

Pachad David

*On the
Festivals*

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***

First edition, Adar I, 5774

Jerusalem





לאשתי נו"ב

מרת ויויאן אסתר מנב"ת

שבוכות מסירות נפשה לתורה זכיתי להגיע עד הלום
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עוסקים בתורה, ולא תמוש התורה מפייהם עד עולם



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טוב מבנים ומבנות"**

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ת.נ.צ.ב.ה



"עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה"

התודה והברכה נתונה בזאת מאיתי
 לכל העוסקים והמסייעים בהחזקת המוסדות
 הקדושים ע"ש אבותי הקדושים זיע"א
 בארץ הקודש ובעולם כולו
 ולכל המסייעים בהוצאה המפוארת של הספרים

"פחד דוד"

זכות אבותי הקדושים זיע"א תגן עליהם
 להתברך בכל מילי דמיטב ברוחניות ובגשמיות,
 ויראו רוב ברכה והצלחה בעמלם
 ורוב נחת מכל יוצאי הלצם כל הימים, אכי"ר.

בברכת התורה ולומדיה
 ע"ה דוד חנניה פינטו



ברכתי ברכת בן לאמי היקרה

הרבנית מזל טוב תחי'
 אשת אבא מארי הרה"צ הקדוש
 רבי משה אהרן פינטו זיע"א
 אשר בלעדיה לא הייתי מגיע עד הלום
 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



May Hashem be glorified for allowing me, with His great mercy, the *zechut* to stand at the gateway to the English translation of the sefer *Pachad David* on the Jewish holidays. May it be His will that this volume be accepted in all Jewish communities, by those who appreciate the significance of the Jewish festivals.

On each festival, the same spiritual illumination fills the world that was present when the original miracle took place, many years ago. The same level of *kedushah* permeates the air, just as in those days. A person is able to gain an abundance of blessing from this *kedushah* during the festival. The Torah (*Vayikra* 23:44) tells us that “Moshe declared the appointed festivals of Hashem to the Children of Israel.” The *Sefat Emet* comments that the pasuk does not say that Moshe **spoke of** the appointed festivals, but that he **declared** the appointed festivals themselves. By transmitting the details of each holiday to the people, Moshe infused them with the blessing inherent in it. This was so that when the festival would be celebrated on the same date in the future, these blessings would arrive, as well. Am Yisrael are above the laws of nature. When a holiday comes, they return to the circumstances of the past, experiencing all of the *kedushah* and the miracles intrinsically connected with that particular time.

I would like to add that perhaps this is why we recite in the *Al Hanissim* prayer, “In those days, at this time.” Even nowadays, we merit becoming illuminated, once again, by the light that shone so brilliantly in the original days when the miracle took place. Thus, during the festivals, a person can soak up an abundance of *kedushah* and purity

and thereby fill himself with pure *yirat Shamayim* and *ahavat Hashem*, which will stand by him throughout the year.

Each festival has its own unique quality. It is a person's obligation to extract that specific property and adopt it for himself as "food for the road" on his journey through the calendar. This spiritual illumination will influence his entire Avodat Hashem. Let us take Pesach as an example. Pesach is when one has the ability to gain simple faith in the Creator. Hashem released our forefathers from Egyptian bondage, from the valley of eternal enslavement. Bnei Yisrael merited leaving with great might, before the eyes of everyone. Even in our generation, we can access this feature of freedom. After Hashem withdrew Bnei Yisrael from the forty-ninth level of impurity, they corrected their character traits, day by day, until they arrived at the forty-ninth level of purity and were worthy of accepting the Torah. This sealed their release from the house of bondage that was Egypt. With *Kabbalat HaTorah*, they became truly free men, as the Mishnah states (*Avot 6:2*), "The truly free man is one who is involved in Torah."

Another example is the Yamim Noraim. During these days, great illumination is shone upon the world, lighting the way for man to do teshuvah and correct his actions. The virtues of teshuvah are described at length in various sefarim. The entire concept of teshuvah is a kindness from Hashem, which we cannot fathom at all. It is based completely on Hashem's compassion for us. Teshuvah is so tremendous that our Sages (*Berachot 34b*) say, "In a place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim cannot stand."

After a person has corrected his thoughts and deeds, subduing his *Yetzer Hara*, he is ready to be sheltered in the sukkah, under the shadow of the *Shechinah*. On Sukkot, man leaves his permanent residence. A house gives a person the feeling that this world is permanent and everlasting. To negate this feeling, the Torah commands us to go out to a temporary dwelling. This is not a one-time

command, but is mandated every year. This is because after the seven days of Sukkot, one returns to his home once again feeling that this is the world of permanence. Therefore, on Sukkot of the following year, he must again move out of his home, in order to remember that this world is transient.

The sukkah is a temporary residence, consisting of flimsy walls and a roof of *s'chach*. It may not have a thick roof like a house. One must be able to look through the covering and see the sky. This will give him a connection with Hashem and His *Shechinah*. This is the meaning of dwelling in the Shadow of Faith. In this manner, one will be worthy of celebrating the holiday of Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah with the true joy of Torah study and the knowledge that he has a part in upholding the world.

Chanukah teaches the importance of giving over to his children pure Jewish outlook. During the days of the Chashmonaim, Am Yisrael were in great spiritual peril. Many of them had defected from the ways of the Torah and become Hellenists, for they had been educated with the heretical thoughts of the depraved Greek culture. The entire objective of the Greeks was to detach Am Yisrael from their heritage and sever their connection with pure Jewish education, in order to distance them from Hashem and His Torah. They understood that it is difficult to change the patterns of the elders, for they are set in their ways and have established their lifestyles. Therefore, they chose to foist their noxious notions upon the pure *neshamot* of the youth. They invested all of their energies toward this end, realizing that once the youth would absorb their twisted outlook, they would follow it throughout their lives.

One of the decrees of the Greeks was that the Jews were forced to write on the horns of their oxen "We have no portion with the G-d of Israel." Why specifically on the horn of their oxen? In those days, the horn of an ox was used as a bottle, from which they would feed their

babies. The Greeks wanted these words of heresy to enter the Jewish babies from the earliest age, together with their mothers' milk.

But Hashem took pity on His nation. He gave might to a few tzaddikim, Mattityahu and his sons, the Chashmonaim. They sacrificed their lives to fight the Greeks. Hashem delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, and returned the crown of Torah to its former glory. Am Yisrael returned to pure *chinuch*, as established from time immemorial.

Chanukah revolves around providing our children with this pure Jewish *chinuch*. During candle lighting, one should remember to educate his children to Torah and mitzvot, instilling the Torah into their pure souls. This is how he ignites the candle of their *neshamah*, which is the main objective in lighting the Chanukah lights. Chazal teach (*Shabbat* 23b), "One who lights candles consistently merits sons who are *talmidei chachamim*." The Chanukah candles light up our path, the path of pure education based on Torah.

The festival of Purim occurs in the month of Adar. The *Chiddushei HaRim* writes that the word אדר has the same root as the word דירה (residence). I would like to suggest that on Purim, one is required to sanctify himself and rise spiritually, to the point that Hashem will wish to reside within him. Just as in the days of Mordechai and Esther, when a great light descended upon Bnei Yisrael, and they willingly accepted the Torah (see *Shabbat* 88a), this light shines every Purim, year after year. It brings upon us many blessings.

However, one must know how to utilize this illumination properly. He must sanctify himself in Torah study and delve into it with love and eagerness. He must purify his thoughts, removing all improper ideas from his heart. This will make his body into a fitting vessel in which the *Shechinah* can dwell, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them." The *Alshich Hakadosh* comments that the pasuk does not say "so that I may dwell in **it**," but "so that I may dwell in **them**." This teaches us that

Hashem wishes to rest his *Shechinah* upon each and every Jew.

Certain forms of labor are prohibited on the festivals. One must halt his daily activities and rest on them. This gives a person pause to contemplate the miracle that took place at that time of year and draw inspiration from it for the rest of the year.

Based on this, we can understand why even Tishah b'Av is called “a festival,” as the pasuk states (*Eichah* 1:15), “He proclaimed a set time against me.” The word מועד (set time) denotes a holiday. How is it possible to call Tishah b'Av a holiday, when all are mourning and weeping? This was when tens of thousands of Am Yisrael died grisly deaths, in thirst and hunger and tremendous deprivation. This day seems to be the polar opposite of what we would term מועד, a word which conjures up scenes of feasting and joy. The pasuk, though, teaches us that although Tishah b'Av is, indeed, a day of sorrow, each of us has the potential to transform it into a day of joy. It all depends on us. If we strengthen our connection with our Creator, through increasing our Torah study, He will certainly change this day into one of joy.

This is Yirmeyahu's intent by calling Tishah b'Av a “set time.” All of the Jewish holidays have specific dates. Sukkot falls on the 15th of Tishrei, Pesach on the 15th of Nisan, Shavuot on the 6th of Sivan, etc. But the date of the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and the coming of Mashiach are not specified. The redemption can take place even today, if we but heed His call (*Tehillim* 95:7). The statement of the prophet, “He proclaimed a set time against me” is worded most accurately. Each of us bears the responsibility of this set time. Every person should think: “It depends on me. I must correct my deeds and strengthen my connection with Hashem through Torah study.” Hashem yearns for the day that He can redeem us eternally from the darkness of this *galut*. Our job is to take the first step, by reconnecting to Him through Torah study.

This is hinted to by the words of Eichah: “He proclaimed a set time against me.” The *gematria* of the word קרא (proclaimed), adding one for the word itself, equals that of the word קרב (close), as well as קבר (burial plot). On the one hand, we have the ability to bring the holiday of the redemption closer, changing it into a day of joy and festivity, an eternal salvation. On the other hand, we can “bury” the day, postponing redemption indefinitely. Our deeds either bring us closer to the redemption, or distance us from it.

This, then, is the essence of the festivals and the *kedushah* inherent within them. They should be designated for increasing one’s fear of Hashem through learning Torah and longing for the redemption. In this sefer, I have attempted, with Hashem’s kindness, to commit these thoughts to paper so that all who wish to ascend, little by little, one level after another, with purity of soul, will have the merit to do so.

With praise and thanksgiving for all of His kindnesses to me, and with the prayer that He never leave me, continuing to bestow goodness upon me, I would like to thank **the Living G-d, Master of all, Creator of the heavens and earth**. I pray for His salvation always, Amen.

He has dealt me immense kindness in the form of my dear wife, blessed among women, the **Rabbanit Viviane Esther, tichyeh**. With her added measure of wisdom, she sacrifices her life day and night to help me support the bastions of Torah in Eretz Yisrael and throughout the world.

With *mesirut nefesh*, she undertakes to deal with all aspects of the household, including the education of our children, so that I might continue bringing merit to the public. How fitting for her are the words of Shlomo Hamelech (*Mishlei* 31:29), “Many women have amassed achievement, but you have surpassed them all.” If not for her dedication and support, I would never be able to involve myself and ascend in my holy endeavors. She deserves the praise which Rabbi

Akiva accorded his wife, “Mine and yours are hers.” May Hashem allow us together to see true *nachat* from all of our children, watching them ascend the road to the House of Hashem, with pure *yirat Shamayim*, Amen.

I would like to bless my beloved sons, may they live long. First of all, I give my blessings to my firstborn, **Rabbi Refael Meir Amram, shlita**, and **his wife, tichyeh**, who stands staunchly at his side. He constantly devotes himself to increase Torah throughout the world. Apart from the kollelim which he heads, *Baruch Hashem*, he dedicates himself to *kiruv rechokim*, giving others a taste of pure Torah Judaism. May Hashem be satisfied with his deeds, and may he and his wife have much *nachat* from their dear children, Amen.

I would like to bless my dear son, **Rabbi Moshe Aharon Yoshiyahu, shlita**. He sanctifies his days and energies with spreading the sweetness of Torah to others, the wonderful young *bachurim*, who ascend in *yirat Shamayim* daily. May **his wife**, who always supports him, be blessed, as well. “May Hashem bless you and protect you” is my *berachah* to their wise son, **Chaim Sa’adyah Yehudah Yisrael, may he live long**. May he in the future bring glory to his family, Amen.

I would like to extend a father’s blessing to my precious son, **Rabbi Yoel Yichyeh Shlomo, shlita**, who extends himself to bring back wayward sons to their Father in Heaven. He works tirelessly to shine the light of Torah in the darkness of *galut*. May Hashem grant him the energy to continue his tremendous work, May Hashem bless him and his kallah **Orly Attar** with every blessing.

I extend my heartfelt blessing to my dear son, **Rabbi Michael Yosef Alexander, shlita**, who sacrifices himself for Torah study, always in the most pleasant way. He strengthens the hearts of those who observe him, for he portrays the true *ben Torah* and *yarei Shamayim*.

I would like to bestow my warm wishes upon my dear son-in-law, **Rabbi Yitzchak Saban, shlita**, and **his wife**, my dear daughter, **Mrs.**

Sarah Ruby Aisha, tichyeh. They consecrate all of their time to raise the banner of Torah. They support Torah institutions. May they see much *nachat* from their dear children.

My blessings go to my dear daughters, **Julie Mamach Miriam Yehudit, tichyeh,** and **Arielle Chanani Mazal Leah, tichyeh.** May we see them growing in the ways of Torah, and merit that they should soon stand under the chuppah, Amen.

I would like to give the blessings of Torah to all of the esteemed Rabbanim, shlita, who stand at the helm of our kollelim and yeshivot. I extend my blessing to the avrechim in the kollelim and the *bachurim* in the yeshivot, as well. They devote all their time to Torah study, with utmost mesirut nefesh, in all of our institutions, *Orot Chaim U'Moshe,* and *Peninei David* in Eretz Hakodesh, France, the United States, and Argentina. May they merit upholding Torah and glorifying it amidst peace and calm, constantly sharing their Torah knowledge with others, Amen.

I would like to mention all those who are generous of heart, who come to the aid of the Torah scholars, supporting our institutions with an open hand. They literally give life to those who “kill themselves in the tents of Torah.” May the *zechut* of supporting Torah scholars stand by them forever, as Mishlei states (3:18), “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.”

May it be Hashem’s will that the merit of the holy words written here influence us all, as well as our brethren wherever they may be, and that we soon see the rebuilding of Hashem’s Palace, when He will return His redeemed ones to Tzion, may it be speedily in our day, Amen.

Signing for the honor of the Torah,

The servant of Hashem,

David Chananya Pinto

ELUL



FORTUNATE IS THE NATION THAT RECOGNIZES THE SHOFAR'S BLAST

“A lion has roared; who will not fear?”

(Amos 3:8)

The days of Elul are days of mercy, days of preparation for the approaching Yamim Noraim. One is seized with great fear, in awe of the majesty of Hashem, Who sits on the Throne of Justice, meeting out judgment for each person's deeds. One is gripped by anxiety as to his upcoming verdict. Will he emerge innocent? A person is naturally fearful of the outcome of a trial conducted by a human judge. How much more must we tremble before the judgment of the King of kings!

But fear alone is insufficient to cleanse us of our spiritual maladies, rendering us pure on the Day of Judgment. Teshuvah and regret are the most important factors in obtaining absolution.

We have been given the gift of the days of Elul for this reason. They invite us to strengthen our bond with Hashem Yitbarach. Our Sages say (as quoted in *Mishnah Berurah* 581) that the initials of the words אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי (I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine) form the word אֵלּוּל (Elul), inferring that the objective of these days is to forge a connection with Hashem.

In order for Hashem to become close to us, we must make every effort to become close to Him. We should actively seek Him out and cleave to Him, as the pasuk commands (*Devarim* 30:20), “And you shall cleave to Him.”

A person is obligated to yearn to be close to Hashem. He should subjugate his ego and devote all his actions to Him. There is no option of being partially attached to Hashem and partially connected to physical, worldly pleasures. One must constantly be in a state of belonging to Hashem, being dedicated to Him. In that case, he will belong to Hashem, and Hashem will belong to him, showing His dedication toward him measure for measure.

Man’s *avodah* in this world is to awaken the spark of Divinity that is within him. Then, he will feel Hashem’s closeness to him. His life will be intertwined with Hashem, each bound with the other. This is the ultimate definition of “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.”

The month of Elul is designated for this connection. It is the month propitious for relinquishing physical pleasures, to become complete in body and soul, entirely devoted to Hashem.

During the rest of the year, a person is involved with his livelihood and physical sustenance. Even if he sets aside times for Torah study and does mitzvot, the burdens of earning a living may draw him away from Hashem, without him even realizing. He is liable, with time, to drift farther and farther away from Hashem. The month of Elul comes, with its inherent powers, to renew and repair the bond between man and Hashem. Hashem desires to be close to us.

In order for this process to be effective, a person must subjugate himself to Hashem, strengthening the connection between himself and his Creator. This connection takes place specifically on Rosh Hashanah, the day of the creation of Adam Harishon, the day he was pure and free of sin (see *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* 8; *Zohar* III, 100b). Thus,

Rosh Hashanah is the opportune time for a person to once again attain the status of Adam before the sin.

The work increases as the Day of Judgment approaches. The *Yetzer Hara* constantly tries to make one stumble, especially during these days. His situation can be compared to that of a person who must reach a goal by a certain time. He rushes in order to meet his deadline, but, just as he is about to reach his goal, at the height of his activity, he is overtaken by exhaustion. Since he is restricted by his time frame, he tries to ignore his fatigue. For, if he halts his work, he will miss the deadline and lose all the profit he would have made, rendering all his efforts worthless.

Similarly, as the Day of Judgment draws nearer, the *Yetzer Hara* tries to cause one to sin in many different areas, in order that he will miss the date specified for teshuvah. Then he will miss the opportunity to rectify his previous misdeeds, and also fall into the clutches of the *Sitra Achra*. He fails to utilize this time to nullify his ego before Hashem in order to prevent the forces of falsehood from controlling him. In this manner, all his previous steps in teshuvah are nullified.

The motif of Chodesh Elul is nullifying one's ego for the sake of our Beloved, Hashem. This is the goal of the shofar blasts during this month, that cry out to man, "Repent, repent from your evil ways" (*Yechezkel* 33:11). Hashem desires that we return to Him, through the power inherent in the month, the power of "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine."

However, Hashem's call to a person is not enough to effect the process of teshuvah. One must take the first step. Chazal state (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3), "Open for me an opening the size of a needle's hole..." in order to return to Hashem. One is enjoined to hearken to the call of the month, the call to renew his connection with Hashem. The Rambam writes, "Wake up, you sleepers, from your sleep; you slumberers, arise from your slumber." The *Navi* states (*Yonah* 1:6),

“How can you sleep so soundly? Arise! Call to your G-d!” The Gemara instructs us (*Yoma* 38b), “Return to Him, for He waits to renew His eternal bond with you. If you will make an effort to reestablish your connection with Hashem, He will surely assist you, as we know that ‘one who comes to purify himself, is aided by Heaven.’”

This is truly amazing. Hashem’s kindness never ends. It is so vast that Hashem Himself calls out to His people, “Return to Me, and I will return to you. I desire to renew My connection with you. Even though you angered Me throughout the year, I now desire your closeness and ask you to return to Me.”

If one would only take heed of this call, subjugating himself to Hashem as a devoted servant, he would reap untold benefits. As a consequence of his actions, Hashem will be near to him, as the pasuk continues, “and my Beloved is mine.”

A person can attain this level only by subjecting his core essence to Hashem Yitbarach. By doing so, he will attain the highest level possible, belonging to Hashem, and having Hashem belong to him.

This is the tremendous pleasure that he will experience on Rosh Hashanah, after renewing his bond with his Creator through purifying himself and perfecting his *avodah* throughout the days of Elul. This concept is above our understanding.

“Fortunate are the people who know the shofar’s blasts” (*Tehillim* 89:16). When the shofar is sounded on Rosh Hashanah, fortunate are the people who took heed of its call during the month of Elul. Now, on Rosh Hashanah “by the illumination of Your countenance they walk” (*ibid.*). They walk together with Hashem, as they have reached the epitome of closeness to Him on Rosh Hashanah, after a month of self-arousal and returning to Him with a perfect heart.

Rosh Hashanah – Days of Judgment

What we have said sheds light on the nature of Rosh Hashanah. The two days of Rosh Hashanah are days of judgment, when the Books of the Dead and the Living are brought before Hashem (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b). On this day, all creatures of the world pass before Him like sheep (ibid. 16a), to be judged for life or death. Who will be written immediately for death, and who will be written immediately in the book of tzaddikim, for good life?

The judgment that takes place on Rosh Hashanah is also inferred by Chazal from the pasuk (*Tehillim* 81:4), “Blow the shofar at the moon’s renewal, at the time appointed for our festive day.” On this day, Hashem sits upon the Seat of Justice, to judge all creatures (*Rosh Hashanah* 8b).

However, we do not find that this is mentioned in the Torah. Why isn’t Rosh Hashanah referred to there as the Day of Judgment?

In regard to Rosh Hashanah, the Torah states (*Bamidbar* 29:1), “It shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you.” This means that we are instructed to blow the shofar then. Furthermore, the Torah describes these days as days of joy and festivity, as it says (*Bamidbar* 10:10), “On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals, and on your new moons, you shall sound the trumpets... and they shall be a remembrance for you before your G-d; I am Hashem, your G-d.”

The Torah emphasizes these days as days of happiness. Why is there no mention of the judgment that takes place on them?

This can be answered in line with what we previously explained. Throughout the month of Elul, a proclamation emanates from a man’s heart urging him to return to Hashem in teshuvah and subjugate his ego to Him. This is effected by the sound of the shofar that is heard every day, during *Selichot*. The shofar announces the Day of Judgment, which is fast approaching.

In general, when a person is awakened in a strong manner, it is in order to make sure that he should not fall into a coma or an eternal sleep. He receives a rude awakening in order to verify his existence on this earth. Likewise, all the preparations of Elul are for the great and awesome day that is on the horizon, the Day of Judgment. If one does not arouse himself to renew the bond between himself and Hashem, he will be brought to justice. Who can know what awaits him? Any thinking person realizes this.

After one has spent the entire month of Elul in teshuvah, renewing his bond with Hashem and becoming one with Him, Rosh Hashanah will automatically be a day of joy and festivity for him, a day of reconnecting with Hashem. Then, certainly, he will emerge victorious in judgment and have success in subduing his *Yetzer Hara*. He will be spared the fate of death, as he prepared himself properly during Elul.

Therefore, Rosh Hashanah is not called “the Day of Judgment” in the Torah, in order that we should relate to this day as one of forgiveness and atonement. Consequently, the Torah emphasizes the aspect of joy and happiness, which are the result of atonement.

But, because the Satan prosecutes, since there is nothing which he desires less than a person’s teshuvah, and he is certainly not pleased with the renewal of a person’s bond with Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, we are commanded to blow the shofar on this day. This is because the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah confuses the Satan (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b). He observes that during Elul we sit when the shofar is blown at the end of Shacharit, whereas on Rosh Hashanah we stand during the shofar blowing. Thus, the shofar’s blast chases away the *Yetzer Hara*, preventing him from prosecuting.

This is similar to when trumpets are blown in war in order to frighten the enemy into fleeing. Even when they possess large amounts of artillery, when they hear the blasts of the trumpets, they are overcome with fear and confusion and flee from the battlefield.

The mitzvah of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is in order to extract an arousal to teshuvah from a person's heart and banish the Satan. Then he will feel close to Hashem, and will be able to achieve great things in the coming year, freed of the persuasion of the *Yetzer Hara*.

In order to be able to constantly elevate oneself in the ways of Hashem, he must be prepared to conduct himself with *mesirut nefesh*. In order to perfect himself in this way, as Hashem desires, one should blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah with all his might.

There is an intrinsic difference between the shofar blasts of Elul and the shofar blasts that we sound on Rosh Hashanah. During Elul, the shofar blasts are an external impetus to awaken a person to teshuvah. Conversely, on Rosh Hashanah, one must extract the message of the shofar through his own efforts. This is to ensure that the renewal that he has experienced should remain with him throughout the new year.

Evidence of this can be found in the pasuk itself (*Bamidbar* 10:10), "On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals, and on your new moons, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt-offerings and over your feast peace-offerings." "On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals, and on your new moons" refers to Rosh Hashanah, the day of renewal of the connection between man and Hashem. "You shall sound the trumpets" means to sound blasts against the *Yetzer Hara*, who prevents one from approaching Hashem. "Over your burnt-offerings (עולותיכם)" hints to the constant elevation (התעלות) that one must strive for. "And over your feast-offering (זבחי)" means that one should act with self-sacrifice, as if he were bringing himself as an offering (זבח). "Your peace-offerings (שלמיכם)" infers that one should strive to reach perfection (שלימות).

Thus, if one elevates himself, sanctifying himself to Hashem like an offering, and making himself perfect in his *avodah*, he will be worthy of "and they shall be a remembrance for you before your G-d" – he will

always be remembered by Hashem. Moreover, this day will be perpetuated by Hashem throughout the year, since the *kedushah* of the day will spread throughout the rest of the year, in order that he should be remembered for good before Hashem.

For that reason, the days of Rosh Hashanah are not called days of judgment in the Torah, rather “days of joy and gladness.” For, when a person arouses himself throughout the month of Elul, renewing his ties with Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, they will certainly be days of happiness. He will emerge meritorious in judgment. This is Hashem’s desire: to make these days into happy ones for Bnei Yisrael.

This is expressed by the statement of the Tur (*Orach Chaim* 581): “Bnei Yisrael dress in white and wrap themselves in white clothing... and drink and are happy on Rosh Hashanah, for they know that Hashem will perform miracles for them.”

Rosh Hashanah is called a “Day of Remembering” because, by restoring one’s connection with Hashem, he will be remembered for good, not only on Rosh Hashanah, but throughout the year, as long as he draws the *kedushah* of these days with him all through the year.

The Benefit of Blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah

Since the shofar has such tremendous power, arousing Bnei Yisrael to teshuvah, and enabling them to be remembered positively by Hashem as a result of their renewed connection with Him, why doesn’t the Torah instruct us to blow the shofar every day of the year? Then we could confuse the Satan even further, as we ascend in holiness and purity, constantly reminding ourselves of our spiritual obligations. Why were we commanded to blow the shofar only on the two days of Rosh Hashanah, and not at any other time? (The shofar blowing at the end of Shacharit during Elul is a custom rather than a command.)

Furthermore, why isn’t our teshuvah, coupled with genuine tefillah, potent enough to confuse the Satan? We are constantly doing teshuvah

without the aid of the shofar. We see that throughout the year teshuvah is effective without us having to confuse the Satan in order that he should not disturb our prayers and good deeds. Why, then, do we need to use the shofar as part of the Rosh Hashanah service?

The shofar's blasts on Rosh Hashanah remind a person that he can always return to Hashem. They have the power to confuse the Satan for the entire forthcoming year. If one will, indeed, do teshuvah for any sin committed during the past year, the Satan will be unable to prosecute against this repentance. The sounds of the shofar reverberate throughout the year, arousing a person to do complete teshuvah at any given time.

The feelings of a person who merits seeing the king every single day cannot be compared to the feelings of one who sees the king only once a year. The excitement and anticipation of the latter are much greater.

This is illustrated by the plea of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 27:4), "Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to contemplate in His Sanctuary." The sefer *Imrei Shefer* explains that David asked that every visit of his to the Beit Hamidrash should be considered a one-time visit, as though he were arriving there for the very first time. This was so that he should not become accustomed to the place and disdain it. Familiarity breeds contempt, a lack of awe and respect. David wanted to avoid this at all costs.

Similarly, we find that the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:2) states about the Kohen Gadol, "He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary." He was allowed to enter only once a year, on Yom Kippur. This was in order that the awe of the *Kodesh Hakodashim* should remain etched in his heart, and he would pray there for all of Klal Yisrael with due reverence. Had he been allowed to come and go as he pleased, he would have become habituated to the sanctity of the place, praying in a regular way there, *chas v'shalom*. It was vital that he not do so, since

the nation relied on him to plead their cause in the most effective way possible, so that Hashem would respond positively.

With this in mind, we can understand the setback inherent in blowing the shofar every day. We would become accustomed to it, and would not do it with the full fervor intended. Our tefillot on Rosh Hashanah would lack the freshness and uniqueness of the day, becoming similar to those of the rest of the year.

Therefore, we are obligated to blow the shofar only on Rosh Hashanah, making the accompanying blessings of hearing the shofar and *shehecheyanu*. Thus the shofar's blasts leave a deep impression in the Heavens and a lasting impact on a person's mind.

The sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah has the power to help a person do complete teshuvah and reach great heights throughout the rest of the year.

Two Days

Rosh Hashanah is celebrated for two days. Chazal (*Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 8; Zohar III, 100b) tell us that Adam was created on Rosh Hashanah, which was on the sixth day of Creation (*Sanhedrin* 38a). They explain: In the first hour, earth was gathered; in the second hour, a form was fashioned; in the third hour, organs were placed within it; in the fourth hour, a *neshamah* was blown into it; in the fifth hour, he stood on his feet; in the sixth hour, he named all the creatures; in the seventh hour, Chava was formed; in the eighth hour, they had relations and bore two children; in the ninth hour, he received the command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; in the tenth hour, he sinned; in the eleventh hour, he was judged; in the twelfth hour, he was punished.

(*Pesikta* has a slightly different version. There it states that in the twelfth hour, Adam was exonerated from punishment. Hakadosh

Baruch Hu told him, “You act as a symbol for your descendants. Just as you underwent judgment this day and emerged innocent, so too, will they come before Me to be judged on this day and be acquitted.”)

We see that Adam’s verdict was on Rosh Hashanah. But he did not receive his punishment until after Shabbat (*Tanchuma, Bereishit*). Chazal state that Adam’s face maintained its radiance until after Shabbat departed, because he praised Hashem in the song (*Tehillim* 92:1) “A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day.” In this manner, he experienced the first Shabbat in the world with no decree of punishment. The *zechut* of Shabbat protected him. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 32a) states that on Erev Shabbat and on Shabbat, litigations carrying the death penalty do not take place.

Now we understand why even those living in Eretz Yisrael observe two days of Rosh Hashanah. These are reminders of the first Erev Shabbat and Shabbat, after the sin of Adam Harishon. We blow the shofar in order to confuse the Satan and renew man’s connection with Hashem Yitbarach through teshuvah. Its remembrance remains with us throughout the year.

Am Yisrael is the continuation of Adam Harishon. He was judged on Rosh Hashanah, and on all subsequent Days of Judgment his decree is re-enacted upon all mankind. Everyone is judged for life or death.

Thus, it is not necessary for the Torah to mention that the two days of Rosh Hashanah are days of judgment, since it is self-understood. They are merely a continuance of the original Rosh Hashanah, when Adam Harishon was judged.

The Days of Selichot Are a Rectification for the Sin of the Golden Calf

We might look at Rosh Hashanah, the blowing of the shofar, and the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah in a different light.

Bnei Yisrael weakened their Torah observance after *Matan Torah*, causing a defect in the Ten Commandments, which had been written by the hand of Hashem on the *luchot*. When Moshe Rabbeinu descended Har Sinai, on the 17th of Tammuz, he saw the nation worshipping the Golden Calf, and he immediately broke the *luchot* (*Shemot* 32:15-19).

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended the mountain for forty days on three occasions. The last time he went up, the forty days began on Rosh Chodesh Elul and ended on Yom Kippur. At that time, Hashem forgave Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf, and Moshe Rabbeinu descended with the second set of *luchot*.

Prior to his ultimate return, when Bnei Yisrael realized just how grave was their sin in damaging the Ten Commandments, which are the foundation of Torah and belief in the oneness of the Creator, they began to repair what they had damaged. They became involved in the teshuvah process from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur. They spent these forty days in repentance, so that they might arrive at the Day of Judgment cleansed of all iniquity, ready for the atonement of Yom Kippur. It was fitting that they should spend forty days in teshuvah, as the Torah had originally been given after a forty-day wait.

The principal time for teshuvah is during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Each day is designated to correct another one of the Ten Commandments that were violated.

For this reason, the principal shofar blowing takes place on Rosh Hashanah, and not on the other days of the year, for that is when the rectification of the Ten Commandments begins. After *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael did not observe the Torah as was fitting, and did not involve themselves in its study, ascending to great heights through *mesirut nefesh*. On the contrary, they descended to the point of fashioning the calf. As a result, the *luchot* were smashed.

In order to rectify this, we must blow the shofar specifically on Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei, the perfect day for renewal. This is in order that we should remember our previous sins, among them, the sin of the Golden Calf. Thus, we will receive atonement, for there is no forgiveness without doing teshuvah for the past.

The shofar's blasts awaken us to rectify the sin of the Golden Calf, which caused the breaking of the *luchot*. This is the directive to every generation. This is the message of the shofar.

This message is self-understood, therefore, the Torah saw no need to mention it. On the contrary, Rosh Hashanah is not connected to the theme of judgment in the Torah, in order that each person should contemplate his actions, realizing the enormity of the defect he caused in the world. In this manner, he will do complete teshuvah. He will merit enjoying happy, festive days, both on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur, days of forgiveness and atonement.

Conversely, he will have to face judgment if he fails to take to heart the message of Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness, ignoring the magnitude of the damage he has caused by his wrong actions during the year. This is the month when a voice calls out to him to wake up, enjoining him to come close to Hashem, with the words "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." Let him use this wonderful opportunity!

Chazal relate that Bnei Yisrael took full advantage of these days of Elul, when Moshe Rabbeinu returned to the Heavens to receive the second *luchot*. They returned to Hashem in complete teshuvah for the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Midrash (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 46) narrates that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Elul for the third time, the following announcement was made to the people: "See that Moshe is ascending to obtain the second set of *luchot*. Try to repent and regret

your former misdeeds.” They sounded the trumpets in order to arouse their hearts to submission. At that time, Hashem’s Name was elevated, as it says (*Tehillim* 47:6), “G-d has ascended with the blast.” This is the blast of the shofar. By means of its call, Bnei Yisrael’s hearts broke in repentance, bringing them to perfect teshuvah.

Furthermore, Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ki Tisa* 391) tell us that when Moshe ascended to acquire the second set of *luchot*, Bnei Yisrael spent the days in fasting. On the last day, (Yom Kippur), they approached Har Sinai, weeping at the arrival of Moshe Rabbeinu, who, in turn, wept for them. These tears came before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. His compassion aroused, He accepted them in complete teshuvah. A Heavenly Voice proclaimed: “My children, I swear that your weeping will become tears of joy; your day of sorrow, a day of atonement. You and your descendants, for all generations, will merit forgiveness on this day.”

The month of Elul should be utilized for teshuvah, as rectification for the sin of the Golden Calf and in order to renew our connection with Hashem. Through elevating ourselves with *mesirut nefesh*, we will be able to attain perfection.

The words “אני לדודי ודודי לי – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me” can be explained homiletically. The four letters ך at the end of each word are numerically equal to forty, when combined. This alludes to the forty days of teshuvah, as well as the forty days of a person’s creation (see *Sotah* 2a).

It also alludes to the rectification of the sin of the Golden Calf, because of which the *luchot*, which were given at the end of forty days, were broken (*Menachot* 99b). The forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are days of repentance, when we can rectify this sin.

All these concepts are interrelated. For, if man, who was created in forty days, sins, it is a result of his failure to rectify the sin of the

Golden Calf, which caused the *luchot* to be smashed after forty days. Therefore, it is fitting that in these forty days, a person corrects all his shortcomings, thereby repairing the deficiencies he made in the world.

During the month of Elul, one must endeavor to reach the level of belonging solely to Hashem. The three letters ׀ of the first three words of the phrase **אני לדודי ודודי לי** are numerically equal to thirty, signifying the thirty days of Elul. Beginning on Rosh Hashanah, a person enters the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, the most appropriate days for coming close to Hashem and reaching perfection. At that point, Hashem is truly his. Thus, the forty-day cycle is complete, with the *gematria* of the fourth ׀ (לי). Ten days were chosen for teshuvah, to rectify the sin of the Golden Calf, which damaged the Ten Commandments.

According to this, we can understand why Rosh Hashanah is not referred to as the Day of Judgment in the Torah. For it is up to a person to understand this on his own. It is incumbent upon him to rectify the sin of the Golden Calf and the broken *luchot*, and in general, to correct the deficiencies of the previous year. In this manner, he will rightfully be granted forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

I thought of adding to this a hint that we can learn from the pasuk in *Tehillim* (122:1), “I rejoiced when they said **to me** (לי), ‘Let us go to the House of Hashem.’” The words “to me” are specified to indicate the following. After thirty days of Elul, in which a person heard the shofar’s blasts that emanated from his heart, he does teshuvah, which is the level of “I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for **me** (לי).” Then, on Rosh Hashanah, he is aroused to “blow for himself,” using his own powers to renew the bond between himself and Hashem.

He will then feel tremendous joy because of “me – לי,” which contains the fourth letter ׀. He increases this joy by “going to the courtyards of Hashem,” elevating himself with *mesirut nefesh* in the quest for spiritual perfection. This will ensure that he will receive the atonement of Yom

Kippur (the fortieth day), thus granting him an even greater level of joy.

[We can add that the word נלך (Let us go) is numerically equivalent to one hundred. This refers to the one hundred blasts of the shofar sounded on Rosh Hashanah, which brings a person to complete teshuvah.]

“You shall sound the trumpets” is an instruction for the holiday. The word חצוצרות (trumpets) is similar in spelling to the word לחצרות (to the courtyards). This refers to the courtyards of Hashem, i.e., His Sanctuary.

After a person reaches the level of לי, meaning that he has incorporated the last letter ם into his mindset, and is entirely devoted to Torah, teshuvah, and acts of kindness, renewing his connection with Hashem, he deserves to blow the trumpets in triumph, as the pasuk states, “And you shall sound the trumpets.”

Thus we see that the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah are auspicious days for rectifying the sin of the Golden Calf. Every person in every generation contains an aspect of that sin. Chazal expound on the pasuk (*Shemot* 32:34) “On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account” that every punishment includes retribution for the sin of the Golden Calf (see *Sanhedrin* 102a; *Yalkut Shimoni, Ki Tisa* 393).

Therefore, if a person desires to reach the level of לי (for me), being bound up with Hashem, he must awaken in time, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul. It is impossible to be connected with Hashem while, at the same time, having any form of connection with the sin of the Golden Calf. A person must decide where his allegiance lies.

Each person surely desires to be close with Hashem. For that reason, his heart should be aroused to reach the level of לי, until, through *mesirut nefesh*, he renews his connection with Hashem, through the shofar’s blast, and reaches the peak of perfection.

In Summary

- Elul is the month of coming close to Hashem, through teshuvah. The initials of the phrase “אני לדודי ודודי לי – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me” spell אלול. One must be completely devoted to Hashem, and then Hashem will be “his.” In the month of Elul it is easier to approach Hashem and nullify one’s ego. However, the *Yetzer Hara* tries to cause a person to sin. He must therefore reinforce himself against this, so that he should not lose all he previously invested in doing teshuvah. How is this done? We are told: “Open for Me the opening of a needle’s hole...” One just has to make a small effort in doing teshuvah, and Hashem will help him. The essence of this relationship takes place on Rosh Hashanah. Fortunate is the nation that “recognizes the shofar’s blast,” because it has the power to bring them back to Hashem.
- Why does the Torah call the days of Rosh Hashanah “days of rejoicing and festivals,” rather than “days of justice”? The entire month of Elul is preparation for Rosh Hashanah. Once a person reaches the level of “belonging to Hashem,” the days of Rosh Hashanah will be days of gladness and festivity for him, in appreciation of the closeness he has gained with Hashem. With the shofar’s blast, he has succeeded in confusing the Satan, chasing him away. This is alluded to in the words “On your day of gladness, etc.,” for a person must overcome his *Yetzer Hara* with every part of his being. When that is the case, Rosh Hashanah is truly a festive holiday for him.
- Why don’t we blow the shofar all year long, in order to confuse the Satan and prevent him from trapping us in sin? Why doesn’t tefillah have the potency to confuse the Satan? The sound of the shofar brings a person merit before Hashem. If we were to blow the shofar throughout the year, it would become a mundane act, and we would not be aroused by its call to the same extent. Then we would not find the Rosh Hashanah prayers to be as soul-stirring as they are. We can compare this to the Kohen Gadol, who entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* only once a year, in order that he should feel the sanctity of the place and pray with the requisite emotions for the nation. Thus, the principal shofar blowing is on Rosh Hashanah.

- Rosh Hashanah is inherently a day of judgment, since Adam Harishon was created and judged on that day. It is incumbent upon us to do complete teshuvah, for we, too, are judged then.
- The forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are days of rectification for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe spent these days in Heaven, supplicating before Hashem. We, too, must utilize them as days of teshuvah. These forty days are hinted to by the last four letters " of the words, "אני לדודי ודודי לי", which are numerically equivalent to forty. These letters also hint to the forty days which Moshe Rabbeinu spent in Heaven before *Matan Torah*, as well as the forty days of the creation of a person. Moreover, the first three letters " are numerically equal to thirty, referring to the thirty days of Elul itself. The ten days of the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah complete the forty days, assuring us closeness to Hashem in complete perfection.
- The days of Rosh Hashanah are not mentioned as days of judgment since it is understood that each person must repent for the sin of the Golden Calf. This is the meaning of the pasuk "I rejoiced when they said to me..." When I reached the level of לי (to me), meaning, closeness to Hashem, I was happy. One attains this level by repenting completely in the month of Elul. He is connected solely to Hashem, and not to the calf, thus attaining the peak of perfection, meriting being blessed with a good, healthy new year.

I AM MY BELOVED'S AND MY BELOVED IS MINE

The word אלול is the acronym for the phrase אני לדודי ודודי לי. It is based on the pasuk in *Shir Hashirim* (6:3), "I alone am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine, He Who grazes His sheep in roselike pastures." The month of Elul has the special quality of drawing a person close to Hashem.

Why specifically is Hashem referred to as "דוד – my Beloved," which alludes to a familial relationship, since it can also mean "uncle"?

Wouldn't Hashem's relationship with us be better defined as "our Father," or "our King"?

No quarrel is as bitter as the quarrel between siblings. This quarrel spills over to include the children of his siblings. Conversely, even if a child were to anger his father, at one point or another, the father's compassion will be aroused, and he will forgive his son completely. Likewise, we find that a king who is angry with one of his subjects is liable to pardon him of his offense. Friends, also, have the quality of easily forgiving each other, as Chazal (*Avot* 1:6) enjoin us to "judge every man favorably."

Yet, when it comes to brothers, the hatred never dissipates. The seeds of anger are bequeathed to the next generation. An uncle will hate his nephews, since they are an offshoot of their father.

Thus the double meaning of the word דוד hints that even if one's actions have distanced him from Hashem, warranting His anger in the same way that an uncle feels bitter antagonism toward a nephew who has sinned against him, nevertheless, Hashem behaves differently. He is our Beloved.

If the sinner truly repents, admitting his sins with all his heart, Hashem will carve out an opening under His Throne, just as He did for Menashe (*Rut Rabbah* 5:6), and accept him back in complete teshuvah.

The pasuk in Tehillim (90:3) states, "You reduce man to pulp." This is an allusion to the *ba'al teshuvah* who repents his wrongdoings, since pulp is an analogy to the lowest level of sin (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 2:1). Moreover, the word דבש (pulp) is numerically equivalent to the word דודי (my Beloved/my uncle), adding one for the word itself. This hints that man is reduced to pulp when he is, so to speak, hated by Hashem, his Beloved, who acts toward him as an uncle to a hated nephew.

Notwithstanding, Hakadosh Baruch Hu leaves the Seat of Justice and sits on the Seat of Mercy, in order to accept his teshuvah. Hashem

constantly wants to bring us close to Him, so that we should fulfill His will with a complete heart, through true love and fear (*Tikkunei Zohar* 18:34a). When one does teshuvah, he comes close to Hashem once more, so that Hashem is truly his Beloved.

Thus the pasuk teaches that when man sins and becomes pulp, warranting the hatred of Hashem, by doing teshuvah, he will be reinstated to being beloved to Hashem, and will be able to call him יידי once again.

Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 19a; *Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 3), “If you see a *talmid chacham* sin at night, do not suspect him in the day, for he certainly did teshuvah.”

I found an explanation to Chazal’s words in the sefer *Ruach Yaakov*, written by Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat, zy”a, a disciple of my illustrious grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a. He explains: Since everyone is commanded to fulfill all 613 mitzvot, and teshuvah is included among them, it can be that a *talmid chacham* purposely sinned in a minor matter specifically in order to have the opportunity to do teshuvah. This is what Chazal were referring to when discussing a *talmid chacham* who sinned. The *talmid chacham* surely did the sin only in order to be able to do teshuvah. By the time another person sees him on the next day, he has already done teshuvah. Therefore, do not wonder about him on the following day.

This provides a fitting explanation for the pasuk (*Kohelet* 7:20) that teaches “there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins.” This poses a difficulty. The entire purpose of man is to do the will of Hashem and not sin. Moreover, Hashem created the Torah as the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b), to assist one in his battle, so that he should not sin. How can Shlomo Hamelech say that everyone, even the most pious person, sins?

As the author of the *Ruach Yaakov* explains, there is no person, not even the most righteous, who does not sin. At one point, the tzaddik

will transgress a small sin in order to be able to keep the mitzvah of teshuvah. However, it is forbidden to suspect him of having sinned in the normal manner, for his sin was a “descent for the purpose of ascent,” in order to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah.

This helps us understand how Bnei Yisrael are able to approach Hashem. Bnei Yisrael are described as (*Tehillim* 122:4) “the Tribes of G-d, a testimony for Israel, to give thanks to the Name of Hashem.” When are Bnei Yisrael called the “Tribes of G-d”? When they are a “testimony for Israel,” meaning when they keep the Torah, which is the testimony of Israel. As soon as they transgress any mitzvah written in the Torah, they immediately return to Hashem in complete teshuvah, admitting their iniquity.

The pasuk (*ibid.*) continues, “To give thanks to the Name of Hashem.” The word להודות (to give thanks) can also mean “to admit.” Those who repent can be compared to Adam Harishon, who did teshuvah immediately after he sinned. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:28) tell us that he said the psalm (*Tehillim* 92), “A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day. It is good to thank (להודות) Hashem.” Adam Harishon both admitted his sin to Hashem and thanked Him for the opportunity to do teshuvah. However, if, *chas v’shalom*, Bnei Yisrael do not repent, they lose their status as the tribes of Hashem, until they do teshuvah. Then, they are called Hashem’s tribes, coming close to Him, as is indicated in the phrase, “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.”

In Summary

- The word אלול (Elul) is an acronym of, “אני לדודי ודודי לי – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me.” The term דוד means both “beloved” and “uncle.” Why is Hashem called our “Uncle,” rather than our “Father” or “King”? A father will always forgive his son, and a king pardons his people. Likewise, friends will make amends. But a family feud will always remain. It is inherited by the next generation. When we refer to Hashem as “Uncle,”

we impress upon ourselves that Hashem forgives sins that would cause this type of bitter enmity and strife between Himself and us, allowing us to approach Him.

- One who is considered “reduced to a pulp,” indicating that he is mired in the mud of sin, can still attain forgiveness. The word **דבש** (pulp) has the same numerical value as the word **דודי** (my Beloved/uncle). Hashem descends from the Seat of Justice, and sits upon the Seat of Mercy, to accept a person’s teshuvah.
- Chazal forbid us to wonder about the actions of a *talmid chacham* who sinned, for he surely did teshuvah. Teshuvah is one of the 613 mitzvot, and he sinned slightly only in order to be able to fulfill this mitzvah. This is the reason why even a perfect tzaddik is said to sin.
- When Bnei Yisrael return to Hashem in complete teshuvah, they are called the “Tribes of Hashem, to thank (or admit before) Hashem.” They repent, just as Adam Harishon repented and said, “A song... It is good to thank Hashem.” May we come close to Hashem with all our heart and soul.

RETURNING TO HASHEM

The mitzvah of teshuvah is a tremendous kindness from Hashem. It is derived from the following pesukim (*Devarim* 4:39), “You shall know this day and take to your heart...” and (ibid. 30:2), “...and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d.”

The word “return” is used here. Where exactly did the person go that he is enjoined to return?

One who sins has departed from Hashem. He distances the *Shechinah* from himself. The Gemara (*Berachot* 43b) states that one who walks with haughtiness pushes away the *Shechinah*. How is it possible not to fear Hashem, isn’t “the whole world filled with His glory”?!

By doing teshuvah, one comes back to Hashem, returning the

Shechinah to its rightful place. One's job is to restore himself to his former status, prior to sin. Hashem Himself asks a person to do teshuvah, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 90:3) states, "You reduce man to pulp and You say, 'Repent, O sons of man.'"

Hashem does a kindness with us by providing us with forty days of preparation in which to do teshuvah. By doing teshuvah in these days, we come close to Him, and He comes close to us and forgives us. These are the forty days beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul and ending on Yom Kippur. These forty days are hinted to by the last letters of the motto of Elul "אני לדודי ודודי לי" – I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine," since their numerical value is forty (*Mishnah Berurah, Tur, Orach Chaim* 581).

Why did Hashem give us forty days for teshuvah? Wouldn't one day be enough in which to return to Him? It is understandable why Bnei Yisrael needed forty days of teshuvah after the sin of the Golden Calf, since they had originally erred in their count of forty days, when waiting for Moshe to return with the first set of *luchot*. Thus, the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur correspond to Moshe's forty-day stay in Heaven, in which he gained atonement for the nation, when he returned on Yom Kippur.

However, this reason does not apply to us. The fast day of Yom Kippur is our day of atonement. Moreover, we find that Rosh Hashanah is not referred to as a day of judgment in the Torah. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 10:10) refers to Rosh Hashanah by saying: "You shall sound the trumpets... and they shall be a remembrance for you." In light of these facts, why do we need forty days to do teshuvah?

When one sins in thought, word, or deed, it indicates either that he does not learn enough Torah, or that he fails to put sufficient effort into his learning. For it is impossible for a person who is completely engrossed in Torah study to sin, as the Torah protects one from sin (*Sotah* 21a) and influences him to do only good.

Additionally, sometimes a person is not aware that he has sinned. Nevertheless, the sin remains. The severity of the punishment is commensurate with a person's level. A greater person is held more accountable; therefore, he is given a harsher punishment for his iniquities. Chazal tell us that had the Avot been punished by the full extent of justice, they would not have been able to endure it.

What can we, who live subsequent to *Matan Torah*, say, when strict justice will be meted out to us? Even were we to delve in Torah day and night, we are full of sin and iniquity, for which we must do teshuvah.

How can we correct our transgressions? Chazal tell us that the 248 limbs and 365 sinews in a person's body parallel the 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions of the Torah. This indicates that Hashem has instilled within a person tremendous powers to rectify all the components of his make-up, through fulfilling the positive commandments and staying away from the prohibitions.

Upon reflection, we find that each mitzvah contains all the other mitzvot within it. For, although each individual mitzvah corresponds to one particular part of the body, all the body parts participate in the performance of every mitzvah, to a greater or lesser degree. This being so, when a person damages one body part, he damages his entire body. Similarly, when he damages one mitzvah by sinning, he has damaged all the mitzvot.

These thoughts are awesome. This is the meaning of the maxim (*Avot* 4:2), "One aveirah leads to another." A defect in one mitzvah is liable to cause terrible damage in all the mitzvot. What will we answer on the Day of Justice? How can we possibly overcome these dreadful flaws? Chazal adjure us (*Sukkah* 52b; *Kiddushin* 30b), "If this degenerate one encounters you, draw him to the Beit Hamidrash." The Torah has the power to protect a person from his *Yetzer Hara*.

The *nazir* and one who makes an oath, who both accept extra stringencies upon themselves, make “fences” around the Torah in order to distance themselves from the *Yetzer Hara* as much as possible. Similarly, tzaddikim sanctify themselves in areas that are essentially permitted to them (*Yevamot* 20a). Their actions are commendable, as they wish to stay away from temptation in these permissible areas (*Nedarim* 9a). This is the power of Torah. It can correct everything and remove all deficiencies and shortcomings that a person has.

Rectification for the Sin of Bitul Torah

We find that all sins and suffering come in the wake of *bitul* Torah. The *Shelah Hakadosh* says an amazing thing. He quotes the pasuk in Tehillim (119:59), “I considered my ways and I returned my feet to Your testimonies.” The *Shelah* explains that we can interpret the pasuk according to the words of the Gemara (*Berachot* 5a): “If a person sees suffering coming upon him, let him search his actions; if he searched and did not find [a reason for the suffering], let him attribute it to a lack in Torah study.” The word “feet” can also refer to “reason” (see *Bereishit* 30:30). David was saying, “I searched all my actions, and found no explanation for my suffering. Therefore, I attributed it to ‘Your testimonies,’ to a laxity in Torah study.”

David said that each day he would plan on going somewhere, but it never worked out. Then he would turn his feet to the Beit Hamidrash, meaning that he ascribed these forms of suffering to the sin of *bitul* Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:1). David was also referring to a laxity in tefillah, which is most conducive in the setting of a Beit Hamidrash.

The *Yetzer Hara* constantly attempts to prevent a person from learning Torah. The Torah was given at the end of forty days (*Menachot* 99b). Therefore, Bnei Yisrael need forty days of forgiveness and preparation before Yom Kippur, the day when they received the second set of *luchot*, as a means of correcting the sin of *bitul* Torah.

Why was the Torah given after forty days? Couldn't Moshe have received it in one day? Then, Bnei Yisrael would have needed only one day to gain forgiveness. Why did Moshe need to spend forty days in *Shamayim*?

A person is made up of 248 limbs and 365 sinews, which take forty days to be formed (*Berachot* 60b). This is Hashem's decree, and we cannot fathom its reasons. Therefore, he needs forty days to do complete teshuvah for all the parts of his body that may have been involved in sin, whether in thought, speech, or action, thus completely cleansing them from any iniquity. Only afterward, can he return to Hashem and can Hashem become his, as it says (*Malachi* 3:7): "Return to Me and I will return to you."

Moreover, the mitzvot also perfect all a person's limbs and sinews. Therefore, it was necessary for the Torah to be given over to Moshe in forty days, rather than in one. On Moshe's part, he required a full forty days in Heaven to receive the Torah in order that he could attain spiritual perfection and be a fitting conduit for imparting the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

The forty days of the formation of a person are also alluded to by the fact that the last four letters "י" of the phrase "אני לדודי ודודי לי" – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me" have the combined *gematria* of forty. This hints that one must cleanse himself of his sins and iniquities in these forty days. For, when a person causes a defect in Torah and mitzvot, he causes a defect in himself. Thus, on Yom Kippur, he is like a newborn, since his teshuvah effects that all parts of his body regain their original status.

According to this, we can understand the statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 30b; *Kallah* 2) that "in the future, each woman will give birth each day." There will be no need for the forty days of fashioning the embryo, for there will be no *Yetzer Hara*. Since there will be no more *bitul* Torah, and thus no necessity for teshuvah, the connection

between the forty days of the transmission of the Torah to Moshe and the forty days of the creation of a person will no longer be necessary.

In these days of Elul, one is enjoined to prepare advocates on his behalf. He should return to Hashem and bring the *Shechinah* back to its former glory, after having distanced the *Shechinah* from himself through sin. There is no better advocate for a person than his own organs. We state, “All my parts will say, ‘Hashem, who is like You?’” This is the greatest form of teshuvah.

This form of rectification can be made only through the 613 mitzvot, which correspond to the 613 body parts. Likewise, exerting oneself in learning Torah repairs damage incurred to the body. Forty days are needed for this.

Those who return in teshuvah, yet continue to sin, are not involved in Torah. One who becomes habituated to sinning, states, “I will sin, and I will repent.” Since sin has become permissible to him, he will never succeed in repenting completely (*Yoma* 86b).

Even when he does teshuvah, he will never repent for those things that he permitted himself due to force of habit. In order to do so, he must learn Torah. Through Torah, a person is cognizant of what is permissible and what is forbidden, and he knows what needs to be repaired.

Torah is truth (*Berachot* 5b), and truth is eternal, as the *Navi* (*Shmuel* I, 15:29) states, “The Eternal One of Israel does not lie.” Whoever is connected to truth is also eternal. Throughout our history, many nations rose and fell. Only Am Yisrael remains in existence forever, despite all the decrees against us. Torah, Hashem, and Yisrael are one (*Zohar* III, 73). Since Hashem’s seal is truth (*Shabbat* 55; *Bereishit Rabbah* 81:2), and Torah and Yisrael are truth, Am Yisrael has never changed, because it has always been attached to Hashem and Torah.

The nations of the world require thousands of years in order to change. But Hashem has done a *chessed* with our nation. Bnei Yisrael

need merely forty days in order to correct themselves every year, through the power of teshuvah. Every single Jew, on whatever level, has the ability to utilize these forty days to improve and ascend to a higher level.

Now we can understand what transpires on Yom Kippur (*Vayikra* 16:30): “For (כִּי) on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins, before Hashem shall you be cleansed.” In order to attain this forgiveness, one must make preparations. The word כִּי is numerically equivalent to thirty. These are the thirty days of Elul, days of preparation for the great day of Yom Kippur, the culmination of the Days of Awe, the Day of Atonement for our sins.

Without the gift of teshuvah, Am Yisrael would not be able to endure, *chas v’shalom*. Teshuvah breathes life into a person, giving him the status of a newborn, pure of sin (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:4). Without teshuvah, Bnei Yisrael would be unable to renew themselves or come close to Hashem.

The pasuk in Tehillim (85:12) states, “Truth will sprout from the earth.” Torah is called truth. It will flourish through man who was created from the dust of the earth. By doing teshuvah together with learning Torah, man grows and becomes born anew and is able to draw close to Hashem.

The sefer *Minchat Kohen* explains that one of the attributes for attaining Torah is humility (*Avot* 6:4; *Kallah* 8). In light of this, we can explain the above verse “Truth will sprout from earth” in the following way. If one humbles himself as the earth, he will be able to grow through Torah study, and the Torah will be upheld in him.

Sincere humility involves nullification of self, total subservience to Hashem. Achav is an example of this. He submitted himself to Hashem and repented of his wicked ways (*Melachim* I, 21:29). One can reach this level only through toil in Torah and teshuvah.

This is man's calling in the days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. During this time, he sanctifies his organs. He purifies himself, by means of Torah, in anticipation of Yom Kippur.

— In Summary —

- Teshuvah is a lofty concept. One distances the *Shechinah* from himself through sinning. By doing teshuvah, he brings the *Shechinah* back to its proper place.
- The auspicious time for teshuvah is the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. Why are forty days needed for this process? Why isn't one day enough? This is because sin is a result of a lack of Torah study. All mitzvot are intertwined, and a deficiency in one causes a deficiency in all of them. The greater a person, the more severely is he judged. By means of Torah study, one's entire body becomes improved. Chazal have enjoined us to drag the *Yetzer Hara* to the Beit Hamidrash, for there he becomes null and void. Furthermore, one reaches closeness to Hashem by sanctifying himself through that which is permitted to him.
- David said, "I have considered my ways." He searched his deeds for sin, but found none, thus, he ascribed his suffering to *bitul* Torah. All misfortune comes in the wake of *bitul* Torah. This is the reason that we are given forty days in order to rectify our actions, just as the Torah was given after the forty days that Moshe spent in Heaven.
- The Torah was given after forty days because that is the amount of time it takes for all of the limbs and sinews of a person to be fashioned. Torah corrects the organs of a person, perfecting him. This is hinted to by the words "אני לדודי ודודי לי" – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me." The four last letters "דודי" are numerically equivalent to forty. These are the forty days of teshuvah, which rectify the ailments of the body. Let a person choose fitting advocates who will speak on his behalf. Then, all his parts will praise Hashem, and he will do complete teshuvah with all his heart and soul.
- Through teshuvah, one connects to Hashem, for Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are truth, and all are one. One who does teshuvah is born anew, meriting

eternal existence, unlike the gentiles, who disappear after a time. When Yom Kippur arrives, he is pure as a newborn, through the power of Torah. Torah is acquired through humility. This is the meaning of “Truth will sprout from the earth.” When one is humble and nullifies himself before Hashem, he is nurtured and grows in stature. He comes to Yom Kippur pure and fresh. Therefore, in the month of Elul, a person should sanctify himself through Torah, in holiness. In this manner, his teshuvah enables him to reach Yom Kippur completely holy and pure.

PREPARING FOR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

The month of Elul, the days of mercy, precedes Rosh Hashanah, the day when all mankind will be remembered for life or for death. On this day it will be decided who will be rich and who will be poor, who will be healthy and who will suffer illness, *chas v'shalom*. The Books of Life and Death are opened before Hashem, and all of man's actions throughout the previous year will be read aloud.

Chazal teach that there are three books open before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah: one in which the living will be inscribed, one for those who are destined to die, and one for those who have not yet received a definitive judgment (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b; *Pesikta Zuta Vayeira* 22). But why is there a need for three books? Doesn't Hashem know everything, including all of man's thoughts?

The word ספר (book) has the same root as the word סיפור (story). Each person's story is placed before Hashem. In it, is written everything that he has ever done, including everything that he did in the previous year and everything that he will do in the coming year. This book provides indisputable testimony to all of a person's actions.

When one understands that all is written down before Hashem, he will improve his deeds and be cognizant of the Day of Justice. The

month of Elul is a gift, presenting one with the opportunity to change the “story of his life” and nullify any evil decrees which may have been declared against him. The Book of Life (ספר החיים) also means “the story of life,” the story of what will happen to a person in the upcoming year.

Since a person is not aware of what is in store for him in the coming year, he is enjoined to do teshuvah in the month of Elul, before Rosh Hashanah. Thus, as a result of his good deeds, he will acquire advocates and merits, which will come to his defense when his life’s story is read out and he is judged on Rosh Hashanah.

One must prepare himself for judgment. Just like any good lawyer needs time to prepare a case before presenting it in court, a person should prepare himself in advance of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

A good attorney knows how to defend a person in court. He can even defend a murderer and prove his innocence. I once heard about an attorney who was so good at his profession that his client, who was a murderer, was himself convinced by his arguments that he had not in fact done the deed.

Only by doing teshuvah and increasing his mitzvah performance does a person acquire a defense attorney (*Avot* 4:11) to speak on his behalf. *Iyov* (33:23) states, “If there will be for someone but a single defending angel out of a thousand.” Then, it will be proven whether or not one readied himself properly for judgment.

Conversely, if one does not do proper teshuvah, he proves that he did not prepare for the Day of Justice. He did not acquire defense attorneys. It is an act of chutzpah to come to judgment without proper preparation.

Furthermore, he incriminates himself by not preparing properly for judgment. Woe to the person who did not do teshuvah and make preparations. Who knows what his verdict will be?

