *chatan* and *kallah*. Their great happiness will cause the Name ה-י to reside between them forever.

Chazal ask (*Ketubot* 16b), “How do we dance before the *kallah*?” One must be exceedingly careful when dancing before the bride, in order to prevent wrong thoughts from surfacing, as this can cause great damage, *chas v’shalom*.

The joy must be expressed in a modest manner. The sole desire of the guests should be to bring spiritual pleasure to the *chatan* and *kallah*. They show them that they are now leaving the pleasures of this world, in order to be connected only with Hashem and His Torah.

This is the essence of what the joy should be. The time of the chuppah awakens the spiritual influences of the chuppah of Adam Harishon and Chava, and the joy which Hashem brought them. To the extent that we express our joy in this world, so too there is spiritual joy on High. This is the meaning of the words “happiness in His abode.” In the Upper Spheres, there is great joy for the bride and groom, who are now becoming vessels for the Name of Hashem ה' in its entirety. They will be worthy of plentiful goodness and blessing.

With this in mind, we can now understand why two brides may not be praised at the same time. The mitzvah of gladdening the hearts of the *chatan* and *kallah* is so great that we may not combine this mitzvah with another. Each couple is an entire world, therefore each marriage must be celebrated individually.

It is well-known that Izevel, the wife of Achav, worshipped idols like he did and aided him in his wicked deeds (*Eliyahu Rabbah* 10). In the end she was sentenced to death and her remains were eaten by dogs as a punishment. Yet, Chazal tell us that her head, feet, and the palms of her hands remained intact, and were eventually brought to burial (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim II, remez 232; Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 17). What did she do to merit this?

Izevel fulfilled the mitzvah of gladdening the *chatan* and *kallah*. She would dance before them with all her might. For this reason, her head, feet, and hands, which aided in her mitzvah performance, remained whole. This is quite amazing. Although she was so very wicked, the merit gained by performing the mitzvah was so great that even the dogs, who do not know what they are eating, did not touch these limbs. This

illustrates how great is the mitzvah of bringing joy to the *chatan* and *kallah*.

Izevel's actions were contradictory. On the one hand she obviously appreciated the greatness of the mitzvah of bringing joy to the *chatan* and *kallah*, and causing Hashem's Name ה' to rest among them. On the other hand, she continued to worship idols. How can we explain this paradox?

The answer is quite simple. The fact that one is aware of the truth does not ensure his righteousness. One must decide if he wants to acquire eternal happiness or continue pursuing the delights of this world. The *Yetzer Hara* arouses the desire for money, glory, and all other pleasures of this transitory world, pushing him to invest his energies in pursuing physical and material possessions.

Man must choose. As they say, "You can't take it with you." It is impossible to live a life submerged in earthly pleasures while expecting to attain a portion in the World to Come. One comes at the expense of the other. Man is led in the way he chooses (*Makkot* 10b).

Izevel knew that her husband, Achav, was a *talmid chacham*, who respected the Torah (*Sanhedrin* 102b). She appreciated the mitzvah of gladdening the bride and groom. Moreover, just like Achav, Izevel did not transgress the laws of *lashon hara*. Chazal teach that the generation of Achav always emerged victorious from battle because they refrained from slander (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1; *Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2). However, Izevel was involved in idol worship. How can we understand this?

Although she indeed recognized the truth, Izevel wanted worldly pleasures, as well. An example of this is the case of Navot Hayizraeli. Achav desired his vineyard, and when he refused to give it, Izevel advised him to have Navot killed in an underhanded way (*Melachim I*, 21). Did the king lack vineyards that he specifically needed the one that belonged to Navot? It was the desire for more and more materialism that drove Achav to covet another's possessions. Thus, he and Izevel, although standing at the height of their kingdom, fell to the lowest levels.

One must decide between life in this world and life in the World to Come. The failure to make the right choice caused the downfall of Achav and Izevel. However, Izevel's head, feet, and hands were saved from punishment and merited to be buried, because she used them to gladden the *chatan* and *kallah*, bringing the *Shechinah* to reside among them. This teaches the tremendous value of bringing joy to the bride and groom.

### ————— In Summary —————

- We do not glorify two brides in one city, because each is deserving of her individual joy. Gladdening the hearts of the *chatan* and *kallah* is of utmost importance. We know that Rabbi Tarfon honored his mother excessively, yet when a *kallah* would pass by, he would ask his mother to bathe her and make her happy.
- The Name of Hashem, ה-י, rests between the *chatan* and *kallah*. The *Shechinah* resides among them. Thus Hashem, the *chatan* and the *kallah* form “a three-ply cord which is not easily severed.”
- We find that Hashem gladdened Adam and Chava. Lilit was created to be Adam's wife before Chava, but she argued with him, and eventually ran away. Later, Hashem brought Chava to Adam. She was endowed with an extra measure of wisdom, and was also very beautiful. Hashem Himself gladdened them. Through them, the Name of Hashem became complete. So is it with every *chatan* and *kallah*. For that reason, Chazal advise us to dance before the bride and groom and bring them joy. This is a most lofty act, and should be done with the utmost modesty in order to prevent transgression. The entire wedding ceremony should be conducted in a spirit of holiness and purity.
- Izevel, the wicked wife of Achav, was punished in a most shameful way. Her body was consumed by the dogs. But because she would dance before the bride and groom, her head, feet, and hands remained intact. This is astounding. She was an idol worshipper like her husband. However, they desired both worlds: the world of materialism, and the world of spirituality. These two worlds cannot co-exist. Thus the king and queen fell to the lowest levels. The fact that

Izevel merited that the limbs she used to bring joy to the bride and groom were buried teaches the tremendous importance of this mitzvah. It helps bring the Name of Hashem to rest between the couple. Great reward awaits all who do so.

## LIVING WITH THE SHECHINAH

If a man and woman merit, the *Shechinah* rests among them (*Sotah* 17a). What does this mean? We find that the man (שׂא) contains the letter ׀, whereas the woman (השא) contains the letter ׀ה. These two letters combined spell ה-׀, the Name of Hashem. When man and woman marry, Hashem Yitbarach rests His *Shechinah* upon them.

But if there is no harmony between them, Hashem removes His Presence from them, thereby invalidating the letters ה-׀. The remaining letters spell שא (fire). The Gemara states (*ibid.*), “And if not (if they do not merit), a fire consumes them.”

It is definitely difficult for a man and woman, who hardly know each other, to live under the same roof. They will be successful in doing so only when Hashem dwells with them. But, if the couple lacks harmony, Hashem removes His Presence from them, and the fire of dissention will burn between them.

*Shidduchim* is not a simple matter. Unfortunately many matches become annulled. Many prayers are needed in order for a match to receive Divine assistance and endure. We must also pray that the forces of impurity should not affect the new couple in any way.

The word שדוך (match) hints to this. It is a combination of the letters כו, which have the numerical equivalent of the entire Name of Hashem (ה-י-ה-ו-ה), and שד, a name of one of the negative forces. With much prayer, a couple will merit Divine intervention and Hashem’s presence will rest among them. Then the negative force of שד will be annulled. But lack of prayer lessens the Divine help that they may receive, which may then

enable the **שׁו** to weaken the harmony between the couple and prevent them from attaining true unity.

People think that it is enough to pray that the match turn out okay. I don't think this is sufficient. I believe that constant prayer is needed in order that peace should reign between them, and that no negative forces take control. The word **שׁוֹמֵר** can be divided into three parts: **שׁו**, **ו**, **מֵר**. This hints that first, the power of impurity (**שׁו**) must be vanquished. After that, the Name **ו-י** can reside among the couple. The next level is that the entire Name of Hashem, **ו-י-ו-י**, should dwell between them. This occurs when there is harmony between man and wife, which ensures that the match will endure, until one hundred and twenty years.

### ————— In Summary —————

- “If a man and woman merit, the *Shechinah* rests among them.” The letter **ו** from the man (**שׁוֹמֵר**) and the letter **ו** from woman (**שׁוֹמֵר**) together form the Name of Hashem (**ו-י**). When the two live in harmony, the *Shechinah* dwells amongst them. Conversely, when there is lack of harmony, the fire of dissention consumes them, hinted to by the remaining letters **שׁו** (fire).
- The letters **ו-י** in the word **שׁוֹמֵר** have the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem, hinting that when the couple prays for Divine intervention in their marriage, they will overcome the negative forces. Once the couple is married, constant prayer is necessary to merit Hashem's presence in their home.

## MARRIAGE – FULFILLING THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

Chazal teach that there is a connection between the pasuk, “If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill” and the marriage ceremony. This pasuk is mentioned during a wedding. The Ben Ish Chai writes, “After the *kiddushin*, the *chatan* breaks a glass in memory of

Yerushalayim, as it says (*Tehillim* 137:5-6), ‘If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill...if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy’” (*Hilchot Shanah Rishonah, Parashat Mishpatim* 11).

What is the connection between one’s wedding day and Yerushalayim? Why do we place Yerushalayim above our joy specifically when a couple unites in marriage?

Perhaps we can answer in the following way. It is known that Yerushalayim was destroyed because Bnei Yisrael neglected the Torah. When a person forgets that Yerushalayim has been destroyed and Bnei Yisrael and the *Shechinah* are now in *galut*, it indicates that he is remiss in Torah.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 27:22) says, “The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Eisav.” Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20) explain that when the voice of Yaakov is heard emanating from Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, the hands of Eisav have no power over Bnei Yisrael or Eretz Yisrael, the place of the *Shechinah*. But when Bnei Yisrael are lax in their Torah study, Yerushalayim becomes forgotten.

The main purpose of marriage is that the fire of Torah burn within the couple. The letters of fire (שן) are contained within the names of man and woman, hinting to this lesson. Their objective must be to always live according to the maxims of the Torah.

The other letters of their names form the Name of Hashem, הוה. This teaches that Hashem’s Name should always be among them. This is the purpose of Creation, as the *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 26:4), “For in G-d (הוה), Hashem, is the strength of the worlds.” The Gemara (*Menachot* 29b) expounds, “The world was created with the letters הוה.” These ideas hint to the couple that without Torah there is no point in the continuation of the world.

With this in mind, we can understand Chazal’s statement (*Berachot* 6b), “He who gladdens a *chatan* and *kallah* is considered as rebuilding one of

the ruins of Yerushalayim.” When man and wife go in the ways of Hashem Yitbarach, in observing the Torah and mitzvot, they are literally rebuilding Yerushalayim, which was destroyed through negligence in Torah and baseless hatred. By their positive way of life, the new couple hastens the ultimate redemption.

But when man and woman marry and only pursue their own physical pleasures, ignoring the essence of their creation and their marriage, they prevent the rebuilding of Yerushalayim. It is as if the Beit Hamikdash were destroyed again. For this reason, we bless the *chatan* and *kallah* that they merit building “an everlasting structure.” If they will have worthy children, they will both fulfill the purpose of Creation and also rebuild the Beit Hamikdash and the ruins of Yerushalayim.

Moreover, the chuppah is likened to the Creation of the world. The *chatan* and *kallah* are, so to speak, standing in the world, surrounded by Clouds of Glory. When they become sanctified to one another they are like Adam and Chava before the sin, as all of their iniquities are forgiven on their wedding day (*Yerushalmi, Bikkurim* 3:3). This is the reason they were created – to bring satisfaction to their Creator.

Now we see the importance of saying the pasuk “If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill” at the wedding ceremony. The entire purpose of the union between bride and groom is that they not forget Torah (which is called “right”), and not forget Yerushalayim. They are instructed to do all in their power to rebuild the ruins of Yerushalayim by keeping the Torah and mitzvot. Then they will truly emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu, since they uphold the entire Creation through their actions.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The pasuk “If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill” is said at a wedding. What is the connection between marriage and Yerushalayim?

- Yerushalayim was destroyed because of laxity in Torah study. When a couple marries they are enjoined to keep the fire of Torah burning. This is hinted to by the word **שא**, whose letters come from the man (**אי**) and the woman (**שה**). Without Torah there is no point in the continuation of the world.
- When man and wife go in the ways of the Torah, they are rebuilding Yerushalayim by fulfilling the purpose of Creation.

# EXILE AND REDEMPTION



## AWAKENING OURSELVES TO REDEMPTION

Thus said Hashem, “I remember for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land” (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). In this pasuk, Hashem expresses His appreciation for the faithfulness which the Jewish people demonstrated when they followed Him into the desert.

This seems somewhat puzzling. The Jewish people followed Hashem into the Wilderness after being cruelly enslaved in Egypt. They had been both physically and spiritually tormented. Hashem finally heard their cries and redeemed them. It would seem that Bnei Yisrael were the ones who owed Hashem a debt of gratitude, not the other way round. He redeemed them from slavery and then protected them with the Clouds of Glory, giving them manna from heaven for forty years. Yet the above pasuk emphasizes that it was Hashem Who remembered the kindness of the Jewish people by following Him into the desert, as if He felt a debt of gratitude toward them.

Chazal say that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt because of four things: They preserved their Jewish names; they kept their way of dress; they spoke only Hebrew; and they kept themselves apart from the Egyptians (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5; *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:24). Since they were so careful to preserve their Jewish identity, how could they descend to the forty-ninth level of impurity (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a)? Chazal say that if they would have fallen just a little bit more, to the “fiftieth level,” they would have lost all hope of being redeemed.

Perhaps we can explain this idea in the following way. The Torah teaches (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow my decrees,” which Chazal explain means “If you toil in Torah.” Only through serious Torah study is it possible to live a true Jewish life. The Shulchan Aruch teaches (*Orach Chaim* 60:4) that one should do mitzvot with intent, not by rote. This is only possible when one learns Torah.

Perhaps we can now understand the extent of Bnei Yisrael’s faith in Hashem when they left Egypt. Since they hadn’t yet learned Torah, they didn’t yet “know” Hashem. They had to have tremendous faith in agreeing to follow Him in an “unsown land.”

The proof of this was that many Jews did not in fact want to leave. They died in the plague of darkness. Rabbi Nehorai said (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 1) that only one Jew out of five thousand left Egypt. The tremendous self-sacrifice and faith that these Jews possessed merited Hashem’s gratitude and praise.

The spiritual condition of the Jewish people who left Egypt can be viewed both positively and negatively. On the one hand, they had succeeded in preserving the four points listed above, keeping themselves apart from the Egyptians despite the impurity which engulfed them. On the other hand, if they were able to keep those four things, why didn’t they keep the rest of the mitzvot that they knew, as well? Various factors should have helped them to do so. First, is the premise (*Avot* 4:2; *Devarim Rabbah* 6:4) that “one mitzvah leads to another.” Second, they had inherited the tremendous spiritual strengths of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Third, there was a yeshivah in Goshen. Chazal say (*Yoma* 28b) that from the time of our forefathers, the Jewish people were never without a yeshivah. However, they were held accountable for not learning Torah there.

Thus we find that on the one hand Bnei Yisrael were praised for the faithfulness that they demonstrated by following Hashem into the Wilderness, despite their low level of spiritual awareness. On the other

hand, they were faulted for failing to learn Torah, but merely guarding the four points which preserved their identity. This led them to fall to the forty-ninth level of impurity.

This teaches how precious Torah study is in the eyes of Hashem. How highly Hashem regards one who sends his son to learn Torah in a yeshivah, and the boy who willingly chooses to abandon material pleasures in order to study there. Even though this boy does not yet have the tools to appreciate the great value of Torah learning, he overcomes all obstacles and goes wholeheartedly to learn Hashem's Torah.

In addition, it is clear that when a *ben Torah* performs a mitzvah with self-sacrifice, his reward is much greater than that which an unlearned person would receive for the same action. Chazal say (*Sukkah* 52a), "If a person is greater than his friend, his *Yetzer Hara* is also greater." He is faced with greater obstacles than the other person, and if he succeeds in overcoming them, his reward is consequently greater.

However, the decision to go to learn in a yeshivah does not guarantee immunity against the *Yetzer Hara's* ploys. If a boy does not completely immerse himself in Torah study, he might still descend to the forty-ninth level of impurity. We find that even though the Jewish people merited redemption through preserving their identity, they were still on a low spiritual level because they didn't study Torah in the yeshivah in Egypt. It is only because they were not to blame for this that they merited to be redeemed.

In order to be able to accept the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, one must be prepared to make changes in his behavior and to revitalize himself spiritually. An especially opportune time for this is the period before Shavuot, the day when the Torah was given to us. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 68b) describes how Rabbi Yosef expressed the uniqueness of this day. When he asked to have a choice calf prepared for him in honor of Shavuot, he exclaimed, "If not for this day [when the Torah was given] –

if not for the fact that I studied Torah and became elevated through it – I would be no different from all of the other ‘Yosef’s’ in the marketplace.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Every day, a voice calls out from Mount Chorev, saying, ‘Woe to mankind for causing insult to the Torah’” (*Avot* 6:2). The Ba’al Shem Tov questions the purpose of this voice, if no one hears it. He answers that even though we don’t actually hear this voice, it prompts the heart of each person to do teshuvah.

The Torah’s power is so great that it can help a person completely change himself. Even when one is on a low spiritual level, the tremendous energy of the Torah enables him to overcome the most daunting obstacles, each person according to his level.

At times, it is the tremendous strength which lies deep inside every single Jew that fortifies him with the power to overcome his negative qualities and completely change his mode of thought. Avraham Avinu is the paradigm for such change. While his father was an idol worshipper, Avraham applied himself to single-mindedly search for the truth. This search helped him uncover deep inner strength, which, in turn, enabled him to discover the radiant light of faith and project it throughout a pagan world of darkness.

His accomplishments were not easily achieved. He searched relentlessly for the truth, caught in a battle between the voices of holiness, which urged him to recognize Hashem as the Creator of the World, and the forces of impurity, which fought to prevent this recognition at all costs. Ultimately, Avraham reached the truth. This was only because of the spark of holiness within him that enabled him to make the right choice, without any outside encouragement or prompting.

Even when a person falls to a very low level, he never loses the inner spark that lies dormant within him. When the right moment arrives, this spark can be fanned into a great flame and bring him closer to his Father in Heaven. Perhaps this is the spark that enabled our forefathers to

preserve their Jewish identity in Egypt. If only the Jewish people would have then utilized their full inner potential and strength, they would never have fallen so low.

### ————— In Summary —————

- “I remember for you the kindness of your youth.” Why was Hashem grateful for the fact that the Jewish people agreed to leave Egypt and follow Him into the desert? Surely Bnei Yisrael should have felt indebted to Hashem for redeeming them! Moreover, how is it possible that despite the fact that the Jewish people did not change their names, language, and manner of dress, or mix with the gentiles, they still sank to the forty-ninth level of impurity?
- When one does not learn Torah, he cannot appreciate it properly and therefore cannot fulfill the mitzvot in the correct manner. Since Bnei Yisrael were unable to learn in the yeshivah in Egypt, the fact that they followed Hashem into the Wilderness was indeed a great sign of self-sacrifice, which He remembered with love for many generations to come. However, since they didn’t hold on to more than their four identity-preserving ways, they fell to the forty-ninth level of impurity.
- The days leading up to Shavuot present us with a special opportunity for coming close to Hashem through Torah study. When a person immerses himself in Torah despite the difficulties involved, he is given great energies, generated by the Voice that emanates from Har Sinai. This awakens him to teshuvah, enabling him to change for the better and rise to the highest levels of holiness.

### A Practical Lesson

Just as Hashem lovingly remembers Bnei Yisrael’s self-sacrifice in following Him into the Wilderness, although they didn’t yet “know” Him, He greatly values a person who sends his son to learn in a yeshivah. All the more so does He appreciate a boy who chooses to ignore the enticements of this world in order to go to learn there. Although he is not yet able to fully appreciate the Torah’s value, this boy overcomes all

obstacles to “follow Hashem in the Wilderness,” and this deserves the highest praise.

## CORRECTING THE CAUSES OF DESTRUCTION

“Take comfort, take comfort, my people, says your G-d” (*Yeshayahu* 40:1, 2). Chazal ask why the word “comfort” is repeated. They answer by explaining, “For she [the Jewish nation] has received double for all her sins.” Just as her punishment is two-fold, correspondingly her comfort is doubled.

This *haftarah* is read on the Shabbat following Tishah b’Av to remind us that since the Temple was destroyed through baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b) it will be rebuilt only when there is unity amongst us. Unity will bring the final redemption.

The value of unity is inestimable. Without it, the Jewish people could not have received the Torah. When Bnei Yisrael camped next to Har Sinai, the Torah says (*Shemot* 19:2), “And Israel encamped there” in the singular form. Chazal (*Rashi, Mechilta* 1) teach that this means that “the Jewish people were united as one man with one heart.” Many of the Torah’s commandments deal with matters between man and his fellow Jew, which cannot be properly fulfilled without unity.

True unity can be achieved only through humility. The Torah says (*Shemot* 17:19), “And they stood at the bottom of the mountain.” The Jewish people stood at the bottom of Har Sinai, which symbolized humility. The Gemara states (*Sota* 5a), “One should always learn from the opinion of His Maker. Hashem disregarded all the taller mountains and hills and rested His *Shechinah* on Har Sinai [the most humble of mountains].”

The Jewish people stood beneath this lowest of mountains, and gazing at it, resolved to internalize its lesson. Har Sinai was no more than a mountain: a mass of rock and soil, without body or soul. Still, it humbled itself, and remained humble even after Hashem chose it as the stage for the greatest spiritual revelation in world history. If a mere mountain demonstrated humility, all the more so should man, who is endowed with Hashem's image, conduct himself with humility and refrain from becoming arrogant. Hashem will certainly shower him with blessings and rest His *Shechinah* upon him. From the example set by Har Sinai, the Jewish people realized that humility is the key to acquiring the Torah. They stood "at the bottom of the mountain," signifying that they felt even more humble than Har Sinai, which had humbled itself.

The importance of humility is hinted to by the words of the *Navi*, "נחמו נחמו עמי" – Comfort, comfort my people." Since the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred and lack of Torah study, it can be rebuilt only when we rectify these sins. Unity dispels hatred and also influences us to learn Torah. How does it do this? We know that the Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu after he spent forty days at Har Sinai (*Shemot* 24:18, see *Menachot* 99b). The letters of the word נחמו can be rearranged as חנו מ' – "They camped for forty days." This implies that the ultimate comfort will come only when we are in a state of unity similar to that which existed when we camped together at the foot of Har Sinai, and also when we desire the Torah which was given to Moshe in forty days.

The *Navi* states the word "comfort" twice to imply that Hashem will comfort us for the destruction of both Batei Mikdash. He will comfort us for the first Beit Hamikdash, which was destroyed due to the lack of Torah study, and for the second, which was destroyed because of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b).

Therefore, this *haftarah* is read specifically on the Shabbat following Tishah B'Av. During the three weeks, we mourn the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash, which was caused by *bitul* Torah. The lack of Torah

learning led to pride and baseless hatred, which caused the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash.

The *Navi* tells us that if we want Hashem to take us under His wings again, so that we should reside with Him as his beloved nation, we must be unified with Him, through doing teshuvah. This is hinted to by the fact that the word עַמִּי (My nation) can also be read as עִמִּי (with Me). In order to dwell with Hashem we must rectify our ancestor's transgressions. Right after Tishah b'Av, we are given the opportunity to correct ourselves and repent. Shabbat is a particularly opportune time for doing teshuvah. The letters שבת are included in the word תשובה (teshuvah). When the Jewish people do teshuvah and keep Shabbat, they will be immediately redeemed (*Shabbat* 118b; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16).

Shabbat is a particularly opportune time for teshuvah. The teshuvah of Adam Harishon was accepted by Hashem on Shabbat (*Midrash Socher Tov* 92). The *Ba'al HaTanya* writes as follows (*Iggeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 10), "... As it is known to people of understanding, Shabbat contains the essence of higher teshuvah. שבת is written with the same letters as "תשב אנוש – Repent, O Mankind" (*Tehillim* 90:3). On Shabbat, the *neshamot* rise to their source, especially through the Shabbat prayers."

This is the great comfort that Hashem gives the Jewish people, after all of the suffering which we have endured subsequent to the destruction. Hashem is telling us that salvation is at our very doorstep, and all that is needed is one act of loving-kindness and Torah study, to bring *Mashiach*.

Unfortunately, the Satan recognizes the special potential of these days. Immediately following Tishah b'Av, he convinces everyone to choose this particular time for their summer vacation. Thus we find that on *Shabbat Nachamu*, instead of focusing on repentance, there is great *bitul* Torah, and people learn even less than during the rest of the year. Moreover, these vacations frequently lead to immodesty, one of the causes of the destruction (*Zohar* II, 77b). Immorality damages one's intellect, causing a

partition to be formed between him and Hashem, making it exceedingly difficult to repent (*ibid.*, Part III, 44b).

Summer vacation can desensitize a person, preventing him from experiencing the requisite fear for the approaching month of Elul. The damage wrought can prevent a person from repenting even when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur arrive. He will find it difficult to wake up early for Selichot to ask Hashem for forgiveness. If he does show up in the Beit Hakeneset, the *Yetzer Hara* will convince him to think that he has nothing to repent for, and that Hashem has already forgiven him for all of his wrongdoings. “Just give charity and do *kapparat*,” the *Yetzer Hara* urges him, “that will be enough to earn you a good and sweet New Year.”

We see how the Satan makes a person sin, by desensitizing him. Many people fall into his trap, decreasing their spiritual pursuits and immersing themselves in the pleasures of this world. The only way to save oneself from the *Yetzer Hara* is to become engrossed in Torah study. The Gemara says (*Kiddushin* 30b), “If this degenerate one (the *Yetzer Hara*) encounters you, drag him to the Beit Hamidrash.” The Torah is the prime remedy against the *Yetzer Hara* (*ibid.*).

One should not assume that his service of Hashem is complete just because he wakes up early for tefillah, contributes large sums of money to charity, and cleaves to Torah scholars. When a person does not set fixed times for Torah study, he is liable to transgress many sins, even serious ones, without realizing it.

As an example, I would like to mention one particular pitfall which is common amongst those who are not learned in Torah and relate to the holidays as a simple tradition, while disregarding some of their most important laws. Even though they pray and give *tzedakah*, they begin to prepare food containing chametz on the last day of Pesach, before the festival is completely over, in anticipation of the *mimouna* festivities which begin as Pesach ends. In addition to the prohibition of preparing on a festival for a weekday (*Rambam, Shevitat Yom Tov*, 1:9), they

transgress the prohibition of “No chametz may be seen in your possession” (*Shemot* 13:7). Even though chametz may not be owned or enjoyed in any way until Pesach is over, they shop for chametz delicacies during the holiday, to adorn their tables in honor of their guests at the *mimouna* feast. Had they studied Torah and been familiar with the relevant laws, they would have been more careful.

Likewise, we see people who engage in arguments in the Beit Hakeneset, shaming and insulting one another. This is despite the fact that the *Shechinah* dwells there (*Megillah* 29a), as we are told: “Know before Whom you stand” (*Berachot* 28b). Why do people fail to understand this and use the Beit Hakeneset as a place for conducting their personal battles?

The answer is that without Torah study, one cannot recognize Hashem. Consequently, “light and darkness serve together” – one will sometimes fulfill mitzvot, and at other times, transgress. Since he doesn’t fully recognize the existence of the Creator, he won’t be able to properly appreciate the sanctity of the Beit Hakeneset, or other holy places. Only through studying Torah, about which it is written (*Mishlei* 3:17), “Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its pathways are peace,” does one learn to love Hashem and serve Him wholeheartedly.