Conversely, even if a person sinned but prepares himself properly by doing teshuvah, he proves that he regrets his former deeds. Then it is evident that he truly fears the impending justice. In that case, even if his previous life story was not so complimentary, his advocates will speak in his defense.

Moreover, Hashem sees that he desires to return to Him, and even if he has not yet done teshuvah, considers it as though he has, in line with the dictum that intending to do a good deed is considered as if one has in fact done it (*Kiddushin* 40a; *Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1). Proof that this person desires to come close to Hashem is that if the opportunity to sin would be presented to him, he would not do it. He is interested only in mitzvot.

How much teshuvah must we do! How vast is the severity of judgment! The *Ba'alei Mussar* tell us that Hashem judges a person for every moment that he wasted from learning and every moment that he prayed without proper intention. This thought is awesome.

In previous generations, the fear of Elul was felt in every corner. They say that the fish in the sea trembled during the month of Elul. A story is told of a tzaddik who wrote a letter to his son during Elul, which the son found difficult to read. When he asked his father why this was the case, as the father generally did have a good hand, the father answered, "What can I do? It is difficult for me to write in Elul, for my hands tremble in fear of the impending Day of Judgment."

Fear of the Day of Judgment

How awesome is it to imagine that in the past, people literally had trouble writing, out of fear of the Day of Judgment, feeling this fear in all their limbs! Nowadays, there is no such fear or trepidation. Business goes on as usual. The *Navi* (*Amos* 3:8) declares, "A lion roars; who will not fear?" How is it possible to not be afraid?

A person is aware that the Day of Judgment is drawing near; how can he ignore this truth? This can be compared to someone who receives a letter from the tax department, stating that he has evaded certain taxes and that he owes money to the government. What does he do? He hires a professional accountant to organize his accounts, for he is afraid of the fine awaiting him.

But in our day, no one is afraid of the ultimate investigation, of the upcoming awesome Day of Judgment. One will be questioned about all aspects of his Avodat Hashem, judged for every minute detail. He will be interrogated about his level of Torah study, teshuvah, and good deeds. It is much more frightening than any judgment of a human court. How is it possible that people are simply not afraid?

Maybe we can say something in their defense. In the olden days, Jewish communities were very close-knit. If a person or a family did teshuvah, they would influence those in their surroundings to join them. Everyone eventually would correct his ways.

From here we can understand the importance of living in a Torah community. We find an example of this with Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma (*Avot* 6:9). Furthermore, in days of old, the Jews were foreign citizens, denied independence and citizenship. They paid head-taxes to the government. With no form of liberty or voice in the government, they put their trust only in Hashem, developing a connection to Him with all their heart and soul. When Chodesh Elul came, they would be filled with fear and return to Him.

Times are different. Jews are spread out, enjoying citizenship and independence wherever they reside. They do not all live in places of Torah, and do not have the opportunity to influence each other as in the past. Each person does as he wishes. Therefore, our aveirot separate us from Hashem (see *Yeshayahu* 55:11).

People simply do not realize that they sin. When one is told to do teshuvah, he does not know what he is being told. He thinks he is being mocked. There is hardly any fear in the air in the month of Elul.

This is illustrated by the following incident. I know of someone who goes bareheaded and travels to the beach with his family on Shabbat. They do not behave in a modest manner, *rachmana litzlan*. However, amazingly, the father is the *shaliach tzibbur* in the Beit Hakeneset, and even gives a lecture on Shabbat for the members of the congregation. People come to him with their questions regarding the permissible and the prohibited, and he responds.

I approached him, and said, “It is very wrong that you go around without a head-covering and do not behave according to the dictates of the Torah. On the other hand, you lead the prayers, speak publicly, and answer halachic questions.” To which he responded, “So what if I go bareheaded? What’s the connection between the two?”

I answered, “Those who observe you think to themselves that if the *shaliach tzibbur* can go bareheaded, it is permissible for them, as well. Even if they have heard from others that it is forbidden, they use you as a role model to permit this type of lifestyle.”

I rebuked him time after time, in order to fulfill the directive of chastising a sinner even one hundred times (*Bava Metzia* 31a). But to no avail. He would look at me, lower his eyes, and walk away. I would also walk away, thinking to myself that maybe he’ll reconsider his ways and change. But he continued acting the same way, even though he knew it was wrong.

When a person lives in a place of Torah, among those who fear Hashem, it helps him overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. Even if he is a citizen of a gentile country, living among fellow Jews is to his benefit. He knows when the days of Elul are approaching and that he must do teshuvah. He prepares properly for Rosh Hashanah, and he has *siyata di’Shemaya* to free himself from the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*.

One who toils in Torah in the yeshiva will feel the very walls of the Beit Hamidrash tremble in Chodesh Elul, from fear of judgment. They are reminding him to return to Hashem.

Toil in Torah as Preparation for the Day of Judgment

If a person feels that doing teshuvah is too daunting a proposition, he should know that the Torah has the power to melt his stubborn heart. The entire Creation proclaims that the Day of Judgment has arrived. Only man, in his obstinacy, does not pay attention. But, by doing teshuvah and learning Torah, one can emerge from the captivity of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The *Yetzer Hara* dulls a person's heart (טמטום הלב), making him indifferent to spiritual matters. We find a hint to this in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 11:43) that prohibits us from eating insects "lest you become contaminated through them – ונטמתם בם." Chazal (*Yoma* 39a) expound, "Do not read ונטמתם – lest you become contaminated, but ונטמתם – lest you become dulled by following them."

Conversely, when a person learns Torah without becoming involved in other things, he then "speaks in them and not in anything else," as Chazal (ibid. 19b) explain the words, "ודברת בם – You shall speak in them." The letters of the word בם are an acronym for the first word of the Written Torah (בראשית) and the first word of the Oral Torah (מאמתי). Speaking in Torah removes the crassness and contamination of the *Yetzer Hara* from oneself.

However, one must labor in Torah. When one labors in Torah, his sins are forgiven (*Berachot* 5a), and he becomes liberated of his *Yetzer Hara*, for there is no free man except for the person who is involved in Torah (*Avot* 6:2, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:21).

This being the case, when the Day of Judgment arrives, he feels completely devoted to Hashem, for his heart was not dulled to teshuvah, and he heeded the injunction to return to Hashem.

This is as the *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:1) instructs us: “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.” We are enjoined to return in teshuvah, literally until Hashem. After one does teshuvah, he enjoys the same closeness with Hashem that he enjoyed before he came to this world. He will then merit all good, both the concealed and the revealed. The pasuk in Tehillim (34:9) states, “Contemplate and see that Hashem is good.” There is no “good” except for the Torah (*Berachot* 5a). Through toiling in Torah study, one attains good. He sees the truth and never returns to his sin and folly.

But if a person does not toil in Torah, he places himself in the category of one who states that he will sin and then repent. Such a person is never granted the opportunity to do teshuvah for this sin (*Yoma* 85b).

Hashem desires everyone’s teshuvah, whatever sin he did. This is borne out by the pasuk “Return, Israel... for you have stumbled in your iniquity,” which is written in the singular form. Hashem is speaking to each Jew individually. How precious is each person in the eyes of Hashem!

We can all make improvements. We should try to be satisfied with less, especially in our day, when material matters are abundant and spirituality is scarce. Every person should feel that the world was created for him (*Sanhedrin* 37a) and that the existence of the world depends on him. If he does a mitzvah, he tilts his personal scales and the scale of the entire world to the side of merit (*Kiddushin* 40b), and if he sins, he is causing untold damage to the world.

When one sins in matters between man and Hashem, it results in a sin between man and his fellow man, for he brings punishment upon others, as well. He can correct his transgressions through learning Torah in a Torah environment. This is especially important in our times, when everyone feels that they are free to do as they please.

The correlation between the mitzvot between man and his fellow man and mitzvot between man and Hashem can be explained in the following way. Every day, Bnei Yisrael receive an abundance of blessings from Hashem. If they sin, though, this Heavenly blessing is showered upon the nations of the world, as Yitzchak said when he blessed Yaakov (*Bereishit* 27:22): “The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Eisav.” Bnei Yisrael receive Heavenly blessings only when Yaakov’s voice resonates in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot. At that time, Eisav’s hands hold no sway (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16). But when Yisrael are not engaged in Torah study, Eisav’s hands stretch forth and grab all these blessings.

Thus, the sin of one person causes that bounty is denied to the entire nation. This is a sin between man and his fellow man. It is also a sin between man and Hashem, since by sinning he prevents Hashem from showering Bnei Yisrael with the blessings that He desires to give them, even though he may do teshuvah at a later stage. How great is the depth of justice!

Therefore, each person should do teshuvah and good deeds in Elul. He must strive to rectify his deeds, ensuring that abundance returns once again to our people. This is by laboring in Torah in a surrounding of Torah. He should ask forgiveness of his fellow man and repent in those areas between himself and Hashem, so that he should not be punished with the severe hand of justice. In this manner, abundance of blessings will return to Bnei Yisrael.

“The voice is the voice of Yaakov” can also refer to the shofar, which directs a person to do teshuvah, bringing bounty to Bnei Yisrael.

For that reason, we blow the shofar during Elul. The word שופר has the same root as the word שיפור (improvement). It is also related to the word פשרה (compromise), meaning that one makes peace between himself and Hashem. When one allows the call of the shofar to enter his heart, he will improve his deeds, and he will draw an abundance of blessing upon the world.

The *Navi* (Amos 3:6) cries out, “Is it possible for the shofar to be sounded in a city, and the people not tremble?” The shofar calls to a person to better his deeds and to promote blessing upon our nation. One must prepare himself for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah through doing teshuvah. In this way, he will emerge innocent in judgment.

————— In Summary —————

- The days of Elul are days of mercy and grace, intended for doing teshuvah before Rosh Hashanah. Three books (ספרים) are open then. The stories (סיפורים) of every person are written in them, as well as the story of what his life will be like in the approaching year. No one knows if his story is a happy one; therefore, he should do teshuvah. He will then have defense attorneys to speak on his behalf on the Day of Judgment. One who comes to judgment without prior preparation is displaying chutzpah.
- Previous generations had more fear for the Day of Judgment than we have today. In former times, the Jews lived together in Torah communities. They had no citizenship and did not enjoy privileges, as the gentiles did. Therefore, they placed all their trust in Hashem and did teshuvah when Elul came. But today, truth is ignored. People feel secure in their native countries. Everyone does as he sees fit. People continue to sin, even after being rebuked many times. However, if one lives in a place of Torah and engages in Torah study, he has the opportunity to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara* and return to Hashem, arriving at the Day of Justice cleansed. He will surely be found innocent in judgment.
- The *Navi* Hoshea enjoins us to return to Hashem. Each person is called individually to taste the sweetness of Torah and come back to Hashem, for He is good. When one returns, he tips the scales in favor of the entire world. For, an abundance of blessing is showered upon Bnei Yisrael in the merit of Torah.
- Conversely, when Bnei Yisrael sin, the hands of Eisav grab these blessings. Therefore, let every person beware of the severity of justice, both in matters between man and Hashem, and between man and his fellow man. He should improve his actions, awakening himself through the shofar’s call. In this

manner, he will arrive perfect in Torah and good deeds at the Day of Judgment, and he will emerge meritorious in judgment, receiving a verdict for a good new year.

A Practical Lesson

The strict hand of justice is exacting. If one sins, he will be responsible for withholding blessing from the world. Therefore, one should spend the month of Elul in Torah study and teshuvah. In this manner, he will return blessing to Yisrael. He will neither come to sin between himself and Hashem, nor between himself and his fellow man. If one lives in a Torah environment and is constantly involved in Torah, influencing others to behave properly, in his merit, bounty will flow upon Am Yisrael throughout the year.

TESHUVAH THROUGH MAINTAINING OUR JEWISH IDENTITY

The days of Elul are designated for teshuvah. The *Mishnah Berurah* (*Orach Chaim* 581:1) states that the commentaries find a hint to this in the word אָלול itself, which is an acronym for the pasuk “אני לדודי ודודי לי – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me.” The last letters of each word combined have the *gematria* of forty, which alludes to the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur, the most auspicious time for repentance.

Moreover, only through the power of Torah, which was given at the end of forty days (*Menachot* 99b), can a person do complete teshuvah. One day of teshuvah is not enough; much preparation is needed. Through learning Torah, Hashem, Who knows a person’s heart, will testify that he will never return to sin (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2). Torah gives a person the wherewithal to do teshuvah.

If a person only knew what type of judgment awaits him, he would tremble from fear. Therefore, it is wise to prepare defense attorneys beforehand. These are his Torah learning and mitzvot, which will stand him in good stead during his trial.

The judgment itself is all-encompassing. The *Sifrei Mussar* explain that one will be judged regarding every letter of tefillah and every moment wasted from Torah study. Were a person aware of this, great fear would seize him. All year long, he hasn't taken note of his actions, and everything seems permissible in his eyes. Now, he has much to be ashamed of.

We find that Yosef's brothers became anxious when he revealed himself to them (*Bereishit* 45:3), for they were ashamed of the way they had treated him. How much more must a person be ashamed when Hashem will judge him. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:10) state, "Woe to us on the Day of Justice, woe to us on the Day of Rebuke. For if the Shevatim could not withstand the rebuke of Yosef, the youngest of the brothers, how much more ashamed will we be!"

Unfortunately, there are many among us who feel that we must keep up with the times, for the world is changing and advancing. Only we, the religious Jews, remain the same. But what is left of the nations of the world? They disappear and are eternally forgotten. Only our small Jewish nation exists after so many years.

Sociologists cannot explain the secret to our survival, but it is simple. It is because we represent truth, and truth endures. Falsehood disappears. Am Yisrael's continued existence is because of teshuvah, for although they sin, they always return to Hashem (*Shemot Rabbah* 23:11).

Distancing Ourselves from the Gentiles

Another important aspect of teshuvah is to distance oneself from the nations of the world, and not become involved with them. The Torah

(*Devarim* 12:29-30) states, “When Hashem, your G-d, will cut down the nations... beware for yourself lest you be attracted after them.” We are enjoined not to mingle with them.

The Admor of Sanz, zt”l, asks the following question. Hashem warns Bnei Yisrael not to follow the ways of the gentiles “after they have been destroyed before you” (*ibid.*). This indicates that Hashem will destroy them. How is it possible to go after them and copy their ways after they have been annihilated?

We see from here that it is possible for a person to witness miracles, but instead of using them as a springboard for teshuvah, he continues sinning, for the *Yetzer Hara* blinds him, preventing him from seeing what is correct. For this reason, the Torah warns us that not only must we dissociate from the gentiles when they are living, but we must separate ourselves from their ways even after they have perished. The *Yetzer Hara* has cunning tricks to make the ways of the nations seem proper, and it is possible to emulate them even after they no longer exist. One must be careful to always distance himself from their ways. This is true teshuvah.

An example of this is the fact that Bnei Yisrael needed forty-nine days to prepare for receiving the Torah. The negative actions of the Egyptians were so ingrained in them that they would not have been able to purify themselves from their influence in one day alone.

Every Jew has a pure *neshamah*, which is called a light (*Shabbat* 32a). *Mishlei* (20:27) states, “A man’s soul is the light of Hashem.” In the prayers recited when we light the Chanukah candles, we say, “These lights are holy, and we have no permission to use them.” We can interpret this to mean that one may not use his *neshamah*, his life, for anything other than matters of *kedushah*.

The way to ignite this light is through the fire of Torah (*Devarim Rabbah* 3:13; *Tanchuma, Yitro* 12). Just as a candle is lit up by a flame,

so too, the *neshamah* is lit by the flame of Torah. Chazal (*Tzeidah Laderech* 12) teach, “A little bit of light casts away much darkness.” The *Yetzer Hatov* is active when it is light, when people do mitzvot, e.g., tefillah and Torah study. Conversely, the *Yetzer Hara* is active in darkness, for that is when people sin (*Yeshayahu* 29:15). For that reason, Chazal (*Kiddushin* 40a) have instructed us that if a man sees that his *Yetzer Hara* is overpowering him, he should dress in black clothing, for sins are compared to darkness. But the light of the *Yetzer Hatov* has the ability to chase away the darkness of the *Yetzer Hara*, through Torah, which brings a person to complete teshuvah.

Elevation in Matters of Kedushah

Chazal (*Shabbat* 88a) tell us that at *Matan Torah*, Hashem held the mountain over the nation like a barrel, forcing them to accept the Torah. *Tosafot* asks, “Since Bnei Yisrael had proclaimed ‘We will do and we will hear,’ why did they need to be compelled to accept the Torah?”

This was in anticipation of those times when a person may become discouraged and think that he is disinterested in Torah. At these times, he should remember that we were forced to accept the Torah, and he should do teshuvah. The merit of Torah will bring him close to Hashem.

In this light, perhaps we can explain the connection between the parshiyot of *Nitzavim* (stand) and *Vayelech* (go). They seem to contradict each other, for either one is standing or one is going. However, when one constantly walks the path of *kedushah*, it demonstrates that he is standing in a fixed place, for he has neither changed his ways nor deviated from the customs of his forefathers and the Torah.

The juxtaposition of these two parshiyot also hints that one should be consistent in his actions and not waver between extremes. He should not sometimes believe and other times display lack of belief,

sometimes love *talmidei chachamim* and sometimes hate them, sometimes give his children a Torah education and sometimes allow them to watch television, *rachmana litzlan*. Similarly, a woman might light Shabbat candles and then turn on the television. A person is commanded to be steady in his commitment to a life of *kedushah*.

Bnei Yisrael said “We will do and we will hear” because they were overcome with fear of Hashem (*Tosafot, Shabbat 88a*), for in their hearts they desired the Torah. After this fear would abate, they would accept the Torah from love. Hashem wants this love, which is everlasting and will keep them attached to Torah.

This can be compared to a man who is instructed by his doctor to take a specific medicine. At the beginning, he takes it out of fear of the doctor, but, after seeing its effectiveness, he has great admiration for the doctor and takes the medication willingly.

Similarly, at *Matan Torah*, the people first accepted Torah out of fear, and afterward, out of love. The primary aspect of Avodat Hashem is joy in doing mitzvot. Joy brings a person to fear Hashem.

Constant, sincere teshuvah, coupled with the power of Torah, as well as distancing ourselves from the gentiles and their ways, help one attain this level of service of Hashem. In this manner, one will merit a good, blessed new year, in both physical and spiritual matters.

———— In Summary ————

- Elul is the month designated for teshuvah. The word אלוּל is an acronym of the words “אני לדודי ודודי לי” – I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me.” The last letters of these words have the *gematria* of forty, alluding to the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. It also alludes to the Torah, which was given after Moshe spent forty days in Heaven. With the power of Torah, one can return to Hashem.
- One must make preparations for the approaching judgment of Rosh Hashanah. He should be ashamed of his sins, just like Yosef’s brothers, who

were ashamed before him. Chazal say, “Woe to us on the Day of Judgment; woe to us on the Day of Rebuke.”

- Am Yisrael alone has prevailed from among all the nations, because we personify truth, and they are nothing but falsehood. Therefore, one should be careful to detach himself from the gentiles and their ways, even after they perish. This is another element of teshuvah.
- Bnei Yisrael prepared themselves for forty days before *Matan Torah*, in order to erase the negative impression of Mitzrayim from themselves. A person’s *neshamah* is called a light, and it must be utilized only for matters of *kedushah*. The *Yetzer Hatov*, symbolized by light, is capable of repelling the darkness of the *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem compelled Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah in anticipation of those times when they may wish to reject it. They will then be able to maintain their ties with the Torah regardless of the situation, and by learning Torah, will return to Hashem.
- This is the connection between the parshiyot of *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech*. One is enjoined to **go** only after matters of *kedushah*, then he will be able to **stand firm** in his Avodat Hashem. He should sustain this stability and not waver.
- At *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael were forced to accept the Torah in order that they would afterward accept the Torah willingly, out of love. Then, they would rejoice with Hashem and fear His majesty. The power of the Torah helps Bnei Yisrael return to Hashem, meriting a good new year, full of blessing in both the physical and spiritual realms.

SILENCING THE PROSECUTION

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven on Rosh Chodesh Elul, the first day of the month of mercy and forgiveness. He spent his time in Torah and tefillah and reviewed all that he had previously learnt. He intended to silence the prosecution against his nation for the sin of the Golden Calf, by means of Torah, during these thirty days. Added to this are the two days of Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem gets up from the Seat of Justice and sits on the Seat of Mercy. Throughout this period, Moshe

Rabbeinu rose to the level of לב (heart) which has the *gematria* of thirty-two, hinting to the thirty days of Elul and the two days of Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem examines man's heart (*Sanhedrin* 106b; *Zohar* II, 165b).

Rosh Hashanah is the day when Hashem creates a new heart within us, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 51:12) says, "לב טהור ברא לי אלוהים – Create a new heart for me, O G-d." The word לי (for me) has the *gematria* of forty, hinting to the forty days that Moshe spent in Heaven in order to receive the Torah. When we add these forty days to the thirty-two days from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Rosh Hashanah, they equal seventy-two, alluding to the Ineffable seventy-two letter Name of Hashem. If we utilize these days properly, we can attain tremendous closeness to Hashem.

During the remaining eight days until Yom Kippur, Moshe ascended to the level of eight, above nature. On Yom Kippur, he merited atonement for all Bnei Yisrael, as Hashem told him, "I have forgiven as you have said."

By remaining in Heaven for this second set of forty days, Moshe enabled Bnei Yisrael to be elevated with him to the highest *sefirah* level.

Forty plus forty equals eighty, which is the *gematria* of the letter פ. When this letter is spelled out as פה it means a mouth. This hints to the fact that during the eighty days that Moshe spent in Heaven, he rectified any sins connected with the voice that comes out of the mouth, meaning the voice of Torah. He sanctified the glory of Hashem and subdued the *kelippah*, until it was completely nullified.

The first time that Moshe spent forty days in Heaven was from the 18th of Tammuz until Rosh Chodesh Elul. These were days of anger. Rabbi Yosef Caro, in his sefer, *Maggid Meisharim*, explains that the months of Tammuz and Av are harsh, difficult times. They are followed

by Elul, wherein all arise to say *Selichot*. If one corrects his deeds during the months of Tammuz and Av, he has no need for teshuvah during Elul, as Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolsburg explains the pasuk in Iyov (31:1), “I forged a covenant for my eyes, and I would not gaze at a maiden.”

Nevertheless, Moshe Rabbeinu hinted to Bnei Yisrael during the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur that it is possible to correct everything. One can subdue the voice of prosecution and become elevated through Torah, even rising above nature, like an angel.

This is the task of every Jew during these days. He must quiet the voice of Eisav and his angel, so that they should not accuse our nation of *bitul* Torah during the year.

————— In Summary —————

- The thirty days of Elul plus the two days of Rosh Hashanah equal thirty-two, the *gematria* of לב (heart). We ask Hashem to “create a new heart” for us during this time.
- The eighty days that Moshe Rabbeinu spent in Heaven, during his two sojourns there, have the *gematria* of פ' , hinting to the fact that during this time he rectified any sins connected with the voice that comes out of the mouth (פה), meaning the voice of Torah.
- If one corrects his deeds during the months of Tammuz and Av, he has no need for teshuvah during Elul.
- Moshe Rabbeinu hinted to Bnei Yisrael during the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur that it is possible to correct everything. One must quiet the voice of Eisav and his angel during this time, so that they should not accuse our nation of *bitul* Torah during the year.

THE BEST DEFENSE ATTORNEYS

There is a story told about Rabbi Aharon Kotler, who went along with another Rav in order to solicit charity in a specific place. But, unfortunately, they did not meet with success. In contrast, a Reform rabbi, who had visited the same place at approximately the same time, managed to collect a respectable amount of money.

When Rav Aharon was asked how it was possible that he received nearly nothing, whereas the Reform rabbi was successful, he replied, “This is the will of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He wants me to remain here for a few weeks so that I should give Torah lectures to the people here. In this way, I will also become strengthened in Torah and *emunah*. As long as I haven’t collected a sizeable sum, I give Torah discourses and strengthen the religious level of the people here. Conversely, Hashem doesn’t want anyone to become influenced by the Reform Rabbi. He immediately got the entire sum he needed and left, in order that he should not have a negative impact on the townspeople.”

The situation is similar in our generation. One who does not fear Hashem is accepted as an authority by the masses. No one argues with him. He himself cannot explain this phenomenon. It is part of Hashem’s plan. One who is empty of substance is listened to instantly, in order that his influence should be removed as quickly as possible. On the other hand, something of value needs a strong foundation in order to endure.

Therefore, when one is faced with a test, one should strive to overcome his natural tendencies. This will be to his benefit. Everyone needs a good defense on Yom Kippur. One can imagine how expensive it would be to send an attorney to Heaven. Who can defend us? The *Ba’alei Mussar* explain that the best defense attorneys a person can acquire for himself are the merits he gains by overcoming his natural

instincts, for then all his sins are forgiven (*Yoma* 23a; *Megillah* 28a). Hashem, in turn, overcomes His attributes and pardons man's iniquities.

This applies when a person gives Torah his undivided attention, as it says, "And you shall speak in them." The words "in them" imply "in words of Torah and not in anything else."

There are several ways that are particularly effective in overcoming one's natural tendencies: One should subdue his desires in order to learn Torah and become strengthened in mitzvah observance, and teach Torah to others with *yirat Shamayim*.

All material matters have a limited value and change with time. This is not the case with Torah, which is constant and eternal. Even though the majority of people do not value it appropriately, as soon as they get involved in Torah, they find it difficult to stop. Torah brings a person to teshuvah and fear of Hashem.

————— In Summary —————

- Something of value needs a strong foundation in order to endure.
- Everyone needs a good defense on Yom Kippur. The best defense attorneys a person can acquire for himself are the merits he gains by overcoming his natural instincts, for then all his sins are forgiven. Hashem, in turn, overcomes His attributes, and pardons man's iniquities.
- Torah brings a person to teshuvah and fear of Hashem.

ROSH HASHANAH



CORONATING HASHEM

Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, “On Rosh Hashanah, say before Me *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*. *Malchuyot*, in order to coronate Me as your King and *Zichronot* in order that I should remember you for good. How? By means of the shofar” (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a, 34b).

This raises a question. Why is Rosh Hashanah different from any other day? Surely we proclaim the majesty of Hashem every single day. In the tefillah of *Az Yashir* every morning, we state (*Shemot* 15:18), “Hashem shall reign for all eternity!” In every blessing we call Hashem “King of the world.” In the *Kedushah* prayer in Musaf, we say, “A crown will be given to You.” In the *Kaddish* prayer, we likewise announce the unequivocal sovereignty of Hashem over all the worlds. What does it mean that we should make Hashem our King on Rosh Hashanah? Is blowing the shofar the only way to do this?

Moreover, if the main aspect of coronating Hashem is by means of the shofar, it would seem sufficient to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and not to proclaim Hashem’s majesty during the rest of the year.

Furthermore, why does Hashem desire that we should remind Him of our merits specifically with the shofar? We have *zechut Avot* and the inherent merit of being the children of Hashem. Are these merits insufficient to grant us a favorable judgment? If it is only the shofar that

possesses such potency, then we should wait to mention our merits before Hashem only on Rosh Hashanah, with the blast of the shofar, and not on any other day.

On Rosh Hashanah, we crown Hashem by means of the shofar in order to confuse the Satan, who prosecutes us (*Rosh Hashanah* 16).

Additionally, on Rosh Hashanah we are considered tzaddikim before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and He judges us as we appear on this day (see *Bereishit* 21:17). He does not judge a person according to how he was in the past, nor for how he will be in the future, but only according to his present level. Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk expounds on this.

Hashem tells His nation, “When you coronate Me on Rosh Hashanah, it affects the entire year. For, although you are constantly praising Me and crowning Me as your King, the Satan intercedes, due to your sins, and your proclamation of My Kingship is deficient.

“But, on Rosh Hashanah, the channels of blessing are opened. By means of these channels, abundance of all good is directed your way, throughout the entire year.”

Therefore, Hashem wants us to coronate Him specifically on Rosh Hashanah, in order to open these conduits of blessing. The shofar confounds the Satan, since it inspires Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah all through the year, enabling them to be remembered for good by Hashem at all times.

One who is not sure if his own remembrance has merit mentions the merits of the Avot and previous tzaddikim specifically on Rosh Hashanah and the days of *Selichot*. In this way, he will be connected to them, and his remembrance will ascend together with theirs before Hashem.

Even if a person has sinned, when he does teshuvah, the conduit of blessing that comes through coronating Hashem on Rosh Hashanah is

opened, and he will be showered with an abundance of blessings throughout the rest of the year.

————— In Summary —————

- Why are we enjoined to mention *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot* specifically on Rosh Hashanah and not throughout the year? Don't we have a mitzvah to coronate Hashem as our King every single day?
- Although we are constantly crowning Hashem as our King, the Satan often steps in, causing us to sin and preventing us from attaining Hashem's many blessings. On Rosh Hashanah, we confuse the Satan by our shofar blasts, meriting many blessings for the entire year. This is specifically in the merit of mentioning *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*. We coronate Hashem on Rosh Hashanah with the shofar, in order to provide us with merit for the coming year.

BLOW THE SHOFAR AT THE MOON'S RENEWAL

In the tefillot of Rosh Hashanah, we state, "Today is the conception of the world. Today He will bring all creatures of all the worlds to justice." Rosh Hashanah is an awesome day of judgment for everyone.

The fact that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment is not mentioned by the Torah. On the contrary, the Torah calls Rosh Hashanah a day of joy, as the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 10:10) states, "On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals... you shall sound the trumpets." It seems as though Rosh Hashanah is a festive day, just like the rest of the Jewish holidays. The judgment that takes place on this day is only alluded to in the Scriptures, as it says (*Tehillim* 81:4), "תקעו, בחודש שופר בכסא ליום חגנו כי חוק לישראל הוא משפט לאלוהי יעקב – Blow the shofar at the moon's renewal, at the time appointed for our festive

day. Because it is a decree for Israel, a judgment [day] for the G-d of Jacob.” The word בכסא alludes to the hidden nature of the day, since it is similar to מכסה (cover). Why is the tremendous holiness of this day hidden from us?

This is in order to conceal it from the eyes of the Satan and the prosecutors. This is hinted to by the fact that the moon “is concealed on this holiday” (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a), since it can hardly be seen, as Rosh Hashanah is celebrated at the beginning of the month, at the time of the new moon. The Satan anticipates our depressed state, saddened by our multitude of sins. It is then that he will pounce on us to prosecute.

But, instead of being downtrodden, just the opposite occurs. Bnei Yisrael wear white clothes and are happy (*Sha'arei Teshuvah; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 581a; *Mateh Ephraim*, ibid. 55). They admit their faults in their hearts. On the other hand, the Satan observes how the angels tremble with fear and trepidation. He does not know what to make of it and becomes utterly confused. Furthermore, there is a hurried atmosphere, as Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) tell us, “All are reviewed with one glance.”

Another reason for Rosh Hashanah being called “a day of joy” and not “a day of judgment” is in order to bring merit to Bnei Yisrael, so that they should obtain a favorable judgment. The Satan is confused by the joy of the day and does not take the opportunity to prosecute.

However, one should not think that perhaps his sins were overlooked due to the haste of the judgment in Heaven on Rosh Hashanah. This is not the case at all. In spite of the speed of the judgment, one must own up to each and every deed that he did. Hashem does not fail to notice a thing. Whoever says Hashem overlooks, will have his life overlooked (*Bava Kama* 50a).

Hashem does a great act of kindness with Bnei Yisrael by having them all pass before Him like sheep, glanced over with one sweeping

glance (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a, 18a). This is in order that the Satan should not prosecute them. For, if the Satan were to stand at the side of each person being judged, no one would emerge innocent, *chas v'shalom*. It is in the eyes of the Satan that people seem to be judged all at once. In reality, each and every person is judged individually for every detail of his life.

This, then, is the reason for the joy of Rosh Hashanah. We indicate to the Satan that he has no claim against us, for we are secure in the knowledge that Hashem will judge us for the good. On the other hand, we are commanded to sound the shofar, for the shofar has the ability to shake us out of our complacency (*Rambam, Hilchot Shofar*). In this manner, we will do complete teshuvah for all the wrong we did throughout the previous year, in thought, word, and deed, and for any sins we committed due to desire and negative character traits. Teshuvah is the sole means by which to correct a misdeed. Through teshuvah, we will merit forgiveness from Hashem.

We must take the shofar's sounds to heart. For, if not, even though the Satan is confounded by the shofar's blasts, the evil angels caused by our wrong actions throughout the year bear witness to our sins. These angels are not frightened off by the shofar's blasts, as they are part and parcel of the person himself, created by his improper actions.

The teshuvah that one does on Rosh Hashanah can obliterate them completely. This is because the intention to do a good deed is considered as if the person has already done it (*Kiddushin* 40a; *Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1). In this merit, one will be written on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur in the Book of Life.

The Asseret Yemei Teshuvah are the litmus test to see whether or not a person keeps his resolution to genuinely return to Hashem. When it is evident that he is living up to his promise, Hashem proclaims that Yom Kippur will atone for him, and the Satan has no power to

prosecute (*Yoma* 20a; *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:15). Man becomes completely cleansed and purified.

The Severity of the Sin of Chillul Shabbat

We are exhorted to “blow the shofar at the moon’s renewal – תקעו בחודש שופר” (*Tehillim* 81:4). The initials of these words spell שבת.

Adam Harishon was created on Rosh Hashanah (*Zohar* III, 100b). He sinned immediately afterward, deserving death. But, in the merit of teshuvah, which he did on Shabbat (*Bereishit Rabbah* 28:22; *Zohar* II, 138a), saying, “A psalm, a song for the Shabbat” (*Tehillim* 92:1), he avoided death. We blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah to remember the sin of Adam Harishon and the teshuvah that he did. He was saved from death in the *zechut* of Shabbat.

Shabbat is equal to all the mitzvot (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5). Consequently, all sin derives from the desecration of Shabbat. The fact that we still blow the shofar indicates that we have not merited keeping Shabbat as fit. If Bnei Yisrael would keep two, or even one, Shabbat, in the appropriate manner, they would immediately be redeemed, and Mashiach would arrive (*Shabbat* 118b; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16). How great, then, is the power of Shabbat Shuvah, the Shabbat after the Day of Judgment, because that was when Adam Harishon repented and received atonement.

The shofar awakens us to the call of teshuvah and to keep the laws of Shabbat. In this merit, we will be worthy that all our iniquities will be hidden, and no prosecution will be allowed, as it says, “On the day when the moon is covered, for our festive day.”

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a) state that Yosef left prison on Rosh Hashanah. This is hinted at in the words תקעו בחודש שופר, the last letters of which spell שור (ox), an allusion to Yosef Hatzaddik (*Devarim* 33:17; *Sotah* 13a).

Torah and Shofar Bring a Person to Teshuvah

Apart from mentioning blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, David Hamelech refers to the power of Torah in this chapter (*Tehillim* 81:5): “Because it is a decree for Israel... He appointed it as a testimony for Yosef when He went out over the land of Egypt.” What does the word “testimony” refer to?

The *Yetzer Hara* can tolerate a person’s mitzvah performance, but one’s Torah learning is too much for him to bear. This is because the Torah is the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b). By learning Torah, one gives great satisfaction to his Creator, connecting all the worlds, and bringing many blessings in its merit. Keeping mitzvot without learning Torah is incomparable to keeping mitzvot when one does learn, since then one performs the mitzvot in the optimal way, according to Hashem’s will.

This is the meaning of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3) “If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments.” Rashi quotes the Midrash (*Torat Kohanim*, *ibid.*) that this means “that you should labor in Torah.” One who exerts himself in learning Torah will keep the commandments properly.

This is also hinted to by the sounds of the shofar at *Matan Torah*. The pasuk says (*Shemot* 19:19) that the shofar’s blasts became increasingly louder. This is an allusion to the sounds of Torah, which must grow stronger and stronger with time (based on *Tehillim* 84:8). The shofar of Rosh Hashanah reminds a person of the shofar blasts at Har Sinai, and he becomes strengthened in Torah. He remembers his misdeeds, and his heart breaks within him. He is subdued before Hashem.

Through the sounds of the shofar, a person remembers the *bitul* Torah for which he is responsible. The crooked ram’s horn is an allusion to his crooked heart, and the arrogance with which it is filled.

The pasuk uses the word “testimony,” for Torah is called “testimony,” as it states in Tehillim, “The testimony of Hashem is loyal.” In the merit of laboring in Torah, Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah. We, too, will merit delivery from the hand of the *Yetzer Hara* through teshuvah, Torah, and hearing the shofar’s blast, for by these means all negative character traits leave us, and we merit a good, blessed year.

The greatest humiliation is to be caught red-handed while sinning. The shame at being found transgressing is indescribable, especially for a person who is considered by others as an upright, honorable man.

The Shevatim were exalted people, who were called “the tribes of Hashem, a testimony for Yisrael” (*Tehillim* 122:4). They were secure in their decision to sell Yosef. Yet, when he revealed himself to them, they were extremely distressed (*Bereishit* 45:3). They were so embarrassed that they even contemplated killing him. Chazal (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 5) state that they indeed tried to kill Yosef, but an angel appeared and scattered them in all directions.

Yosef then called them to him, and they approached, shamefully. Regarding this, Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:11) state, “Woe to us on the Day of Judgment; woe to us on the Day of Rebuke. Yosef was of the youngest of the Shevatim, yet his brothers could not withstand his rebuke. How much greater will be our shame when we will be judged by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as it says (*Tehillim* 50:22), “I will rebuke you and lay it clearly before your eyes.” We learn from the episode of Yosef and his brothers just how severe will be the indictment against a person for every sin. What tremendous humiliation awaits a person when he faces the Heavenly Tribunal!

Sounding the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah stirs a person’s conscience, reminding him of all his sins of the previous year. There are several different types of shofar blasts. Each one applies to a different type of person. The *tekiah gedolah* (a long blast) is directed

toward reshaim. This is a loud blast, meant to reprimand them for their many sins. The *tekiah ketanah*, which is a softer sound, is directed toward average people (*beinonim*). And the *shevarim teruah* (a series of short, broken blasts) is intended for the tzaddikim, for they do not sin, but rather, overcome their *Yetzer Hara*, and so to speak, break it up (שובר). Each person hears the message of the shofar that is pertinent to him.

Since there is no one in this world who is completely righteous and never sins (*Kohelet* 7:20), everyone is enjoined to listen to the shofar blowing, and if one has proper intentions, he receives atonement. This is sufficient humiliation for him. It is preferable to suffer humiliation in this world than to suffer it in the World to Come.

The initials of the words תקעו בחדש שופר (Blow the shofar at the moon's renewal), spell בשת (shame). The shofar's blasts remind one of his sins, causing him to feel shame and consequently do teshuvah for them. He will then be cleansed from his sin and not have to face prosecution in the Heavenly Court. The last letters of תקעו בחדש שופר spell the word שור (ox). Yosef, who is compared to the ox, brought humiliation upon his brothers, thereby inducing them to do teshuvah.

There is a powerful lesson here. Just like Yosef prompted his brothers to do teshuvah by humiliating them, in the same way, we gain atonement when we feel embarrassed over our sins. The reason for this is that humiliation is akin to murder, as one's face becomes drained of blood when one is shamed (*Bava Metzia* 58b). Just as death atones for one's sins, so too does embarrassment.

The power of the shofar is that it prompts one to do teshuvah, when he remembers his sins and feels embarrassed over them. When the sounds of the shofar reverberate in a person's heart, the accompanying shame drives away the Satan, preventing him from prosecuting. By doing teshuvah out of love of Hashem, one's

intentional sins become transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 33b).

————— In Summary —————

- The Torah does not mention that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment. Rather, it calls Rosh Hashanah “a festive day.” This is in order to confuse the Satan, so that he should not prosecute. Then, Bnei Yisrael are able to do teshuvah and come close to Hashem.
- Hashem judges all mankind with one sweeping glance, but despite the swiftness of the judgment, each and every person receives his individual trial. The sound of the shofar is meant to wake us up. Even though the Satan himself becomes confused, the angels that were created by our aveirot linger. These can be eradicated only by doing teshuvah.
- During the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, Hashem tests a person to see if he utilizes these days for returning to Him. If, indeed, he does teshuvah, he is forgiven, and on Yom Kippur, he is sealed for a good, blessed new year.
- The initials of the words **תקעו בחדש שופר** (Blow the shofar at the moon’s renewal), spell the word **שבת**. Adam Harishon was created on Rosh Hashanah (Erev Shabbat), and sinned on that day. He merited doing teshuvah in the *zechut* of Shabbat. All sin is a result of the desecration of Shabbat. Therefore, we blow the shofar to arouse everyone to do teshuvah. Then, Rosh Hashanah will be a day of **כסה** (covering), for our sins will be concealed.
- The last letters of the words **תקעו בחדש שופר** spell **שור** (ox), which is an allusion to Yosef, who was released from jail on Rosh Hashanah. Tehillim states, “He appointed it as a testimony for Yosef.” The word “testimony” refers to the Torah, for through Torah, man can correct his sins and merit blessing. The *Yetzer Hara* tries his utmost to disturb one’s Torah study, since this brings bounty to all the worlds. The Torah was given amidst shofar blasts, for the shofar is a means of reminding a person to repent from *bitul* Torah.
- The shofar awakens a person to repent and be ashamed of his misdeeds. Yosef’s brothers were ashamed before him, when they were faced with the sin of selling him. This is the essence of the Day of Judgment. The different

types of shofar blasts arouse a person to mend his ways. This prevents the Satan from prosecuting, and one's sins are changed into merits. He returns to Hashem and merits many blessings.

CONFUSING THE SATAN

“Blow the shofar at the moon’s renewal, at the time appointed for our festive day. Because it is a decree for Yisrael, a judgment [day] for the G-d of Yaakov”

(Tehillim 81:4-5)

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 8b) learn the concept of Rosh Hashanah from these pesukim. We also learn from here that Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment.

Why doesn't the Torah explicitly mention that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, sufficing with this hint? Chazal (*ibid.* 16b) teach that we blow the shofar in order to confuse the Satan. Rashi explains that when the Satan observes how precious the mitzvot are to Bnei Yisrael, he is left speechless.

In light of this, we can understand that it is in fact an act of Hashem's kindness that Rosh Hashanah is not called the Day of Judgment in the Torah. Thus, the Satan does not realize that judgment is taking place on this day, and is unable to prosecute against us.

Rather than proclaiming that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, Hakadosh Baruch Hu instructed Bnei Yisrael to bring sacrifices and be happy on this day (see *Bamidbar* 29:1-6). It is also described with the words “בכסה ליום חגנו” – at the time appointed for our festive day.” This can be interpreted to mean that on this festive day, our sins, and even our trial, are hidden (מכוסה) from the *Yetzer Hara*. This prevents him from prosecuting.

Furthermore, when the *Yetzer Hara* sees how the Jewish nation is happy, dressed in white clothing, resembling the angels (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 581), he becomes afraid of them. The white clothes indicate forgiveness of sin, as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 1:18) states, “If your sins are like scarlet they will become [white] as wool.” We are joyous that we have emerged innocent in judgment.

The Satan is confused by our joy on the Day of Judgment and by the blasts of the shofar. Rosh Hashanah is a day of concealment. The moon is hidden on this day, since Rosh Hashanah is celebrated at the time of the new moon, hinting that our aveirot are concealed from the *Yetzer Hara* also. It is only when our aveirot are mentioned that he has the power to prosecute. The shofar blasts further confuse him, preventing him from prosecuting us.

If this is the case, why do we find Yom Kippur openly described in the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:28) as “the Day of Atonement to provide you atonement before Hashem?” Why isn’t the essence of the day of Yom Kippur concealed, as well? This seems to give leverage to the *Yetzer Hara*. He has a full ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to prepare a powerful prosecution against us, for he knows the great day of forgiveness is on the horizon. The Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:3) writes, “The essence of Yom Kippur atones, as the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30) states, ‘For on this day He shall provide atonement for you...’” Wouldn’t it be fitting for Yom Kippur to be merely alluded to, so that the Satan should not be prepared for it?

The shofar is made from a ram’s horn in order to remember *Akeidat Yitzchak* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a). When we blow it, Hashem considers it as if we are offering ourselves as sacrifices to Him.

Why is it necessary to remind Hashem of *Akeidat Yitzchak*? Hashem remembers everything. Why do we need to remember it? Do we worry throughout the days of the year that the *Yetzer Hara* might hinder our teshuvah process? We do not use the shofar throughout the year. Does

that mean that Rosh Hashanah is the only day designated for teshuvah?

The main causes of sin are lack of sufficient toil in Torah and the failure to perform mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*. Only a person who serves Hashem with self-sacrifice shows his great love toward Him.

We are commanded to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, since it is a difficult mitzvah to do. The one who blows it nearly chokes as he blows the one hundred blasts. They compensate for the one hundred *berachot* which a Jew is enjoined to say every day, *berachot* that are not always said with proper intent. These blasts also compensate for all the mitzvot that one does during the day, which may not have been performed with *mesirut nefesh*. The *ba'al tokea* is left breathless, almost like a dead person, who has no breath inside of him.

In this vein, the sefer *Likutei Moharan* explains that when a person sighs as he does teshuvah, his breath is stopped for a moment. It is as if he gives up his life to gain atonement, just like a *korban* on the Mizbeach.

When we remember the *mesirut nefesh* involved in *Akeidat Yitzchak*, our shofar blowing will reflect that self-sacrifice, encouraging us to improve our deeds and to act with self-sacrifice in the future, bringing us closer to Hashem.

We rejoice on Rosh Hashanah and dress in white to allude to the fact that all mitzvot must be done with joy and purity, with no taint of sadness or sorrow. Sadness prevents one from acting with *mesirut nefesh* in Avodat Hashem.

Now we can understand why Yom Kippur is specified as a day of atonement. If one serves Hashem with *mesirut nefesh* and joy, doing complete teshuvah, he has nothing to fear on Yom Kippur. The Satan has no power whatsoever on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (*Yoma* 29a; *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:15).

On Rosh Hashanah, we recite pesukim of *Malchuyot*, coronating Hashem as our King (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a, 34b). Even if a person were to sin on this day, he has already proclaimed his intention to crown Hashem as his Ruler. His true desire is to subject himself to Hashem, serving Him with love and joy and self-sacrifice, just like Yitzchak Avinu, who was prepared to offer himself to Hashem at the *Akeidah*.

Thus, Rosh Hashanah is designated as a day of tefillah and elevation, a day for correcting areas between man and Hashem and man and his fellow man, and performing mitzvot with happiness and through *mesirut nefesh*. It is a day when the *Yetzer Hara* has no control.

The resolve one makes on Rosh Hashanah to improve his ways is beneficial for the entire year. The Satan will arrive on the scene, at some point in the year, to confuse him. However, the Satan can only try to interfere with a person's teshuvah; he does not have the power to prevent him from doing teshuvah. This is because on Rosh Hashanah he coronated Hashem as his King; his subjugation to Hashem cannot be affected by the Satan's ploys.

Hashem has bestowed kindness upon us by showing us how to return to Him on Rosh Hashanah by means of the shofar, thereby enabling us to overcome our *Yetzer Hara* throughout the rest of the year.

We blow the shofar only on Rosh Hashanah and not throughout the year, because Rosh Hashanah is the day designated for correcting any defect in the mitzvot we did during the year. We confuse the Satan on this day with our teshuvah and through accepting Hashem's Kingship with *mesirut nefesh*. His prosecution against us is silenced.

One should always be careful not to open the door to the *Yetzer Hara* by sinning. But if he already sinned, the power of the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah can bring him to teshuvah.

Moreover, the shofar blasts can help him throughout the year. One is instructed to constantly remember the shofar blasts of Rosh

Hashanah, as it says (*Bamidbar* 10:10), “They shall be a remembrance for you.” This recollection has the strength to confuse the Satan throughout the year.

From here we see just how much Hashem wants to do kindness with His people, so that they may be able to return to Him without the Satan’s interference. He desires our closeness always.

————— In Summary —————

- Rosh Hashanah is not called the Day of Judgment in the Torah, but rather “a day of blowing the shofar.” This is in order to confuse the Satan. Since he is unaware of the judgment taking place, he does not prosecute against Bnei Yisrael. Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to bring *korbanot* and wear white clothing as an indication of their atonement, further preventing the *Yetzer Hara* from accusing us.
- Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is explicitly referred to by the Torah as the Day of Atonement. However, the Satan is unable to prosecute us since we do teshuvah.
- The blowing of the shofar alludes to *Akeidat Yitzchak*. What is the point of this? Sin is a result of a lack of *mesirut nefesh* in fulfilling Torah and mitzvot. Sounding the shofar is an act of *mesirut nefesh*, as one is compelled to hold his breath when blowing it. It is therefore a rectification for any lack regarding the one hundred *berachot* we are enjoined to say each day, as well as mitzvot that were not done with the correct level of *mesirut nefesh*. The reason we remember *Akeidat Yitzchak* is to bring the subject of *mesirut nefesh* to the fore. Then, joy can enter our lives, banishing sadness and sorrow, which lead to sin.
- On Rosh Hashanah, we coronate Hashem as our King. Although we may sin even on this day, we have already stated that our true desire is to be subject to the rule of Hashem. We have no fear of the *Yetzer Hara*, for he is confounded on Rosh Hashanah for the entire year. At any point in the year, we have the ability to return to Hashem, through the strength of the shofar blasts. Hashem does this kindness with Bnei Yisrael, in order to bring them back to His service.

HASHEM REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

In the tefillah of *Zichronot* on Rosh Hashanah, we state that Hashem “remembers the forgotten.” If something is forgotten, why does Hashem remember it?

When Hashem sees that a person does teshuvah and sincerely regrets his iniquities, He forgives him and even forgets these sins. However, these forgotten sins are also remembered by Hashem in order that they may be transformed into merit, through the teshuvah that a person does out of love (*Yoma* 86b).

There is another aspect to Hashem’s remembering forgotten sins. When one says, “I will sin and I will repent, I will sin and I will repent,” (ibid. 85b), he is never granted the opportunity to do teshuvah. By repeating his sin, his former teshuvah is invalidated. Hashem remembers those sins which were previously forgiven, when he did teshuvah, and he is now held liable for them.

Nevertheless, Hashem is long-suffering (*Yerushalmi, Ta’anit* 2:1; *Zohar* I, 140a). He does not kill a sinner instantly, ignoring the prosecuting angels who desire to punish the steady sinner.

Hashem also never forgets Yaakov Avinu. His image is engraved on the Heavenly Throne (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:2). This is in order to defend Am Yisrael. Yaakov stands before Hashem, proclaiming, “The *Yetzer Hara* is mighty. But, I, Yaakov, waged war against him all my life. Therefore, forgive Bnei Yisrael.”

Yaakov was the chosen one among the *Avot* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 76), who speaks in defense of his children. Just as Yaakov’s image came to Yosef’s aid in *Mitzrayim*, helping him to overpower the *kelippah* and bring *kedushah* into the world, so too, does it enable each and every one of us to do the same.

GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges a person based on his present level and behavior. It does not depend on his past or his future. Yishmael was the prototype for this. He was saved from death because he was still righteous at the time that he was judged.

However, one should not remain at the level he was on when he was judged on Rosh Hashanah. He must always go forward. He must constantly and consistently ascend in his Avodat Hashem.

When going to perform the *Akeidah*, Avraham Avinu took with him his two young men, Yishmael and Eliezer. When they reached the mountain, he told them (*Bereishit* 22:5), “Stay here by yourselves with the donkey.” Chazal (*Yevamot* 62a) teach that Avraham was hinting to the fact that Yishmael’s nation is likened to the donkey, since the words עִם הַחֲמֹר (with the donkey) can also be read עִם הַחֲמֹר (a donkey-like nation).

This is astounding. If Yishmael was compared to a donkey, what was he doing in the house of Avraham? Moreover, Sarah asked Avraham to banish him from the house (*Bereishit* 21:10) because he was a rasha and served idols (*Tosefta, Sotah* 6:3). The fact that Avraham compared Yishmael to a donkey at the *Akeidah* indicates that he possessed an intrinsic defect.

How can we resolve the two conflicting descriptions of Yishmael? When he was being judged, the angels testified to his righteousness before Hashem. On the other hand, Avraham compared him to a donkey, indicating that he was flawed.

We are faced with another question. Why didn’t Hashem judge Yishmael according to his future actions? Although at this point in his

life he was considered righteous, this may have been because of the teshuvah that he did in the heat of the moment. However, the sincerity of this type of teshuvah is doubtful, just like one who says, “I will sin, and I will repent.” Such a person is not given the opportunity to do teshuvah (*Yoma* 85b).

After much thought, we can explain these questions according to the following ideas.

On Rosh Hashanah, a person is charged to transform himself from one extreme to the other, emotionally as well as spiritually, advancing from strength to strength (*Tehillim* 84:8). He should always be ascending. Otherwise, he remains at the level of the ignoramus. He is similar to the donkey, which does the same work, day after day, without any change.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for change. It is a day when one is inspired to increase his level of Avodat Hashem. Just as a businessman strives to increase his holdings from year to year, gauging his success by this barometer, so too, should a person strive to increase his spiritual assets. One should advance from one level to the next.

This is what Avraham Avinu was telling Yishmael. He reprimanded him by saying that he had not changed one iota from the time that he was judged in the wilderness, “as he was then,” until now. Thus, he was compared to the donkey, which constantly does the same work, never demanding more of itself. If he is loaded with a burden, he carries it. If not, he sits like an idle worker.

Maybe Avraham’s words helped Yishmael do teshuvah. He, too, merited withstanding the *nisyonot* on the way to *Akeidat Yitzchak*, for example, the test of the river which stood in their way (*Tanchuma, Vayeira* 22). But he was incapable of perceiving the cloud above the mountain (ibid. 23), which alluded to the *Shechinah* (*Bereishit Rabbah*).

He was commanded to remain below and was denied the opportunity to serve Avraham and Yitzchak at the time of the *Akeidah*,

even though he subjugated himself to them. This was because he continued as previously, without improving himself in any way since the time that his life was given back to him, on the Day of Judgment, when he nearly died of thirst. He had not advanced spiritually, and this was held against him.

For that reason, Avraham told him, “Stay here.” The word שׁוּב (sit/stay) can also mean *repent* or *return*. He was telling Yishmael and Eliezer that if they would do teshuvah and advance spiritually, they would also merit having great revelations. But because there was no change in Yishmael’s character, Yishmael remained a donkey.

On Rosh Hashanah, each person is judged according to his present level. If he is righteous on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem will decree a good life for him. But if he has not changed or elevated himself in any way since the previous Rosh Hashanah, as was demanded of him, he will be charged with being no better than a beast. This is the exacting measure of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

One who begins each day with tefillah, just as he has always done, and learns Torah and performs mitzvot in the same way as he has in previous years, is meritorious. But his Avodat Hashem is deficient, for he is not striving to reach greater heights. He is like the nation compared to the donkey.

The Ram’s Head – The Ability to Withstand a Nisayon

With the above in mind, we can understand the meaning behind eating a ram’s head on Rosh Hashanah eve, as well as why we remember the ashes of Yitzchak on the *Akeidah*.

Every moment that Yitzchak accompanied his father to the *Akeidah*, he withstood a *nisayon*. At any time, he could have turned to his father, stating, “I do not want to be an offering on the Altar.” He was thirty-seven years old at the time, yet he did not refuse to go along. He

certainly ascended to greater heights with each passing moment, until the culmination of his ordeal, with the words of the angel (*Bereishit* 22:12), “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad.”

Yitzchak reached such lofty levels that when Avraham Avinu offered a ram in exchange for his son, the pasuk (ibid. 13) states that the ram was “instead of his son.” It was as if each part of the sacrificial service was done with Yitzchak himself (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:10).

Even though Yitzchak was not actually sacrificed, he rose to great heights through his willingness to be the *korban*. Likewise, each person ascends not only while doing a mitzvah, but even merely when thinking about, or desiring to fulfill, a mitzvah that he intends to do at a later time. In this way, his entire life is sanctified, since “one mitzvah leads to another” (*Avot* 4:2).

When one’s head is constantly involved in thoughts of Torah and mitzvot, he soars to greater and greater heights. His life is one big tapestry of Avodat Hashem. He can account for every second of life, utilizing it to its maximum capacity. He is the master of his time. He will never say, “I have no time for Torah learning,” for he knows how to utilize his time correctly; he is in control.

When a person reaches this level of managing his time appropriately, then even if he is prevented from doing a mitzvah, it is most probably due to being involved in another mitzvah. Hashem will grant him the opportunity to do all mitzvot, either in actual deed, or through the merit gained by desiring to do a mitzvah. Hashem considers the good thought as part of the deed (*Kiddushin* 40a).

Yitzchak Avinu taught us how to cleave to mitzvot constantly, ascending higher and higher in spiritual realms, being in control of one’s time and utilizing it solely for Avodat Hashem.

Furthermore, we learn from Yitzchak that every person should devote his time only to Avodat Hashem. The pasuk in *Tehillim* (44:23)

states, “Because for Your sake we are killed all the time.” We must emulate Yitzchak, who always ascended in thought and deed. Therefore, he was considered a *korban* for Hashem, even though he was replaced by the ram.

During Elul, one must make an effort to change himself, raising his level in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. With this transformation, he will come to Rosh Hashanah renewed.

Not only should he be cleansed of sin and earthly pursuits, but he should feel elevated above his former level. Since he is in control of his life, he comes with an accounting of how he spent every moment in the service of Hashem. He comes “with his days,” as the pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:1) tells us regarding Avraham Avinu. And he goes on the path of Yitzchak, always ascending.

Thus, when we eat a ram’s head on Rosh Hashanah, we remember how Yitzchak always ascended spiritually in thought and deed. He was the actual *korban*. The ram (כִּבְשֶׁת) was merely sacrificed in his stead. In this manner, he blazed (כִּבְשֶׁת) a trail for his progeny.

One should go from strength to strength, improving his service of Hashem throughout the year. Rosh Hashanah is the day of renewal, when one should transform himself, elevating his level of Avodat Hashem. This is the fulfillment of the pasuk (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 17:6), “His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem.”

Conversely, if one does not make an effort to change for the better each year, he is compared to the beast, which keeps on doing its task without any thought of improvement. This is a great deficiency in a person, for he is created in the image of Hashem, and he is enjoined to constantly grow.

This was the essential difference between Yishmael and Yitzchak. Yishmael remained “as he was,” since he did not utilize his time to the utmost. He never transformed himself into something better. He lost

out by not meriting witnessing the great revelations that Avraham and Yitzchak were witness to at the *Akeidah*. He did not see the *Shechinah* on the mountain. Avraham compared him to the donkey and instructed him to remain at the bottom of the mountain, together with the donkey, until he would learn to utilize his every moment in the service of Hashem.

Avraham told his youths (*Bereishit* 22:5), “We will worship and we will return to you.” He was hinting to them that he and Yitzchak were found worthy, whereas they were not. They lost out on everything because they remained on the same spiritual level, whereas he and Yitzchak were constantly improving themselves, and thereby merited great visions.

One who transforms himself, constantly becoming a better person, merits illumination. The ram’s head reminds us that we should strive to become a more thinking person. We read the parashah of the *Akeidah* on Rosh Hashanah to remember Yitzchak and how he withstood the *nisayon*, converting himself into a *korban* for Hashem. Hashem gives blessing to his children in this merit.

Yitzchak Avinu further taught us that when a person is involved in a mitzvah, the gates of Gan Eden open before him. Although he cannot physically see Gan Eden, it is revealed to his *neshamah*, as long as he is connected with his Creator.

As proof of this, we find that at the time of the *Akeidah*, the gates of Heaven were opened, and Yitzchak saw the angels crying (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:14). We know that on the brink of death, a person sees his portion in Gan Eden. But here, Yitzchak was not about to be sacrificed; why did he merit seeing Gan Eden?

This question is strengthened by the following thought. Yitzchak’s joy at witnessing the tremendous reward awaiting him in Gan Eden was liable to interfere with that reward, since it may have influenced him

to do mitzvot merely for their reward. Tzaddikim do mitzvot *l'shem Shamayim*. How could Yitzchak have been tested by seeing his portion in Gan Eden, which could have lowered his level of Avodat Hashem?

We can explain this according to our previous line of thought. When one is engaged in Torah study and mitzvah performance with *mesirut nefesh*, he attains greater levels in Avodat Hashem. He sacrifices himself for Hashem, thereby reserving for himself a portion in Gan Eden. He enjoys the splendor of the *Shechinah*, like the tzaddikim in Gan Eden (*Berachot* 17a). This is on condition that he clings to Hashem in his lifetime, through performing Torah and mitzvot, and constantly elevates his spiritual level.

When a person is busy ascending the ladder of perfection, he prevents the *Yetzer Hara* from persuading him to do wrong. Even if the *Yetzer Hara* endeavors, with all his might, to hinder him from coming close to Hashem and meriting a portion in Gan Eden, he has already prepared himself properly and will not succumb to the *Yetzer's* blandishments.

When a person grows in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* in this world, he receives a taste of Gan Eden. Torah is a spiritual entity. Fortunate is one who merits sampling it here in this world. His joy will be doubled in the World to Come. In this manner, he merits closeness to Hashem, as well as Heavenly assistance in combating the *Yetzer Hara*, for Hashem has chosen him and his *avodah*.

Nisyonot Bring a Person Closer to Hashem

The ram that was used for the *korban* is described as follows (*Bereishit* 22:13): “Behold, a ram! – afterwards, caught in the thicket by its horns.” Why did Hashem show Avraham the ram at the end of the episode of the *Akeidah*, and not at the beginning?

Moreover, how did Avraham know that this ram did not belong to someone, or was not stolen property, and therefore unfit for a sacrifice

(*Vayikra Rabbah* 2:7)? Additionally, what is the reason for the wording, “A ram! – afterwards? The word “afterwards” seems superfluous. We know there is not one extra letter in the Torah; what can we learn from this word?

Hashem only gives a person a test if he is capable of withstanding it. Avraham’s *neshamah* needed the test of the *Akeidah* and would have suffered without it.

Hashem always prepares the remedy before the malady (*Megillah* 13b). Before telling Avraham to desist from slaughtering Yitzchak, Hashem prepared a ram in his place. This was not revealed to Avraham, in order that his spiritual *avodah* should not be disturbed, and he would be able to continue to elevate himself during *Akeidat Yitzchak*. This ram had been waiting since the Six Days of Creation (*Rashi; Yalkut Shimoni*). All of the lofty intentions which Avraham invested into the *Akeidah* were transferred to the sacrifice of the ram.