We should aspire to achieve greatness in Torah in the same way that we aspire to become rich. Although it is impossible for everyone in the world to be wealthy, everyone tries. People work hard to earn as much money as they can, even if they don’t expect to become millionaires. We should feel the same about Torah study. Not everyone is capable of becoming a great scholar, or of knowing the entire Torah. Shlomo Hamelech says, (*Kohelet* 7:28), “One man in a thousand I have found.” The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Kohelet* 977) explains this in the following way: “A thousand people enter to study Chumash, but only a hundred leave (are successful); a hundred enter to study Mishnah, and ten are successful; and only one studies Talmud.” Nevertheless, one should do his best to become familiar with all facets of the Torah. His strong desire

to learn Torah demonstrates the extent of his love for Hashem, even if he doesn't become the leading scholar of the generation.

Chazal say that even if a person does not succeed in carrying out his positive intentions, Hashem still considers it as if the deed was done (*Kiddushin* 40a; *Zohar* I, 28b). When Hashem sees how greatly a person wants to learn and become fluent in all aspects of the Torah, and that the only thing that thwarts him is his limited intellectual capacity, He values this person as greatly as a leading scholar.

This is illustrated by the description of Yiftach, the judge. "Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel in his generation" (*Rosh Hashanah* 25b). Even though Yiftach was on a far lower spiritual level than Shmuel, he was still considered a great leader in his generation. Hashem judges every person according to his own level and talents, and the environment in which he finds himself.

Hashem called both the sun and the moon "the two great luminaries" (*Bereishit* 1:16) despite the enormous disparity in their size. Although the moon's light is negligible in comparison to that of the sun, when it serves on its own, to light up the night, it is invaluable. Hashem created a host of stars to accompany the moon, adding to its light. Even though, when compared to each other, the sun is certainly larger than the moon, they are both called "great luminaries" since each one is "great" in its own right and in fulfilling its own role.

In light of all the above, we see how important it is to constantly maintain our connection to the Torah. Otherwise, we make ourselves easy prey for the *Yetzer Hara*, who can seize the moment to grab hold of us and lead us astray. Chazal teach (*Pirkei Avot* 3:7; *Zohar* III, 80a) that Rabbi Yaakov said, "One who walks on the road while reviewing [a Torah lesson] but interrupts his review and exclaims: *מה נאה אילן זה! מה נאה זה* – *מה נאה ניר זה* – How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field! – Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul." The explanation is as follows. When a person is immersed in his Torah studies and turns

away from them in order to enjoy the world's pleasures, he is liable to fall into the snare of the *Yetzer Hara*, who then causes him to sin.

This can be compared to a person who is strolling and talking with the king. When he meets someone else, he interrupts his conversation with the king in order to talk to the other person. This is a very serious offense; it might even be considered an act of rebellion punishable by execution (*Sanhedrin* 101b). As such, every yeshivah student and every person who sets aside fixed times for learning Torah must be extremely careful not to interrupt his learning with mundane conversation.

This is alluded to in the words Hashem uses to comfort His nation. The words “נחמו נחמו עמי” – Comfort, comfort My nation,” share the same numerical value as “נאה ניר זה” – How beautiful is this meadow.” Hashem comforts the Jewish people by giving us a guideline for life: to be careful not to interrupt Torah study in order to discuss other matters. On the contrary, we should remember that lack of Torah study, as well as baseless hatred, caused the first and second Batei Mikdash to be destroyed. By strengthening ourselves in Torah study, we will merit the ultimate comfort of the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash.

May it be Hashem's will that the merit of our unity and Torah study will lead to “גאל ה' עבדי יעקב” – Hashem's deliverance of His servant Yaakov,” which shares the same numerical value as נחמו נחמו עמי.

### ————— In Summary —————

- On the Shabbat following Tishah B'Av, we read the *haftarah* which begins with the words “Comfort, comfort My people.” Since lack of Torah study and baseless hatred caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, it is important to focus on correcting these two transgressions after Tishah b'Av.
- True unity can be achieved only through humility. Har Sinai merited that the Torah was given on it because it was humble. The word נחמו can be rearranged to spell חנו מ' (they camped for forty days), implying that we will be given the ultimate comfort of having the Beit Hamikdash rebuilt only when we are united

in the same way as when we received the Torah after spending forty days at Har Sinai, when the Jewish people were “as one person with one heart.”

- Shabbat helps us repent and achieve unity. This is hinted to by the fact that the letters שבת (Shabbat) are included in the word תשובה (teshuvah). Hashem accepted the teshuvah of Adam Harishon on Shabbat. By making small but significant acts of unity and loving-kindness, we will succeed in bringing about the final redemption.
- Unfortunately, we see that many people, instead of contemplating the causes of the destruction, go away on vacation after Tishah b’Av. Instead of trying to correct the sins which brought about the destruction, they become more lax in their religious observance. This makes it difficult for them to experience the appropriate fear when Rosh Hashanah approaches. And even when they do rise early for Selichot, they feel confident that all is well, and that Hashem will surely forgive them for all their transgressions. However, this is not so. In order to be protected against the *Yetzer Hara*, one must toil in Torah study without interruption. When a person is truly attached to the Torah, it protects him from all harm.

## MASHIACH – ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN, OR A DONKEY?

In reference to Mashiach, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says (*Sanhedrin* 98a), “It states (*Daniel* 7:13), ‘...with the clouds of heaven, one like a man came,’ and it says (*Zechariah* 9:9), ‘...a humble man riding on a donkey.’ If the Jewish people are worthy, Mashiach will come on the clouds of heaven. If they are not worthy, he will come as a humble man on a donkey.” Rashi explains that “with the clouds of heaven” implies that Mashiach will come swiftly, and “a humble man on a donkey” implies that the process for his arrival will be gradual.

This presents a question. What difference does it make how Mashiach comes? If the generation is worthy, he will come like a king; if not, he will

come humbly on a donkey. The main thing is that he will finally arrive and bring the world to recognize Hashem.

Three different terms are used to describe Mashiach's era:

1. Messianic pangs (*Sanhedrin* 98b)
2. The days of Mashiach (*ibid.* 99a)
3. The footsteps of Mashiach (*Sota* 49b)

Why do we need so many different terms?

The truth is that to Mashiach himself, it makes no difference whether he comes like a king or a beggar. But to us, the difference is significant. If we would be able to withstand all the trials that the *Yetzer Hara* puts in our way during the pre-Messianic era, this period will be transformed into "the days of Mashiach." This means that the transition will take only a few days, or maybe even just one day. Our deeds, and perhaps the merit of the whole nation observing two Shabbatot, will have the power to bring Mashiach immediately (*Shabbat* 118b), without the need for major wars. The entire world will immediately recognize Hashem as King and the Jewish people as His Chosen Nation. Such a scenario is known as "*achishena*," since Hashem said (*Sanhedrin* 91a), "If they are worthy, *achishena* – I will hasten it."

However, if the Jewish people remain unworthy, all the ominous signs heralding Mashiach's arrival that we have been warned about by Chazal will come true. Rabbi Nechemiah said (*ibid.* 97a), "In the generation that the son of David comes, brazenness will increase, prices will skyrocket [although] the grapevine will bear fruit, wine will be expensive, all governments will turn heretical, there will be no admonition, etc." Consequently, the redemption will take place gradually. The "days of Mashiach" will not be few but many; the "Messianic pangs" will be long and drawn out. Many wars and travails will precede Mashiach's arrival. Even once he comes, he will be like a poor man riding on a donkey; not

everyone will be convinced that he is Mashiach. He will need to wage many wars against the nations of the world in order to subdue them and demonstrate that he is Hashem's messenger.

Although we were promised by Hashem, and we believe with all our heart, that He will bring Mashiach, as it states (*Devarim* 30:3), "Then Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in," the *Navi* is teaching us that the amount of suffering that we will endure before his arrival is dependent on our deeds. By correcting our ways we could avoid the hardships and distress heralding the Messianic era. If the whole world will recognize the Mashiach as soon as he comes, we will be saved from much suffering.

We should realize that the essence of the final redemption is liberation from the *Yetzer Hara*. When a person improves his behavior and does teshuvah, he tastes what redemption is, even though it hasn't actually arrived. This is because he has broken free of the *Yetzer Hara's* shackles. When the Jewish nation left Egypt, the Torah says (*Shemot* 14:2), "Let them encamp... at the mouth of Cheirut." While Cheirut was the name of a place, it also means "freedom." This implies that the Jewish people began to be free from the *Yetzer Hara* when they left Egypt. The *Yetzer Hara* was finally uprooted from their hearts when they stood at Har Sinai (*Zohar* I 52a, 63b, 126b; Part II 94a, 193b). Chazal say, "Only one who involves himself in Torah study is truly free" (*Avot* 6:2; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:21).

May we all be worthy of greeting Mashiach through the joyous fulfillment of the Torah's mitzvot, without any hardship or suffering.

### In Summary

- Chazal use several terms to refer to the Messianic period. They call it "the days of Mashiach," "the footsteps of Mashiach," and "Messianic pangs." One source states that Mashiach will come on the clouds of the heaven, whereas elsewhere it says that he will come humbly on a donkey. The way in which Mashiach will

arrive is of great significance to us. If we improve our ways, the Messianic pangs will be very short, perhaps lasting only one day, and the entire world will immediately recognize Hashem. The pre-Messianic suffering will be avoided.

- When a person improves his behavior and frees himself from the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*, he is able to feel what redemption means, even though it has not yet arrived. However, if people fail to repent, *chas v'shalom*, Mashiach will come humbly, in a gradual manner, and we will need to wage wars to bring the world to recognize Hashem. This will cause major suffering in the world. Therefore, let us take heed and free ourselves of the *Yetzer Hara*. Then the redemption will arrive *achishena* – speedily, without any hardship or war.

## THE SECRETS OF EATING FISH ON SHABBAT

There is a custom to eat fish on Shabbat, as the *Mishnah Berurah* (242:1) says, “It is good to eat fish at every one of the three Shabbat meals.” The Ben Ish Chai writes, “It is a mitzvah to eat fish at the three Shabbat meals, even if only a small amount, as mentioned in the *poskim*” (Second year, *Parashat Vayera* 18).

One of the reasons for this custom is that fish were created from water. We know that fish can survive only in water. By eating fish on Shabbat, man, who was created on Erev Shabbat, is reminded of the Torah which is compared to water (*Devarim Rabbah* 7:3; *Shir Hashirim* 1:19). He realizes that the sole purpose of his creation is to enable him to study Torah.

Furthermore, we might be too busy during the week to make time to study. Shabbat is the day when we rest from all our activities, and there is nothing preventing us from immersing in the waters of Torah undisturbed. Moreover, just as fish cannot live without water, man is incapable of surviving without the Torah, which is compared to water (*Bava Kama* 17a).

Even one who does study throughout the week should not think that he can take a break from learning Torah on Shabbat. The sanctity of Shabbat is greater than that of the weekdays. Shabbat is the source of all the blessings we receive throughout the week (Zohar II, 63b). Refraining from Torah study on Shabbat weakens our spiritual level during the rest of the week, since we lack the blessings that it generates.

Eating fish on Shabbat reminds one that if he is lax in Torah study, he may be punished by being reincarnated as a fish (*HaRama MiPano, Tikkunei Teshuvah*, ch. 10). The connection between death and fish is hinted to by the following pesukim. When the Torah recounts Yaakov's death, it uses the word  $\text{הִתְקַבֵּץ}$  (he was gathered). This word is also used in connection with fish (*Bamidbar* 11:22): "If all the fish of the sea will be gathered ( $\text{הִתְקַבֵּץ}$ ) for them." Failure to immerse in the deep waters of the Torah is punishable by being reincarnated as a fish, which lives in the depths of the sea. One who does not learn Torah will be punished by water or fire, which are both metaphors for Torah (*Devarim Rabbah* 7:3; *Shir Hashirim* 5:9).

Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that "Mashiach will come only when fish will be sought for sick people, but will not be found." Where will all the fish disappear to? It seems that this is an allegory. When the time becomes ripe for Mashiach to arrive, Hashem will rectify all the souls of the Jewish people so that they will no longer need to be reincarnated as fish. The tzaddikim will look for fish in order to make a *tikkun* for the souls within them, but they won't find any. This is one of the great miracles that will occur when Mashiach comes.

The numerical value of  $\text{דג}$  (fish) is seven, hinting to Shabbat, the seventh day. When fish, numerically equivalent to seven, is eaten on Shabbat, the seventh day, together they equal fourteen, which is the numerical equivalent of the word  $\text{דוד}$ . This teaches that the arrival of Mashiach ben David will be in the merit of keeping Shabbat. The resolve a person makes on Shabbat to strengthen himself in Torah study and

service of Hashem throughout the week, and the *tikkunim* that he makes by eating fish, hasten the coming of Mashiach ben David.

Mashiach will come once all souls have returned to the world perfected (*Yevamot* 62a), meaning that they no longer need to be reincarnated in a fish, or in any other way.

Chazal say (*Shabbat* 118b) that if only the Jewish people would keep two Shabbatot, they will immediately be redeemed. When a person thinks about the great merit he has to be able to observe Shabbat, and has the intention to effect a *tikkun* for the souls reincarnated in the fish that he eats on Shabbat, it will lead him to immerse himself in the Torah's waters throughout the week, just as fish can only survive in water.

The moment a fish is taken out of water, it can no longer live. Similarly, when a person detaches himself from Torah study, his lifeline, he is considered dead. What value can life have without Torah? Does man have no higher purpose than living like an animal, whose only concern is its physical existence, hunting for prey and fleeing from predators?

If everyone would be awakened to teshuvah on Erev Shabbat, then we will not find any fish on the next Erev Shabbat. This is because there will no longer be any souls awaiting *tikkun* within the fish. By keeping two Shabbatot properly, the Jewish people will merit the ultimate *tikkun*, with the coming of Mashiach. Chazal teach that "an awakening from Above must be preceded by an awakening from below" (see *Zohar* I, 70b). By striving to perfect our souls in the ways mentioned above, all the souls of the Jewish people will be ready and worthy to greet Mashiach and merit Hashem's redemption.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The tradition of eating fish on Shabbat reminds us that just as fish can only live in the water, so too can a Jew live only when he learns Torah. It is especially important to learn Torah on Shabbat, since we are not preoccupied with mundane

matters. In addition, Shabbat is the source of blessing for the rest of the week. Failure to learn Torah on Shabbat may warrant reincarnation as a fish.

- Chazal say, “Mashiach will come when fish will be sought for sick people, but are not found.” This means that once everyone does learn Torah on Shabbat, tzaddikim will no longer find fish that require a *tikkun*. The ultimate *tikkun* will be made with the coming of Mashiach.
- “If only the Jewish people keep two Shabbatot, they will be immediately redeemed” (*Shabbat* 118b). On the first Shabbat, a person will be inspired to realize he cannot live without Torah, just as a fish cannot survive out of water. He will try to keep the first Shabbat properly, and thus enter the following Shabbat without needing further *tikkun*. Through arousing himself to make this *tikkun*, he will help bring the final redemption.

## REDEMPTION THROUGH TORAH

The Rambam lists “belief in the final redemption” as one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith (see the *Rambam’s* commentary on *Mishnayot, Sanhedrin* 10:1). We express this belief when we say, “I believe with complete faith in the coming of Mashiach. Although he may tarry, even with all this (עם כל זה), I will await his arrival every single day.”

What do the words “עם כל זה – even with all this” add to this statement? Wouldn’t it be enough to say “although he may tarry, I will await his arrival”?

Rava said (*Shabbat* 31a), “When a person is brought before the Heavenly Tribunal, he is asked, ‘Did you conduct your business dealings honestly? Did you set fixed times for Torah study? Did you bring children into the world? Did you await the coming of Mashiach?’” Hashem gave us the Torah to use as a weapon in our battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. Rabbi Yishmael said (*Kiddushin* 30b), “My son, if this evil one encounters you, drag him into the Beit Hamidrash. If he is a stone, he will be softened; and

if he is metal, he will shatter.” Moreover Chazal teach that Hashem created the *Yetzer Hara*, and He created the Torah as a remedy against it.

How is it then possible for people who come to learn in the Beit Hamidrash to interrupt their studies and get side-tracked with all different things, thereby causing *bitul* Torah? If “dragging the *Yetzer Hara* into the Beit Hamidrash” is the way to defeat it, how does the *Yetzer Hara* have the power to stop one from learning?

This shows us the wily nature of the *Yetzer Hara*. He has a very devious plan. First he causes a person to interrupt his studies. Once one stops learning, boredom and idleness may easily lead him to all types of transgressions, such as dishonesty, immorality, etc. (*Ketubot* 5:45; *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 11).

To implement his plan, the *Yetzer Hara* convinces one to interrupt his studies and instead focus on longing for Mashiach and on thinking about him all the time. Instead of delving into the Torah, one begins to be distracted by passively “awaiting salvation.” The *Yetzer Hara* makes him feel that it is a waste of time to learn Torah since Mashiach has not yet come. Rather, he should concentrate on awaiting the *geulah*.

This person doesn't realize that in addition to disregarding the mitzvah of “learning Torah day and night” (see *Yehoshua* 1:8), he is waiting for Mashiach in the wrong way. The way to bring Mashiach closer and merit the redemption is through Torah study (see *Zohar* III, 178b, 270b). We can infer this from the Gemara quoted above, which shows that a person is asked whether he has learnt Torah before he is asked whether he waited for Mashiach (see above). This teaches that one does not wait for Mashiach properly if he fails to learn Torah. Refraining from Torah study causes the exile to stretch out even longer (*Zohar Chadash, Bereishit* 12b). Moreover, when one does not immerse himself in Torah study, he becomes vulnerable to serious transgressions, such as *lashon hara*, etc.

Along these lines, I once heard that the Gerrer Rebbe said that it's wonderful if a person is able to learn, but even if he can't learn, he should

still go to the Beit Hamidrash to hear others learning. This is hinted by the words that Bnei Yisrael proclaimed when they received the Torah (*Shemot* 24:7): “*Na’aseh v’nishma* – We will do and we will hear.” “*Na’aseh*” indicates that one should himself learn, and “*nishma*” indicates that one should listen to others learning, as opposed to remaining idle.

In light of the above, we can answer our opening question: Why do we lengthen our declaration of faith by saying “**עם כל זה** – even with all **this**, I will await his arrival”? In the Chumash, the word **זה** (this), or its alternative form **זאת**, refers to the Torah. The Midrash says (*Devarim* 4:44), “The word **זאת** always refers to Torah, as it says, “And this (**זאת**) is the Torah that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisrael.” When we affirm our faith in the coming of Mashiach, we are also asserting that we will not wait for him passively, merely longing for him to come, but will await him “along with **this**” – by learning Torah, which actively brings the redemption closer.

Another pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 19:14), “This (**זאת**) is the Torah of a person who dies in a tent.” This teaches that one should “kill himself” in learning Torah in the Beit Hamidrash, which is compared to a tent. Torah can be acquired only by exerting oneself in his learning (*Berachot* 63b; *Shabbat* 83b). When we lift up the Sefer Torah, we say “**התורה וזאת**” to remind us to learn Torah with the devotion of one who “kills himself” over it (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 134:2; *Ben Ish Chai, Halachot* Year 2, *Toldot* 16).

The additional words “**עם כל זה**” in our affirmation of faith in the coming of Mashiach emphasize that learning Torah is the main requirement of waiting for Mashiach. This realization prevents a person from falling into despair. Even though Mashiach may tarry, and a person may suffer terribly, learning Torah will give him the strength and morale to continue waiting, no matter what.

In our times, when the darkness of exile casts its final shadows, we should place special emphasis on setting aside fixed times for Torah

study, and keep to them diligently. Instead of sitting and talking about Mashiach and speculating about his whereabouts, his identity, and his ethnic origin, we would be much better off by actively getting ready for the redemption by learning Torah. In this merit may we be worthy of greeting Mashiach speedily, in our times.

### ————— In Summary —————

- The twelfth principle of faith listed by the Rambam is “belief in the final redemption.” Every morning, we say, “I believe with complete faith in the coming of Mashiach, and although he may tarry, even with all this, I will await his arrival every single day.” “Even with all this” means that when fortified with learning Torah, which is called “this,” we will be able to overcome the hardships of exile and truly prepare ourselves for Mashiach’s arrival. The *Yetzer Hara* tries to make a person stop learning and focus instead on when Mashiach will come. We fail to realize that in the absence of Torah study, our anticipation of the redemption is inadequate.
- Torah study will be the main cause of the redemption. Therefore, the question “Did you set aside time to learn Torah?” precedes the requirement to wait for the redemption. Salvation comes through constant Torah study. This is hinted at in the proclamation “We will do and we will hear.” This implies that if we cannot learn Torah ourselves, we should at least listen to others studying. Speculating about the redemption, instead of learning Torah diligently, delays the *geulah*. Only constant Torah study will bring Mashiach.

## HASTENING THE REDEMPTION

### **Money as a Means for Torah and Mitzvah Observance**

Mashiach will come only when there is no money left in a person’s pocket (*Sanhedrin* 97a). This raises a question. There are many wealthy people; where will all their money disappear to? After all, money always

passes from one person to the next (*Bava Kamma* 84a); it has to end up in someone's pocket.

Money is liable to make its owner proud and take him away from learning Torah. Because of his many business concerns, he comes home tired at the end of the day and doesn't have the energy or patience to open a sefer. This is because, as Chazal say (*Avot* 2:7), "the more possessions one has, the more worries he has." Therefore, Chazal state that "Mashiach will come only when there is no money left in a person's pocket." Chazal are teaching us that although wealthy people will still possess money, they will realize that their money is theirs only for safekeeping and use it accordingly. The only thing that can really be considered "theirs" is Torah and mitzvot. By diligently keeping the Torah, they will hasten the redemption.

The *Navi* says (*Yeshayahu* 1:27), "Zion will be redeemed through justice, and those that return to her through *tzedakah*." When people freely give money to *tzedakah*, consequently "no money will be left in a person's pocket." This will help them regard their money as a deposit to be used in accordance with Hashem's will, as the prophet says (*Chagai* 2:8), "Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold – the word of Hashem, Master of Legions."

It follows then, that when tzaddikim acquire money, it is not considered that "they have money in their pockets," since they don't see it as "theirs." Moreover, the money of wicked people is also not rightfully theirs, because it is stolen. Since they do not pray to Hashem or bless Him, expressing their recognition of Him as the Source of all bounty, Hashem, in turn, does not shower them with abundance. Whatever they do have cannot be considered "theirs," as by failing to acknowledge its Source, they relinquish their right as a proper custodian for the deposit. Thus wicked people also cannot be considered as having "money in their pockets."

We might add that Chazal meant that Mashiach will come only once doubt is eliminated. This is hinted to by the fact that the word ספק (doubt) is etymologically similar to the word כסף (money). This means that money, which is often the cause of doubt and risk, will no longer distract a person from his service of Hashem. All the effort and sweat that a person invests in inflating his bank account can easily lead him to believe, “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” (*Devarim* 8:17). Then he starts doubting Hashem’s involvement in his life, which delays the redemption. When people will realize that everything is from Hashem, the redemption will come.

It is amazing to note that the word “dollar” written in Hebrew letters דולר, has the same numerical value as both the Hebrew words ספק (doubt) and עמלק (Amalek). Both money and Amalek cause coldness of heart. When Amalek attacked the Jewish nation after they had left Egypt, the pasuk states (*Devarim* 25:18), “אשר קרך בדרך – That he chanced upon you on the way.” The word קרך (chanced) can also mean “cooled you off.”

Throughout history, abundance of wealth caused the Jews to sin. Chazal say (*Berachot* 32a) that Moshe told Hashem, “Master of the Universe, the silver and gold which You showered upon the Jewish people, so much so that they even begged You to stop, is what caused them to make the Golden Calf...” Where do we see that Hashem acknowledged the truth of Moshe’s words? The *Navi* says (*Hoshea* 2:10), “I lavished silver and gold upon her, but they used it for the Ba’al.”

If money distracts us from Torah study and causes us to commit serious sins, why does Hashem give us money? How could Hashem get angry at the Jewish people for using the loot taken from the Egyptians at the Yam Suf for fashioning the Golden Calf when He had given them that loot in the first place? Moreover, Hashem had promised us this wealth many generations earlier, when He told Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 15:14), “Afterwards they will leave with great wealth.” What was the complaint against the Jewish people?

It seems that they took more wealth than they really needed. They should have taken only what they considered necessary, left the rest, and then proceeded to prepare themselves for receiving the Torah. However, they could not detach themselves from the shimmering mountains of precious gems at the shores of the sea, and lingered to fill their sacks with more and more. Finally, Moshe had to steer them away by force (see *Rashi, Shemot 15:22; Tanchuma Yashan*, chapter 16). This is why Hashem became angry with them.

On the one hand, money can lead a person astray. On the other hand, if we use it positively, such as for charity, kindness, and mitzvah observance, it can help us achieve spiritual perfection. This will hasten the redemption, as it says (*Yeshayahu 1:27*), “Zion will be redeemed through justice, and those that return to her through *tzedakah*.”

### **Proper Observance of Shabbat Hastens the Redemption**

If only the Jewish people were to observe two Shabbatot properly, they would immediately be redeemed (*Shabbat 118b*).

Why do we need to keep two Shabbatot in order to be redeemed? The answer may be found by comparing two pesukim that discuss Shabbat. In *Bereishit (2:3)* it says, “Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He abstained from all His work which Hashem created to make.” In *Shemot (31:16)* it says, “The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbat, to make the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations.” In the first pasuk, Hashem “makes the Shabbat,” whereas in the second pasuk Bnei Yisrael are responsible for “making the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations.”

On the first Shabbat after Creation, the world stood at the pinnacle of perfection. The Jewish people are commanded to observe the Shabbat “for their generations,” striving to reach the same level of perfection that existed on that first, purely divine Shabbat. Only through our observing Shabbat can the entirety of Creation fulfill its purpose. The Shabbat which

followed the six days of Creation would have been perfect. However, Adam Harishon sinned immediately before Shabbat commenced (*Zohar* I, 53a), preventing the Creation from realizing its goal.

Our task as a nation is to rectify this damage, by striving to restore the original perfection of Shabbat. By keeping one Shabbat properly, the following Shabbat will fulfill the goal of “bringing the world to acknowledge Hashem’s Kingdom.” We might suggest that this is even hinted in the words of the second pasuk. “The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbat” refers to the first Shabbat, and the continuation of the pasuk “To make the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations” hints at the second Shabbat, which will bring Mashiach.

We can also add that the main reason for the requirement of two Shabbatot is that Shabbat has two essential elements. One is the relationship between man and his fellow man, and the second is the relationship between man and Hashem. One’s Shabbat observance cannot be complete when one of these elements is lacking. Shabbat cannot be properly observed when there is slander and dissention amongst us. Conversely, it is insufficient to be concerned only with our interpersonal relationships, while neglecting issues between man and Hashem. Therefore, “two Shabbatot” can be explained as “both elements of Shabbat.” The redemption will come only when the Jewish People will be harmonious in both their relationships with one another as well as in their relationship with Hashem.

The traditional Shabbat greeting, “Shabbat Shalom,” expresses the importance of unity, as “shalom” means “peace.” The Ben Ish Chai writes as follows (*Halachot, Year 2, Bereishit* 29), “This is the order of Kiddush, according to the Arizal. After Ma’ariv, one should enter his home, and when he approaches the Shabbat table, he should say ‘Shabbat Shalom’ out loud and with much joy, and kiss his father’s and mother’s hands.”