Since he had not seen the ram at the beginning of the *Akeidah*, but only afterwards, Avraham understood that it was ready and waiting for his use and was not forbidden as a sacrifice. Hashem does not cause mishap to His tzaddikim (*Ketubot* 28b), as the pasuk (*Shmuel* I, 2:9) states, “He guards the steps of His devout ones.”

This is a fundamental principle for every servant of Hashem. He should know that whenever he is placed in a situation of a test, the solution has already been prepared by Hashem. He must merely overcome his *Yetzer Hara* and withstand the trial.

This is a basic tenet of our *emunah*. According to the natural order, the *nisayon* may seem insurmountable. But Hashem never puts a person into a *nisayon* which he is unable to overcome.

This, then, is the meaning behind the words איל אחר (a ram – afterwards). The *gematria* of these words, adding two for the number of words themselves, is equal to the *gematria* of the words בם בחר

(chose them). This alludes to the fact that Hashem chooses only those who constantly withstand the *nisayon* of the *Yetzer Hara*.

There is a vast difference between a person who always has it good, and never has *nisyonot* placed before him, and one who always faces *nisyonot* in Avodat Hashem and triumphs over them. One who does not face adversity in his Avodat Hashem certainly loves Hashem, for he lacks nothing. But who is to guarantee that as soon as a difficulty comes his way, he will continue to love Him?

Therefore, Hashem especially loves one who is inflicted with *nisyonot* and withstands them. This person indicates that his love for Hashem supersedes everything else. He loves Hashem with all his heart, all his soul, and all his resources. As Rabbi Akiva stated, “When will this mitzvah (of *kiddush Hashem*) come to my hands, that I may fulfill it?!” One who withstands a *nisayon* is most beloved by Hashem.

When Avraham withstood the *nisayon* of **not** sacrificing his son, and overcame his desire to offer him up to Hashem, the Torah testified that Hashem chose him, for he withstood such a difficult test.

There are people who are happy to prove their loyalty by withstanding trials, thereby becoming close to Hashem, and even feel saddened when the *nisayon* ends. When that is the case, Hashem immediately sends a mitzvah their way. This mitzvah gives them further fulfillment, as well as containing an element of *nisayon*, so that they have another chance to withstand a test.

The pasuk (*Bereishit 22:13*) says that the ram was “caught in the thicket (סבך) by its horns.” This refers to the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to tangle up (לסבך) a person, so that he fails in his trials. The true servant of Hashem emerges victorious.

We see from here that Avraham was not satisfied to remain at his previous level of service of Hashem. He constantly strove to reach

greater heights, by means of overcoming more difficult *nisyonot*, as was the case in not sacrificing Yitzchak.

Hashem presented him with a ram, which proved to be a *nisayon*, as well, albeit on a much smaller scale. The ram was caught by its horns, and Avraham needed to extricate it from the thorns with alacrity.

In this way, Avraham merited that *Akeidat Yitzchak* was a perfect sacrifice and would always stand in defense of his sons on the Day of Judgment on Rosh Hashanah, ensuring that they should emerge innocent.

When Bnei Yisrael continue to withstand the *nisyonot* that they are faced with, the *zechut* of the *Akeidah* enables them to cleave to Hashem, going from strength to strength. There is no accusation that they are remaining at their previous level, for they constantly strive to thrive and grow closer and closer to Hashem.

One is enjoined to merely open an opening in teshuvah the size of a needle's hole, and Hashem will open for him an opening of Divine assistance the size of a banquet hall (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3). Afterward, he has the ability to become greater and greater in Avodat Hashem, even if he is not yet on that level, just like Avraham and Yitzchak Avinu.

A man approached me, demanding, "Rebbi, why was this past year so bad for me? I kept Torah and mitzvot and withstood many *nisyonot*. Why, then, do I not have a source of income? I've lost all my money!"

I answered, "Why do you say that you had a bad year? You are, *Baruch Hashem*, alive and well. Isn't that enough reason to call it a good year? Many young people have died within the past year, and here you are, alive and healthy. Is the year called 'good' only if you made a lot of money? Did you forget the millions of times that Hashem saved your life and that of your family? If you had earned a lot of money, the *Middat Hadin* might have struck you in another area, because of some aveirah.

Then, *chas v'shalom*, you would have died or gotten sick. Why do you say you had a bad year? You are displaying a lack of appreciation toward Hashem.” He was silenced and asked forgiveness for his words.

This is the method employed by the *Yetzer Hara*. Before Rosh Hashanah, he instills thoughts of heresy in a man’s mind. He will then pass through Rosh Hashanah full of grievances toward Hashem. This is so that he will lose the opportunity to transform himself on Rosh Hashanah, and he will not come closer to Hashem. He will stagnate in his Avodat Hashem. Although he may not have aveirot, he is certainly not moving upward on the ladder of perfection. This is due to his attitude toward Hashem, and indicates a failing in withstanding *nisyonot*.

A Chassid Is One Who Protects the Divine Image within Himself

“An unlearned person (*am ha'aretz*) cannot be scrupulously pious (a *chassid*)” (*Avot* 2:6). Why is an unlearned person called an *am ha'aretz*, and a pious person called a *chassid*?

The word *chassid* (חסיד) is comprised of the words חס (has pity) and יד (hand). One who has pity on his *neshamah* maintains its purity, even when mired by the physicality of the body. In this manner, he converts his being from one of material to one of form. This person is called a *chassid* since he pities the Divine image that he possesses. This is hinted to by the fact that the word יד is numerically equivalent, adding one for the word itself, to the Name of Hashem, יהי. This is the Divine image residing within each and every one of us.

A true *chassid* does not lend a hand to the *Yetzer Hara*. He does not allow the *Yetzer* to influence him, but maintains his spiritual standing. He flees from the *Yetzer* as if from fire. He ascends to greater heights each day, adding *yirat Shamayim* to his previous level. He constantly

strives to reach higher levels in Avodat Hashem, never complacent with what he has already attained.

Not so the *am ha'aretz* (lit. nation of the earth). He, too, has the ability to believe in Hashem and keep Torah and mitzvot. Instead, he remains sunk in the mire of materialism. He never transforms the substance to form. He always remains on the same spiritual level. This is like the earth, which is always the same and does not change. It will always be just as it was at the time of Creation. One who remains unchanging as the earth does not have the potential of being a *chassid*, who climbs higher and intensifies his Avodat Hashem.

“Avraham raised his eyes and perceived the place from afar” (*Bereishit* 22:4). When one is careful not to defile his eyes and gazes only at that which will bring him *kedushah*, such as words of Torah, he merits “perceiving from afar,” an allusion to *ruach hakodesh*. The *Shechinah* rests upon him.

Avraham and Yitzchak alone merited sighting the *Shechinah* on the mountaintop (*Tanchuma, Vayeira* 23). Although Yishmael and Eliezer did overcome their *Yetzer Hara*, surmounting many *nisyonot*, like Avraham and Yitzchak, they did not have the same spiritual power of perception as did Avraham and Yitzchak, because they failed to constantly elevate themselves to greater heights in Avodat Hashem.

This teaches that we must galvanize our inner strengths to grow in Avodat Hashem on a steady basis. Yishmael and Eliezer, who did not put enough effort into sanctifying their eyes, could not sight the place from afar, to their great loss.

Maybe they did take this lesson to heart, changing their status for the better. Yishmael did eventually do complete teshuvah, and Eliezer merited a portion in Gan Eden.

The purpose of Rosh Hashanah is to overcome improper thoughts, so that one is not like the donkey (Yishmael), remaining on the same

level as previously. He should constantly strive to rise spiritually and come ever closer to Hashem.

“One who comes to be purified, is helped from Above” (*Yoma* 38b). Hashem will help him withstand *nisyonot* and merit a sweet new year.

————— In Summary —————

- On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges the person according to his present state, as we find with Yishmael. But a person must constantly aspire to increase his spirituality, going from strength to strength in his service of Hashem. Yishmael is compared to the donkey. Sarah instructed Avraham to expel Yishmael from the house. How, then, could he be expected to return to Hashem and grow in spirituality, becoming a tzaddik? Even if he were to do teshuvah, it would be in the category of “I will sin and I will repent,” in which case, one’s teshuvah is never accepted.
- Why do we eat a ram’s head on Rosh Hashanah, and why do we read about *Akeidat Yitzchak* specifically then?
- On Rosh Hashanah, each person is enjoined to transform himself and not remain the same as before. This is the main aspect of Rosh Hashanah. And this is what Avraham Avinu told Yishmael, “Although you may be righteous, you are not ascending the ladder of spirituality, and for that you are like the donkey.” This is why Yishmael did not merit sighting the *Shechinah* over the mountain, even though he had done teshuvah. It is also why he did not merit being the *korban*. On Rosh Hashanah, every person is enjoined to ascend to higher levels in spirituality. One who does not do so is held accountable. Even a tzaddik has this obligation.
- Based on this, we can understand why we eat the head of a ram on Rosh Hashanah. Yitzchak withstood the *nisayon* of the *Akeidah* and ascended to greater levels, minute by minute. In this manner, he blazed a trail for his descendants to also become elevated. Even after the ram was offered in his stead, he was considered the *korban*, for he was constantly rising in spirituality. One who grows spiritually on Rosh Hashanah is continuing in Yitzchak’s ways. This is the reason we read *Akeidat Yitzchak* on Rosh

Hashanah. If one remains at his former level, he is merely like an animal, which never changes.

- Yitzchak also taught us that if we, indeed, rise to greater heights, the gates of Gan Eden open before us, just as they did for him at the *Akeidah*. The pleasure one has from his Torah study is akin to the pleasure of Gan Eden. Torah is the most appropriate weapon to use in order to combat the *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem helps the person immersed in Torah to conquer the *Yetzer Hara*.
- Why didn't Hashem show Avraham the ram at the beginning of the *Akeidah*? Also, how did Avraham know that the ram was abandoned and available for his use? Furthermore, what is the reason for the wording of the pasuk, "A ram – afterward"?
- Hashem only gives a person a test that he is capable of withstanding. He always creates the remedy before the malady. Telling Avraham Avinu not to sacrifice Yitzchak was a great *nisayon* for him. For this reason, it is clear that the ram was prepared for him beforehand. Avraham was not made aware of this immediately, in order not to disturb his concentration at the time of the *Akeidah*. Avraham knew that Hashem guards the steps of his devout ones and therefore, when he discovered the ram, he realized that it was ownerless and available for his use. This is how he was able to overcome the *nisayon* of not sacrificing Yitzchak.
- When a person surmounts a *nisayon*, Hashem chooses him, and he has the *zechut* to ascend on the ladder of Avodat Hashem. Hashem promises us that all we must do is open an aperture to teshuvah the size of a needle's point, and He will open an opening the size of a banquet hall, assisting us tremendously. One should never complain that the past year was not good, for this is a tactic of the *Yetzer Hara*, to bring people to stumble and arrive at thoughts of heresy.
- This is the explanation of "An unlearned person (*am ha'aretz*) cannot be scrupulously pious (*chassid*)." The word **חַסִּיד** (*chassid*) is composed of the words **יְדוּחַ**, indicating that such a person has mercy on the *neshamah* that embodies the Divine image (י-ה) within it. But the *am ha'aretz* (*ignoramus*) is compared to the earth, which never changes or improves itself. One who

ascends to greater heights, merits “perceiving the place from afar,” perceiving the revelation of the *Shechinah*. Avraham and Yitzchak saw the *Shechinah*, but Yishmael and Eliezer, who failed to ascend in spirituality, remained at their original level. When they corrected their shortcomings, they merited a portion in Gan Eden.

MAN IS JUDGED “AS HE IS NOW”

When Hagar and Yishmael were banished from Avraham Avinu’s house, Yishmael almost died of thirst in the desert. Hagar implored Hashem, and an angel appeared to her, saying (*Bereishit* 21:17), “Fear not, for G-d has heeded the cry of the youth in his present state (באשר בהוא שם).” Hagar then noticed a well nearby, and Yishmael was saved.

Rashi, quoting Chazal (*Eichah Rabbah* 2:4), states that a person is judged according to his present level and not based on what he will do in the future. The angels came before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, claiming, “How can You create a well for one whose sons will in the future kill Your children through thirst?” Hashem answered, “What is he at present? Is he righteous or evil?” They responded, “Righteous.” To which Hashem replied, “I judge him according to his present state.” This is the meaning of the expression “in his present state” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 53:14).

This is difficult to understand. Yishmael was a rasha, proof being that Sarah drove him out of the house when she observed his behavior. She certainly prophetically saw that he would continue in his evil ways. Avraham obeyed her, as Hashem instructed him, and banished Yishmael (*Bereishit* 21:12). How could Yishmael change from being a rasha to being a tzaddik in such a short time? And if he, indeed, was found to be righteous in the wilderness, how could he have been so wicked when in Avraham’s house?

The argument of the angels seems to be legitimate. We find that the *ben sorer u'morer* is put to death based on his eventual behavior (*Sanhedrin* 72a). Why was Yishmael allowed to live and have evil offspring, from whom we still suffer to this very day?

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem does not consider the past or the future of a person. He judges the person only “as he is now,” what is going on in his mind on this Day of Judgment. Therefore, if a person repents his previous sins and intends to avoid sin in the future, he is regarded as a *tzaddik* in the eyes of Hashem, and is related to as such.

This is a fundamental principle in *teshuvah*. A person comes before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, pleading for forgiveness and atonement. In exchange for a good life, which he beseeches Hashem to grant him, he promises to give Him *nachat* and cleave to the “Tree of Life,” the Torah.

The sinner promises to transform himself completely and become free of sin, just like a newborn. Certainly, when Hashem, Who examines the innermost thoughts of man, sees a positive change in this person, He is appeased. He gives him the label of “*tzaddik*,” for that is the level he is on at this time.

This is not like those who arrive to prayers on Rosh Hashanah, begging forgiveness and atonement, livelihood and good life, but for their part, offer nothing in return. This is because their minds are not in consonance with their hearts. They feel no desire to improve in spiritual matters.

The purpose of Rosh Hashanah (ראש = head) is that one should effect a makeover in his mind. This transition occurs when a person promises to be different (שונה, which is similar to שנה) from how he was until now. In order to effect this change he should accept upon himself to learn and review (משנה ושונה) halachot and Torah teachings. Only in this manner, can a person truly coronate Hashem on Rosh Hashanah. For if not, he is likened to one who immerses in a *mikveh* to purify himself while holding an insect, which is impure (*Ta'anit* 16a).

Therefore, when a person displays a change in his mindset on Rosh Hashanah, he is considered pure as a newborn, a perfect tzaddik. He is just like the newborn, who vowed before his birth (*Niddah* 30b) to “be a tzaddik and not a rasha.” One is allowed to come to this world only on this condition. And even if he will sin at a later time, Hashem judges him by the promise that he makes now, in his present state.

Man Is Judged According to His Actions

Based on the above, we can better understand the incident with Yishmael. He was judged “באשר הוא שם – in his present state.” The word באשר (in) has the same letters as the word בראש (in the head). Hashem asked the angels, “What is he in his mind, at present – a tzaddik or a rasha? Does Yishmael have evil thoughts lurking in his head?”

The teshuvah he did in the desert wiped out his previous misdeeds. And he was not judged at that time concerning his future actions. At present, he was pure as a newborn, free of all thoughts of evil. He was a perfect tzaddik at that moment.

There was a reason why Hashem treated Yishmael in this manner. It was so that the nations would not prosecute against Bnei Yisrael in the future, when we arrive at the Yamim Noraim and desire to repent. They are unable to claim: “It is true that at the moment, they are tzaddikim, but their teshuvah holds no water. In the past, they sinned, and they will surely sin in the future. Their heads are not clear of their future misdeeds. They are like one who immerses in a *mikveh* while holding an insect.”

For Hashem will respond, “Isn’t this the way I behaved toward Yishmael? When he was dying of thirst, I also judged him like a tzaddik, according to his present state. His mind was free of evil designs. And although the angels were opposed to My decision, for he would in the future harm My children greatly, I judged him in his present state.

“Likewise, Bnei Yisrael arrive at Rosh Hashanah, crying and supplicating Me for forgiveness. They pledge to change their thoughts and ways of life. I trust them and do not look at their future deeds. The important thing is that at present they are behaving perfectly.

“Their future offenses are caused by the *Yetzer Hara*, which overpowers them. In their hearts, they do not want to sin, for on Rosh Hashanah they promised me that they would transform their minds from impure to pure.” This is Hashem’s valid reply to the prosecutors.

Yishmael may have been a rasha in the house of Avraham Avinu, and would even return to his wicked ways later on, but Hashem did not consider his past or his future when judging him. The charges of the angels went unheeded. Hashem always judges a person according to his present state. If his mind is full of good thoughts, he does not deserve death. Therefore, Yishmael was granted life, regardless of his past and future actions.

Hashem judges people differently than we do. It is forbidden to judge our fellow man in an unfavorable light, for we never really know his full story (*Avot* 2:5). When we see someone acting wrongly, we should realize that he may subsequently do teshuvah, and Hashem will forgive him. One must be extremely cautious when casting judgment upon another person.

The episode with Yishmael highlights this point. Sarah, according to her understanding, ruled that he was unworthy and ordered that he should be expelled from the house. Since she had ruled correctly, the *Middat Hadin* stood in prosecution against Yishmael, demanding his death. Likewise, when each person is being judged on his day of death as to whether he should continue to live, or whether he should die, all his actions are taken into account.

Conversely, on the Day of Judgment, Hashem looks at a person’s present state (באשר). Hashem examines what is going on in a person’s

head (שׂאֵר). Does it contain improper thoughts, which will hinder his Avodat Hashem? Or is it clean and clear, open to serving Hashem appropriately? His future actions are not considered at this time.

Now we can understand why a person is not judged based on his future actions, as is the case with the wayward and rebellious son. In his case, Hashem sees that there is no hope for him, for he does not obey his father and mother (*Devarim* 21:18). Certainly, when he leaves their dominion, he will cease to obey the voice of Hashem also, and will continue to do damage. Therefore, the concept of “in his present state” is not relevant to him.

But when Hashem sees that a person will eventually do teshuvah, He is patient with him and anticipates his teshuvah. This is how Yishmael was judged. Hashem judged him in his present state, which was righteous. He was not judged by his wicked past, in Avraham’s house, or by his evil future, when his descendants would kill the Jewish people.

Yishmael ultimately did teshuvah, at the death of Avraham Avinu (*Bava Batra* 16b). The Gemara (ibid.) expounds that every death which is accompanied by the words “he expired,” refers to the death of the righteous. This was the case with Yishmael.

The incident concerning Yishmael is recounted before the parashah of *Akeidat Yitzchak* on Rosh Hashanah. This is to teach that when a person’s head and heart are aligned in teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah, just as Yishmael’s were when he was being judged, Hashem perceives him in that state. He examines a man’s inner thoughts and seals him for good life, and a good new year, based on his present state. One whose mind is open to teshuvah is likened to one who overcame a *nisayon* and conquered his *Yetzer Hara*, reaching up to Hashem.

But even if a person merits being righteous in his present state, it is not enough. One must constantly go from strength to strength

(*Tehillim* 84:8), continually aspiring to reach greater and greater heights.

————— In Summary —————

- Hashem had compassion on Yishmael and did not allow him to die of thirst. He told the angels, “I am judging him only according to his present state, and he is presently righteous.” How are we to understand this? Sarah had Yishmael driven out from Avraham’s house because he was wicked. How could he have become transformed into a tzaddik in such a short time? Furthermore, why wasn’t he judged for his future actions, just like the wayward son, who is put to death for eventually turning wicked?
- On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem forgives sin and does not look at a person’s past or future, only at his present state. He examines what is going on in a person’s mind on the Day of Judgment. He asks for forgiveness, and Hashem is appeased, for He sees a change for the better. He is like a newborn, and he is immersed in Torah teachings. If he learns Torah and prays, Hashem judges him based on his present state, which is righteous.
- The purpose of Rosh Hashanah is to make changes. One should make changes in his mindset, which is hinted to by the fact that the word ראש means head. One should also strive toward other forms of change, as hinted to by the fact that the word השנה (the year) has the same root as the word שונה (different). If one promises to change his ways, he is considered a tzaddik, and coronates Hashem, fulfilling the oath to be righteous that his *neshamah* took before he was born. Even if he will eventually sin, Hashem judges him according to his present promises.
- This is the meaning of the phrase באשר הוא שם. The letters of the word באשר can be interchanged to spell בראש (in the head). If one’s head is clear of improper thoughts on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges him for continued life. The prosecutors of Bnei Yisrael state that their teshuvah should not be accepted, for they will eventually sin. But Hashem judges Bnei Yisrael according to their present state and will accept them back, just as he accepted Yishmael, even though he would later sin.

- Only the *ben sorer u'morer*, who has no hope, is judged according to his end. Yishmael's head was clear of sin at the time he was judged. Thus Bnei Yisrael are judged in the same way, according to their present state. Yishmael ultimately did teshuvah, and his days were counted, proving that he died a tzaddik. Therefore, this parashah is read on Rosh Hashanah before *Akeidat Yitzchak*. Yishmael's situation was similar to ours on Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem observes our present state. If one's mind is in consonance with his heart in teshuvah, Hashem waits patiently for him to repent and forgives his sins. His test is to overpower the *Yetzer Hara* and return to Hashem. Hashem judges each person according to his present state.

UNITY ENSURES THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PRAYERS

Before his death, Moshe gathered the nation to impress upon them the importance of keeping the commandments. He said to them, "You are standing today, all of you" (*Devarim* 29:9). What is the significance of the word "today"?

One can stand beside his friend, seemingly in unity, but, in his heart, he is not at peace with him. On the day of his death, Moshe Rabbeinu beseeched Bnei Yisrael that the entire nation should be unified. He expressed this wish by using the word היום – today. This hints to the day (היום) of death, which is a day of judgment for every person who passes on; everyone is equal in this respect. Moshe was thus hinting that Bnei Yisrael should consider themselves equal now and be truly unified, their hearts in total harmony.

This is hinted to by the word אתם in the phrase "אתם נצבים היום כלכם" – You are standing today, all of you," since its letters can be interchanged to spell אמת (truth). Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to stand truly united. Moshe Rabbeinu intimated that this would not be difficult

for them to do, “rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it” (*Devarim* 30:14).

Moshe also hinted that Bnei Yisrael should view the day of his death (היום) as Rosh Hashanah, which is called the Day of Judgment (יום דין). The fear that everyone feels on this day also unifies the people, enabling them to ascend in spiritual level and merit a good, sweet year.

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) state that on Rosh Hashanah, all people pass before Hashem like sheep. Rashi explains this is like sheep which go through a small opening so that the shepherd can count them as he tithes them. Each goes in by itself; only one can fit in at a time.

However, elsewhere it says that Hashem glances over everyone in one sweeping glance. This seems to indicate that everyone passes by together, not individually like sheep. These ideas seem contradictory.

We can clarify this matter according to our previous line of thought. We learn a tremendous principle from *Matan Torah*. The Torah was only given to the nation when they were completely united, as one man with one heart (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19:2). Yet, we find that Hashem compelled Bnei Yisrael into accepting the Torah, holding Har Sinai over their heads and threatening them to accept the Torah (*Shabbat* 88a). Why was this necessary if they were unified in their desire to accept it?

It is not enough to profess to love another person or to love him intellectually. Fellow Jews must live as one man with one heart. Everyone must be connected. By holding the mountain over their heads, Hashem forced Bnei Yisrael into close proximity with each other. They became literally one unit at that time.

Therefore, on the Day of Judgment, when Hashem desires that Bnei Yisrael be like one flock of sheep, he transports them through a narrow opening. One touches the other, and the love and unity are palpable. They are literally as one, with one mouth and one heart. Only in this

way can Hashem glance over them with one sweeping glance. In the merit of their true unity, since each one feels intimately connected with the other, they merit a good new year.

David Hamelech teaches: “Praiseworthy are the people who know the shofar’s cry” (*Tehillim* 89:16). Chazal explain (*Vayikra Rabbah* 23:3), “Praised is the nation who knows how to appease its Creator with the shofar’s blast, so that He arises from the Seat of Justice and sits on the Seat of Mercy.”

Let us try to understand this. Is it such a great feat to know how to blow the shofar? Don’t the gentiles also know how to do it? Furthermore, what is the connection between blowing the shofar and appeasing the Creator?

Perhaps we can explain this in line with our original idea. Moshe addressed the nation with the words, “You are standing (נצבים) today.” Only Bnei Yisrael are stable (יציב) in their unity before Hashem. By assembling the nation before his passing, Moshe imbued the people with love for one another, even those who were as yet unborn. This is something the nations of the world will never attain. They may be able to blow the shofar, but they are unable to attain this level of unity. All of their gatherings are held with malicious and malevolent intent; planning how to hurt and harm. No good ever comes of them.

Conversely, the Jewish nation “knows the shofar’s cry.” For, even if only one person in the congregation knows how to blow the shofar, they all gain the merit of the shofar blowing since they are interconnected in unity. This unity effects that Hashem moves from the Seat of Justice to the Seat of Mercy.

This is hinted by the fact that the *gematria* of the phrase יודעי תרועה (know the shofar’s cry) is the same as that of אחדות בבורא העולם (unity in the Creator).

Bilaam, the greatest of the gentile prophets, testified about Bnei Yisrael (*Bamidbar* 23:9), “Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in

solitude.” They live in unity, and the *Shechinah* resides among them. In this merit, their tefillot are accepted. The prayers of the nation are unified, just as the people themselves are unified. The prayers of the tzaddikim ascend after the prayers of the ordinary people and the reshaim, pushing them forward and upward. Thus, the prayers of all ascend heavenward together, as one unit. This is the power of unity.

— In Summary —

- Moshe Rabbeinu told Bnei Yisrael, “אתם נצבים היום כולכם – You are standing today, all of you” to teach them that by standing in unity with each other, they would come close to Hashem. The letters of the word אתם (you) can be rearranged to spell אמת (truth). Bnei Yisrael must stand united in truth. The word היום (today) is a reference to Rosh Hashanah. When there is unity among the people on Rosh Hashanah, they are guaranteed a good year.
- Bnei Yisrael are judged by Hashem individually, like a flock of sheep that passes through a gate to be counted, and are also glanced over with a sweeping glance. This seems to be a contradiction. How is it possible to be judged individually and generally, at the same time? At *Matan Torah*, the entire nation was as one man with one heart, since the overturned mountain above them guaranteed their physical unity. Likewise, on Rosh Hashanah, the “sheep” of Hashem touch each other as they press forward to pass through the gate to be counted, uniting them. Then, they can be judged with a sweeping glance, as one entity, and be collectively inscribed for a good, sweet new year.
- “Praiseworthy are the people who know the shofar’s cry.” Bnei Yisrael know how to appease their Creator, causing Him to arise from the Seat of Justice to sit on the Seat of Mercy. Their unity brings blessings upon them. The Jewish people perceive the message of the shofar blasts, even if only one individual knows how to blow the shofar. For they are connected to each other in perfect unity. Their prayers are therefore accepted, and they are inscribed and sealed for a good year.

ALL OF A PERSON'S NEEDS ARE ALLOTTED ON ROSH HASHANAH

Each person is obligated to learn Torah, whatever his circumstances. This is taught by the following account of Chazal (*Yoma* 35b). A pauper, a wealthy man, and a wicked person will arrive at the Heavenly court to be judged. The pauper will be asked, “Why weren’t you engrossed in Torah study?” If he answers, “I was involved in supporting myself, for I was extremely poor,” they will respond, “Were you poorer than Hillel the Elder?” Although Hillel was a pitiful pauper, he saved up his pennies to learn Torah. One day, he had no money with which to pay the gatekeeper of the Beit Hamidrash. He climbed to the top of the building and prostrated himself above the roof, listening to the words of Torah being learned below. Snow began falling, but he was oblivious to it. It fell thicker and faster. In the morning, he was discovered, nearly frozen to death, under a blanket of snow. Shemaya and Avtalyon brought him into the Beit Hamidrash, and although it was Shabbat, a fire was lit in order to revive him. His poverty did not prevent him from sacrificing his life for the sake of Torah.

The wealthy man will be asked, “Why weren’t you engrossed in Torah study?” He will answer, “I was very rich, and constantly involved in my business enterprises.” They will respond, “Were you richer than Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsum?” His father endowed him with one thousand cities on the land and one thousand ships at sea. All his life, he never even went to see them, rather he spent all his days learning Torah.

The wicked man, too, will be asked, “Why weren’t you engrossed in Torah study?” He will answer, “I was busy with my *Yetzer Hara*.” To which they will counter, “Were you busier with your *Yetzer Hara* than Yosef Hatzaddik, whose daily encounter with the wife of Potiphar

provided a constant *nisayon* to sin? Yet he withstood the test admirably, refusing to be together with her, either in this world or the Next.

Hillel obligates the poor, Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsum obligates the rich, and Yosef Hatzaddik obligates the reshaim to learn Torah.

We can learn an awesome lesson from this. Every single person, even the simplest among the nation, can reach the level of Hillel, Rabbi Eliezer, and Yosef Hatzaddik. No one should ever say, “Who am I to be compared with these giants?” That argument holds no water in the eyes of Hashem. Every single person is born with the abilities to become the Torah teacher of the generation. For this reason, he will be held accountable for not being engrossed in Torah like Hillel, Rabbi Eliezer, or Yosef Hatzaddik.

Chazal (*Beitzah* 16a) state, “All of a person’s needs for the entire year are allotted to him on Rosh Hashanah.” This refers to physical sustenance, as well as spiritual. The physical will not interfere with the spiritual. It is merely provided to enhance his elevation in Torah.

Maybe this is what is meant by Chazal’s statement, “If he lessens, he is given less, and if he adds, he is given more.” If he decreases his Torah study and mitzvah performance, he will receive less. On the other hand, if he increases, he will be granted more.

Livelihood Is from Hashem

I was once asked the following. Why do the Sephardim have the custom of selling the privilege of opening the Aron Hakodesh when perek 24 of *Tehillim* is read, the chapter referring to livelihood, and not while reciting the perek referring to wisdom?

I answered that we must ask Hashem for our daily sustenance. Therefore, we pay for the privilege of opening the Ark when reciting

the perek of livelihood. But wisdom is an inborn trait, which is granted to a person at the time of conception (*Niddah* 16b).

A person is born with the means to recognize the Creator of the world, if only he wants to. He has the wherewithal to actualize his potential. Money is merely a garment; he is born unclothed and will be interred without clothes. None of his physical possessions remains his after he passes on (see *Tehillim* 49:18).

Regardless of whether a person is poor or rich or wicked, he has the tools to use his inherent wisdom to vanquish his *Yetzer Hara* and involve himself in Torah study.

On Rosh Hashanah, we recite the chapter of Tehillim that deals with livelihood. It states (ibid. 24:7), “Raise up your heads, O gates.” The Kabbalists explain that this chapter refers to Hashem’s entering Gan Eden in order to delight in *divrei Torah* together with the *neshamot* of the tzaddikim. What is the connection between this and livelihood?

A person should pray to Hashem, asking Him that his sustenance should be provided for him without too much trouble and hardship on his part. This is in order that he should not get bogged down with trying to earn a living. One should constantly keep in mind that wealth is liable to distance him from Torah study, as it says (*Avot* 2:7), “The more possessions, the more worries.” The test of wealth is greater than the test of poverty. If one becomes distant from Hashem, he will not merit, *chas v’shalom*, to delight with Him in *divrei Torah* upon his arrival at Gan Eden, together with the *neshamot* of tzaddikim.

If one keeps this in mind, he will realize that he has much to lose if he utilizes his wealth only for physical endeavors. If he makes materialism the dominant factor in his life, what will he possess in the afterlife? Will he merit hearing *divrei Torah* from Hashem, delighting together with Him in Gan Eden?

When we recite this chapter of Tehillim, we should straighten out our priorities, and realize how much we may lose by making wealth of

paramount importance in our lives. This is also hinted to by the fact that the word שערים (gates) contains the same letters as the word עושרי (my wealth). One's wealth may cause him to lose out on hearing the Torah secrets told over in Gan Eden from Hashem Himself.

One must know how to utilize his wealth. He must realize that whatever he earns has been pre-allotted to him on Rosh Hashanah. He should strive to emulate Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsum, whose wealth did not disturb his Torah learning. On the contrary, he should use his money to support Torah scholars, just as Zevulun supported Yissachar (*Bereishit Rabbah* 99:9). The word שערים also hints to the words עני (pauper), עשיר (rich man), and רשע (sinner).

We can bring a proof from Rabbi Akiva, who was an ignoramus (*Ketubot* 62b, 63a; *Nedarim* 50a). Rachel married him and was disinherited by her father, Kalba Savua. Many years later, he heard that Rabbi Akiva had become the leading Torah Sage, and he annulled his vow.

This raises a question (*Tosafot* on *Ketubot* 63a). There is a clause stating that a vow cannot be annulled based on a fact that took place after the vow was made (*Nedarim* 64a). Thus, it seems that Kalba Savua's vow to disinherit his daughter could not be annulled, for Rabbi Akiva's ascent to the heights of Torah began only after he made the vow.

We can answer this according to *Tosafot*, who explains that Rabbi Akiva's ascent to greatness was not something new that took place after Kalba Savua made his vow, for he had gone to pursue Torah study earlier, and one who pursues Torah study will most likely become great in Torah. Rabbi Akiva always had the potential to become a Torah leader.

This lesson applies to everyone. Each person can become great in Torah. Moreover, money does not have to stand in his way. Rabbi

Akiva eventually became tremendously wealthy, and this did not hinder his Torah study. One's sustenance is allocated to him on Rosh Hashanah, and he always has the ability to come close to Hashem.

All of Bnei Yisrael are considered tzaddikim in the eyes of Hashem on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem does not look at the future. All arrive to pray on the Day of Judgment, and Hashem forgives them in the *zechut* of the Torah learned in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot. Hashem removes all of the prosecutors, for the light of Torah brings people back to the right path (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 1:7*) and helps them become great in Torah.

————— In Summary —————

- Chazal tell us that Hillel obligates the paupers, Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsum obligates the rich, and Yosef Hatzaddik obligates the sinners to learn Torah. This teaches us that each and every person has the ability to reach the lofty levels of these great people.
- A person's sustenance is meted out to him on Rosh Hashanah. Financial comfort can bring a person peace of mind, to delve in Torah and do teshuvah. For that reason, the privilege of opening the Aron Hakodesh is sold before the recital of the chapter of Tehillim referring to livelihood. One must ask Hashem that his livelihood should not detract him from his Avodat Hashem. None of his money will accompany him to the grave. We do not ask for wisdom, for it is given at birth. Everyone has the resources to bring forth his latent wisdom.
- At the recital of this perek on Rosh Hashanah, one should focus on the fact that Hashem delights in learning Torah with the tzaddikim in Gan Eden. One should be wary lest his wealth distance him from Hashem and prevent him from this enjoyment.
- Kalba Savua cut off all ties with his daughter, Rachel, because she married an ignoramus, Akiva. If he had known that Rabbi Akiva would grow to become the Torah giant that he did, he would never have made such a vow. Rabbi Akiva never forgot his Creator, even after he became wealthy. This is a great lesson for us.

- When Bnei Yisrael are in the Beit Hakeneset on the Day of Judgment, Hashem forgives them and removes all prosecutors. They remember their Creator and do not allow their wealth to blind them from being involved in Torah and doing complete teshuvah.

IN ONE SWEEPING GLANCE

When Bnei Yisrael are judged on Rosh Hashanah, “all creatures pass before Him like sheep of the flock,” as it says (*Tehillim* 33:15), “He Who fashions their hearts together, Who comprehends all their deeds” (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a).

The Gemara (ibid. 18a) states that all are glanced over with one sweeping glance. It continues with the words of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak, “We learned, regarding the words, ‘He Who fashions their hearts together,’ that the Fashioner sees their hearts in one glance, and comprehends all their deeds.”

First of all, how are Bnei Yisrael judged with one sweeping glance? And secondly, what is Rabbi Nachman adding by his words?

We can answer by way of a parable. If a person climbs to the top of a very high tower and looks down, he sees other tall buildings, some higher than others. He also sees houses that are barely discernable. Since he is so high up, he can only make out the tall buildings clearly.

Likewise, when Hashem wants to judge the entire world, He sees only the tzaddikim, and, so to speak, overlooks the sinners. In the merit of these tzaddikim, He judges the entire world in one glance.

This is the meaning of Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak’s statement: Hashem sees the hearts of the tzaddikim together, and in their merit “He comprehends all of their actions,” including those of the simple people.

How can it be that there are those who are not judged at all? This, too, can be explained by way of a parable. A king arrives at the gates of a city, and all the people come out to receive him. His main motive is to meet with the prominent communal figures. He wants to find out how each one is carrying out his task. The simple townspeople are secondary.

When the king notes that the communal leaders are honest and upright, he correctly presumes that the townspeople are also upright and law-abiding.

So it is on Rosh Hashanah. Every simple person is enjoined to do teshuvah on the Day of Judgment. This gives strength to the tzaddikim, so that in their merit the entire world is judged in one sweeping glance, for good life and peace, a good year in both the physical and spiritual realms.

Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak explains that that all people pass before Hashem like a flock of sheep, and all are judged in one sweeping glance. How? “Like a shepherd who checks his flock.” The tzaddikim go before Hashem, and only they are seen, similar to the high towers in the first parable. The simple people are barely noticed, like the small houses, and thus gain the same positive judgment as the tzaddikim. This is comparable to a flock of sheep that passes before the shepherd. The big ones are easily seen; the small ones, hardly at all.

In this manner, may we, the simple ones among the nation, merit to be rescued in the merit of the great tzaddikim. They need *siyata di'Shemaya* in order that Bnei Yisrael heed their words, so that we should be saved and receive a good year.

————— In Summary —————

- On Rosh Hashanah “all creatures pass before Him like sheep of the flock.” The Gemara states that all are glanced over with one sweeping glance, and Hashem comprehends all their deeds.

- When one stands on the top of a high tower, he sees the tallest buildings most clearly; the small houses are barely discernable. Likewise, Hashem sees only the tzaddikim, overlooking the sinners.
- When Hashem sees the hearts of the tzaddikim, in their merit “He comprehends all of their actions,” i.e., the actions of the simple people also. Thus the simple people gain the same positive judgment as the tzaddikim.

EMERGING VICTORIOUS IN JUDGMENT

“Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near”

(*Yeshayahu 55:6*)

Just as we are commanded to search for physical chametz and burn it in the month of Nisan, so too, it is our obligation in the month of Elul to burn all forms of spiritual chametz from our hearts. We must make a thorough search for any spiritual impurities that may have adhered to us during the year. Whoever truly wishes to become purified in this month is accorded Heavenly assistance, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu 55:6*), “Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near.” Moreover, the pasuk in Tehillim states (145:18), “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him.” But one must bear in mind the end of that pasuk: “to all who call upon Him sincerely.” Only one who genuinely seeks Hashem wholeheartedly will be helped by Him in his endeavors.

These days are called the “Days of Awe” with good reason. Our situation is truly awesome. We stand in judgment before Hashem, with no idea what our verdict will be. We hope that with Hashem’s help, we will be inscribed in the Book of Life. We have faith in Hashem’s *chessed* and in the *zechut* of our Avot. But there is no one who knows what has been decreed upon him for the coming year.

One who contemplates the events of this past year (5771) will note how many troubles befell our people, from within and without. Terrible sickness and suffering was the lot of our nation, *rachmana litzlan*. Our enemies constantly sought ways and means of harming us. Everything is decided at the beginning of the year, on the Yamim Noraim. It is therefore our moral obligation to purify our minds and sanctify our souls by eradicating the *Yetzer Hara* completely. In this manner, we will demonstrate to Hashem that we seek His closeness, and we truly desire to be under His protection. Then He will surely take pity on us and seal our fate for a good, peaceful year.

The Midrash states in the name of Rabbi Eliezer (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:1), “On the 25th of Elul, the world was created... in the first hour on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem thought of creating Adam... in the tenth hour, he transgressed Hashem’s will and ate of the fruit of the tree. In the eleventh hour, he was judged, and in the twelfth hour he was judged with *chessed* and emerged victorious. Hashem told Adam, “This is a sign for your sons. Just as you stood before Me today in judgment and were exonerated, so too, will your children stand before Me in the future on this day and be exonerated.”

Adam Harishon was punished most severely for his offense. He and all future generations were banished from eternal life in Gan Eden to a transient life, filled with suffering and ending in death. Is this the definition of emerging victorious in judgment and being judged with *chessed*?! Where do we find that Adam was exonerated, to the extent that he set a precedent for his sons to be acquitted in the future?

Furthermore, in order to draw upon himself Heavenly kindness, Adam had to do a distinct act. Where do we find in the Torah that Adam did a specific act that brought Hashem’s *chessed* upon him?

In order to resolve these questions, let us try to understand Adam Harishon’s mindset, and how he had the boldness to transgress Hashem’s command and partake of the fruit of the tree. Adam was no

simpleton. His holiness and piety were unlimited. How, then, could he disobey Hashem's command?

Chazal relate that at the very same time that the Serpent was persuading Chava to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam Harishon was walking together with Hashem in Gan Eden. Why didn't Hashem make Adam aware of the diabolical deeds of the Serpent? Why didn't He send Adam to stop the Snake from his evil machinations?

Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael were committing the terrible sin of fashioning the Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu was sitting on High learning Torah together with Hashem. Why didn't Hashem stop learning with Moshe and send him back down to earth to halt the nation from their wicked deeds?

Hashem's ways are hidden from us. But in order to shed some light on these events, I would like to suggest the following. Hashem places *nisyonot* before us. Man's mission is to withstand them through his own efforts. Hashem commanded Adam and Chava not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. He gave them the wherewithal to withstand all temptation to partake of its fruits. From that point on, it was in the hands of man. Would he choose good and listen to Hashem's command, or would he, *chalilah*, choose to violate His command? Chazal tell us that a person is never given a test too difficult to overcome. Hashem, therefore, saw no need to send Adam to stop the Snake from his deeds. Chava had the strength to stand up to his persuasions, had she only desired to do so. Likewise, at the sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael had the ability to stand up to the *Yetzer Hara* and not transgress the word of Hashem. What was lacking was their will to do so.

Chazal tell us (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*) that after Chava ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, she saw the Angel of Death hovering over her. She thought she was about to die. She decided to give her husband to eat, as well, for she feared that he would live and marry

someone else. She struck him until he relented (*Ba'al Haturim*), as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 3:12), “The woman whom you gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

When Adam Harishon took note of Chava’s overwhelming fear, he thought that perhaps it would be appropriate to violate Hashem’s word in order to share in her suffering. Adam’s objective in eating from the tree was to sympathize with Chava and share in her plight. His intentions were *l’shem Shamayim*. But obviously, he miscalculated. He had no right to behave this way, even though his intentions were good, for kindness that comes through sin is not kindness at all.

But since Adam’s intentions were altruistic, Hashem took pity on him and lessened the severity of his decree. It was a verdict laced with *chessed*: He was kept alive, in order that he could rectify what he had spoiled in the world and make himself whole once again. Thus, Adam’s act of *chessed* toward his wife drew Heavenly kindness upon himself, and he merited acquittal from death.

Adam “emerged victorious” in the respect that Hashem sweetened his judgment in comparison to what he really deserved. Adam deserved to die because of his sin. He would have been cut off both from this world as well as from the World to Come. He would never have had the opportunity to correct his sin. The *Navi* states (*Eichah* 3:39), “Of what shall a living man complain?” The Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah*) expounds, “It is enough that he is living.” Adam Harishon realized he had sinned and immediately did teshuvah. This is a sign for all generations. If a person sins and subsequently regrets his deeds and does teshuvah, Hashem will judge him with *chessed* and acquit him.

There is another reason behind Adam Harishon’s sin. Bnei Yisrael are on a higher level than the angels themselves. The angels serve Hashem without a *Yetzer Hara* and without being faced with tests. In contrast, Bnei Yisrael are constantly faced with the various temptations of the *Yetzer Hara*. They withstand them admirably,

choosing to do Hashem's will. This grants Bnei Yisrael a special standing. Before Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he had no *Yetzer Hara* whatsoever. This may be the reason for his partaking of its fruit. He thought to himself, "What is the purpose of serving Hashem when I have no counterforce pulling me in a different direction? I am merely at the level of angels, who have no *Yetzer Hara* either. If I eat of the tree, I will strengthen the power of the *kelippah* within me. The force of the Serpent, representative of the *Yetzer Hara*, will enter me, and I will then need to make the effort to withstand the tests placed before me. This is the epitome of service of Hashem!"

But just as soon as he ate, and the *Yetzer Hara* entered him, Adam Harishon realized his mistake. He discovered the true power of the *Yetzer Hara*, and how much self-sacrifice would be required to overcome him. Once he realized that he had sinned, he regretted his actions and immediately did complete teshuvah.

Hashem observed that Adam sinned with pure motivations. He therefore judged him with *chessed* and acquitted him with mercy. This was a sign for all future generations. As soon as we recognize our sins and regret our misdeeds, doing complete teshuvah, Hashem will release us from judgment and decree upon us a verdict of kindness and mercy.

May it be Hashem's will that He judge us favorably and inscribe us in the book of tzaddikim, for many years of good life.

————— In Summary —————

- During Elul we must make a thorough search for any spiritual impurities that may have adhered to us during the year. Whoever truly wishes to become purified in this month is accorded Heavenly assistance, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 55:6), "Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near." One who genuinely seeks Hashem wholeheartedly will be helped by Hashem.

- Adam Harishon was judged on Rosh Hashanah and “emerged victorious,” being judged with *chessed*. This is a sign for Bnei Yisrael. Just as Adam stood before Hashem on that day in judgment and was exonerated, so too, Bnei Yisrael will stand before Him in the future on this day and be exonerated.
- However, Adam was severely punished, suffering exile from Gan Eden and having death decreed upon him. How can we say that he was pardoned?
- Adam deserved to die immediately for his sin. The fact that he was granted more years of life in itself was exoneration. For as long as a person is still alive, he can do teshuvah for his sins. This is a sign for all generations. If a person sins and subsequently regrets his deeds and does teshuvah, Hashem will judge him with *chessed* and acquit him.
- Adam was judged with *chessed* since he ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in order to share in the suffering of Chava.
- Another reason for his sin was that he wanted to be on a higher level than the angels, who serve Hashem without having to face the tests of the *Yetzer Hara*. By eating the fruit, Adam strengthened the powers of the *kelippah* within him and now needed to make the effort to withstand the tests of the *Yetzer Hara*. Only afterward, did he realize that this was a mistake.
- However, Hashem knew that Adam had sinned with pure motivations and thus judged him with *chessed*. This is a sign for all future generations that if a person truly wishes to do teshuvah, Hashem will judge him with *chessed* and acquit him, just as he acquitted Adam Harishon.

ASSERET YEMEI TESHUVAH



“RETURN, ISRAEL, UNTO HASHEM YOUR G-D”

This world is compared to a mega-department store. A person walks around and browses, but purchases nothing. As he leaves, he is asked, “Could you not find anything at all in such a big store?!” And he is ashamed.

One enters this world with a lofty *neshamah* and all of his bodily organs. He has eyes, hands, feet, etc. He asks, “What is there for me to do in this world?” He is answered, “In this world, there is lots to do! There are Torah and mitzvot to keep, good deeds to do, and also food, drink, and all sorts of pleasures to enjoy!”

So, he wanders about, filling himself with delights, but acquiring nothing of value. After his death, his *neshamah* ascends to Heaven, and he is asked, “Did you bring nothing along with you? Don’t you have any mitzvot whatsoever to your credit?” He stands there embarrassed and stammers, “I had no time...”

To prevent such a scenario, the *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:2) proclaims, “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.” He exhorts us to return to Hashem so that we will not be ashamed in the World of Truth. This is a tremendous act of *chessed* on the part of Hashem. Instead of us having to beg Him for forgiveness, He invites us to return to Him, opening His arms wide to accept us, and opening all doors before us.

By doing teshuvah, even a hardened sinner, who committed many wrongdoings and is completely disconnected from Hashem, can reach greater heights than a tzaddik. Hashem awaits his return with open arms. The Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:6) writes, “Just before, this man was hated by Hashem. He was despicable and abominable to Him. But now (after he has done teshuvah), he is beloved and cherished by Him, and extremely close to Him.”

There are two methods by which a person can do teshuvah.

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu wished to confer merit (זכות) upon Yisrael; therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance” (*Makkot* 23b; *Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 41:17). By performing one mitzvah perfectly, a person will consequently perform many more mitzvot and thus become pure of sin. This is hinted to by the word זכות (merit), which contains the word זך (pure).

The *neshamah* of a person is a spark of the Divine. This spark arouses him to thoughts of teshuvah and good deeds. Even a completely wicked man is still connected to Hashem through this Divine image within him. He must merely remember this fact and return to Hashem.

Let us try to comprehend this idea. If the power of forgetfulness causes a person to become distant from Hashem, why did Hashem create it in the first place? Wouldn’t it be better if we would only remember and not forget?

There are two types of forgetfulness. The first is a positive kind. It was created in order that a person should forget the day of death. Chazal (*Pesachim* 54b) state that the day of one’s death is concealed from him, for if he were to be aware of it, he would not perform mitzvot, due to the worry he feels over his future fate. Thus, forgetfulness prevents a person from suffering over his eventual demise and enables him to do mitzvot.

But there is another type of forgetting, one which comes from the *Yetzer Hara*. It makes a person disregard the future day of reckoning and the punishment that awaits him if he sinned. Additionally, when Chodesh Elul arrives, the *Yetzer Hara* causes a person to forget the upcoming Day of Judgment; he feels no fear of it whatsoever. Thus, he continues to sin, not considering doing teshuvah. This is the worst type of forgetfulness.

In order to feel the fear of judgment, one should view himself as a tourist in this world, not as a permanent resident. He should always bear in mind that there is Someone calling him to teshuvah. This is Hashem's call: "Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity."

When a person considers this, he will do teshuvah of his own volition. If he waits for Hashem to call him, it will be much more difficult for him. Who knows how far he may fall before Hashem awakens him to do teshuvah?!

With this in mind, let us examine the following account of Chazal (*Eiruvin* 13b). For two and a half years, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai had a major dispute. They argued whether it is preferable for man to have been created or not. Beit Hillel said that it is, and Beit Shammai maintained that it is not. They came to a compromise, and stated that ideally it would be preferable for man not to have been created, but now that he has been created, he should search his deeds and check that they are appropriate.

Let us explain. Beit Shammai maintained that it is preferable for man not to have been created, because of the power of forgetfulness, which pulls a person away from Hashem. They said it would be better that one should never forget and always remember that he will ultimately die. This would encourage him to serve Hashem and do teshuvah. However, since the *Yetzer Hara* steps in, causing a person to forget this, it would have been better for him not to have been created at all.

Beit Hillel countered the following. One has the ability to overcome his *Yetzer Hara* and the forgetfulness he instills within him. However, when they understood that the risks of falling are so great, they agreed that it is, indeed, preferable for a person not to have been created. Nevertheless, now that he is in this world, he should search out his ways, i.e., do teshuvah. Let him understand that he is not here permanently. He should always fear the future justice and return to Hashem wholeheartedly.

One should constantly remember that Hashem will bring him to justice for every moment that he could have done a mitzvah but desisted. Not one moment is overlooked. *Avot* (3:1) states, “Know... before Whom you will give justification and reckoning.” On this Mishnah, the Gra asks, “What is the reason for the double language – justification and reckoning?” “Justification” will be demanded for a person’s actual sins. “Reckoning” will be demanded for the time spent sinning, time which could have been utilized for the performance of mitzvot.

I once heard that an aveirah can be compared to a matchstick. Even though it is a small piece of wood, it can burn down an entire field. So too, one aveirah can cause a person to lose everything. Conversely, by doing a single mitzvah, one can merit unlimited good. How great is the virtue of teshuvah!

As an example, we can bring the famous account of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). He once had an urge to sin with a woman across the sea. He took a pouch of coins and crossed seven rivers. At the time of sin, she passed wind. Then she proclaimed, “Just as this air will never return to its source, so too, will Elazar ben Durdaya never be accepted in teshuvah.”

He took her words to heart. He went and sat among the hills and valleys, asking them to beseech Heavenly mercy upon him, but they declined. They stated that they had to request mercy for themselves.

Similarly, the heavens and earth refused his appeal. Also the sun and the moon, and the stars and constellations refused him. Then he said, “The matter is dependent solely upon me.” He put his head between his knees and burst into bitter tears, until his soul departed. At that point, a Heavenly Voice proclaimed, “Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for life in the World to Come.”

This narrative is difficult to understand. The woman was wicked. Why did she rebuke him? When she observed how much self-sacrifice he endured in order to sin, she herself was aroused to do teshuvah. She understood that he had forgotten himself, influenced by the *Yetzer Hara* to sin. This impelled her to do teshuvah. In this way, she succeeded in bringing Rabbi Elazar to do teshuvah as well. The same self-sacrifice that can be used to sin should be used to perform mitzvot and do teshuvah.

————— **In Summary** —————

- The virtue of teshuvah is priceless. One may loiter about in this world without acquiring a thing. After 120 years, he will face the Heavenly Tribunal filled with shame. Therefore, it is incumbent upon him to do teshuvah. He should be aware that through teshuvah, he will be counted among the tzaddikim.
- By performing one mitzvah perfectly, one merits to perform many more mitzvot and become pure of sin. This is hinted to by the word זכות (merit), which contains the word זך (pure). Also, when one remembers that he possesses a Divine image, he will be aroused to do teshuvah.
- Forgetfulness was created in order that one will forget his day of death. For, if he were to constantly remember that he will ultimately die, he would become dejected and refrain from doing mitzvot. However, there is another kind of forgetfulness promoted by the *Yetzer Hara*: To forget Hashem. In order to do teshuvah, he should shake himself free of this forgetfulness, remember Hashem, and return to Him. He must make the first move and not wait for Hashem to pull him out from the mire of his evil ways.

- This is the point of contention between Beit Shammai and the Beit Hillel. Beit Shammai contended that it is preferable for a person not to have been created, for the power of forgetfulness can draw a person away from Hashem. Conversely, Beit Hillel maintained that it is preferable for a person to have been created, for he has the ability to overcome his forgetfulness. He can search out his deeds, in teshuvah.
- Hashem judges a person both for the actual sins he has committed and for the time he spent sinning, which could have been utilized to perform mitzvot. We find that a wicked harlot brought Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya to repentance. She noticed his *mesirut nefesh* for doing an aveirah and understood that one must act with the same *mesirut nefesh* in order to perform mitzvot. One must also exhibit *mesirut nefesh* to return to Hashem wholeheartedly.

TESHUVAH TRANSFORMS INTENTIONAL SINS INTO MERITS

“How great is teshuvah, for intentional sins are transformed into merits”

(Yoma 86b)

This statement requires explanation. One who sins intentionally knows that he is transgressing a prohibition, yet sins nonetheless. By the strength of his teshuvah, his sin will be forgiven, and even more, it will become transformed into merit!

Chazal teach that “one who says *I will sin and I will repent* is not given the opportunity to do teshuvah” (Yoma 85b; *Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 6). Surely, one who sins intentionally is in this category. How, then, is it possible that such a person’s teshuvah can transform his sins to merits?

We might explain in the following manner. One who says “I will sin and I will repent” is not granted Heavenly assistance to do teshuvah. That is why he is unable to succeed in doing teshuvah.

However, if one expends tremendous effort and strengthens himself to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, without receiving help from Hashem, and repents out of love, he will merit that even his intentional sins will be changed to merits. This is because of the great amount of exertion he applied in order to do teshuvah.

It is a tremendous thing when one manages to sever himself from his *Yetzer Hara* and return to Hashem without any Heavenly assistance. This is possible when one does teshuvah out of love of Hashem.

Let us examine the case of Acher (Elisha ben Avuyah). It seems that he was prevented by Heaven from doing teshuvah. Chazal (*Chagigah* 15a) state that a Heavenly Voice called out: “Return, wayward sons, except for Acher.” We know that Hashem assists those who desire to do teshuvah; how is it possible that Acher was denied this opportunity?

This can be explained in light of what was previously stated. Hashem generally helps people do teshuvah. But Acher was different. He was not assisted from Heaven to do teshuvah, yet he was not prevented from doing teshuvah. He himself was not interested in repenting. Therefore, he received no Heavenly assistance, and did not merit doing teshuvah.

We find that Hashem bestowed a special merit on our people, drawing us closer to Him. The pasuk in Yechezkel states, “Then I passed you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, ‘In your blood you shall live.’” Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 17:3, *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3) state, “Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw the blood of *brit milah*, mingled with the blood of the *korban* Pesach, and in this merit, they were redeemed.”

Rabbi Yichyeh Taboul, shlita, asked me, “How can Chazal explain ‘wallowing in your blood’ to refer to the blood of *brit milah*? A person does not wallow in the blood of *milah*, it is merely the letting of a few drops of blood. Maybe *wallowing* could be used to describe the blood of the *korban* Pesach, but it is not correct to use that word to describe the blood of *milah*.”

I answered that it is a figure of speech. Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael wallowing in the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro 39a*). They nearly drowned in their defilement. Then they would have been completely lost and would never have been redeemed. Therefore, Hashem immediately told them, “In your blood you shall live.” He told them that those very sins that they had committed because of the *kelippah* would now be transformed to *kedushah* through the power of their teshuvah. They would be able to transform the negative effects of the *Yetzer Hara* to positive things by doing teshuvah, according to the principle that teshuvah converts intentional sins to merits.

When Hashem observed His nation wallowing in the blood of their iniquities, mingled with the *kelippah* and *tumah*, He told them, “In your blood you shall live.” With the very same means that they had used for sinning, they were enjoined to live. They would transform the bad into good and attain *kedushah*. This is hinted to in the word דָּם (the blood), which has the *gematria* of forty-nine, an allusion to the forty-nine levels of impurity.

This indicates that although one may be wallowing in *tumah*, he has the ability to transform the bad to good, and he is guaranteed Heavenly assistance when he wants to purify himself (*Shabbat 104a; Yoma 38b*). Hashem promises him that he will live in the merit of this blood, the wrongdoing that he now transforms into good through his teshuvah. Even one who sins intentionally, forgoing the benefit of Heavenly assistance in doing teshuvah, if he exerts himself to do teshuvah, will have his intentional sins changed to merits.

————— In Summary —————

- How great is teshuvah, for intentional sins are transformed by it to merits. However, we are told that one who states he will sin and then repent will not succeed in doing teshuvah. This means that he will not be granted Heavenly assistance in repenting. Acher is an example of this. Because he refused to make the effort to do teshuvah, he was denied Heavenly assistance and did not merit doing teshuvah. Conversely, if one exerts himself and returns to Hashem through his own efforts, overcoming his *Yetzer Hara*, he will be accepted in teshuvah, and his intentional sins will become transformed into merits.
- In Egypt, Hashem saw us wallowing in the blood of the *korban* Pesach and the blood of *brit milah*. He stated, “In your blood you shall live.” What does this mean? One does not wallow in the blood of *brit milah* since a very small amount of blood is let in order to do the mitzvah. Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of impurity. When Hashem saw that they exerted themselves to return to Him, He changed their iniquities to merits. The aveirot themselves were the springboard for the rectification of impurity and the means by which they ultimately attained *kedushah*, changing bad to good. This enabled Bnei Yisrael to be extracted from slavery to liberation.

FORTY DAYS FOR TESHUVAH

The days designated for teshuvah can be divided into two parts. The first is the month of Elul, days of mercy and grace. The second is Asseret Yemei Teshuvah. These days begin with Rosh Hashanah and end with Yom Kippur, totaling forty days.

Why do we need so many days in order to do teshuvah? Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 10b) state, “One can acquire his portion in the World to Come in a single moment.”

Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. Chazal (*Arachin* 16b) state that whoever speaks *lashon hara* is akin to a heretic. Why is

this so? What is the connection between a slanderer and a heretic?

The very first case of *lashon hara* was that of the Serpent, who spoke derogatorily about Hashem to Adam and Chava. They accepted his words, and he was afflicted by *tzara'at* (*Yalkut Me'am Loez, Bereishit* p. 174). When Adam and Chava accepted his words, they denied the power of Hashem, and were thus compared to heretics. Therefore, whoever speaks *lashon hara* is compared to a heretic.

Let us comprehend the severity of the sin of *lashon hara*. Chazal (*Arachin* 15b) state that one who speaks *lashon hara* increases his sins to the Heavens. *Lashon hara* is equivalent to the three cardinal sins. It has devastating results: the *Shechinah* departs and harsh decrees come upon the world because of it.

The *neshamah* of each Jew contains a Divine spark within it. When one derides a fellow Jew, he is, in essence, disparaging the Divinity within him. He thus denies Hashem Himself.

To demonstrate just how grave is the sin of *lashon hara*, Chazal (*Yevamot* 63b) state, "Due to the sins of the living, the dead suffer." Because of *lashon hara*, as well as other aveirot, the prosecutors are given power to dig in the graveyards. Instead of the tzaddikim resting in peace, and their lips moving in the grave with words of Torah (*ibid.* 97a; *Pesikta Rabbah* 2:5), their tombstones and graves become destroyed, and they are humiliated.

How can we rectify this? The pasuk (*Devarim* 3:23) states, "ואתחנן אל ה' – I implored Hashem." Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 11:6) state that Moshe Rabbeinu prayed 515 tefillot, the numerical value of the word ואתחנן. This is also the numerical value of the words שירה (song) and תפלה (prayer). When one sins against another person, he must implore him for forgiveness. This is part of the teshuvah process. The word תשובה has the same root as the word להשיב (to return). One must "return" words of appeasement and apology to the one he sinned against. The most opportune time to do this is in the month of Elul.

How does a person do true teshuvah? In matters between man and Hashem, one needs merely a single moment to do teshuvah. In this case, one can acquire his portion in the World to Come in an instant.

How did Adam and Chava correct the original sin of *lashon hara*? Through the power of Torah.

How? Chava was given the mitzvah to light the Shabbat candles, for she had extinguished the light of the world (*Shabbat* 32a; *Tanchuma, Metzora* 9). A candle refers to a mitzvah, and Torah is light (*Mishlei* 6:23). The light of Torah brings a person back to the proper path (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7). This is hinted to in the words נר של שבת (the candle of Shabbat). The words נר של contain the letters ר' לשן (evil speech). *Lashon hara* brings darkness to the world; Torah brings light.

Adam himself was cursed (*Bereishit* 3:19) that “by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.” Bread is an allusion to Torah, for Torah is called לחם – bread (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeitzei* 123), as it says (*Mishlei* 9:5), “Come and partake of my food (לחמי).” The words “My food” refers to Torah.

Just as Adam lived on bread, his sustenance will be Torah, which is the elixir of life (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 34:10), as the pasuk (*Mishlei* 3:18) states, “It is a tree of life...” Only in this manner will Adam and Chava’s sin, the source for all future sins, be rectified.

Just like the *neshamah* is fashioned in forty days, so too, was the Torah given after forty days (*Menachot* 99b). Therefore, for matters pertaining to man and his fellow man it is fitting to spend forty days in teshuvah, from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur. One single moment is insufficient for this.

Chava gave birth after only a few moments of pregnancy, whereas today, a woman gives birth after nine months. Forty days before the formation of a person, his match is proclaimed in Heaven (*Sotah* 2a). After forty days, it is established that a woman is expecting a baby.

Now we can understand the concept of requiring forty days for

teshuvah. The forty days designated for teshuvah correspond to the forty days Moshe spent in Heaven, receiving the Torah. The Ten Days of Repentance correspond to the Ten Commandments.

The correction of the sin of *lashon hara* is to strengthen oneself in Torah. In this manner, one rectifies his sins, and his teshuvah will be accepted by Hashem.

————— In Summary —————

- Why do we need forty days to do teshuvah, including the Ten Days of Repentance? We are told that a person can acquire his portion in the World to Come in a single moment!
- The first sin that mankind committed was when Adam and Chava heard and accepted *lashon hara* from the Serpent, rendering them akin to heretics. The *neshamah* of each Jew contains a Divine spark within it. When one speaks evil of his fellow man, he is, in essence, disparaging this spark of Divinity within him. Through this sin, the dead are defiled, as well. The method of correcting this vice is by means of **וְאִתְחַנֵּן**. One must beseech his fellow man for forgiveness. This is one's task in Chodesh Elul, the month of teshuvah. The word **תְּשׁוּבָה** comes from the same root as the word **לְהָשִׁיב**, to return to one's fellow man an apology and request his forgiveness.
- In matters between man and Hashem, one moment of teshuvah is all that is necessary. But matters between man and his fellow man are different. The rectification of man's first sin, *lashon hara*, lies in Torah. Chava was given the mitzvah of lighting Shabbat candles, which symbolize the light of Torah. Torah is the antithesis of *lashon hara*, for it brings brightness and light to the world, whereas *lashon hara* casts a shadow of darkness and gloom. Man's rectification for this sin is that he must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Bread is also an allusion to Torah, for Torah is the staple of life.
- The forty days designated for teshuvah correspond to the forty days Moshe spent in Heaven, receiving the Torah. The Ten Days of Repentance correspond to the Ten Commandments. It also takes forty days for a pregnancy to be established. Thus, after forty days, the rectification of one's sins is complete, and his teshuvah is accepted.

SHABBAT SHUVAH



SHABBAT SHUVAH INFLUENCES THE ENTIRE YEAR

“Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d... Take words with you and return to Hashem”

(Hoshea 14:2-3)

“And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d”

(Devarim 30:2)

The Asseret Yemei Teshuvah are days auspicious for teshuvah and tefillah. Shabbat Shuvah, the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is most propitious for these matters. For, aside from the fact that the sanctity of Shabbat enhances a person’s level of *emunah* in Hashem, which is the basis for teshuvah, Shabbat Shuvah is a day designated especially for teshuvah. While we celebrate all other Shabbatot of the year by delighting in various pleasures, this Shabbat is intended for teshuvah and introspection.

What is the special quality of Asseret Yemei Teshuvah? Surely, one can do teshuvah on any day of the year. Moreover, why is this Shabbat designated for teshuvah? On any given Shabbat, one can examine his deeds and do teshuvah. We know that these ten days are distinctive,

since the following is said about them: “Search Hashem when He can be found.”

The wording of the pasuk itself raises a question. Why are we told to return “**unto** Hashem your G-d?” This seems superfluous, for when a Jew does teshuvah, it reaches the Heavenly Throne (*Yoma* 86b). The Gate of Tears and the Gate of Repentance are never closed (*Berachot* 32b; *Shochar Tov* 65:4; *Zohar* I, 132b). It seems as though it would be more appropriate to say, “Return **to** Hashem your G-d.”

Additionally, what is referred to by the instruction to “take words with you?” Which words should one take in the process of doing teshuvah?

Perhaps we can explain in the following manner. On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem enjoins Bnei Yisrael (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) to “recite [pesukim of] *Malchuyot* before Me, so that you should coronate Me over yourselves.” We crown Hashem as our King on the Day of Judgment.

This seems difficult to understand. Throughout the year, we mention that Hashem is King, accepting His authority. Chazal (*Menachot* 43b) state that a person is obligated to make one hundred *berachot* a day. In each *berachah*, we proclaim, “Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the world...” What is the purpose of reciting pesukim referring to Hashem’s Kingship on Rosh Hashanah?

By reciting *Malchuyot* before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, we submit ourselves to His Rulership, thus coronating Him over us for the rest of the year.

The sounding of the shofar, too, has the ability to resound throughout the upcoming year. The pasuk (*Shemot* 19:19) states, “Moshe would speak and G-d would respond to him with a voice.” This is the voice of the shofar, implanted into the heart of every single Jew. “Moshe would speak” – this gives each Jew the ability to speak in words of Torah, and not sin before Hashem. “And G-d would respond

to him with a voice” – Hashem comes to his assistance. This is what is meant by the statement (*Shabbat* 104a; *Yoma* 38b) “One who comes to be purified, is assisted from Above.” The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3) states, “Open for Me an aperture the size of a needle’s hole, and I will open for you an opening wide enough for wagons to go through.” Hashem will always help us to do teshuvah.

Thus, when one sincerely repents during the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, this influences the rest of the year. It becomes easier for him to do teshuvah at other times.

Similarly, the efforts a person makes on Shabbat Shuvah to make a personal accounting of all his deeds and do teshuvah influence all the Shabbatot of the year. Thus we see that the potential for teshuvah of all the days of the year is derived from these Ten Days of Repentance.

Shabbat itself has a special capacity to bring a person to teshuvah, as we find that (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:28) Adam Harishon sinned on Erev Shabbat and did teshuvah on Shabbat, saying (*Tehillim* 92:1), “A psalm, a song for the Shabbat.” He also separated from his wife for 130 years (*Eiruvin* 18b) as a form of repentance.

This is the power of these days, especially Shabbat Shuvah. The gates of repentance are never closed (*Eichah Rabbah* 3), and a person can do teshuvah any time. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Tehillim* 789; *Eichah Rabbah*, *ibid.*) compare teshuvah to the vast ocean. Just as the ocean is wide open, so too, are the gates of teshuvah constantly open, welcoming the sinner to repent.

Throughout the year, one must exert himself to do teshuvah through his own efforts. However, during these ten days, which are designated for teshuvah, one merits *siyata di’Shemaya* to do teshuvah. These days influence the rest of the year. Just as on Yom Kippur “the essence of the day atones” (according to Rebbi), so too, these days are auspicious for teshuvah, influencing the rest of the year.

Serving Hashem with Perfection, No Questions Asked

According to the above, we can explain the following pesukim (*Hoshea* 14:2): “שובה ישראל עד ה' אלוקיך” – Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d,” and the pasuk (*ibid.* 3) “קחו עמכם דברים” – Take with you words.”

The word עד (unto) is numerically equivalent, adding one for the word itself, to the word למה (why). The core of a person’s teshuvah should be regarding the complaints he has vis-à-vis Hashem’s acts. He may have questioned, “Why did Hashem do this and this to me?” This habit is the source of many sins and can bring a person to heresy. For this a person must return to Hashem.

You might ask why the tzaddikim must do teshuvah, specifically very great tzaddikim, who never sin. Which sins did they commit for which they are instructed to repent?

One might respond that all of Klal Yisrael are responsible for each other (*Shavuot* 39a; *Sanhedrin* 27b), and their *neshamot* share one source. Therefore, when an ordinary person sins, even the tzaddik must repent, for his *neshamah* is connected to that of the sinner. The *sifrei Harashash* expound on this.

But the truth is: nobody’s perfect. Even a tzaddik is liable to err in some small area, as it says (*Kohelet* 7:20), “There is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins.” Hashem’s call to teshuvah is also directed at the tzaddik, small as his sin may be.

Chazal tell us that even tzaddikim are unable to withstand the severity of Hashem’s judgment. This is mentioned in regard to the Avot. Therefore, the tzaddikim must also repent.

If the tzaddikim are enjoined to do teshuvah, all the more so must ordinary people repent. It is natural for a person to ask, “Why has this

suffering befallen me? Why do I have such a hard time making a living? Why do I sin? Why does Hashem punish me so severely?" They also question the suffering of others, "Why is this tzaddik suffering so? He is so righteous!" Everyone, on his level, may question the ways of Hashem.

Sometimes this question is asked out of despair. He fails to contemplate the matter and consider, "The Rock! – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice" (*Devarim* 32:4). All of the ways of Hashem are true and just, and He is the perfect Judge.

Therefore, Chazal (*Berachot* 5a) tell us, "If one sees suffering come upon him, he should search through his deeds." Through reviewing his actions, he will understand why these hardships befell him, and he will do teshuvah. He will cease asking questions and will not become angry at the ways of Hashem.

One should strive to answer his doubts, for otherwise they will eat at him constantly. He will believe that his suffering is random, without rhyme or reason, and there is no Judge or justice (*Yoma* 72a), *chas v'shalom*. He is liable to spiral downward, without even realizing it, as one aveirah leads to another (*Avot* 4:2; *Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 1). All this is because he never received an appropriate response to his original question of "Why?" He forgot that he began merely by questioning the ways of Hashem.

This is the way of the *Yetzer Hara*. He causes a person to forget his sins, suggesting instead, "Do this mitzvah, and all will be good." The person believes, indeed, that he has corrected himself. But he does not realize that since he did not uproot the initial aveirah of questioning the ways of Hashem, it still remains.

Even an upright, righteous man might be affected by this. Although he may have done something which cannot be considered a sin at all, he may harbor a hint of complaint against Hashem for the way He runs the world.

From this slight smidgen of sin, the tzaddik may then do more serious sins, for one sin leads to another. He does not even realize that he sinned against Hashem and still considers himself a tzaddik and one who fears Heaven.

As an example, let us take a righteous person who awakens early in the morning to pray Tefillat Shacharit. On his way to the Beit Hakeneset, it starts raining, and he gets wet to the bone. He suddenly asks, “Why does it have to rain just now?” But he continues on his way, despite his soaked state. He prays and learns Torah, as usual.

This man does not seem to have sinned. But on further consideration, we see that he did sin, ever so slightly. He asked why Hashem sent the rain, and this is a form of complaint against Him. For he did not believe that if the rain was sent specifically then, it was sent from Hashem, for reasons unknown to us. Hashem has His calculations for what He does and when He does it. He sent the rain just then in order to make the person wet. *Mishlei* (11:31) states, “A righteous person is punished on earth.”

A person has the habit of forgetting all these small complaints he had voiced against Hashem, and he does not repent for them, or justify Hashem’s purpose in what He sends his way. He is left with his grievances, even if he did not mean to openly protest Hashem’s ways.

If this applies to a tzaddik, how much more so is an ordinary person affected. He has all kinds of criticisms and objections concerning the way Hashem does things. “Why did I fall now? Why did my shirt tear? Why are my bones aching?” These seemingly small difficulties may cause one to have heretical thoughts, feeling that Hashem is an unfair judge, *chas v’shalom*.

It is forbidden to ask these types of questions. Rather, one should trust that everything happens through Divine Providence, and no bad ever comes from Hashem (*Eichah* 3:38). One must bless Hashem for

what seems to be bad, just as he does over the good (*Mishnah Berachot* 54a).

One should accustom himself not to grumble, but, rather to say, “This, too, is for the best” (*Ta’anit* 21a; *Sanhedrin* 28b). He should always be aware that whatever Hashem does is for the good (*Berachot* 60b). He should never question the ways of Hashem, but understand that every detail of his life is calculated Above.

However, we see that Moshe Rabbeinu did question the ways of Hashem. He said (*Shemot* 5:22), “Why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?” What was his intention? It seems that he spoke out of his great compassion for his people. Hashem chose Moshe as His emissary because of the concern he displayed toward the sheep (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:2). Hashem said, “Just as you have mercy on the sheep, so too, will you show mercy to My flock, Bnei Yisrael.” It seems that Moshe complained against the ways of Hashem purely out of his love for Bnei Yisrael.

Nevertheless, because he did not correct this slight iniquity, he was punished. Hashem responded (*Shemot* 6:1), “Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh.” Moshe would see how Hashem would punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but he would not be allowed to see how Hashem conquered the thirty-one kings of Canaan. There is an element of sin when one questions why Hashem does something.

For this reason, we are enjoined to “return **unto** Hashem your G-d.” The fact that the word עָד (unto) has the same numerical value as the word לָמָּה (why) hints that the very first step in the teshuvah process is repenting for the complaints one had against Hashem, wittingly and unwittingly. Complaints against Hashem’s ways are liable to bring greater sins in their wake.

Part of this process is to “take with you words.” This means that one should find words of explanation to settle his doubts and return to

Hashem. The word *teshuvah* has two meanings. One is to return to Hashem, and the other is a response, or an explanation. When one can explain why various things have happened to him, he is then able to draw close to Hashem. He is no longer distanced from Him by his questions.

He Opens the Gates for Those Who Wish To Do Teshuvah

It is fitting that the one to urge us to return to Hashem was Hoshea Hanavi, for he came from the tribe of Reuven, the paradigm *ba'al teshuvah* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:12). Reuven questioned his father's actions, asking, "Why did Yaakov go to the tent of Bilhah?" (see *Shabbat* 55b). He sinned in a most slight way (according to Targum Yonatan and others).

Although he acted in order to defend his mother's honor, it was considered a sin, and Yaakov rebuked him for it when he blessed him (*Bereishit* 49:4). This all came about because he asked, "Why?"

Reuven did teshuvah for this sin and was not ashamed to admit it (*Sotah* 7b). He wore sackcloth, fasted, and repented (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:18; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:17). He merited that his grandson, Hoshea, opened the gates of teshuvah for the nation, by stating, "Return, Israel."

Furthermore, Hoshea taught the nation not to question the ways of Hashem. Chazal (*Pesachim* 87a) testify that he was the first of four prophets who prophesied in his day, and he was the greatest among them.

We find that David Hamelech also questioned the ways of Hashem, when he stated (*Tehillim* 22:2), "My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?" Why wasn't he punished?

David's question was altogether different. Although he did not understand why Hashem had forsaken him, he prefaced his words

with, “My G-d, my G-d.” This proved that even though he found it difficult to understand Hashem’s ways, he retained firm belief in Hashem as his G-d and remained completely attached to Him. He had no grievances against Hashem whatsoever. David teaches us the correct way of thought for the believing Jew.

If one would accept suffering without complaint, he would never sin. But, since a person is accustomed to asking questions, he is liable to damage his *emunah* in Hashem. For this reason, he must first correct the sin of asking *why*. He must realize that everything comes from “my G-d.” With the understanding that Hashem is the Mastermind behind every aspect of his life, one will not complain about his lot and will come closer to Hashem.

Based on this, we can explain the pasuk (*Devarim* 30:6) “And Hashem, your G-d, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring.” The word וּמַל (and [Hashem] will circumcise), has the same numerical value, adding one for the word itself, as the word לְמָה (why). This hints that if a person desires to repent for his questions, Hashem will help him find answers and come close to Him. As Chazal (*Shabbat* 104a, *Yoma* 38b) say, “One who comes to be purified is assisted by Hashem.”

One should understand that everything is from Hashem, and His judgments are true and just. An incident is related about the Chazon Ish regarding this matter. A person approached him and asked many questions about the Holocaust. He was full of grievances. The Chazon Ish responded, “One who is not knowledgeable in the art of sewing cannot fathom why a tailor would take a perfectly good piece of expensive cloth and cut it up. He thinks the tailor is ruining it. He has to trust that from these torn pieces a beautiful garment will emerge. So, too, must we believe that all of Hashem’s ways are just and true, and we cannot fathom His reasons at all. If we would understand why He acts the way He does, we would have no questions at all.”

We find proof to this in Megillat Esther. When Esther was taken into the palace of Achashveirosh, the Jews certainly thought it was a most terrible decree. They surely could not fathom why Hashem allowed it to happen. But, in the end, everyone understood that it was for the best, in order to save our nation from Haman Harasha.

There was an episode with a Rabbi whose young daughter passed away. In his anguish, he travelled to his Admor, the Saraph of Kotzk, but he did not tell him the reason for his visit. The Admor asked him to explain a passage in the Gemara, and he complied. The Admor continued challenging him, and the Rabbi settled all his difficulties. The Admor continued, “But the matter still seems incomprehensible, based on what is stated elsewhere.” The Rabbi exerted himself to find a resolution to the difficulties raised. Then the Saraph told him, “In this case, you have found everything to be in order and just. Also the ways of Hashem are just, and we have no questions about them.” The Rabbi was comforted.

We see from here that Hashem has a ready response for all of a person’s questions and doubts. Once a person accepts this, he can do teshuvah. The Asseret Yemei Teshuvah and Shabbat Shuvah are auspicious for teshuvah. The rest of the days of the year draw their strength for teshuvah from these special days.

— In Summary —

- What is the special quality of Asseret Yemei Teshuvah and Shabbat Shuvah that makes them propitious for doing teshuvah? Also, why are we exhorted to “return... **unto** Hashem, your G-d”? And what is meant by the exhortation to “take with you words”?
- We recite the verses of *Malchuyot* on Rosh Hashanah in order that we should be able to coronate Hashem upon us throughout the year. The shofar blast

also resounds throughout the year. The Ten Days of Repentance and Shabbat Shuvah influence the entire year with the potential for teshuvah. The gates of teshuvah are never closed, and teshuvah is always effective.

- This is why we are told to “return **unto** Hashem your G-d.” The word **עד** (unto) has the same numerical value, adding one for the word itself, as the word **למה** (why). All sins are the results of the doubts that one has concerning Hashem’s ways. Even tzaddikim can sin slightly in this area, holding a hint of grievance against Hashem regarding something in their lives. A small misdeed such as this is liable to snowball into a great sin. The *Yetzer Hara* works mightily to prevent a person from doing teshuvah. Questioning Hashem about why certain things happen to him is the beginning of the road to heresy, even for a great tzaddik. One should “take words” of explanation in order to resolve his doubts and strengthen his belief that Hashem is in charge of everything. He will see that everything is, indeed, for the best, and he will repent all of his misdeeds.
- We find that Moshe Rabbeinu was punished for asking Hashem why He mistreated His people. He was not allowed to witness the defeat of the thirty-one kings of Canaan. David Hamelech also questioned Hashem, “Why have you forsaken me?” but he prefaced his question with the words “My G-d, my G-d.” He understood that everything is from Hashem. When one realizes this, he will be able to repent, and he will receive assistance from Hashem, as it says, “Hashem, your G-d, will circumcise your heart.”
- Both the Chazon Ish and the Rebbi of Kotzk explained that we should know that everything is from Hashem, and His ways are just and true. If a person will resolve his doubts, he will easily return to Hashem and connect to Him. This is the power of the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah and Shabbat Shuvah, which influence us throughout the rest of the year to come close to Hashem and repent our misdeeds.

UNITY AND TORAH – FOUNDATIONS OF TESHUVAH

“Repent, Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem”

(*Hoshea 14:2*)

Shabbat Shuvah is named for the essence of the day, which indicates its tremendous power. Every person is able to take advantage of the ability to do teshuvah on this day, reaching right up to Hashem, as it were.

There are two questions we must ask:

What is the uniqueness of this Shabbat that sets it apart from all other Shabbatot of the year?

The author of the sefer *Lechem Shlomo* asks, “What is the meaning of, ‘Take words with you’? How is it possible to take an intangible object?”

Teshuvah rests upon two foundations. They are unity and Torah. When people are in harmony with one another, they come close to Hashem, ascending higher and higher in spirituality.

This is the reason why the *Navi* begins his injunction in the singular, “Repent, Israel.” Each person should value the other, and humble himself before him. In this manner, he will return to Hashem. Additionally, all of Yisrael will be responsible for each other (*Shavuot 39a; Sanhedrin 27b, Shemot Rabbah 27:8*), united as one.

Furthermore, the word שׁוּבָה (return) has the same numerical value, adding one for the word itself, as the word שְׁ-דַי, the Name of Hashem

written on the mezuzah. Just as the mezuzah protects our homes, teshuvah protects each and every Jew.

But no amount of teshuvah will be effective if one lacks unity with his fellow Jew. Chazal (*Yoma* 85b; *Pesikta Rabbah* 39) state that sins between man and his fellow man are not forgiven on Yom Kippur until one has appeased his friend.

Therefore, teshuvah has to reach up to Hashem. The letters of the word **עַד** (unto) can be interchanged to spell **דַע** (know). By doing teshuvah, one gains greater knowledge of Hashem. This helps him become aware of the severity of his sin, as David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 51:5), “My sin is before me always.” This awareness will protect him from future sins.

Conversely, if a person does not attain harmony with others, he will not be able to comprehend the gravity of his aveirot and will not merit gaining knowledge of Hashem. He will not be worthy of the special protection provided for those who exert themselves in this area.

Shabbat Shuvah, which falls on the Shabbat when the portion of parashat *Vayelech* is read, hints at this. In this parashah, the subject of *shemittah* is mentioned. *Shemittah* is called “Shabbat of the land” (based on the words of the *Ohr Hachaim* on parashat *Behar*), for it is forbidden to work the land during this year. One must gird himself with faith and trust in Hashem. *Shemittah* also includes an aspect of loving one’s fellow Jew, as it is a type of Shabbat, the day that we bless each other. One attains this level after reaching the level of love of Hashem. In this merit, He pours His blessing over His nation (*Vayikra* 25:21).

It is most fitting to read about *shemittah* on Shabbat Shuvah. Moreover, this parashah begins with the word “*Vayelech*” (and he went), for one who “goes” in the way of Hashem is maintaining an aspect of *shemittah*, love of Hashem and love of his fellow man. This ensures that his teshuvah is accepted.

Chazal teach us just how careful one must be with his friend's honor. Hashem told Hoshea (*Pesachim* 87a), "Your sons (Bnei Yisrael) have sinned." To which Hoshea responded, "Exchange them for another nation." A long dispute erupted between Hashem and Hoshea, until Hashem convinced him that He could not exchange the Jewish nation, for they are His beloved children. Then Hoshea began beseeching forgiveness for himself and Bnei Yisrael, crying out to them, "Return, Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d."

We see from this account that although Hoshea was a prophet, because he spoke ill of the Jewish nation, he lacked an aspect of knowledge of Hashem and was forgiven only after he asked for forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael. It is forbidden to speak derogatorily about a fellow Jew.

We find that Hoshea's ancestor, Reuven, son of Yaakov, was the one who paved the way to teshuvah. As a result, Hashem told him (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:18; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *ibid.* 142), "Your descendant, Hoshea, will open the way to teshuvah, as the pasuk states, 'Return, Israel.'"

Why did Reuven deserve this honor? Because he did not speak ill of Yosef, for he was not present when Yosef was sold. He intended to save Yosef and bring him back to their father (*Bereishit* 37:23). He wanted to prevent his murder (*ibid.* 22), even though Yosef had spoken *lashon hara* about him to Yaakov. From here we see that unity and love for one's fellow Jews are the keys to doing teshuvah.

Take Words with You – Words of Torah

However, unity alone is insufficient. Therefore, Hoshea states, "Take words with you." Which words is he referring to?

When a person is lacking in knowledge of Hashem, even if he is a wise man, all the more so, if he is an ignoramus, this causes much *bitul*

Torah. He spends his time on frivolities, and has no time left for Torah study. Distancing oneself from Torah causes him to become distant from Hashem as well. The Rambam (end of *Hilchot Issurei Biah*) states, “Thoughts of immorality take hold only of a person whose heart is devoid of wisdom [i.e., Torah].”

For this reason, Hoshea instructs us, “קחו עמכם דברים – Take words with you.” The word קחו (take) has the same root as the word מקח (merchandise). The best merchandise one can obtain is Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 4:2), “כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם – For I have given you a good teaching.” There is no good other than Torah (*Avot* 6:5; *Berachot* 5; *Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 3:8). One who strengthens himself in Torah finds it easier to do teshuvah, which is a direct outcome of his learning.

The word “take” refers to the revealed Written Torah. “Words” refers to the secret, hidden aspect of Torah. This is hinted to by the fact that the word דברים (words), adding one for the word itself, is numerically equivalent to the word רזים (secrets), the innermost chambers of Torah.

One must literally take the words of Torah and involve himself in them. Torah is merchandise to be handled. Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 33:1) state that Hashem tells us, “I am sold together with the Torah.” Torah is a commodity worthy of acquisition.

It is not sufficient for a person to be erudite in the Written Torah; he must also be familiar with the inner secrets of Torah. In this way, he connects more strongly with Hashem, and he gains a clear knowledge of Him. Conversely, knowing the hidden secrets is insufficient; they must be accompanied by knowledge of the Written Torah.

There are two types of teshuvah. One is regarding matters between man and his fellow man. Unity brings a person to know Hashem. Hashem, in turn, grants him protection from further sin, and he returns to Him in teshuvah.

The second type of teshuvah is in matters between man and Hashem, in the Written Torah and in the secrets of Torah. For this, too, a person must do teshuvah.

Both of these aspects are alluded to in the words of Hoshea. "Return, Israel," is written in the singular form, referring to the unity one must have with one's fellow man. The exhortation to "take words with you," refers to matters between man and Hashem. These are words of Torah and its secrets. Both constitute foundations of teshuvah before Hashem.

Shabbat Shuvah is flanked by Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Shabbat is the most auspicious time for teshuvah. For on Shabbat, all of Creation becomes united as one. In addition, Chazal teach (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah*) that Shabbat is a favorable time for Torah study.

Thus, Shabbat contains both of the basic elements of teshuvah, unity and Torah. On Shabbat, one gains greater awareness of Hashem, and His Name then guards him from sin, assisting him in his quest for teshuvah. The highlight of teshuvah will be reached on Yom Kippur.

At that time, Hashem will tell him (*Bamidbar* 14:20), "I have forgiven because of your word," just as He told Moshe Rabbeinu. One who does teshuvah is modeling himself after Moshe Rabbeinu, who unified the nation and gave them the Torah. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu attained the loftiest levels of spirituality, so too, will this person reach these two basic foundations of teshuvah and closeness with Hashem.

Chazal state (*Sanhedrin* 97a), "Ben David (Mashiach) will come only once there is no money in a person's pocket." Is it true that people will have no money when Mashiach will come?

Perhaps we can explain this in the following way. The word פרוטה (penny) has the same root as the word פרטיות (privacy). The meaning of the statement, then, is the following. Mashiach will arrive when there is no longer any privacy. This means when a person does not worry

only about himself. He includes himself in the community at large and lives in unity with others. This is the way to hasten the redemption.

“The pocket” alludes to a person’s heart. If one makes his heart into a public domain, feeling another’s worries as his own, Mashiach will arrive.

May we merit gaining clear knowledge of Hashem and doing complete teshuvah.

————— In Summary —————

- Why does the pasuk state, “Return, Israel” in the singular form? And what is meant by the instruction “Take words with you”? Words are intangible; how can they be “taken”? And, lastly, what is the significance of Shabbat Shuvah regarding teshuvah?
- There are two foundations of teshuvah: unity and Torah. If one lives in harmony with his fellow Jew, he is capable of doing teshuvah. Hashem provides him protection which enables him to repent. All of Yisrael are responsible for each other. By means of teshuvah, a person can reach Hashem. By doing teshuvah “unto Hashem,” one comes to “know” Him. This is hinted to by the fact that the letters of the word **דע** (unto) can be interchanged to form the word **ידע** (know).
- Teshuvah is similar to *shemittah*, the Shabbat of the land. Shabbat is symbolic of *ahavat Hashem* and love of one’s fellow man, which bring a person to teshuvah. Hoshea Hanavi, who spoke disparagingly of Bnei Yisrael, repented and paved the path to teshuvah by exhorting the nation: “Repent, Israel.” His ancestor, Reuven, son of Yaakov, merited doing teshuvah, for he showed love toward Yosef and did not speak derogatorily about him. This brought him to teshuvah.
- The second foundation of teshuvah is Torah. This is the aspect of teshuvah between man and Hashem. One must engage in study of the Written Torah, as well as the secret, hidden aspects of Torah. The phrase “Take words with you” refers to taking the merchandise called “Torah” and its secrets, and

doing teshuvah. “Return, Israel” is written in the singular form to suggest love of one’s fellow Jew. These are the two foundations of teshuvah.

- This is the essence of Shabbat Shuvah. On Shabbat, both aspects of teshuvah are apparent: the entire Creation is in unity, and Shabbat is a day auspicious for Torah study. When a person spends Shabbat appropriately, he hastens the *geulah*.
- Mashiach will arrive when money will not be found in a person’s pocket. This can be interpreted to mean when people’s hearts are open to their fellow man, not concerned only with their own problems. When one acts in this way and also learns Torah, one can do proper teshuvah, bringing the *geulah*.

TESHUVAH REACHES UNTIL THE HEAVENLY THRONE

Chazal (*Yoma* 86a) state, “How great is teshuvah, for it reaches until the Heavenly Throne, as the pasuk (*Hoshea* 14:2) states, ‘Return, Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d.’” Every Jew has the ability to do perfect teshuvah and come close to Hashem. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 23:11) states that although Bnei Yisrael sin, they do teshuvah. Everyone is capable of doing teshuvah; the path is blocked for no one.

However, the following account (*Chagigah* 15a) seems to contradict this principle. A Heavenly Voice proclaimed, “Return, you wayward sons, except for Acher.” Acher, the mentor of Rabbi Meir, was denied the opportunity to do teshuvah. Why was he singled out in this way?

The Gemara (*ibid.*) relates that after Acher had already forsaken the Torah, he asked Rabbi Meir, “What is meant by the pasuk (*Iyov* 28:17) ‘Gold and glass cannot approximate it, nor can its exchange be [in] golden articles?’” To which Rabbi Meir responded, “This refers to words of Torah, which are as difficult to acquire as gold, and as easy to lose as glass vessels.” Then Acher replied, “Rabbi Akiva, your teacher, did not explain the words in that manner. He said, ‘Just like

golden and glass articles can be repaired once they are broken, so too, can a *talmid chacham* who sinned, attain his *tikkun*.” To which Rabbi Meir said, “You, too, should return.” He answered, “I have already heard from on High, ‘Return, you wayward sons, except for Acher.’”

This narrative raises the following questions.

Why did Acher ask Rabbi Meir to explain the passage in Iyov? He already knew the explanation of Rabbi Akiva.

What do we learn from the words “after Acher had already forsaken the Torah”? The end of the story confirms the point that this incident took place after he had forsaken Torah, besides which, he was already called, “Acher” (Another), an appellation given to him after he abandoned the Torah’s ways.

Rabbi Akiva was the mentor of Rabbi Meir. How was it possible that Rabbi Meir was unaware of Rabbi Akiva’s explanation of the verse in Iyov? And if he did, indeed, know how Rabbi Akiva explained it, why didn’t he preface his remarks with those of his teacher?

From Acher’s words to Rabbi Meir, “Your mentor, Rabbi Akiva, explains the matter differently,” it is understood that Acher did not agree with Rabbi Meir’s explanation. Why not?

What was meant by Rabbi Meir’s advice to Acher, “You, too, should return”?

We can resolve all of these questions based on the words of the Gemara (*Chagigah* 15a). Chazal recount that Acher was riding a horse on Shabbat, and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him, learning Torah from him. Upon reaching the limits of *techum* Shabbat, Acher told Rabbi Meir, “Go back, Meir, for I figured out, based on my horse’s footsteps, the exact distance one may walk until he is out of the boundary of *techum* Shabbat.” To which Rabbi Meir responded, “You, too, should return.” Acher replied, “I’ve already told you, that I heard from on High, ‘Return, you wayward sons, except for Acher.’”

This seems very hard to understand. How could Rabbi Meir risk learning Torah from the mouth of Acher? Was he not afraid that he would be negatively affected by him? The Gemara (ibid. 15b) states, “Rabbi Meir discovered a pomegranate; he ate its inside and discarded its rind.” Is it permitted to rely on the fact that one will discard the rind, and therefore eat of the fruit? May one learn Torah from a rotten source?

Furthermore, Chazal expound on the virtue of teshuvah (*Yoma* 86a and b). They state that through teshuvah one’s intentional sins are transformed into merits, one’s life is lengthened, the *geulah* is hastened, healing comes to the world, and teshuvah reaches up to the Heavenly Throne and annuls harsh decrees. Why were the gates of repentance closed before Acher?

Additionally, how could Acher display such paradoxical actions? On the one hand, he desecrated Shabbat in public, by riding on a horse on Shabbat. Yet, he concerned himself to prevent his disciple, Rabbi Meir, from desecrating Shabbat by walking outside the *techum*.

This is even more difficult to understand when we contemplate who Acher was. He was attuned to Heavenly Voices, coming from sublime places, which no one else had access to. The Gemara (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 2:1) states that he heard pronouncements emanating from the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. On the other hand, he was spoiled to the core.

The Gemara (*Bavli; Yerushalmi*) provides some reasons as to why Acher left Torah. Chazal (*Kiddushin* 39b) recount the following story. A father instructed his son to bring him some nestlings from the nest. This is the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird, about which one is promised (*Devarim* 22:7) to have a good, long life. However, on the way back to his father, the boy fell and died. Acher, who witnessed the entire scene, asked, “Where is the good, long life promised to this child?” He thought that the boy should have been rewarded for this

mitzvah in this world; when he saw that this would not happen, he left the folds of Torah.

Another cause for his defecting was that he saw the tongue of Rabbi Chutzpit Hameturgeman, one of the Ten Holy Martyrs, dragged through the streets by a pig. Acher asked, “How can the tongue which spouted forth pearls of wisdom now lick the dirt?” In this case also, he could not understand how Rabbi Chutzpit deserved such “reward” for his righteousness. This caused him to abandon his heritage.

The roots of his defection can be traced to his infancy. The Gemara (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 2:1) teaches that on the day of Acher’s *brit milah*, his father, Avuyah, invited all the scholars of Yerushalayim and seated them in one room. He seated Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua in a separate room. These two Torah giants stated, “When the others eat and drink, we will sate ourselves with words of Torah.” They sat down and began learning Torah. A Heavenly fire descended and surrounded them. Avuyah approached them and charged, “Did you come to burn down my house?” They answered, “*Chas v’shalom*. We were simply engrossed in a Torah discussion. The words made us as happy as though we were at Sinai. There, the Torah was given through fire. Therefore, a fire surrounded us, as well.” To which Avuyah responded, “How great is the power of Torah! If this child lives, I will consecrate him to a life of Torah!” Because he had ulterior motives for giving his son a Torah education, Acher went on alien paths.

We find from these narratives that both Acher and his father expected reward in this world. Chazal teach us (*Eiruvin* 22a; *Avodah Zarah* 3:4b) that in this world, one works, and in the Next World, one eats from the fruit of his labor. Acher should have understood that when we are exhorted to do mitzvot “so that it will be good for you” this refers to the world which is completely good, and the words, “and your days will be lengthened” refers to the world which spans eternity (*Kiddushin* 39b).

Acher lacked true *yirat Shamayim*. Torah without fear of Heaven is worthless (see *Shabbat* 31a). He was compared to a treasurer who holds the keys to the inner chambers, but does not have the keys to the outer door.

Acher was remiss in his level of *ahavat Hashem*. Had he loved Hashem sufficiently, he would not have become disgusted with Torah and mitzvot. He would have realized that reward for mitzvot is not in this world (*Kiddushin* 39b), but reserved for the World to Come.

He served Hashem in a superficial way, for the sake of reward. Chazal (*Sifri; Rashi, Va'etchanan* 6:5) state that one who serves Hashem through fear of punishment alone, without loving Him, is liable to forsake Hashem's commands when he does not see immediate reward for his deeds.

From early infancy, Acher was brought up in this manner. When he found no instant recompense for his Torah study, he left Torah. It apparently had nothing to offer him, so he sought to graze in other pastures. He joined the ethos of evil. Torah is called "good" (*Berachot* 5a), and anything in opposition of Torah is called "evil." Chazal (*Chagigah* 14b, 15a) state that Acher "chopped down the saplings" (see *Rashi, Chagigah* 15a). The words of our *Chachamim* are compared to young trees, which have the potential to grow and flourish, spreading out and bearing fruit. Acher ceased his Torah study, effectively halting the proliferation of Torah.

Teshuvah Benefits Everyone

According to the above, we can understand the words of Chazal in their narrative regarding Acher and Rabbi Meir.

Although Acher left the folds of Torah, Rabbi Meir was still able to "eat of the fruit, and discard the rind," learning from his Torah wisdom. For Acher's power in Torah stood by him. The Gemara (*Chagigah* 15b)

states that the Torah of a *talmid chacham* who abandoned Torah is still valuable. Since Acher's Torah teachings were still intact, Rabbi Meir was able to learn from his mouth. Torah is compared to the inner essence (see *Shabbat* 31a), and for that reason, Rabbi Meir could accept the Torah of Acher. However, Rabbi Meir could not learn from his external ways, since he lacked true *yirat Shamayim* and love of Hashem.

Thus, the gates of teshuvah were closed to Acher. He himself was responsible for this because he claimed that the Torah was fraudulent by declaring, "Is this the reward for those who keep Torah?!" Also, by ceasing his Torah study, he prevented the propagation of Torah.

But the Torah knowledge he had previously garnered stood by him, and he therefore had the ability to inform Rabbi Meir, his disciple, where the city limits were, in order that he should not desecrate Shabbat. When Rabbi Meir saw this, he believed that maybe Acher would still do teshuvah. For that reason, he told him, "You, too, should return. You are preventing me from desecrating the Shabbat; there is still hope for you. Come back before it's too late."

Acher responded, "I heard a Heavenly Voice stating..." Meaning, "The power of my Torah enabled me to hear what was being said Above, in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* (for one who learns Torah is in the proximity of Hashem). I heard them state that I have no chance of doing teshuvah, for I cut off all ties with Torah." All of Klal Yisrael are like sons of Hashem, when they do His desire. They all have the ability to return to Him (see *Shemot Rabbah* 24:1), except for Acher, whose teshuvah will never be accepted.

But an aperture was opened for him in *Shamayim*, for teshuvah reaches until the Heavenly Throne, past the screen which separates us from our Father in Heaven. One who does not take advantage of the opportunity to do teshuvah is effectively prevented from doing so. The gates of teshuvah then become locked before him. He remains in his

present state in this world, gaining the reward that he desired in this world, but cut off from any future reward in the World to Come.

Based on this, we can comprehend the argument between Acher and Rabbi Meir regarding the explanation of Rabbi Akiva about the vessels of gold and glass.

Acher realized his shortcomings, yet did not do teshuvah. Every time his conscience gnawed at him, enjoining him to do teshuvah, he stilled its voice and continued in his life of sin. He was considered as forsaking Torah each time anew. He was prevented from doing teshuvah, for Hashem saw that his motives were not genuine.

However, Acher did have stirrings toward teshuvah. He wanted to remove the partitions between himself and Hashem. To that end, he entered into a discussion with Rabbi Meir. It was in order to find an opening through which he could reach the path of return.

Although Acher knew the explanation of Rabbi Akiva, and also knew how Rabbi Meir translated the pasuk, he wished to emphasize the message of Rabbi Akiva, “Even a *talmid chacham* who becomes corrupted, has hope of repentance.” There is an element of teshuvah available even to him.

Acher wished to hear what Rabbi Meir would tell him, for this would open an aperture for teshuvah before him. For if he had no interest in doing teshuvah, what was the point of asking Rabbi Meir to explain the pasuk? He knew that if a Heavenly decree was thwarting his ability to do teshuvah, it could be annulled by the words of the tzaddik, as we are taught (see *Mo’ed Katan* 16b), “The tzaddik decrees, and Hashem fulfills.”

The revelation of Rabbi Akiva’s explanation was proof that Hashem wanted Acher to do teshuvah. Acher should have contemplated the matter and repented. His indifference in the matter rendered him an outcast.

Rabbi Meir believed that Acher did, indeed, wish to return to Hashem, but was just hindered by various factors. That is why he did not reveal to him the words of Rabbi Akiva. He felt they would be ineffective, for they lacked the power to awaken regret in his heart.

Instead, he reminded him of his past, when he was a *talmid chacham* and great scholar, who pored over his Torah studies with great exertion. And now he had lost it all, forfeiting his reward in the World to Come by abandoning Torah values and amassing increasingly greater punishment.

Rabbi Meir told Acher all this in order to cause him to regret his actions. He was like a shattered glass dish, which had no purpose whatsoever. All that could be done with it would be to smelt it together again, creating a new vessel. This was Rabbi Meir's intention. He told Acher that regret is not enough; a complete transformation is necessary in order to do teshuvah properly.

Then Acher responded, "Your mentor, Rabbi Akiva, did not explain the pasuk that way. He said that a *talmid chacham* who defected has hope." Acher did not want to go through the process of teshuvah. He relied on his former Torah knowledge to sustain him.

Upon hearing this, Rabbi Meir understood that Acher truly wished to do teshuvah. Therefore, he enjoined him, "You, too, should come back." He likened him to the glass dish, which, although broken, is able to be repaired.

But Acher held his ground, "I have heard from behind the screen that my teshuvah is not wanted." Meaning, "By the power of my Torah knowledge, I was able to observe what transpires on High. I heard that they do not desire my teshuvah."

What Acher did not realize was that if he was privy to hear what they were saying on High, it was a sign that Hashem did indeed desire his

teshuvah. He took the words at face value, and did not repent. How bitter was his end!

From here we learn that everyone has the ability to do teshuvah and reach until the Heavenly Throne, entering the sanctum of Hashem Himself. This is what is meant by the directive, “Return, Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d.”

In Summary

- Teshuvah reaches until the Heavenly Throne. But regarding Acher (Elisha ben Avuyah), a Heavenly Voice called out, “Return, you wayward sons, except for Acher.” Why was Acher singled out in such an awful way? We find that he disputed Rabbi Meir regarding teshuvah. Rabbi Meir told him that he had no chance to do teshuvah. Rabbi Meir “ate the insides, and discarded the rind” – he learned Torah from Acher, without being affected by Acher’s negative influence.
- Acher was rotten to the core. He did not act *l’shem Shamayim*. How did this begin? He observed a boy die through fulfilling a mitzvah that promises long life. Also, he saw the tongue of Rabbi Chutzpit Hameturgeman licking the dirt. He assumed that mitzvot must be paid for in this world and did not have faith that true reward awaits the righteous in the World to Come. Furthermore, his father sanctified him for a life of Torah on condition that he would gain honor. He had ulterior motives in educating his son to Torah. All of these were instruments in the destruction of Acher’s spiritual world.
- Acher’s sin was that he did not believe in reward in the World to Come. He felt that all recompense should be meted out in this world. Therefore, he halted the proliferation of Torah, effectively “cutting down the saplings” of Torah study. The power of his former Torah study stood by him, enabling him to comprehend what was being said in the Upper realms. He heard that his teshuvah would not be accepted. He forfeited his share in the World to Come and was left only with his portion in this world.
- For that reason, he disputed Rabbi Akiva’s explanation, which stated that even a *talmid chacham* who turned away from Torah has hope of repentance.

“If that is the case,” he countered, “Why will my teshuvah not be accepted? I have heard from on High, that my teshuvah will never be accepted.” Acher himself rejected the opportunity to do teshuvah, for he distanced himself from Hashem, and for this he had no rectification.

- From here we see that everyone can do teshuvah, if only he wishes to, and with the power of teshuvah, he can reach Hakadosh Baruch Hu, ascending to His very Throne.

IT DEPENDS SOLELY ON ME

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) tell us a frightening story about Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. There was not one harlot whom he neglected. He once heard about a harlot who lived across the sea and charged a pouch of dinarim for her services. He took the money and crossed seven seas to reach her.

At the time of sin, she passed wind and said, “Just as the air which escaped from me will never return to its source, so too, will the teshuvah of Elazar ben Durdaya never be accepted.” He took her words to heart and went to sit among the mountains and valleys. He asked them to beseech Heaven for mercy on him, but they refused, explaining that they must first request mercy for themselves.

He then asked heaven and earth to beseech Heavenly mercy, but they, too, declined. The same happened with the stars and constellations. He finally came to the understanding that “the matter is dependent solely upon me.” He put his head between his knees and cried bitterly, until his soul departed. A Heavenly Voice rang out, proclaiming, “Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for the World to Come!”

Upon hearing of this, Rebbi wept, stating, “One can acquire his portion in the World to Come in but a moment. Not only are *ba’alei teshuvah* accepted, but they are even called, ‘Rabbi.’”

This narrative raises several difficulties.

How could it be that a woman of such low morals, who sold herself for money and attracted sinners from far and wide, would give *mussar* to a stranger? This is not the way to get customers. Furthermore, if she gave him rebuke, she should not have been called a harlot, but, rather, one who brings others to teshuvah. Besides, she herself should have repented before trying to cause others to do so, as it says (*Tzefaniah* 2:1), “Improve yourselves and improve each other.” Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 107a) expound, “Improve yourself first, and afterward, improve others.”

How did this woman know the severity of the sins of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya that she could say with assuredness that his teshuvah would never be accepted? Chazal (*Yoma* 86a) state, “How great is teshuvah, for it reaches until the Heavenly Throne.” Moreover, the pasuk (*Tehillim* 90:3) states, “You reduce man to pulp.” Chazal (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 2:1) explain that this means that Hashem brings a person to depression, until his soul nearly expires, in order that he should do teshuvah. There is nothing that can prevent a person from doing teshuvah, if he truly desires.

Why did Rabbi Elazar turn to heaven and earth and the mountains and valleys to beseech Heavenly mercy? Didn’t he know that “the prayer of the sick person is most effective” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 53:19)? Why didn’t he simply beseech Heaven for mercy on his own behalf? Alternatively, wouldn’t it have been beneficial for him to approach the tzaddik of the generation and ask him for some sort of *tikkun*? Chazal (*Bava Batra* 116a) state, “He should go to a wise man who will request mercy for him.” Why did he beg the natural elements for help?

Perhaps we can explain in the following manner. When a person sins, he thinks no one is watching (see *Avot* 2:1; *Midrash, Mishlei* 85). This is not so. There is Someone Who is always watching one’s actions, even in one’s innermost chambers. One who does an aveirah in secret is

punished in public (*Sotah* 3a). The beams and the stones of a person's home testify about him after his death (*Ta'anit* 11a). If a person sinned in the field, heaven and earth testify against him. If he sinned in the mountains and valleys, they testify against him. One who sinned in the daytime will be indicted by the sun; one who sinned at night will be arraigned by the moon and stars.

One who is greater than his friend is held more accountable for his sins. One who recognizes his Creator and is close to Him is punished more severely for his crimes. Even if, superficially, his sin is negligible, Hashem is scrupulous with His devout ones to the width of a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b).

Bnei Yisrael are enlisted in the "army of Hashem," recruited to fight the battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. The ultimate goal of Avodat Hashem is to defeat him.

The army is divided into various ranks. There are soldiers, lieutenants, and generals. The higher one's rank, the more men he is responsible for. The higher one's rank, the closer he is to the king. It is clear that a general who falls short in his obligations is held to account more stringently than a simple soldier who made a mistake. His punishment, too, will be all the greater. However, even a simple soldier who damages the king's property will receive due retribution for having dared to do such a thing.

When a person sins, he is culpable not only for the actual sin, but also for transgressing the directive (*Devarim* 30:19) "You shall choose life." We find that although man is given free choice to go on the proper path and choose a life of serving Hashem, people often endanger their souls by choosing the path of evil. The accusation against them is tremendous. They will be told, "You had the intelligence to make a choice. Why did you choose wrongdoing? Why didn't you come to the conclusion that the good path is the right one to take? Why didn't you understand that you put yourself in peril by choosing to do wrong?"

Once, Eliyahu Hanavi met a sinner and rebuked him for his deeds. The man replied, “I have a ready response when I will be charged on the Day of Judgment. I was not granted the intelligence to differentiate between the permitted and the forbidden.” Asked Eliyahu, “What is your vocation?” The man answered, “I am a fisherman.” To which Eliyahu countered, “You obviously have enough intelligence to make nets for fishing. If you have the brains to learn a trade, you certainly were given the intelligence to serve Hashem. The pasuk (*Devarim* 30:14) states, ‘The matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it.’ If you truly desire to serve Hashem, you can overcome your *Yetzer Hara*” (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Zuta* 14).

What Is the Correct Path That a Man Should Choose?

This idea is borne out by the following pasuk: “Grant me understanding so that I may learn Your commandments” (*Tehillim* 119:73). Everything in this world has a lesson to offer. Even the minutest objects can teach the grandest lessons. By the power of one’s intellect, he can differentiate between good and bad. If he does not do so, what is the point of living?

Chazal ask (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:1), “Why was man created after all the animals and beasts? So that, if he becomes haughty, he would be told, ‘The simple flea preceded you.’ Contemplating this subdues a person’s heart.”

One should always calculate his steps. He should think through his actions and consider whether something is the correct thing to do, or whether it will damage him. Even if a person is sunk in the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, if he thinks about things carefully, he will be able to work out what he should do. But first, he must shake himself free of the dust of falsehood and acquire good *middot*, and then he will be able to walk securely on the road of teshuvah.

“How abundant are Your works, Hashem...” (*Tehillim* 104:24). “When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the

stars that You have set in place” (ibid. 8:4). The entire Creation is the signature of Hashem, testimony to His existence.

The word עולם (world) has the same root as the word העלם (hidden). It is our duty to reveal Hashem, Who is hidden in the physical world.

The following parable can explain this thought. A new doctor arrives at a city, bearing a diploma signed by a famous professor. In it, the professor testifies to this doctor’s credibility and states that one may rely on him.

Everyone who reads this letter trusts in the ability of the new doctor, for the well-known professor has vouched for his worth. And although no one sees the big professor, his signature is sufficient to convince them.

So, too, is it with Creation. The Creation is dependent upon the Torah, which is the certificate bearing Hashem’s signature. Torah authenticates the existence of the world, and all of Creation. Chazal (*Shabbat* 55a) state, “Hashem’s signature is truth.” There is no truth other than Torah (*Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 3:8). Hashem created both this world and the World to Come merely with His Name. The pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 26:4) states, “כי ביה ה' צור עולמים – For in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds.” This world was created through the power of the letter ה', and the World to Come was created through the power of the letter ך' (*Menachot* 29:72).

The entire Torah is comprised of Names of Hashem (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19). It follows that the entire Creation is comprised of His Names, since it is dependent on the Torah. Thus the Creation testifies to the existence of Hashem. This is in the merit of the Torah, as it says (*Bereishit* 1:1), “In the beginning of G-d’s creating.” The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1) tells us that the entire Creation is for the sake of Torah, which is called “the beginning,” and for the sake of Bnei Yisrael, who are also called “the beginning.” Torah is the certificate validating

Creation, as the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 8:16) states, “Fasten this warning and seal the Torah onto [the hearts of] My students.”

By means of Torah, one recognizes the Creator. Then he studies his relationship to His Maker. “Know from where you came” (*Avot* 3:1), “Know the G-d of your father and serve Him” (*Divrei Hayamim* I, 28:9). Knowledge of Hashem puts one on the road of righteousness.

David Hamelech further enjoins us (*Tehillim* 46:9), “Go and see the works of Hashem.” Observing the handiwork of Hashem helps one recognize Hashem Himself. There are many examples of reshaim who abandoned their wicked ways after witnessing the prayers of tzaddikim. Sparks of holiness emanate from tzaddikim, awakening others to teshuvah.

However, if one does not apply himself to recognize Hashem through His works, great accusation will be leveled against him. The *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 1:3) states, “Yisrael does not know, my people does not comprehend.” Instead of studying nature and acknowledging Hashem’s signature, he chooses the way of evil, jeopardizing his very soul with earthly pleasures, forfeiting the true pleasures of the World to Come.

You Shall Choose Life

In light of the above, we can understand the incident with Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. When the harlot noticed how he had risked his life in order to sin with her, traversing seven seas to spend a short time with her, it would have been only natural for her to think, “Look at how popular I am! People come from all corners of the world just to sin with me!” But this was not the case. When she noted how determined he was, a mixture of guilt and fear brought her to teshuvah.

She thought, “Can it really be that for the pleasure of the moment, people go through such hazards, in order to sin with me? Who am I and what am I? I am nothing. Woe to these people who risk their lives

to sin with me, who never contemplate which is the correct path to take. Why didn't I myself travel the correct road in life?"

Feelings of regret engulfed her, for her previous life of depravity. The episode with Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya, who made such an effort to reach her, touched her heart and brought her to teshuvah.

She even succeeded in causing Rabbi Elazar himself to do teshuvah. She understood that a person is held responsible for risking his life for the wrong reasons, for fleeting pleasures. She reasoned that this same power of *mesirut nefesh* can be used to go on the path of mitzvot.

We see from here that every person, even a great rasha, has the choice, specifically at the time of sin, to transform himself and choose spiritual life. Nothing stands in the way of one's true desire. All matters of the heart depend on desire (*Zohar* II, 162b). With the power of perseverance, even the greatest rasha can conquer his *Yetzer Hara*.

The Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 5:1) writes, "Every person has the choice to become a tzaddik. This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Bereishit* 3:22), 'Behold Man has become like the Unique One among us, knowing good and bad.' Man is unique in the respect that he is the only creation that has the ability to distinguish between good and evil and choose his actions. There is no one preventing them from making this choice." The choice is placed in each person's hands, and he has the ability to transform himself from wicked to worthy.

The name of an object testifies to its qualities. An item which is good has its good name speak for itself, and it produces items of quality. Conversely, something bad has its name bear testimony to its foulness, and it produces only destruction and devastation.

There are people who naturally see nothing wrong with themselves. They recognize their own faults only when they notice others who have the same negative qualities as themselves. This is due to the force of habit. Habits have a way of making themselves permissible in the eyes

of their performer. Only when a person perceives someone else with the same deficiency does he realize he had this deficiency all along. (It can be compared to a camel who mocks his fellow camel upon seeing his hump. If he would think a little, he would refrain from mockery, for he himself is humped...)

This concept of noticing one's failings in others was at play in the story of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. By observing the drive for degeneracy within him, the woman came to the recognition of her own life of lewdness. She was overcome by feelings of guilt and regret. She realized that if it is possible to imperil one's life for the pursuit of evil and corruption, it is certainly well worth the effort to exert oneself for pure and worthy goals. She understood how steeped in sin she herself was, causing others to sin as well.

Since she was the first to awaken to this reality, she began chastising him. She gave him a powerful message from the smell of the gas which had emitted from her. This smell holds no attraction; on the contrary, people try to rid themselves of it. Likewise, one who does not exploit his positive attributes retains a "bad odor." He is compared to this wind which will never return to its source, for he never returns, either, and his teshuvah is not accepted.

The prosecution held against a great person who behaves in this manner is like that against a general in the army, whose sin is compounded because of his high position. He is taken to task for not seeking to do teshuvah and transform himself.

This harlot understood all this. At first, she herself did teshuvah, because of the wickedness of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. In light of the fact that she recognized the severity of his sin, she was able to bring him to teshuvah, as well. Her words, emanating from the heart, entered his heart, as Chazal (*Sefer Hayashar L'Rabbeinu Tam*: 13) tell us that words which come from the heart, enter the heart, even the heart of one so corrupt and sinful.

After Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya nullified his personal interests, for this was the only way the words could enter his heart and fulfill their purpose, he felt subdued before her, and he decided to do teshuvah.

Teshuvah Removes the Prosecutors

Together with his desire to do teshuvah, he wished to wipe away any vestige of prosecution which might have been held against him. To that end, he called the “witnesses” who saw him sin to remove their testimony from him, so that he could emerge clear of sin or blame.

Therefore, he approached the mountains and valley and the heavens and earth. He asked them to remove their charges from him and beseech Heavenly mercy, asking Hashem to forgive his sins. Had they acquiesced, he would have understood that they had removed all claims against him, and his sins were forgiven.

But they declined his request. They, after all, did not sin. They were merely witnesses, and a witness may not withhold testimony (*Vayikra* 5:3). The matter was not dependent on them at all, only on himself. He had to take himself to task and repent. Furthermore, the Gemara (*Berachot* 59a) states, “A prosecutor cannot become an advocate.”

They added that before they asked mercy for him, they had to ask mercy for themselves. Every day, they said, they witness evil taking place and people trampling the Torah. They beseeched mercy for themselves so that they could continue to exist in the face of such corruption. This is because Hashem made a stipulation with Creation. If Bnei Yisrael would accept the Torah, fine. But if not, He would return the entire world to nothingness (*Shabbat* 88a). Every day, this condition is nullified, and our existence is in peril. Only by Heavenly mercy do we exist, as we state in the morning prayers, “He Who brings light to the world and its inhabitants with compassion and in His goodness renews Creation every day.” The natural elements require

Heavenly mercy for themselves, thus they instructed Rabbi Elazar to speak up for himself.

When he discovered this, he realized that teshuvah was solely dependent upon him. Only he had the ability to pray for himself, eradicating all former sin. By doing this, he would be influencing the witnesses of nature to speak in his defense. For, by doing teshuvah, he would rectify the defect he had caused in nature, and his iniquities would be converted to merits.

Why didn't he approach a tzaddik, to ask for Heavenly mercy on his behalf? He internalized the words of Hillel (*Avot* 1:14), "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" If I do not exert myself in teshuvah, tefillah, and good deeds, to atone for my transgressions, who will be my guarantor, praying on my behalf?

If a person himself does not put effort into doing teshuvah, but, rather, approaches the "hills and valleys," an allusion to the tzaddikim of the generation (*Tanchuma, Bechukotai* 5), he will remain a rasha. He must have faith in his own power of teshuvah and utilize it for its proper purpose.

The Mishnah (*Avot* 1:14) continues, "And if I am for myself, what am I?" After he does appropriate teshuvah, he can approach the tzaddik for guidance. His own teshuvah and the tzaddik's guidance, each individually, cannot effect a complete turnabout. He needs both elements to become complete.

The elements of nature hinted at this to Rabbi Elazar. "The matter depends upon you. When you will do teshuvah, you will be able to ask the tzaddikim for mercy, and then your teshuvah and tefillah will be accepted by Hashem."

This concept is illustrated in parashat *Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32:1), "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of

my mouth. May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew.”

While a person asks heaven and earth, his witnesses, to advocate on his behalf, he must first do teshuvah on his own and pray for himself. This is meant by the words “May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew.” The word “teaching” refers to Torah, for Torah is called a good teaching, as *Mishlei* (4:2) states, “For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” This is the method of correcting whatever he damaged in Creation.

If he desists from Torah, he is causing the world to return to nothingness. Only after repairing his Torah study “may my utterance flow like the dew.” This means that his teshuvah has been accepted. At this point, the natural witnesses, who originally prosecuted against him, will advocate for him. “Dew” is a reference to Torah. When he accepts the yoke of Torah and mitzvot upon himself after doing teshuvah, all accusations against him will become null and void.

Based on this, we can understand the wording of the morning prayers, “He Who lights up the world and its inhabitants with compassion, and, in His goodness, renews Creation every day.”

When one sins, he damages all the worlds. The world can stand only in the merit of Torah study. If, *chas v’shalom*, there is a deficiency in Torah and mitzvot, the world is simply in danger of collapsing.

Thus, the heavens and earth had to beseech Hashem’s mercy in order to continue existing; they could not afford to pray on behalf of Rabbi Elazar. Although they are in constant danger of destruction, due to the paucity of Torah study in the world, Hashem showers His kindness upon them. He lights up the world, day after day, and renews Creation for all His creatures. He reenacts the Creation of the world every single day. Yet the world remains deficient until man rectifies it through his Torah, teshuvah, and good deeds.

One Can Come Close to Hashem Only through Personal Exertion

“Rabbi Elazar is destined for life in the World to Come.” Now we can well understand why the Heavenly Voice called him “Rabbi.” It was because he taught a novel interpretation of the concept of teshuvah. One may not rely on the teshuvah or tefillot of anyone else in order to effect atonement for himself. “The matter is solely dependent upon me,” means that it is imperative for the sinner to pray and repent on his own behalf; no one else can do the job for him. For teaching the world this explanation, he deserved the title “Rabbi.”

If a person wishes to transform the witnesses of prosecution to those of defense, he must do teshuvah of his own accord, accepting upon himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot. He must not be like those who sin, repent, and repeat their sin. They appear before tzaddikim, requesting *berachot*, *segulot*, and the like. They believe that this is the way to attain atonement. They think that there is an easy way to reach Hashem, without effort on their part.

But they are mistaken. Without accepting upon oneself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, the guiding lights for the *ba'al teshuvah*, his repentance is not complete and will not endure. Only through personal exertion can a person truly reach Hashem.

With this perspective, we can understand the continuation of the Midrash. “Rebbi wept, stating, ‘There is one who attains his portion in the World to Come in a single moment. It is not enough that *ba’alei teshuvah* are accepted, but they are given the title *Rabbi*.’” Why, indeed, did Elazar ben Durdaya merit the title “Rabbi”?

Based on the above, we can resolve our question. Only by accepting upon himself the burden of Torah and mitzvot with great *mesirut nefesh* can one hope to achieve the benefits of teshuvah. By becoming a true Torah Jew, one can remove all prosecution from himself.

Only Hashem, Who examines the heart, knows the quality of repentance of the *ba'al teshuvah*. He Himself can testify that a person did true teshuvah. The Rambam writes (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2), “The sinner should abandon his transgression forever, removing it from his mind, and resolving never to do it again... The One Who knows all secrets will testify that this man will never do this sin again.” If a person does this, his level will rise in the eyes of Hashem.

Therefore, Rabbi Elazar repented in such a drastic way, accepting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot through *mesirut nefesh*, becoming great in Hashem’s eyes. Hashem considered his lofty intentions as deeds (*Kiddushin* 40a), and saw him as the great giant in Torah and mitzvot that he had the potential to become. For that reason, he was already now called “Rabbi.”

This was the reason for Rebbi’s weeping. He stated, “There is one who acquires his portion in the World to Come in but a moment.” One can reach the level of the greatest of the great, even higher than tremendous tzaddikim. Chazal (*Berachot* 34b) state, “In the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, perfectly righteous people cannot stand.” This is because the penitent did whole-hearted teshuvah.