We shake each other’s hands in greeting to express the unity between us. The word **יד** (hand) has the same numerical value as **ידד** (David),

which hints at the redemption with the coming of Mashiach ben David. The redemption will come when there is peace and unity among the Jewish people, hinted to when we shake another's hand in greeting on Shabbat.

Two Shabbatot signify the completion of two weeks, fourteen days, fourteen being the numerical value of  $\text{ל"ד}$ . When we add one for the word itself, it totals fifteen, equal to Hashem's Name,  $\text{יהוה}$ . This hints to the fact that Mashiach will come only once the Jewish people keep two Shabbatot. Then Hashem's Name will become "complete." This is derived from the following pasuk (*Shemot* 17:16): "For the hand is on the throne ( $\text{כס}$ ) of Hashem ( $\text{יהוה}$ )." Chazal ask why both the word "throne," as well as Hashem's Name, are written in a shortened form. They answer (*Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 11), "Hashem swore that neither his Name nor His throne will be complete, until Amalek's name is obliterated. Once that happens, both His Name and His throne will be complete." When Mashiach comes, the *sefirah* of *hod*, which has the same numerical value as Hashem's Name (fifteen), will receive its *tikkun*. We know that until Mashiach comes, the *chitzonim* have hold over this *sefirah* (see *Zohar* I, 26b), which also hints at  $\text{ל"ד}$ , which has the same numerical value of fifteen (*Zohar* III, 4a).

Keeping two Shabbatot refers to two complete weeks. During these two weeks, we should ensure complete harmony between us and Hashem by keeping the Torah and mitzvot properly. This includes using our money and observing Shabbat in the correct way. We should also strive during this period to perfect our relationships with others. Then the entire Creation will reach its *tikkun*, and the redemption will come.

### — In Summary —

- Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that Mashiach will come when there is no money left in a person's pocket. Where will all the money disappear to? A person should realize that he is only a custodian of his wealth, and his job is to use his money

for Torah and mitzvot. By spending his money in the service of Hashem, including charity and good deeds, he will no longer have “money in his pocket” as his personal belonging; he will use all his money for charity and other worthy causes.

- Chazal say that if the Jewish people would only keep two Shabbatot properly, they would immediately be redeemed. One pasuk states that it is Hashem Who “makes” the Shabbat, while another pasuk states that Bnei Yisrael are the ones who “make” the Shabbat. This means that on the first Shabbat, they will reach the pinnacle of perfection that existed in the world on that first Shabbat when Hashem was alone in the world. They will then be able to keep the second Shabbat properly, and bring the world to its ultimate goal of having Hashem’s sovereignty established throughout the world.
- We might also say that “two Shabbatot” alludes to “the two elements of Shabbat,” namely, the relationship between man and Hashem, and between man and his fellow man. Mashiach will come once we are all united. The word **יָד** (hand) has the same numerical value as the word **יד**, which is fourteen, hinting to the fourteen days leading up to the two Shabbatot. This hints that Mashiach will come only once we keep two Shabbatot properly. Then Hashem’s Name, **יהוה**, which totals fifteen (fourteen plus one for the word itself), will also become complete.

## MERITING THE REDEMPTION THROUGH TZEDAKAH

Jerusalem will be redeemed only through charity, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 1:27), “Zion will be redeemed through justice, and those that return to her through *tzedakah*” (*Shabbat* 139a; *Sanhedrin* 98a). The Rambam writes (*Hilchot Matnot Ani'im* 10:1), “It is a positive commandment to give *tzedakah*, since Israel is redeemed only through its merit.”

Let us examine the different forms of *tzedakah*.

## Tzedakah and Torah

The pasuk in Devarim (6:25) says, “It will be a *tzedakah* for us if we are careful to perform this entire commandment.” The Targum translates the word *tzedakah* as “merit.” We know that the merit of *tzedakah* saves one from death (see *Mishlei* 10:2). This pasuk teaches us that the Torah also saves one from death.

Not only does the Torah’s merit protect us in this world, it also protects us in the World to Come. The *Navi* says (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), “Your *tzedakah* will precede you.” Chazal explain (*Bava Batra* 11a) that the word “*tzedakah*” refers to Torah. The *Zohar* (III, *Pinchat* 213a) says, “When one exerts himself in Torah study in this world, many gates are opened for him in the World to Come.” We see that the merits of both Torah and *tzedakah* will stand in our stead in the World to Come.

The *Navi* (*Amos* 5:24) uses water as a metaphor for *tzedakah*: “...and *tzedakah* like a mighty stream.” Water is also compared to Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a): just as water flows and spreads, so does Torah continually flow and spread throughout the world. In the same way *tzedakah*, which is compared to Torah, is also ever-increasing, as the *Ba’al HaTanya* writes (page 161), “*Tzedakah* is compared to a river which flows continually, whose progression and permanence have no end.”

“*Tzedakah* saves from death” (*Mishlei* 10:2). Since Torah study is also called *tzedakah*, we can infer from this pasuk that learning Torah saves us from death, from the *kelippot*, which are called *מות* (death) (*Zohar*, beginning of *Parashat Pinchas*).

This helps us understand our original statement: “...And those who return to her (ושביה) [will be redeemed] through *tzedakah*.” This may be explained as: Bnei Yisrael who are in captivity (השבויים) under the nations of the world will be returned (redeemed) only through the merit of their *tzedakah*.

## Children of Hashem

Moshe Rabbeinu told Bnei Yisrael (*Devarim* 7:6, 14:2), “You are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d.” Do not think that when you attain a level of *kedushah*, this is purely for your own benefit. The converse is true. You should use all spiritual accomplishments “to Hashem your G-d” – for His sake.

When one does everything for Hashem’s sake, he will be saved from many spiritual pitfalls, e.g., eating non-kosher food. Why does Hashem watch over us in this way? It is because He is our loving Father and we are His children, as it states (*ibid.* 14:1), “You are children to Hashem, your G-d.” We should follow in His ways, striving to emulate His mercy and compassion (*Sota* 14a), and then we will be saved from all evil.

## Tzedakah with Ourselves

A most important form of *tzedakah* is being kind to oneself, as Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima says (*Pirkei Avot* 5:20), “Be bold as a tiger, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.” Be bold as a tiger in the face of those who mock you, strong as a lion in overcoming spiritual challenges, and swift as a deer to serve Hashem. Do not expect any endorsement for your actions from others; you must be the one to give yourself support and encouragement.

Without a strong motivation to serve Hashem, it is impossible to overcome the many spiritual challenges which we encounter throughout life. For example, when one comes home tired and hungry at night, he might easily first attack his food and then make a beeline for his pillow as soon as he finishes. Yet with a little more thought and willpower, he could first wash his hands and make the appropriate blessings, thanking Hashem before and after the meal.

## Tzedakah with One Another

The simplest meaning of *tzedakah* is to act benevolently with others. The Arizal was very particular to pay his workers before Minchah time. It is well-known that the afternoon, when the *minchah* offering was brought, is a time of favor. Consequently, one should try to concentrate during this tefillah, as the *Navi* says (*Yeshayahu* 49:8), “In time of favor I answer you” (*Zohar* I, 230a). There were two reasons that the Arizal was so meticulous in paying his workers before praying Minchah. He understood that delaying their payment would create a barrier, preventing his tefillot ascending through the Heavenly gates. Furthermore, the efficacy of his prayers would certainly be diminished if a worker was left hungry because he hadn’t yet received his wages.

We are taught that before praying in the morning, we should accept upon ourselves the mitzvah of loving another person as oneself (see *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 46, introduction). This is also a form of charity that a person must do with his fellow man. In the merit of *tzedakah*, Bnei Yisrael will be redeemed speedily in our days.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Only through *tzedakah* can Bnei Yisrael merit the final redemption. *Tzedakah* saves one from death and stands in our stead in the World to Come. It is compared to Torah, which is also called *tzedakah*. Torah saves one from death, guards him in the World to Come, and protects him against *kelippot*.
- One should not think that the *kedushah* he attains is for his personal benefit alone. Rather, all his spiritual accomplishments should be directed toward the service of Hashem, which will protect him from *kelippot* and all other forms of evil.
- Another aspect of *tzedakah* is to be kind to oneself by being swift and bold to perform Hashem’s will.
- It is also important to act benevolently with one another, e.g., paying a laborer’s wages before Minchah. This ensures that our tefillot will be readily accepted.

- Before starting to pray in the morning, we should accept upon ourselves to love our fellow Jew as ourselves, since we should practice kindness to others. In the merit of all forms of *tzedakah*, may we be redeemed, speedily and in our days.

## BRINGING MASHIACH CLOSER

Mashiach will come when fish is sought for sick people, but is not found (*Sanhedrin* 98a). This seems somewhat puzzling. I think that this statement is hinting to the *neshamah*, as souls are reincarnated as fish and achieve their *tikkun* on Shabbat, the seventh day. The numerical value of לז (fish) is also seven.

My holy grandfather, the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto, was very particular to eat fish on Shabbat. He often experienced great miracles in obtaining fish, especially in the winter months, when they were scarce. He would always have fish on his table in honor of Shabbat. I have read many stories about Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, who was careful to personally prepare the fish in honor of Shabbat.

What does it mean that “Mashiach will come when fish is sought for sick people, but is not found”? One explanation is that Mashiach will come only once the tzaddik, who is called a “sick person,” because he wears himself down in his self-sacrificing service of Hashem (see *Nedarim* 49b), will have nothing left to correct in himself. Another explanation may be that it will no longer be necessary for *neshamot* to be reincarnated in sick people to gain their *tikkun*, since when Mashiach comes all *neshamot* will have already achieved their *tikkun*.

Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that Mashiach will come only when there is no money left in a person’s pockets. This may mean that money will have lost all value. Pursuit of money distances a person from Hashem. People often refrain from going to *shiurim* or to the Beit Hakeneset because they are involved in business matters. When money will no longer have any

value, a person will have no distractions and will go to learn Torah. One needs great willpower and self-sacrifice to withstand the temptation of money.

Several people who have lost their money subsequently told me that they now have more free time to devote to learning Torah. I asked them, “Why did you wait until you lost all your money to start learning? Had you made the time to study beforehand, you might still be rich today.” When Hashem sees that a person becomes distant from Torah and mitzvot as a result of the very blessings which He showers upon him, He takes some of those blessings away. When a person loses his money, or suffers the loss of someone very close to him, he is often awakened to teshuvah.

When one says that he has no time to learn Torah since he is too involved with his business, Hashem may counter by saying that He has no time to keep him alive and sustain him. People become lax in serving Hashem since they devote themselves to the pursuit of wealth. Once a person makes his first million, he struggles for his second. When he makes two million, he needs three... By the time he reaches five million, although he might fear the “evil eye,” it doesn’t prevent him from pursuing yet another million. If one doesn’t fortify himself at the very outset with a strong determination to study Torah regularly, he will never be able to attain any lasting spiritual achievements.

However, we have seen rare exceptions of people who retained a certain level of belief, even without Torah study. Once, a man without a *kippah* told me that he was having a very hard time financially, and requested a blessing. I asked him, “You don’t pray or keep Shabbat, and you eat non-kosher food; do you really believe in the power of a blessing?”

The man replied in the affirmative.

“How is it possible,” I continued, “that you believe in the power of blessings, but not in the authenticity and Divine origin of mitzvot?”

The man replied that since he didn’t understand them, he didn’t believe in them.

I took a sefer off the shelf and asked the man, “Is murdering permitted?”

“No.”

“And how about stealing?”

“Of course not.”

“And what do you say about smoking on Shabbat?”

“I’ve heard that that’s not allowed either,” the man replied.

“I see that you are quite certain that killing and stealing are forbidden, but about smoking on Shabbat, you have your doubts; you’ve only ‘heard’ that it’s forbidden. Let me ask you something else. Do you sympathize with Hitler and his ideals?”

“Heaven forbid! Hitler was an evil man, who committed the most terrible crimes.”

“What did he do wrong?”

“Is that even a question? He killed six million Jews,” replied the man.

“Well, just as Hitler is being punished in Gehinnom for murder, that is also the punishment of a Jew who violates other commandments. Hitler transgressed the prohibition against murder, but you regularly transgress the prohibitions against desecrating Shabbat and coveting another’s wife. Who’s to say that you won’t meet up with him in Gehinnom?”

In the end, the man asked me for a blessing that he should be able to do teshuvah.

It is very easy to close our eyes to the truth. It is quite simple to convince ourselves that whatever we do is right. However, if we really want to see the truth, we must look beyond our own comfort level, and be prepared to make sacrifices for its sake. Going to the Rav for a blessing is not enough; one must be prepared to act in accordance with the truth in order for the blessing to have effect.

This means that one should be prepared to do whatever it takes in order to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 30b), “If this evil one encounters (פגע) you, drag him into the Beit Hamidrash.” The Hebrew word for “encounters” is the same as the word for “harms.” The *Yetzer Hara* can harm a person only once that person makes an opening for him by sinning. Since he did not overcome his evil inclination with *mesirut nefesh*, he must correct this by overpowering the *Yetzer Hara* and dragging him to the Beit Hamidrash with *mesirut nefesh*.

For this reason, the Torah requires a Jew who sins to bring a sacrifice. The smoke of the offering confuses the Satan, and its holiness chases him away. A person is consequently freed from his grip and is able to come close to Hashem. Chazal say (*Berachot* 5a), “A person should always rouse his good inclination against his evil one.” Not only should we guard our hearts against the *Yetzer Hara*’s assaults and invasions, we must actively wage war against him. If we take positive steps toward improving our service of Hashem, then the *Yetzer Hara* will not be able to sway us.

This can help us understand the following statements of Chazal concerning the period preceding Mashiach’s arrival. They say (*Sota* 49b), “Before Mashiach comes, brazenness will rear its head; heresy will increase; sons will rise against their fathers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; the youth will disgrace the elderly; the generation’s face will be like the face of a dog, etc.” Chazal also say (*Sanhedrin* 98a) that Mashiach will come either in a generation which is entirely worthy, or in a generation which is entirely unworthy.

This statement seems somewhat puzzling. We would expect that in the era preceding Mashiach, the Jewish people will realize that it is time to end their sinful behavior and begin to repent. However, we see just the opposite. People are forsaking Jewish tradition more than ever, and seem to be moving further away from Hashem. We see the materialization of the second half of Chazal’s statement: that Mashiach will come in a generation which is entirely unworthy. How can we understand this?

Chazal say (*Sukkah* 52a), “At the end of days, Hashem will slaughter the Satan.” This will happen when Mashiach comes and Hashem’s glory will be revealed before the entire world. The Satan realizes that his game is nearly over. Now is the time for him to play his last cards, and he is doing so with maximum deftness and cunning.

It seems that Chazal mean that Mashiach will come only once the generation makes the Satan “deserving of death” due to their virtue and worthiness. Once the entire generation is worthy, the Satan will expire. He is trying his utmost to have the rest of the world influence the Jews negatively, thus postponing his death sentence from being executed. Yet, when we see that we are beset by financial straits and other troubles, we should strengthen our service of Hashem and our faith in Him, thus “making the Satan deserving of death.”

When the Beit Hamikdash was standing, it was easier to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, as its holy influence fortified the nation. However, now that the *Shechinah* is in exile, every small victory over the *Yetzer Hara* is highly valued by Hashem, since He understands how much self-sacrifice it has entailed. It is only during *galut* that we can prove our devotion to Hashem. He, in turn, will readily help us. Our spiritual achievements seal the “death sentence” against the Satan and bring us much closer to the redemption.

Over the past decades, it has become much easier to fight the Satan. There are many kollelim and yeshivot, and people thirst to hear Hashem’s word. All that’s required of us is a little bit of self-sacrifice, just as our ancestors had in Egypt. Despite all their suffering, they were careful to preserve their Jewish manner of dress and speech, their Jewish names, and to keep the laws of family purity (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). When we also demonstrate our loyalty to Hashem despite all hardships, the redemption will come, and light will burst forth from the darkness.

Hashem promises us (*Micah* 7:15) that when He will bring the final redemption, He will show us wonders even greater than those we experienced when we left Mitzrayim. The word Mitzrayim (מצרים) is

related to the word “pain” (צער). Similarly, our future redemption will also stem from painful circumstances. The truth is that even today, miracles are happening of no lesser magnitude than those which took place in Egypt; we need only open our eyes in order to see them.

This is the reason that Chazal say that Mashiach will come only when fish is sought for sick people, but is not found. Sickness always indicates an imperfection of the soul. Since everyone will keep Shabbat, and the entire generation will be worthy of the redemption, there will be no more sick souls reincarnated in fish that require a *tikkun* on Shabbat Kodesh.

Chazal say, “Mashiach will come only in a generation which is entirely worthy.” We can merit the *geulah* only through performing mitzvot with self-sacrifice. By exhibiting total devotion to the mitzvot of Hashem, we will be considered entirely worthy and deserving of redemption. If the generation is unworthy, Mashiach will also come, but only after a great deal of suffering and financial hardship. Lack of devotion to the Torah causes us to suffer from harsh and unpleasant decrees.

The era heralding Mashiach’s arrival begins in the months of Tammuz and Av, the months of darkness. However, it is from the darkness itself that light emerges to illuminate our path. Similarly, these months, replete with tragedies throughout our history, have the potential of bringing the redemption, just as the painful circumstances of Mitzrayim led to our redemption. Whatever efforts we make toward banishing the darkness of *galut* will be met with great Heavenly assistance. The *Shechinah* itself is in exile and longs for the redemption. The word גלות (exile) comes from the same root as the word גלוי (revelation), indicating that through our dedication to Hashem, which we demonstrate even amidst the darkness of the *galut*, we will hasten the redemption.

### ———— In Summary ————

- “Mashiach will come when fish is sought for sick people, but is not found.” Fish hint to the *neshamah* reincarnated in it, which is brought to its *tikkun* by the tzaddik who serves Hashem devotedly.

- We also know that Mashiach will come only once “there is no money left in a person’s pocket,” meaning that money will no longer have any value. Money is one of the main impediments to serving Hashem. People who have lost their wealth begin to learn Torah, not realizing that if they had only set aside time to study beforehand, they might have retained their riches. The redemption is delayed by lack of self-sacrifice and dedication in serving Hashem.
- The *Yetzer Hara* is defeated through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot with self-sacrifice. The Satan tries to postpone the redemption by making us sin. We can overcome the *Yetzer Hara* and bring the redemption closer by “dragging him to the Beit Hamidrash.” As the redemption approaches, the *Yetzer Hara* redoubles his efforts to delay it. Every small victory that we make in combating him is considered great in Hashem’s eyes.
- There is a tremendous thirst for Torah and all matters of *kedushah* in our times. Just as our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt by virtue of their faith and their self-sacrifice in serving Hashem, by acting in the same way, so too, will we be redeemed.
- The word גלות (exile) has the same root as the word גלוי (revelation), teaching that through our dedication to Hashem, which we demonstrate even amidst the darkness of the *galut*, we will become worthy of redemption.

## TORAH AND UNITY – OUR WEAPONS AGAINST THE NATIONS

When we observe the grave situation of the world today, how the enemies of Yisrael have roared and raised their head (based on Tehillim 83:3), the only option for us is to awaken Heavenly mercy, begging Hashem not to forsake His people.

When we consider what is going on, we see that the entire world is consumed with conflicts, which can quickly erupt into a world war. The world is torn by fear and dissention, yet the nations are always ready to unite against Am Yisrael. We are indeed like a lamb among seventy wolves

(*Esther Rabbah* 10:11; *Tanchuma, Toldot* 5). There is no international body to which we can even complain regarding this situation, asking what we did to deserve being pursued as we are. No one will listen.

Our enemies succeed in blaming the Jews for every world disaster, through coarse, unbridled slander and media propaganda. However, we must not, *chas v'shalom*, take revenge, because we will only suffer from it. What we can do is to try to understand from where they get the power to convince the entire world to despise us, for no apparent reason.

The *Navi* sheds light on this with the following pasuk (*Michah* 7:18), “מי א-ל כמוך נושא עון ועובר על פשע – Who is a G-d like You, Who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgressions?” If Bnei Yisrael are worthy, Hashem pardons their פשע (transgression), transforming it into שפע (abundance). Bnei Yisrael will then receive the bounty which is rightfully theirs. But if they are found unworthy, this blessing is bestowed upon the nations of the world. Certainly the sin of *lashon hara* empowers the nations to torment us, *rachmana litzlan* (*Zohar* III, 133a).

This truth is expressed by the Torah (*Bereishit* 27:22): “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” Chazal explain that when Yaakov’s voice is heard in the Batei Kenesiot, the hands of Eisav (the gentiles) have no power. The words of a Jew make an impression on High (*Zohar* III, 204a). An example of this is when a person states, “I am a *nazir*.” Through his words he immediately obtains the sanctity of a *nazir*, with all the inherent prohibitions (*Rambam, Hilchot Nezirut*, Part 1). If a person becomes a *nazir*, transforming his essence merely through a statement, how much more powerful is each word of Torah that one utters when learning. They have the power to transform a person into a completely new being. By being bound with the Torah, he becomes sanctified; a veritable living Sefer Torah.

However, in order for Klal Yisrael to merit the “abundance” of blessings there must be *achdut* among them. This is what Yosef Hatzaddik hinted to Yaakov Avinu by sending wagons (עגלות) down to Mitzrayim (*Bereishit*

45:27). The tragedy of *galut* Mitzrayim was caused through *lashon hara* and its outcome – lack of unity. The *Kedushat Levi* (*Parashat Vayigash*) explains that Yosef was hinting that the rectification of this sin is through עגולות (circles), which has the same root as the word עגלות (wagons). Circles imply *achdut*, as they have no beginning or end. The only way we can receive Heavenly compassion is by maintaining unity and togetherness, as demonstrated by a circle. Otherwise, we will be at the mercy of the seventy nations.

By sending the wagons, Yosef hinted to his father that *achdut* among the brothers is imperative. Torah study alone is insufficient and inefficient, as proven by the brothers' hatred of him for his dreams, in spite of their elevated level in Torah learning. Yosef was also at fault for maligning them to their father. They were enjoined to be united, as denoted by a circle.

Rabbi Yehudah Yekutieli, zy"l, the Admor of Sanz, writes that the reason why the matzot we eat on Pesach are round is to indicate that Bnei Yisrael were redeemed only in the merit of their *achdut*, which is hinted to by the round shape of the matzot. Bnei Yisrael are adjured to feel unity with each other, just as a round matzah has no corners or rough edges, *chas v'shalom*. Similarly, the Torah was given to Am Yisrael only after they camped at the bottom of Har Sinai "as one man with one heart."

The author of the sefer *Avodat Yisrael* (*Parashat Vayigash*) writes that the wagons (עגלות) sent by Yosef also alluded to the *eglah arufah* (עגלה ערופה), another hint to disunity being the cause of the exile. Concerning the *eglah arufah*, the pasuk states (*Devarim* 21:4), "And they shall axe the back of its neck in the valley." This is to remind the people who lived nearby that this wayfarer died because they lacked a feeling of kinship toward him, resulting from disunity. The Gemara explains (*Sotah* 45b) that the townspeople must announce that they were not guilty of sending him off without provisions for the way, and they didn't allow him to leave without escort. Lack of unity is a fatal mistake for the nation. Each of the

brothers held himself separate from the others, wanting to rule Bnei Yisrael. They can be compared to circles which are completely closed, which cannot connect to one another. The wagons that Yosef sent to Yaakov also hinted to this.

Chazal (*Mechilta Yitro* 19:2) explain just how essential unity is by describing the status of Bnei Yisrael immediately prior to *Matan Torah*. The pasuk says (*Shemot* 19:2), “And Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain.” Rashi clarifies, “As one man with one heart.” From here we see that harmony among the nation is a precondition for receiving the Torah. The *Navi* (*Yirmeyahu* 9:11-12) laments, “For what reason did the Land perish? Because they forsook My Torah that I put before them.” The lack of unity among the nation caused Bnei Yisrael eventually to forsake the Torah.

Chazal (*Shabbat* 33b) relate that once, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yosi, and Rabbi Shimon were on the road. Rabbi Yehudah began extolling the Romans, “How wonderful are the deeds of this nation! They established marketplaces, fixed bridges, and instituted bathhouses.” Rabbi Yosi remained silent. Rabbi Shimon responded, “Whatever they did, they did only in their own best interest.”

Rabbi Shimon answered with such a strong expression in order to negate the influence of the gentile culture, which he feared would infiltrate the Jewish community, separating them from their Father in Heaven. Rabbi Yehudah, on the other hand, although also wary of outside elements, was of the opinion that one can overcome all negative influences with Torah, as we are told (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as an antidote.”

When we study the teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, we discover a paradox. On the one hand, he proclaims (*Megillah* 29a), “Come and see how beloved are Yisrael before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Wherever the Jews were exiled, the *Shechinah* went along with them.” That would seem to imply that we have nothing to fear from the gentiles, as Hashem is always

with us and protecting us. On the other hand, he says (*Sifri, Beha'alotcha* 11, *Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar, remez* 722), "It is an established fact that Eisav hates Yaakov." This would suggest that we should fear the gentiles.

Perhaps we can resolve this matter by stating that one is dependent on the other. Because of Eisav's unmitigated and baseless hatred toward Yaakov, he tries to separate Yisrael from the *Shechinah*. For that reason, the *Shechinah* goes down into exile with Bnei Yisrael. This is in order to protect them so that they should not become influenced by the ways of the gentiles, and remain unified while living among them. If every Jew would, indeed, feel the *galut* of the *Shechinah*, he would realize that it has been caused by divisiveness among our nation. The *Shechinah* is exiled in order to cause Bnei Yisrael to rectify this sin, which will bring the *geulah*.

In the future, Hashem will place a Sefer Torah in His lap, so to speak, and proclaim, "Whoever toiled in Torah, come and receive your reward" (*Avodah Zarah* 2a). Immediately, the nations of the world will come, stating, "We established bathhouses, and we invested lots of money in various projects. We did all this only for the sake of Bnei Yisrael, in order that they should be able to learn Torah." Hashem will reply, "Fools! All that you did, you did only for yourselves!"

This is quite puzzling. How dare the nations display such brazenness? For what exactly do they expect to receive reward? For tormenting Am Yisrael? They will claim that all the suffering that they brought upon our people was in order to maintain unity among them. They will state that through the hardships to which they subjected the Jews, they brought us to teshuvah.

To this, Hashem will answer, "That is not true. Whatever you did, you did for yourselves. You built bathhouses in order to divide the Jewish nation, by encouraging them to assimilate amongst you. If you granted them land for Batei Kenesiot, it was not for the sake of Heaven, but rather so that they remain in your vicinity, so that you could wean them from their Judaism. And all of the troubles which you brought upon them were

certainly not in order to help them do teshuvah, but to punish them for not assimilating. But they are a nation that dwells alone and is not calculated among the nations.”

In light of the above, we see that both unity and Torah are essential for Bnei Yisrael to reach spiritual perfection. This is illustrated by the account of the causes that prompted Yitro to join the Jewish people. The Torah states (*Shemot* 18:1), “Yitro...the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt...” Chazal (*Zevachim* 116a) ask, “What did Yitro hear that brought him to come? The Splitting of the Sea, and the battle with Amalek.” However, this seems to contradict the pasuk that states that he heard how Hashem took the nation out of Egypt most miraculously. How can we understand Rashi’s words, that it was the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek that drew Yitro to the Jewish nation?