It is astounding to contemplate how much a *ba'al teshuvah* has to gain from one moment of teshuvah. He can literally acquire his life in the World to Come. But this is possible only when one contemplates deeply, understanding which path one should choose in life, for we know (*Makkot* 10b) that “the way in which a man desires to go is the way in which he is led.” If he chooses to go in the proper way, he will be encouraged from on High to do so. He will be blessed with all good, enabling him to reach great heights, higher than those of complete tzaddikim. But, if, *chas v’shalom*, he opts to go on the path of evil, he will spiral downward (*Chagigah* 5b). Even the gates of teshuvah will be locked to him, *rachmana litzlan*.

Shlomo Hamelech teaches (*Mishlei* 24:16), “כִּי שָׁבַע יפֹּל צַדִּיק וְקָם – For though the righteous one may fall seven times, he will rise.” The word שָׁבַע (seven) can also be read as שָׂבַע (sated). This hints that although a person is satiated and satisfied with his fill of earthly pleasures, in the blink of an eye, he can raise himself up, acquiring his portion in the World to Come. He will be considered a tzaddik, as long as he has awakened himself in true teshuvah. He can hope to arrive at sublime levels of spirituality, both in this world and in the World to Come. “He who comes to purify himself, is assisted by Heaven” (*Yoma* 38b).

— In Summary —

- We find a frightening account regarding Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. He sinned, yet the elements of nature would not agree to ask for mercy on his behalf, until he prayed for himself. A Heavenly Voice proclaimed that he was destined for life in the World to Come.
- We learn a marvelous message from this incident. All of Creation bears testimony to a person’s actions. If one sins in his house, the very stones of his home bear witness to his crimes. The greater the person, the more severe the charges against him. David Hamelech asked Hashem, “Grant me understanding, so that I may learn.” He wished to learn from everything in Creation. Everything in this world has a purpose in fulfilling its Master’s will, and he, too, has a mission to complete. The most important thing in this world is Torah, for it is the certificate testifying to the veracity of the entire Creation.
- This helps us comprehend the deeds of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya. The woman observed his strong desire to sin, and realized that she, too, was sunk in sin. Feelings of guilt engulfed her. She rebuked him in order to bring him to teshuvah. He accepted her words and wished to repent. But none of the elements agreed to help him attain Heavenly mercy. They, after all, had not sinned and did not feel it fitting to defend him. He finally came to the realization that “the matter was dependent solely upon me.” In order to do teshuvah, he needed to desire it with all his heart. He then cried out bitterly, returning to Hashem in true teshuvah.

- He was called “Rabbi,” for he taught a tremendous lesson about the nature of teshuvah. Ultimately, teshuvah rests only in the hands of the sinner. Since his sole desire was to return to Hashem, and he accepted the yoke of Torah and mitzvot upon himself, Hashem considered his lofty intentions as deeds. He was now considered as the great giant in Torah and mitzvot that he had the potential to become, and was thus called “Rabbi.” His teshuvah was accepted, and he was designated a portion in the World to Come.

A Practical Lesson

Teshuvah is dependent upon the sinner, and no one else. One who repents is considered a “Rabbi,” righteous in the eyes of Hashem, for his good intention to do teshuvah brings him to complete repentance. One who does teshuvah is able to rectify all the deficiencies of Creation, the results of sin. He is granted Heavenly assistance and brings blessing upon the entire world.

TESHUVAH — A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

“Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity”

(Hoshea 14:2)

The *sefarim hakedoshim* extol the virtues of teshuvah at length. We are unable to comprehend the tremendous *chessed* of teshuvah, which is a complete kindness from Hashem.

Rabbeinu Yonah begins his sefer *Sha'arei Teshuvah* with the statement, “Hashem has granted His creatures a great favor by preparing for them a way to emerge from the filth of their deeds and escape the pitfall of their sins, sparing their souls from Gehinnom and removing His wrath from upon them. He taught them to return to Him after they have sinned. He knows their inclinations, as the pasuk states

(*Tehillim* 25:8), ‘Good and upright is Hashem, therefore He guides sinners on the way.’ Even if they increased their sins and rebelled against Him, He has not closed the gates of teshuvah before them, as the *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 31:6), ‘Return to the One from Whom you have profoundly turned away.’ Furthermore, we are told (*Yirmeyahu* 3:22), ‘Return, O wayward sons, and I will heal your waywardness.’”

The *Mesillat Yesharim* (Chapter 4) explains that according to the strict letter of the law a sinner should be punished immediately for his sin, without any period of clemency. Moreover, his punishment should be severe, since he has rebelled against his Creator. He should also not be able to rectify the sin, since how can one rectify something that has already been committed? For example, if a person murders or commits adultery, the act has already been done – how can he correct it? Is he able to undo this act? It is Hashem’s Attribute of Mercy that allows the sinner time to rectify the matter, rather than being punished with immediate death. Furthermore, the punishment he receives for this sin does not completely destroy him. It is pure kindness from Hashem that he is given the opportunity to do teshuvah, for by erasing the desire for the sin from his heart, it is considered as if he has literally erased the sin itself. According to the Attribute of Justice, he should not merit receiving such a kindness from Hashem.

The Gemara states (*Yerushalmi, Makkot* 2:6) that the Sages inquired of Wisdom, “What is the punishment of a sinner?” Wisdom answered, “Evil should pursue him.” They asked Prophecy the same question, to which Prophecy answered, “The sinning soul should die.” They asked Torah this question. Torah answered, “He should bring a *korban* and be forgiven.” Then they asked Hashem Himself this question. He answered, “He should do teshuvah and receive atonement.”

By way of *remez*, we might say that Hashem’s response is alluded to in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 36:7), “You save both man and beast, O Hashem.” In His great mercy, Hashem suffices with the repentance of

the sinner, thereby saving him from death, and the animal from being slaughtered as a *korban* in atonement.

I read the following in the sefer *Hadrachah Yesharah*, quoted from the Chida, in the name of the early Sages. How is teshuvah effective, to the extent that merely thinking thoughts of repentance is beneficial? Proof of this is the ruling (*Kiddushin* 49b) that if a man marries a woman on the condition that he is a complete tzaddik, the *kiddushin* is valid, for even if he was not a tzaddik at the time, he may subsequently have had thoughts of repentance. Likewise, when a person thinks of improving his deeds, it is already a level of teshuvah. Confessing one's sins orally is another stage of teshuvah.

Why is this so? If a person merely sinned in thought or word, it would seem appropriate that mere thoughts of teshuvah or words of confession are effective. But if a person sinned in deed, how can thoughts of teshuvah benefit him and nullify his misdeeds?

The virtues of teshuvah are so great that Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 34b), "In a place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, perfect tzaddikim cannot stand." Is it really true that a person can rectify his deeds and reach such a high level of teshuvah that he reaches a level even greater than that of perfect tzaddikim?!

The whole concept of teshuvah is a wonderful gift from Hashem in his kindness to us. An intrinsic part of this gift is the fact that even thinking thoughts of repentance effects teshuvah.

The consequences of this are amazing. The *Yetzer Hara* is fearful lest one should awaken in teshuvah, shedding himself of the cobwebs of complacency. As soon as the *Yetzer Hara* notices a spark of purity ignited in man's heart, he fights him tooth and nail in order to extinguish that spark. How does Hashem come to the aid of the true penitent? He collects these sparks of teshuvah, although they are mere thoughts and not yet complete. Nonetheless, Hashem considers them

a measure of teshuvah. When the *Yetzer Hara* sees that the sinner's teshuvah has been accepted, he gives up on him and leaves him alone. He realizes that as soon as Hashem accepts his motion toward teshuvah, He will fill him with tremendous energy to continue on his chosen path of repentance. From thought he will come to action, rectifying all his previous misdeeds. The *Yetzer Hara* knows that then it will be too late to convince this person to sin, for he will surely refuse, due to the *siyata di'Shemaya* that he has earned. This is all a tremendous *chessed* from Hashem, in order to remove the *Yetzer Hara* from him. This will thwart the *Yetzer Hara's* attempts to prevent him from doing teshuvah.

May it be Hashem's will that we arouse ourselves to return to Him. Thoughts of teshuvah should fill our hearts, and we should correct our conduct. May Hashem accept our teshuvah.

————— In Summary —————

- Teshuvah is a gift from Hashem. According to the Attribute of Justice, the sinner should be immediately punished in a severe way for the sin he has committed. However, Hashem, in His mercy, grants the sinner a period of clemency in which he is able to do teshuvah. Moreover, the sinner's punishment is not as severe as it should be.
- Teshuvah is a kindness from Hashem that goes above the natural laws, since by erasing the desire for the sin that was committed, one actually erases that act.
- By merely thinking thoughts of repentance, one attains a level of teshuvah.
- As soon as the *Yetzer Hara* realizes that one is awakening himself to teshuvah, he abandons his attack on him. Hashem then further helps the person convert his desire to repent into action and do complete teshuvah.

YOM KIPPUR



A DAY OF ATONEMENT – ABOVE THE LAWS OF NATURE

“And you shall afflict yourselves; on the ninth of the month in the evening”

(*Vayikra* 23:32)

The Gemara asks (*Berachot* 8b), “Do we fast on the ninth (of Tishrei)? We fast on the tenth. But whoever eats and drinks on the ninth is considered to have fasted on the ninth and on the tenth.”

How can we compare one who eats to one who fasts? Surely, one who fasts is on a higher level than one who feasts. The latter suffers no discomfort. What, then, is the affliction of the ninth of the month?

Let us preface our answer with another question. Why are there specifically ten days designated for teshuvah? The *Mishnah Berurah* (beginning of chapter 581) quotes the pasuk in *Shir Hashirim* (6:3) “אני לי לדודי ודודי לי – I am by Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.” The initials of these words spell the name of the month אלול, and the last letters have the *gematria* of forty.

There are thirty-nine (ל”ט) days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until the ninth of Tishrei, which are designated for teshuvah, hinting to the dew (טל) of *kedushah* and *taharah* that one can draw upon himself during

this time. As a result of the efforts he makes during these days, Hashem purifies him, and he becomes consecrated to Hashem. On Erev Yom Kippur, he completes his effort, becoming לי (numerically equivalent to forty), completely devoted to Hashem on Yom Kippur, the fortieth day.

These thirty-nine days allude to the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 26:19), “כי טל – For Your dew is like the dew of light.” Teshuvah draws the light of *kedushah* upon a person. Therefore, already by the ninth of Tishrei, he is considered as if he is fasting on that day as well as the tenth. He is already completely consecrated to Hashem, and Hashem accepts his teshuvah. Yom Kippur is the culmination of this process.

On the ninth of Tishrei, a person feels great tension due to his fear of the Day of Judgment and repents. It is truly a day of affliction for him, for his future is decided then. It is difficult to eat on this day as if nothing is taking place. He simply has no appetite for food.

It can be compared, *l'havdil*, to one whose dead is lying at his feet, and he is told to eat and drink. He can't do it; whatever he brings to his lips causes him tremendous suffering. This is the case on the ninth of Tishrei. All eating, even for the sake of a mitzvah, is nearly impossible. All he can taste is the fear of judgment.

One who eats and drinks on this last day of the thirty-nine days of *kedushah*, in order to fulfill the Torah's command, is considered to have fasted and afflicted himself by doing so. This enables him to merit the special טל אורות, and the desire inherent in eating is nullified.

Specifically through eating *l'shem Shamayim*, one displays his commitment and his belonging to Hashem, as referred to in the pasuk, “I am my Beloved's.” One's greatness is measured at the time of *nisayon*. The greatness of the person who eats and drinks on the ninth of the month lies in the fact that he has done the will of Hashem, in spite of personal hardship. This, then, is the affliction of the ninth of Tishrei.

The concept of “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine” is divided into two parts. The first is the month of Elul, days of teshuvah, mercy, and forgiveness, up until Rosh Hashanah. The second segment is the days of Asseret Yemei Teshuvah up until Erev Yom Kippur. At that point, a person has reached perfection, completely committed to Hashem. This is after he has gone through the ninth of Tishrei, the day of a person’s inner struggle with his *Yetzer Hara*. On that thirty-ninth day, he received טל אורות, the light of *kedushah*, and will further attain the status of “and my Beloved is mine” on the fortieth day, Yom Kippur. This is indicated by the fact that the word לי (mine) has the *gematria* of forty.

Ultimately, after one achieves the level of the ninth day, which is טל אורות, totaling a *gematria* of forty, when including one for the word itself, he finally reaches the tenth day, of Yom Kippur. At that point he reaches beyond the level of אדם (man), becoming above nature, as described in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30), “For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you,” implying that Hashem will cleanse a person in a supernatural way.

According to Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, Hashem does a tremendous *chessed* with us and allows the day of Yom Kippur itself to atone for our sins (*Yoma* 85b; *Kritut* 7a). The Satan levels prosecution against a person, striving to separate him from Hashem. But Hashem does not heed his voice and only desires a person’s teshuvah.

In fact, on Yom Kippur, Hashem forbids the Satan from accusing Bnei Yisrael (*Yoma* 20a; *Shir Hashirim* 1:15). The very essence of the day atones for a person’s sins, helping him return to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The day passes, and the accusing angels meet with no success. A person is purified from all sin and iniquity.

All this is certainly above the laws of nature. After the preparatory stage of Chodesh Elul and Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, including the affliction of the ninth of Tishrei, a person reaches Yom Kippur. Yom

Kippur is called *Shabbat Shabbaton*. Just as the essence of Shabbat is holy, so does the holy essence of the day of Yom Kippur atone. This is on condition that a person prepared properly beforehand, with inner strength, to bring the *kedushah* of the טל אורות upon himself.

Then, the prosecuting angels cannot detect him. He is similar to the administering angels and the *Seraphim* on High, each person according to his level. He is able to attain exalted levels through the *kedushah* inherent in this fortieth day. A person's sins can become merits, as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 1:18) states, "If your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow." One will finally attain true fear of Hashem.

The pasuk (*Devarim* 10:12) states, "ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלוקיך שואל" – Now, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem." The word כי (only) is an acronym for יום כיפור, and the word אם also refers to Yom Kippur, for it has the *gematria* of forty-one. This is because this day is elevated above the rest of the forty days, since it is above the laws of nature. Already on the ninth of the month, the person reached the level of forty, for the *gematria* of טל, adding one for the word itself, equals forty. This being the case, Yom Kippur may be considered the forty-first day, allowing a person to ascend to a level above the laws of nature.

In order to attain fear of Heaven on Yom Kippur, he must first traverse the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah. These are specifically ten days, not more and not less, for they correspond to the ten *sefirot* to which a person connects himself. He binds them together to allow all the channels of *kedushah* to be interconnected.

The entire purpose of man in this world is to connect the worlds of אבי"ע (the four levels of the world, based on Kabbalah). When a person fulfills this purpose and becomes pure of sin, no prosecution can stand against him. He becomes attached to Hashem with the *Ohr Hamakif*.

Ultimately, he achieves the level of "I am my Beloved's and my

Beloved is mine.” He can attain perfection and reach heights above nature. The essence of the day of Yom Kippur atones for his sins, and he is eternally bound with his Creator.

————— In Summary —————

- One who eats on the ninth of Tishrei is considered to have fasted on the ninth as well as on the tenth. Fasting brings one to a higher level than eating and drinking. What is the affliction referred to by eating on the ninth of Tishrei? And why were specifically ten days designated for teshuvah, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?
- The word **אלול** is an acronym of the words **אני לדודי ודודי לי** (I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine). The *gematria* of the last letters is equal to forty. This hints to the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur. The ninth of Tishrei is the thirty-ninth day in this cycle. It receives the blessing of **טל אורות** (spiritual bounty), for the word **טל** is numerically equivalent to thirty-nine. A person merits attaining this level by preparing himself properly beforehand. Due to fear of the Day of Judgment, eating on the ninth poses a real form of affliction for him. Thus, he arrives at Yom Kippur, pure and perfect, truly belonging to Hashem. The word **לי** has the *gematria* of forty. The fortieth day of this time period, Yom Kippur, provides atonement, enabling him to truly belong to Hashem.
- The phrase “I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine” can be divided into two. “I am my Beloved’s” refers to the days of Elul. “And my Beloved is mine” refers to the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah. When Yom Kippur arrives, the Satan is silenced from prosecuting, and Hashem desires the sinner’s return. His entire teshuvah process is above the laws of nature. All of this is possible after a person worked on himself, making proper preparations to draw the **טל אורות** of *kedushah* upon himself. The ten days of teshuvah correspond to the ten *sefirot*. By doing teshuvah, the ten *sefirot* become connected to Hashem. Teshuvah also causes that the four worlds of **אבי"ע** are connected to the *Ohr Hamakif* of Hashem. On Yom Kippur, he receives atonement above the laws of nature.

TESHUVAH THROUGH SUBMISSION

Chazal (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 31) state that Moshe was in Heaven for 120 days. He brought down the first set of *luchot*, which he subsequently broke. Then he returned to Heaven. The third time he ascended was on Rosh Chodesh Elul, and he remained there until Yom Kippur. At that time, Hashem told him, “I have forgiven as you have requested.” Hashem designated that day as a day of forgiveness and atonement for all generations, as the pasuk states (*Vayikra* 16:30), “For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you...”

On Yom Kippur, the tenth of Tishrei, Bnei Yisrael received the Torah for the second time, when they were given the second set of *luchot* with the *Asseret Hadibrot* engraved on them.

Since Yom Kippur is the day of receiving the second *luchot*, it is customary on Yom Kippur eve to take out a Sefer Torah, and hug it and kiss it. We demonstrate that we accept the Torah upon ourselves through complete submission. We confess in the prayer of *Kol Nidrei* for all the things we said in place of saying words of Torah.

Every word uttered by a Jew, no matter what level he is on, can either build or destroy entire worlds. Therefore, when we wish to once again accept the Torah upon ourselves, we must do complete teshuvah. We must also do teshuvah for discontinuing to do good deeds that we ingrained into our consciousness by repeating three times, conferring upon them the status of an oath.

The essence of this awesome day helps one do teshuvah. The Satan is forbidden from prosecuting on Yom Kippur. The word השטן (Satan) is numerically equal to שס"ד (364). This is the number of days in the year over which the Satan has control. But the 365th day, the day of Yom Kippur, is out of his realm, and he is powerless on it (*Yoma* 20;

Zohar III, 63). This makes it easier for a person to do teshuvah on this day.

The pasuk says, “כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם” – For on this day He shall provide atonement for you.” The words כי ביום הזה (for on this day) have the same numerical value as the word קו (line or path). The day of Yom Kippur provides a straight pathway for the entire year. This day is pure and holy, without prosecution whatsoever.

The *kedushah* of Yom Kippur has the potential to influence a person throughout the rest of the year. But this is only on condition that his thoughts are in accordance with the Torah. What is the point of doing teshuvah on Yom Kippur if his head is full of thoughts that are diametrically opposed to the will of Hashem? Especially if he does not feel any regret over them at all on Yom Kippur.

An example of this is someone who hates his fellow Jew and does not remove this hatred from his heart on Yom Kippur. Since he still hates the other person, he harbors improper thoughts throughout the day. It follows that if he has not changed in this area, he most likely has not changed himself in any other area either. How does the fact that this is a day of teshuvah benefit such a person? Yom Kippur has no effect on him, for it is beneficial only for those who are prepared to change themselves. This is what is meant by the directive, “Open for me an aperture the size of the hole of a needle, and I will open for you an opening wide enough for a wagon to pass through” (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3).

If a person truly wishes to change for the better, he must first nullify his ego. This is alluded to in our original pasuk. The initials of the words כי ביום הזה (for on this day), are numerically equal to ז"ך (twenty-seven), which means pure. On this day, a person becomes purified, transformed into a new man.

The last letters of the words ביום הזה spell מה (what). A person should sanctify himself to the extent that he is “what,” i.e., nothing at

all. He should feel as though he is but dust and ashes and remember before Whom he will have to give an accounting.

One should constantly bear in mind the following words of Chazal (*Ta'anit* 16a): One who transgresses a sin and does not confess is akin to one who immerses himself in a *mikveh*, while holding on to an insect. Even were he to dip into all the *mikvaot* in the world, he will remain impure as long as he has not let go of it. *Mishlei* (28:13) states, "He who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will be granted mercy." A person must return from his iniquities (based on *Rashi*).

In order to awaken one's heart to teshuvah on Yom Kippur, he must first subjugate his ego to Hashem. He should bear in mind that Hashem examines the heart and the mind. Only after humbling himself, can he do complete teshuvah.

The Essence of the Day Atones

The essence of the day of Yom Kippur atones (*Yoma* 85b; *Kritut* 7a). This is on condition that a person subjugates himself to Hashem on this day. He takes advantage of the power of the day, when the *Yetzer Hara* holds no sway, to purify himself and take the path leading toward Hashem. He thereby merits *siyata di'Shemaya*. But if he doesn't nullify his ego and his lusts on this day, he creates a barrier between himself and this holy day. And although his adversary, the *Yetzer Hara*, has no power on Yom Kippur, a person is liable, due to his sins, to become his own worst enemy, *chas v'shalom*.

In order for a person to sever himself from his desires and carve for himself a straight path to Hashem which will endure for the entire year, he subdues his physical being on Yom Kippur and afflicts himself with five types of hardships (*Yoma* 73b, 76a; *Pesikta Zuta*, *Emor* 23:32). Specifically by hungering for these forbidden pleasures, he will satisfy himself spiritually (*Sukkah* 52b; *Yerushalmi*, *Ketubot* 5:8).

Everything in this world has a beginning. Nullification of the *Yetzer Hara* and physical pleasures begins on Yom Kippur, and preparation for this begins on Rosh Chodesh Elul.

David Hamelech tells us (*Tehillim* 104:21), “הכפירים שואגים לטרף” – The young lions roar after their prey, and to seek their food from G-d.” The word כפירים (young lions) shares a root with the word כיפור (Yom Kippur). When a person perceives Yom Kippur correctly and subdues himself before Hashem, purifying himself and paving a path of perfection in Avodat Hashem, he is termed לבקש מאל – one who seeks his food from G-d. All of his tefillot and supplications are directed at asking for *siyata di'Shemaya*, in order to serve Hashem. He will be granted his heart's desires.

Then (*ibid.* vs. 22), “The sun rises” – he receives special blessing. The continuation of the pasuk (*ibid.*) “and they are gathered in” means that he will always be united with Hashem, in an eternal bond. All is dependent on the efforts a person makes on this day. The more preparation he invests, the greater the dividends.

I have read in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that Yom Kippur is a taste of *Olam Haba*. The *Yetzer Hara* cannot disturb a person from connecting with his Creator on this day. Adam lived peacefully in Gan Eden until his sin. Afterward, he understood that the Satan desires to interrupt his Avodat Hashem. The fact that the Satan holds no sway on this day is evidence that it is a portion of *Olam Haba*.

In the World to Come, there is no eating, drinking, or earthly pleasures. Tzaddikim sit and enjoy the splendor of the *Shechinah* (*Berachot* 17a). Similarly, on Yom Kippur we refrain from eating, drinking and other pleasures. By spending the day in tefillah, one truly feels that he is standing before the Creator. By subduing himself with the five afflictions of the day, he merits that his tefillot are accepted, as it says (*Tehillim* 52:19), “A heart broken and humbled, O G-d, You will not despise.”

It is essential that one's heart is in consonance with his mouth (see *Terumot* 3:8; *Pesachim* 63a) in teshuvah. During the month of Elul, a person cries out in supplication, confessing his sins and asking forgiveness. He continues in this manner throughout Yom Kippur. He must make sure that his heart is in it and submit himself totally to Hashem.

The word כִּי (for) in the pasuk כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לֵב is numerically equal to the word לֵב (heart), adding two for its two letters. This hints that on Yom Kippur one must subdue his heart so that his sins will be forgiven, and he will thereby become purified.

Without subjecting his heart completely in teshuvah, he will not feel the *kedushah* of the day. He may go through the motions of prayer and fasting, but it will be a burden on him. He will constantly check his watch to figure out how much longer he needs to fast. His mind will be on breaking his fast, rather than breaking his desires and subjugating them to Hashem's will.

The Rema writes (*Orach Chaim* 624:5) in the name of the Maharil, "Those who are scrupulous begin building the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur, in order to go from one mitzvah directly to another."

The feeling of submission attained on Yom Kippur must extend to the other days of the year as well. Therefore, as soon as Yom Kippur is over, one begins to build a home for the *Shechinah* and also sanctifies the new moon (*Rema, Orach Chaim* 426:2). When one contemplates how far he is from the moon, which is only one of the creations of Hashem, he realizes how small he is in contrast to the entire Creation. In this manner, he will recognize the greatness of the Creator and his own lowliness (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2). Who is he to take pride before the Creator of the world?!

On Yom Kippur, a person returns to his roots. He once again receives the Torah after forty days of preparation, just as our fathers

did in the Wilderness. The forgiveness which they received then is granted to their children each year anew, when they do teshuvah.

————— In Summary —————

- On Yom Kippur, Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second set of *luchot*. Yom Kippur is, therefore, a day of *Kabbalat HaTorah*. For that reason, before *Kol Nidrei*, Sifrei Torah are removed from the ark, and we kiss them. We confess all sins committed through speech.
- The essence of the day helps a person, because the Satan cannot prosecute on it. If one resolves to change for the better, he is able to pave a path for himself, which he will tread throughout the year.
- This applies on condition that a person nullifies his ego, through submission and humility. He becomes purified only by deeming himself as dust and ashes. One who remains haughty is akin to a person who immerses in the *mikveh* while holding an insect in his hand. Only complete subjugation to Hashem will effect the atonement inherent in the day. When he afflicts himself with the five afflictions of the day and distances himself from physical pleasures, his teshuvah is effective, and he brings bounty upon himself for the entire year. Hashem grants him the *siyata di'Shemaya* to succeed.
- Yom Kippur is a taste of *Olam Haba*. The Satan has no control on this day. His entire being is based on the sin of Adam in Gan Eden. Without being affected by the Satan, it is as if one is dwelling in the World to Come. And just as in *Olam Haba*, there is no eating or drinking, so are these pleasures irrelevant on Yom Kippur. One merits that his tefillot are heard only on condition that his heart is in it, completely subdued before Hashem.
- Immediately at the conclusion of the fast, we build the sukkah, a house for Hashem, and we bless the new moon. This helps us recognize the greatness of Hashem, and our own low level. Our acceptance of the Torah anew brings great satisfaction to Hashem Yitbarach.

THE GIFT OF YOM KIPPUR

Moshe was in Heaven for 120 days (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 31). He brought down the first set of *luchot*, which he subsequently broke. Then he returned. The third time he ascended was on Rosh Chodesh Elul, and he remained there until Yom Kippur. At that time, Hashem told him, "I have forgiven as you have requested." Hashem designated that day for forgiveness and atonement for all generations, as the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30) states, "כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם – For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you..."

Just as Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah anew on Yom Kippur in the Wilderness, so too, every year, on Yom Kippur, we accept the Torah anew.

Every year, Hashem forgives Am Yisrael, for He derives satisfaction from their teshuvah. He grants them this day of Yom Kippur as a gift for the entire year, the opportunity to do complete teshuvah. This is alluded to in the words כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם. The word יכפר (He shall provide atonement), is numerically equivalent to 310, just as the word שי (gift).

What was the great joy that Bnei Yisrael experienced on Yom Kippur, which warranted it being called a gift? Bnei Yisrael withstood a great *nisayon*, in order to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*. Had the Satan succeeded in tripping them up just one more time, after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu would not have been able to pray on their behalf.

Bnei Yisrael knew the Satan was trying to cause them to stumble. Therefore, they prepared themselves for forty days beforehand. They even fasted in order to combat the *Yetzer Hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ki Tisa* 371). By completely overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*, they thwarted his ability to prosecute at all on this day for all future generations.

Hashem was greatly satisfied with Bnei Yisrael's success, and He therefore presented them with Yom Kippur as a day of forgiveness and atonement for all generations. Had Bnei Yisrael preserved the tremendous influence they gained from this day throughout the year, they might have managed banishing the Satan from their midst forever.

Why, indeed, don't we find that Bnei Yisrael exerted themselves to eliminate the Satan from their midst, once and for all, upon Moshe's descent with the second *luchof*? Hashem bestowed this day on them as a gift, and even added the festival of Sukkot following it, to maintain their state of submissiveness before Him.

Bnei Yisrael reach such an exalted level by the end of Sukkot that on the eighth day, Hashem proclaims, "It is difficult to part from you" (*Sukkah* 55b). Why was their teshuvah unable to eradicate the *Yetzer Hara* from the world forever?

When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the calf, they implanted supernatural powers into the Satan, which can never be completely removed. Only with the restoration of the Beit Hamikdash will his powers be obliterated. The Satan is aware of this. At that time, he knew that if Moshe Rabbeinu would have entered Eretz Yisrael, he would have built the Beit Hamikdash, and it would never have been destroyed. The Gemara (*Sotah* 9a) states that Moshe's enemies had no control over his handiwork. Therefore, the Satan put all his energies into tripping up the Jewish people.

And, indeed, he achieved his goal. Bnei Yisrael complained about the water (*Shemot* 16:2, *Bamidbar* 17:6), and Moshe became angry at them, stating (*Bamidbar* 20:10), "Listen now, O rebels." It was then decreed that Moshe and Aharon would not be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael.

The Satan further caused our nation to sin by speaking derogatorily about the Land (*ibid.* 13:32; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:5). They were decreed to weep for generations, with the destruction of both Batei Mikdash

(*Sotah* 35a; *Sanhedrin* 104b). They had the ability to nullify the powers of the Satan merely for one day, the day of Yom Kippur, when even reshaim are able to do teshuvah without being prosecuted by the Satan.

On Motza'ei Yom Kippur, when the Satan returns and sees that Hashem is pleased with their prayers, he does not have the temerity to spoil Hashem's joy by prosecuting against His people. Bnei Yisrael return home with light hearts, as the pasuk (*Kohelet* 9:7) states, "Go, eat your bread with joy... for G-d has already approved your deeds." They emerge victorious in judgment.

If one truly desires to draw the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur upon himself throughout the rest of the year, submitting himself to Hashem's service, he has the ability to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*, thereby making his choice to do good easier for himself.

Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness were on this lofty level. They were surrounded by seven Clouds of Glory (*Sukkah* 11b; *Tanchuma, Beshalach* 3), and they ate the manna, which is called "the bread of the mighty" (*Tehillim* 78:25). Chazal state (*Yoma* 75b) that this was the food that the administering angels eat, attesting to the high level of purity Bnei Yisrael attained. Throughout their lives, they witnessed many wonders and miracles.

They certainly could have eradicated the Satan for all time, had they continued their service of Yom Kippur throughout the rest of the year. The *gematria* of the word שָׂטָן (Satan) is 364. If Bnei Yisrael would have served Hashem on the 364 days of the year that are under the Satan's control in the same way that they served Him on Yom Kippur, they would have been able to eradicate the Satan.

The Generation of the Wilderness had the capability to do this. But they sinned by complaining against Moshe and Aharon, thereby angering Hashem. They tested Him ten times (*Avot* 5:7) and therefore did not manage to nullify the Satan.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 110b) relate that the Generation of the Wilderness does not have a portion in the World to Come, as the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 14:35) states, “In this Wilderness shall they cease to be, and there shall they die!” They shall cease to be in this world, and they shall die in the World to Come, as it says (*Tehillim* 95:11), “I have sworn in My anger that they shall not enter My land of contentment.” Moreover, they even fell to the level of denouncing the Land (*Bamidbar* 13:32), increasing their sin and earning them the punishment of eternal weeping (*Ta’anit* 29a).

There is another reason why the accusation against them is so strong. After the sin of the Golden Calf, when Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah and heard that Hashem forgave them, they reached a level higher than they had reached at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. At the time of the Exodus, they received a spiritual arousal upon witnessing the countless wonders and miracles. But after the sin of the Calf, they needed to arouse themselves of their own accord. They did teshuvah and awaited the second set of *luchot*.

When Yom Kippur arrived, and with it the second set of *luchot*, they were meant to take with them the *kedushah* of the day and apply it to all the days of the year. In this manner, they would have uprooted the Satan forever after.

This is alluded to in the pasuk, **כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם**. The word **כִּי** is an acronym for the phrase **כָּל יוֹם** (every day). Every day of the year, one has the potential to utilize the *kedushah* inherent in Yom Kippur in order to return to Hashem in teshuvah. Then he will become purified throughout the year.

Man’s Tikkun on Yom Kippur

Each person has his “moment of favor” on Yom Kippur. This is the moment when Hashem examines him and scrutinizes his deeds. Since no one is aware of his exact moment, he should “play it safe” and not

waste even a second of this sanctified day. He should utilize each moment to its maximum.

And even if his moment has not yet arrived, he is surely benefitting his fellow Jews by his virtuous behavior, as all of Yisrael are responsible for each other (*Shavuot* 37a; *Sanhedrin* 27b).

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 92a) state, “One who prays on behalf of his friend, and is in need of the same thing, his need is fulfilled first.” One who behaves admirably throughout the day is surely increasing his merits, producing a positive outcome of the moment when he will be scrutinized. His tefillot will be answered, and he will be inscribed and sealed for a good and peaceful long life.

This is hinted to in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30), “כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם.” The word בַּיּוֹם (on this day) is used, in order to imply that we are unaware of the exact hour and minute of our individual judgment. We know only that it occurs at some time **on this day**.

Since one does not know when this moment will come, he should maintain a level of *kedushah* throughout the day and not waste even one minute. In this manner, his tefillah will not go unheeded. Moreover, he will increase his merits by his actions on behalf of his fellow man, acting out of a sense of responsibility to bring the community merit, as well.

The first step in utilizing every moment to its fullest is to subdue one’s ego. To do this one should remember the day of death. This causes a person to feel humble and submit himself to Hashem’s will.

On Yom Kippur morning, we read the Torah portion of *Acharei Mot* (*Vayikra* 16:1), describing the death of Aharon’s sons. At Minchah, in the afternoon prayers, we read the injunctions to refrain from the acts of the people of Egypt and Canaan (*ibid.* 18:2). After contemplating one’s mortality in the Shacharit Torah reading, one is capable of distancing himself from the abominations of the gentiles. They bring

one to haughtiness. The submissiveness a person attains by considering his day of death prevents him from committing the terrible sins of the depraved gentiles.

We also mention our forefathers in our tefillot. Despite their exalted levels, they were not conceited, but regarded themselves as dust and ashes (see *Bereishit* 18:27).

They also compared themselves to branches that are similar to their roots. Roots are covered with sand and soil, their inherent powers concealed from the eye. Only the branches are exposed. But in spite of all their beauty and color, any wind can shake them, and they are in danger of breaking. Then they fall to the ground. The root, on the other hand, is the heart of the tree. If the root gets destroyed, the entire tree collapses.

Likewise, if one's heart is subdued before Hashem, the entire person becomes subservient to Him. Only by submitting himself to Hashem can one feel the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur.

Even if he stumbled in sin, he can repair the damage through doing teshuvah. Chazal (*Yoma* 86b) state, "How great is teshuvah, for it reaches up until the Heavenly throne." No prosecuting angel can interfere with the tears of the *ba'al teshuvah*, for the gate of tears is never locked (*Berachot* 32b). This is alluded to by David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 39:13), "Hear my prayer, Hashem, give ear to my outcry, be not mute to my tears."

The merit of Shabbat is beneficial. The word תשובה (teshuvah) has the same letters as the word השבת (the Shabbat). Chazal (*Shabbat* 118b) state that if Bnei Yisrael would observe two Shabbatot properly, they would immediately be redeemed. For in the *zechut* of Shabbat, the gates of teshuvah remain open. The reason for this is the following. The entire Creation was made in order that Hashem would rest on Shabbat, and His Kingship would be revealed throughout the world. All

would acknowledge that He is King and there is none other. Similarly, one who truly repents reveals Hashem's Kingship. By doing teshuvah, he attains a level of the World to Come, since he submits himself to Hashem, ridding himself of the frivolities of this world. He actually feels the pleasure of the World to Come in this world.

Yom Kippur is called *Shabbat Shabbaton*. The double language refers to the power of Shabbat and the power of teshuvah. Hashem does a *chessed* with all who repent, by never allowing the gates of teshuvah to close before them. By doing teshuvah, one coronates Hashem as King over the entire world. He reveals Hashem's glory and becomes close to Him. This is on condition that he submits himself to Hashem with all his heart and soul.

May it be Hashem's will that we all merit to draw from the *kedushah* of this holy day for the rest of the days of the year. By means of the combined tefillot of Bnei Yisrael, who are all responsible for each other, may we complete the necessary *tikkun* and hasten the arrival of Mashiach, speedily in our days, Amen.

————— In Summary —————

- After the sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael withstood a great *nisayon*, and they defeated the *Yetzer Hara*, meriting receiving the second set of *luchot*. This was the great joy of their teshuvah. Why did they not merit nullifying the *Yetzer Hara* for the rest of the year?
- The Satan knew that their goal was the building of the Beit Hamikdash. Had Moshe entered the Land, he would have built the Beit Hamikdash, and it would never have been destroyed. The Satan therefore injected an atmosphere of complaining among Bnei Yisrael. Moshe was angered, and he was forbidden from entering Eretz Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael were decreed to cry for generations. They succeeded in attaining an elevated level of *kedushah* on Yom Kippur, when they emerge victorious in judgment, and the *Yetzer Hara* holds no sway.

- Each person has the capability to eradicate the *Yetzer Hara*. However, the Satan manages to place grievances in one's heart, which are very difficult to ignore. For this reason, the Generation of the Wilderness does not have a place in the World to Come. They sinned and did not nullify the *kelippah*. Even though they reached a higher level than they had attained at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, they failed to extract the *kedushah* of the day of Yom Kippur and eliminate the Satan.
- Every person has a "moment of favor" on Yom Kippur, but he is not aware of when it is. Therefore, he should make sure not to waste even a moment of this precious day. He should pray and supplicate Hashem continually. If he prays on behalf of his friend, he will be answered first. This is on condition that he subjugates himself to Hashem. One way of doing this is by remembering the day of death. For this reason, we read about the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur. When one contemplates his mortality, he will submit himself to Hashem and distance himself from the behavior of the gentiles. The merit of our forefathers, who were as humble as dust and ashes, also protects us. The heart is the root of the body; as soon as the heart humbles itself, the entire body is humbled. By humbling oneself, a person can experience the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur.
- By doing teshuvah and keeping Shabbat, a day that is auspicious for teshuvah, one is able to bring a *tikkun* to the world. This is the power of Yom Kippur, *Shabbat Shabbaton*. The double language indicates both levels of Shabbat and teshuvah. Through teshuvah, a person coronates Hashem. By submitting himself to Hashem on Yom Kippur, he will merit the revelation of Hashem's glory.

WAGING WAR AGAINST THE YETZER HARA

“When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture his captives”

(Devarim 21:10)

This pasuk refers to Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness and atonement. The letters of the word כִּי (when) are an acronym for יוֹם כְּפֹרֵר. This teaches that on Yom Kippur, after preparing himself in teshuvah during the previous forty days, starting on Rosh Chodesh Elul, one is sufficiently armed to go out to war against the enemy of all time – the *Yetzer Hara*. In this battle, “you will capture his captives.” By doing teshuvah, you will be able to remove from the *Yetzer Hara*’s possession all the aveirot that he has gathered from you during the year, which he uses to prosecute against you.

This is essential, for although it is true that the Satan is forbidden to prosecute on Yom Kippur (*Yoma* 20a; *Zohar* III, 232a), nevertheless, the aveirot of the entire previous year are in his possession. If one fails to recapture them, all his aveirot remain in the dominion of the *Yetzer Hara*, and he continues with his evil plans against our people.

How are sins erased? Only through teshuvah. When a person truly repents and accepts upon himself never to return to his former sin (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2), all his iniquities are erased. This applies to aveirot that one actually committed. These aveirot were recorded in writing, so that when he repents them, they are simply wiped out. But what happens with aveirot of the mind? How can one

do teshuvah for improper thoughts that were never translated into action, and hence, never written down?

If a person confesses to sinful thoughts, they are recorded on High. Once he does proper teshuvah, they are then erased, just as sins that are actually committed.

From here we see the importance of repenting for improper thoughts. We know that preparing to do a mitzvah with alacrity brings a person to do the mitzvah. Likewise, thinking of sin brings one to sin. Sinful thoughts are more severe than sins themselves (*Yoma* 29a), and therefore it is crucial to do teshuvah for them.

This can be inferred from the following *remez*. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write: “הרהורי עבירה קשים מעבירה – Thoughts of sin are more severe than sin itself.” The initials of these words spell the word מעקה (a fence). This alludes to the pasuk (*Devarim* 22:8), “You shall make a fence for your roof.” We can learn from this to fence in and protect our mitzvot, so that we should not come to sin, descending through thought or deed, fulfilling the continuation of the pasuk: “...if a fallen one falls from it.” The *gematria* of the words מעקה לגג (a fence for your roof) equals that of צדיק הוא ולא חטא (he is righteous and has not sinned).

Each person should do teshuvah, tzaddikim as well as simple people, as the *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:2) enjoins us: “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.” All those called “Israel” are enjoined to do teshuvah. The pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 60:21) states, “Your people will all be righteous.” When tzaddikim repent, they inspire the entire nation to repent, and an atmosphere of teshuvah will pervade the entire world.

A hint to this can be found in the pasuk (*ibid.* 54:13) “All your children will be students of Hashem, and your children’s peace will be abundant.” These are the tzaddikim, who teach the people the correct way to learn Torah. Through Torah, peace descends upon the world

(*Zohar* III, 13a). In this manner, tzaddikim build up the world. The Gemara (*Berachot* 64a) states, Do not read בניך (your sons), rather בוניך (your builders).”

The outcome of this is guaranteed, as David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 29:11) proclaims, “Hashem will give might (עוז) to His nation; Hashem will bless His nation with peace.” The word עוז (might) is related to the word עזות (boldness). In general, it is difficult to ask forgiveness from a friend with whom he argued. A person is stubborn. But Hashem sees when a person truly wishes to repent and make amends with his fellow Jew. Then He bestows might upon His nation. He grants us the boldness and the strength of character to ask forgiveness from our friend. In this way, Hashem blesses His nation with peace. This refers to Torah (*Zohar* III, 176b). Peace descends upon these adversaries and upon the entire world. Together they can reclaim the captives taken by the *Yetzer Hara*, i.e., the aveirot that were in his domain. Then one can return wholeheartedly to Hashem.

————— In Summary —————

- The pasuk “כי תצא למלחמה על אויביך” – When you will go out to war against your enemies” is a hint to Yom Kippur. The word כי is an acronym for יום כיפור. Yom Kippur is an auspicious time for waging war against the *Yetzer Hara* and taking from him the captives he has in his possession, the sins of Bnei Yisrael. Through teshuvah, the *Yetzer Hara* is silenced on this day, and our sins are erased.
- One must repent even for sinful thoughts. When one does teshuvah for these sins, they are recorded and immediately erased. The prosecution against us is silenced. Tzaddikim must also do teshuvah. Their teshuvah rebuilds the world. The pasuk states, “Your children’s peace will be abundant.” Peace brings *berachah* to the world. And although it is difficult to ask a fellow Jew for forgiveness, Hashem strengthens us and enables us to appease each other. Peace then reigns among us, and among the entire world. We are able to recoup the captive sins from the *Yetzer Hara* and return completely to Hashem.

TRUE TESHUVAH

On Yom Kippur, we confess our sins. This is not a global form of teshuvah, but, rather, an individual confession for each and every detail of sin. The *Yetzer Hara* is tremendous. We must fight each aspect of evil that was created by each individual sin.

This is the reason why the injunction “When you will go out to war against your enemies” (*Devarim* 21:10) is written in the plural form. The enemies are many, indeed. A prosecuting angel is formed from each sin. But if we triumph, then “Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand.” Moreover, this is written in the singular (בידך – your hand), indicating that you will be at peace with one another, as one man with one heart.

This directive applies even more to tzaddikim, for their aveirot are more far-reaching. Once, one Rabbi told another that he had been reincarnated on account of a slight feeling of pride that he had exhibited. He had once said, “*Baruch Hashem*, I have learned much Torah.” This revealed an element of haughtiness that he had never rectified. For that small sin, he needed to return to this world.

Chazal state (*Avot* 2:8), “If you have studied much Torah, do not take credit for yourself.” Do not be arrogant about your level of Torah knowledge. How vital is it to repent for this sin!

We must know what true teshuvah is. One Erev Yom Kippur, I was asked the following. Why aren’t people influenced by Yom Kippur throughout the year? On the day after Yom Kippur, people already begin speaking *lashon hara* and doing other forms of sin.

People fast on Yom Kippur, making preparations for the holy day. They dress in white and afflict themselves. Do they know the essence

of the day? Do they know the meaning of Chodesh Elul, the meaning of *tekiat shofar*? These are not days to be wasted. They contain the most exalted secrets. The potential inherent in these days is tremendous. Why do people not feel this?

I once asked a group, “Why do you fast on Yom Kippur? What do you feel then?”

They responded, “We were born in Jewish households, and in our homes, we were accustomed to fasting on Yom Kippur.”

People like these don’t feel a thing. Maybe they think it’s a fad to fast, a quick way to take off a few extra pounds... After it’s over, the day has left no impression upon them at all. Such people don’t know their right from their left. They see others fasting, dressed in white, doing *kapparot* with a chicken. However, if they are doing it merely out of habit, it will not help them do teshuvah.

These people do not fathom the true reason for fasting. They feel nothing during the month of Elul, or on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. That is why as soon as Yom Kippur has ended, they return to their life of iniquity.

I once asked a fellow Jew what he felt at the blowing of the shofar. To which he replied, “I get the chills.” The sound of the shofar should instill fear and trepidation into a person. The *Navi* (*Amos* 3:6) states, “Is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people do not tremble?” It is meant to awaken those who are sleeping to galvanize themselves into action. The Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:4) writes, “Then the Knower of all secrets will testify that this man will not return to this sin ever again.” The shofar is not meant to give us the chills. One must resolve to change for the better and return in teshuvah. He should resolve not to repeat his previous mistakes.

Sin is rooted in bad habits. Even a great person must contemplate this matter, eradicating his negative tendencies. For if not, he is likely to continue sinning.

This can be compared to a person running through the streets. Others see him running, so they follow him. But they do not know why he is running. After a while, there is a whole line of people running after him. Finally, the man enters a store in order to claim a prize that he won in a raffle. But all of the others are disappointed, for they had not won a prize. All their running was for nothing.

So, too, is it with a person who rushes to do teshuvah. He merits the big prize and is inscribed in the Book of Life. But the others, who just go through the motions, fasting and praying without understanding what they are doing, dressing in white and doing *kapparot* without the main ingredient of teshuvah, will be disappointed indeed, for they have not gained a thing.

Therefore, it is imperative to prepare during Elul. Then, when the shofar blast will be heard on Rosh Hashanah, its sound will ring in one's ears throughout the rest of the year.

True, Unconditional Teshuvah

On Rosh Hashanah, we recite the words, "Contemplate and prepare who you are and what you do." These words alone are enough to instill the greatness of Hashem and the lowliness of man into a person's heart and help him realize that he is nothing (*Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:2*).

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said that the previous generations would tremble from fear at the onset of Rosh Hashanah. There were tzaddikim who, from the beginning of Elul, were afraid to venture into the streets, for fear of the severity of justice. It is said that even the fish in the sea tremble from fear of the Day of Judgment.

If people felt such fear during Elul, how much more so should one tremble on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. How much more should one fear judgment then, and repent wholeheartedly.

However, many people do teshuvah in order to attain a certain goal. Such people usually reject Hashem after He has brought them salvation. There are people who became rich overnight, but instead of attributing their wealth to Hashem, go after their hearts' desires and abandon their heritage, *rachmana litzlan*. Others were deathly ill and miraculously recovered after receiving a *berachah* from a tzaddik. Instead of doing teshuvah, they rebelled against Hashem. They fell instead of rising.

Some people have a hard time finding their soul mates. They go to tzaddikim to receive blessings. They pray and promise that if Hashem will send them their predestined partner, they will strengthen their commitment to Judaism. They keep their word: they purchase a tallit and Kiddush cup, say Tehillim, and give *tzedakah*.

But after finding their marriage partner, instead of strengthening their commitment to Judaism, with a *chuppah* and *kiddushin*, in true Jewish fashion, accepting upon themselves the laws of family purity, they prepare a wedding where men and women mingle, with no trace of *tzeniut*.

A young man used to frequent my house weekly, asking me to bless him that he should merit finding his life's partner. No one desired to marry him. In his distress, he did teshuvah. He would constantly check his appearance in the mirror, to see whether he was good-looking or ugly. And although he was considered a good-looking young man, he could not find his intended. Finally, he met a young lady, a religious attorney.

The couple came for a blessing before the wedding. I was very happy and blessed them warmly. But I also reminded them, as usual, of the need to observe the laws of family purity. To my surprise, the young man replied that although his bride wished to keep these laws, it would be too difficult for him to live according to them for so many days of the month... *rachmana litzlan*.

I was stunned at his words, and began reprimanding him strongly, but he stood his ground. Nevertheless, I attended the wedding ceremony, thinking that maybe he would have a change of heart. But this was not to be. Instead of seeing the Hand of Hashem, which helps a person each step of the way, and doing teshuvah, people rebel against Hashem, refusing to keep Torah and mitzvot.

“Any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone” (*Avot* 5:19). If one does teshuvah only in order that Hashem fulfill a desire of his, when that desire is fulfilled, he rebels. This is because his teshuvah was conditional. Once the condition has been fulfilled, he forgets his obligations to Hashem.

One is enjoined to love Hashem unconditionally. He should do His will without thought of reward (*Avot* 1:3). The reward of a mitzvah is not in this world (*Kiddushin* 39b). For that reason, a person must appreciate the seemingly bad things that happen to him, just as he shows gratitude for all the good he receives (*Berachot* 54a, in the *Mishnah*).

If a person does teshuvah only on condition that he is inscribed in the Book of Life, he is in danger of reverting to his former misdeeds immediately after Yom Kippur. Therefore, he should do unconditional teshuvah. Then even after Yom Kippur has passed, he has until Hoshana Rabbah to prove himself. By displaying a marked change in his actions and attitudes during these days, he demonstrates that his teshuvah was genuine.

Based on this, we can understand why the seven *ushpizin*, holy guests, come to visit us specifically on Sukkot (*Zohar* III, 103b). After the *chagim*, a person’s teshuvah has been accepted. The *ushpizin* have a distinct satisfaction upon observing a person’s unconditional teshuvah, especially David Hamelech, the last of the *ushpizin*, who arrives on Hoshana Rabbah.

Even if a great tzaddik sinned in a slight transgression, he is held accountable for it. The severity of justice is so great that he may lose his portion in the World to Come because of a brief moment of transgression. Conversely, one can attain his portion in the World to Come in a brief moment (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). One who is greater than his friend has a greater *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52a). Chazal state (*Avot* 2:4; *Berachot* 29a), “Do not believe in yourself until your day of death.” Yochanan was a Kohen Gadol for eighty years, yet at the end of his life became a Sadducee.

Our forefathers were told that even one who sinned all his life has the ability to do teshuvah. They may have feared that there was no hope for their wayward sons, for even a great man can lose everything in a moment of weakness. When they find their sons repenting unconditionally, ridding themselves of all their bad habits, they come, on Sukkot, into the “Shade of Faith” (*Zohar* III, 103a), to celebrate with their descendants.

By doing teshuvah unconditionally on Yom Kippur, one is able to prepare himself for a sin-free year. His teshuvah will be accepted, and he will be inscribed for a good year full of blessing.

————— In Summary —————

- The *viduy* confessions on Yom Kippur are very detailed, for the *Yetzer Hara* entices a person to transgress each and every sin. Thus, each sin must be individually combated and confessed for. Even great tzaddikim are enjoined to admit and repent for minor transgressions.
- It is important to know what true teshuvah is. There are those who do not understand the essence of Yom Kippur. They fast and do *kapparot*, but they are not aware of the main purpose of the day. They merely parrot what they see others doing. This is a bad habit, and should be changed. These people return to their ways of iniquity soon after Yom Kippur, because their teshuvah was done out of habit, rather than being wholehearted. Even tzaddikim may

act out of habit and must rectify their behavior. This is the reason that we do not blow the shofar every day of the year. We should not become accustomed to the shofar's blasts, unable to feel their impact.

- The month of Elul, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur all contain profound mysteries. One should ensure that he does true teshuvah and not reject Hashem after He has answered him. We find many people who reject Hashem after He brought them salvation. This is because they changed their ways only in order to get what they desired. After their conditions were met, they returned to their former ways. One must do genuine teshuvah, unconditionally, and without hope of remuneration. This type of teshuvah will be truly accepted by Hashem.
- After Bnei Yisrael do complete teshuvah during the Yamim Noraim, the *ushpizin* come to visit them in their Sukkot. They are happy that their descendants do teshuvah unconditionally. Everyone, without exception, is enjoined to repent and return to Hashem. The joy at having done perfect teshuvah is tremendous. True teshuvah on Yom Kippur influences the following year in a most positive way.

THE SECRET OF THE SECOND LUCHOT

How great is the virtue of teshuvah! In order to come close to Hashem it is not enough to learn Torah, but one must do wholehearted teshuvah. Chazal (*Yoma* 86b; *Pesikta Zuta* 45:9) state, "How great is teshuvah, for it reaches until the Heavenly Throne."

When one does teshuvah, his *neshamah* ascends to the Heavenly Throne, as pure and pristine as it was before coming into this world. The *neshamah* receives strength and inspiration from the Upper Worlds, as well as the spiritual pleasures of *kedushah* and *taharah*. Then, it returns once again to עולם הזה (this world), dressed in Torah. The word הזה is numerically equal to the word טוב (good). Good refers to Torah (*Berachot* 5a). Torah gives a person the wherewithal to

continue his Avodat Hashem in *kedushah* and *taharah*, with renewed energy.

Teshuvah raises a person to the most exalted levels of closeness to Hashem. The *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:2) states, “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.” Through teshuvah, one actually reaches Hashem’s Throne of Glory.

A tzaddik is also enjoined to do teshuvah, and he repents even for those sins which he did not commit. Through teshuvah, he ascends spiritually, all the way to the Throne of Glory, which the angels cannot aspire to reach.

These ideas hint that teshuvah is loftier than Torah study. It is very difficult to cleave to Hashem perfectly through learning Torah. One may have become slightly haughty about his level of Torah learning, or gained improper honor because of it, causing a barrier between himself and Hashem. His Torah study becomes a confusion of light and darkness. Teshuvah, on the other hand, brings a person directly in contact with Hashem.

The sefer *Noam Elimelech* states that before the performance of any mitzvah, a person should do teshuvah. He may have previously sinned, creating a prosecuting angel, who prevents future mitzvot from ascending. Teshuvah will remove any accusing angels from his path. This is the greatness of teshuvah; it annuls the prosecution against a person.

When one does teshuvah, he “returns unto Hashem your G-d.” He literally feels the closeness of Hashem and the security of being together with Him, just as he felt before entering this world, when his *neshamah* was engraved from under the Heavenly Throne. This feeling should assure him that his teshuvah has been accepted.

These ideas shed light on the events that occurred when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah and returned on Yom Kippur.

Hashem said to Moshe (*Shemot* 24:12), “Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone Tablets and the teaching and the commandment.” When Moshe was in *Shamayim*, the angels argued that the Torah should not be given to mankind (*Shabbat* 88b). Moshe convinced them that Hashem should give the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

This raises a question. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu have to ascend to Heaven to receive the Torah; couldn't Hashem have taught him the Torah when he remained on earth? This would have avoided the confrontation with the Heavenly angels.

This indicates Moshe's exalted level, for, although only a man of flesh and blood, he merited ascending to Heaven to receive the Torah, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 68:19) states, “You ascended on High, you have taken captives.” For this reason, the Torah was given in Heaven. But even if the Torah would have been given to Moshe in this world, he would still be praiseworthy, for he had merited learning Torah, which is compared to fire (*Yirmeyahu* 23:29), from the Mouth of Hashem, Who is also compared to fire (*Devarim* 4:24).

One cannot say that Moshe ascended to Heaven in order to prove that he was not afraid of the angels, for the Gemara (*Shabbat* 88b) clearly states that he was exceedingly afraid lest they burn him with the vapor of their mouths. Hashem saved him by instructing him to hold onto the Heavenly Throne and respond to their challenge.

Furthermore, when the angels refused to part with the Torah they said, “What is frail man that You should remember him?” (*Tehillim* 8:5). The angels did not agree that man should receive the Torah. Moshe responded, “Do you possess a *Yetzer Hara*?” Why didn't Hashem answer them, and give them all of the rest of the responses which Moshe gave? Why didn't Hashem save Moshe from entering into an argument with them?

Before the Torah was given, it was not possible to make a person swear that he would be righteous (based on *Niddah* 30b), for how is it possible to be righteous without the Torah?

Therefore, it was imperative that Moshe ascend to *Shamayim* in order to learn Torah there, just as all *neshamot* learn Torah in Heaven before descending to this world (*Niddah* 30b). It was specifically in Heaven that Moshe would be capable of understanding the essence of truth. In this manner, he was able to come to this world blessed by the words (*Devarim* 28:6) “Blessed shall you be when you come in,” i.e., free of sin. He would likewise, be able to leave this world clear of sin, as the pasuk continues, “Blessed shall you be when you go out.”

Moshe was equivalent to all of Bnei Yisrael (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64a, *Zohar* II, 47a). His ascent to *Shamayim* can be considered as though all of Bnei Yisrael ascended and learned Torah there, from the Mouth of Hashem. Then they descended to this world, free of sin, purified by the Torah.

Alas, when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu broke the *luchot*. Instead of remaining at their exalted level of “blessed shall you be when you come in,” which they attained immediately upon receiving the Torah, they sinned and fashioned a Golden Calf. This is truly unimaginable.

For that reason, Hashem immediately instructed Moshe (*Shemot* 32:7), “Go, descend, for your nation has become corrupt.” Moshe was instructed to descend since Bnei Yisrael, who ascended with him in order to learn Torah, had sinned on their descent to the world. Therefore, he, too, must descend and rectify the matter, since he was equivalent to the entire nation.

Man’s Atonement, through the Power of Torah

When Bnei Yisrael sinned, Moshe was forced to return to Har Sinai and acquire the second set of *luchot* to bring to the nation.

There is good reason why Moshe brought down the second Tablets specifically on Yom Kippur. This is a day of atonement, as the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30) states, “For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins.”

Furthermore, Yom Kippur is a day that is completely free of sin, as we find that it is called a taste of the World to Come. The *Yetzer Hara* is prevented from prosecuting on this day (*Yoma* 20a; *Nedarim* 32b). It is considered the day of a person’s birth, for a *ba’al teshuvah* is as pure as a newborn (*Yevamot* 22a). A person is sworn before his birth to be a tzaddik and not a rasha, in order that he may continue to draw upon himself the spirituality which he gained in *Shamayim*. Likewise, a *ba’al teshuvah* is like a newborn, and continues to draw spirituality to himself, just as he did before he was born. He is in the category of “blessed shall you be when you come in.” He is free of sin and cleaves to Hashem as he did before his birth. This ensures that his departure from this world will also be free of sin. For this reason, Moshe brought down the second *luchot* on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur atones in the merit of Torah. At the beginning of this essay, we mentioned that Torah is called טוב (good) (*Avot* 6:3; *Berachot* 5a). The *gematria* of the word טוב is the same as the word הזה (this). This alludes to the pasuk regarding Yom Kippur (*Vayikra* 16:30), “כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם – For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins.” One who repents on Yom Kippur in the *zechut* of Torah, is fulfilling the mitzvah of teshuvah to perfection. This is the special quality of Yom Kippur. It was then that the *neshamot* of all of Bnei Yisrael descended with Moshe with the second set of *luchot*. Yom Kippur is comparable to the World to Come, and Bnei Yisrael were as if newly created, for they had ascended to Heaven and descended together with Moshe, since he was equivalent to all of them.

Yom Kippur brings a person to the exalted level of “blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.”

Torah had to be received in Heaven, in order that Bnei Yisrael would be blessed upon entering and upon exiting this world. Their ascent and descent made it possible for them to do teshuvah for the sin of the Golden Calf, which Hashem had foreseen.

For this reason, Hashem arranged that the ultimate day of receiving the Torah would be Yom Kippur. This way, Bnei Yisrael would do teshuvah through the power of Torah, rectifying the damage they had done. They would merit leaving this world free of sin, just as they had entered.

This explains why Moshe went up to *Shamayim*, and why Hashem told him to answer the angels' complaint against man receiving the Torah (*Shabbat* 88b). Hashem implied that the angels have no connection to Torah, for they are mere creations. Bnei Yisrael, on the other hand, possess *neshamot* that were fashioned under the Heavenly Throne and, after death, return there. Thus they need the Torah. This is what Hashem meant by stating, "Grab hold of My Throne of Glory." This implied that the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael, which are hewn from under the Heavenly Throne, are compatible for Torah, which is etched not only on their bodies, but also on their *neshamot*.

The holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim Vital, zy" a, states that just as there are 248 limbs and 365 sinews in the human body, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot (*Makkot* 23b), so too, does the *neshamah* have 248 limbs and 365 sinews, paralleling the 613 mitzvot. The Torah and its mitzvot rightfully belong to Bnei Yisrael.

Thus Moshe refuted the argument of the angels, who complained that a man of flesh and blood had come to take the Torah. By ascending to *Shamayim*, Moshe proved to the angels that both his body, with all its organs and sinews, and his *neshamah* contained the entire Torah, and that he was merely taking that which was rightfully his.

This is what Hashem meant when he ordered Moshe “החזר להם תשובה” – Give them an answer.” The word תשובה (answer/return) hints that a person returns to his roots. He does teshuvah specifically by the power of Torah. In this way, he is like a newborn. He is connected to Yom Kippur, for he is intrinsically connected to Torah.

When a person does teshuvah on Yom Kippur, his teshuvah rises to *Shamayim*. The angels then cry out, “What is a human being doing among us?!” Meaning, “The entire year, this man sinned in all forms of iniquity. How can he now come to take the Torah, desiring to be connected to it?”

Hashem calls out, “Respond to them.” And Moshe responds to the angels, “Do you have a *Yetzer Hara*? A human being has a *Yetzer Hara* made of fire (*Kiddushin* 81b), which disturbs him from doing teshuvah and being involved in Torah.” Therefore, when Yom Kippur arrives, they do teshuvah, accepting the Torah, and the *neshamah* within it, containing the 613 commandments. They descend once again to this world, free of sin as the day they were born.