Yitro did indeed “hear everything,” but it was the account of the two miracles of the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek that propelled him to join the nation. What was so unique about these miracles in particular, that compelled Yitro to abandon his entire lifestyle, following Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness? We don’t find that any other gentile joined the nation, even though everyone had heard about the Exodus from Egypt (*Shemot* 15:14; *Yehoshua* 2:10).

The Splitting of the Sea demonstrated to Yitro the profound *achdut* of Am Yisrael, to the extent that one individual, Nachshon ben Aminadav, was prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of the nation. When Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the waters of the Yam Suf, he didn’t know that they would split. He walked further and further into the sea, until the waters reached his neck. All this he did for the sake of Am Yisrael (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:4). He wanted to obey the command of Hashem, Who told Moshe, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and they will travel.” He travelled ahead of the nation in order that they should observe him and learn a lesson in faith, following him in the path of *emunah* that he blazed. No other nation can boast such self-sacrifice.

The battle with Amalek proved to Yitro the vital importance of Torah learning. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:8), “יבא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל” – Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim.” Chazal ask (*Sanhedrin* 106a; *Bechorot* 5b), “What is the meaning of the word רפידים?” Rabbi Yehoshua answers “שריפו עצמן מדברי תורה” – They became lax in their Torah learning.” This is what gave Amalek the strength to attack them.

From these two miracles, Yitro deduced that both Torah and *achdut* are indispensable factors for Am Yisrael to reach perfection as the Chosen Nation. For that reason, he left everything behind, desiring to be connected with Am Yisrael, and learn Torah from them. Torah and *achdut* are intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. Only when we are truly unified as one nation, and immersed in Torah as we should be, will we be able to conquer our enemies. Then we will merit Heavenly assistance, and the ultimate redemption, speedily in our days, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Today, Am Yisrael is pursued by all the nations, who are bent on eradicating us. We merit an abundance of blessing from Hashem when we toil in learning Torah, at the time that the voice of Yaakov is heard emanating from the Batei Midrashot.
- However, this is contingent on there being *achdut* among the nation. Yosef hinted this to Yaakov by sending him wagons (עגלות), which has the same root word as circle (עגולות). A circle hints to both unity and a lack of it. A circle indicates unity since it is enclosed, representing the joining together of separate elements. On the other hand, the closed nature of the circle hints to a lack of connection with outsiders. *Achdut* is a precondition for accepting the Torah. We should feel “As one man with one heart.”
- Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai stated that the Romans did nothing on behalf of Klal Yisrael. He was afraid that the Roman influence would destroy the unity of our nation with Hashem. Rabbi Yehudah claimed that the merit of Torah study is sufficient to ward off negative influences. However, unity is a significant factor.

Since “Eisav hates Yaakov,” when we go into *galut*, the *Shechinah* is exiled together with us, so that we may be united with it in *galut*.

- The success of the nations in the battle against Am Yisrael is due to the dissention that exists between fellow Jews. The nations will claim that all the advances in technology etc. that they made were in order to help Bnei Yisrael, but Hashem will counter that the opposite was true; their objective was only to destroy the harmony between the Jews. The nations will, therefore, receive no reward for any of these undertakings.
- The Torah and *achdut* of Am Yisrael are what drew Yitro to join our nation. These are our most basic assets. We must strengthen ourselves in these matters; then we will merit survival in spite of all the persecution and hatred against us. By strengthening ourselves in Torah learning and ensuring *achdut* among us, Hashem will help us overcome our enemies and we will merit the final redemption.

# FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION



## A TZADDIK LIVES BY HIS FAITH

### SAID AT THE HILULA OF THE TZADDIK RABBI CHAIM PINTO, ZY”A

First, we would like to express our appreciation to the esteemed rabbis and congregation who have come to attend the *hilula*. It is a tremendous demonstration of your great faith in tzaddikim, and a wonderful *zechut* for Rabbi Chaim, zy”a, that you have troubled yourselves to come from afar to attend his *hilula*. We would like to mention that the large sums of money that you have spent to buy candles to light in the tzaddik’s memory is a wonderful investment, as illustrated by the following story.

Chazal tell us (*Bava Batra* 11; *Pesikta Rabbati* 25) that King Munbaz emptied both his own treasuries, as well as those of his forefathers, in order to provide for the poor when there was a famine in his kingdom.

People exclaimed, “Your ancestors guarded their wealth so carefully, even adding to the capital amassed by their fathers; how can you squander it so carelessly?”

King Munbaz replied by teaching them a lesson in values.

“My forefathers amassed wealth in this world, but I am amassing spiritual wealth in the next world. They amassed wealth in a place where material acquisitions can never be considered entirely safe, but my wealth is protected in a place where no one can harm it. While my fathers’ capital retained only its original value, my investment continually grows. Their

fortune was of a purely monetary nature, but I have the merit of keeping people alive. Whatever my forefathers acquired was left for others, but the merits that I have earned will be mine forever. They stored wealth for use in this world, but I have stored merits for the World to Come.”

The money you have donated in order to purchase candles will be used for many charitable functions and for building yeshivot. Once, a certain rabbi was asked what contribution he had made toward building yeshivot and upholding places of Torah study. He replied that not he, but candles, are responsible for building Torah. Meaning, that the money which people donate to buy candles to light for the souls of tzaddikim, is what enabled him to build yeshivot.

Why are people willing to part with such large sums of money in the tzaddik's honor? What is it that breeds this faith? We could more easily understand this if they had attended Torah institutions and had been instilled from a young age with faith in Hashem and tzaddikim. However, many do not have such backgrounds, and often do not even properly understand the tefillot that they say every day. They are immersed in worldly matters and are constantly influenced by the *Yetzer Hara*. Yet these people display tremendous faith in Hashem and in tzaddikim. This is a source of great wonder.

It is also incredible how even those who have had a religious upbringing acquire such faith, since they have never personally witnessed the miracles done for our fathers. We cannot say that it is due to their lofty *neshamot*, as every person is given free choice in spiritual matters. Chazal say (*Berachot* 33b), “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, aside from the fear of Heaven.”

The words of Chazal shed light on this matter. The *Navi Chavakuk* (2:4) placed the entirety of Judaism on one fundamental principle: “The righteous person shall live by his faith.” Faith is the foundation of Judaism. A person who has faith and belief in Hashem is called a tzaddik (*Makkot* 24a; *Tanchuma*, *Shoftim* 9). However, we see that there are those

who believe in Hashem but are not versed in Torah. Are they, too, considered tzaddikim?

It seems that the word *tzaddik* in the above pasuk can also be interpreted as “one who performs acts of charity,” thus rendering the pasuk to mean, “One who performs acts of charity shall live.” Hashem, in His wisdom, created the world in such a way that every person who gives *tzedakah* can attain true faith and can potentially achieve full mitzvah observance. By giving *tzedakah*, he automatically earns the title *tzaddik*, since he is emulating Hashem, Who “performs loving-kindness and charity with all his creations” (*Sota* 14a). He clothes the naked, tends to the sick, etc., as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 9:23), “For I am Hashem, Who does kindness, etc.”

When a person follows in Hashem’s ways, he has the potential to become a tzaddik like Avraham Avinu. The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 15:6), “And he trusted in Hashem, and Hashem reckoned this to him as an act of righteousness (*tzedakah*).” We know that his unique attribute was that of kindness (*Zohar* III, 231a, 302a), and he was constantly involved in acts of charity and compassion. Why was it specifically Avraham’s faith that was credited as an act of righteousness?

Avraham was unique because he did not require the springboard of giving *tzedakah* to bring him to believe in Hashem. First he came to a level of complete faith, which was considered by Hashem as an act of righteousness (*tzedakah*). Then, through the acts of charity, righteousness, and loving-kindness which he constantly performed, he reached an even greater level of faith. We, however, need to start our spiritual ascent by giving *tzedakah*. This enables us to acquire pure faith.

Now we can understand how it is possible that people whose religious observance is sometimes lacking still continue to believe in Hashem and in tzaddikim. The *tzedakah* that they give preserves their strong faith. By giving even a small amount of *tzedakah* with pure intentions one can be impelled to reach high levels of faith, observance, and teshuvah.

### In Summary

- The faith in Hashem and in tzaddikim that is demonstrated by people who are weak in mitzvah observance stems from the *zedakah* that they give. By giving *zedakah*, they become close to Hashem, Who performs acts of loving-kindness with all His creations. They are then able to attain greater levels of faith and mitzvah observance.
- As such, people who donate money for candles in the merit of tzaddikim, have a two-fold merit. First, they contribute to the elevation of the tzaddik's soul. Second, they have the merit of donating money to charity. Their money helps build yeshivot and Torah institutions, and also propels the donors themselves to strengthen their own faith.
- The *Navi* says, "A tzaddik lives by his faith." Giving *zedakah* leads one to believe in Hashem. Only Avraham Avinu was able to attain faith without first giving *zedakah*. However, ordinary people like ourselves, must begin our spiritual ascent by doing acts of charity, and loving-kindness, and following in the ways of tzaddikim. By doing so, we will be able to achieve true faith and attain high spiritual levels.

## STANDING STEADFAST BEFORE HASHEM

### A SUMMARY OF WORDS SPOKEN AT THE GRAVESITE OF MY FATHER, RABBI MOSHE AHARON PINTO, ZY" A, 5TH ELUL 5753

In Sefer Devarim (29:9), we find that Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the Jewish people with the words, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem." This pasuk teaches that a Jew should be steadfast in his service of Hashem, then he will be capable of receiving the influence of a tzaddik, who "stands before Hashem." If, however, the disciple wavers in his Avodat Hashem, he can cause the tzaddik to be ashamed to have influenced such a person.

On the day of a tzaddik's *hilula*, the spiritual bond between the tzaddik and his disciples is strengthened. The reason for this is as follows. On the tzaddik's *hilula*, his good deeds are remembered in heaven, and the good deeds which others performed in his merit over the past are also credited to his account. This brings him even closer to Hashem. This is the reason that in several places we find that the day of a great tzaddik's passing is called their *hilula*, which translates as "festival" (*Zohar, Edra Zuta* 291b). It is comparable to a wedding, for the *nefesh* becomes coupled with the *ruach*, and comes before Hashem to bask in the splendor of the *Shechinah* (see also *Si'ach Yitzchak*, Part 1, *drush* on *Parashat Bereishit*).

Since on the day of his *hilula*, Hashem shines more of the radiance of His *Shechinah* on him, the tzaddik in heaven also has greater power to influence his students. Yet this can happen only if the student is willing to receive this Divine blessing and radiance. He becomes a worthy receptacle for this blessing by steadfastly serving Hashem.

Indeed, now, as we stand next to the tzaddik's gravesite, we all feel remorse and regret any wrongdoings we may have done. We genuinely desire to do complete teshuvah, especially since we are now in the month of Elul. We are certainly awakening the tzaddik's merit, which will cause Hashem to shower us with blessing.

It is not sufficient just to decide to do teshuvah, because we are subjective and blind to our own faults. How can we overcome our subjectivity and do proper teshuvah? The Torah teaches us (*Devarim* 16:18), "Judges and officers you shall appoint in all your gates." Aside from its simple meaning, this pasuk teaches a great lesson. Our bodies have several "gates," including the mouth and the eyes. Guarding these gates from sin is no easy task. Chazal admonish us (*Avot* 2:5), "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." One should never feel assured of his righteousness and immunity against the evil inclination. Rather, we should "appoint officers" over ourselves to guard us. The Torah is the best "officer." When we learn Torah, we are protected from all corruption and misdeed.

The word in the pasuk for “appoint” is תתן, which shares the same root as the word מתנה (gift). This alludes to the Torah, which is called a “gift” (*Eirvin* 54a; *Nedarim* 55a; *Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 428). This teaches us that by engrossing ourselves in the study of our very special gift, the Torah, we will be protected from sin.

The above pasuk can also be understood as a directive to defer to the Torah’s authority and laws, just as we defer to civil law, which is made by legislatures and judges. The “officers” are the tzaddikim, who guide our way. We should accept their authority and learn from their ways. The tzaddik’s consistency and steadfastness in serving Hashem awakens us to follow in His ways.

In the pasuk “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem,” the word for “you” is אתם. The letters of אתם can be rearranged to spell אמת (truth). Just as truth is real and undeniable, so, too, are you, Am Yisrael, a true, indestructible entity. The deceased tzaddik is also eternal. He resides in heaven, in the World of Truth, while his body is buried here in the ground, and he is a conduit for bringing Divine blessing to the Jewish people. Because his body remains holy, his grave is considered a holy place.

As such, Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish people, “When the time comes for me to leave this world, you will remain standing; I will continue to influence you, from heaven. Just as you are influenced by me today, so too will you continue to receive my influence after my death, on condition that you remain as steadfast as you are here today, as you stand before Hashem.” The power of a tzaddik is that he influences the world for the better even after his death.

### ———— In Summary ————

- On the day of the tzaddik’s *hilula*, Hashem showers him with added Divine abundance and radiance. As such, the tzaddik is able to influence his disciples from on High. Yet the disciple can be influenced by this goodness only if he is

a suitable receptacle. From the words “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem” we learn that a disciple can be influenced by a tzaddik only when he is steadfast in his Avodat Hashem and does teshuvah.

- Resolving to do teshuvah is not enough. One must be on constant guard and counter his personal interests and subjectivity by “appointing judges and officers over himself.” The best “officer” is the Torah. The word used for “appoint” is **תַּתַּן**, which has the same root as the word **מַתָּנָה** (gift), since there is no greater gift than the Torah, which protects a person. One must defer to the Torah and tzaddikim, then the tzaddik will be able to influence us.
- The word **אַתֶּם** can be rearranged to spell **אַמֶּת**. This teaches that “you,” the Jewish people, are considered a “reality” which cannot be vanquished, and is eternal. Therefore, the tzaddik can influence us, since he, too, continues to live on; his soul is in heaven while his body is interred in the ground.
- Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish people that just as they were influenced by him for the good during his lifetime, they would also receive his influence after his death by remaining steadfast in their service of Hashem. In this way the tzaddik can continue to influence the world with his goodness even after his passing.

## THE ETERNAL INFLUENCE OF MOSHE

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF  
MY FATHER, RABBI MOSHE AHARON PINTO, ZY”A, WHO DIED ON  
THURSDAY, 5TH ELUL 5745 (1985)**

The Zohar teaches (*Tikkunei Zohar* 69, 112a) that there is a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu in every generation. It is embodied within the generation’s foremost Torah scholar and leader, who is the “spiritual defendant” of the generation. This phenomenon is called the “diffusion of Moshe in every generation.” (See also the Arizal’s *Likutei Ta’amim* on *Parashat Va’etchanan*.)

This raises a question. We see that when a tzaddik must manifest his presence in the world after his death, even if he does so for a worthy purpose, it causes him distress, and is a form of punishment and atonement for him. An example of this is Eliyahu Hanavi. The Ben Ish Chai teaches that Eliyahu is present at every *brit milah* in order to atone for the fact that he spoke against the Jewish people, saying that they were not keeping this mitzvah (*Zohar* I, 93a). Eliyahu must now come to every *brit milah* and attest to the fact that the Jewish people do, indeed, keep the covenant. Instead of being able to sit with the rest of the tzaddikim in heaven and bask in the *Shechinah's* radiance (*Berachot* 17a), Eliyahu must descend to the material world and attend every *brit*. If there are many *britot* in one day, his *nitzotz* is present at all of them. Was Moshe Rabbeinu also guilty of sin, requiring that his *nitzotzot* should be present in every generation? Why could he not instead bask peacefully in the *Shechinah's* radiance?

We learn from the Gemara (*Berachot* 64a) that in the Upper World, tzaddikim engage in the same activities as they did in this world. For example, if, during his lifetime, a certain tzaddik used to help other people, when he reaches the Upper World, he will continue to pray that Hashem shower the Jewish people with benevolence.

Moshe Rabbeinu taught the Jewish people Torah, defended them, and constantly interceded on their behalf. Since he sacrificed himself for the Jewish people, it is not sufficient for him to remain in heaven to pray for them. Rather, he descends to this world in every generation and actively teaches Torah to Bnei Yisrael, just as he did during his lifetime.

Moshe used to speak with Hashem “face to face,” which is the greatest pleasure imaginable. However, when the Jewish people sinned, and Hashem wished to destroy them, Moshe requested (*Shemot* 32:32), “Erase me now from Your book.” He was willing to forgo his closeness with Hashem for their sake. In fact, Hashem specifically chose Moshe as their leader because of his quality of selfless devotion. Therefore, even after his

death, he continues to demonstrate self-sacrifice for his people, descending to this world in every generation to continue bringing merit to his nation.

“Moshe was a shepherd” (*Shemot* 3:1), not only of his father-in-law’s sheep, but of his people. When he died, Hashem mourned over the death of “Moshe, the faithful shepherd” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Va’etchanan*, 821). Since he was so unselfishly devoted to the Jewish people during his lifetime, it would not suffice for him, after his death, only to remain in the Upper Worlds and pray on their behalf. In order to continue in his role as the selfless and devoted shepherd, teaching the Jewish people Torah and bringing them closer to Hashem, he needed to manifest his *nitzotzot* in this world, in the tzaddikim of every generation. Thus, his manifestation in every generation is not a punishment, but rather, a continuation of his role.

The Satmar Rebbe (*Sefer Hakuntress, Parashat Va’etchanan*) cites the *Ba’al Haturim’s* commentary on Moshe Rabbeinu’s words (*Devarim* 3:23), “ואתחנן אל ה' - I implored Hashem.” The *Ba’al Haturim* writes as follows, “ואתחנן shares the same numerical value as the word שירה (song). This teaches that [Moshe] ‘said *shirah*’ before Hashem, so that He would hear his prayer.” The Satmar Rebbe asks, “Why did Moshe Rabbeinu say *shirah* together with this particular prayer? He prayed to Hashem many times, for example, after the sin of the Golden Calf, yet this is the only time that he combined his entreaty with *shirah*.”

Let us examine the essence of *shirah*. It seems its special power lies in the fact that it is the exuberant song of praise to Hashem that bursts forth at the conclusion of a miracle. For example, when the Jewish people left Egypt, they said *shirah* after Hashem split the Yam Suf and drowned the Egyptians in it. Likewise, when the Jewish people emerged victorious from their battle against Sisra, Devorah the Prophetess said *shirah* (*Shoftim* 5:1).

Conversely, King Chizkiyahu was punished and did not become the Mashiach since he did not say *shirah* after the great miracle of the destruction of the entire army of the evil King Sancheirev (*Sanhedrin* 94a). Thus we see that saying *shirah* has tremendous power.

### **Moshe's Ability to Prevent Galut and Churban**

In order to explain the reason that Moshe Rabbeinu coupled his entreaty to enter Eretz Yisrael with *shirah*, we first need to understand why entering the Land was so important to him. Chazal say that if Moshe would have been allowed to enter the Land, he would have built the Beit Hamikdash, and it would never have been destroyed. The Jewish people would have continued to reside peacefully in their land forever. We will soon see how Moshe's entry to the Land would have achieved this.

Chazal ask (*Sotah* 14a) why Moshe Rabbeinu was so insistent that he should enter Eretz Yisrael. Did he want to taste its fruits and enjoy its bounty? They answer that there are some mitzvot that can be observed only in Eretz Yisrael. Moshe said, "I will enter Eretz Yisrael and perform all of the mitzvot, without receiving any reward."

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu feel it was imperative to perform all the mitzvot himself? He knew that the merit for all of the mitzvot which the Jewish people would observe in Eretz Yisrael would be accredited to him, since he had taught them the entire Torah.

Perhaps this can be explained in the following way. Only Moshe was familiar with the deepest secrets of each and every mitzvah. He even knew the hidden reason for the mitzvah of the Red Heifer (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6), a secret which no one else in the world comprehended. Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of men, failed to understand the meaning of this mitzvah, as he said (*Kohelet* 7:23), "I said that I would discern it, but it has eluded me."

If Moshe Rabbeinu would have merited entering Eretz Yisrael and performing all the commandments relating to the land, he would have

completely eradicated *avodah zarah*. He would have conquered and destroyed all the native nations residing there, according to Hashem's command, thus preventing them from causing the Jews to sin. Since Yehoshua and the Judges did not totally destroy these nations, the Jews copied their corrupt lifestyles and customs.

The Zohar (end of *Parashat Va'etchanan* 3, 286b) writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was so great that even the angels were afraid of him. After Moshe died, and Yehoshua brought the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael, Moshe Rabbeinu became an angel of Hashem, and all of the Jewish people, including Yehoshua himself, feared him.

Chazal state (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim* 981), "When the Torah was given at Har Sinai, the *Yetzer Hara* was uprooted from the hearts of Bnei Yisrael. It returned to them when they made the Golden Calf. This *kelippah* can be eradicated by Bnei Yisrael fulfilling mitzvot." Moshe was so spiritually powerful that if he had performed mitzvot perfectly in Eretz Yisrael, he would have defeated the *kelippah* and the *sitra achra*, which had been created through the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moshe realized that it would take time until Yehoshua and the Torah scholars of the generation would grasp the deep meanings behind every mitzvah. Meanwhile, the power of the *kelippah* (manifested as the *Yetzer Hara* within the Jewish people) would wreak irreparable damage. Since Moshe knew the hidden secrets of all the mitzvot, he wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael at all costs and personally perform the mitzvot with all their hidden aspects. He understood that the power of the *kelippah* and *Yetzer Hara* could be eradicated only through high-level mitzvah observance.

Moshe embodied the attribute of *netzach* (eternity). By keeping the mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael with all their hidden aspects, he would have gained everlasting merit for the Jewish people. The Beit Hamikdash would have been established for eternity, and the Jewish people would never have been exiled from the Land. Likewise, he would have prevented the

need for the exile, since, in his merit, every single Jew would have kept all of the mitzvot properly.

We see that Moshe Rabbeinu wished to enter Eretz Yisrael so that he could prevent the *galut* by keeping mitzvot perfectly there. Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 98a) that Mashiach will come only in a generation which is entirely worthy. This means that the Jews will fulfill all the mitzvot as Moshe Rabbeinu intended them to, thereby rendering them all worthy, and bringing the redemption.

When Moshe saw that his final days were approaching, he began to entreat Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael. When he saw that Hashem would not consent, he began to supplement his prayers with *shirah*, hoping that this would cause them to be accepted. Now we return to the question of the Satmar Rebbe: If the power of *shirah* was so great, why didn't Moshe say *shirah* to abolish other decrees as well?

It seems that other decrees did not necessitate *shirah*. They were abolished by Moshe evoking the great merit of the forefathers and relying on Hashem's infinite mercy. Yet the decree prohibiting Moshe from entering Eretz Yisrael seemed irrevocable. He saw that the decree against Aharon entering the Land had not been revoked, since he had already died. Thus, Moshe felt he had to employ the strongest method possible to nullify the decree against him.

Moshe started his prayer by mentioning his personal merit and that of the forefathers. Yet when he saw that his prayers were not being answered, he began saying *shirah*, praising Hashem. He recounted the many wondrous miracles which Hashem had performed for His nation, from the time of the Exodus throughout their sojourn in the desert. He lauded Hashem for bringing an end to the hardships of the Jewish people, and finally allowing them to enter the Land. Then he requested that Hashem perform a "miracle" for him as well, and allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael.

We have learned that *shirah* has two aspects. First, that it should be said with true emotion. Second that it should be said as the culmination of experiencing a miracle. Moshe hoped to awaken Hashem's mercy by saying *shirah* with the heartfelt emotion of one who is close to his death. Since he desired to enter Eretz Yisrael only in order to keep the mitzvot properly and thus cancel the decree of *galut*, he hoped that his prayers would be answered.

Moreover, this was a particularly opportune time to say *shirah*, because it was the culmination of the miracle of Bnei Yisrael's continued existence. They were now poised to enter Eretz Yisrael after surviving the decree to die following the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe hoped that just as Hashem had shown Bnei Yisrael compassion and forgiveness by allowing them to enter the Land, He would likewise annul the decree against him.

Unfortunately, despite the tremendous power of saying *shirah*, Moshe's tefillot did not reverse the decree barring his entry to the Land. Hashem's response was (*Devarim* 3:26), "Do not continue to speak further to Me about this matter." Hashem told Moshe that while his merit was great enough to awaken Divine mercy in all other cases, and his *shirah* was said as the culmination of a miracle, he should not continue to ask Him to grant him this particular request. The pasuk says, "And I implored Hashem at that time," stressing that the time that Moshe said *shirah* was a special time of Divine favor and grace. Yet Hashem still did not grant him his request.

Despite the decree, the Torah testifies that on the day Moshe died (*Devarim* 34:7) "his eye had not dimmed and his vigor had not diminished." Until the last moment of his life, he continued to act on behalf of Klal Yisrael. Even though he knew that he was about to die, he did not lose his composure, and continued to pray and say *shirah*, hoping to bring the *geulah* for Klal Yisrael. The decree against him was so serious that although in normal circumstances Moshe had succeeded through his supplications to reverse harsh judgments against Bnei Yisrael, in this

case, even coupling *shirah* with the hundreds of prayers that he made could not revoke it.

## Moshe's Toil on Behalf of the Jewish People

Let us suggest another reason why Moshe desired so strongly to enter Eretz Yisrael and perform the mitzvot there. Adam Harishon was given one mitzvah to keep, which contained the essence of all 613 mitzvot. When he failed to keep that mitzvah, he “damaged” all 248 organs and 365 sinews in his body, which correspond to the 613 mitzvot. All the mitzvot were then “scattered,” through what is known in Kabbalah as “*shevirat hakeilim* – the shattering of the vessels of holiness.” When the Torah was given at Har Sinai, the mitzvot became complete once again. The Jewish people numbered 600,000 at the time the Torah was given, corresponding to the 600,000 letters that it contains.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the mitzvot were “scattered” once again. In order to correct this a second time, the Jewish people had to keep the mitzvot perfectly, with all their hidden aspects, in Eretz Yisrael (see *Zohar* III, *Parashat Va’etchanan* 281a).

Chazal teach (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 10) that Moshe Rabbeinu was equal to the entire Jewish people. This is the reason why he asked Hashem to obliterate his name from the Torah, instead of destroying the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf. Because he was willing to sacrifice his life for the Jewish people, Hashem annulled His decree against them.

Since Moshe was equal to all the Jewish people, he knew the Torah insights that all future disciples would expound on (*Megillah* 19a). The Jewish people correspond to the number of letters in the Torah. The letters of the word ישראל are an acronym for **יש ששים ריבוא אותיות לתורה** – There are 600,000 letters in the Torah. In every generation, there are only 600,000 Jewish souls, which are divided into many roots. In fact, the Ramban writes that the names of all the Jewish people, until the coming of Mashiach, are alluded to in the song of *Ha’azinu*. Since Moshe

understood the connection between every Jewish *neshamah* and its individual source in the Torah, he already knew and understood the insights that every Jewish student would postulate.

This further explains Moshe's desire to enter the Land. Since he understood the source of every *neshamah* and its connection to the Torah, he would perfect each *neshamah* by performing the mitzvot perfectly. It was in Moshe's merit that the Jewish people were able to receive the *orot* (spiritual influence) of all the mitzvot. He wanted to open the remaining channels of these *orot* by fulfilling the rest of the mitzvot connected to the Land. His sole desire to enter the Land was to benefit the Jewish people.