Moshe’s ascent to *Shamayim* and his response to the angels proved that Torah is suitable only for Bnei Yisrael. Only they have the ability to do teshuvah. This is in the merit of the Torah. Therefore, a human was granted permission to ascend to Heaven and take the Torah, the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b).

There are, unfortunately, many who place a *kippah* on their heads upon meeting a Rav or *talmid chacham*. This shows that they fear people more than they fear Hakadosh Baruch Hu. For this, the *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:2) calls out, “Return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.” One should not do a token form of teshuvah, which finds favor merely in men’s eyes but not in the eyes of Hashem. Rather one should return “unto Hashem your G-d.” Return all the way. Connect to Hashem, and you will reach the Throne of Glory. From there your *neshamah* was

fashioned. The power of Torah will enable you to merit doing proper teshuvah.

———— In Summary ————

- The virtue of teshuvah is very great, for it reaches until the Heavenly Throne. The *Navi* states that one should return “until Hashem your G-d,” for the *neshamah* ascends to the place it inhabited before it came to this world. It is free of sin; pure and connected to its Creator. This is in merit of the Torah, which is called טוב (good). The word טוב has the same *gematria* as the word הזה (this), which hints to Yom Kippur, as it says, “For on this day...” The advantage of teshuvah over Torah is that it brings a person to cleave to Hashem. Therefore, one should do teshuvah before performing any mitzvah. This removes all prosecutions and carries a person “until Hashem your G-d.” By doing teshuvah, one is able to connect to Hashem.
- Now we can understand the reason why Moshe had to ascend to *Shamayim* in order to receive the Torah and return on Yom Kippur with the second set of *luchot*. Why couldn’t he just get the Torah in this world? And what was the purpose of his argument with the angels in *Shamayim*? Why didn’t Hashem respond to them, ordering Moshe to reply instead?
- Before *Matan Torah*, it was not possible to force a person to swear that he would be righteous, for it is impossible to be righteous without the Torah. One also could not receive the blessing, “Blessed shall you be when you go in, and blessed shall you be when you go out,” meaning that he would be as pure of sin when departing this world as when he was born. This is possible only after receiving the Torah. Therefore, Moshe ascended to Heaven and was considered as a new *neshamah*, arriving back in this world pure and free of sin.
- Moshe was equivalent to the entire Jewish nation. Therefore, his ascent to Heaven was akin to the entire nation ascending. He received the Torah there and brought it down to them. When they sinned with the Golden Calf, he returned to *Shamayim* and descended on Yom Kippur. This is the day designated for teshuvah, in the merit of Torah. The Torah is a part of their *neshamot*, just as when they arrived in this world, free of sin like a newborn.

- We attain atonement on Yom Kippur through doing teshuvah. The Torah is the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*. The angels objected to Bnei Yisrael receiving the Torah, asking: “What is a human being doing here? All year long, people sin; how can they receive the Torah?!” Moshe responded that Bnei Yisrael have a fiery *Yetzer Hara*. Torah is necessary, in order to combat it. This Torah is engraved in the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael, for the *neshamah* contains 613 components, just as the body is comprised of 613 parts, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot.
- This is what Hashem meant by instructing Moshe to respond to the angels. We are enjoined to return in repentance on Yom Kippur. The root of the word תשובה is שב (return). This can mean to return to Hashem in repentance, or to respond with an answer. Hashem ordered Moshe to hold on to His Throne of Glory, for all of the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael are hewn from it. Therefore, it was necessary to ascend to *Shamayim* in order to bring down the Torah. Teshuvah is accepted only in the merit of Torah. But teshuvah must be “until Hashem your G-d.” It cannot be a superficial type of repentance, merely to find favor in men’s eyes. Teshuvah means to connect with Hashem.

“I WILL SIN AND I WILL REPENT”

On Yom Kippur, we do teshuvah, making all sorts of resolutions never to sin again. But at the same time, we know that immediately after Yom Kippur, we will return to our wayward ways.

This type of teshuvah is lacking. A person is led in the way he wishes to go (*Makkot* 10b). If one wishes to fool himself, he is given free choice to do so. If he decides to improve himself, he receives Divine help to continue on this path.

We must be aware of a basic principle regarding teshuvah. If a person seriously contemplates his actions and honestly questions why he is not doing proper teshuvah, he will realize that the negative qualities of pride, jealousy, and honor prevent one from doing proper

teshuvah and “remove one from this world.” But if he never makes a thorough accounting, he is liable, in all innocence, to think he is doing real teshuvah.

If a person is not genuine in his teshuvah, Hashem hardens his heart even more than it was originally. Opportunities to continue sinning are placed before him, just like with Pharaoh. One who did teshuvah on Yom Kippur, but afterward continues sinning, is given the chance to descend even lower than he did before Yom Kippur.

I know of a case where the president of a Beit Hakeneset was demoted from his post because he did not fill his position properly. Immediately after Yom Kippur, he entered into a dispute with the members of the congregation, causing a tremendous *chillul Hashem* among the gentile neighbors.

How could it be that after Yom Kippur, having “done teshuvah” for sins between man and Hashem and man and his fellow man, he could go back to his past iniquities? The answer is that already on Yom Kippur he had thoughts of contention. He restrained himself from arguing until afterward. His entire teshuvah was a sham, a display for public view. Therefore, Yom Kippur made no impression on him, and he remained in his former state.

What prevented him from exerting himself to do a proper teshuvah? The negative traits of arrogance, honor, and jealousy. Had he truly desired to eradicate these three negative character traits, he would have received Divine assistance on Yom Kippur, enabling him to vanquish them completely.

If a person knows that after Yom Kippur his friend will receive an honor from the congregation instead of him, he should, at the outset of the holy day, remove the desire for this honor from his heart. He should realize that if Hakadosh Baruch Hu denied him this honor, and chose his friend to receive it instead, it is a sign that this honor was not meant for him.

If, *chalilah*, a person goes around all day on Yom Kippur with the thought of how to take revenge after the *chag* for the imagined honor that was taken from him, his teshuvah is worthless. On the contrary, he will be in a worse position than he had been before Yom Kippur.

This was how Pharaoh behaved. Although he constantly repented his ways, he failed to correct the main point. This prevented him from doing true teshuvah and caused him to return to a life of evil and folly. He did not eliminate the cravings for glory, jealousy, and arrogance from his heart. They led to his downfall and removed him from the world.

Only once Pharaoh was left alone, after the Splitting of the Sea, did he realize what a fool he had previously been. He then understood that he could have done teshuvah while yet in Mitzrayim, by eradicating his pride. Since he found it too difficult to defer his personal honor for Hashem's Glory, he was smitten with the Ten Plagues.

At the Yam Suf, Pharaoh recognized Hashem, declaring, "Who is like You among the heavenly powers, Hashem!" (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 42). However, he admitted to this realization even in Egypt, when he stated, (*Shemot* 9:27), "Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones." When did his change of heart occur; in Egypt when he saw Hashem's greatness manifested by the plagues, or when he witnessed Hashem's miracles at the Yam Suf?

It seems that in Egypt, his professed recognition of Hashem was not truly sincere, but a result of the pressure he was under. But when he was floundering in the sea, he made this proclamation from his inner being. At that point, he had been stripped of all personal honor, jealousy, and hatred. He was all alone in the world, and the water was quickly rising... At that moment, he nullified his ego, and came to the point of truth, the point of "There is one who acquires his portion in the World to Come in a single moment" (*Avodah Zarah* 10b). It was a shame that he did not utilize the many opportunities that Hashem had

granted him earlier to do teshuvah and attain his portion in the World to Come. He failed to do so because his heart was not in consonance with what he professed. He was motivated by personal interests, which he refused to yield to the will of Hashem.

There are people who do not bother to do teshuvah until their last moments on earth. Hashem certainly accepts them, as the *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 18:32) states, “For I do not desire the death of the one who should die... Turn [yourselves] back and live.” But it is a shame that he allowed so much time to elapse without doing teshuvah. There is an inherent danger in waiting until one’s final moments to do teshuvah: He may miss the opportunity. Then he will lose his chance to gain a portion in the World to Come forever. It is best to strive to do teshuvah during one’s lifetime.

————— In Summary —————

- If one does not do proper teshuvah, he is liable to return to his former transgressions as soon as Yom Kippur has ended. One should make a personal accounting, eradicating the negative qualities of pride, jealousy, and honor from himself, in order to submit himself to the will of Hashem and return to Him.

A DAY OF HOLINESS

The holy day of Yom Kippur should be approached after making extensive preparations during the month of Elul and on Rosh Hashanah. For, on Rosh Hashanah one realizes where he stands spiritually.

The Satan constantly tries to disturb our tefillot. One of his evil schemes is to disrupt the shofar blower, so that the people should not hear the blasts and will do not do teshuvah. For this reason, the Satan hides inside the shofar.

We have heard of congregations waiting two hours until the shofar was finally sounded. This scenario indicates that the people had not yet done proper teshuvah. It was easy for the Satan to prosecute. When people see that it is difficult for the shofar blower to do his job, they must do teshuvah. The lack is certainly theirs, not his.

But, when Yom Kippur arrives, there is no Satan and there is no *Yetzer Hara*. On this day, the Satan is forbidden from prosecuting (*Yoma* 20a; *Nedarim* 32a). Specifically on Erev Yom Kippur, there is a command to be happy and eat festive meals. With eating, one's appetite grows. This makes fasting on the next day all the more difficult. By increasing our food intake on the ninth, the mitzvah of afflicting ourselves on the tenth, by fasting, is all the greater. Chazal (*Berachot* 8b; *Zohar* III, 68b) state, "Whoever eats and drinks on the ninth of the month is considered to have fasted on the ninth and on the tenth."

If a person feels an overwhelming thirst after partaking of the last meal before the fast, he should know that it is a ploy of the Satan, who tries to distance him from Hashem and confuse his thoughts during the prayers. One must exert himself, knowing that in this way he fulfills the mitzvah of afflicting himself on Yom Kippur.

When the tefillah of *Kol Nidrei* (at the opening of Yom Kippur) is recited, the Heavenly gates are open. This is the most opportune time to ask for forgiveness from Hashem and appreciate the great opportunity He has afforded us in allowing us to do teshuvah.

The ways of Hashem are not like the ways of a human king. After a mortal king makes a decree, it cannot be revoked. But Hashem, in His great mercy, erases our sins, as long as we ask for forgiveness. Furthermore, if we return to Hashem through love, we merit that all our intentional sins are transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86b; *Bava Metzia* 33b).

It is fitting that after the tefillah, once everyone has come home, they should recite Tehillim with devotion, asking Hashem for whatever they need. They should pour out their hearts, for He is our Father and King, Who forgives and pardons.

It is also appropriate, due to the sanctity of the day, to refrain from speaking on it. A *ta'anit dibbur* is equivalent to many fasts from food. Moreover, by keeping one's words to a minimum, he is constantly cognizant that he stands in judgment before the Creator of all worlds. For, at that time, there is a dispute on High, between the advocates and the prosecutors. When we recite (*Tehillim* 24:7) "Raise up your heads, O gates, and be uplifted," Hashem enters Gan Eden to enjoy the presence of the tzaddikim there.

If, *chas v'shalom*, at that time, instead of being engrossed in tefillah and teshuvah, we are involved in frivolity and pettiness, we increase the prosecutors against ourselves. We must fortify ourselves, in order to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. We should also minimize our sleep, for there is a court case taking place in Heaven. Our entire lives are now placed on the scales. We must be involved solely in teshuvah throughout the day.

We should strengthen ourselves especially at Minchah time, for that was the time when Eliyahu was answered (*Berachot* 6b), as it says (*Melachim* I, 18:36-37), "And it was at the time of the afternoon-offering, Eliyahu... approached and said, 'Answer me, Hashem, answer me...'"

Minchah time is auspicious for tefillah on any day; all the more so, on Yom Kippur. The word מנחה (Minchah) is related to the word מנוחה (rest), as well as the word מתנה (gift). Naturally, a person is inclined to rest in the afternoon of Yom Kippur, for he is tired, hungry, and thirsty. But if, instead, we fortify ourselves and pray at that time, we are offering a gift to Hashem, forgoing our hour of rest. We are offering our very blood (see *Berachot* 17a). Hashem, in return, grants us the gift of teshuvah, forgiving us for all our sins.

Finally, we arrive at Tefillat *Ne'ilah*, and the tefillah of *Aneinu*, which, according to Kabbalah, is most important. At this time, we are being judged, and our fate is being sealed. Therefore, it is most appropriate to intensify our cries and arouse Heavenly mercy upon us. This is our last chance to change our decree, immediately before the Heavenly gates are sealed.

The word נעילה (*Ne'ilah*) hints to the fact that it is fitting to refrain from speaking on Yom Kippur. The first two letters – נע – are also the last letters of the term לשון הרע (*lashon hara*). The other letters י-ל-ה have the same *gematria* as the word אדם (man). If one guards his speech, he guards himself from misfortune (*Mishlei* 21:23). He also causes, measure for measure, that the mouths of our enemies and prosecutors are closed, just as the holy day of Yom Kippur is coming to a close at this time (*Sanhedrin* 90a). In this manner, his decree will be sealed for a good, blessed, new year.

————— In Summary —————

- On Rosh Hashanah, a person is aware of his spiritual level. The *Yetzer Hara* tries to disturb his prayers, specifically during the shofar blowing. When this happens, it is difficult to emit a sound from the shofar. But Yom Kippur is sanctified from its beginning until its end. The Satan is forbidden from prosecuting then. Therefore, on Erev Yom Kippur, we eat a festive meal. This makes it all the more difficult to fast on Yom Kippur. The mitzvah of afflicting ourselves becomes even greater.
- The time of *Kol Nidrei* is propitious for asking for forgiveness. Hashem, in His goodness, forgives our sins, and even transforms them to merit. Therefore, it is most fitting that after the tefillah one should recite Tehillim in order to merit a decree for a good year. He should also make a *ta'anit dibbur*. There is a war being waged between the forces of good and the forces of evil. We must fortify ourselves and combat the *Yetzer Hara*, thereby being inscribed for a good year. Specifically at Minchah time, one must strengthen his inner resources, for this is a most auspicious time. Instead of resting, we

bring Hashem the gift of tefillah. In recompense, He grants us the gift of atonement for all our sins.

- The tefillah of *Aneinu* at *Ne'ilah* has special significance. This is an auspicious time for arousing Heavenly mercy. Therefore, one should utilize it for increasing tefillah, and also refraining from speaking. The first letters of the word **נְעִילָה** (*Ne'ilah*) are **נע**, which are the last letters of the words **לְשׁוֹן הָרַע** (*lashon hara*). The other letters of *Ne'ilah* **י-ל-ה** are numerically equal to the word **אָדָם** (man). One who guards his mouth ensures that his prosecutors will be silenced. Measure for measure, Hashem seals his fate for a good, blessed new year.

NE'ILAH – SEALING THE YEAR

“For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins”

(Vayikra 16:30)

When we contemplate the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur, we are gripped by fear and trepidation. But we must be aware that Hashem has promised to provide atonement for us. This is when one does true, wholehearted teshuvah.

The sanctity of the day assists a person, enabling him to return to Hashem in teshuvah. This can be compared to a person who sleeps in the streets at night. The heat of the morning sun awakens him; he is unable to sleep anymore. Similarly, on Yom Kippur, even though one's heart may be as hard as stone, the *kedushah* of the day is like the bright sunshine, awakening him to do teshuvah. The teshuvah that one does on Yom Kippur will positively affect him for the rest of the year. It enables him to do teshuvah at any time during the year, for any wrong he may have done.

This is alluded to in the words of the pasuk, **כי ביום הזה**. The word **כי** is an acronym for **כל יום** – every day. Every day of the year is influenced by Yom Kippur, having the potential for teshuvah. Teshuvah is always guaranteed to be accepted.

The importance of arousing ourselves in teshuvah is illustrated in the *haftarah* of Minchah on Yom Kippur. The pasuk (*Yonah* 1:6) states, “The ship’s master approached him, and said to him, ‘How can you sleep so soundly? Arise! Call to your G-d!’” These words contain a message for every person. Even if someone is tired from the rigors of the day, when the time for Tefillat *Ne’ilah* arrives, he must strengthen himself and direct all his thoughts to Hashem. *Ne’ilah* is a very significant time. Hashem awaits these moments, knowing that each person’s desire at this time is to return to Him. *Ne’ilah* means “locking,” for now the gates of Heaven are closing, and this is the last opportunity we have to effect great things. Woe to the person who sleeps or diverts his attention to other matters at this critical time. He is liable to forfeit everything. Specifically now one is called to “Arise! Call to your G-d!”

This is hinted to by the word **נעילה** itself. The first two letters form the word **נע** (move). The other letters **י-ל-ה** are numerically equivalent to the word **אדם** (man) (*Zohar* II, 119b). At the time of *Ne’ilah*, it is as if a person is instructed: “**נע אדם** – Move yourself, and progress.” In order to merit Torah, one must exile himself to a place of Torah learning (*Avot* 4:14; *Shabbat* 147b).

In the merit of accepting Torah upon oneself, his sins are forgiven. Torah is a shield and protection, guarding one from sin (*Sotah* 21a). Through accepting the yoke of Torah, one merits a good and peaceful life and a blessed new year, both in the spiritual and physical realms.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* teach us that **יום כיפורים** (Yom Kippurim) is **כ-פורים** (like Purim). This implies that Purim is actually greater than Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we do teshuvah out of fear, whereas on Purim we do teshuvah from love. This is explicitly stated in the

Megillah (*Esther* 9:27): “The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves.” The Gemara (*Shabbat* 88a; *Shavuot* 39a) teaches, “They confirmed what they had previously undertaken.” On Purim, Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah with love. Likewise, on Yom Kippur, we should strive to accept the Torah without the force of affliction, but through joy and love.

As an aside, let us explain the following. Why are there special tefillot for *parnasah* (livelihood) on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, yet we don’t find that there is any special prayer for health? Of what good is *parnasah* if one is lacking the good health to enjoy it?

In general, people are born healthy. If a person is ill, it is due to some sin that he did either in this life or in a previous incarnation. He must rectify this matter. When he does proper teshuvah, he will once again be healthy and complete. This is through the power of Torah, which brings healing to the world (*Avot* 6:7). Torah is the potion of life and remedy to man (*Eiruvin* 54a). Through involvement in Torah, one merits to be healed.

On the other hand, *parnasah* is a gift from the Creator. One must ask for it. If one is worthy, he will receive it through Hashem’s mercy, and it will enable him to learn Torah unencumbered by disturbances.

Chazal (*Chulin* 91a; *Shemot Rabbah* 1:25) state that tzaddikim value their money more than themselves. This is because they can use their money to accomplish great things.

There are people who vie for the honor of opening the Aron Hakodesh at *Ne’ilah*. They pay huge sums to purchase this privilege, since it is a *segulah* for *parnasah*. Hashem gives wealth to a person in order to encourage him to put his efforts into serving Him properly. People should not let their riches affect them adversely. They should always remain the master of their money, and not the other way around.

There are those who pursue wealth, neglecting Torah. Their entire objective is increasing their bank account. They forget that when they die, they take neither honor nor money with them, as it says (*Tehillim* 49:18), “For upon his death, he will not take anything, his glory will not descend after him.”

The Protection of Mezuzah and Tzitzit

On a daily basis, we can learn the message inherent in *Ne'ilah* from the mezuzah. One should never sit idly, but even when in the comfort of his home or in his workplace, he should be involved in mitzvot.

The word מזוזה alludes to this. It can be divided into two words: זוז and מ-ה. The word זוז means to move, and the letters מ-ה have the same *gematria* as the word אדם. Even if a person is tired from a full day's work, he should spur himself into action and involve himself in Torah study. As he exits his home, he acknowledges that the mezuzah protects him from all harm. He will be safe and secure, for he immerses himself in Torah and mitzvot.

The mezuzah also teaches that Hashem watches over us, and we have nothing to fear. This is illustrated by an incident that occurred with Onkelos the convert (*Avodah Zarah* 11a). After he converted, his uncle, the Caesar, sent a troop of soldiers to bring him back to Rome. When he saw the soldiers, he placed his hand on the mezuzah and explained its qualities to them. He said, “It is the way of the world for a king to sit inside, and his servants stand outside to guard him. But with Hashem, just the opposite is the case. He protects His servants from the outside, as the pasuk (*Tehillim* 121:8) states, “Hashem will guard your departure and your arrival.” They all converted.

Prior to *makkat bechorot*, Bnei Yisrael were instructed to put the blood of the *korban* Pesach on their doorposts, as it says (*Shemot* 12:13), “The blood shall be a sign for you upon the houses... I shall pass over you; there shall not be a plague of destruction upon you.” In

Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael were bare of mitzvot (*Yechezkel* 16; *Mechilta, Shemot* 12). Without Torah, they were especially vulnerable to the angel of destruction, who does not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked (*Bava Kama* 9a). Bnei Yisrael needed the sign of the blood on the doorposts to prove that they were involved in mitzvot, which would ensure their protection.

By way of *remez*, we might add that the word **הַדָּם** (the blood) is numerically equivalent to the word **אָדָם**, plus four **ד'**, which signifies the **דלת** (doorpost). This is a reference to the mezuzah, which stands sentry at the doorway, protecting our people.

We find a similar idea concerning the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 15:39) states, “You may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem.” *Tzitzit* help a person perform all the mitzvot. Chazal relate how *tzitzit* rescued a hardened sinner from further sinning, when they slapped him across the face at just the right time (*Menachot* 44a).

These mitzvot protect a person, guarding him so that he can involve himself in Torah and mitzvot. This is also the power of *Ne'ilah*, whose influences are felt for the entire year.

————— In Summary —————

- “For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins.” Hashem forgives us, even though we have sinned before Him. The day of Yom Kippur influences the entire year. Even a hard-hearted individual is aroused to do teshuvah on this day.
- We are urged in the *haftarah* of Yonah at Minchah on Yom Kippur to “Arise! Call to your G-d!” Precisely at this time, when the time of *Ne'ilah* is approaching, one must arouse himself, for the Heavenly gates are closing. One must hurry to enter them, beseeching Heavenly mercy for himself, for the entire year.
- The word **נְעִילָה** is numerically equivalent to **נַע אָדָם**. This teaches us to move

and relocate to a place of Torah, for Torah protects and provides a good life. Yom Hakippurim is similar to Purim. On Purim, Bnei Yisrael confirmed their acceptance of the Torah out of love. On Yom Kippur, as well, we try to accept the Torah out of love for Hashem, and not from the force of affliction.

- There are no special tefillot for health on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur. A person's health is solely dependent upon him. If he does not sin, he will be healthy. Conversely, sustenance must be requested from Hashem. One must know how to use his money wisely. Purchasing the honor of opening the Aron Hakodesh on Yom Kippur is a *segulah* for *parnasah*. One should not allow himself to become a slave to his savings. Much can be accomplished with wealth.
- The word מְזוּזָה is comprised of the word זוּז and the letters מ-ה, which have the numerical equivalent of אֶדָּם. This teaches that a person should move, spurring himself into action in Torah study. Then he will have nothing to fear, for the mezuzah is his protection. The blood on the doorposts in Egypt provided Bnei Yisrael with the merit of a mitzvah, thereby protecting them from the angel of destruction. *Tzitzit*, too, have the power to protect a person. This is the distinction of the tefillah of *Ne'ilah*, which influences the entire year.

BECOMING PURE ON YOM KIPPUR

“For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed”

(Vayikra 16:30)

As we enter the holy day of Yom Kippur, we recite with great feeling the blessing: “Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.” We generally make this blessing upon eating a new fruit or wearing a new garment, when one is filled with joy. Why, then, do

we recite it at the outset of Yom Kippur, a somber day of fasting and affliction?

Just as the body enjoys physical pleasures, the *neshamah* enjoys spiritual pleasures. One who wears a new garment or eats a new fruit experiences physical pleasure and thus makes this blessing. On Yom Kippur, one experiences spiritual pleasure. When one contemplates the wonderful *chessed* of Hashem, realizing that in spite of the sins that he has committed throughout the year, Hashem still grants him life and sustenance, he will be filled with joy. Moreover, Hashem bequeaths him the wonderful gift of this sanctified day. It is part of the process of forgiveness and atonement. This causes a person to be filled with elation. We express our spiritual joy by reciting the blessing: “Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.”

The spiritual pleasure we experience on Yom Kippur is akin to that of the tzaddikim in the World to Come. The Gemara relates (*Berachot* 17a) that there is no eating or drinking or any other physical pleasure in the World to Come. Tzaddikim sit with their crowns upon their heads and enjoy the splendor of the *Shechinah*. Every Jew has a similar feeling on Yom Kippur. On this day, too, we neither eat nor drink. Our pleasure on this day is purely spiritual, since the *neshamah* is now purified from all vestige of *tumah* that adhered to it during the year. It is being transformed into a pure and sanctified entity.

Chazal state that “the essence of the day atones.” Even if a person had no remorse for his sins, and he did not do teshuvah as he should, his sins are still forgiven. How can this be?

The following parable sheds light on this. Someone who enters a perfume store will emerge with some scent lingering on him, even if he bought nothing. Similarly, on Yom Kippur, even if he does no specific act, one is affected by the *kedushah* of the day. This is like a person who goes into a sauna. Even if he only sits there, the heat and steam cleanse his body of dirt. So too, the spiritual heat of the day of Yom

Kippur cleanses a person of all impurities, scrubbing his soul of its defilement.

Obviously, one who exerts himself to become purified and repents his sins completely, will certainly earn a higher level of purification. The intensity of the day's holiness will cling to him in a much more significant way. Commensurate with one's effort is his level of purification and refining. For this spiritual pleasure of purity of the soul, a person should exult and exalt Hashem. We declare this in the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* that we make at the beginning of the day.

At the end of Yom Kippur, we recite the verse (*Kohelet* 9:7), "Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds." How can a person be joyous and glad on Motza'ei Yom Kippur? Who guarantees that he was, indeed, sealed for a good year? Does he have any proof of this? I once knew a dear Jew by the name of Mr. Moshe Marciano, z"l. He died immediately after Yom Kippur (5771), *rachmana litzlan*, at the young age of fifty-two.

True, nobody knows what was decreed upon him for the upcoming year. Nevertheless, on Motza'ei Yom Kippur, one is joyous in the knowledge that Hashem has allowed him to reach this day of purification and has cleansed him of all his sins. What was decreed upon him is no concern of his. The most important thing is that he was purified through Hashem's kindness on this special day, when all sins and transgressions are atoned. At this prospect, his heart is filled with joy.

The Yom Kippur offering is two he-goats, as the pasuk states (*Vayikra* 16:8), "Aharon shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot 'for Hashem' and one lot 'for Azazel.'" What was the purpose of the lots? Couldn't the Kohen himself have decided which goat should be sacrificed for which end? Also, why were goats offered, rather than bulls or rams?

There are secret Kabbalistic meanings hidden in this. I would like to explain the matter according to *mussar*. It is known that the he-goat represents the Satan and his cohorts, the *kelippah* and *Sitra Achra*, which derive from Eisav Harasha. Yaakov said (*Bereishit* 27:11), “הן עשו” שְׁעִיר – But my brother Eisav is a hairy man.” The word שְׁעִיר (hairy) is similar to the word שְׁעִיר (he-goat). The Torah specifically commands that lots should be drawn regarding the fate of each goat, in order to teach us that our fate is in our own hands. How we live our lives depends solely on us, and we decide which road to take. Do we belong to Hashem or, *chalilah*, to Azazel, connected to the *kelippah* and forces of impurity?

On Yom Kippur, Hashem showers upon a person a tremendous amount of *kedushah* and *yirat Shamayim*, helping him in a tangible way to follow the Torah and mitzvot. I would like to suggest that Chazal’s dictum (*Berachot* 33b) “All is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven” refers to all the days of the year except for Yom Kippur. On that day, a person’s fear of Heaven, too, is relegated to Heaven. On Yom Kippur, Hashem gifts us with *yirat Shamayim* and purity of soul, without any effort on our part. But from that point on, throughout the rest of the year, everything is dependent on man’s free choice. His destiny is in his hands. Will he choose life, sanctifying himself for the sake of Hashem and His Torah? Or will he, *chalilah*, be drawn after the he-goat for Azazel, continuing in his wickedness and attracted to abomination?

How amazing is Hashem’s compassion for Klal Yisrael on this sanctified day! I found a special prayer which the Jews of Tangier, Morocco, would say at Minchah time on Yom Kippur: “Do for the sake of Your holy and pure angels, who serve You and seek mercy for Your nation, Yisrael. There is a group in Heaven called Annullers of Decrees, Voiders of Vows, Forgoers of Jealousy, Silencers of Anger, Recallers of Love, who remind Hashem of Avraham’s love toward Him. When these emissaries observe Hashem’s anger, they prostrate themselves before

Him begging Him to forgive, for He is Master of Creation, stronghold of Yaakov. Forgive, forgive, Holy One of Israel, for You are the strength of kings, strong and blessed... Why should You have anger toward the progeny of Avraham, who loved You? Why should you be jealous of the sons of Yitzchak, who was sacrificed on the Altar for Your sake? Why should You compete with the sons of Yaakov, Your perfect one? Immediately, rays of splendor are emitted from under the Heavenly Throne, proclaiming, 'Praiseworthy are those who find merit with My sons.' You are lauded for evoking the merit of the Avot. You will be honored by all of the Heavenly legions."

When reading this wonderful tefillah, I wondered why Hashem needs the angels to arouse Heavenly mercy upon Bnei Yisrael. Isn't the teshuvah we do, coupled with the multitude of prayers and *Selichot* which we pour forth on Yom Kippur, sufficient?

Granted, Hashem bequeathed to us this tremendous day, designated for forgiveness and atonement. But unfortunately, we are mere flesh and blood, and not all of us know how to utilize this day to the maximum. Many people become exhausted due to the fasting and intense prayers. Others keep glancing at the clock every few minutes, counting the seconds until the fast will be over. Some people do teshuvah and ask for forgiveness for their sins, but this is only lip-service, not true teshuvah from the depths of their hearts. For this reason, in spite of the numerous prayers, the gates of Heaven remain firmly closed. Then the Satan has a field day. He attempts to speak disparagingly about Am Yisrael. The Satan has no control on Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, his cry is heard from afar, as he persuades the Creator not to accept the teshuvah of Am Yisrael, who do not genuinely repent.

But Hashem, in His great love and mercy for us, calls the advocating angels to speak on our behalf and find merit for us. All their claims in the above prayer make a strong impression on High. Hashem becomes

filled with great mercy for Bnei Yisrael and grants them a good judgment. Hashem favors the advocating angels and praises them: “Fortunate are you who have found merit with My sons.” Hashem seeks only our good on this holy day and takes mercy upon us.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 578) quotes the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30), “For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you.” Samael (angel of evil) saw that Hashem found no sin in Bnei Yisrael. He said to Him, “*Ribbono shel Olam*, You have one nation similar to the angels. Just as the ministering angels go barefoot, so does Am Yisrael go barefoot on Yom Kippur. Just as the angels stand, so do Bnei Yisrael stand in prayer. Just as angels do not eat or drink, so Bnei Yisrael fast on this day. Just as angels are free of sin, so are Bnei Yisrael. Just as angels are in harmony with one another, so are Bnei Yisrael.” Hashem accepts the testimony of the prosecutor and forgives all of their sins.

This Midrash is difficult to understand. For if Hashem accepts the words of the Satan and immediately grants forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael’s sins, why do they need the atonement of Yom Kippur?

This is another demonstration of Hashem’s overflowing kindness toward us, His beloved sons. Bnei Yisrael have sins. They are not free of faults. They do require atonement. But Hashem hides this fact from the Satan, in order that he should not indict us on this holy day. Hashem shows the Satan only our good side. The Satan is duly impressed by Am Yisrael’s greatness and sings their praises, proclaiming that they are pure of all sin, just like the ministering angels. These words of defense, from the mouth of the Satan himself, who usually prosecutes, make a tumult in Heaven, to the benefit of Bnei Yisrael. At that time, although Hashem knows the real truth, He forgives them. This is just a small example of Hashem’s *chessed* with us on this exalted day.

One should strive to utilize this day correctly, so that he should feel its influence throughout the year. Regrettably, there are those who do

merit feeling Hashem's *Shechinah* resting upon them in the Beit Hakeneset, but as the day ends, all of their purity of heart ends with it. They return to their wayward ways just as beforehand. They have no interest in gaining the purity that is being showered upon them from Above. They are so set in their wicked ways that they do not have any inclination to change for the better. The *kedushah* of the day does not linger long with them, and disappears with the setting sun.

The *haftarah* of Yom Kippur illustrates this concept. Yonah Hanavi finds himself on a ship, together with representatives of various nationalities. The boat suddenly begins to rock, in the middle of the stormy sea. All are filled with fear and cry out to their deities. But nothing helps. Then they see Yonah, fast asleep in the corner of the ship. The captain shouts at him (*Yonah* 1:6), "How can you sleep so soundly? Arise! Call to your G-d! Perhaps G-d will think of us and we will not perish." Yonah informs them that he is the one responsible for this situation, for he fled from Hashem. He tells them to cast him overboard. As soon as they do, the waters become still. The *pasuk* states (*ibid.* 16), "Then the men felt a great fear of Hashem; they slaughtered a sacrifice to Hashem and took vows."

If the gentiles were so impressed by Hashem and His strong hand, and filled with fear of Heaven, why didn't they forsake their deities? Why didn't they desire to convert to the nation that serves Hashem and come under the wings of the *Shechinah*? They saw with their own eyes how Hashem is the G-d of the heavens above and the earth below, and that there is no other force besides Him. Why did they only offer sacrifices to Him?

They were tremendously impressed by what they observed. But immediately afterward, the impression dissipated, just as the storm at sea. In the deep recesses of their hearts, they were not prepared to change their lifestyles. They preferred to live lives of lust and licentiousness rather than becoming bound to the Creator and obligating themselves to observe His mitzvot.

A similar incident is related in the Gemara (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 63b), in the name of Rabbi Tanchuma. A boat full of gentiles set sail upon the water, with a Jewish child among them. Suddenly, a storm started brewing. In fright, each one turned to his deity and prayed for salvation. But nothing helped. They then turned to the Jewish child, asking him to pray to his G-d, for they had heard that He hearkens to the prayers of His people. The child cried out in supplication, and Hashem accepted his prayers. The waters immediately subsided. The idol worshippers were very impressed. They told the child, “We are here, but our deities are in Rome or Babylon. But your G-d is with you wherever you are.” This resulted in a great *kiddush Hashem*.

Here, too, we can ask the same question. Why didn't their excitement last? Why didn't their admiration draw them closer to Hashem? Why didn't they convert? The answer is that they did not want to change their lifestyles. They extinguished the fire of enthusiasm that had been ignited in their souls before it could burst into a burning blaze of desire to go in Hashem's ways. No trace of inspiration was left in their hearts.

This is what can happen on Yom Kippur. One must try to arouse his heart and truly desire that the *kedushah* of the day should accompany him permanently. He should wish that Hashem's light continue to illuminate his way throughout the year. One should not allow the arousal of the moment in the Beit Hakeneset to lie dormant. One should strive not to return to his previous crooked ways, to which he had become accustomed.

I heard the following tale from an affluent Moroccan Jew. It illustrates the importance of teshuvah, as well as the greatness of my holy grandfather, the miracle-worker, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, zt"l. Aside from performing miracles, he was successful in bringing many wayward sons back to their Father.

This man had a relative who left the fold of Judaism, much to the distress of his family. They tried in all ways to bring him back, but to

no avail. One night, my holy grandfather appeared to this wayward son in a dream. Grandfather rebuked him, shouting, “You should be ashamed of yourself! You are bringing disgrace and humiliation to your father and grandfather, who are *yerei Shamayim* and suffer tremendously from your wicked deeds. Decide here and now that you will repent!”

He was extremely shaken by this dream. But his wife brushed his fears aside, stating that dreams mean nothing. He calmed down and tried to forget the dream. But a few nights later, the tzaddik again appeared to him. This time, though, he spoke more strongly than previously, stating that if he didn’t change his ways, he’d be sorry. The next morning, he decided once and for all to change his ways and observe Torah and mitzvot. From that time on, he has annually made the trip from Paris to Essaouira, Morocco, prostrating himself on the grave of Rabbeinu, zt”l.

A short while after he and his wife had made up their minds to do teshuvah, he was once again visited by Rabbi Chaim in a dream. This time he said, “Fortunate are you that you merited bringing pleasure to your Creator.”

Suddenly, the tzaddik turned to him, and asked, “Why did you change your glasses?”

The man answered, “I can see better with these glasses.”

Rabbeinu was hinting to him that the closer he came to Torah and mitzvot, the better he could spiritually see Hashem and His *Shechinah*. The tzaddik then gave him a hug and kiss and blessed him from the depths of his pure heart.

May it be Hashem’s will that we all merit doing complete teshuvah, bringing Him pleasure. In this manner, we will be inscribed for a good, long life of peace.

————— In Summary —————

- Why do we say the *berachah* “Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season” before Yom Kippur, a somber day of fasting and affliction? Just as the body enjoys physical pleasures, the *neshamah* enjoys spiritual pleasures. Yom Kippur is a gift from Hashem, enabling us to attain forgiveness and atonement, thus filling us with joy. We express this joy in the *berachah* that we say.
- The essence of the day atones. Just as a person who enters a perfume store emerges with some scent lingering on him even if he does not buy anything, so too, even if one does not do teshuvah on Yom Kippur, the very essence of the day purifies him. The more efforts one exerts in this process, the more he will be purified.
- We are joyous at the end of Yom Kippur in the knowledge that Hashem has cleansed us of all sin.
- The offering of Yom Kippur is two he-goats. The he-goat represents the Satan, personified by Eisav. We are commanded to draw lots regarding the fate of the goats, to teach us that our fate is in our own hands. We choose whether to take the path to Hashem, or, *chalilah*, to Azazel.
- “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven” applies on every day of the year except Yom Kippur. On this day, Hashem showers us with *yirat Shamayim* and purity of soul, without any effort on our part. From that point on, everything is dependent on our choice.
- On Yom Kippur, although Bnei Yisrael are not free of fault, Hashem hides this from the Satan in order that he should not be able to indict us.
- Just as Yonah Hanavi was urged: “Arise! Call to your G-d!”, likewise we must arouse ourselves in teshuvah and make the most of this holy day. The inspiration that the gentile sailors felt quickly dissipated after they were saved. Conversely, we should strive to hold on to the inspiration of Yom Kippur and use it to reach greater heights throughout the coming year.

SUKKOT



THE SUKKAH – SHADOW OF FAITH

“You shall celebrate it as a festival for your G-d, for a seven-day period in the year... You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period; every native in Israel shall dwell in booths. So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d”

(Vayikra 23:41-43)

Chazal (*Sukkah* 2a) expound, “The Torah mandates that one leave his permanent home for a seven-day period and sit in a temporary dwelling. What is this temporary dwelling? It is the sukkah, termed by the Zohar (*Emor 103a*) ‘the Shadow of Faith.’”

The Shadow of Faith is a protective shield of sorts, designed to envelop a person and protect him from harm. The Gemara (*Sukkah* 11a) states in the name of Rabbi Eliezer that our sukkah is a commemoration of the Clouds of Glory with which Hashem enveloped Bnei Yisrael when they left Mitzrayim.

A few questions arise when we study this subject:

After instructing us “You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period” what is added by the directive “Every native in Israel shall dwell in booths”?

What is the intention of the Zohar in calling the sukkah “the Shadow of Faith”?

Why do we find the word Sukkot sometimes written in full (סֻכּוֹת), and at other times, without the letter וּ (סֻכַּת)?

Hashem performed a great act of *chessed* with us by giving us the festival of Sukkot in the month of Tishrei, following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the festivals when we do teshuvah, erasing our previous sins.

Everyone feels a spiritual elevation on these festivals. They are aroused from Above in merit of the arousal they made below (*Zohar* I, 86b; 88a). Everyone trembles on the Yamim Noraim, for all are remembered either for life or for death. Everyone passes before Hashem like sheep and fears the great judgment which takes place.

But, after Yom Kippur has passed, and a person stands at the peak of perfection, cleansed from sin, he needs an added measure of protection to prevent him from falling into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. He has elevated his spiritual level and become great by doing teshuvah. However, Chazal (*Sukkah* 2a) state, “One who is greater than his friend has a greater *Yetzer Hara*.” The *Yetzer Hara* tries mightily to bring about his downfall. For this reason, as soon as Yom Kippur ends, we are instructed to begin building the sukkah in honor of the upcoming holiday. This mitzvah protects us from the *Yetzer Hara* (*Rema, Orach Chaim* 624:5).

As soon as one is purified of his iniquities on Yom Kippur, it is imperative to fill the vacuum within his soul with holiness and purity, in order that the *Yetzer Hara* should not find a place to reside within him, causing him to transgress all over again.

“You shall take for yourselves on the first day” (*Vayikra* 23:40). This pasuk refers to the mitzvah of taking the four species on Sukkot. It is called “the first day,” for it is the starting point of accounting each person’s sins for the coming year. One must be vigilant not to fall into the trap of sin.

The sukkah is a miniature Tabernacle, as it says (*Yechezkel* 11:16), “I have been for them a small sanctuary.” The *Shechinah* resides within each one of us. Building a dwelling place for Hashem in this world immediately after Yom Kippur is as if we are inviting Hashem to dwell among us.

Hashem considers one’s good thoughts as an intrinsic part of a mitzvah (*Kiddushin* 40a). Although the holiday of Sukkot does not arrive until the 15th of the month, one’s efforts in preparing for the festival are considered as part of the mitzvah. When one does a mitzvah, he is imbued with its *kedushah*. When one makes preparations to do a mitzvah, he is imbued with the illumination that is connected to the root of the mitzvah. Thus, when one builds a sukkah, even though he has not yet fulfilled the mitzvah of dwelling in it, he is imbued with the *kedushah* connected to the root of the mitzvah of sukkah, which is to invite Hashem into our hearts.

When one builds his sukkah, he must believe that it has the same qualities as the Clouds of Glory that enveloped our nation in the Wilderness, safeguarding them from all forms of danger (*Yalkut Shimoni, Beshalach* 228). Hashem protected Bnei Yisrael with these clouds from the cold and heat and all the dangers of the desert. Bnei Yisrael clearly felt the *Shechinah* in their midst. Likewise, the *Shechinah* resides within the sukkah and protects a person from all harm.

Just as a shadow shields one from the sun’s relentless rays, so too, does the sukkah, and the *Shechinah* within it, protect a person from the *Yetzer Hara*, so that he should not fall into his trap. This is in the

merit of the simple faith which we display by keeping the mitzvah of sukkah.

The Torah instructs us to leave our permanent dwellings and enter temporary ones. We invite the seven shepherds of our nation to spend time with us in the sukkah. These are the holy *ushpizin* from on High (*Zohar* III, 103a). Although we cannot see them, they come to visit us every day of Sukkot, in the merit of our faith.

The Ohr Hamakif and Adam Harishon

Adam Harishon forfeited the protection of the *Ohr Hamakif*. Adam was commanded to toil and to guard Gan Eden. But, instead, he and his wife sinned and heeded the ploys of the Serpent. The Arizal states that had he just toiled and guarded the Garden and waited for Shabbat to arrive, he would have merited having the *Ohr Hamakif* surround him, protecting him from all harm.

The *Ohr Hamakif* is of an exalted spiritual nature, comprising opposing qualities. Thus the sukkah is a paradox. Generally, a shade produces darkness, which protects one from the sun's rays, whereas the sukkah provides protection because of the light of the *Ohr Hamakif* brought by the *Shechinah* within it. This illuminates one's path.

This idea helps us resolve our first question as to why we are first told "You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period" and then again told "Every native in Israel shall dwell in booths." First, one is obligated to sit in a sukkah for seven days. When he does so, he must believe that he is providing a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, which will envelop him in its all-encompassing protective light. This is alluded to in the words, "Every native in Israel shall dwell in booths." The word האזרח (native) can be divided in two: הא-זרח. The numerical value of the word הא, adding one for the word itself, is seven. These are the seven days of the festival. The word זרח (shines) refers to the special light that shines upon a person during this period.

This teaches that for the seven days of Sukkot, Hashem surrounds a person with the all-encompassing shining light, which continues to shine upon him throughout the days of the year. This is in order that he should maintain the lofty spiritual level that he achieved on the Yamim Noraim. However, this depends upon the level of his faith, whether or not he truly lives in the Shadow of Faith.

Now we can comprehend, as well, why the first mention of Sukkot (סכּת) is without a ך and only afterward, is Sukkot (סכּוּת) written with a ך. To begin with, one has no idea of the magnitude of spirituality in store for him when he sits in his sukkah. Therefore, the first time the word Sukkot is used, it is written incompletely. During the festival, one is able to draw the *Kav* (“Straight line”) of the *Ohr Hamakif* upon himself. This is represented by the straight line of the letter ך. However, if he does not fulfill his obligations appropriately, he will not merit this, and his mitzvah of sukkah will be lacking. This is hinted to by the missing ך.

Conversely, if he spends the holiday of Sukkot correctly, his mitzvah of sukkah will be complete, containing the letter ך. The light of the *Shechinah* will shine upon him and will remain with him throughout the year. This is hinted to by the wording of the pasuk, (*Vayikra* 23:41): “You shall celebrate it as a festival for Hashem, a seven-day period in the year (בשנה)...” The light of the sukkah will shine his way throughout the year.

The four species that one takes on Sukkot allude to the *Ohr Hamakif*. They are the *etrog*, *aravah*, *lulav*, *hadas* (citron, willow branch, palm branch, and myrtle). The sum of the numerical values of the first letters of each word is 106, the same as the *gematria* for the word קו (line). These species have the potential to draw blessing upon a person from the *Kav* of the *Ohr Hamakif*, which is included in the ten *sefirot*.

The Kav Hamakif and the Ohr Hamakif

I would like to explain, in short, the concept of the *Kav Hamakif* and the *Ohr Hamakif*. The sefer *Da'at U'Tevunah*, the writings of the Arizal, and the sefer *Eitz Chaim*, relate the following thought, which is known to the Kabbalists. After Hashem condensed Himself, so to speak, in the place which only He is aware of, in order to create in the remaining space an empty, round void, He placed the *Ohr Ein Sof* into it, with the *Kav* of light extending from the top to the bottom. From this *Kav*, He made *igulim* (circles), which are the ten *sefirot*.

By preparing oneself properly on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, one is able to reach great levels in *kedushah* on Sukkot. He can become intimately connected with Hashem, bonded with the *Kav* of the *Ohr Ein Sof*, from which all worlds were created. This is a very complex subject.

When a person enters his sukkah, he has the ability to connect all four worlds (*Atzilut, Bria, Yetzirah, and Assiah*). He becomes the quintessential man, for all worlds are contained within him. He likewise connects the roots of the *sefirot*.

Only he, through his *Avodat Hashem* and spiritual service, can succeed in combining the ten *sefirot*, which emanate from the *Kav* of the *Ohr Ein Sof*. (The sefer *Chessed L'Avraham* expounds on this topic.)

Chazal relate (*Bava Batra 75a*) that in the World to Come, Hashem will erect a sukkah for the *tzaddikim*, made of the skin of the leviathan. This will prove that the world has reached perfection through the deeds of the righteous.

————— In Summary —————

- Why is the sukkah called “the Shadow of Faith”? And why is the word Sukkot in the Torah at times written complete (סוכות) and, at other times, incomplete, without a ך? What is the purpose of sitting in the sukkah altogether?

- The festival of Sukkot was given after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when a person is purged of his former sins. He is then able to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*. He merits this through his *emunah*.
- The command to sit in the sukkah is repeated to explain the reason for the mitzvah. “Every native – הַאֲזָרָח” is commanded to sit in the sukkah. This word can be split into two, hinting to the seven days of Sukkot (הַאֲ) when the light of the *Ohr Ein Sof* shines (זָרַח) upon a person who keeps the mitzvah of sukkah in pure faith. The letter ן of the word סֹכֶת alludes to the *Kav* – the straight line – of the *Ohr Ein Sof*. At first it may not be perceived and thus is missing from the first mention of sukkah, but once one fulfills the mitzvah of sukkah properly, it then surrounds him, as hinted by the full spelling of the word Sukkot (סִכּוֹת). Through the *Kav* of the *Ohr Ein Sof*, he is bonded to Hashem, connecting all the worlds and the roots of the *sefirot*. He is also protected by it from sin.

BNEI YISRAEL’S SUKKAH VS. THE SUKKAH OF THE GENTILES

In the future, the nations of the world will approach Hashem, demanding reward. He will tell them, “I have an easy mitzvah called *sukkah*. Go and build one.” They will build sukkot on their rooftops. Hashem will remove the sun from its shield, making the weather unbearably hot. They will all immediately kick their sukkot and leave them (*Avodah Zarah* 3a).

This is difficult to comprehend. Why will Hashem choose to test the gentiles with the sukkah, and not any other mitzvah? Moreover, why will He torment them with oppressive heat? He is the one who commands them to do it; why will He make it so difficult, especially after calling it an “easy mitzvah” (מצוה קלה)?

Since the time of Creation, the nations of the world have caused great harm to Creation. Through their many sins, they introduced Bnei

Yisrael to wicked temptations, bringing untold damage to the world. For this reason, in the future, they will request to rectify their deeds, by connecting all the worlds and returning them to their former glory. These worlds allude to the holy and pure Jew who enters his sukkah, which hints to the *Ohr Hamakif* from the light of the *Kav Hayashar*.

The *gematria* of the word אָדָם (man) is forty-five, which is the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem, when each letter is written out, and adding one for the word itself (*Zohar* I, 25b; *Zohar Chadash, Rut* 102b). The first and last letter of the word מִצְוָה also have the *gematria* of forty-five. Similarly, the first and last letters of the phrase מִצְוָה קְלָה (an easy mitzvah) have the *gematria* of forty-five. The gentiles are also enjoined to perform this mitzvah.

But, as soon as they enter the sukkah, they cannot tolerate its tremendous *kedushah*. This is because they do not possess the *kedushah* conferred by *brit milah*, and they have lessened their inherent *kedushah* by damaging all the worlds through their sins. One is able to feel the *kedushah* and the hidden secrets of the sukkah only if he has prepared himself properly beforehand. This cannot be said about the gentiles; they flee from the sukkah and remain at their inferior level.

Hashem tests them precisely with the mitzvah of sukkah since it gauges the level of perfection that one has reached, and if he has helped bring the world to its *tikkun*.

“An easy mitzvah” shows whether one is “easygoing” about his spiritual *avodah* and if he takes care to rectify those matters that demand correction. A hint to this is the following. The words מִצְוָה קְלָה have the *gematria*, adding one for the words themselves, as the words סוּכָה (sukkah), אַבְיָע (the four worlds), and קו (Kav – line: the *Ohr Ein Sof*).

Because the gentiles are unfit to sit in the sukkah, Hashem shines the heat of the sun on them. The shade of the sukkah does not protect

them from the sun's relentless rays. These rays, in essence, are their sins, which prevent them from being protected from the *Ohr Hamakif*, the *Ohr Ein Sof*. The sun drives them out of their sukkah, and they leave it with a kick.

The Jewish nation is different. Because we were granted Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to correct our mistakes, the sukkah protects us. We invite the seven *ushpizin* into our sukkot, in order that they should assist us in connecting the four worlds, and bringing the world to its ultimate *tikkun* of Hashem's Kingship. This is the quality of the sukkah.

The *gematria* of סוכה (sukkah), adding fifteen for the date of the holiday (the 15th of Tishrei), is equal to that of קו (line). This is the *Kav Ein Sof* that joins all worlds. This is the means by which we can hasten the redemption. On Sukkot, we ask (see *Amos* 9:11), "May the Merciful One raise up the fallen sukkah of David."

Based on this, we can understand why Shemini Atzeret follows Sukkot. During Sukkot, one attains the peak of elevation and recognition of Hashem. Hashem finds it difficult to part with His people and asks them to remain with Him for one more day, Shemini Atzeret. This is comparable to a king who prepares a feast for his beloved friend and cannot part with him (*Rashi, Vayikra* 23:36; *Sukkah* 55b). The pasuk in *Tehillim* (90:4) states, "For even a thousand years in Your eyes are but a bygone yesterday." In just the one day of Shemini Atzeret a person has the potential to draw down the *Shechinah* into his life for the next thousand years.

It all depends upon the person himself. How he will conduct himself after the holiday will affect his future. This is the meaning of "It is difficult for Me to part with you." Hashem beseeches us not to part from the *kedushah* gained during the Yamim Noraim and Sukkot, but to take it with us throughout the rest of the year.

One must prepare himself properly to attain the *emunah* and *kedushah* that the sukkah provides him. He must believe with all his might that he has the power to connect all worlds into the *Ohr Hamakif* and thereby build a resting place for the *Shechinah*. If he does this, these concepts will be implanted in his heart. Through his perfect *emunah* he will return everything to its root in the Upper Worlds. This is why the sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith.”

We are commanded to sit in the sukkah “so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt.” What is the connection between the Exodus from Egypt, the sukkah, and the *Ohr Hamakif*?

The word מצרים (Mitzrayim) has its root in the word מיצר (oppression). This refers to the coercion of the *Yetzer Hara*, who exerts pressure on a person day after day, bent on killing him (*Kiddushin* 30b).

In Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). They needed the *Ohr Hamakif* and the *Kav Ohr Ein Sof* to extricate them before they would fall into the abyss of the fiftieth level, the point of no return. They were redeemed in the merit of the sukkah, which was depicted by the Clouds of Glory. It was in the merit of their faith that they left Egypt and became Hashem’s people. The *Navi (Yirmeyahu 2:2)* refers to this faith in his words, “I recall for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land.”

Let us also remember this, for in the merit of our faith, we will be enveloped by the *Kav Ohr Hamakif* and the *Ohr Ein Sof*. We obtain this *emunah* from the sukkah, which draws the presence of the *Shechinah* upon us. Then, just as our fathers in the Wilderness, we too will be rescued from all oppression and persecution and all forms of harm. We will merit reaching the fiftieth level of *kedushah* and *taharah*.

————— In Summary —————

- The sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith” only for Am Yisrael. The gentiles are not worthy of this privilege, for they ridicule the sukkah. They were not blessed with faith and are not protected by the *Ohr Hamakif* and the Names of Hashem. (The word סוכה is numerically equivalent to Hashem’s two names: יה-ו-ה and א-ד-נ-י). The gentiles are not capable of performing an “easy mitzvah.” The first and last letters of מצוה קלה (easy mitzvah) are numerically equivalent to the word אדם (man). Even though the gentiles are enjoined to sit in the sukkah, they do not possess the requisite *kedushah* to keep this mitzvah.
- Only Bnei Yisrael, who were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the merit of their faith, are capable of enjoying the blessings of the sukkah. The Clouds of Glory protected them in the Wilderness. These clouds were the quintessential sukkah – the Shadow of Faith. In the merit of the *Ohr Hamakif* and the *Ohr Ein Sof* we will be redeemed in the future, may it be speedily in our days.

WHEN THE GENTILES TRY TO DWELL IN THE SUKKAH

In the future, Hashem will call the gentiles to gather in Yerushalayim and celebrate Sukkot. We read this in the *haftarah* of Sukkot (*Zechariah* 14:16), “It shall be that all who are left over from all the nations ... will come up every year to worship the King ... Hashem and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot.”

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 3a) state that in the future, the gentiles will approach Hashem, requesting to keep a mitzvah. Hashem will respond, “I have an easy mitzvah, called *sukkah*. Go ahead and build one.” They build sukkot, but then escape them, kicking them on their way out.

Why will Hashem call to all of the nations to gather in Yerushalayim and celebrate Sukkot?

As we mentioned before, the gentiles damage the worlds of *Atzilut*, *Briah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Assiah* through their corrupt behavior. After Bnei Yisrael, through their service on Sukkot, have repaired this damage and restored the *Kav*, the *Ohr Ein Sof* and the *Ohr Hamakif*, the nations will see the distinct difference between themselves and the Jewish nation.

Yerushalayim is the ultimate place for this rectification to take place. The *Shechinah* has never departed from the Kotel Hama'aravi (*Tanchuma*, *Shemot* 10). The light of the *Shechinah* shines in Yerushalayim, the center of the universe (*Pesikta Rabbah* 10:2).

Hashem told Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 12:1), "Go ... to the land that I will show you." The Zohar (*Lech Lecha* 78a) expounds, "I will show you things that you were incapable of fathoming until now. I will reveal to you the hidden qualities of the Land." The qualities of Yerushalayim, the crown jewel of Israel, are hidden and mysterious. Only in the future, will its hidden light be revealed.

This is the reason why, in the future, the nations of the world will come to Yerushalayim, the holy city, to celebrate Sukkot in the Beit Hamikdash. They will desire to see the *Kav Ohr Ein Sof* and the *Ohr Hamakif*, which they had previously damaged, and which Bnei Yisrael repaired through their good deeds.

BATTLING THE KELIPPAH ON SUKKOT

Sukkot is the festival of joy, as it says (*Devarim* 16:14-15), "You shall rejoice in your festival... and you will be completely joyous." Every person is enjoined to feel joy at the honor Hashem gives him by visiting him with the seven *ushpizin*, the Heavenly entourage (*Zohar*, *Emor* 103).

Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz, zy" a, states (*Bnei Yissachar*) that the sukkah hints at *ruach hakodesh*, which a person attains in his sukkah.

Hashem visits our sukkot with His Heavenly entourage. We certainly have the ability to joyfully draw waters from the wells of salvation (see *Yeshayahu* 12:3). These waters refer to *ruach hakodesh*. Chazal (*Yerushalmi, Sukkah* 5:1) state that at the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah*, the people were capable of drawing *ruach hakodesh*.

Sukkah is a reminder of the Clouds of Glory (*Sukkah* 11b; *Sifri, Bamidbar* 10:34). Clouds are formed from water and give forth water. Torah is compared to water (*Ta'anit* 7a; *Bava Kama* 17a). Only through Torah can one merit true happiness, which brings to *kedushah* (see *Yerushalmi, Sukkah* 5:1). We are enjoined to draw water with joy, from the wells of salvation. These are the wells of *ruach hakodesh*, which we attain in the sukkah.

The word סוכות (Sukkot) contains the same letters as the word כוסות (cups). On Sukkot, each person becomes a vessel that can be filled by the light of the *Shechinah*, as well as the *kedushah* of the Avot, who were called “the chariot of the *Shechinah*” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:7; *Zohar* I, 213b).

The element of joy is mentioned only concerning the holiday of Sukkot. This seems strange since we experience a certain amount of discomfort by leaving our regular abodes and temporarily dwelling in the sukkah (see *Sukkah* 2a).

It is specifically through affliction that one is capable of attaining elevated heights, and even achieving *ruach hakodesh*, becoming “enrobed in royal clothing.” This is hinted by the fact that the letters of the word סוכות are the same as the word כסות (garment). The *Ohr Hamakif* envelops a person on Sukkot and shields him from all harm.

Both Sukkot and the ritual of the Pouring of the Water (*nisuch hamayim*), contain elements of *ruach hakodesh* and sanctity. Everyone may tap into the wells of salvation.

In line with this, we shall explain the secrets of Sukkot and the four species. The Torah (*Vayikra* 23:42) tells us, “You shall dwell in booths

for seven days.” Why does Sukkot follow Yom Kippur? What is the significance of Sukkot being *zman simchateinu* (the time of our rejoicing), and the *nisuch hamayim* and four species?

What is the reason for the many names of the festival? Sukkot is called *Chag Ha’asif* (the Festival of the Ingathering [of the harvest]) (*Shemot* 34:22)? The last day is called, *Atzeret* (Assembly). Sukkot is also called, *Tzila di’Meheimenuta* (the Shadow of Faith) (*Zohar* III, 103a).

Let us preface with an interesting Midrash. Chazal (*Yoma* 20a; *Nedarim* 32b) relate that on Yom Kippur, the Satan has no power to prosecute at all. I found an explanation for this in the sefer *Tehillat David* of the kabbalist, Rabbi Sasson Mordechai Moshe, zt”l. He quotes the *Ba’al Hapardes* in *Sha’ar Hatemurot*, chapter 5.

[There are two types of *Lilit*, one is small and one is large (see *Zohar* I, 29, 79:145). The older is the wife of the Satan, and the smaller is the wife of Ashmodai. *Lilit* is the wife of the Satan. She controls 480 female forces, corresponding to the *gematria* of her name. She goes out on Yom Kippur into the wilderness, wandering around and wailing, since she is the Lady of Wailing.

Machalat, the daughter of *Ishmael*, is the concubine of the Satan. She goes out with 478 female forces, corresponding to the *gematria* of her name. When the two armies meet each other, they fight with each other on Yom Kippur in the Wilderness, challenging each other until their cries reach the Heavens, and the earth is filled with their screams.

Hashem ensures that this takes place in order that they should not be able to prosecute Bnei Yisrael on Yom Kippur.]

The Sukkah Protects One from the Kelippah

On Yom Kippur, Bnei Yisrael are compared to the ministering angels. The *kelippah* has no control over them. But on Motza’ei Yom Kippur,

Bnei Yisrael eat and drink, descending to the level of humans once again. The *kelippah* attempts to gain a foothold among them and destroy them.

However, Bnei Yisrael have been cleansed of all their sins, so the *kelippah* does not have an easy job. To further prevent his success, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael to start building the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur (*Rema, Orach Chaim* 624:5). This puts the *kelippah* out of commission for the time being.

Why was specifically the mitzvah of sukkah chosen to eliminate the *kelippah* from our midst?

The numerical equivalent of the word סוכת (Sukkot) without a ך, is the same as that of לילית (Lilit). After Yom Kippur, Lilit regains power, fighting Bnei Yisrael with renewed vigor. She wishes to recoup all that she lost by her surrender on Yom Kippur. Building the sukkah is our shield against her.

Although there are many who cannot, for whatever reason, begin building their sukkot immediately after Yom Kippur, Hashem considers their good intentions as if they had done this mitzvah (*Kiddushin* 40a).

Furthermore, sukkah hints at *ruach hakodesh*, which drives away the *kelippah*. Sukkot is “the time of our rejoicing,” a time when the *kelippah* is repelled, since it hates happiness but revels in sadness and despair (*Zohar* III, 227b; *Tikkunei Zohar* 21:53b).

Waving the four species is another method of eradicating the *kelippah*. The sukkah provides shelter against the *kelippah*, but one must make a personal effort to eradicate it, and then he will be helped from on High (*Yoma* 38b). He will then be given the ability to withstand the *kelippah* even after the festival of Sukkot has passed.

Now we might understand why we draw water on Sukkot. The *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 12:3) states, “You can draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.” On Sukkot, we draw *kedushah* from the Clouds of Glory.

What is the purpose of clouds? The sefer *Machaneh Yehudah* explains that the ten *sefirot* enclothe the *Ohr Ein Sof*, for without this covering, the world could not exist, all the more so, mankind. Everything would simply be consumed by this great light. Therefore, Hashem created ten *sefirot*, as one garment upon another, to lessen the glare of the *Ohr Ein Sof*, so that it should not scorch the entire world.

Clouds have this property, as well. The *Shechinah* descends into our sukkah, accompanied by the ten *sefirot*. These *sefirot* envelop the sukkah as within a cloud, just as the Clouds of Glory protected our people in the Wilderness.

For this reason, Sukkot is called *Chag Ha'asif* (Festival of the Ingathering), and *Tzila di'Meheimenuta* (the Shadow of Faith). One must have perfect faith in all the hidden meanings of Chag HaSukkot. One should strive to collect all of the blessings granted to us by Hashem on Sukkot and strengthen his faith in Hashem. The essence of Sukkot is *emunah*: "So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths" (*Vayikra* 23:43).

Just as our forefathers in the Wilderness merited elevated heights through their *emunah*, so may we merit their level of greatness, vanquishing the *kelippah* and attaining *kedushah* and *ruach hakodesh* throughout the year.

———— In Summary ————

- Sukkot is a festival of joy. We rejoice when Hashem arrives with the *ushpizin*. Sukkah is related to *ruach hakodesh*, for at the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah* celebration on Sukkot, the people would draw *ruach hakodesh*. The sukkah reminds us of the Clouds of Glory. Clouds rain down water, an allusion to Torah, which sanctifies us and thus causes us joy.
- The letters of the word סוכות are the same as the letters of the word כוסות (cups). On Sukkot, a person becomes a vessel fit to receive *kedushah*. Even though it may be difficult to leave one's permanent abode for a temporary

one, this is where he draws forth holiness. The letters of סכות can be transposed to spell כסות (garment). This refers to the Ohr *Hamakif* that envelops a person on Sukkot and shields him from all harm.

- Sukkot and the ritual Pouring of the Water (*nisuch hamayim*) bring one to *ruach hakodesh* and spiritual elevation. Thus Sukkot is the “time of our rejoicing.”
- On Yom Kippur, the Satan is prevented from prosecuting. The two forces of Lilit fight among themselves, and Hashem forbids them from prosecuting on that day. After Yom Kippur, Bnei Yisrael descend from their lofty level, and are no longer likened to the ministering angels. We are commanded to build the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur in order to protect us from the impure force of Lilit. The word סכת, without a ו', has the same *gematria* as לילית (Lilit). The *kedushah* of the sukkah enables us to combat this impurity. The *kelippah* thrives on sadness; waving the four species wards off its *tumah*.
- Drawing water on Sukkot hints at clouds, and the sukkah itself reminds us of the Clouds of Glory. Clouds allude to the ten *sefirot*, which envelop the *Ohr Ein Sof*. They protect the world from its unbearable glare, allowing it to continue in existence, just like the Clouds of Glory in the Wilderness protected Bnei Yisrael like a cloak.
- Sukkot is called “the Shadow of Faith,” for it is the time when we strengthen ourselves in *emunah*, just as our forefathers in the Wilderness believed in Hashem. It is called “The Festival of Ingathering” since we add to our strengthened *emunah* the influences we receive from Above. We thereby eradicate the negative forces and attain *ruach hakodesh* and *kedushah*.

SECRETS OF SUKKOT

There are several puzzling aspects to the festival of Sukkot.

What is the reason behind the mitzvah of sukkah?

Why do we invite the seven *ushpizin* to visit us specifically on Sukkot, and not on any other holiday?

Why were the following species chosen to be shaken on Sukkot: the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadass*, and *aravah*?

Why do we celebrate Sukkot specifically after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:2) connects the pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:40), “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree” and the pasuk (*Tehillim* 16:11), “You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence.” The Admor of Satmar asks: What is the connection between the two?

It seems fitting to answer that the main purpose of asking Hashem for life is in order to fulfill the Torah and mitzvot. Torah is the “potion of eternal life” (*Aderet d’Rabbi Natan* 34:10), and “it is a tree of life to those who grasp it” (*Mishlei* 3:18).

This is hinted to in the mitzvah of the four species. The *gematria* of the word אתרוג, adding one for the word itself, is equal to that of תורה (Torah). When a person holds the *etrog*, he is considered to be upholding the Torah. The *gematria* of לולב is equal to that of חיים (life). By taking the *lulav*, a person ensures for himself a life of Torah. This sheds light on the pasuk from *Mishlei*: “It is a tree of life” hints to the *lulav*, which comes from the palm tree, “to those who grasp it,” which is the *etrog* that we grasp in our other hand.

The Midrash explains that the pasuk “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree” refers to Torah. The word ולקחתם (you shall take) comes from the root לקח. The Torah is called לקח, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 4:2), “כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם – For I have given you a good teaching.” “You will make known to me the path of life,” refers to Torah, the ultimate life.

The mitzvah of the four species alludes to traveling the true path of life. Through keeping Torah, one attains (*Tehillim* 16:11) “the fullness of joys in Your Presence.” When one learns Torah and keeps its

mitzvot, one is constantly in Hashem's Presence. He will be deserving of attaining the conclusion of the pasuk: "the delights that are in Your right hand for eternity." Hashem will always be at his side, rescuing him from sin. All that is incumbent upon us is to do His mitzvot.

We might add that the four species allude to different levels in Torah and Avodat Hashem. The *etrog*, as previously mentioned, refers to the Written Law. Its letters (אתרג) are similar to תרי"ג, the 613 commandments of Torah. The *lulav* hints at a life of Torah. The word הדס (*hadass*) is numerically equivalent to סוד (secret), adding one for the word itself. These are the hidden aspects of Torah. And the ערבה (*aravah*) hints to the pleasant ways of the Torah – עריבות התורה.

Now we can understand why we invite the *ushpizin* to visit specifically on Sukkot (*Zohar* III, 103a). Throughout the days of Elul and the Yamim Noraim, we mention *zechut Avot*, arousing Heavenly mercy. On Sukkot, we show that we have not forgotten the Avot, inviting them into the sukkah. We demonstrate that they were effective in defending us, for now we are keeping the promises that we made then. By entering the sukkah, the Shadow of Faith, and taking the four species, we prove that we are connected to the Torah and have *emunah* in Hashem.

There are seven *ushpizin*, corresponding to the seven days of the festival. They also allude to the seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The *gematria* of the word אלול (Elul), adding nine for the days of teshuvah up until Yom Kippur, is seventy-six. The *gematria* of the initials of the names of the seven *ushpizin* (Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and David), is also seventy-six. We invite them to advocate our cause and speak in our defense.

The *Chidushei HaRim* writes that when a person enters his sukkah, he is considered as if he fulfills all of the mitzvot of the Torah. Based

on the above, this is understandable. Sukkah is a demonstration of our humility before Hashem. Humility is one of the prerequisites for acquiring Torah (*Avot* 6:4). On Sukkot, we shake the four species, which represent different aspects of Torah, as we mentioned above. By fulfilling the mitzvot of Sukkot, a person indicates that he accepts upon himself all of the mitzvot of the Torah. He takes the *etrog* in his left hand, thereby destroying the *kelippah* which stands at the left, and becoming strengthened in Torah and its 613 mitzvot.

The Admor of Satmar, zt”l, asks why we take a *lulav* specifically on Sukkot, and not on any other holiday. This is connected to the question of why we celebrate Sukkot specifically after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The majority of our tefillot on these days revolve around Hashem granting us long, good life and forgiving our sins. Hashem, for His part, requests that after the Yamim Noraim, we should do an act to bring us merit. We therefore build the sukkah, a symbol of our submission to Hashem.

One who sins displays haughtiness, which Hashem cannot bear, as it says (*Mishlei* 16:5), “Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem,” and (*Tehillim* 101:5), “One with haughty eyes and an expansive heart, him I cannot bear.” Prayers and good intentions are not enough; one must act with humility. Leaving one’s permanent home to enter the temporary dwelling of the sukkah is a tangible expression of our desire to rid ourselves of haughtiness and become humble. When one is humble, his sins are forgiven. Once one has attained this level, if he then desires to be granted a long life, he should take the *lulav* (לוּלָב), which is numerically equivalent to חיים (life), together with the other species.

Combining the four species and shaking them is a means of eradicating the prosecutors, until Hoshana Rabbah, when we are sealed for a good life.

Although Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah are both days when one's fate is sealed, they are intrinsically different. On Yom Kippur, we afflict ourselves by abstaining from eating and drinking, and on Hoshana Rabbah, we abstain from sleep. These are forms of physical pleasures, through which we exist. Abstaining from them demonstrates our nullification of materialism in favor of the spiritual. By doing so, one merits long life.

————— In Summary —————

- What is the secret of the sukkah? Why do the *ushpizin* arrive specifically on Sukkot, rather than on the other holidays? Why do we take these specific species? Why does Sukkot follow Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? What is the connection between the pasuk “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree” and the pasuk “You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence”?
- One merits long life through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot. Each of the four species hints to Torah and mitzvot. The word **אתרוג** is numerically equal to **תורה** Torah, and similar to **תרי"ג**, the 613 mitzvot. The word **לולב** is numerically equal to **חיים** – a life of Torah, and **הדס** (*hadass*) is numerically equal to **סוד** (secret) – the secrets of Torah. The **ערבה** (*aravah*) alludes to the sweetness of Torah (**ערבות התורה**). The word **ולקחתם** (you shall take) hints to the Torah, which is called a **לקח טוב** (good teaching). When one waves the four species, he indicates that he is following the Torah's path of life. In this way, he will obtain the fullness of joys, and Hashem will stand at his right side, to support him.
- We invite the *ushpizin* into our sukkot after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to prove that it was beneficial that they defended us, for we are now upholding the Torah in their merit. The *gematria* of the initials of their names equals seventy-six, the same as the *gematria* of **אלול** (Elul), adding nine for the days of Tishrei up until Yom Kippur. One who fulfills the mitzvah of sukkah is considered as if he is observing all of the mitzvot of the Torah.
- Sukkot follows Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The teshuvah we did on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is actualized in the act of building the

sukkah, the symbol of humility. Torah is acquired through humility. Leaving one's house and entering the sukkah is a demonstration of the desire to forsake arrogance and acquire humility. On Sukkot, one combines the *lulav* and *etrog*, which symbolize the Torah and mitzvot. Through these acts, he merits that he should be sealed for a good verdict on Hoshana Rabbah. On Yom Kippur, we afflict ourselves by abstaining from food and drink; on Hoshana Rabbah, we abstain from sleep. By overcoming physical pleasures, we strengthen ourselves spiritually and merit eternal life.

THE LIGHT AND SHADE OF THE SUKKAH

Why does the mitzvah of sukkah begin specifically on the fifteenth day of the month? (*Vayikra* 23:34). The sukkah is “the Shadow of Faith” (*Zohar* III, 103a). We must have perfect faith that the mitzvah of sukkah has the quality to unite the Name of Hashem יה-י, which has the *gematria* of fifteen.

We have a part in hastening the *geulah* by bringing this *tikkun* to His Name. Our state of exile is called “the fallen sukkah of David” (*Amos* 9:11). By strengthening our *emunah* when we sit in the sukkah, we help to raise the sukkah of the House of David, bringing Mashiach closer.

The word סוכה (*sukkah*) is numerically equivalent to Hashem's Names יה-ו-ה and א-דני. The letters ס' and כ' of סוכה refer to the *Shechinah*. The remaining letters ו' and ה' from סוכה combine with the Name יה-י (hinted to by the fact that Sukkot is on the 15th of the month), to complete Hashem's Name יה-ו-ה. Then the *geulah* will arrive.

After the solemn days of weeping and supplication of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we reach the joyous festival of Sukkot. We advance from a state of somberness into a state of festivity, as it says (*Devarim*

16:14), “You shall rejoice on your festival... you will be completely joyous.”

Although Sukkot is a holiday of rejoicing, it is a time most auspicious for prayer. If we keep the festival properly, raising our level of *kedushah* on it, our prayers will surely be accepted. We firmly believe that Hashem forgives our iniquities in the Shadow of Faith.

The seven days of Sukkot parallel the seven days of the week. For, although we did teshuvah during the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, we now have another opportunity to repent. Each of the seven days of Sukkot has the quality of being able to atone for the sins committed on the corresponding day of the week, throughout the previous year.

Based on this, we can understand the comparison of the sukkah to the Clouds of Glory in the Wilderness (*Sukkah* 11b; *Rashi*, *ibid.*). There were seven clouds, alluding to the seven days of the holiday. Remembering Hashem’s miraculous protection of us with the clouds causes us to marvel at His wonders, instilling faith deep in our hearts.

We attain a greater level of *emunah* by contemplating this point. This ensures that Hashem will listen to our prayers. This is hinted at in the term ענני כבוד (Clouds of Glory). The word ענני (clouds) is similar to עניני (answer me). Glory (כבוד) belongs to Hashem. Hashem will accept our prayers in the merit of our *emunah* in Him. This will influence our nation for generations to come.

This *emunah* is beneficial not only for Bnei Yisrael, but even for the nations of the world. How do we understand this?

In the *haftarah* on the first day of Sukkot, we read (*Zechariah* 14:16-21), “It shall be that all who are left over from all the nations who had invaded Yerushalayim will come up every year to worship the King Hashem... and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot. And it shall be that whoever... does not go up... there will be no rain upon them.”

At the time of the final redemption, all the nations will recognize Hashem and will coronate Him as King, as the *Navi* (ibid. 9) proclaims, “Hashem will be King over all the land.” All of the nations will believe in Him.

Why will Hashem command the nations to come to Yerushalayim, and why specifically on Sukkot, rather than on any other holiday?

This is difficult to understand, especially in light of the following statement of Chazal. The Gemara (*Yerushalmi, Ta’anit* 2:2) relates that in the future, all the festivals will be annulled, including the festival of Sukkot. The Rambam (*Hilchot Megillah* 2:18) expounds on this. How, then, will all of the nations ascend to Yerushalayim on Sukkot in the future?

The sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith.” The nations had certainly heard about the numerous miracles which Hashem wrought for Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness (*Shemot* 15:14). But they did not perceive the miracle of the Clouds of Glory, which protected our people at that time. Although they may have heard about them, they did not fully believe in their miraculous nature, for this was something above their level of understanding.

Therefore, Hashem desires that in the future, before the coming of Mashiach, when the festival of Sukkot will still be valid, all the gentiles will come to the Beit Hamikdash to witness how Hashem surrounds His nation with the seven Clouds of Glory, just as He did in the Wilderness. Then they will certainly admit to His greatness and believe in Him completely. Those who refuse to come demonstrate that they have no belief whatsoever in their hearts. This is the meaning of “the Shadow of Faith.” The sukkah instills faith even in the hearts of the gentiles.

The Connection between Simchat Torah and Sukkot

Immediately following Sukkot, we are enjoined to rejoice with the Torah. Simchat Torah is celebrated on the festival of Shemini Atzeret.

The numerical equivalent of the name חג העצרת (*Chag Ha'atzeret*) is equal to that of עץ התורה (the wooden handles of the Torah scrolls). Why do we rejoice with the Torah on Simchat Torah and not on Shavuot, when we actually received the Torah?

After coronating Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and returning to Him in teshuvah on Yom Kippur, we build the sukkah, a home for the *Shechinah*. One does this specifically after he has received atonement for his wrongdoings in order to impress upon him the importance of not returning to his former ways. He should desire to continue dwelling with the *Shechinah* after the holiday also.

After we have dwelt with the *Shechinah* and rejoiced for the seven days of the festival, Hashem makes a request: “Remain with me another day. It is difficult for Me to part with you” (*Sukkah* 55a).

Hashem wants us to rejoice with the Torah that He gave us. The word עצרת of Shemini Atzeret refers to lingering before Hashem. This is borne out in the pasuk (*Shmuel* I, 21:8), “Now there... was one of Shaul’s servants, who lingered (נעצר) before Hashem.” Rashi explains (ibid.) that he lingered at the Tent of Meeting, to rejoice and become engrossed in Torah.

Hashem tells us that on this day of *Atzeret*, when we celebrate Simchat Torah, He will rest His *Shechinah* upon us, for we are pure of sin and worthy of rejoicing with the Torah.

———— In Summary ————

- The mitzvah of Sukkot is specifically on the fifteenth of the month, an allusion to part of Hashem’s Name (י-ה), which is united with the second part (ו-ה) on the festival of Sukkot. The letters י-ה are numerically equivalent to fifteen, the date of Sukkot. The letters ו-ה of Hashem’s Name are part of the word סוכה (*sukkah*). Through keeping the mitzvah of sukkah, we raise the glory of Hashem, which has been trampled. This is the secret of Sukkot. It is

a festival of rejoicing, after the spiritual *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The seven days of the festival rectify the damage we caused on the seven days of the week throughout the year.

- The seven Clouds of Glory parallel the seven days of the festival. The word עֲנַנֵי (clouds) is similar to עֲנֵנִי (answer me). Glory (כְבוֹד) refers to Hashem, the Master of glory. Hashem accepts our tefillot in the merit of our *emunah*. We merit blessing for generations to come. Even the nations of the world will benefit from this influence in the future. Then, they will arrive at Yerushalayim on Sukkot. They will observe the Clouds of Glory, and recognize Hashem, believing in Him and crowning Him as King. They will attain perfect faith, for this is the secret of the holiday of Sukkot, the Shadow of Faith.
- This is the connection between Sukkot and Simchat Torah (which is celebrated on Shemini Atzeret). After the *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we build a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, the sukkah. We put our faith in Hashem and rejoice with the Torah. On Simchat Torah, we linger to rejoice with Hashem and His Torah. This day is most auspicious, for we have been cleansed of all sin and have the ability to appreciate the joy of the Torah.

A Practical Application

Everyone must strengthen his *emunah* in Hashem, specifically on Sukkot, the festival called “the Shadow of Faith.” In the merit of our faith, we can accept the Torah and become connected to it. Only one who is free of sin can acquire Torah. Through his actions, he can build a dwelling place of *kedushah* for Hashem.

WHY SUKKOT IS CELEBRATED IN TISHREI

The Tur Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 625:1) states that the sukkot in which our forefathers were sheltered were the Clouds of Glory. They protected Bnei Yisrael from the elements. Even though our fathers left Egypt in the month of Nisan, we are not commanded to build sukkot then. Nisan is the beginning of the summer, when people often sit outdoors under a shaded structure. By sitting in a sukkah then, it would not be noticeable that we are doing so for the sake of the mitzvah. Instead, we are commanded to build sukkot in Tishrei, the beginning of the rainy season, when people prefer to remain indoors. When we go outdoors into our sukkot, we demonstrate that we are doing the will of Hashem.

This raises several difficulties. First, Hashem intended that Bnei Yisrael should keep the mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael, the land where His Providence is most apparent. In Eretz Yisrael it is still warm in Tishrei, and it does not usually start to rain until later in the winter. Therefore, when we sit in the sukkah in Tishrei it might very well look like we are sitting in booths in order to enjoy the warm weather, rather than for the sake of the mitzvah. This seems to be just as problematic as sitting in a sukkah during Pesach, in the spring. In addition to this problem, in some parts of the world, it snows on Sukkot. How is one expected to sit in a sukkah then?

The Torah does not take into account whether it is an easy time to keep this mitzvah or not. This is because mitzvot were not given to us for our personal enjoyment (*Eiruvin* 31). Rather, one should do a mitzvah *l'shem Shamayim*, without personal motives.

However, since the mitzvah of sukkah is to commemorate the Clouds of Glory in the Wilderness, it would seem more appropriate to sit in

the sukkah at the time that we enjoyed that miracle, i.e., in the month of Nisan. Why is the fulfillment of the mitzvah postponed until after Yom Kippur? In addition to the Tur's explanation, quoted above, I would like to offer the following reason.

A person is surrounded by *nisyonot*. At times he withstands them; at times he succumbs. Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows the future; He foresaw what would transpire with Bnei Yisrael after they entered the Land, during the *churban* and the long *galut*. In order that they should not, *chas v'shalom*, fall into despair and be unable to withstand the exile, He granted His children the *Shalosh Regalim*. Pesach is in the spring, Shavuot is in the summer, and Sukkot is in the fall. The festivals are tools to help us combat the *Yetzer Hara*, strengthening us to withstand the exile, until the ultimate redemption. The redemption from Egypt was incomplete. Moshe Rabbeinu perceived this through *ruach hakodesh*. Klal Yisrael await the true, complete *geulah*, bolstered by the spiritual inspiration of the festivals.

There is a spiritual progression from Nisan to Sukkot. The month of Nisan, the month of redemption, is a time propitious for strengthening our faith in preparation for receiving the Torah. There is a tremendous message in searching for chametz and eliminating it from one's possession. It inspires a person to make a personal accounting. He realizes that if the Torah is so stringent regarding physical chametz, how much more stringent should he be in eliminating any negative character traits that he might possess. Just as one searches his home for chametz, one must examine his *middot*, ridding himself of any negativity in order to become a true servant of Hashem. The mitzvot concerning chametz assist a person in perfecting his character.

Next, comes the month of Iyar, when man continues in his spiritual quest. This is the month designated for character improvement. We count the forty-nine days of Sefirat Haomer in anticipation of receiving the Torah. Then, in the month of Sivan, one becomes even more elevated as he accepts the Torah anew.

Subsequently, during Tammuz and Av, he continues honing his character traits, as he contemplates the *churban* (*Mishnah, Ta'anit* 26). The *churban* was caused by lack of Torah study, baseless hatred, and the three cardinal sins. Therefore, during these months, one should strengthen himself in Torah study. If, *chas v'shalom*, he was lax in Torah, he does teshuvah during Elul, striving to improve his ways and wholeheartedly return to Hashem throughout the period of the Yamim Noraim.

However, there is a downside to having spent so many months involved in character improvement and spiritual striving. Now that he feels so spiritually elevated, and knowing that he has received complete atonement on Yom Kippur, one may feel smug with his accomplishments. He may easily become arrogant, which is abominable in Hashem's eyes. Chazal warn us (*Sotah* 5a) that Hashem cannot live together with one who is proud. This may, *chas v'shalom*, be the beginning of his downfall.

Moreover, after Yom Kippur, he may also feel exhausted from his previous spiritual exertions. He might just want to relax. He may then lose all of the elevated levels he attained from Nisan, up until that point.

To counter these pitfalls, Hashem, in His great love for us, has commanded us to build the sukkah at this time. This provides us with an extra measure of *emunah*, as the sukkah is called "the Shadow of Faith" (*Zohar* III, 103a). One thereby prevents himself from falling into despair, entering the period of rejoicing instead. This joy reaches its zenith on Simchat Torah, when he dances with the Sifrei Torah. In this manner, rather than falling, one is able to elevate himself even further in his spiritual pursuits: strengthening his faith, increasing his level in Torah, and improving his *middot*.

When a person contemplates the meaning of the festival of Sukkot, he will realize that Hashem granted him this gift to prevent him from

falling into the clutches of arrogance, allowing him to “recharge his batteries” after the intense *avodah* of the Yamim Noraim. The sukkah contains Hashem’s Names יה-ו-ה and א-ד-נ-י. Hashem comes to visit him in his sukkah, together with the seven *ushpizin*, so that they should influence him with their spiritual qualities (*Zohar*, *ibid.*). This will grant him the ability to withstand *nisyonot* as they arise. He thus has the ability to defeat the *Yetzer Hara* and ascend in Torah, *middot*, and pure *emunah*.

The fact that Hashem comes to visit us together with the holy *ushpizin* in our sukkot demonstrates that He truly forgave us on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This can be compared to a person who asks forgiveness from his friend. How can he be sure that his friend has, indeed, forgiven him? If this friend comes to visit him and also brings along gifts, he will know that he has been forgiven. Similarly, Hashem does not only visit us, but He also brings along gifts: pure *emunah*, the ability to come close to Him, and elevation in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

In addition to this, Hashem acts with us in a truly amazing way. Instead of thanking Hashem for forgiving us, He thanks us for trusting in Him! The *Navi* proclaims (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), “I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials (חסד נעוריך), your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land.” Hashem appreciates the efforts we make in shaking off (לנער) the *kelippah* and *aveirot*, and following Him into “the Wilderness.” We accept upon ourselves to cultivate *emunah* in our hearts and involve ourselves in mitzvot. Nothing of significance comes easily. Hashem, in turn, comes toward us, visiting with the *ushpizin* in our sukkot.

We have so much for which to thank Hashem! Hashem has given us the festival of Sukkot in order to warm our spirits with the *kedushah* of this mitzvah, so that our fervor should not cool off after the intense period of the Yamim Noraim. He wishes to instill within us the strength

to endure future *nisyonot*. When one leaves all of his possessions behind and ascends to Yerushalayim for the *chag*, his heart becomes fired up to Hashem, and he connects to Him with renewed enthusiasm. At the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah*, one is capable even of attaining the level of prophecy.

Hashem sees how Bnei Yisrael stand up to the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara*, triumphing over him. Then He remembers the kindness of our youth, when our ancestors followed Him in the Wilderness. This, then, is why He sees fit to visit us in the sukkah, together with His Heavenly entourage, the seven *ushpizin*. Specifically in the month of Tishrei, after all the months of spiritual quest, Hashem strengthens our morale.

Building the sukkah is our manifestation of gratitude toward Hashem. We are grateful for the kindness He remembers in our merit, and all the good He does for us even though we have sinned. Our improper actions do not make us worthy of His gratitude. He acts beyond the letter of the law by demonstrating His love and gratitude toward us (*Berachot 7a; Bava Kama 99b*). In this manner, He grants us the ability to recognize His goodness and become closer to Him. This helps us withstand future *nisyonot* and ascend in Torah, *emunah*, and good *middot*.

Now we can understand why the mitzvah of Sukkot is “out of season.” By commanding us to build sukkot in the month of Tishrei, Hashem is, in essence, building us up anew. Sukkot is a natural continuation and the culmination of the spiritual *avodah* started on Pesach.

Just as we are commanded to ascend to Yerushalayim for each festival, we are commanded to keep the mitzvot of the festival at the right time. If one lives in a cold climate, the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah still applies in Tishrei, since it is the appointed time for the mitzvah in Eretz Yisrael. To further illustrate this point, someone who

lives in Argentina, where the summer months come after Tishrei, nevertheless says the tefillah of “*mashiv haruach u'morid hageshem*” then, since the halachah is fixed according to the months in Eretz Yisrael.

————— In Summary —————

- We are commanded to sit in sukkot in the month of Tishrei and not in Nisan, when Bnei Yisrael sat in sukkot after leaving Mitzrayim. The reason for this is that Nisan heralds the summer months, when it is normal to sit in a shaded structure. If we would go out into our sukkot at this time, it would not be noticeable that we are doing it to fulfill Hashem’s command.
- However, the fact that we sit in sukkot in Tishrei still raises this question, since the weather in Eretz Yisrael is still warm at this time. There must be a compelling reason for keeping the mitzvah of sukkah in Tishrei, which is even more important than proving that we are keeping the mitzvah because of the Divine command.
- In the month of Nisan, a person eradicates the chametz from his heart and comes closer to Hashem. In Iyar, he improves his *middot*, preparing for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. In Sivan, he becomes even more elevated when he receives the Torah. In the months of Tammuz and Av, he corrects his deeds, for he wishes to help rebuild the Beit Hamikdash. In Elul, he does teshuvah, and on the Yamim Noraim, he prays for atonement. After such an intense *avodah*, he may feel that he has perfected himself and become arrogant. This would, *chas v’shalom*, bring about his downfall.
- Hashem’s command that we build the sukkah specifically in Tishrei is for the purpose of improving ourselves even further by strengthening our *emunah* and our commitment to Torah and *middot* improvement. The mitzvah of sukkah fills us with enthusiasm for Hashem’s mitzvot, as we are in a state of limbo after Yom Kippur, not “heated up” by the intensity of the day, yet not under the control of the *Yetzer Hara*. By building the sukkah, a person comes closer to Hashem. Hashem demonstrates His forgiveness by visiting him in his sukkah. It is truly incredible that instead of us thanking Hashem for granting us forgiveness, He shows us gratitude by remembering the kindness

we displayed by following Him into the Wilderness. We placed our fate into His hands, and we planted *emunah* in our hearts. Therefore, He comes to visit us in our sukkot, together with the seven *ushpizin*.

- We must thank Hashem for His great kindness. Hashem does not want a person to become depressed or spiritually deflated after the intense period of spiritual *avodah* from Pesach through the Yamim Noraim. Therefore, He commanded that we build a sukkah, and He comes to visit us there. This gives us the wherewithal to withstand future *nisyonot* and become further elevated. Sukkah is a manifestation of gratitude toward Hashem. According to our deeds, we are not worthy of His gratitude. If He nevertheless shows us gratitude, it is beyond the letter of the law. We must reciprocate this gratitude, and become closer to Him, standing up to temptations, and rising in Torah, *emunah*, and good *middot*.

SUKKOT – THE FESTIVAL OF FAITH

“Arrive, honored and holy guests, to sit in the shade of faith”

(Zohar)

On the festival of Sukkot, each evening, the holy *ushpizin* visit us. Why do they come specifically on the holiday of Sukkot? Why not on Pesach, the festival of our salvation and redemption? The commentaries ask another question. Since the sukkah commemorates the Clouds of Glory with which Hashem surrounded Bnei Yisrael at their Exodus from Mitzrayim, why are we not commanded to build sukkot in the month of Nisan, on the holiday of Pesach, the date when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt?

Let us explain by examining the words of the Haggadah on the pasuk (*Devarim* 26:8), “Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand.” “Hashem took us out” – not by means of an angel or a *seraph* or a

messenger, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself, as it states (*Shemot* 12:12), “I shall go through the land of Egypt on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from man to beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment – I am Hashem.” On this the Haggadah comments, “I shall go through the land of Egypt on this night” – I and not an angel, “And I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt” – I and not a *seraph*, “And against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment” – I and not a messenger, “I am Hashem” – I and no other.

Chazal state that when Hakadosh Baruch Hu descended upon Mitzrayim to mete out punishment to the Egyptians, ninety million angels descended along with Him. Among them were angels of fire and angels of hail, angels of horror and angels of fear. They turned to Hashem and asked, “Master of the World, when a king of flesh and blood goes out to war, his servants and slaves surround him to protect him. Let us go out to fight Your battle, Hashem, as we are Your servants; let us avenge the cause of Your people.” To which He responded, “I myself will descend, in My full glory and greatness and holiness. I am Hashem, I and no other.”

The *geulah* of Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim is attributed solely to Hashem. He alone fought the Egyptians and took revenge on behalf of His people. He Himself led them out of Egypt and rescued them from the hands of the wicked Pharaoh. To Him alone belongs our praise and thanks. No other can take credit for the miracle of salvation which they experienced. Even though the angels and *seraphim* were Hashem’s agents in the Exodus, He prevented them from acting according to the regular protocol that servants have toward their king, in order to demonstrate His complete supremacy. Thus, the *ushpizin* do not come to visit us on Pesach, since it is the festival of our redemption, which was totally and utterly dependent on Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself.

This is also the reason why the name of Moshe Rabbeinu does not appear even once in the Haggadah of Pesach. Klal Yisrael were saved

by Hashem alone. To remember this, the festival of Sukkot is celebrated many months after Pesach. If we would be commanded to sit in sukkot on Pesach, and the *ushpizin* would come to visit us then, we might mistakenly think that they had some part in assisting in our salvation. Instead, we are commanded to celebrate the festival of Sukkot in Tishrei, so that it should be distinct from the festival of Pesach. This helps us to remember that it was Hashem alone Who redeemed us.

The word סוכה (*sukkah*) is derived from the word כיסוי (covering, protection). The *sukkah* protects us from prosecution. Our Sages (*Bereishit Rabbah*, *Acharei Mot*) tell us that during the Yamim Noraim, and specifically on Yom Kippur, the Satan has no permission to prosecute. I would like to offer the following explanation. Hakadosh Baruch Hu “dresses us up” on Yom Kippur, disguising us as angels, clean of all sin and iniquity. In this manner, He “covers up” our crimes and hides our transgressions from the eyes of the Satan.

This is hinted to in the words of the pasuk (*Tehillim* 81:4), בכסה ליום, “חגנו.” The word כסה also comes from the root כיסוי. Hakadosh Baruch Hu covers up our sins and dresses us as angels in order that the Satan should not prosecute us. But immediately after Yom Kippur, the Satan comes back, full of energy, to accomplish his job. He tells Hashem, “Although on Yom Kippur, Am Yisrael were similar to angels, free of all sin, now they have returned to their daily routine, without the mask of angels and without the guise of holiness that previously surrounded them.”

In order to shield us from his accusations, we are immediately commanded to sit in the *sukkah*. It provides protection, guarding us from the charges of the Satan. As soon as the Satan arrives at the doorway of the *sukkah*, which is termed “the Shadow of Faith,” and sees the *Shechinah* and the seven *ushpizin* sitting there, he is dumfounded. All his claims are gone. He is immediately subdued, and leaves just as he came.

One who sits in the sukkah is able to absorb pure *emunah* in Hashem through the influence of the *ushpizin*, who visit every sukkah. Although the *ushpizin* are not alive and among us today, in His great mercy, Hashem has planted tzaddikim and righteous men in each and every generation. They steer the ship of Bnei Yisrael on the proper course, to safe shores. They teach us the correct way to go. They set an example based on the deeds of the holy *ushpizin*. Whoever attaches himself to them, learning from them and following in their ways, will increase his faith and fear of Heaven. The merit of these righteous people is so great that it also protects us from the Satan, silencing him from speaking against us. Anyone with a deep-seated belief in Hashem in his heart can merit witnessing salvation and miracles in his lifetime.

Chazal teach us (*Chulin* 7b), “Tzaddikim are greater in their deaths than in their lifetimes.” Even after they pass away, their merits stand on our behalf, nullifying evil decrees and securing salvation. There are many stories related about my grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt”l, one to whom miracles happened often. I will tell a mere few, which touched me.

Mr. Daniel Afriat told me that his family wanted to return home from North Morocco, after a few days of vacationing there. After a few minutes on the road, they felt something was wrong with their car. The motor began making strange noises, indicating that it was overheated. While they were wondering what to do, the motor stopped completely. They found themselves in the middle of a busy thoroughfare, not able to do a thing.

After a few hours of waiting, Mr. Afriat suddenly began praying to the Creator, mentioning the merit of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt”l. He asked that he intercede on his family’s behalf. Then he added, “Master of the world! This is the very car in which Rabbi David Chananya travels, as he makes his yearly trip from Casablanca to Mogador on the anniversary of the passing of his holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto.

How can You turn me down?! Please, Hashem, at least let me arrive home in my car, and after that, do what You want with it!”

With a heart full of belief and trust in Hashem and His tzaddikim, he returned to his car and turned on the engine. The unbelievable took place! The car sputtered back to life and began to move as usual, riding quickly with no problem whatsoever. And the most amazing thing of all is that his request was answered in full. As soon as they turned into the driveway of his house, a sudden explosion was heard from the car’s engine, and the motor died.

Another miracle “on the road” in the merit of the tzaddik, was told to me by Mr. Yoram Azran, may Hashem protect him. He purchased a new car in Paris, intending to ride through Spain to his home in Casablanca. After travelling for one day, he took a short break in the long trip. He returned to his car, to continue the ride home, and suddenly the engine stopped completely. Distressed, he contacted the company representative to clarify the cause of the mishap. He was utterly baffled. How could there be something wrong with a brand new car, which he had bought just a few days previously?

The representative arrived, checked out the car, and stated that the transmission wasn’t working properly. There was no hope of the car working. But Mr. Azran did not give up, and began praying from the depth of his heart. He asked Hashem to help him in the *zechut* of Rabbi Chaim zt”l, and to make the car drive normally, as he was late to work... Suddenly, against all odds, the engine began to work again, as if nothing had happened! The company representative stood there, utterly shocked. He also merited witnessing a minute amount of the greatness of our tzaddikim, who are able to protect us even after their death.

We should know that the tzaddikim achieve great things on behalf of anyone who mentions their merits before Hashem. Miracles are wrought for Jew and gentile alike. As long as a person has simple faith

in the power of the tzaddik, he merits salvation, whether he belongs to the Chosen People, or is one of the Nations of the world.

The following is an example concerning a wealthy magnate, a gentile who owns a large import/export company of air conditioners. We rent air conditioners from him for the *hilula* of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, in Morocco. When the person in charge of arranging the air conditioning, Mr. Daniel Afriat, came to make a deposit, he was told, “I don’t need a deposit from you. I have full faith in the Jews.” After the event, Mr. Afriat met with the company manager for a private talk, and asked why he loves the Jews so much, trusting them with absolute faith?

The gentile explained, “I once found myself in the Moroccan city of Ouezanne. The resting place of the holy tzaddik, Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan, zt”l, is located there. My acquaintances told me that it is a very good idea to visit his grave. I went there and kissed his tombstone, believing with perfect simplicity that the power of the tzaddik can accomplish great things for those who come to his gravesite. The guard gave me a candle, which he requested that I light in a special place near the grave. He then gave me some of the oil from the lit candle, and instructed me to rub it onto my neck, which I did.

“The visit at the tzaddik’s gravesite made me feel elevated. When I left, together with my friends who had accompanied me, we continued on our journey. Suddenly, we came upon an old, dignified man, who had a long white beard, which flowed onto his clothing. He was standing at the crossroads, waiting for someone to give him a lift. I stopped the car and turned to him with a smile, inviting him to climb in and sit in the empty back seat. We continued riding, when something totally unexpected occurred. Thick, heavy smoke began billowing from the engine... I pulled over to the shoulder, completely shaken, ready to open the hood and check out the problem.

“Suddenly, I noticed another elderly man, dignified and impressive, with a long white beard, resembling a Heavenly angel. He stood at the

side of the road and waved at me and said, ‘Don’t worry. The car is fine. You just need to tighten the oil cap in the motor. That is what’s causing all the smoke. Close it well and continue on your way in peace.’ He had hardly finished speaking, when he disappeared just as quickly as he came... I was still shaken by this, when I realized that the old man in the back seat had disappeared as well... My friends and I were overcome with great fear. I quickly revved up the motor and fled the place, dumbstruck by the magnitude of the miracle we had witnessed.

“This is not the end of my story. After some time, I met with a Jewish woman, who presented me with an unusual, rare album. It contained a collection of pictures of the many tzaddikim who are buried in Morocco. As I turned the pages, one of the pictures brought back the incident of the miracle on the highway. It was a picture of a distinguished, old man, with a long white beard. It matched perfectly to the old man on the road who assisted me when my car began smoking on the trip in Morocco. A quick perusal of the caption under the picture made my heart pound and brought tears to my eyes. There, in black on white, it stated, ‘This is the picture of the tzaddik, Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan, zt”l’... Then I realized that this tzaddik, who had the power to help me, was sent from Heaven to aid us. He was the one who helped us on the road, in the merit of the emotional prayer which we prayed at his grave.

“The oil that I rubbed on my neck also stood me in good stead,” the manager continued. “When I stayed in Belgium, I was driving with my friends at a speed of 150 kilometers an hour, when suddenly an oncoming vehicle smashed into us. We were rushed to the hospital. Look what a miracle it was – all my friends sustained terrible injuries, including broken bones. They were all bandaged up. The medical team initially thought that I had sustained a fatal injury to the neck... exactly at the spot where I smeared the oil from the gravesite of the tzaddik. By an outright miracle, all of the examinations indicated that, thank G-d, nothing was wrong with me. Even the doctors were amazed at how

I survived such a horrific accident without injury. Since I merited experiencing the greatness of the Sages of the Jews, I have a special affinity for them. I know that they are the ones chosen by the Creator to be His special people.”

I also felt the great holiness of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan zt”l. When I was about twenty-nine years old, I visited his grave. At that time, I promised that if I were to find my match in the near future, in the merit of my prayers there, I would call my first-born son Amram, after this great tzaddik. Indeed, after a short time, I stood under the chuppah, and shortly thereafter, a son was born to me. During that time, two of my uncles had passed away: Rabbi Refael and Rabbi Meir Pinto, zt”l. I decided to call my son Refael Meir after these two giants. I also had in mind that he would be named after Rabbi Refael Hakohen and Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. The night before the *brit*, Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan appeared in a dream, sitting in the Beit Hakeneset of Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hakatan, zt”l, in Casablanca. I immediately woke up, understanding that there was a reason why he had appeared in my dream, specifically the night before the *brit*. It was because I had vowed to call my firstborn by his name. His beaming face continued to escort me throughout the *brit milah*. I saw it again just as the name was about to be called. Indeed, I added the name Amram to the child’s name, calling him Refael Meir Amram, may Hashem protect him.

On another occasion, one of my friends related the following. His elderly father once felt tremendous pains in his entire body. My friend called the doctor. They did comprehensive testing, and it was discovered that he had a terrible illness. His condition was so severe that it was decided to operate immediately. The date was set for Thursday morning. The preceding Wednesday, the son came to me with his father, requesting a blessing for a complete recovery in the merit of my holy fathers. I picked up a cup which had been lying on the table and filled it with water. I ordered the father to make a blessing and drink, thereby ensuring a complete recovery. The father,

embarrassed, stated that he had to fast in preparation for the operation he would undergo the next day.

I didn't consider his hesitation to be relevant. I had a strong feeling that my blessing would be accepted in the merit of my forefathers, especially when I noticed the great faith which I saw on their faces. Therefore, I requested once more that the father drink the water, adding, "Know that you are completely healthy. You have nothing to worry about at all." The next day, before performing the operation, the doctors decided to examine his condition one more time. Lo and behold! The tests showed that the man was completely healthy, with no sign of illness at all!

The professor who checked the results was greatly shaken and suggested that maybe the results had been mixed up and these belonged to someone else. He asked that the tests be redone. They showed the exact same results: perfect health. In this way, my words came true, with the help of Hashem. I had stated that the man was perfectly healthy. I know that this was not in my weak power, G-d forbid, but only in the merit of my great ancestors, tzaddikim whose *neshamot* rest in the Higher Spheres, close to the Throne of Glory. It was their prayers and righteousness that brought mercy upon the elderly man. Their *zechut* was able to save him from all harm, and the Creator sent him a complete recovery, in a most miraculous way. The merit of the deceased tzaddikim is able to bring salvation to a person, nullifying all decrees against him.

Mr. Shimon Cohen related an astonishing story, which happened to his father, Rabbi Yichya Hakohen, zt"l, in Morocco. Once, Mr. Cohen was travelling with his father to the grave of Rabbi David Ben Baruch, zt"l. On their way home, after heartfelt prayers at his gravesite, their car suddenly broke down. All their endeavors to restart it were in vain, and they became very frightened. The road was empty, and here they were, in the middle of the night, without any solution in sight. As is the

way of believing Jews, they offered up a prayer from the depths of their heart, begging for salvation in the merit of the tzaddik, Rabbi David Ben Baruch.

Before they had even finished praying, they suddenly saw an Arab on a motorcycle, with his tools in his hand. “At first, we were scared of him. But then he approached us with a pleasant look on his face, asking if we needed help. After we told him what had happened, he asked us to move away from the car, stating he would fix the problem. That is exactly what happened. With dexterity, and within a short time, he had the car working again. We waited on the side, ready to pay him for his work when he was done, or at least to thank him for the kindness he did for us in the middle of the night. How great was our surprise when we saw that he simply disappeared. Only our working car was able to remind us of the miracle that took place. There is no doubt that the Creator sent us an angel in the merit of Rabbi David Ben Baruch.” This was how Mr. Cohen ended his story.

Our family doctor, Dr. Bismuth, is also a good friend. He related that when he bought a new car, he took a quick trip around the block to test it. Suddenly, a car came toward him, and collided with him with tremendous impact. By a great miracle, his new car was totaled, but the doctor himself emerged without a scratch.

When he calmed down somewhat, he began praying in gratitude to the Creator for the miracle that had occurred to him. Yet, since his brand-new car that he hardly had a chance to use had been totaled, he was somewhat upset. He said, “Master of the universe! I just now returned from a *shiur* given by Rabbeinu David Chananya, grandson of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt”l. How could it be that specifically now, the car was damaged so severely?”

After he finished his prayer and arrived home, he felt much better. He knew that his prayer had been accepted, in the merit of Rabbi

Chaim Pinto. The next morning, he went to the parking spot where he had left his demolished car, in order to have it towed away. He looked all around, but the car was nowhere to be found! He immediately called his wife to help him, explaining the mystery. She, in turn, turned to her husband, astonished, and asked him to look in their driveway. There stood the new car, intact and shining. It had no signs of an accident, not even a scratch.

Dr. Bismuth nearly fainted from the magnitude of the miracle. He remembered the prayer he had uttered, from the bottom of his heart, only a few hours earlier. He realized that the miracle he had experienced was in the merit of his simple faith in tzaddikim. Of course, he retracted the charges against the other driver, because he no longer had any complaint against him.

This story was told to me by a prestigious, intelligent doctor, not someone who has delusions. The forms that he filled out in front of the other driver can prove, without any doubt, that a very serious accident did, indeed, take place. Here, one can ask: What took place during the night? An unbelievable miracle occurred. One thing is certain. Whoever believes in tzaddikim and asks for mercy from Hashem Yitbarach in their merit is guaranteed that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will hearken to his prayers and bring about a salvation from on High.

The essence of the festival of Sukkot is perfect faith in Hashem Yitbarach and His servants, the tzaddikim. That is why the sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith.” All who take refuge in the shadow of the sukkah are, in actuality, taking protection in the shadow of Hashem, strengthening their faith in the Creator of the world, in conjunction with the *ushpizin*, who connect the person to Hashem through their holiness and righteousness. Their entire lifetime was spent in faith in Hashem, *avodat hakodesh* in Torah and pure fear of Heaven.

May it be His will that we all merit to strengthen ourselves in faith in Hashem and His holy tzaddikim, who do His will. May the merit of my holy fathers, some of whose stories we merited to savor here, stand by all of us.

———— In Summary ————

- Why do the *ushpizin* visit us specifically on Sukkot, rather than on Pesach, the festival of our redemption? Why don't we have the command to sit in the sukkah in Nisan, when the miracle of the Clouds of Glory actually took place?
- The Haggadah emphasizes that the Exodus was brought about by Hashem alone, without any intermediary. This is to demonstrate His complete supremacy. We are totally and utterly dependent on Hashem Himself. This is also the reason why the name of Moshe Rabbeinu does not appear in the Haggadah at all. If we would sit in a sukkah on Pesach and be visited by the *ushpizin*, we might mistakenly think that they had some part in our salvation.
- The word סוכה (*sukkah*) is derived from the word כִּיסוּי (covering, protection). The sukkah protects us from prosecution. On Yom Kippur the Satan is unable to prosecute. Hashem “dresses us up,” disguising us like angels and “covering up” our sins. However, after Yom Kippur, the Satan renews his campaign against us. Hashem shields us from his accusations in the sukkah.
- We no longer have the holy *ushpizin* amongst us. However, in every generation there are tzaddikim who guide our path and in whose merit we witness salvation and miracles.

HALF FOR HASHEM AND HALF FOR YOU

*“Three times a year all your males shall appear
before the Lord Hashem, the G-d of Israel”*

(*Shemot 34:23*)

On Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot, we read parashat *Ki Tisa*, which relates the incident of the Golden Calf, as well as Moshe’s ascent to Heaven to supplicate on the nation’s behalf. Afterward, the Torah speaks about the three festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. What is the connection between these two subjects?

The festivals were given to us in order to bring us physical pleasure. Much of the day revolves around the meals, with emphasis on meat and wine, which gladden the heart. This poses a spiritual risk. A person might get so sunk in his wine that he forgets Hashem, *chalilah*. One must be extra vigilant on these days. We merit great spiritual illumination on the festivals, but we must know how to utilize them properly. Amidst the physical feasting, one must know how to consume spiritual sustenance, adding to his spiritual level with the pleasures of the festival. He should not allow himself to become defiled with gluttony, thereby missing out on the main aspect of the day. He should make time for Torah study, increasing his *yirat Shamayim*.

This is the reason for reading the portion recounting Bnei Yisrael’s sin with the Golden Calf. One should learn from this to guard himself against his own personal *avodah zarah*, not allowing himself to be drawn after it, *chalilah*. There are many forms of idol worship. Everyone has his own miniature Calf. One person is consumed by gastronomical greed. Another deifies the dollar, constantly chasing after it. Yet another is filled with lust. The Torah warns us to distance

ourselves from our own Golden Calf. This is especially important on the festivals, when one is enjoined to give pleasure to his body. We should not sink into the quagmire of physical pleasure, but always remember Hashem and His Torah.

This point is emphasized by the continuation of the parashah. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shemot* 34:1), “Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones.” The Gemara expounds (*Nedarim* 38a), “Hashem told Moshe, ‘The chips will be yours.’ Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, ‘Moshe became wealthy from the chips of the *luchot*.’” Immediately after Moshe was informed of this, the pasuk states (*ibid.* 34:4), “Moshe arose early in the morning and ascended Har Sinai.” Moshe did not become blinded by the brilliance of the precious stones which became his. He was not captivated by their glow. All of his desires were directed at ascending Har Sinai, in order to come closer to Hashem. Matters of this world could not compare with closeness to Hashem.

This is indicated by the pasuk (*ibid.* 19:14), “Moshe descended from the mountain to the people.” Rashi explains, “This teaches us that Moshe did not attend to his own business, rather, he went directly from the mountain to the people.” Moshe’s aspirations were to reach greater spiritual heights. He had no concern for money or physical pleasures.

This, then, is the reason for reading this parashah on Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot. When immersed in the physical pleasures of the festival, enjoying the meat and wine, as he is instructed, this parashah reminds one not to lose sight of the main point: the spiritual facet of the festival. He should appreciate the *kedushah* of the holiday, realizing that he can gain tremendous illumination on it. He should strive to come as close to Hashem as he possibly can, increasing his level of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

This is the path that Avraham Avinu walked. In spite of all his wealth, he did not take any interest in his riches whatsoever. On the other hand, Avraham was diligent and enthusiastic in pursuing mitzvot. He ran like a deer to do Hashem's will, as we read regarding *Akeidat Yitzchak* (*Bereishit* 22:3), "So Avraham woke up early in the morning." His gratification in life stemmed from spiritual pursuits. He took pleasure in serving Hashem with honesty and spreading His word throughout the world, as the Torah testifies (*ibid.* 12:5), "ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן – And the souls they made in Charan." Rashi explains, "They took them in under the wings of the Divine Presence. Avraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women." This was the extent of their pleasure in this world. This is hinted to in the words themselves. The *gematria* of the initials of the phrase *נפש עשו בחרן*, when adding one for the phrase itself, is equal to that of *ענג* (delight). Avraham and Sarah's delight was in bringing others closer to Torah.

The mitzvah of sukkah also teaches a person not to grant excessive importance to physical pursuits and not to chase after passing pleasures. For this reason, the Torah commands us to leave our well-appointed homes and enter the simple sukkah. The sukkah has limited physical comfort, but it is rich in spiritual splendor, housing the infinite light of the *Shechinah*. This should drive home the point that one must make do with the barest minimum in physical matters, and not spend his life chasing after them. His main interest should be to increase his Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. All of his concerns should revolve around matters of spirituality. He should strive to constantly be surrounded with *kedushah* and *taharah*, just as he is on Sukkot, enveloped in the embrace of the Shadow of Faith, the embrace of *emunah* and the holy *Shechinah*.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that entering the sukkah is the equivalent of going into exile and atones for those sins which warrant expulsion. If, on Yom Kippur, a person was decreed to die, *rachmana*

litzlan, his sentence can be exchanged for one of exile, which can take the form of leaving his home for his sukkah.

We could interpret this allegorically. Am Yisrael have experienced terrible torment in their years of exile. For nearly two thousand years of *galut*, we have suffered tremendously at the hands of the gentile nations, who constantly seek to annihilate us. Throughout the years, Jewish blood has flowed like water. On top of all this, we wage a steady battle with the *Yetzer Hara*, who consistently attempts to ensnare us in his trap and drag us into sin. From one day to the next, our trials and troubles multiply.

The halachah is that one who suffers from sitting in the sukkah is exempt from this mitzvah and may leave his sukkah to return home (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 640:4*). This symbolizes our situation in this world. We tell Hashem, “*Ribbono shel Olam!* We are suffering terribly in this exile. One who suffers is exempt from sitting in a sukkah, which alludes to exile. Please, Hashem, return us to our home. We have no strength left to bear the burden of *galut*. We have suffered more than enough. Build for us the Beit Hamikdash and bring us closer to You and Your Torah. Protect us under Your wing, Hashem.”

The mitzvah of sukkah is a kindness of Hashem, for it reminds us of our wanderings in the Wilderness, when we were actually in exile. That exile, though, was one in which we were accompanied by the glory of the *Shechinah*. But today the *galut* is gruesome. The *Shechinah*, too, is suffering with us. When a person sincerely prays to Hashem to bring an end to this exile, it certainly makes a tumult in Heaven and stands in our defense.

In this vein, we can understand the following account of the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah 3a*). In the future, when the gentiles observe the tremendous reward of Am Yisrael, they will approach Hashem with the claim that they, too, wish to receive the Torah. After much give-and-take, Hashem accedes to their request, telling them, “I have an

easy mitzvah, called *sukkah*. Go and perform this mitzvah, and I will grant you reward.” They all set out immediately to build a *sukkah*. Then Hashem causes the sun to blaze with the heat of mid-summer. Each of them then kicks his *sukkah* in disgust and abandons it. Hashem mocks them for this.

Why does Hashem test the nations specifically with the mitzvah of *sukkah*? Furthermore, if Hashem wants them to fulfill this mitzvah successfully, why does He intensify the heat of the sun in order to cause them discomfort? Since one who is uncomfortable is exempt from sitting in a *sukkah*, why are the gentiles mocked for leaving it in the heat of the day?

Let us take our analogy of the *sukkah* and *galut* to the next level. Hashem tells the nations of the world, “For what do you demand reward? In this world, you never suffered the pains of exile. In contrast, My beloved sons were constantly consigned to suffering and oppression. They were shackled and enslaved like prisoners. Nevertheless, they never forsook Me. On the contrary, they clung to Me and studied My Torah, observing My mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*. In this manner, they did My will and kept My commandments in spite of all their suffering. They fulfilled the verse (*Tehillim* 44:18), ‘All this came upon us, yet we have not forgotten You, and we have not been false to Your covenant.’” The main reason for the hatred of the gentiles is due to Bnei Yisrael’s strict adherence to the Torah and mitzvot.

“If you, too, desire reward,” Hashem continues telling the nations, “let us make a little test to see whether you, too, are loyal to the Torah even when the going gets rough.” He seats them in the *sukkah*, the symbol of exile, and tests them by making them uncomfortable in the blazing sun. He wishes to prove to all whether or not they can stand up to a small sample of the suffering of exile. But they suddenly stampede out of their *sukkah*, complaining that it’s too hot. Hashem sits on High and scorns them. “You couldn’t hold out for even a short

amount of time. You were uncomfortable and immediately made a mockery of Torah and mitzvot. See My beloved nation. They have suffered throughout the long years of *galut*, yet remained loyal in spite of their difficulties. They never abandoned Me nor disparaged My mitzvot. They clung to Me tenaciously and followed Me through fire and water. They are the ones deserving of tremendous reward, while you will get nothing at all.”

It is precisely after one purifies himself on Rosh Hashanah and receives atonement on Yom Kippur, cleansing his soul completely from all taint of sin that he merits sitting in the sukkah. Hashem invites him to enjoy the splendor of his *Shechinah* and absorb the spiritual illumination contained within this mitzvah. Regarding Rosh Hashanah, the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 81:4), “At the time appointed for our festive day.” The word בכסה (at the time appointed) is similar to the word מכוסה (concealed). On Rosh Hashanah, the light of Hashem is still concealed from him, since he has not yet been purified of his sins. He is not capable of seeing the *Shechinah* in its full glory. But after the Yamim Noraim, when he was cleansed of all impurities, he has the potential to see the light of Hashem in its full glory on Sukkot. All the divisions between us and Hashem fall away, and we are capable of experiencing the revelation of Hashem as it radiates from the sanctity of the sukkah.

The sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith.” It is incumbent upon a person to strengthen his faith, believing that Hashem’s glory shines upon him in the sukkah. This is in light of the revelation of the *Shechinah*, as well as the radiance of the *ushpizin* who join him there. Even if he does not see this physically, he is enjoined to believe it without hesitation. It is self-evident that when anyone is sitting in his sukkah, he feels a spiritual stirring within his *neshamah*. He is enveloped by the *Shechinah* and the light of the *ushpizin*. If one does not feel an added measure of spirituality in the sukkah, it is an indication that he may not have sufficiently purified himself from his

former sins, in spite of having gone through Yom Kippur. This is why he cannot feel the presence of the *Shechinah* and fails to feel added sanctity in the sukkah.

This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:40), “You shall take for yourselves on the first day.” The Midrash expounds (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra* 30), “The first day for the accounting of sins.” One who enters his sukkah and does not feel any special inspiration, failing to believe that the *ushpizin* are visiting with him, is committing a sin, *rachmana litzlan*.

The first step to feeling the light of Hashem’s *Shechinah* is to increase Torah study, for Torah brings a person closer to Hashem. An allusion to this can be found in the pasuk in *Iyov* (19:26), “מבשרי אחזה אלוה – I see G-d from my flesh.” The *gematria* of the initials of this phrase, מבשרי אלוה אחזה is equivalent to that of the word בם (in them). This refers to words of Torah, as the pasuk states ודברת בם (you shall speak in them). Only one who consumes spiritual sustenance, sating his soul with Hashem’s Torah, merits seeing Him. He will also merit revealing Torah novellae and uncovering pearls of wisdom.

One can literally produce Torah from his own being. Regarding Avraham Avinu, the Midrash states (*Bereishit Rabbah* 95) that his two kidneys emitted words of Torah. He saw G-d from his own flesh. When one sits in his sukkah, he should make every attempt to be engrossed in Torah, as well. He should not be involved only in eating and drinking. Exertion in Torah will award him the satiation of the brilliant light of the *Shechinah* and the splendor of the seven *ushpizin* who visit him.

The sukkah represents the Clouds of Glory that surrounded Bnei Yisrael when they left Egypt. Chazal tell us (*Ta’anit* 9a) that Bnei Yisrael merited the manna in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu and the Clouds of Glory in the merit of Aharon. The last letters of the words מן ענני כבוד (manna, Clouds of Glory) spell the word דין (judgment). The initial

letters of **מִן עֲנֵנֵי כְבוֹד** spell the word **עַמְךָ** (your nation). Moshe and Aharon, two of the seven *ushpizin*, have the power to nullify all forms of judgment against us. After that, Bnei Yisrael can tell Hashem, “We are Your nation and Your flock of sheep. We wish to be close to You and one with You.”

Moshe and Aharon represent the *sefirot* of **נְצַח** (*netzach*) and **הוֹד** (*hod*), the last letters of which have the *gematria* of twelve. Through sweetening the judgment of Bnei Yisrael, Moshe and Aharon cause the Twelve Tribes to become one unit, bonded with Hashem.

May it be Hashem’s will that we and our children should be illuminated by the spiritual light of these festivals throughout the year, so that we should continue ascending in the spiritual pursuits of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

————— In Summary —————

- What is the connection between the sin of the Golden Calf and the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot that are mentioned in the Torah reading of Chol Hamoed Sukkot?
- The festivals were given to us for our personal pleasure. We must be careful not to forget the purpose of these days; rather we should utilize them properly for spiritual elevation. Each person has his personal form of Golden Calf and is warned to avoid worshipping it.
- Even though Moshe became wealthy with the “chips of the *luchot*,” his primary concern was to reach greater spiritual heights. Similarly, Avraham and Sarah’s delight in life was to bring others closer to Torah.
- By sitting in a simple sukkah, we internalize the message that we should not grant undue importance to physical pursuits and passing pleasures. We should strive to be surrounded by *kedushah* and *taharah*, enveloped in the embrace of the Shadow of Faith.
- Moving out of our homes into the sukkah is a form of exile. According to halachah, if one suffers by sitting in the sukkah, he is exempt from the

mitzvah. We implore Hashem to bring an end to the exile that we endure at the hands of the nations, since we suffer too much from it.

- The gentiles will demand to receive the Torah at the End of Days. Hashem will give them the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah. When they are unable to do so because of the discomfort that they suffer, this will prove the dedication of Bnei Yisrael, who remain loyal to Hashem's Torah and mitzvot despite the suffering of the *galut*.
- On Sukkot, one is able to see the light of Hashem in its full glory. This is after the Yamim Noraim, when he has been cleansed of all sin and impurity. All the divisions between himself and Hashem are now removed, and he is capable of experiencing the revelation of Hashem as it radiates from the sanctity of the sukkah.
- The sukkah is called “the Shadow of Faith.” One must strengthen his faith through keeping this mitzvah. If one is unable to feel the extra *kedushah* in the sukkah, it may indicate that he has not sufficiently purified himself during the Yamim Noraim. In order to experience the light of the Shechinah, one should increase his Torah study.
- The sukkah represents the Clouds of Glory that surrounded Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness. The last letters of the words **מן ענני כבוד** (manna, Clouds of Glory) spell the word **דין** (judgment). And the initial letters of **מן ענני כבוד** spell the word **עמך** (your nation). Moshe and Aharon, two of the seven *ushpizin*, have the power to nullify all forms of judgment against us.
- Moshe and Aharon represent the *sefirot* of **נצח** (*netzach*) and **הוד** (*hod*), the last letters of which have the *gematria* of twelve. Through sweetening the judgment of Bnei Yisrael, Moshe and Aharon cause the Twelve Tribes to become one unit, bonded with Hashem.

HOSHANA RABBAH



THE KEDUSHAH OF HOSHANA RABBAH EVE

On the eve of Hoshana Rabbah we recite the *Hoshana* tefillot of the entire festival of Sukkot. Each day of the festival is extremely holy. This is attested to by the fact that the exalted *ushpizin* visit us every day. The level of *kedushah* becomes greater with each passing day of the festival, thus Hoshana Rabbah, the final day, is the peak of *kedushah*.

Yeshayahu Hanavi (12:3) proclaims, “You can draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.” This is the source for the *Simchat Beit Hasho’eivah* celebration, which was held in the Beit Hamikdash every day of Sukkot. Chazal (*Sukkah* 51a) state that whoever did not witness the *Simchat Beit Hasho’eivah*, did not witness true joy.

Every day, when we recite *Hoshanot*, we shake the *lulav*. This is in order to silence any prosecution. We mention the *zechut* of our holy *ushpizin*, so that their merit may protect us. The night of Hoshana Rabbah, though, is the most critical of the entire holiday. We repeat all of the *Hoshana* prayers then.

We find Hoshana Rabbah a day of paradox. On the one hand, we cry out for salvation (*Hoshana*) as though we are fearful of something. We beseech Hashem for mercy in the merit of our Avot. On the other hand, we experience the unparalleled joy of the *Simchat Beit Hasho’eivah*. Let us try to understand the connection between the fear and the joy.

Moreover, this day, the seventh day of the festival receives its own specific name, separate from the rest of the days of Sukkot. Why is this so?

There is a custom to remain awake the entire night of Hoshana Rabbah, as well as to perform certain *tikkunim* during the day (*Mishnah Berurah* 664:1:8). We pray and weep, just like on Yom Kippur. This is unique to Hoshana Rabbah; we do not do this on any other day of the festival.

Additionally, at times we find the name Hoshana Rabbah spelled with the letter 'ח at the end, and at other times, it ends with the letter 'ה.

Perhaps we can explain as follows. Chazal (*Sukkah* 51a; 53a) state that the light of the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah* fires would illuminate all of the courtyards of Yerushalayim. Rabban Gamliel would juggle eight torches of fire.

The *kelippah* is in control only at nighttime (*Zohar* II, 141a). Each day of the Sukkot festival, when *kedushah* would reign, Bnei Yisrael would fervently pray to Hashem in order to vanquish the *kelippah*, who rules at night. This was most appropriate on Sukkot, for the word סכת (*Sukkot*) is numerically equivalent to לילית (*Lilit*), a female force of impurity, may her name be obliterated.

The joy felt on Sukkot is the joy of being saved from the grasp of the *kelippah*. The light of *kedushah* reached even into the alleyways of the unlit houses. This is an allusion to the places where the *kelippah* would normally reside. They became infused with a supernal glow, the glow of *kedushah* which shines at night, and from which one can draw *ruach hakodesh* (*Yerushalmi, Sukkah* 5:1).

On Sukkot, we are fearful of the *kelippah* and implore Hashem to save us from its grasp, yet at the same time, we are joyous at its eradication. The *Ohr Hamakif*, which is present in the sukkah, enables us to pray

for this goal in the proper way, ensuring that our prayers will be accepted.

The Spiritual Peak of Hoshana Rabbah

Based on this, we can understand the essence of Hoshana Rabbah. Every day of Sukkot, the people would pray more, and become more sanctified. Thus, each day they were infused with greater joy and a greater level of *ruach hakodesh*. They would ultimately attain the level of *malchut*, which is portrayed by the last of the *ushpizin*, David Hamelech, the quintessential king.

David reached the height of *malchut*, the peak of perfection, through his *avodah* of singing songs of praise to Hashem at night instead of sleeping (*Berachot* 3b; *Yerushalmi*, *ibid.*). Likewise, on this night, we too banish sleep from our eyes, praying and weeping instead. Specifically on the eve of David's visit, we pray for the eradication of the *kelippah*, concentrating all the *Hoshana* prayers into the prayers of Hoshana Rabbah toward that end.

David Hamelech considered himself “a stranger” before Hashem. He nullified himself completely before Him. Even when Shimi ben Geira vehemently cursed him, he withheld punishment, instructing his son, Shlomo, to ensure that he would be punished after David died (*Melachim* I, 2:8-9). He was exceedingly humble, calling himself “a sojourner” in this world (see *Tehillim* 119:19). Therefore, on the night of Hoshana Rabbah, influenced by the *kedushah* of David Hamelech, we also state that we are merely sojourners and strangers before Hashem.

This is the reason for the different spellings of Hoshana Rabbah. The word רבא, ending with the letter א', is numerically equivalent to the word גר (sojourner), whereas the word רבה, ending with the letter ה', is numerically equivalent to the word זר (stranger). We remind Hashem that we are merely strangers and sojourners in this world. We beseech Him to speedily redeem us.

Let us expound on the *kedushah* of Hoshana Rabbah and its special qualities. I have seen it written in sefarim that the word לִיְתָן (leviathan) is numerically equivalent to the word מַלְכוּת (royalty). David Hamelech corresponds to the *sefirah* of *malchut*. This is expounded upon by the *Bnei Yissachar*.

Chazal (*Bava Batra* 75a) relate that in the future, Hashem will erect a sukkah from the skin of the leviathan. On the night of Hoshana Rabbah, we mention the coming of Mashiach, descendant of the House of David, who represents the perfection of *malchut*. Although it is already the last day of the holiday, we request that we may merit sitting in the sukkah of the leviathan.

We are forbidden to despair of salvation. We must attempt to awaken mercy in the *zechut* of David Hamelech. We will thereby merit redemption from this *galut*, and will no longer suffer as strangers and sojourners among the nations. We will speedily sit in the sukkah of the leviathan.

Sukkot is the time of our rejoicing. The word for “he will rejoice” is יִשְׂמַח, the letters of which can be transposed to spell מְשִׁיחַ (Mashiach). Therefore, on the holy night of Hoshana Rabbah, one still keeps the mitzvah of sitting in a sukkah, as well as reciting the tefillah of all the *Hoshana* prayers of the entire holiday. By these means, we nullify the *kelippah* and bring the world to its *tikkun* in the Kingship of Hashem.

There are those who have the custom to sound the shofar on Hoshana Rabbah (*Shelah* on *Sukkah*). This is in order to confuse the Satan eternally. We mention the name of David, alluding to the *geulah*. For, in the future, Hashem will prepare a feast for the seven shepherds of our nation and David will be the one to take the cup for the *berachah* (*Pesachim* 119b). (The numerical value of the word כּוּס (cup) is equal to that of the expression “גָּאוֹל יִגְאֹל – He will surely redeem,” adding two for the number of words.)

Hoshana Rabbah – Foundation for the Future Redemption

Hoshana Rabbah night is auspicious for the coming of Mashiach and the ultimate redemption, for it is the night attributed to David Hamelech. In the merit of the prayers of this night, we are able to eradicate idol worship not only from the courtyards, but from “the wilderness,” as well. To that end, we reside outdoors in our sukkot. This offsets the strength of the *kelippah*, which is found outdoors. Through this, we will merit sitting in the sukkah of the skin of the leviathan.

The initials of the phrase “בסוכות תשבו שבועת ימים – You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period” spells the name תשבי (Tishbi), alluding to Eliyahu Hanavi, who will herald the future redemption.

The Torah calls Sukkot: “The Festival of the Ingathering at the close of the year” (*Shemot* 23:16). Hashem, so to speak, “gathers” our sins, and disposes of them. This will be a festive day for us, and herald the *geulah*. And just as Shabbat is the seventh day, a day for resting from work, so too, is Hoshana Rabbah the seventh day, a day for resting from this *galut*, and arriving at the *geulah*.

Just as we celebrate Shabbat on the seventh day and become liberated from the work week, and just as a slave works for his master for six years and receives his liberation in the seventh year (*Shemittah*), so too, our nation has been exiled for six thousand years and will be redeemed in the seventh millennium (*Tikkunei Zohar, Zohar Chadash* 172b).

Specifically on Hoshana Rabbah, we raise our voices in supplication for salvation, more than on any other day of the holiday. There are several allusions to redemption in the name of the festival itself. The word הושענא refers to Hashem’s seventy-two letter Name (see *Tikkunei Zohar*, Introduction 10a). The *gematria katan* of הושע is twenty-one. The *gematria* of the word נא is fifty-one. Together, they add up to seventy-two.

We are asking Hashem to redeem Himself, so to speak. We beg Him to rescue Himself from the gentiles. The *gematria* of the word רבה is equal to that of זר (stranger). We tell Hashem that He is considered a stranger among the nations of the world; His place is with us.

We beseech Hashem to “please redeem us” – הושע-נע. The word נא (please) is numerically equal to אליהו (Eliyahu), adding one for the word itself. We beseech Hashem to bring Eliyahu, who will herald the arrival of Mashiach.

On Hoshana Rabbah eve, we read a portion of the Torah, for we will be redeemed in the merit of the Torah (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 2:6; *Tanchuma, Emor* 16). Immediately after Hoshana Rabbah, we celebrate Simchat Torah. This day is similar to the day that we received the Torah.

In the merit of Torah, the *geulah* will arrive, and the world will be rectified in acknowledging the Kingship of Hashem. The *kelippah* will finally be eradicated, and the banner of the House of David will be raised in redemption.

————— In Summary —————

- Each day of Sukkot possesses a greater level of *kedushah*. Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of the festival, possesses the most intense level of *kedushah*. The *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah* was for the purpose of drawing *ruach hakodesh* upon oneself. The Satan's Prosecution against us is halted. What is the reason for beseeching Hashem to redeem us – הושע-נא? It seems to contradict the joy of the festival. On Hoshana Rabbah, we remain awake all night, immersed in tefillah and tears. What is the purpose of this? Why do we find the phrase Hoshana Rabbah sometimes written with the letter א' and sometimes with ה'?
- The joy of the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eivah* was tremendous. All of the courtyards of Yerushalayim were lit up by the light of its fires. It is well-known that the *kelippah* rules at night, specifically the force of לילית

(Lilit), which is numerically equivalent to סוכת (Sukkot). On this auspicious day of *kedushah*, Bnei Yisrael prayed for the nullification of the *kelippah*. They were most joyous when this took place. This is the reason behind the supplications of Hoshana Rabbah eve. Some have the custom to remain awake all night, in order to combat the forces of the *kelippah*. Then, even the distant courtyards, which had previously been in the domain of the *kelippah*, will be illuminated by the light of *kedushah*.

- Hoshana Rabbah is the day of the *ushpizin* of David, the quintessential representation of majesty in this world. David himself remained awake all night long, praying to Hashem. He also considered himself a stranger and a sojourner in this world. We too, are like strangers. The word רבה ending with the letter ה' is numerically equivalent to the word זר (stranger), and the word רבא with an א' at the end is numerically equivalent to גר (sojourner). We beg Hashem to redeem us from this status, eradicating the *kelippah* and revealing His Majesty throughout the world.
- The word לויתן (leviathan) is numerically equivalent to the word מלכות (royalty). The essence of Hoshana Rabbah is *malchut*, depicted by David Hamelech. In the future, the tzaddikim will sit in a sukkah made of the skin of the leviathan. We pray that this *galut* should come to a speedy end, and that we merit sitting in this special sukkah, in the *zechut* of David Hamelech, the anointed one of Hashem. Sukkot is *zman simchateinu* (the time of our rejoicing). The word ישמח (he will rejoice) has the same letters as the word משיח (Mashiach). This *tikkun* will be achieved by David, the one who will take the cup of blessing in the future. The *gematria* of the word כוס (cup) is equal to that of the expression גאול יגאל (He will surely redeem), adding two for the number of words. Mashiach, scion of the House of David, will bring rectification to all areas, including the courtyards. This is alluded to by the fact that our sukkot are located in the courtyards, outside. For this salvation, we supplicate on Sukkot. The word הושענא רבה of נא, is numerically equivalent to אליהו (Eliyahu), adding one for the word itself. The *gematria katan* of הושע is twenty-one, and the *gematria* of נע is fifty-one. Added together they total seventy-two, hinting to the seventy-two letter Name of Hashem. We implore Hashem to rescue His Name, which is desecrated among the nations, and bring the Mashiach, who will be heralded by Eliyahu Hanavi.

- Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Sukkot, is similar to Shabbat, the seventh day of the week. It has the inherent quality to release us from *galut*, bringing the *geulah*. The ultimate salvation will come in the seventh millennium. We merit redemption mainly through the Torah; hence, we study Torah during the night of Hoshana Rabbah. Then we celebrate Simchat Torah, a day which is similar to *Kabbalat HaTorah*. In the *zechut* of Torah, the *geulah* will arrive and the *kelippah* will be eliminated. May Mashiach soon come to rescue us, speedily in our day.

THE EVE OF SEALING FOR BNEI YISRAEL

On Hoshana Rabbah, we increase our prayers, do special *tikkunim*, and sound the shofar (*Shelah* on *Sukkah*). We mention the merits of our Avot and Imahot. It is similar in sanctity to Yom Kippur, when our fate is sealed. On Hoshana Rabbah the decree is sent out. It is a day of teshuvah.

But wasn't our teshuvah of Yom Kippur sufficient? Why is it also necessary to repent on Hoshana Rabbah? Furthermore, why is the day that David Hamelech, the seventh *ushpizin*, visits us chosen as the day for teshuvah? (This was already clarified elsewhere, but I would like to add an explanation.)

Whenever a person sins, he creates a prosecuting angel (*Avot* 4:11; *Zohar* III, 17a). This angel is similar to the *Yetzer Hara* in that he persuades the person to continue sinning. This is the consequence that (*Avot* 4:2) "one sin leads to another."

On Hoshana Rabbah, the initials of which spell הָר (mountain), an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*, we are in need of great salvation in order

to eradicate our mountains of aveirot. But why were these mountains of sin not removed on Yom Kippur? Why were the prosecutors not eradicated on that day? Why do we need this extra day for teshuvah? Why wasn't man already completely sealed for a good life on Yom Kippur?

I would like to explain with a personal account regarding myself and the times I was witness to. Maybe this will be beneficial to those who read it during difficult situations.

During the Gulf War, in 1991, we witnessed how mighty enemies rose up against Bnei Yisrael, threatening our very existence. Our Torah leaders strengthened the hearts of the people. They encouraged us not to fear the chemical missiles. They explained that Am Yisrael has a more powerful weapon: the Torah. For thousands of years, Am Yisrael has employed this weapon against many enemies bent on destroying them. Through Hashem's great *chesed*, we exist till this day, for Torah is mightier than any ammunition in the world.

Moreover, we are discovering that many of the prophecies of the earlier prophets are being realized. Many statements of Chazal regarding the times of the *geulah* are coming true.

There is hardly anyone who doesn't mention the *geulah* and the coming of Mashiach. Specifically in light of the delicate security situation, we feel that Hashem desires to redeem His nation from the bitter darkness of exile.

But Mashiach cannot arrive when everyone is sitting placidly "under his grapevine and under his fig tree," eating and drinking and enjoying this world. If we are all satisfied and complacent in exile, whom should Mashiach redeem? If everyone feels liberated, who needs Mashiach to free him?

Therefore, Hashem orchestrates that one nation wages war with its neighbor, and Am Yisrael is in the thick of it. In the end, these nations

will make peace, uniting against us. The gentiles blame Bnei Yisrael as the source of all their problems (*Pesikta Rabbah* 36:2). Then, Bnei Yisrael cry out to Hashem for salvation, immersing themselves in Torah study, for Torah is our shield and protection (*Sotah* 21a). As a result of this awakening on our part, an awakening will be made on High (*Zohar* I, 86b; 88a). Mashiach will then arrive to rescue us.

This is exactly what we witness today. The world criticizes every act of the Jews. The nations would like nothing more than to swallow us alive. All of the terrible things that are taking place in the world mean nothing to them; they turn all their attention and hate toward the Jews.

They blame us for all the world's problems. We are responsible for the economic slump, the security setbacks, and the world's wars. They eventually unify in order to attack Am Yisrael. Every Jew feels this deep in his heart.

We find that there is a tremendous awakening, throughout the world, for the coming of Mashiach. Children, who are compared to prophets (see *Bava Batra* 12b), continually speak about Mashiach's arrival. This is a Divine prophecy, placed in their mouths, in order to bring about his arrival, in the near future, with Hashem's help.

The Torah leaders have enjoined Bnei Yisrael to prepare for Mashiach's arrival specifically on the Yamim Noraim and on Sukkot. They have intimated that a war will break out, and Bnei Yisrael will emerge victorious. That will be the harbinger of Mashiach's arrival. This is alluded to in *Shir Hashirim* (2:12), "The righteous blossoms are seen in the land, the time of your song has arrived."

We find many people who have heeded the call to teshuvah. The words of our Sages penetrated their hearts, and they returned to Hashem wholeheartedly. I personally know of people who didn't believe in Torah at all. However, when the Yamim Noraim arrived, they were awakened to teshuvah. Today, they are vigilant in all aspects of

halachah, displaying great *mesirut nefesh*. They believe completely in the coming of Mashiach. They see the words of the Prophets and the Sages coming to life. This has brought a spirit of awakening and elevation into the hearts of every Jew.

Man's Elevation on the Festival

It could very well be that the reason I personally feel a Divine spirit of sanctity and elevation on these holidays, more than on any other festival, is because there is an awakening from below, stirring an awakening from Above (*Zohar* I, 86b). I feel a distinct sense of elevation and a spiritual stirring of my soul, due to the awareness of Mashiach that permeates the air.

But at the culmination of the *chag*, I feel a slight descent, due to my sins. I begin to lose a measure of the influence from the *kedushah* of the festival. Why is this so? Where is all the light that I experienced throughout the festival? I could have drawn from that holiness throughout the coming year. Why am I missing it? I feel a tremendous pain at this loss. Where am I to turn at this time of pain and darkness?

Then I remember the words of Chazal (*Berachot* 5a): If a person experiences suffering, he should search his actions. If one suffers a regression in his *yirat Shamayim*, he should check out why this is so. If he fails to examine the matter, he is liable to fall even further.

Chazal teach (*Avot* 5:16), “Any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone; but if it does not depend on a specific cause, it will never cease. What did not depend upon a specific cause? The love of David and Yonatan.”

There are people who feel that they have sinned against Hashem, who repent with a broken heart. Through sincere teshuvah, they connect their souls to Hashem through love. They are prepared to undergo privation and even sacrifice their lives for the smallest

mitzvah. No matter how much they suffer, they are prepared to suffer even more. This proves their love of Hashem. They do not expect any remuneration for their suffering. They do it all out of love. This is a most exalted level of Avodat Hashem. It is unconditional love. This type of love will continue, preventing them from committing future sins and helping them maintain a deep relationship with Hashem.

Unfortunately, there are those who have no real understanding of Hashem, or of what teshuvah really is. Their sole motivation in doing teshuvah is that they hear that the Book of Life and the Book of Death are open before Him (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b). They are afraid of being sealed in the Book of Death. They do teshuvah out of fear. These people do not experience what it means to do true teshuvah, for they have never really connected with Hashem, and they never attain perfect love of Him.

This type of teshuvah may be effective, but it is not long-lasting. And even if these people kid themselves into believing that they return to Hashem out of love, it is conditional love. In truth, they return to Him from fear of the Day of Judgment. As soon as this day passes, their fear dissipates, and any love that they may have felt also disappears.

Naturally, after the festivals end, their resolutions do, as well. The cause (the fear of Judgment) is gone, therefore, the love is gone, and they return to their previous iniquities.

Conversely, those who do teshuvah out of pure love of Hashem, remain bound with Him even after the Yamim Noraim are over. They continue loving Him with every fiber of their being.

David Hamelech, the Secret of Wisdom

Now we can well understand why Hoshana Rabbah falls on the day of the *ushpizin* of David Hamelech. He epitomizes unconditional love of Hashem.

While we are still rejoicing during Sukkot, the time of our rejoicing, we call a halt and designate a day for tefillah and teshuvah. We are thereby demonstrating that our joy is a result of our unconditional love of Hashem.

Moreover, the fact that we halt our festivities and repent through joy and love of Hashem, which is not dependent on any outside factor, proves that our teshuvah on the Yamim Noraim was from unconditional love of Hashem, and not merely out of fear of the Day of Judgment. The days of judgment and fear have already passed. Although we are free of sin, we continue doing teshuvah.

We find people who descend from their exalted level at the conclusion of the Yamim Noraim. This is because they did teshuvah purely from fear. After the Yamim Noraim, they begin the cycle of sinning once again.

Maybe this is another facet of Hoshana Rabbah. We repent for all the mitzvot that we did conditionally, including teshuvah itself. Our teshuvah was merely to nullify the prosecution against us. For this reason, we repent once again on Hoshana Rabbah, out of pure, unconditional love.

One of Avraham Avinu's tests was to leave his land. He was told by Hashem to "go for yourself." The Zohar (I, 77b) quotes Rabbi Elazar, who explains that his departure was in order to improve himself and bring himself to a higher spiritual level. However, it is not enough to go from strength to strength, achieving greater heights in Avodat Hashem. One must also ensure that he does mitzvot for Hashem's sake alone, not for personal motives.

If a person is inclined to feel that he has perfected himself in any given area, he is sorely mistaken. In every level of service, there are thousands of levels. Perfecting a specific level requires a vast amount of exertion.

This is what is meant by Rabbi Shimon's exhortation that each person should use wisdom to combat the *Yetzer Hara* at every level he ascends to, ensuring that his Avodat Hashem is purely *l'shem Shamayim*.

May Hashem assist us to do each mitzvah for His sake, without ulterior motives. Then, we will feel illumination and elevation throughout the year, serving Hashem through joy and closeness.

————— In Summary —————

- On Hoshana Rabbah, we increase our prayers and make *tikkunim*. It is a day of teshuvah, like Yom Kippur. What is the reason for this? Wasn't our teshuvah on Yom Kippur adequate? Why do we need to do teshuvah again on Sukkot, the holiday of rejoicing? And why specifically on the day of the *ushpizin* of David Hamelech?
- Every sin a person does creates a prosecuting angel, which is like the *Yetzer Hara*, who is compared to a mountain, הָר. We nullify these sins through doing teshuvah on Hoshana Rabbah, the initials of which spell הָר. But why weren't these prosecutors eliminated on Yom Kippur?
- There are many incidents taking place nowadays in the Persian Gulf. Neighboring countries are at war. Yet they are united in their efforts to eradicate Israel with their missiles. But we have greater ammunition. This is the Torah, which protects us from all fear. All of the prophecies of the Torah are coming true. The stage is set for Mashiach's arrival. But he cannot arrive if people feel complacent, not lacking a thing, and do not await his arrival. Therefore, Hashem gives us reason to do teshuvah and await the coming of Mashiach. Then, the redemption will come. We are witnessing an awakening to teshuvah and great anticipation of Mashiach, in the face of our enemies' uprisings against us.
- Those who return to Hashem out of pure love, with no ulterior motives, will maintain this love. But those who do teshuvah based on an insincere motivation will find that as soon as that motivation disappears, their impetus to return to Hashem and connect to Him ceases also.

- I felt a distinct lessening in my spiritual level after the festivals, for my love of Hashem was conditional on my anticipation of Mashiach. One is exhorted to return to Hashem wholeheartedly, without any ulterior motives.
- This is why we do teshuvah on Hoshana Rabbah. While in the midst of the festivities of the time of our rejoicing, we return to Hashem through unconditional love. We do this specifically on the day designated for David, for he portrayed unconditional love of Hashem. This is to teach us to awaken ourselves without ulterior motives, and to constantly anticipate Mashiach's arrival, without letup. We should not despair of his arrival.
- One must constantly work on his level of Avodat Hashem. He must correct his *middot* without personal motives, so that nothing remains deficient. When one strives to serve Hashem *l'shem Shamayim* in every area of his Avodat Hashem, he will feel illumination and elevation throughout the year.

TESHUYAH FROM FEAR AND TESHUYAH FROM LOVE

The “notes” regarding what has been decreed upon us for the upcoming year are delivered on Hoshana Rabbah. We therefore bless one another for a “*Pitka tava*,” meaning a good message on one’s “note.” We try to arouse Heavenly mercy on Hoshana Rabbah eve, in order to be sealed for a good, peaceful life and a year of blessing.

What is the significance of Hoshana Rabbah? The essence of the day is judgment, since the verdict sealed on Yom Kippur is sent out on Hoshana Rabbah; we even recall the merit of our forefathers on our behalf, just as on Yom Kippur. Isn’t it enough that we have Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as days of judgment?

Moreover, it is appropriate to do teshuvah on Yom Kippur, when we fast and afflict ourselves, but why do we need to do teshuvah on Hoshana Rabbah, which is part of Sukkot, the time of our rejoicing?

Also, why is Hoshana Rabbah precisely on the seventh day of Sukkot, the day before Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret? And why does Sukkot immediately follow Yom Kippur?

There are two types of teshuvah: teshuvah from love, and teshuvah from fear (*Yoma* 86b). It is preferable to do teshuvah out of love of Hashem.

When one does teshuvah from fear, he repents because of the various troubles with which he is faced. He reckons that if he does not repent, they will only get worse. He is afraid of this, so he repents.

Conversely, when one returns to Hashem purely out of love, he has no ulterior motive. He returns simply because he loves Hashem. He does not need pain and hardship to bring him back. This is considered a great merit for him, and Hashem shows him special favor.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we sound the shofar. The shofar instills fear and trepidation in our hearts. In response, we return to Hashem from fear, for we are afraid for our fate if we do not repent. The *Navi* (*Amos* 3:6) proclaims, "Is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people do not tremble?" But Hashem does not want His people to repent merely from fear of Him. He desires that they return to Him out of love, in order that they should continue to serve Him out of love during the forthcoming year.

Hashem wants us to be like the son who does his father's will out of affection for him and the desire to please him, not like the son who obeys his father because he is afraid of retribution.

This is the reason that Sukkot follows Yom Kippur. Sukkot is a holiday of rejoicing, when we take the four species with gladness of heart. It inculcates within us the desire to serve Hashem with love and joy. Sukkot is the template of doing teshuvah out of love.

The Four Species

The four species point to this love. The numerical equivalent of the word אֶתְרוֹג (*etrog*), plus three for the remaining species, is 613, alluding to the 613 mitzvot. After Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment, a person accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot by his act of taking the four species, which allude to the Written Law.

The word הֶדְס (myrtle branch) is numerically equivalent to the word סֹד (secret), after adding one for the word itself. This refers to the Oral Law, which contains more hidden facets than its written counterpart. The word עֵרְבָה (willow branch) hints that one should be עֵרֵב (pleasant/responsible) toward his fellow man. All Bnei Yisrael are responsible for one another (*Sanhedrin 27; Shavuot 39a*). One may not be envious or hateful of his fellow Jew. On the contrary, we are enjoined to love one another, and help each other out in any way we can (even rebuking when necessary).

The לולב (palm branch) alludes to the two sections of man's heart (לב). Man is commanded to serve Hashem with both his inclinations, as the pasuk (*Devarim 6:5*) states, "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart." The Gemara (*Berachot 54a*) explains that בכל לבבך is written in the plural form, literally meaning "With both of your hearts," to indicate that we should serve Hashem "with both of your inclinations." This hints to teshuvah done both through fear and through love.

The main aspect of our Avodat Hashem is the service of the heart. For that reason, we make the blessing of the four species specifically on the *lulav*, which portrays the two inclinations with which we serve Hashem. We subjugate ourselves to Hashem with all our heart. By dedicating ourselves to Hashem, it is as if He acquires us. In order to finalize the transaction, we take the *lulav*, since all acquisitions are made by taking possession of an item. We thereby become the subjects of Hashem.

As we previously mentioned, the festival of Sukkot inculcates within us the commitment to serve Hashem with love and joy. By taking the four species, we agree to the following four things: To learn the Written Law (alluded to by the *etrog*), and the Oral Law (alluded to by the *hadas*), to be pleasant to our fellow Jews (alluded to by the *aravah*), and to subject both our inclinations to Hashem (alluded to by the *lulav*). The fact that we make the blessing on the *lulav* indicates that we should serve Hashem wholeheartedly and do teshuvah through both fear and love.

Hoshana Rabbah incorporates both aspects of fear and love into the holiday of Sukkot. It is a unique day of eating, rejoicing, learning Torah, and doing teshuvah out of love. But it also contains the element of affliction, like Yom Kippur, since we remain awake all night long. Thus, the mitzvot of the day have both elements of fear and love, and enable a person to do complete teshuvah.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur one does teshuvah out of fear; on Sukkot one does teshuvah out of love; Hoshana Rabbah is an amalgamation of both types of teshuvah.

Avodat Hashem out of Love

Simchat Torah immediately follows Hoshana Rabbah. This is in order that we should be able to put into practice the ideas mentioned above, to which we have committed ourselves on Hoshana Rabbah.

Particularly, we have committed ourselves to the Torah, which is the essence of Simchat Torah. The name of the festival is *Atzeret* (lingering). Rashi (*Shmuel* I, 21:8) explains that when Doeg “lingered (ניעצר) before Hashem” it means that he engrossed himself in Torah study. The entire Creation came into being in the merit of the Torah, which ensures its continued existence (*Pesachim* 68b; *Nedarim* 32a; *Zohar* II, 161b).

One who serves Hashem out of love is guaranteed not to sin. This is possible through the power of Torah. Hashem does not desire that we serve Him merely from fear of the Day of Judgment, for this can lead to depression, *chas v'shalom*, and bring ruination to the worlds on High. Rather, Hashem desires that we should serve Him out of love and joy. The Torah (*Devarim* 28:47) ascribes the retribution that Bnei Yisrael have suffered to their lack of doing so: "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart." The primary motivating factors in Avodat Hashem should be joy and love. This is how we will arrive in the World to Come clean and pure (see *Rabbeinu Bachya, Bamidbar* 8:2).

Immediately after Yom Kippur, we commence building the sukkah joyfully (*Rema, Shulchan Aruch* 624:5; 625:1). We purchase the four species and decorate our sukkah, all a display of our love for Hashem (*Shabbat* 133a).

At the close of Yom Kippur, a person feels awe of Hashem. Therefore, He gave us a holiday in which we can become elevated through joy, love, and fear. This will enable us to perfect our souls through doing mitzvot out of love and joy. When we take the *lulav*, we are accepting this *avodah* upon ourselves, since when one takes an oath, he takes an object of *kedushah* in his hand.

Based on this, we can understand the ceremony of the *nisuch hamayim* on Sukkot (*Ta'anit* 3a; *Sukkah* 48a). Why is this done only on Sukkot, and not on any other holiday? Sukkot is unique in that it is a synthesizing of teshuvah from fear and teshuvah from love. When a person brought a sacrifice, he would do teshuvah out of fear, realizing that the animal was a substitute for himself, (see *Ramban on Vayikra* 1:9). Water is a metaphor for Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a), which gladdens a man's heart (see *Tehillim* 19:9). This represents doing teshuvah out of love, as Chazal (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7) state, "The light of Torah brings a person back."

Thus, the pouring of the water over the Altar in the ceremony of the *nisuch hamayim* combines both aspects of teshuvah: the Altar represents teshuvah from fear, and the water represents teshuvah from love. The water is a symbol of man's desire to fulfill the commitment that he made on Sukkot to involve himself in Torah study and return to Hashem through true love. This will grant him a good, blessed year.

————— In Summary —————

- Hoshana Rabbah is the Day of Judgment, when our “notes” are signed and our fate is sealed for the upcoming year. This is why we supplicate Hashem for mercy on this day. Why aren't the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur enough for praying for a merciful verdict? Why does Hoshana Rabbah fall specifically during the festival of Sukkot, since it has the elements of affliction inherent in Yom Kippur? Why does Hoshana Rabbah immediately precede Simchat Torah? Hashem could have sealed us in the Book of Life on Yom Kippur. Why does Sukkot follow Yom Kippur?
- It is preferable to do teshuvah out of love than teshuvah out of fear. One who truly loves Hashem returns to him without the threat of suffering hovering over him. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur one does teshuvah out of fear of judgment. But Hashem desires that we repent out of love as well. Therefore, He added Sukkot to these holidays. Sukkot is the time of rejoicing, when we do teshuvah out of love.
- This is also the reason why we take the four species on Sukkot. The *etrog* hints to the Written Law; the *hadas* hints to the Oral Law; the *aravah* hints that one should act responsibly and in a pleasant manner toward one's fellow man; and the *lulav* hints that one should serve Hashem with both inclinations. We take these items to represent taking an oath that we truly wish to serve Hashem with love.
- Hoshana Rabbah combines both teshuvah out of fear and teshuvah out of love. It is a joyous holiday, but contains an aspect of affliction, since we do not sleep on this night. Simchat Torah follows Hoshana Rabbah, for then we can fulfill our promise to involve ourselves in Torah. Torah is paramount.

Teshuvah out of fear is insufficient, for it can damage the Upper Worlds. We must serve Hashem out of love, as well. We must serve Him with both inclinations, thereby becoming complete in our Avodat Hashem. For this reason, we build the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur. This awakens joy and love in our hearts, and helps us perfect our *neshamah*. This is the idea of the ceremony of *nisuch hamayim* on Sukkot. The Altar and the *korban* allude to fear. Water is Torah, depicting teshuvah out of love. We merge the two components of love and fear, thus coming close to Hashem in the most complete way.

A DAY OF KEDUSHAH, PROTECTED FROM PROSECUTION

The day of Hoshana Rabbah is eminently great. Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, Yom Kippur is the day of signing the verdict, and Hoshana Rabbah is the day when the emissaries are dispatched with the notes containing this verdict, in order to implement it (*Zohar* III, 31b). For that reason, we wish one another, “*Pitka tava*” (a good note).

Through doing complete teshuvah and perfecting the damage of the past, one can transform his verdict for the good on Hoshana Rabbah.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we cannot really be sure that we did perfect teshuvah. Maybe it was all due to our fear of judgment. This would render our teshuvah deficient.

But, after experiencing the joyful days of Sukkot, we have become strengthened in our *emunah* by sitting in the sukkah, the Shadow of Faith (*Zohar* III, 103a). We shake the four species, shaking off all traces of sin and impurity. We are given a second chance to do teshuvah correctly.

Therefore, on Hoshana Rabbah, we walk around the *bimah* with a Sefer Torah, and we blow the shofar. We recite a few of the *Selichot*

prayers. We perform a type of flagellation, as a form of atonement. We engage in Torah study all night long.

This is a tremendous *tikkun* for the eyes, which did not spend enough time looking into the Torah. They were too involved in gazing at the forbidden. This brought devastation to the body, warranting death and *karet*. The eyes are the agents of sin (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:8; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:6). In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, the worst types of sin would earn a person the four punishments of Beit Din.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* cite that on Hoshana Rabbah we can rectify all forms of sin caused by feasting and revelry which were not *l'shem Shamayim* and were not connected to the joy of doing a mitzvah.

There are many examples of tzaddikim who would remain awake with their disciples all through the night and day of Hoshana Rabbah, engaged in Torah study until the onset of Shemini Atzeret. They pierced the Heavens through the prayers that emanated from their broken hearts. Who could observe them crying and not cry along with them? This day is auspicious for effecting important *tikkunim*.

A Day of Judgment for All of Creation

Now that we have described the virtues of the holy day of Hoshana Rabbah, I would like to pose a few questions.

If Hoshana Rabbah is so awesome, comparable to Yom Kippur, why is its *kedushah* not mentioned in the Torah? It is not specified as a unique day. It is only Chazal who point out the virtues of the day.

We find that on Pesach, both the first day and the seventh day are mentioned as “holy days to desist from labor” (*Vayikra* 23:6-8). In contrast, on Sukkot, we have the injunction to keep only the first and eighth days as holy and desist from work (*ibid.* 34-36), but the seventh

day is not mentioned at all. In light of the fact that this day, Hoshana Rabbah, possesses the holiness of Yom Kippur, this is most puzzling.

Perhaps we can resolve this matter with the following idea. Just as Hoshana Rabbah is not mentioned in the Torah, so too, the name “Rosh Hashanah” is not mentioned at all. Rosh Hashanah possesses tremendous *kedushah*, for this is when all creatures pass before Hashem like sheep (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a), and everyone is judged for life or death.

However, the Torah does not mention that one should fear this judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Nor does it mention that we should sound the shofar and recite *Selichot* in the month of Elul. It merely states (*Bamidbar* 10:10), “On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals... you shall sound the trumpets.” Tehillim likewise states (98:6), “With trumpets and shofar sound, call out before the King, Hashem.”

Chazal (*Sukkah* 45a) tell us that the people would bring *aravot* to the Altar and sound the shofar. Hallel was recited with joy for eight days (*Ibid.* 48). We see from here that the shofar must be blown with joy.

It is difficult to understand the paradox of the shofar. On the one hand, it instills fear in one’s heart. The shofar calls out, “Awaken, you slumberers from your sleep” (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:4). This is the call to teshuvah. On the other hand, we find that the shofar is sounded at a time of joy and that it does not mitigate one’s joy. How can this contradiction be resolved?

Out of Hashem’s great mercy and compassion, on Rosh Hashanah, He displays satisfaction and joy in order to allow Bnei Yisrael to emerge meritorious in judgment, and to prevent prosecution against them.

This can be compared to an accused man being led to the courthouse, flanked by policemen and security guards. He is not

dressed in prisoner's garb but in a tailored suit, accompanied by high-ranking officers and a band of musicians. Even the judge grants him honor, by arising at his entry and cheering for him, displaying his affection for him. When the prosecuting attorney witnesses this scene, he flees. He is simply unable to accuse the defendant, for he sees that everyone favors him. Furthermore, he knows that if he would try to prosecute, he is liable to get himself into trouble. Therefore, he leaves the room, and the defendant emerges innocent.

Likewise, when Bnei Yisrael dress in their finest clothes on Rosh Hashanah, it proves that they have nothing to fear from the judgment, since they have done complete teshuvah. The tzaddikim arrive and advocate on their behalf. This silences the prosecutors.

This is referred to in Tehillim (81:2-4), "Call out to the G-d of Yaakov. Raise up a song and sound the drum... Blow the shofar at the month's renewal." On the one hand, we are instructed to joyfully "raise up a song," yet, on the other hand, we are told to sound the shofar, the symbol of fear. Rosh Hashanah is truly a day of justice and fear, but it is concealed from the Satan, so that he should not prosecute against us. We further confuse the Satan by alternatively sitting and standing when the shofar is blown. Hashem desires that we should emerge righteous in judgment. He therefore shows us a pleasant expression on this day.

The purpose of the shofar is twofold. First, it increases our joy, enabling us to emerge innocent in judgment. Second, it frightens us into doing teshuvah, allowing us to become white as snow. But this only takes effect if the Satan is not in the courthouse. For, were he there, he would prosecute against us continuously, for even the smallest sin. How would we ever be able to emerge intact?

We must bear in mind that the level of satisfaction which a person gives Hashem is dependent upon his level of teshuvah. Each person must do teshuvah according to his ability. Hashem judges us alone,

without the Satan being present. Out of Hashem's compassion for us, He hides the Day of Judgment from the Satan.

Chazal tell us (*Rosh Hashanah* 8b) that the tzaddikim are the first to appear before Hashem in judgment. This is in order that they should defend Am Yisrael. In their merit, Hashem judges each individual in a positive light.

This is alluded to by the singular form used in the Priestly Blessings: "May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you." Each individual is important to Hashem. Rosh Hashanah contains elements of both joy and fear intermingled. However, Hashem illuminates His countenance upon each and every person, and vindicates him in judgment.

Hoshana Rabbah, Hidden from the Yetzer Hara

Now we might understand why Hoshana Rabbah is considered a day of Chol Hamoed, and is not sanctified like the first or the eighth day of the festival of Sukkot. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the days when one's fate for the upcoming year are inscribed and sealed, are concealed from the Satan, so that he is unable to prosecute on them. In this manner, we are granted a year of blessing (*Yoma* 20a).

But Hoshana Rabbah, the day when the notes are delivered to those who will carry out the decree written in them, is hidden from the Satan in a different way. Were he to be aware of the awesomeness of the day, he would attempt to prevent the delivery of the notes. Therefore, Hashem hid this day from him, as well. Since Hoshana Rabbah is not given the status of a holiday, like the first and last days of Sukkot, the Satan does not realize the intrinsic worth of the day and does not prosecute Bnei Yisrael on it. Thus, Bnei Yisrael merit a positive verdict.

Based on this, we can appreciate the greatness of the day, and why it is included in the holiday of Sukkot. Let us explain with a parable. A

king arrives at one of his provinces. All of the townspeople immediately behave most graciously toward him. They settle their debts and dress in their finest clothes to greet their king, displaying their utmost love and devotion. No one dares prosecute them, for they are on their best behavior. When the time comes for the king to leave, all the townspeople escort him. They want to ensure that he is pleased, for then he will be satisfied with them. Then an envoy approaches the king, requesting that he remain another day. If he were to agree to this, how great would be the joy of the townsfolk!

Likewise, on Rosh Hashanah, Bnei Yisrael start the process of teshuvah, settling all their debts and becoming free of their sins. If they conduct themselves appropriately throughout the festival period, utilizing the festivals for teshuvah and coming close to Hashem, He will agree to remain with them for another day at the end of the holidays. How great is their joy then! They display this joy by dancing with Hashem's Torah on Simchat Torah.

Thus, Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Sukkot and the conclusion of the holidays, is a joyful day, since we receive the happy news that Hashem agrees to remain with us another day. Although it is like an ordinary day of Chol Hamoed, its *kedushah* is tremendous. This is because it is the day of ultimate appeasement, when Hashem informs us that He wishes to remain with us another day, since it is difficult for Him to part with us (see *Sukkah* 55a)

Hoshana Rabbah is concealed from the Satan, so that he should not prosecute us. For that reason, its greatness is not mentioned in the Torah.

After Hoshana Rabbah, we rejoice on Simchat Torah. If we resolve to always involve ourselves in Torah and mitzvot, we will receive abundance of blessing throughout the coming year.

————— In Summary —————

- Hoshana Rabbah is the day of the delivery of the notes containing the fate of each and every person. We have an additional chance to return in complete teshuvah before Hashem on this day. Furthermore, Hoshana Rabbah has the potential to rectify any deficiencies in the physical as well as the spiritual realms. Therefore, tzaddikim would pray tearfully throughout the day and night to merit a good year for themselves and their disciples.
- Why isn't the sanctity of the day mentioned in the Torah, as we find with the seventh day of Pesach? Also, why is Hoshana Rabbah part of Sukkot? Why is it the seventh day?
- Rosh Hashanah is not mentioned in the Torah as a day of fear and judgment. The Torah merely commands us to blow the shofar on our days of rejoicing, such as on Sukkot. Isn't the shofar the symbol of fear, not of joy?
- Rosh Hashanah combines elements of both fear and joy. Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, but Hashem hides this from the Satan, and instead shows that he is pleased with us so that we may emerge innocent in judgment. The tzaddikim are the first to be judged, in order that they advocate for the nation. The Satan is powerless at that time.
- Hoshana Rabbah is not specified as a holy day in the Torah, in order that the Satan should be unaware of its inherent powers and not prosecute Bnei Yisrael. In this manner, we emerge innocent in judgment at the conclusion of Sukkot.

THE DAY OF DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL

Hoshana Rabbah is the day of when David Hamelech leads the *ushpizin* (*Zohar* I, 261a). There are several explanations for this; let us examine one of them.

We previously explained that Hoshana Rabbah is a day hidden from the Satan, so that he is unable to prosecute against Am Yisrael. That is why it is not mentioned in the Torah. Similarly, David Hamelech's

lineage is also shrouded in mystery, from its beginning to its end.

Tamar, the mother of the Davidic dynasty, upon hearing of Yehudah's pilgrimage to Timna to shear his sheep, "covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself up; she then sat by the crossroads" (*Bereishit* 38:14). The entire matter was concealed. "When Yehudah saw her, he thought that she was a harlot since she had covered her face. So he detoured to her by the road" (*ibid.* vs. 15-16). Chazal explain (*Bereishit Rabbah* 85:8) that Yehudah wished to bypass her. But an angel appeared before him, saying, "Yehudah, where are you going? Kings and great men are destined to emerge from you." Against his will, he turned toward her. This is also difficult to understand.

Afterward, a Heavenly Voice proclaimed, "The entire matter came from me" (*Sotah* 10b; *Makkot* 23b). Tamar acted modestly in Yehudah's house, concealing herself from the outside world. This merited her founding the Davidic dynasty. The entire chain of events came about thanks to the modesty of Yehudah and Tamar and the hidden manner in which things took place.

Similarly, later in history, the incident of Boaz and Rut, from whom David descended, was also enveloped in secrecy. It occurred in the nighttime, under most obscure circumstances. Even the ruling of Chazal (*Yevamot* 69a; *Rut Rabbah* 4:8) that a male Ammonite and Moabite, but not a female, are forbidden from joining the Jewish nation, is also difficult and beyond our understanding.

The emergence of David, the future king, was hidden. The Midrash (*Yalkut Hamikiri, Tehillim* 119:28) states that he was born with a ruddy complexion. His brothers suspected him of being illegitimate. The matter remained a mystery for twenty-eight years, until Shmuel Hanavi specifically chose David to be anointed as king, the ruddy youth, youngest of all the sons. When David lifted the cup of salvation, all rejoiced.

His father, Yishai, did not confer importance upon him, and his

brothers shamed him. When Shmuel came to anoint him as king, all of the sons except for David appeared before him. Upon learning that they were not the chosen of Hashem, Shmuel turned to Yishai, asking if he had another son. Yishai answered in the affirmative. David was brought in from among the sheep. Even in the fields, he isolated himself with Hashem, hidden from humanity.

When Shmuel anointed David as king, everyone realized that David was the chosen one (*Shmuel I*, 16:12). It was precisely because he was concealed that he was awarded this honor. Already in his mother's womb, he sang songs of praise to Hashem (*Berachot* 10a). He thereby merited that his son, Shlomo, would be the one to build the Beit Hamikdash.

Shlomo Hamelech - Hidden from All

The life of Shlomo Hamelech is also shrouded in mystery. He was born from Batsheva. This appeared to be a sin, since she had previously been married. David himself begged for forgiveness for this sin, and obtained it (*Shabbat* 30a). But he was informed that the consequence of his action would appear in the days of Shlomo, his son.

Indeed, after Shlomo completed building the Beit Hamikdash, he wished to place the Aron in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, but the gates remained sealed (*Shabbat*, *ibid.*). Only when he mentioned the merit of his father, David, did they open before him (*Divrei Hayamim II*, 6:42).

The entire lineage of David Hamelech, beginning with Yehudah and Tamar, continuing with Boaz and Rut, and even his connection with Batsheva, is obscure. This was all in order that the Satan would not interfere. Had he known what lofty *neshamot* were joining Am Yisrael, he would have attempted to prevent this. Chazal state that Mashiach will arrive when we are distracted with other issues. This is also in order that the Satan should not get involved, claiming that we are unworthy.

Therefore, Hoshana Rabbah, a day which is hidden from the eyes of the Satan, is most fitting to be the day of the *ushpizin* of David Hamelech, the forebear of Mashiach, who will arrive in a concealed manner.

Rabbi Simchah Bunim MiPeshischa, zy"ta, states that Shemini Atzeret is the day of the *ushpizin* of Shlomo Hamelech. This is most understandable. After Hoshana Rabbah, the day of David Hamelech, his son, Shlomo, will head the holy guests.

The concealed nature of these events, and the fact that Hoshana Rabbah is not mentioned in the Torah, is all in order to remove all prosecution against us. In this manner, we will merit a sweet new year, with blessing throughout.

————— In Summary —————

- The hidden nature of Hoshana Rabbah is connected to the hidden emergence of David Hamelech as king and forebear of Mashiach. It is thus appropriate that it is the day of his *ushpizin*. It is a day hidden from the Satan, so that he should not be able to prosecute. The entire lineage of David Hamelech is likewise obscure. We cannot understand the incident with Yehudah and Tamar, which was hidden. The episode with Boaz and Rut was also concealed. David's birth was shrouded in mystery. His brothers despised him, and the truth of his purity remained hidden for twenty-eight years. The legitimacy of Shlomo was also beyond understanding. Everyone regarded David's relationship with Batsheva as a sin.
- These events were eventually understood as ploys against the Satan, so that he would be unable to prosecute the emergence of such holy *neshamot* in Am Yisrael. It was all hidden, just as the day Hoshana Rabbah is hidden from the Satan.
- Shemini Atzeret is the day of the *ushpizin* of Shlomo Hamelech. This is in order to nullify the *kelippah*, so that it should not be able to prosecute. May we merit goodness all our days!

SHEMINI ATZERET – SIMCHAT TORAH



VANQUISHING THE YETZER HARA THROUGH REJOICING WITH THE TORAH

All Jews rejoice on Simchat Torah. On this day, one can extract his inner joy from potential to action. Everyone, from the *talmidei chachamim* to the simple people partake of this joy with unbounded exuberance.

This joy arouses *ahavat Torah* and *yirat Shamayim*. Each person, according to his level, is motivated to increase his Torah learning from this day onward.

Simchat Torah is called *Shemini Atzeret* in the Torah, for it is the eighth day of Sukkot. What is its connection to the rest of the holiday of Sukkot?

Furthermore, Shemini Atzeret is still part of *zman simchateinu* (the time of our rejoicing), just as the previous days of Sukkot. Why do we rejoice with the Torah on this day, and not on Shavuot, the day when the Torah was given?

The *gematria* of חג עצרת (Chag Atzeret – the festival of Atzeret) is equal to that of עץ תורה (the tree of Torah). One is enjoined to climb the tree of Torah with effort and exertion, constantly ascending toward the summit.

The *gematria* of the word אֵילָן (tree) equals ninety-one, the same as the sum of Hashem's Names ה-ו-ה-י and א-ד-ו-י. One should do all his actions for Hashem's sake. He should not allow his failures to prevent him from going further in his spiritual ascent.

In order to escape the *Yetzer Hara*, one should imagine being pursued by a murderer. If he sees a sturdy tree, he will race to reach it and climb up in a frenzy, bent on escaping his would-be attacker. This is actually the case. The *Yetzer Hara* is consumed with a desire to bring a person to his doom. He must escape and cling to the Torah, the "tree of life" (*Mishlei* 3:18). He will thereby be saved from the *Yetzer Hara* and be able to overpower him.

This is the level that one reaches after celebrating the festival of Sukkot. The sukkah depicts humility and self-nullification. The *nisuch hamayim* on the days of Sukkot alludes to Torah, for Torah is compared to water (*Bava Kama* 17a).

Torah endures only in one who is humble, like water which always flows to the lowest point (*Ta'anit* 7a). On Sukkot, the people drew forth *ruach hakodesh* (*Yerushalmi, Sukkah* 5:1), as it says, (*Yeshayahu* 12:3), "You can draw water with joy from the springs of salvation."

By ascending spiritually throughout the seven days of the festival, one prepares himself for the eighth day, which is above the laws of nature. This is the day of Simchat Torah, a holiday unto itself; a day which is extremely holy.

We prepare for Shabbat throughout the six days of the week. In the times of the Beit Hamikdash, every day, the Levi'im would recite, "The first of the days until Shabbat, the second of the days until Shabbat..." (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a). Likewise, we prepare for Simchat Torah, a holiday unto itself (*ibid.* 4b; *Zohar* III, 104b), throughout the festival of Sukkot. It is the culmination of the joy felt during Sukkot. It is the time we rejoice with the Torah, when we dance with the Sifrei Torah.

According to *remez*, the word סוכה (*sukkah*) contains the letters ו-ה and ט-כ. The letters ו-ה plus the word חג, equal twenty-two, the number of letters in the Jewish alphabet. The letters ט-כ hint to *ruach hakodesh* and the *Shechinah*. Sarah Imeinu was called יסכה – Yiska, for she was immersed in *ruach hakodesh* (*Megillah* 14a). A person carries this *ruach hakodesh* with him from Sukkot into Simchat Torah.

The Essence of the Name “Shemini Atzeret”

Let us examine why the day is called Shemini Atzeret. The word *Shemini* means eight. Just as a baby enters the covenant of our nation on the eighth day, so too, on the eighth day of the consecration of the Beit Hamikdash, the *Shechinah* descended upon Bnei Yisrael (*Vayikra* 9:23).

Eighty is a sign of might, as it says (*Tehillim* 90:10), “And if with might, eighty years.” Eight is a number depicting a level beyond nature. After a person elevates himself throughout the seven days of the festival, he reaches the lofty level of eight, beyond nature and human calculation, and has the ability to understand secrets of the Torah.

The name of the festival is *Atzeret* (lingering). Rashi (*Shmuel* I, 21:8) explains that when Doeg “lingered (נעצר) before Hashem” it means that he engrossed himself in Torah study. On Shemini Atzeret one connects to Hashem through the power of Torah, in self-nullification and subservience. This is the ultimate might a person can hope to attain. He is considered a warrior in Hashem’s eyes, for he has risen in Torah and vanquished his *Yetzer Hara*.

In our prayers we call the day “Shemini Atzeret, this festival,” and not “The festival Shemini Atzeret,” or “The Festival of Atzeret.” First we mention that it is *shemini* – the eighth day – in order to connect it to the seven days of Sukkot. After that, we mention that it is *atzeret*, a day of lingering with Hashem.

Hoshana Rabbah immediately precedes Shemini Atzeret, since successfully fulfilling the *avodah* of that day enables us to attain the spiritual benefits of Shemini Atzeret. Hoshana Rabbah is a day auspicious for *malchut*, the seventh *middah*. It is the day of the *ushpizin* of David, the ancestor of Mashiach (see *Zohar* III, 301b), and most fitting for the arrival of Mashiach.

This is hinted to by the fact that the *gematria* of the word הושענא (Hoshana), adding one for the word itself, is equal to that of the phrase זה אליהו והמשיח (these are Eliyahu and Mashiach). Torah is also called *malchut* (ibid. 268a). On Hoshana Rabbah, we incorporate the Hoshana prayers of the entire holiday into our tefillah, as a preparation for Shemini Atzeret.

How wonderful it is to unite the seventh day, the day of royalty, to the eighth, which is above the laws of nature and depicts Torah and *malchut*. Hashem, therefore, tells us, “Linger with Me another day” (*Rashi, Emor* 23:36, see *Sukkah* 55b). After the great spiritual exertions that we made during the months of Elul and Tishrei, we reach the epitome of joy on Simchat Torah, wearing the crown of royalty.

The letters of the name שמחת תורה (Simchat Torah), minus the word תש (weakened) spell חמת (anger) and הר (mountain). The *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to a mountain (*Sukkah* 52a) is full of fury against a person. When we are lacking joy, the *Yetzer Hara* gains control and is able to prosecute. The Torah (*Devarim* 28:47) chastises us for not serving Hashem with joy. This was a contributing factor for the exile. But on Simchat Torah, we hug and kiss the Sefer Torah, and dance with it joyfully. Thus we weaken the *Yetzer Hara*. However, dancing with the Sefer Torah while one is in the dominion of the *Yetzer Hara* is a blatant contradiction. One must make extensive preparations to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*.

There are many expenses involved in this holiday. Many institutions request donations. This is a *nisayon* for a person. But through properly

using his money, he can overthrow the *kelippah*, for he can reach high levels in Torah and good *middot*.

Yaakov Avinu had the strength to remove the cover of the well with the ease that one removes a bottle cap from a bottle (*Bereishit Rabbah* 70:12). We all have the wherewithal to go in his footsteps, strengthening ourselves to remove the *Yetzer Hara* from our hearts.

———— In Summary ————

- What is the connection between Simchat Torah and Sukkot? Why don't we celebrate Simchat Torah together with Shavuot? The name חג עצרת has the same *gematria* as עץ התורה. A person must climb the tree of Torah in order to escape from the *Yetzer Hara* and overpower him. Torah exists in a person who is humble. The sukkah symbolizes humility. The *nisuch hamayim* also hints at humility. Torah is like water, for it flows to the lowest level. One can draw *ruach hakodesh* from it. After the seven days of preparation, one arrives at the eighth day, above nature. This is the purpose of rejoicing with the Torah. The letters of the word sukkah can be divided into ו-ה and כ-ס. The *gematria* of ו-ה, plus the letters חג (*chag*), equal twenty-two, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet with which the Torah is written. The letters כ-ס allude to *ruach hakodesh*, which can be gained from the Torah and Simchat Torah.
- The day of Shemini Atzeret is like the eighth day after a baby's birth, when he receives his *brit milah* and enters the covenant with Hashem. Eighty symbolizes might. Eight depicts a level above the laws of nature, an opportunity to bond with Hashem. This is accomplished by preparing oneself on Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day. Hoshana Rabbah is the day of *malchut*, intrinsically connected to the Torah, which is called *malchut*. Hoshana Rabbah is the day of the *ushpizin* of David, the anointed king, father of Mashiach. This day is auspicious for Mashiach's arrival. Therefore, Hashem tells His people, "Linger with me another day," to wear the crowns of *malchut* and Torah, and vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*.

- The Torah is the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*. Thus, Simchat Torah is a most appropriate time for vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara*. The initials of the name שמחת תורה spell תש (weak). It is the day we weaken the strength of the *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to a mighty mountain (הר), and acts with fury (חמת) against a person. Through joy, one is able to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. He likewise has the ability to withstand the *nisyonot* inherent in the holiday, which includes many expenses and requests for *tzedakah*. He can overpower the *Yetzer Hara* with the same ease that one withdraws a bottle cap from a bottle.

STARTING FROM THE BEGINNING ON SIMCHAT TORAH

On Simchat Torah, everyone gathers to rejoice with the Sefer Torah. However, to truly rejoice with the Torah poses a great test. Upholding the Torah entails affliction and self-sacrifice. Chazal (*Nedarim* 81a) instruct us to be careful with the children of the poor, for they will be the ones who produce Torah. This seems to indicate that poverty is a prerequisite for acquiring Torah. Moreover, the *Mishnah* in *Avot* (6:4) teaches, “This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure... live a life of deprivation.” Rejoicing with the Torah seems nearly impossible under these circumstances.

On Simchat Torah we read the last parashah of the Torah, describing the death of Moshe Rabbeinu. We immediately begin again from *Bereishit*. This raises several questions. Why don't we finish the Torah in the month of Adar, when Moshe passed away (*Kiddushin* 38b), rather than on Simchat Torah? Also, shouldn't we be mournful over Moshe Rabbeinu's passing? Why do we read about it at a time of celebration?

Simchat Torah ends a month of festivals. If one prepared himself properly for the preceding holidays, subjecting his heart to Hashem, then on Simchat Torah he deserves to place the crown of Torah upon

his head. He is worthy of rejoicing with the Torah, for he has vanquished his *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, in spite of all the afflictions and self-sacrifice involved in Torah study, one rejoices with the Torah in the knowledge that he has the tools to become a *ben Torah* and has elevated himself throughout the holiday period.

Thus, reading the Torah portion describing Moshe Rabbeinu's death is most appropriate on Simchat Torah. It reminds us of the end of all mortals, a fact which no one can escape. Moshe Rabbeinu was humblest of all men (*Bamidbar* 12:3), tzaddik of tzaddikim, father of all prophets (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:15), giant among the giants. Even *he* passed on, as soon as he had completed his task in this world.

However, Moshe Rabbeinu left us a legacy, described by the words (*Devarim* 34:12), "וזאת הברכה" – And this is the blessing." It is the Torah he bequeathed to us (*Menachot* 53b). The word זאת (this) refers to the Torah (*Vayikra* 7:37; *Devarim* 4:44). Torah is a blessing for those who learn its words.

This is the reason why we start reading from *Bereishit* all over again. The Torah is called "ראשית – beginning" (*Pesikta Zuta*, beginning of *Bereishit*). Regarding the Torah, *Mishlei* (8:22) states, "ה' קנני ראשית דרכו" – Hashem made me as the beginning of His way." The entire world was created for the sake of the Torah. When we read about Moshe's death on Simchat Torah, we remember his instruction for all generations: to be involved in Torah and reap the blessings that it holds.

The Torah does not begin with any specific mitzvah. This is because it is essential for a person to first understand his purpose in this world, and where he is heading.

This concept is hinted at in the words of the Torah itself. The Torah ends with "לעיני כל ישראל" – Before the eyes of all Israel," and begins with "בראשית" – In the beginning." The initials of these words spell one of the Names of Hashem in its full version. This world was created with

the letter ך, and the World to Come was created with the letter ם (*Menachot* 29b; *Bereishit Rabbah* 12:9). There are many secrets hidden in this concept.

Mentioning the death of Moshe Rabbeinu on Simchat Torah helps one feel humble. He realizes that he has nothing to brag about, for he is nothing at all. Just looking at the vastness of Creation makes one realize how small he is (*Yeshayahu* 40:26). One should contemplate his own day of death as he reads about the death and burial of Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem Himself attended to his burial (*Sotah* 14a), for Moshe was true and his Torah was true (*Bava Batra* 74a, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:16). Contemplating the fact that he will ultimately die should encourage a person to recommit himself to the ways of the Torah.

Every *chatan* is reminded of the *churban* Beit Hamikdash on the day of his chuppah. Although he is forbidden to mourn, he demonstrates sadness over the *churban* by breaking a glass (*Berachot* 31a) and having ashes placed on his head (*Bava Batra* 60b). This is to remind him to begin his new life infused with Torah and *emunah*.

The Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu as a *kallah*, adorned with twenty-four decorations (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 16, 18). If one has the correct perspective on Simchat Torah, he will dance with the Sefer Torah as if it were his *kallah*. In this manner, one is invigorated to start afresh from *Bereishit* once again.

We know we will ultimately die (*Berachot* 17a). Therefore, we longingly yearn for Mashiach's arrival. He will do miracles for us, just as Moshe Rabbeinu did. But, unfortunately, he has not yet come. Thus, we begin learning the Torah's lessons from *Bereishit*, once again, renewing our faith in Hashem. We wait for Mashiach to arrive every single day.

The Power of Torah on Sukkot and on Simchat Torah

The *Bnei Yissachar* asks the following question, based on the Chida. On Sukkot, we sit in the sukkah to commemorate the Clouds of Glory (*Sukkah* 11b), which were granted to us in the merit of Aharon Hakohen. However, we have no commemoration of the manna, which fell in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, or of the well, which we had in the merit of Miriam (*Ta'anit* 9a). Why is this so?

Simchat Torah, which immediately follows Sukkot, is itself the commemoration of these two gifts. Torah is called לחם (bread) (*Zohar* III, 33b), as the pasuk (*Mishlei* 9:8) states, “לכו לחמו בלחמי” – Come and partake of My food.” Just as we received the manna, our physical sustenance, in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, so too, we received the Torah, which sustains our very essence, in his merit. Simchat Torah also commemorates the Well of Miriam, for Torah is compared to water (*Bava Kama* 17a).

The *Navi* (*Malachi* 3:22) instructs us, “Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant.” Just as the manna tasted of whatever a person desired (*Yoma* 75a), likewise, all spiritual “flavors” are contained within the Torah, as it says (*Tehillim* 34:9), “Contemplate (lit. taste) and see that Hashem is good.”

Armed with Torah, a person can wage war against his *Yetzer Hara*