This is also why Moshe said *shirah*. He wanted his *shirah* to perfect the souls of all of the Jewish people who remained alive in the desert, at the conclusion of the miracle of their continued existence after the sin of the Golden Calf.

In light of this, why did Hashem not want Moshe to enter Eretz Yisrael? His mitzvah observance would facilitate what the rest of the Jewish people could not accomplish, as they did not yet understand the deeper meanings of all the mitzvot. Only Moshe could have revoked the decree of *galut* by keeping mitzvot in the Land, and the merit of every single mitzvah of his would endure for eternity.

Perhaps we can answer this question with the following thought. The Torah was given to the Jewish nation as a unit. It was their mission as a nation to toil in understanding the Torah in Eretz Yisrael. In fact, when they would later be sent into *galut*, they would finally be able to uncover the Torah's deepest secrets and "elevate the scattered *nitzotzot* of holiness," thus bringing Creation back to its original state of perfection. Moshe's spiritual elevation was only in the merit of the Jewish people as a whole. Therefore, the fulfillment of the mitzvot could be accomplished only through Bnei Yisrael collectively, throughout the generations, until

the coming of Mashiach. It was not possible for Moshe to bring the world to perfection single-handedly.

I would like to add another explanation as to why Hashem did not want Moshe Rabbeinu to enter Eretz Yisrael. Since Moshe said *shirah* on his own, without the rest of Bnei Yisrael, it was not potent enough to be accepted. All of Bnei Yisrael together should have felt the surge of gratitude and thanksgiving which Moshe felt, and joined him in his *shirah*, just as they did after the Splitting of the Sea. When the Torah recounts the song that the Jewish people sang with Moshe after crossing the sea, the word used for “sang” is interestingly written in the future tense – “אֶזְכֹּר” (*Shemot* 15:1). Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 91b) derive that this “hints to the End of Days,” when Bnei Yisrael “will sing.” When the time comes for Mashiach’s arrival, all of Bnei Yisrael together are required to say *shirah*. Since they failed to say *shirah* together with Moshe, the time for the *geulah* had evidently not yet arrived. This is the reason that Moshe’s *shirah* did not achieve its goal, and he was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael and bring the world to perfection.

We see from here the great *mesirut nefesh* of Moshe, who, all his days, labored to benefit Bnei Yisrael. He even said *shirah* in order to bring about the *geulah*, thereby saving all future generations from the *galut*. He aimed to bring an end to the *galut* and reverse the errors of the Jews, as it says (*Tehillim* 95:10), “For forty years, I was angry with the generation; then I said, ‘An errant-hearted people are they.’” He devoted himself to the Jewish nation his entire life, until the very day of his parting.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 14a) asks, “Did Moshe wish to enter Eretz Yisrael only in order to enjoy its fruits? His sole interest was to fulfill the mitzvot of the Land.” He would thereby bring the world to its final *tikkun* of *Malchut Hashem*. He had no personal interest at all. In fact, he acted without expecting reward, as we see that he would have sacrificed his own life to save his fellow Jews.

## The Greatness of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto

My righteous father, like Moshe Rabbeinu, possessed the trait of humility. One who is humble has tremendous influence in heaven, and his prayers are answered. Since he humbles himself before others, and certainly before Hashem, Hashem revokes evil decrees in his merit.

Yet my father never took credit for any of the miracles that took place because of him. He always said that everything was in the merit of his holy fathers, due to their closeness to Hashem.

Throughout his life, he prayed for Hashem to bring the redemption, and cried over the *Shechinah's* exile. There was not a day that he didn't speak about Mashiach, and he awaited his arrival constantly. Unfortunately, the generation was not worthy for Mashiach to come during my father's lifetime. He died, after suffering from multiple illnesses, on the 5th of Elul 5745 (1985).

“Woe to the generation that has lost its leader” (*Bava Batra* 91b). Woe to the generation that has lost such a righteous tzaddik, who protected them through his prayers. May his merit protect the entire Jewish people.

I would like to end with a final thought. The last pasuk of the Torah reads as follows (*Devarim* 34:12), “And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel.” What is the special significance to the Torah's concluding words “before the eyes of all Israel”?

It seems that the answer is as follows. Tzaddikim do not ascribe their achievements to their own merit. On the contrary, the more elevated they become, and the more miracles they perform, the stronger is their conviction that Hashem allowed them to attain these spiritual achievements only in the merit of the Jewish people.

This was the case with Moshe Rabbeinu. Although he performed more miracles than any other person who ever lived, he did not attribute these

miracles to his own merit, but to the merit of the Jewish people. Since they merited witnessing all of the miracles with their own eyes, as Chazal teach that the maidservant saw at the Yam Suf even greater revelations than Yechezkel ben Buzi saw in his prophecy, they obviously deserved these miracles.

This is alluded to in the last words of the pasuk “that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel.” Since the Jews merited seeing all the miracles before their eyes, Moshe attributed this to their credit, and saw himself merely as a messenger.

This was the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu. He always felt that he was just the emissary of Bnei Yisrael. Even though he performed the miracles with great self-sacrifice, he did not believe that they were in his merit, but only in the merit of Bnei Yisrael. His humility is accentuated by the final words of the Torah “before the eyes of all Israel.” He concluded that since the eyes of the Jewish people beheld the miracles, they were worthy of seeing them. This is proof that all the miracles were done in their merit. Such humility was the distinction of Moshe Rabbeinu.

May the merit of my saintly father, who demonstrated humility in all his actions, protect all of Klal Yisrael.

### — In Summary —

- The great tzaddikim of each generation have a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu within them. Is it a punishment for Moshe that his *nitzotzot* descend to this world, instead of him basking in the light of the *Shechinah*? When Eliyahu Hanavi spoke against the Jewish people, saying that they failed to keep the mitzvah of *brit milah*, he was punished by being sent to attend every single *brit*.
- The manifestation of Moshe’s *nitzotzot* in this world is not a punishment. After tzaddikim die, they are occupied on High with the same activities that they did in this world. Since Moshe spent his life selflessly guiding the Jewish people and interceding on their behalf, he continues to do so after his death. This can be

accomplished only by his *nitzotzot* descending to the tzaddikim of every generation.

- We find that Moshe said *shirah* because he wished to enter Eretz Yisrael. Why only now? What is the unique quality of *shirah* that it is said at the culmination of a miracle? If Moshe would have entered Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish people would never have experienced the *galut* or the destruction of the Temples. Moshe wanted to enter the Land in order to perform its special mitzvot, because he knew the secret aspects of each mitzvah. By fulfilling the mitzvot properly, he could destroy all the *kelippot*, thereby preventing the bitter exile. He wanted all the Jews to merit the final redemption. He hoped that *shirah* would annul the terrible decree barring his entry to the Land. Yet despite Moshe's *shirah*, his prayers were not accepted.
- Another reason that Moshe wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael was to teach the Jewish people the essence of the mitzvot and help them regain the *nitzotzot* of holiness that had been "scattered" after the sin of the Golden Calf. He alone was capable of this, as only he was familiar with the source of every Jewish soul and with all of the Torah's secrets. Hashem did not accede to his request, since the world can only be brought to its *tikkun* by the Jewish people collectively, not by one person alone. In order for Moshe's prayer and *shirah* to be accepted, it was necessary for all of the Jewish people to join him in his *shirah*.
- We see how devoted Moshe was to the Jewish people. Everything he did was to benefit them. In his humility, Moshe attributed all the miracles he performed to the credit of the Jewish people. The Torah testifies to this by referring to the miracles that he performed "before the eyes of all Israel." My father, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, was also renowned for demonstrating such humility. Although he performed thousands of miracles, he attributed everything to his ancestors' merits. He waited every day for Mashiach, however, the generation was not yet worthy to greet him. May his merit forever protect us.

## FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

DELIVERED AT A LARGE ASSEMBLY IN LEON, IN THE MEMORY OF  
RABBI MEIR AND RABBI RAFAEL PINTO, ZY”A, ON THE  
ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR PASSING, 15TH SHEVAT.

### How Fortunate Are You, Yisrael!

Today is the *hilula* of the two holy tzaddikim, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Rafael Pinto, of blessed memory. While I arranged that no candles will be sold in their honor, I will be offering certain items in exchange for pledges for several hours or a week of Torah study. I will be distributing gifts for free, and you, in exchange, will give Hashem a “gift” of your precious time. For the time that youths devote to Torah and Avodat Hashem is very precious to Him. Instead of spending your time in inappropriate places, you are making a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* today by attending this assembly. This is a severe blow to the *Yetzer Hara*, who did not succeed in bringing you to depravity and destruction.

How lucky are you, Am Yisrael, children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, that you all came tonight, including your leaders and your youth, to take part in the *hilula* celebration of the two luminaries of the Pinto family. We can learn many lessons from them about how to serve Hashem through learning Torah, outreach, and kindness. Certainly, by mentioning their actions here in this world, it will cause an awakening in heaven, which will generate life and holiness for Hashem’s people.

### Continuity of the Generations

“And the righteous will be glad, they will exult before G-d, they will rejoice with gladness” (*Tehillim* 68:4). This means that when their sons in this world are happy, our righteous ancestors in the Upper World rejoice before Hashem. Therefore, when we, the sons, exult, the souls of our holy ancestors descend to see who it is that joins their children in their joy.

When they see such an impressive crowd that has gathered for the glory of the Torah, they are surely advocating their cause before Hashem.

“Sing joyfully, O righteous, because of Hashem...” (ibid. 33:1). We see that when the righteous are joyous, they cleave to Hashem. After their passing, they look forward to their children continuing in their ways, clinging to Hashem in joy.

The tzaddikim in the Upper World delight in seeing their descendants follow in their ways. As it says (*Mishlei* 17:6), “The crown of elders is grandchildren, and the glory of children is their parents.” Rashi explains: “The crown of elders is complete when they see their descendants following in the right path; and the glory of children is when their parents are righteous people.”

We know that the greatest aspiration of parents is that their children follow in their ways. The Torah relates the argument between Moshe Rabbeinu and Pharaoh. After Pharaoh agreed to let the Jews leave, he asked (*Shemot* 10:8), “Which ones are going?” To which Moshe replied (ibid. 10:9), “With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters...” As we know, Pharaoh did not agree to this. He suggested that only the adults leave and the youth remain in Egypt (ibid. 10:11).

Moshe responded that it is impossible to serve Hashem without the youth. A large focus of Avodat Hashem is to inspire the young ones, the future generations. When young people battle their *Yetzer Hara*, the Name of Hashem is sanctified in all the Upper Spheres. Also, Moshe asserted, the youth are necessary in order to recite Kaddish upon their parents’ passing. The youth are equally dependent on their fathers, for without their parents’ example, from whom should they learn? The *Kli Yakar* explains this at length on the pasuk (ibid. 10:10) “For that is what you seek.”

## Educate the Child According to his Way

When Batya extended her hand to reach the basket containing Moshe in the water, the pasuk says (*Shemot* 2:6), “She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold! a youth was crying. She took pity on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrew boys.’” Chazal ask (*Sota* 12b), “Why was Moshe called a ‘youth,’ when he was only a baby of nine months?”

I think this hints to the key to raising righteous children. From when a child is born, one should relate to him as if he were a mature youngster who understands everything. One should not say, “Oh, he’s still young and doesn’t know the difference, so it’s okay to overlook his lack of mitzvah observance and permit him to behave poorly.” On the contrary, we should realize that a person’s behavior is conditioned when he is young, and he will continue in this behavior until his marriage. It is the responsibility of the child’s parents and mentors to guard him throughout all the stages of his development to retain the same purity that he possessed at birth. We must ensure that his energies are used for Torah and mitzvot.

This is the lesson that was revealed to Batya from Heaven. The secret of Am Yisrael’s survival begins when a child is but a baby. He must already then be guided in the proper path, as though he were a mature child. For this reason, Batya took pity on Moshe; she had sympathy for the heavy burden which Bnei Yisrael would place upon their sons from a very young age. This was before she could appreciate the value of Torah, and the mighty power of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The pasuk states (*Mishlei* 22:6), “Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it.” This means that we must train our children to live a life of holiness and purity from birth, relating to them as young adults. If we engrain these concepts in them as children, it is guaranteed that when they reach adulthood and old age, they will continue in this path.

Yehudah told Yosef (*Bereishit* 44:32-34), “For your servant took responsibility for the youth...then I will have sinned to my father for all time...for how will I go up to my father if the youth is not with me...?” From these pesukim we see that every individual is obligated to be concerned about, and influence, as many people as he can, especially the youth. As we know, “Yisrael are responsible for one other”(Shavuot 39a).

Yehudah’s words to Yosef contain the following hidden rebuke: How can a Jew “go up” after 120 years, to his Father in Heaven “if the youth is not with me,” if he hasn’t brought other youths close to their Father in Heaven and influenced them to improve? There will be a great accusation against him, demanding, “Where are My children? Why did you worry only for yourself and come alone, without bringing others with you?”

The word נער (youth) does not exclusively refer to young people. Hakadosh Baruch Hu regards all Bnei Yisrael as a “youth,” as it says (*Hoshea* 11:1), “When Yisrael was a lad I loved him, and since Egypt I have been calling out to My son.” From the time Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, they were called “youth.” This is because we must begin to educate a child from a young age, since he quickly turns into an adolescent. The age of adolescence is fraught with danger, because at this stage, he begins to make independent choices of which lifestyle he will adopt for the future. Therefore, if he was accustomed to living a life of Torah from childhood, when he reaches adolescence he will certainly choose to continue in this path.

Today, we all feel great joy. I am happy to have merited helping thousands of young Jewish boys search for truth. I am grateful to Hashem, Who has helped me and given me the opportunity to be your spiritual mentor and guide you on the proper path. I am also thankful that you have placed your trust in me and have learned from me for the past fifteen years. Moreover, you also feel great joy for having merited accepting upon yourselves the yoke of Heaven.

Therefore, I request from Him Who sits on High, that if I merit after 120 years to live with my fathers in Gan Eden, that you, too, will join me there. I don't want to be bored sitting alone. And how could I bear the sorrow of my Father, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if I don't bring along with me more holy souls? Since all of us wish to influence others, as well as to receive from others, we all benefit and our joy knows no bounds. We also bring great satisfaction to our Creator, as well as to our ancestors, when they see us celebrating the joy of Torah in true joy.

### **The Jews in Egypt did not Change Their Names, Their Language, or Their Dress**

When the Jews were in slavery in Egypt, they already recognized the existence of Hashem. Consequently, they had a strong desire not to mingle or assimilate among the Egyptians. They knew that the way to prevent assimilation is through Torah study and mitzvah observance. But, alas, this was forbidden by Pharaoh. Due to the staggering amount of work that was forced upon them, the Jews had no time to involve themselves in Avodat Hashem. They began to fear that Am Yisrael would be completely destroyed.

The Jews fought against the *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to cause assimilation among the nations. They resolved not to change their Jewish names and to always dress in their distinctly Jewish clothes that they had worn before going down to Egypt. Likewise, they maintained their Jewish language. This resolution attested to their staunch belief in the Creator. They were not willing to assimilate among the Egyptians. Thus, they paved the path for the *geulah*. When Hashem would later reveal Himself to them at the time of their redemption, they would already be prepared to follow His commandments and accept the Torah.

Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5a; *Midrash Shochar Tov* 114:7) that in the merit of guarding these resolutions, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt. This imparts an important message to us. A Jew may truly want to

fulfill the Torah and its mitzvot perfectly, but encounters mitigating circumstances which prevent him from doing so. However, once he formulates a plan to defeat the *Yetzer Hara* and pursues it, he is guaranteed that in the end Hashem will liberate him from the *Yetzer Hara* forever. Chazal say (*Avot* 4:11), “Whoever fulfills the Torah despite poverty, will ultimately fulfill it in wealth.”

Maybe this is the reason that the Torah commanded us to remember and relate the Exodus from Egypt a number of times throughout the day. The pasuk states (*Devarim* 16:3), “So that you will remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt, all the days of your life.” This reminds a person that when he wants to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, he should make sure to emulate the mode of behavior and good attributes of his ancestors. This will lead him to other good *middot* as well, until he succeeds in completely freeing himself from its grip. He will then be a truly free man, who serves Hashem instead of his *Yetzer Hara*. The *Sefer Hachinuch* states regarding the mitzvot of Pesach (*mitzvah* 16), “For through doing good actions, we are motivated to become good, and worthy of eternal life.”

Moreover, the Exodus from Egypt has an eternal message for all generations. Just as Hakadosh Baruch Hu saved us from the Egyptians, and took us from captivity to freedom, so, too, through constantly remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and arousing the *kedushah* inherent therein, Hashem helps us to overcome the *kelippah* of the immoral culture in which we find ourselves.

Unfortunately, we see how the latest fashions and styles have affected people. Every day, they are busy checking out what the latest fashion is. These fashions are most immodest, especially the styles of summer clothing. This is the antithesis to the resolution our forefathers made not to change their mode of dress, by which we merited redemption from Egypt.

We also see a change regarding names. Many of our fellow brothers are not meticulous in calling children by Jewish names. They purchase books that expose them to many non-Jewish names, and proceed to name their children these foreign names. This is shameful.

Likewise, people do not adhere to guarding our language. A majority of Jews do not know the translation of the prayers and thus have no idea what they are asking from Hashem. Therefore, they don't enjoy praying, and it is burdensome to them. Such a tefillah does not fulfill its purpose. The Mishnah (*Berachot* 4:4) states, in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, "He who makes his prayer standard, it is not a supplication." As a result, "He who regards his prayer as a burden and prays only because he is forced to, will end up not praying altogether" (ibid. 272).

In addition, these people do not have the merit of the Torah to stand by them, since they do not keep it properly. Mitzvah observance has become a burden to them, and they lack even basic knowledge of Judaism. This will eventually lead to assimilation, G-d forbid. They have not adopted a steadfast custom which will assure their continued affiliation with Judaism, as our forefathers in Egypt did.

This is the reason for the tremendous assimilation we witness today. We constantly hear from parents who are consumed with worry about the fact that their children are losing their Jewish identity. We ask them what measures they have taken to ensure their children's affiliation to Judaism. Did they give their children a Jewish education and show them what it means to live a Jewish lifestyle? Unfortunately, they dress in a modern and immodest fashion, their children have gentile names, and they don't even know the Jewish language, rendering them incapable of comprehending to Whom they are praying. Their hearts remain cold to that which is most dear to us – *ahavat* Hashem. These parents are unable to answer me.

## Shabbat – The Foundation of Faith

In addition, there are those who increase their sins and mock the holy Shabbat, which is the precious gift that Hashem bequeathed to Am Yisrael (*Beitzah* 16a). Instead of pausing one day a week, and utilizing the designated day of rest properly, it is trampled and desecrated. Shabbat is the opportunity to enjoy the spiritual pleasures of going to the Beit Hakeneset for the tefillah, and establishing time for Torah learning. It is a time to experience true delight, by enjoying the delicacies of the Shabbat meals and singing *zemirot*. Through such behavior, we demonstrate to the world that we put our faith in Hashem, Who sustains the entire world. It is He Who provides livelihood, which does not diminish when we abstain from working on Shabbat. After all, He is the One Who commanded that we keep Shabbat, as it states (*Shemot* 20:8), “Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it.” But, instead, there are those who turn this holy day into a day of mundane activity.

Furthermore, through the Satan’s devious efforts, precisely on the day which is designated as a day of rest, people succeed in securing the best and most profitable business deals. This desecration of Shabbat is the catalyst that leads to their assimilation, and to their children’s, as well. They display their lack of faith in Divine providence and dependence on Hashem.

Our Sages have taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish (*Beitzah* 16a), “Hashem gives a person an additional *neshamah* on Erev Shabbat, and it is taken back on Motza’ei Shabbat, as it says (*Shemot* 31:17), ‘He rested and was refreshed.’” But, afterward in the Gemara, we find the term “וי אבדה נפש – Woe to the spirit that has left.” Rashi explains, “An additional *neshamah*, meaning a capacity for tranquility and happiness, to relax and be able to eat and drink in a non-gluttonous fashion. From the word וינפש (and was refreshed), we infer the difficulty in parting from Shabbat.” This requires explanation. If the *neshamah yeteirah* is so beneficial, why is it removed from the person after Shabbat?

To prepare properly for the holy day of Shabbat requires much effort. Shabbat is a day for personal reflection; a day for repentance; a day from which to draw faith and belief in Hashem; a day when one sets aside time for Torah study; and a day for basking in its inherent holiness. Shabbat is so full of spiritual treasures, it is nearly impossible for the human body to contain it.

The magnitude of these spiritual pleasures can literally damage the physical body. The Torah is designed for us to live by, and not to perish as a result of following it, as it says (*Vayikra* 18:5), “And live by them (the mitzvot).” For that reason, Hashem gave each person a *neshamah yeteirah* on Shabbat. Man’s *neshamah*, combined with the additional *neshamah* of Shabbat, can endure the *kedushah* of the day. In this manner, much *kedushah* can be obtained on Shabbat Kodesh.

When a man observes Shabbat appropriately, he will literally feel this gift which Hakadosh Baruch Hu has bestowed upon him. Moreover, he is regarded as having fulfilled the entire Torah. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 25:12) states that Shabbat is equivalent to all the mitzvot, and for this reason, it was given to Bnei Yisrael as a special gift, separate from the rest of the Torah. (See *The Gifts of Torah and Shabbat* in the sefer *Pachad David on the Festivals*, section on Shavuot.)

This raises a question. How can we define Shabbat as a gift, if it is listed as one of the 613 commandments? Maybe we can explain this by saying that the gift is the feeling of Shabbat being “*Me’eyn Olam Haba*” (a taste of the World to Come) that we experience due to the additional *neshamah* which we receive on it. This is certainly a wonderful gift. If a person is worthy, the *neshamah yeteirah* helps him become increasingly more sanctified, and his faith in Hashem is strengthened.

This may help explain the statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 10b; *Beitzah* 16a): “Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, ‘I have a good gift in My treasure house. It is called Shabbat. I would like to bestow it upon Yisrael. Go and tell them.’” As we mentioned, the entire purpose of Shabbat is to teach

and train man to believe in Hashem, the Creator of the world, from Whom everything stems. If He commanded us to rest on Shabbat, then man should not fear that he will incur a loss of livelihood by adhering to its laws. One who desists from working on Shabbat is guaranteed that his earnings will be recompensed by Hashem. Furthermore, all the days of the week are blessed in the merit of keeping Shabbat (*Zohar* Part II 63b; Part III 144b).

Chavakuk states (2:4), “The righteous person will live through his faith.” Our Sages explain (*Makkot* 24a) that this means that faith is the foundation of the entire Torah. When man acquires belief, he merits keeping all the mitzvot. By observing Shabbat, man demonstrates his belief and faith in Hashem. The entire Torah is encompassed in this foundation of faith. Therefore, it is considered as if he fulfilled all of the commandments. Accordingly, the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 25:12) states, “Shabbat is equivalent to all the other mitzvot,” because our demonstration of faith in Hashem on Shabbat is the catalyst which prompts us to fulfill all the mitzvot. Hakadosh Baruch Hu considers a good thought as a good deed (*Kiddushin* 40a). Hence, our demonstration of belief on Shabbat is considered as if we performed all the mitzvot that we were commanded.

I pray that each member of this entire holy congregation merit protecting the spark of Judaism within him and that we should merit the ultimate redemption, speedily in our days, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Our ancestors in the World Above rejoice with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and are attached to Him, when their descendants keep the Torah with joy. Their sole desire is that their sons should follow in their ways, as it says, “The crown of elders is grandchildren, and the glory of children is their parents.” The glory of the parents is watching their offspring go in their ways.
- In Egypt, we see that Pharaoh did not want the younger generation to leave with the fathers, but Moshe Rabbeinu told him, “With our young ones and with our

elders, we shall go,” for the young are dependent upon the elders. It is impossible to abandon them to stray in the streets. It is our task to bring our youth closer to Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

- The Torah describes Moshe Rabbeinu as a youth even though he was only three months old, as the pasuk says, “Behold, a youth was crying.” This is because the principles of childrearing are already relevant from babyhood, as it says, “Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it.”
- This is also what Yehudah told Yosef: “For your servant took responsibility for the youth...for how will I go up to my father if the youth is not with me...?” Hashem holds us responsible if we do not bring our youth into the fold by educating them properly.
- This is one of the reasons for remembering the Exodus from Egypt each day. Only in the merit of guarding our Jewish identity did we succeed in overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. Moreover, the Exodus from Egypt has a constant influence on us. Even today, by remembering the holiness of the Exodus, we can merit salvation.
- We must also keep Shabbat, which is the foundation of the Jewish nation, and is equivalent to all the commandments. Shabbat is a wonderful gift from Hashem, and one who observes it, merits keeping all the mitzvot.

## AND ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL WILL WEEP THE CONFLAGRATION

### WORDS OF EULOGY FOR OUR TEACHER, THE GAON AND TZADDIK, RABBI CHAIM SHMUEL LOPIAN, ZT”L

We have come to eulogize our teacher, the Gaon and tzaddik, Rabbeinu Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt”l, author of the great composition *Ravachah Shmatetah*, written on *Shev Shmatetah* of the *Ketzot Hachoshen*. We must reflect whether or not we are worthy to eulogize one of the great sages of our generation whose “Torah was his craft” (*Berachot* 16b). Indeed, his

humility was like that of Hillel Hazakein (*Shabbat* 31a), who did not engage in mundane matters, but was entirely immersed in Torah and halachah. Who will ever be able to take his place? A tzaddik has left this world; the captain has left the ship. There is no one upon whom we can rely but on our Father in Heaven (*Sotah* 49a).

Chazal say (*Berachot* 18a), “Tzaddikim in their deaths are considered living.” Moreover, they add (*Chulin* 7b), “Greater are tzaddikim in their deaths than in their lives.” This is because after they die, their light shines forth, and their great deeds become known. This obligates us to emulate their ways and bring our hearts close to the service of Hashem. By strengthening ourselves in Torah study and cleaving to the ways of the tzaddik, we cause his lips to move in the grave (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 2:1). And even if we did not merit clinging to the tzaddik in his lifetime, at least the sorrow at his passing compels us to follow in his ways and serve Hashem faithfully.

Today we have gathered to say words of inspiration and encouragement, to arouse us to repent in the wake of the loss of this tzaddik. Surely, his passing is due to our sins (*Ketubot* 104). The tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel, certainly did not die for his own sins. He never sinned, since his mouth never ceased speaking words of Torah. One who is connected to Torah with his entire being is like the Holy Ark, flawless, coated with gold from within and without. So was Rabbeinu Chaim Shmuel. He was familiar with all aspects of the Torah. There was no facet of the Torah that he did not study, delving into its depths, uninterrupted, day and night.

He once needed to travel from Gateshead to London. The trip took many hours, so he brought with him an entire set of Shas. Woe unto us, that in order to understand one page of Gemara, we must spend a few hours learning it, whereas this tzaddik could cover the entire Shas in just a few hours!

He did not merit reaching great heights due to exceptional inborn talents. It was only due to his efforts to utilize that same potential with which we are all born. He developed this potential to its utmost, from his youth through old age. In this manner, he managed to cover all aspects of the Torah.

Once, when I visited him in his simple home, he admitted that he suffered terrible agony from various ailments. But, he added simply, “Baruch Hashem, when I toil in Torah and delve into its lessons deeply, I don’t feel any pain at all. However, the moment I cease my learning, in order to eat or take care of my needs, the pain immediately resumes.”

He fled from dispute like a bow shot from an arrow. And even in important matters, he kept a low profile, due to his tremendous humility. He did not for a moment assume that he was one of the leaders of our nation, even though he was worthy of this distinction (*Tosefta Eiduyot* 3:4). Only, when the Gedolei Yisrael beseeched him to participate in a holy mission or event, did he do so, in their honor, but never in order to bestow honor upon himself.

One of his many students related to me that once Rabbeinu approached him and asked how he was doing. He answered that he was considering leaving the yeshiva because it was very difficult for him to concentrate and memorize, which is required in learning Gemara. To which Rabbeinu countered, “Do you know the Shemoneh Esrei prayers by heart?”

“Certainly,” responded the disciple.

Then Rabbeinu said, “One who knows the tefillah of Shemoneh Esrei by heart is capable of knowing a page of Gemara by heart, because they both require the same faculties.”

There is a characteristic story, which all his disciples and admirers relate about him. Whenever he had to look up something in a Gemara, he automatically opened to the page that he needed, without having to leaf through the volume. How could such a thing occur, time and again? Did

he possess *ruach hakodesh* to know to open the sefer exactly at the right page?

It seems that when Hashem saw how immersed this tzaddik was in learning Torah, and how he spent every available moment in its study, to the extent that he hardly rested, nor spent time even on personal needs, He orchestrated that his precious time should not be wasted on leafing through the pages. We know that “in the path that a person chooses to take, he is led” (*Makkot* 10b). Rabbeinu was led by Heaven to the appropriate page as soon as he opened the sefer. Since he made enormous efforts to waste no time which could be utilized for Torah study, Hashem helped him along this path.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:7) explain on the pasuk “Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva” that “the departure of a righteous person from a place makes an impression. For when a righteous person is in a city, he is its magnificence, its splendor, and its grandeur. When he departs from the city, its magnificence, splendor, and grandeur depart also.” The Hebrew word for “impression” is רושם, the letters of which can be rearranged to spell the word שומר (protector). From this we infer that when a tzaddik is in a city, it is guarded from harm in his merit. But when he leaves, his absence is noticeable through the city’s lack of protection.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught us (*Zohar* III, 177a) that when there is an accusation upon the inhabitants of the world, Hakadosh Baruch Hu forgives the generation, in the merit of a righteous person. This can be compared to a king whose subjects sinned against him. He summoned the police to enact justice. Just at that very moment, the king’s beloved friend entered. His eyes lit up, and they sat down to talk. When the policeman arrived and found the king in elevated spirits, he left. Afterward, the king’s friend begged forgiveness on behalf of the people.

This is precisely what has happened to us, with the death of the tzaddik we are eulogizing. We feel his absence strongly, and we feel abandoned; we are left without a father and without his protection. Nonetheless, it is

our duty to improve ourselves and awaken Heavenly mercy, so that his merit should continue to shield us. As it says (*Chulin* 7b), “Greater are tzaddikim in their deaths than in their lives.” We will continue to enjoy the benefits of his great magnificence and splendor by clinging to his exceptional attributes of love and appreciation of the Torah.

The Zohar (III, 220a) states that after a tzaddik’s passing, when he is already in Gan Eden, he frequents the place where he studied Torah in this world. This is especially so, when living tzaddikim discuss new insights in Torah there, as well. Therefore, if we continue in his ways, he will certainly intercede for us on High and perform wonders on our behalf.

### **The Tzaddik Serves Hashem through Self-Sacrifice**

The advantage of one who studies Torah is very great, especially if it is through self-sacrifice. On the pasuk (*Tehillim* 114:3), “The sea saw and fled,” Chazal explain that there were several factors in whose merit the Yam Suf split for Bnei Yisrael when they left Egypt (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 114, *remez* 873). Rabbi Nechemiah says that the sea saw the Hand of Hashem and split, as it states, (*Tehillim* 77:17), “The waters saw You and were terrified.” Another explanation is that the sea saw the coffin of Yosef submerged in the water. Hashem said, “They (the waters) will flee in merit of the one who fled,” as it says (*Bereishit* 39:12), “But he left his garment in her hand, and he fled, and went outside.” Additionally, the sea split in the merit of Nachshon ben Aminadav, who leaped into the water with self-sacrifice (*Sotah* 37a).

Why did Chazal find it necessary to attribute three different reasons for the sea to split?

It seems fitting to explain that in order for the sea to split, all three factors were necessary. Hashem stipulated with the laws of nature that they bend to the righteous only when Bnei Yisrael do His will, i.e., learn Torah and perform mitzvot (see *Zohar* I, 208a). Not only were they lacking this condition, as they had not yet received the Torah, but they were still

at the forty-ninth level of impurity (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a). The Midrash says (*Yalkut Reuveini, Beshalach* 14) that the Angel of the Sea charged: “These are idol worshippers and (similarly) these are idol worshippers.” Both the Egyptians and the Jews were idol worshippers, so why did the Jews deserve to be rescued? Consequently, the sea refused Moshe’s request that it split apart for Bnei Yisrael.

This was the case until Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself appeared and castigated the sea by claiming, “Bnei Yisrael brought with them the remains of Yosef, who conquered his *Yetzer Hara*, and even in Egypt did not forget his Torah, but learnt diligently” (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 11a).” By taking Yosef’s coffin with them, Bnei Yisrael indicated that they wanted to emulate him and learn how to overcome their evil inclinations with self-sacrifice, just as he had. Yosef succeeded in the merit of the Torah which Bnei Yisrael would in the future receive at Har Sinai. In addition, in that moment of crisis, Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the waters with great sacrifice, in order to do the will of Hashem. Thereafter, the waters split.

Therefore, all three factors were necessary in order to convince the sea to split. After all, the condition that nature must comply with the righteous applies only when Bnei Yisrael keep Torah and mitzvot. But since they had not yet received the Torah, Hashem had to defend them by reminding the sea that they had brought the bones of Yosef with them, indicating that they intended to follow in his ways.

This claim was proven by the fact that as long as Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, they anticipated that Moshe would redeem them. They knew this would occur after he would mention the very words that Yosef Hatzaddik revealed (*Bereishit* 50:24): “ואלוקים פקד יפקד אתכם – G-d will surely remember you.” Indeed, when Moshe came and told the Jews the words of Hashem, Who had sent him, they immediately believed him, as it says (*Shemot* 4:31), “And the people believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered them...and they bowed their heads and prostrated

themselves.” In this manner, they publicly displayed their great faith in the Creator of the world.

For this reason, Moshe Rabbeinu desired to personally tend to the transfer of the remains of Yosef Hatzaddik, while Bnei Yisrael were busy with the spoils of Egypt (*Sotah* 13; *Shemot Rabbah* 20:17). This is because Yosef had foretold that Moshe Rabbeinu would be the true redeemer (*ibid.* 5:13). Bnei Yisrael waited for the words of Yosef Hatzaddik to be realized. When the time came, they believed Moshe Rabbeinu, in the merit of Yosef. The entire purpose of their delivery from Egypt was to accept the Torah and serve Hashem with self-sacrifice, just as Yosef Hatzaddik had done, as it says (*Shemot* 3:12), “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain.”

We know that Hashem considers a good thought as though it were already done (*Kiddushin* 40a). Therefore, it was considered as if Bnei Yisrael had already accepted the Torah, and were freed of the impurity and depravity of Egypt. Hence, they merited the waters splitting before them. From this, we see how steadfast their belief in Hashem was.

They succeeded in totally ridding themselves of the corruption of Egypt. Even when they camped, facing Pi Hachiroth between Migdal and the sea (see *Shemot* 14:2), they did not stoop to idol worship, as they had been accustomed to practice in Egypt through coercion. In this merit, Hakadosh Baruch Hu revealed to them all the deficiencies of idol worship. The words specifying the exact location of the encampment, “בין מגדל ובין הים – between Migdal and the sea” allude to the dangers of idol worship. It poses as a מגדל (tower, or high mountain), that has no equal in the world. מול הים (across from the sea) hints to how Hashem exposed the fallacy of the nations, who are swept along to idol worship as the rushing waves of the sea. However, idols are just man-made, as it says (*Tehillim* 115:5), “They have a mouth, but cannot speak; they have eyes, but cannot see.”

Therefore, although the *kelippot* are extremely powerful, being the essence of idol worship and intentionally created in order to test Bnei Yisrael, they had no power to harm them. This is because the glory of Hashem preceded the Jewish camp and escorted them. Regarding this protection, Bnei Yisrael sang a song of praise, as it says (*Shemot* 15:11-14), “Who is like You among the heavenly powers, Hashem! Who is like You, mighty in holiness, too awesome for praise, Doer of wonders...Peoples heard, they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Pelashtet.”

We see the level of greatness that the Jews achieved. Nachshon ben Aminadav’s self-sacrifice of jumping into the roaring sea was similar to that of Yosef Hatzaddik. Nachshon did not directly hear Hashem instruct him to do so; nevertheless, he sensed that the ultimate service of Hashem was complete self-sacrifice. It was in this merit that the sea split.

Considering Nachshon’s selfless devotion, it is surprising that this account of his brave act is only hinted at, and not written clearly in the Torah.

This omission teaches us of the great loss Nachshon incurred because of his involvement in Korach’s dispute. Instead of earning the title of a hero, and serving as a model of selfless devotion in serving Hashem, he was greatly punished and not mentioned in the account of the Splitting of the Sea. His crime of rebelling against Moshe’s authority rendered him unworthy. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 7:12) states, “The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon son of Aminadav...” Chazal explain (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:5) that the pasuk begins with the word וַיְהִי, which is used to denote sorrow. Hashem knew that Nachshon would eventually follow Korach in his rebellion.

Nachshon was punished together with those who disputed Moshe’s authority, despite his self-sacrifice in the service of Hashem. Anyone who questions the authority of his Rav is considered as questioning the authority of Hashem (*Sanhedrin* 110a; *Tanchuma, Korach* 10). Such a person cannot serve as a role model for the Jewish people. Even his

meritorious achievements are not mentioned, since this might mislead people into adopting his errant behavior as well.

Our purpose in this gathering is to publicize the holiness of Rabbeinu, zt”l, whom we are eulogizing today. He was exemplary throughout his life in serving Hashem through self-sacrifice, distancing himself from worldly pleasures, and not wasting one moment from Torah study. He would avoid any feud. His whole being bespoke dignity. His face shone with holiness, and he served as a role model to his many students and admirers.

Just from his recommendation for my sefer, we can see his tremendous greatness and his unbounded love for his disciples, who have continued in his ways by bringing others closer to Avodat Hashem. Who am I, that he should write about me that I don’t need his recommendation? Who am I, that he should state about me that he reads from my sefer *Pachad David* every day? This is his true greatness in Torah. Through his tremendous humility, he knew how to attract tens of thousands of Jews. Hundreds of thousands of stories can be written about him. Upon him it can be said (*Vayikra* 10:6), “And the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem has ignited.”

All who knew him in his younger years, myself included, as I have known him for more than thirty-five years, know that in our eyes he remains a tzaddik. The description “שלם בחכמה – complete in wisdom,” is numerically equivalent to his name, חיים שמואל (Chaim Shmuel). This is certainly a fitting description of Rabbeinu. He sacrificed himself for the sake of Klal Yisrael, willingly and happily. Therefore, we must mourn this tremendous loss. May his great merit protect all of Klal Yisrael until the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our days, Amen.

### — In Summary —

- We have gathered to eulogize our teacher, the Gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt”l, and to commemorate a *gadol* whose Torah study was his exclusive occupation. His humility was like that of Hillel HaZakein. He utilized every

moment for Torah study and mitzvah performance. He was entirely immersed in Torah. Who can replace him? Upon him it is said that tzaddikim are greater in their deaths than in their lives. Therefore, we must learn from his ways, for his light shines brightly. Then, his lips will murmur in the grave. Whoever did not cleave to him in his lifetime can do so after his death.

- Our teacher, the tzaddik, was taken from us as retribution for our sins. He himself was pure of all sin. His mouth never ceased uttering words of Torah. He was constantly involved in Torah, to the extent that on a journey of a few hours he completed the entire Shas. He merited reaching these heights by utilizing his full potential for the sake of Torah. He always distanced himself from any feud, and was exceedingly humble. His entire being manifested the greatness of Torah. Therefore, he merited Heavenly assistance; he never had to leaf through a sefer to find the correct page, in order not to waste any of his precious time.
- Just as Yaakov's parting left an impression on Be'er Sheva, so too, does our Rabbi's death leave us with a gaping void. We feel as orphans without a supporting father. We must strengthen ourselves and cling to his elevated attributes, specifically acts of self-sacrifice, as Bnei Yisrael exhibited at the Splitting of the Sea.
- Such was Rabbeinu's dedication for Torah and mitzvot. He was a living example of self-sacrifice for Torah, humility, and avoiding dispute. With great vigor, he drew tens of thousands of fellow Jews to Torah and Judaism. Upon him we can say, "And your brethren the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem has ignited."

## THE LIGHT OF TZADDIKIM

### SAID IN HONOR OF THE HILULA OF RABBI CHAIM PINTO, ZY" A

Chazal say that Hashem looked into the souls of the tzaddikim and created the world (*Zohar, Tikkunim* II, 98b). This was the light that shone on the first day of Creation. We know that this special light was set aside for tzaddikim to enjoy in the World to Come. The Midrash says, "By the

brilliant light with which Hashem created the world, Adam saw from the beginning of the world till its end. When Hashem saw that the generations of Enosh, the Flood, and the Dispersion were sinful, He hid this light from them, as it says (*Iyov* 38:15), “Light is withheld from the wicked.”

Hashem set aside this special light so that evil people should not be able to enjoy it. Instead, He put it aside for tzaddikim to enjoy in the World to Come. We learn this from the words of the pasuk (*Bereishit* 1:4), “Hashem saw that the light was good.” The word “good” is always used in reference to tzaddikim. The physical light that we enjoy today is a different light; it is the light of the sun and moon, which were created on the fourth day. “The light was good” is an allusion to the hidden light that Hashem has reserved for tzaddikim in the future.

My grandfather, the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, ascended to the Heavenly Yeshiva on the 26th of Elul, 5600. Creation began on the 25th of Elul.

Perhaps we can explain the connection between my holy grandfather’s passing and the special light set aside for tzaddikim in the following way. There are exactly twenty-five words from the word *Bereishit*, the first word of the Torah, until the first time that the word אור (light) appears. This hints that Hashem created light on the 25th of Elul. However, after it was created, this light was bestowed upon Creation through Hashem’s 26-letter Name, which illuminates a brilliant light and goodness throughout the Upper and lower worlds. Therefore, the light shines only through the 26-letter Name, and only through this, is the light of Hashem revealed.

We might also explain that while the Creation of light was completed on the 25th of Elul, the light’s actual dominion began on the following morning, the 26th of Elul.

“Hashem looked into the souls of tzaddikim and created worlds, and placed tzaddikim in every generation” (*Yoma* 38b). Chazal teach that

Hashem's first thought was to create the Jewish people (see *Rashi, Bereishit* 1:1). It follows that since the souls of tzaddikim originate from the light created on the first day, and the world was created for the Jewish people and tzaddikim, then this special light was also part of Hashem's original plan and intent. It was on the afternoon of the Shabbat that came before the first day of Creation that Hashem thought to create this light, and that was also the time when Hashem thought to create the Jewish people.

Shabbat is the most special day of the week. Moreover, Minchah time is "a time of favor" (*Zohar* III, 136b), the most special hour of Shabbat. It seems that this special time is what initiated the world's creation and made Hashem decide to create the world for the Jewish people, so that He could bestow His goodness upon His Chosen Nation and allow them to bask in His brilliant light. This light was created already on the first day, so that it could begin to serve the world and the tzaddikim straight away.

"Hashem saw that the light was good." This refers to the light created on the first day. It was revealed by means of Hashem's 26-letter Name, which encompasses all worlds. All prayers face in the direction of this light. It is well-known that Rabbi Chaim Pinto's goal in life was to uncover and reveal Hashem's mercy. As such, he died on the day that is most symbolic of the complete revelation of Hashem's mercy in the world – the 26th of Elul, when the light began to serve Creation.

The above illuminates, in a small measure, the essence and greatness of tzaddikim, about whom it says (*Devarim* 4:4), "But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d – you are all alive (חיים) today."

## REMEMBERING MY FATHER

**DELIVERED ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF MY HOLY FATHER, RABBI MOSHE AHARON PINTO, ZT”L, TWENTY-SIX YEARS AFTER HIS PASSING [5771]**

We are all gathered here to pay tribute to my father and mentor, the miracle-worker, scion of holy men, Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, zt”l. We wish to remember his holiness and relate some anecdotes about him, in order that we learn from his ways, and emulate them.

In truth, even those who lived in his time did not recognize the degree of his greatness. Even those closest to him were unable to correctly estimate his greatness, for he was a genius at hiding his righteousness from others. As his body stood on the ground, his head was in the heavens. All his thoughts were spiritual. Only after his death did we uncover a small portion of his awesome activities and the miracles he wrought. We will recount some of them here, in order to strengthen our simple faith in Hashem and His servants, the tzaddikim. This will bring us to the level of “and they believed in Hashem, and in Moshe, His servant.”

Mr. Bitton told me that he met a woman who was acquainted with my father, zt”l. She told this story: Approximately thirty years ago, her husband decided to divorce her. They were married many years, yet were not blessed with children. She was devastated and didn’t know what to do. In her distress, she turned to my father and told him her story, crying copious tears. My father calmed her down, “Don’t cry, my daughter. I promise you that next year, you will have a son, and I will be the *sandek* at his *brit*. Hurry and inform your husband!” The woman continued that the tzaddik’s words came true. Exactly one year later, she gave birth to a baby boy, and Father was the *sandek*.

About thirty years ago, Mr. Amram ben Chamu, from Toulouse, France, had a heart attack. It was very serious, and according to the doctors, he was in grave danger. They said that he would not survive another one of

this magnitude, *rachmana litzlan*. Chazal enjoin us (*Bava Batra* 116a) that if one has a sick person in his house, he should ask a *chacham* to pray for him. This is what Mr. Amram ben Chamu did. He arrived at Father's house, and began weeping his fate, saying, "I am yet young, only forty years old. The doctors say my health is precarious. Please, pray for me, that at least I should be at my son's bar mitzvah."

Father held his hand lovingly and told him, "Is it enough for you only to be at your son's bar mitzvah? I promise you, *b'chasdei Shamayim*, you will merit being at his chuppah. Another full twenty years have been added to your life!" In order to encourage him, my father added, "Mark down today's date in your diary."

Approximately ten years ago, when I was in Lyon, a member of his family called me up, stating that he had had another heart attack, and wished to speak with me. He told me, with much weakness, "Honored Rabbi, please come to me in Toulouse, because it is time for me to part from the world." I was shocked at such talk.

I replied, "Why do you speak like this? You are only about sixty years old; you are still young. With *siyata di'Shemaya* you will recover."

But he answered, "You should know that your father blessed me twenty years ago, saying that I was granted another twenty years of life. I see the fulfillment of his prediction, said with *ruach hakodesh*. I had another serious heart attack. In just one week, at 10:00 a.m. next Tuesday, twenty years will have transpired. Therefore, I ask you to stand beside me at this time..."

I was shocked to the core and immediately travelled to Toulouse. On the very date, at the very hour that he had predicted, Mr. Amram ben Chamu was taken from this world. I participated in his funeral and delivered a eulogy.

See what spiritual powers, holy and pure, my father had! He was able to give such blessings, which materialized with complete accuracy! What,

indeed, was the secret to his success? The answer is that he constantly related to Hashem as his loving Father, Who desires to do good to him. He considered himself Hashem's child, clinging to his Father and secure in His protection at all times. Father had unfaltering faith in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem fulfilled his decrees, as we are taught, "A tzaddik decrees, and Hashem fulfills."

Furthermore, Father had an uncanny ability to see the outcome of deeds and look into the future. This was because he kept his eyes unsullied, pure and holy. He was most scrupulous with what he saw and sanctified himself frequently. He never lifted his gaze above four *amot*. It is known that a person's *kedushah* is dependent upon him protecting his eyes, as hinted at in the pasuk in Bereishit (38:21).

He also guarded his speech. Everything he said was measured and sifted appropriately. It is known that he kept a *ta'anit dibbur* for the duration of forty years. Protection of one's eyes and mouth are paramount for one who wishes to attain great heights in *kedushah* and *tzeniut*.

I found a fitting hint to this. The order of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet are ע' פ' צ'. One who guards his עין (eye) as well as his (פה-mouth) is considered a צדיק (tzaddik). Father saw what few were capable of seeing, due to his exalted level of *kedushah*.

Father suffered from diabetes. His condition once became severe, when boiling water spilled on his leg. His leg did not heal, and the doctors stated that it must be amputated in order to prevent gangrene from setting in.

The night before the operation was scheduled to take place, Father sat in his room in the hospital, surrounded by his family, who were fearful of what would transpire. Suddenly, he burst into the liturgy composed by the Saba Kaddisha, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt"l. When he reached the stanza "I will elevate You, Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, Who saves my feet from

illness,” he began weeping. We all joined in his weeping. We felt it was a sort of prayer for his recovery.

Suddenly, Father stated, with conviction, “It will not be. I will not agree to let them amputate my leg. I trust in Hashem that my leg will heal, and there will be no need for surgery.”

The sun rose, and the hour for the scheduled amputation came. My father was brought into the operating room, and was released about an hour later, without undergoing surgery! The doctors stated that they wished to try various medications and avoid an amputation.

In Father, the pasuk (*Tehillim* 125:19), “The will of those who fear Him He will do; and their cry He will hear,” was fulfilled. His pure prayer, uttered the night before the scheduled surgery, activated miracles on High. About him, one can quote the pasuk (*ibid. Shmuel I*, 2:9), “He guards the feet of His devout ones.”

On the 5th of Elul, 5745, on the day of my father’s passing, I was staying at the home of Mr. Mordechai Knafo in Morocco. That very evening, Mr. Knafo’s son was celebrating his bar mitzvah.

I attended the bar mitzvah, not knowing about my father, but I had a feeling of foreboding. I left the simchah early, and returned home. I felt that I should sleep on the ground, which I did.

Early the next morning, there were loud knocks on my door. Mr. Knafo stood there. I asked him why he had come so early; did he possibly know something about my father? At first, he tried to evade the question. Then I told him, “You should know that already yesterday, I had a bad feeling regarding my father.” I brought him into my room and showed him that I had slept on the floor all night. Finally, in distress and anguish, he informed me of my father’s passing. I immediately responded, “Blessed be the true Judge.”

I rushed to the airport, to catch a flight to be in time for the funeral in Eretz Yisrael. I took a flight to France, to meet the funeral party and escort

it to Israel. However, I faced a problem: relations between the state of Israel and Morocco were delicate at the time, and all I held was a Moroccan passport. But I trusted Hashem to help me over this hurdle. I boarded a plane headed toward France. When we landed in France, I was surprised to find that an El Al plane was prepared for takeoff to Eretz Yisrael. I boarded the flight together with the rest of the passengers. Suddenly, I was surrounded by security personnel, demanding to see my ticket and all of my documents. What a ruckus...

I wanted to explain the reason for my haste, and all that had transpired in the last hours, but I got choked up and couldn't say a word. The pilot, who heard the hullabaloo, came out of the cockpit and asked for my name, which I told him. Then he asked for my father's name, which I gave him. He asked when he had died, and I told him, weeping profusely, that he had died yesterday.

On the spot, the pilot instructed them to let me on the plane and arrange a seat for me. I was surprised at the sudden change in attitude toward me. I was subsequently treated well, after the harsh treatment I had previously received. Why did the pilot concern himself with all the arrangements? My surprise did not last long, however. He turned to me and said, "You should know that I am a Jew, but we never observed Jewish law. But today, beyond a shadow of a doubt, I saw Divine intervention at work, in a most clear manner.

"For some years now, I have refrained from listening to the radio broadcasts. All too often, tragedies are announced. This makes it difficult for me to fly a plane. I prefer to fly with a happy heart. But for some reason, this morning, when I awoke at 4 a.m. to get ready for work, I felt an urge to listen to the news. The first thing I heard was the announcement of the passing of your father, zt"l. The broadcaster said, 'Today will be the funeral of the tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, in the city of Ashdod at 4 p.m.' I angrily turned off the radio. *It's a good thing I usually don't turn it on, I thought. I was right. There's always bad news.*

But, for some inexplicable reason, my hand was drawn to turn it on again. And again I heard a broadcast of your father's passing. This kept repeating itself a number of times, without any logical explanation. I wondered what the reason was.

"Now, in front of my eyes, I behold the son of this tzaddik, zt"l, boarding my plane. And now I understand, without a doubt, why I had to hear about your father's demise. It was so that I should feel inclined to help expedite your flight in time for the funeral."

He continued, with a request, "Please mention my name at your father's burial, so that I may attain salvation and blessing."

Of course, I acquiesced to his request, praying for him. I am certain that I was helped in this way only in the merit of my father, zt"l. It was arranged in Heaven that I travel to participate in his funeral, granting him this last honor, as befitting a man of his stature. Although I arrived after the funeral had taken place, I was able to sit *shivah* together with my siblings.

Father went to his Heavenly abode, but, as we know "tzaddikim are called living even after death." His pure spirit and sanctified soul are still with us. Proof of this is the following. It was approximately one week after my daughter-in-law, the wife of my son Rabbi Moshe Aharon, was due to give birth (in Elul 5771), but nothing was happening. I asked my son if they had asked the doctors about this. My son answered, "Father, I prayed that my wife should give birth on the *hilula* of Grandfather, Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, zt"l."

On the eve of my father's *hilula*, I lit a candle in his memory. I prayed fervently that my daughter-in-law should give birth easily and safely.

My wife, who stood at my side, heard my prayer and said, "Rabbi David, I promise that our daughter-in-law will have a baby tonight."

"What makes you so sure?" I asked.

She replied, “I heard how ardently our son, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, was praying, asking Hashem that his wife should give birth on the *hilula* of your father. I am certain that Hashem accepted his prayers, for the *zechut* of the tzaddik and the other rabbanim stand by him, as he brings Jews closer to Torah.”

Indeed, as I was preparing to go to Selichot early the next morning, my son Rabbi Moshe Aharon called from Canada to tell us the good news that his wife had given birth to a baby boy.”

I was filled with joy, as I thanked Hashem for the kindness He had done for us. He granted us a wonderful gift on the day of the tzaddik’s *hilula*. There is no doubt that in *Shamayim*, the tzaddik spoke up on our behalf.

May the merit of my holy ancestors protect us. May the Creator grant you all abundance of blessing and *siyata di'Shemaya*. May Father’s *zechut* stand by us, that we should be inscribed and sealed in the book of tzaddikim, for good life, Amen.

## EULOGIES



### A TZADDIK WHO PERISHED – WHO CAN REPLACE HIM?

#### FROM THE EULOGY OF A TALMID CHACHAM

The impact that is made upon the world by the death of a tzaddik is described by Chazal in the following way: “When a fruit falls from a tree, it makes no sound. But when a walnut falls, it does make a sound. Likewise, when a tzaddik dies, the sound is heard around the world” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim, remez 992*).

The pasuk (*Bereishit 1:4*) states, “And Hashem saw that the light was good.” Our Sages explain (*Yoma 38b; Chagigah 12a*), “There is no good except for a tzaddik.” The *gematria* of טוב (good) is equal to that of אגוז (walnut), hinting that a tzaddik, who is good, can be compared to the walnut. The sefer *Kehillat Yaakov* states that when a walnut falls to the ground, its shell makes a sound, but its insides do not rattle. When a tzaddik dies, the news is heard by everyone, but his inner essence will remain unrevealed and silent unless we eulogize him.

We must awaken the hearts of people and inform them of the great loss which has occurred. We must publicize to the world his inner purity and modesty. We must proclaim this loudly, in order to correct our own behavior. Only then will his passing be an atonement for Am Yisrael. For, otherwise he will protest that he perished for no reason.

Today is a day of great mourning. Because of our iniquities, we have lost a tremendous tzaddik. Who will pray for the healing of the sick? Our

Sages state (*Shabbat* 105b) that when a great man dies, each person should relate to his death as though he were the *niftar's* immediate relative. The *Kehillat Yaakov* explains that when the tzaddik was alive, all would come to him to ask for their needs, like a son comes to take counsel from his father. Therefore, when he dies, all those who were wont to frequent his house feel the passing of their close confidant, who supported them in their distress. One might even feel closer to a tzaddik than a blood relative. This is because the tzaddik directs a person to the World to Come, by guiding him in Avodat Hashem.

Regarding the death of Nadav and Avihu, the pasuk states (*Vayikra* 10:6), “The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited.” Why was it necessary for Hashem to command the people to cry? Surely they themselves understood the enormity of the loss of these two tzaddikim, about whom the pasuk says (*ibid.* 10:3): “Through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored”?

Weeping comes from deep within the heart. We read regarding Yosef Hatzaddik (*Bereishit* 45:1-2), “Now Yosef could not restrain himself...He cried in a loud voice...” We are told that an outburst like this, which comes suddenly and with loud sobbing, is certainly spontaneous. Torrents of love, which were imbedded in Yosef’s heart, burst forth when he was overcome with compassion for his brothers. His weeping was a direct result of his emotions. Thus how can we understand Hashem’s command to weep over the death of Nadav and Avihu? Furthermore, why was the entire nation commanded to weep? Would it not have been sufficient for only those most closely related to the deceased to do so?

When a tzaddik passes away, it is as if the Beit Hamikdash has just been destroyed. Chazal tell us (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b): “The death of tzaddikim is equal to the destruction of the House of Hashem.” This is because the *Shechinah* rests upon a tzaddik, just as it rests upon the Beit Hamikdash (*Zohar* III, 220a, 169b). Shlomo Hamelech describes a tzaddik as “the foundation of the world” (*Mishlei* 10:25). Thus, when a tzaddik dies, the

entire world is in jeopardy. It is the many sins of the generation that cause a tzaddik's death. As the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 57:1) explains: "The righteous one perishes, and no man takes it to heart...because of the impending evil, the righteous one was gathered in."

The sefer *Ye'arot Devash* (Part II, *drush* 7) explains this concept in a similar way. The negative forces are strengthened at the demise of a tzaddik, wielding greater power to influence people to sin. As long as the tzaddik was living, these forces were weakened. This is what Moshe told Bnei Yisrael (*Devarim* 31:27): "While I am still alive with you today, you have been rebels against Hashem – and surely after my death." For then, the *Yetzer Hara* will gain strength and would more easily be able to entice Bnei Yisrael to transgress.

Why did Hashem request that the entire nation should cry excessively for the conflagration that He had caused? They were all enjoined to weep, as they were all held responsible for the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. The heartfelt weeping of members of the nation would arouse the others to cry with them. The *Ye'arot Devash* says (Part I, *drush* 16) in the name of the Rambam, that if some of the people cry, the rest of the nation observes this and feels: If these people are crying, what should we do? After all, we are to blame for this calamity. And their voices will go forth like a river, and they will mourn and shed tears together. This causes the tzaddik who died to protect the generation, as Chazal (*Shabbat* 105b) say, "Whoever sheds tears at the death of a righteous person, merits having Hashem count his tears and store them in His treasure house."

Chazal (*Berachot* 18a; *Kohelet Rabbah* 9:4) teach: "Tzaddikim are called living in their deaths." Just as they protected the generation in their lifetimes, likewise they protect them after their deaths. This is when people shed tears over their demise, which brings them to teshuvah. Therefore, in order to merit his protection, we must eulogize the tzaddik and bring ourselves to tears over his passing.

The main goal of a eulogy is to bring us to teshuvah. What advantage is there in weeping if it does not cause us to feel remorse over our deeds and come closer to Hashem?! When we take the words of a eulogy to heart and mend our ways, the merit of the tzaddik assists us in fighting the *Yetzer Hara*, and this further protects the generation. The greater the number of people influenced to better themselves, the greater the merit that the tzaddik bestows upon the generation.

Since there are many praises to relate about the tzaddik before us, we ask forgiveness if we have not eulogized him properly. We should also mourn over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, since the death of a tzaddik is compared to the *churban*. In heaven, tears shed over the passing of a tzaddik are mixed with the tears shed over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. We must try to give the *niftar* pleasure, each and every day, by clinging to his attributes and good deeds. In Avot (6:9) we read, “When a man departs from this world, neither silver nor gold escort him, but only his Torah study and good deeds.” As Shlomo Hamelech says (*Kohelet* 7:1), “A good name is better than good oil.”

May Hashem help that the *niftar* be a good advocate on High, and in the merit of the tears shed over him, may the *geulah* come speedily in our days. The *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 11:26b) states that in the merit of weeping, Bnei Yisrael will be gathered in from the exile. The Gate of Tears is the only gate left open. The pasuk in Tehillim (17:8) says, “Guard me like the apple of the eye; shelter me in the shadow of Your wings.” What is the definition of “the apple of the eye”? This refers to tears.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Chazal have likened the passing of a tzaddik to the falling of a walnut. The outer shell makes a sound, while the interior is silent. Therefore, at a funeral it is necessary to articulate the inner qualities of the tzaddik, which people may not know about. When a tzaddik dies, everyone mourns him, for he prayed on their behalf. Who can replace him? A tzaddik is superior to a father in the respect that

one's father gives him life in this world, whereas the tzaddik influences him to act righteously, thereby giving him life in the World to Come.

- Hashem commanded all of Bnei Yisrael to weep the passing of Nadav and Avihu. Since weeping stems from one's emotions, how can one be commanded to weep? Furthermore, wouldn't it have been enough if just those closest to these tzaddikim would have wept? Why was the whole nation instructed to weep?
- The tzaddik is the foundation of the world, and he protects it. Therefore, upon his demise, the entire world is in danger. Moreover, the tzaddik's passing is a direct result of the sins of the generation. The essence of weeping and eulogies is to bring one to repentance. For that reason, only when the members of his generation shed tears and do teshuvah, will the tzaddik continue to protect them even after his death. Tzaddikim are greater in their deaths than in their lives.

## HASHEM HAS TAKEN THE ARON HAKODESH FROM US

**WORDS OF INSPIRATION AND EULOGY FOR THE TZADDIK, RABBI  
NISSIM BIGAOU, ZT"l**

When Bnei Yisrael were trapped at the Yam Suf, with the sea in front of them and the Egyptians pursuing them, Moshe Rabbeinu said to the people (*Shemot* 14:13-14), "Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem...Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent." The Midrash tells us an amazing thing: "You shall remain silent" means not to sing. How is it possible to refrain from singing songs of praise when one witnesses the salvation of Hashem before his very eyes?!

Maybe we can offer the following explanation. When Bnei Yisrael encamped by the sea, Moshe Rabbeinu saw how afraid they were of the Egyptians, who were chasing them. The pasuk says (*ibid.* 14:10), "And they were very frightened; Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem." Moshe understood that the real reason for their fear was their lack of trust in Hashem. Even though they had witnessed the might of Hashem in Egypt,

as we say in our Shabbat prayers: “There is no comparison to You, Hashem, our G-d in this world, and there is nothing except for You, our King, in the World to Come...” nevertheless, they feared the Egyptians tremendously.

Therefore, Moshe wished to strengthen them. He told them, “Stand fast!” He was adjuring them to be firm in their trust in Hashem, and focus their hearts solely upon Him. By doing so, they would merit beholding the salvation of Hashem.

However, we are left with a question. For Moshe to encourage the people to stand fast in their *emunah* is understandable, but why did he tell them to be silent and not sing *shirah*? One can remain steadfast in *emunah* without the aid of song, which is the equivalent of prayer, as we shall explain. The *Ba'al Haturim* explains (*Devarim* 3:23) that the word ואתחנן (I implored) is numerically equivalent to the word שירה (song). Chazal expound on this (*Midrash Peliah*) that song is a type of prayer. Moshe was telling Bnei Yisrael that they did not even need to pray to Hashem for deliverance, their firm belief in Him was sufficient to effect their salvation. This is because Hashem looks into the heart of a person to see his true intent (*Sanhedrin* 106a).

This principle is illustrated by the events that happened at the sea. Hashem asked Moshe (*Shemot* 14:15), “Why do you cry out to Me?” He was telling Moshe that it was not the time to pray and sing His praises, because the Satan is liable to take advantage of these moments to confuse the people. Therefore, Moshe should speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them to travel. Moshe explained to them that now was the time for silence. Bnei Yisrael should direct their hearts to Hashem and place their faith in Him, and then they would witness their deliverance. Hashem would consider this demonstration of faith as though Bnei Yisrael had prayed and sang. Silence provides the opportunity to concentrate when one introspects in teshuvah, in order to come closer to Hashem.

However, Moshe told the people that Hashem would fight their wars for them on condition that they stand steadfast in their belief in Him, without wavering whatsoever. Any weakness in their faith would empower the Angel of Egypt in his pursuit of them. Hashem's aid was contingent upon the level of their faith.

This teaches us an important lesson in life. When one experiences a test, the *Yetzer Hara* exploits the situation to weaken his faith in Hashem by rendering him unable to pray properly. He is unable to pray or say praises of Hashem in Tehillim or *zemirot* Shabbat as he should. This is a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara* to prevent him from fulfilling his Avodat Hashem.

Therefore, one should do his utmost to overcome the *Yetzer Hara* and stand up to his trials. He should strengthen his *emunah* and realize that there can be nothing bad which emanates from Hashem, *chas v'shalom* (based on *Eichah* 3:38). Eventually, he will witness Hashem's help in battling all his wars.

We now stand shocked and silent before the *aron* of the Rav and tzaddik, Rabbi Nissim Bigaoui, zt"l. Upon him we can say the pasuk (*Bereishit* 5:24), "Then he was no more, for Hashem had taken him." As you now listen to Rabbanim eulogize a great man, who keenly felt the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 119:72): "The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands in gold and silver," you are surely moved to rend your heart from all the vanities of this world.

I would suggest that in this moment of silence, each person should introspect and do teshuvah. In this manner, you will fulfill the injunction to "stand fast and see." You will leave this Beit Hamidrash with "provisions for the road" from these emotional moments. Continue "standing upright," and you will surely merit "seeing" the light of Torah. Hashem will fight your wars while you remain silent.

Hashem's main desire is for us to trust Him implicitly. A person's sole concern should be how to ascend in Torah and mitzvot. Concerning all

other matters, he should remain silent, trusting Hashem to deal with them on his behalf. In this manner, a person will not waste any time from Torah study. Moshe explained to Bnei Yisrael that Hashem wants us to be strong in our faith. When faced with a trial or tribulation, one should engage in Torah and remain silent about his problem. He will then deserve to see the salvation of Hashem.

My teacher and mentor, Rabbi Masoud Zohar, z”l, under whom I studied in my youth, said the following. The *Navi* (*Shmuel* I, 4) tells about the Pelishtim fighting with Bnei Yisrael in the time of Eli the Kohen Gadol. The nation sent forth the Aron together with Chofni and Pinchas, the two sons of Eli. The Pelishtim defeated Bnei Yisrael, and many of our nation perished. Eli waited for the outcome of the war with great concern. His main worry was what had happened to the Aron.

When Shaul reported to Eli the outcome of the war, he told Eli (*Shmuel* I, 4:17): “Yisrael ran from before the Pelishtim...also, your two sons – Chofni and Pinchas – died; and the Aron was taken!” the *Navi* continues (*ibid.* 18): “As soon as he (Shaul) mentioned the Ark of G-d, Eli fell backwards off his chair...breaking his neck, and he died.” We see from here that the Aron of Hashem was more important to him than his own sons, because only upon mention of the capture of the Aron did Eli fall from his seat and die.

Likewise, Eli’s daughter-in-law did not react upon hearing of her husband’s death. However, when she heard that the Aron had been taken, she died of anguish, saying (*ibid.* 22), “Glory has been exiled from Yisrael, for the Ark of Hashem has been captured.”

We have gathered here today to eulogize a great man, who can be compared to the Aron Hakodesh which contains the *luchot habrit*. His soul has ascended to heaven to be together with the righteous and devout. How can we not cry over this?

Rabbi Nissim translated the prayers into French and was involved in the rabbinate. But then he decided to heed our Sages’ advice (*Avot* 1:10) to

distance oneself from the rabbinate, and all temptations of pride and honor that accompany it. He began to deal in business. He was involved in many acts of *gemilut chassadim* with the poor and needy. He also helped me very much. But then, from Heaven, they desired that he revert back to his original lifestyle, not that of a rav, but as a *talmid chacham*, who sat and learned Torah day and night, amidst the suffering which he underwent for more than two years.

He embodied the statement (*Tehillim* 119:71) “It is good for me (טוב לי) that I was afflicted, so that I might learn Your statutes.” While in tremendous pain, he merited translating the most difficult Mishnayot, and he even desired to translate all of the Mishnayot of *shas*. In this manner, he experienced what the verse states: “טוב לי – it is good for me.” The word לי has the numerical value of forty, referring to the Torah which was given after the forty days that Moshe was in heaven (*Shemot Rabbah* 47:5). There is no “good” other than Torah (*Avot* 6:3; *Berachot* 5a).

Rabbi Nissim would humble himself before me and kiss my hand. But today I ask his forgiveness, because I can’t be considered his mentor, especially after seeing his translation of the Mishnayot. I am not worthy of being his teacher, but only his pupil. For this, I ask *mechilah*.

“Woe unto us on the Day of Judgment, woe unto us on the day of rebuke” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:11). In the future, we will discover that those who were distinguished in this world are considered insignificant in the World to Come. Leaders will be greatly ashamed before their followers. This should inspire us to shake off (להתנער) the layers of the dust of materialism, and be concerned about bringing merit to the youth (נער), as it says (*Bereishit* 44:34), “For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me?” The *Navi* says (*Hoshea* 11:1), “When Yisrael was a lad, I loved him.”

The word for lad (נער) is also related to the word for awakening (ניעור). This provides a lesson for everyone who is lax in awakening in order to study Torah. Hashem loves us when we are a lad, which can be

interpreted to mean when we awaken ourselves. The *Navi* states (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “You should contemplate it (the Torah) day and night.” How will a person face his Creator amidst sleepiness, never having engaged in nighttime Torah study?

In his later years, Rabbi Nissim was involved in Torah study day and night. Rabbi Nissim, how will we manage without you? We will never again merit to see you. May it be Hashem’s will that at least we be comforted by the Mishnayot that you translated on our behalf, and your lips will move in the grave as we learn them (based on *Yevamot* 97a). And may you be a good advocate for all of Klal Yisrael, Amen.

### ————— In Summary —————

- On the pasuk “Hashem will fight your wars and you will remain silent” the Midrash makes a puzzling comment: “Refrain from song.” How could Bnei Yisrael refrain from singing words of praise to Hashem when they had witnessed His salvation? Moshe Rabbeinu saw that the people feared the Egyptians and realized this was due to their lack of faith in Hashem. He therefore beseeched them to strengthen their faith in order to merit salvation, even without praying to Hashem in song. This is what Hashem referred to when He said, “Why do you cry to Me?” Now was not the time to sing, but, rather, to be silent and repent. Only on this condition will Hashem battle for the nation.
- We, too, are standing before the holy *aron* of Rabbi Nissim Bigaoui, z”l, and remain silent. He was a great man, who observed the pasuk “How good for me is the Torah of Your mouth.” We, too, must remove from our hearts all the vanities of this world and put our trust solely in Hashem. Then we will merit seeing the light of Torah. Torah is the most important thing in this world. Eli HaKohen and his daughter-in-law both died only upon hearing about the capture of the Aron of Hashem. Rabbi Nissim was compared to the Holy Ark, infused with Torah.
- Rabbi Nissim translated all the difficult Mishnayot of *shas* and observed the Torah amidst great tribulations. He shunned the rabbinate and only wanted to sit and learn. We are all considered his disciples. We should take *mussar* from him.

If we don't engage in Torah study, especially at night, as he did, with what will we come before our Father in Heaven? We should learn from his ways and engage in Torah study at all times. Then Rabbi Nissim will be a good advocate for all of Klal Yisrael.

## TO VISIT A MOURNER OR DANCE AT A WEDDING

**A SPEECH L'ILUY NISHMAT SEVERAL OF OUR FRIENDS, DELIVERED DURING THE WEEK OF SHIVAH**

Shlomo Hamelech teaches (*Kohelet* 7:2), "It is better (טוב) to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting [i.e. a wedding]." At first glance, this statement seems strange. Chazal say that we have no way of gauging the value or reward of a mitzvah, especially performing loving-kindness. We know that the mitzvah of bringing joy to a bride and groom is an important mitzvah. Yet Shlomo Hamelech tells us that going to a house of mourning has even greater value. If there is no way of really knowing which is greater, when given the choice of going to a wedding or to a house of mourning wouldn't everyone prefer to go to a wedding? Why does Shlomo Hamelech give preference to going to a house of mourning?

When Sarah Imeinu died, it says (*Bereishit* 23:2) that "Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her." What is the Torah teaching us by going into the details of Sarah's passing and burial? If the point is to demonstrate the importance of the Matriarchs, and the regard Avraham had for his wife, why didn't the Torah also write about the passing of Rivka and Leah, and even Bilhah and Zilpah? The regard which Yitzchak and Yaakov had for their wives is well-known; no doubt they also cried and eulogized them.

When Sarah Imeinu was alive, she aided Avraham greatly in his service of Hashem. Together, they raised their son Yitzchak, who brought forth

the Jewish nation. Until this very day, Yitzchak's merit protects us. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:5) says that "the ashes from *Akeidat* Yitzchak still rest on the Altar to atone for the Jewish nation." Avraham himself is described as having "reached old age possessing all of his days" – every moment of his life had value. There is no doubt that his accomplishments could be greatly accredited to Sarah, his wife.

Avraham's appreciation for Sarah, in that case, certainly went much further than admiration for her good looks, even though she was very beautiful (*Sifri, Bamidbar* 99). He valued the assistance she had given him in his life's mission of bringing pleasure to his Creator. "Avraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women." Had Sarah not taught the women about Hashem, Avraham would never have succeeded in converting their husbands.

Sarah was not preoccupied with beautifying herself, and was uninterested in displaying her beauty to others. When Avraham and Sarah had to go to Egypt, he asked Sarah to hide herself inside a chest so that the Egyptians would not take her (*Bereishit Rabbah* 40:5). The chest must have been both poorly ventilated and very hot inside, as the Egyptian climate is stifling. Sarah consented without hesitating. She didn't want any outsiders to enjoy her beauty. It was reserved for her husband.

Even though a woman may possess special qualities like Sarah, Hashem has made it the nature of every man to love his wife; and of every woman, to love her husband. Woman was created from man, and when they marry they become "one flesh," and consequently love one another. Sarah's beauty, her righteousness, and the fact that she attained a higher level than Avraham in prophecy were certainly endearing qualities, but above all, he loved her because she was his wife.

When Sarah died, Avraham felt an immense void. He had tremendous love in his heart, but Sarah was gone. To whom could he transfer this love? Not to Yitzchak, since he already loved him. Also, the relationship between a man and his son is different from the relationship of husband

and wife. One cannot reach spiritual perfection through one's son the same way as he can through his wife. Additionally, one cannot love a deceased person in the same way as when he was alive. Chazal teach us that the dead are no longer remembered after twelve months. In a certain respect, they are no longer able to live vividly in a person's memory, no matter how close the relationship they enjoyed. Since Avraham could not love Sarah after her death in the same way as he had during her lifetime, to whom could he transfer his love?

With tzaddikim, this love does not go to waste. They transfer it to Hashem, and love their Creator more than ever.

When Sarah died, Avraham cried and eulogized her with all his heart. She had been his helpmate, and he missed her greatly. Yet he succeeded in channeling his emotions in a constructive way. The word לבכתי (to cry over her) is written with a small כ in order to teach that although Avraham cried, he didn't stop there. He took his love for Sarah and channeled it to loving Hashem.

If Hashem would have now presented Avraham with more trials, in addition to the ten trials he had overcome, he would have had the strength to overcome them, since he felt greater love for Hashem than ever before.

This helps us understand the prohibition against excessive mourning (*Bava Kama* 91b; *Yalkut Shimoni, Acharei Mot* 587). Doing so would be a sign of focusing too much on the love for the departed one and failing to lift one's eyes and heart to love our Maker, the Source of all life. We find additional support for this in the Gemara's account of how Yehoshua bin Nun mourned so greatly for Moshe Rabbeinu that Hashem had to tell him to arise from the ground. During the period of mourning, Yehoshua forgot three thousand halachot, and the Jews were ready to rebel against him. Hashem showed His displeasure with Yehoshua's excessive mourning by causing him to forget these halachot. Instead, Yehoshua should have channeled his love of Moshe toward Hashem.

After Sarah Imeinu died, Hashem came together with his Heavenly Court to console Avraham. The Torah (*Bereishit* 24:1) says that Hashem blessed Avraham בְּכֹל – “with everything.” This blessing was measure for measure. Just as Avraham now began to love Hashem with his *whole* being, even more than he had during Sarah’s lifetime, accepting Hashem’s judgment lovingly, Hashem repaid Avraham measure for measure, and blessed him in *all* his endeavors, both material and spiritual.

When a person accepts Hashem’s judgment without questioning, he demonstrates a very high level of loving Hashem. Aharon HaKohen is an example of this. After his sons Nadav and Avihu died, the Torah says “וַיִּדּוּם אַהֲרֹן – and Aharon was silent.” Because of this, he merited that Hashem directed His speech to him alone when He gave over the portion of the Torah that deals with entering the Mishkan while intoxicated with wine (*Yalkut Shimoni Shemini* 528). Aharon followed in the path of Avraham, who accepted Hashem’s judgment and increased his love for Him when his beloved wife died.

Similarly, when a person loses a loved one, he should strive to accept Hashem’s decree and repent. Crying and eulogizing are means to help one make a spiritual accounting. After all, no one knows how long he will live. On the other hand, it is not proper to cry and eulogize excessively, since this may bring one to despair, *chas v’shalom*. Instead, one should take the opportunity to think about the meaning of life and reach a higher level of loving Hashem (*Bamidbar* 21:27; *Bava Batra* 78b).

In light of the above, maybe we can explain why people who lose a loved one are often suddenly awakened to repent. They change their lives around, and may begin to wear tefillin, keep Shabbat, and attend Torah classes.

Before they were confronted with death, they believed in Hashem and loved Him in accordance with their spiritual level. Yet after a loved one dies, they are left with great love in their heart that seeks to be channeled.

Avraham showed the way for generations to follow, to utilize mourning as a springboard to reach greater love of Hashem and do teshuvah.

After the death of a relative, a person thinks: “Just as he crossed the threshold from this world to the next, I know that someday I will, too.” He realizes that life is precious and doesn’t last forever. He fears death and seeks to draw nearer to Hashem. He can do so by transferring the love he originally felt toward the deceased, toward Hashem and His service. Iyov states (19:26), “And I see the [the judgment of] Hashem from my flesh.” The love which he had for his relative was channeled toward greater recognition and love of Hashem.

Maybe now we can better understand the pasuk with which we opened our essay: “It is better (טוב) to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting [i.e. a wedding].” It’s not that going to a house of mourning is better and more important than going to a wedding. Both are important; we have no way of gauging which is “better.” Shlomo Hamelech is telling us that going to a house of mourning has the special benefit of helping us attain true “good.” There, we can see people who have intensified their love for Hashem by channeling their love of the departed to Him. One cannot fail to be inspired by seeing people sitting on low stools in mourning who accept Hashem’s judgment with love.

Such inspiration is tremendously valuable, and it would be a shame to wait until we ourselves are stricken by sorrow, *chas v’shalom*, to feel it. Shlomo Hamelech tells us that when we go to console mourners we have the opportunity to attain true טוב (good), which is the Torah – “For I have given you a **good** teaching, do not forsake My Torah” (*Mishlei* 4:2).

When a person goes to a celebration for a mitzvah, there’s no doubt that he has a good time. And no one contests the value of bringing joy to a bride and groom, or of attending any simchah and gladdening the hosts. Yet often, the focus on having a good time plays the central role, and might even come at the expense of other values, causing *lashon hara*, feuds, and *bitul* Torah. When this happens, attending the celebration

detracts from its value as a mitzvah. Thus, we see that one more easily gains spiritual benefits by going to a house of mourning rather than a wedding celebration.

Tomorrow, my son Moshe Aharon Yoshiyahu will become Bar Mitzvah, and it will be a day of great joy for the entire family. Yet the spiritual inspiration I have gained from attending this house of mourning is greater than that which I will gain at the bar mitzvah celebration. Why is this so?

Tomorrow, I will be entirely caught up in the festivities. I will be preoccupied with the following thoughts: Did everyone show up? Is everyone enjoying themselves? Is there enough food at the tables? Did my son's Torah reading go smoothly? My thoughts will be jumping in all different directions during the tefillah; who knows if I will even succeed in praying properly. At the reception, I'll be busy smiling, greeting the guests, and accepting their "mazal tov's" and gifts. When it's all over and we finally get home, we'll spend a long time sitting around the living room, sharing experiences, trying to remember who showed up, discussing what went well and what didn't, how much food was left, etc. Everything will revolve around material things, and I will not have gleaned any spiritual benefit.

Now that I'm here, I feel that I've learned a greater lesson than I will tomorrow at the bar mitzvah. At a party, you'll certainly have a good time; and if you're lucky, you might gain something spiritual. Yet attending a house of mourning is a totally spiritual experience.

There is a halachah that one may not kiss his children inside a Beit Hakeneset, so that it should not seem that his love for his son is greater than his love for Hashem, to Whom he prays. Love for Hashem should be the paramount love that one feels.

The word האבל (the mourner) has the same numerical value as the word טל (dew), when adding one for the word itself. A person who learns Torah will be resurrected with Hashem's dew at the resurrection of the

dead, as the pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 26:19), “For Your dew is like the dew that [revives] vegetation.” Chazal explained that this refers to one who engages in Torah study. Only he will merit the dew of revival at *techiyat hameitim*.

This dew is present at the house of mourning and helps those who come to console the mourners feel greater love of Hashem, learn more Torah, and merit being revived when Mashiach comes.

May we all merit attaining true, boundless love of Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- Shlomo Hamelech said that it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting. Gladdening a bride and groom is certainly a great mitzvah, so why does Shlomo Hamelech give preference to attending a house of mourning? The way that Avraham eulogized and cried for Sarah after her passing sheds light on this question.
- Avraham felt tremendous love for Sarah. She helped Avraham accomplish his life’s mission of bringing the world closer to Hashem, as well as assisting him in his personal spiritual growth. She was beautiful inside and out, and Avraham loved her simply because she was his wife. After she died, Avraham channeled his love for her toward Hashem; his love for Hashem became ever greater than before. If he had been given more trials, he would have been able to overcome them all.
- Shlomo Hamelech encourages us to go to a house of mourning, since that is where we can attain true good – love of Hashem and Torah values – even more so than at a simchah. We are inspired by seeing how the mourner accepts Hashem’s judgment. The word האבל (mourner) has the same numerical value as טל (dew). May the dew of *techiyat hameitim* that is present at the house of mourning help us increase our love of Hashem and be worthy of being revived when Mashiach comes.

## COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

**WORDS OF INSPIRATION IN MEMORY OF THE BOY, YAAKOV, Z”L,  
WHO WAS CUT DOWN IN HIS YOUTH, IN ASHDOD, IN THE PRIME OF  
LIFE, IN A ROAD ACCIDENT, EREV SHABBAT, PARASHAT EMOR,  
7TH OF IYAR, 5760.**

Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 106a) that when one member of a group dies, the entire group should be concerned. I see the boy’s father here, still in the *sheloshim*, sitting and learning. I ask myself, “How is he capable of this, after such a tragedy befell him?” This demonstrates his extraordinary belief in Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The *Navi* tells us (*Nechemiah* 9:33), “You are righteous in all that has come upon us.” It does not state “upon me,” but “upon us.” From here we learn that when one member of the community experiences a calamity, the entire community should be concerned. The boy, Yaakov, was taken not just from his family, but from all of us. When a young person perishes, it is very painful.

The moment that people heard about the accident, each one thought that maybe it was his child who had been hurt. Everyone asked, “Where is my son?” As soon as they discovered that their children were safe, they breathed a sigh of relief. But one child had been injured and lay beneath the wheels of a car. Chazal want to teach us that the fact that a tragedy took place where one lives makes it each person’s personal tragedy, irrelevant of the fact that his own son was not hurt.

The fact that such a horrifying incident happened raises the question of why it took place here, in this city. It might be indicating negligence in the matter of, “If you will follow My decrees” (*Vayikra* 26:3). There may have been some laxity in the area of *tzedakah*, or maybe the laws of the *Shemittah* year have not been properly observed.

We find that parashat *Bechukotai*, which deals with Torah study, follows parashat *Behar*, which discusses faith in Hashem. This teaches that without toiling in Torah, one cannot gain true belief in Hashem. And

if one does not believe, he will not learn Torah. We did find, in Morocco, in recent generations, people who possessed strong faith even though they did not engage in Torah learning. But today, there is no such thing as belief in Hashem without adhering to the Torah; there is no Torah observance without belief in Hashem. Lack of Torah study exposes us to danger, G-d forbid. Therefore, we should return to Hashem in teshuvah.

The subjects of *Shemittah* and of the Giving of the Torah on Har Sinai both teach us faith and trust in Hashem. Hashem provided for our needs at Har Sinai in the merit of our faith, although we were unworthy and even subsequently created the Golden Calf. So, too, would He provide for His nation once they entered the Land of Canaan. Bnei Yisrael should not say that the Wilderness was a holy place, replete with the Well of Miriam, the manna, and the Clouds of Glory, but here, in Eretz Yisrael, it is difficult to make a living and one must enter the business world. Hashem can provide one's *parnasah* wherever he lives. It all depends upon our faith and trust in Him.

Last Shabbat, I related a story regarding belief and trust in Hashem. Just yesterday, someone with a specific problem approached me. When I inquired about this problem, he responded, "The Rav told a story about trust in Hashem. I am already taken care of. The pasuk in Tehillim (55:23) says, 'Cast upon Hashem your burden.' Throw your problems upon Hashem and He will resolve them." He ended by telling me, "Baruch Hashem, I personally have no problems, as I cast them all upon Hashem."

That is really the truth. We think we have problems, but this is not true. We cause our own problems by saying (*Devarim* 8:17) "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" Problems belong to Hashem, and if we cast them upon Him, He will resolve them. Chazal say on the pasuk (*Tehillim* 91:15) "I am with him in distress" that whenever someone is in pain, Hashem, so to speak, is also in pain. If a person would only take note of Hashem's pain, he would receive Heavenly assistance in resolving all his problems.

The death of the boy Yaakov should arouse us to strengthen our Avodat Hashem. We should all be concerned about what happened. When Hashem asked Cain (*Bereishit* 4:9-10): “Where is Hevel your brother?” Cain responded, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” To which Hashem said, “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.” When a person is asked about his neighbor, who is suffering from different issues, he may reply, “Am I my neighbor’s keeper? How am I to know his business?!” This is incorrect. When someone’s neighbor is suffering, Hashem comes to this person with the accusation, “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.”

Although traffic passes by the site of the accident as usual, whoever passes the place remembers what happened there and is left with an impression. We are all obligated by what transpired. It was on account of our sins that Yaakov died. And if we don’t rectify this state, his blood that was spilled on that Friday will call out from the ground, just like the blood of Zechariah the Prophet, which boiled for years on the floor of the Beit Hamikdash (*Gittin* 57b).

There are two types of bloodshed. The first is when someone is killed, and the second is when someone dies tragically, such as in a road accident. “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” teaches us that the ground has life and refuses to accept the blood that was shed in this way. Bloodshed is analogous to sin. One who sins is likened to one who sheds blood in that place. The ground does not want people to sin upon her.

Moreover, the ground is like our brother, for after one hundred and twenty years, we return to the ground. As it says (*Bereishit* 3:19), “For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.” The earth knows the definition of the commandment to rest in the seventh year, yet you don’t recognize this. This earth, which accepted upon herself since the Creation of the world, to rest, is now crying out because she refuses to accept the blood of the innocent.

Although *Shemittah* applies only in Eretz Yisrael, its inherent lesson of having faith in Hashem is applicable to all of us, wherever we live.

We should learn from the story of Kimchit, who merited her seven sons serving as Kohanim Gedolim due to her great modesty. She feared lest the walls of her house see the hair on her head. If that were to happen, the walls would shout: “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me.” When a person sins, the walls of his house are in anguish; the ground cries out; the vessels of his house, his bed, and his books weep. A person must take this message to heart. If death has taken hold in this place, the residents must devise ways to expel it. This tragedy will continue to affect us for a long time, especially those who witnessed it.

The man who called me that Friday and related the story of the accident was very shaken by the entire incident. “I am doing teshuvah,” he stated, “From this minute onward. I have seen many films, but I have never seen anything like this. What should I do?” I answered, “Return to Hashem. You have begun the teshuvah process; don’t stop mid-way. Keep at it; Hashem demands that each person should constantly improve himself. Our Sages teach (*Avot* 2:20): ‘The day is short, the task is great; the laborers are lazy, the wage is great, and the Master of the house is insistent.’ Continue in your path of teshuvah without letup.”

### **Each Person Should Help His Friend and Strengthen His Brother**

How can we, indeed, strengthen and awaken ourselves? Our entire purpose is, Baruch Hashem, to instill Torah in this place. Everyone’s help is needed to achieve this goal. Each person should guard his friend and be concerned for his needs as though he were a brother. The Gemara (*Yevamot* 62b) relates that Rabbi Akiva had twenty-four thousand disciples who perished between Pesach and Shavuot. They died because they did not respect each other sufficiently. Let us imagine how many funerals Rabbi Akiva attended each day. He buried an average of one

thousand pupils a day. He must have shed rivers of tears every single day over his deceased students.

How can we understand that great *Tannai'm* did not respect each other? Chazal do not tell us that they didn't *love* each other, but that they didn't give ample *respect* to one another. When a student entered the study hall, maybe no one bothered to hand him a Gemara, or direct him to the sefer he needed. It could be that one of them took a specific sefer and used it all day long, not paying attention to his colleagues who may have wanted to learn from it. For reasons such as these they died, for Hashem is punctilious with tzaddikim, to a hairsbreadth (*Bava Kama* 50b). We should always show concern for others.

The following story illustrates this point. This took place in the yeshiva in Lyon, on the first Motza'ei Yom Kippur that we spent there. After the fast, the students all went home, and I remained, waiting for the cleaning man. Suddenly, a woman entered with her husband, adamantly demanding to be allowed to immerse in the *mikveh* of the yeshiva. The *mikveh* was, understandably, very dirty after Yom Kippur. There was a note stating where one could find a suitable place to immerse. The woman refused to depart, stating that she had vowed to use only this *mikveh*, and if not, she would return home without immersing.

At that moment, I recalled a saying of Chazal (*Rema, Orach Chaim* 624:5) that on Motza'ei Yom Kippur we are meticulous to begin with a mitzvah, that of building the sukkah. Since I was unable to build a sukkah that evening, I decided to do a different mitzvah. With my own hands, I emptied the *mikveh* water and cleaned the place till it was spotless. Then I refilled the *mikveh*, so that after more than a two-hour wait the woman was finally able to immerse. After the entire episode, I returned home, feeling the satisfaction and joy of having performed a mitzvah. You cannot fathom how exhilarated I felt. I received no monetary remuneration for this act, and I arrived home late, but I had the good feeling that I had personally helped another Jew.

There are many different ways to help others. If one cannot do so monetarily, one can at least offer a good word. Sometimes, one can offer physical help. For example, someone can offer to clean the communal garden in order to prevent quarrels with neighbors who leave litter there. Such actions demonstrate respect of one another. Failing to show deference to another person by not concerning oneself with his problems is an indication of not truly caring for him. This type of conduct has no place among the Jewish people. We are all responsible for each other. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 27b; *Shavuot* 39a) states that all of Yisrael are accountable for each other. One may not say that someone else's problems are no concern of his. When a member of the community has a problem, it is the problem of the whole community; when a member of the community is blessed, we all feel joy. We are all interconnected, so we must make sure to respect each other appropriately.

We can add the following idea. The word דם (blood) is numerically equivalent to the word אדם (a person), after adding one for the word itself. This indicates that the life of a person lies within his blood. The pasuk (*Devarim* 12:23) says, "For the blood, it is the life." The blood is what keeps a person alive. But it is inside a person, unseen. One can be righteous on the outside, yet rotten on the inside. One could even be a murderer without anyone knowing about it. We should labor to be perfect on the inside as well as on the outside.

Furthermore, when a person dies, his blood gets cold and coagulates. A living person's blood is always warm, even if he has a cold nature. We can learn a lesson from this concerning our Avodat Hashem. A person can be "cold" in his service of Hashem, exhibiting no warmth or vitality in performing mitzvot whatsoever. He may also display this coldness by a lack of feeling toward others. Therefore, he should "heat himself up" in his service of Hashem, just as his blood is constantly hot. The pasuk in Tehillim (115:17) states, "The dead cannot praise Hashem." One who lives his life with a burning desire to do the will of Hashem will arrive in the World to Come heated up with love of Hashem.

The blood of the *niftar* is crying out to us from the ground. It demands an accounting for all that has happened. It cries out for all to take heed and serve Hashem with fire. This will bring the *niftar* his *tikkun*.

It is forbidden to say that last week a similar incident occurred in Beit Shemesh, or someplace else, because it should not happen anywhere. Now that it has happened, the entire community should take heart. Had I been living here, I would also certainly have worried lest my son was involved. Hashem Yitbarach relieved you of the sorrow of losing a son, but the community as a whole has been affected. A bereaved father resides among you, a father who grieves for his young son. He was smitten as atonement for the whole community. We should not forget this.

But we have a question. How can we compensate the boy, Yaakov, who is certainly here with us? Chazal teach us (*Berachot* 18b), “Tzaddikim, in their deaths, are called living.” It is known that the death of a young boy is likened to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, because he is a tzaddik (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b). If so, we must mourn him and shed tears. How can we comfort the boy who perished without having reached his bar mitzvah or marriage and building a Jewish home? What solace can we give his father? How can we console him?

One way to comfort him is by strengthening ourselves in the *middah* of *tzeniut*, which is directly connected to the attribute of cleanliness. According to Kabbalah (*Zohar* III, 53b), the *Shechinah* does not reside where there is impurity. Furthermore, Chazal tell us (*Avodah Zarah* 20b) that cleanliness brings a person to *ruach hakodesh* and to holiness, as it says (Tehillim 26:6), “I wash my hands in purity.” Before the Kohanim entered the Beit Hamikdash to do the service there, they would wash their hands and feet to purify themselves. The *Shechinah* resides only in a clean environment. We should not underestimate the importance of this matter, but take it to heart.

I live in France, where, Baruch Hashem, I have established several communities. I have had contact with many different people, both poor and wealthy. We should realize that however wealthy or esteemed a person is in this world, he does not take these attributes to the World to Come. It is only our spiritual attainments that we take with us to the next world. Edmund Safra was a well-known philanthropist who built Batei Midrashot and yeshivot, and helped widows and orphans. Upon his tombstone it is not written: "Here rests the great businessman who had many businesses and banks all over the world..." We don't take anything along with us to the next world. Our merchandise there is only Torah and good deeds. Chazal say (*Pesachim* 50a; *Bava Batra* 10b), "Fortunate is he who arrives here (at the next world), and his Talmud is in his hand." I am not coming to enforce any rules, merely to make suggestions.

I would like to emphasize the power of the attribute of cleanliness with the following anecdote. Once, I felt no inspiration in my tefillot. I even fell asleep while praying. Afterwards, I contemplated the matter for a long time. I was concerned about why I couldn't muster the proper concentration on tefillin and tefillah. After a week, I found out that there was a bad odor in the place where I had prayed. Upon searching, I discovered a dead mouse nearby...then I understood everything. During the time of the Beit Hamikdash, when someone touched an impure creature, he was forbidden to enter the Temple until he immersed in a *mikveh*, because the *Shechinah* rests only upon a clean and pure place.

We should also reinforce ourselves in matters of *kedushah*. Every Jewish home needs much protection. The pasuk (*Esther* 1:22), "Every man should rule in his own home, and speak the language of his own people" refers to speaking the language and ideas of the Torah. Baruch Hashem, there are many capable Rabbanim here who can transmit Torah knowledge. Everyone should strive to pursue Torah ideals and strengthen himself spiritually. In this manner, we will take a lasting message from the death of the boy Yaakov, z"l.

I recall relating a story about a man whose wife was pregnant with four fetuses. The doctors recommended removing two of them because they were endangering the mother. I told her not to have any of them aborted. But the husband said that the doctors were adamant about removing two. I responded, “Do you have faith and trust in the Creator of the world?” To which he said, “Yes.” So I continued, “Hashem gave a woman a womb in order to produce healthy, living children.” Here is this man, sitting beside me, a man who has strong belief in Hashem. His faith has strengthened our faith. Had he heeded the doctors, he may have had only two children today. But he affirmed his trust in Hashem, and he has four healthy children. Although he is not a Torah scholar, he has tremendous faith in Hashem and does many mitzvot. Such a person is worthy of blessing others. We have much to learn from him.

May Hashem grant you blessing and success in all your endeavors, and may the merit of my fathers protect you, Amen.

### — In Summary —

- Chazal tell us that when someone in the community dies, the entire community should be concerned. Initially, each person was worried that it was his son who was injured, but, in the end, were relieved that this was not the case. But Yaakov perished, and the loss belongs to us all. We must all strengthen ourselves in Torah and teshuvah.
- Why did this happen? It could be that we were not going in the ways of the Torah. Maybe we have not kept *Shemittah* carefully, or given *tzedakah*. Maybe our level of faith and trust in Hashem is not as it should be. The parshiyot of Behar and Bechukotai are juxtaposed to teach us that there is no faith without Torah; and there is no Torah without faith. If we feel that things are difficult for us, we should know that we are making a mistake. We have no problems to speak of, for everything is in the hands of Hashem and He is capable of resolving all matters. This horrifying tragedy should wake us up to do teshuvah in these areas.
- We find that Hashem questioned Cain, “Where is your brother, Hevel?” To which Cain responded, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” When a troubling incident

takes place, Hashem is telling us that the blood of our brother is crying out from the ground, like that of the youth, Yaakov, who was run over. The ground screams out that she doesn't want to accept the blood; she doesn't want to be involved in bloodshed. Blood is sin, and one who sins is considered as having shed blood. Thus the ground cries out to us to rectify our sins.

- We should take a lesson from the earth. If she allows herself to lie fallow in accordance with the mitzvah of *Shemittah*, in order to do the will of Hashem, shouldn't we also learn to do the will of Hashem?! We should also learn from the story of Kimchit. The walls shout, the ground shouts, the vessels shout, every item shouts to us to do teshuvah. We must treat each other respectfully in all areas, monetarily and physically. As we know, all of Klal Yisrael are accountable for each other.
- The word **קָרָא** has the same *gematria* as the word **קָרָא** (after adding one for the word itself). A person can remain cold, even if his blood is warm. Our task is to maintain warmth in our service of Hashem, and show warmth to our fellow man. We should all take upon ourselves some measure of improvement in the wake of the terrible tragedy that has taken place. How can we console the boy and his bereaved father? We should strengthen our *tzeniut* and remember that the *Shechinah* can reside only in a clean place. We should also strive for spiritual cleanliness, for purity, for Torah values, for clean speech, and to increase our Torah and good deeds. Only these assets does a person bring with him to the World to Come. Mainly, one should gird himself with faith and trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as we learn from the mitzvah of *Shemittah*. In this manner, Hashem will console the entire community, until the coming of Mashiach, may it be speedily in our days, Amen.

# GLOSSARY



Achdut – unity

Ahavat Hashem – love of Hashem

Ahavat Yisrael – love of one's fellow Jew

Akeidah, Akeidat Yitzchak – the Binding on the Altar of Yitzchak

Al kiddush Hashem – (to die) for the sake of Heaven

Amora, Amora'im (pl.) – Sage(s) of the Gemara

Amot – measurement

Anshei Keneset Hagedolah – the Men of the Great Assembly

Aron – Ark of the Covenant

Aron – coffin

Arvit – the nighttime prayer

Aseret Yemei Teshuvah – the Ten Days of Repentance (between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)

Aveirah, aveirot (pl.) – transgression

Avodah – service, in the Temple; or service of Hashem, specifically referring to prayer

Avodat Hashem – service of Hashem

Avot – Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Ayin hara – the evil eye

Ba'al teshuvah, ba'alei teshuvah (pl.) – (lit. master of return) one who has returned to Jewish observance

Bavel – Babylonia

Be'ezrat Hashem – with the help of Hashem

Bein Hameitzarim – (lit. “between the straits”) the three weeks between the seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah b’Av

Beit Din – rabbinical court

Beit Hakeneset, Batei Kenesiot (pl.) – house of prayer, synagogue

Beit Hamidrash, Batei Midrashot (pl.) – house of study

Beit Hamikdash – the Temple in Jerusalem

Ben, bnei (pl.) – son

Berachah, berachot (pl.) – blessing

Bikurim – gifts of the first fruits given to the Kohen in the Beit Hamikdash

Bircat Hamazon – Grace after meals

Bitul Torah – time wasted from Torah study

Bnei Yisrael – the Children of Israel

Brit – covenant, pact

Brit milah – circumcision

Chachamim – (lit. wise people) – Sages, teachers

Chametz – leavened bread, which is forbidden to be eaten on Pesach

Chas v’shalom – May G-d have mercy

Chashmonaim – Hasmoneans

Chassid – righteous person

Chatan – groom

Chazal – our Sages, may their memory be for blessing

Cheshbon hanefesh – spiritual accounting

Chessed – acts of kindness

Chet Hameraglim – the sin of the Spies sent to Eretz Yisrael in the days of the Wilderness

Chillul Hashem – desecration of Hashem’s Name

Chillul Shabbat – desecration of Shabbat

Chitzonim – negative forces

Chizuk – encouragement

Chuppah – wedding canopy

Churban – destruction, referring to the Beit Hamikdash

Derech erez – proper behavior, character refinement

Duda'im – flowers which assist in conception

Eglah arufah – a calf whose neck was broken as atonement for the death of person found between two cities

Eishet chayil – woman of valor

Eiruv, eirubin – a rabbinical enactment of an area in which one can carry on Shabbat

Emunah – belief, faith

Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel

Erev – the eve of (Shabbat)

Gadol hador – leading Torah authority of the generation

Gedolei Yisrael – leading Torah scholars

Galut – exile

Gematria – numerical value

Gemilut chassadim – acts of loving-kindness

Geulah – redemption

Gevurah – strength

Hakadosh Baruch Hu – Hashem

Hakarat hatov – gratitude, appreciation

Halachah, halachot (pl.) – Jewish law; edict

Halachic – according to Jewish law

Hechsher – Rabbinic certification indicating that food is kosher

Hilchot – the laws of...

- Hilula – celebration conducted on the anniversary of a tzaddik’s death
- Kabbalah – hidden facets of the Torah
- Kabbalists – those who learn Kabbalah
- Kabbalat HaTorah – the receiving of the Torah
- Kallah – bride
- Kavanah – intent, concentration
- Kedushah – holiness, sanctity
- Kelippah, kelippot (pl.) – force of impurity
- Ketoret – incense
- Kiddush Hashem – sanctification of Hashem’s Name
- Kiruv rechokim – reaching out to bring unaffiliated Jews closer to Hashem
- Kodesh Hakodashim – the Holy of Holies, the Inner Sanctuary in the Beit Hamikdash
- Kohen – priest
- Kohen Gadol – high priest
- Kohen Mashiach – anointed Kohen
- Kollel – institute of learning for married students
- Korban, korbanot (pl.) – offering, sacrifice
- Kotel Hamaaravi – the Western Wall
- Kriyat Shema – the recital of the Shema
- L’shem Shamayim – for the sake of Heaven
- Lashon hakodesh – (lit. the holy tongue) Hebrew
- Lashon hara – evil speech, slander
- Leket, shikchah, and pe’ah – different mitzvot involving leaving grain for the poor in the field
- L’iluy nishmat – for the elevation of the soul of a deceased person
- Lishmah – for the sake of Heaven, with no ulterior motives
- Luchot, luchot habrit – the Tablets of the Covenant

- Maaser – a tithe; 10% of one’s earnings that one gives to charity
- Malchut – majesty, kingship
- Mashiach – the Messiah
- Matan Torah – the giving of the Torah
- Mazal – luck, good fortune
- Mechilah – forgiveness
- Mekubal – Kabbalist, one who delves into the hidden aspects of the Torah
- Menorah – candelabra in the Beit Hamikdash
- Meraglim – Spies
- Mesirut nefesh – self-sacrifice
- Mezuzah, mezuzot (pl.) – parchment containing Torah verses, commanded to be affixed to every doorpost
- Middah, middot (pl.) – character trait
- Middat Hadin – Attribute of Divine Judgment
- Middat Harachamim – Attribute of Divine Mercy
- Midrash – homiletical teachings of the Sages
- Mikveh, mikvaot (pl.) – body of water for ritual immersion and purification
- Minchah – the afternoon prayer
- Mishkan – the Tabernacle in Shiloh
- Mitzrayim – Egypt
- Mitzvah, mitzvot (pl.) – good deed; commandment
- Muktzeh – objects which are forbidden to be moved on Shabbat
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- Nachat – joy or pleasure from another’s accomplishments
- Nasi, Nesi’im (pl.) – prince, leader of the Jewish people
- Navi – prophet
- Nazir – person who accepts certain restrictions in order to attain a high level of purity
- Nefesh – soul
- Neshamah, neshamot (pl.) – soul

Netilat yadayim – ritual washing of the hands

Niddah – a woman who became impure due to her menstrual cycle

Niftar – one who has passed away

Nisayon, nisyonot (pl.) – test, challenging situation

Nitzotz, nitzotzot (pl.) – sparks

Oht brit kodesh – brit milah

Olam Haba – the World to Come

Omer – the sacrifice brought from the new barley harvest on the second day of

Pesach

Orlah – foreskin

Parah adumah – the red heifer

Parashah, parshiyot (pl.) – chapter

Parnasah – livelihood

Pasuk, pesukim (pl.) – verse

Perishut – separation from immoral acts, restraint

Pe'ah – a corner of the field, left for the poor to gather its produce

Pirkei Avot (or Avot) – Ethics of the Fathers

Poskim – halachic authorities

Rabbanim – rabbis

Rachmana litzlan – May G-d's mercy be upon them

Rasha, reshaim (pl.) – evil person

Rosh Hashanah – the first day of the Jewish new year

Ruach – spirit

Ruach Hakodesh – Divine inspiration

Sandek – the person who holds the baby during a brit milah

Sanhedrin – the High Court

S'chach – the covering of the sukkah which forms its roof  
 Sefer – book,  
 Sefer Torah, Sifrei Torah (pl.) –Torah scroll(s)  
 Sefirah – behavior by which we perceive Hashem  
 Sefirat Haomer – the mitzvah to count the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot  
 Shacharit – the Morning Prayer  
 Shalom bayit – marital harmony  
 Shamayim – Heaven  
 Shas – the thirty-nine volumes of the Talmud  
 Shechinah – Divine presence  
 Sheloshim – the first thirty days of mourning, when the mourning is most intense  
 Shel rosh – phylacteries put on the head  
 Shel yad – phylacteries put on the arm  
 Shemoneh Esrei – prayer containing eighteen blessings, recited three times a day  
 Shemittah – the commandment to leave the land fallow for seven years, only applicable in Eretz Yisrael  
 Shevet, Shevatim (pl.) – tribe  
 Shidduch – marriage proposal, marriage partner  
 Shirah – song, praise  
 Shiur – Torah lecture  
 Shlita – may he live many good years, Amen  
 Shotrim – those who enforce the law  
 Simchah – joy/joyous occasion  
 Sinat chinam – baseless hatred  
 Sitra achra – the Satan  
 Siyata di'Shemaya – help from Heaven  
 Sukkah – temporary dwelling, which is used on the festival of Sukkot; thatched shelter for human or animal use

Ta'anit dibbur – lit. fast from speech, refraining from speaking for a set amount of time

Tahor – pure

Taharat hamishpachah – laws of family purity

Tallit – prayer shawl

Talmid – disciple, student

Talmid chacham – Torah scholar

Tanna, Tannai'm (pl.) – Sages of the Mishnah

Tefillah, tefillot (pl.) – prayer

Tefillin – phylacteries

Terumah – setting aside produce for the Kohen

Terumot and ma'asrot – mandated tithes on food grown in the Land of Israel

Teshuvah – (lit. return to Hashem) repentance

Tevilah – ritual immersion in a mikveh

Tikkun – rectification

Treif – non-kosher

Tumah – impurity

Tzaddik, tzaddikim (pl.) – righteous person

Tzaddeket – righteous woman

Tzaraat – a disease caused by the spiritual impurity of lashon hara (often translated as leprosy)

Tzedakah – charity

Tzeniut – modesty

Tzitzit – four-cornered garment with fringes, worn by men and boys

Ushpizin – seven shepherds of Israel

Viduy – confession

Yam Suf – the Sea of Reeds

Yerushalayim – Jerusalem

Yeshiva – rabbinical college

Yetzer Hara – evil inclination

Yetzer Hatov – good inclination

Yetziat Mitzrayim – Exodus from Egypt

Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven

Yirei Shamayim – those who fear Heaven

Yom Tov/Yamim Tovim – holiday(s)

Zechut – merit

Zechut Avot – merit of the forefathers

Zemirot – songs sung at the Shabbat table

Zimun – short prayer said as an introduction to Bircat Hamazon when there are three or more men present

Zman – time, semester

Zt”l – May the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing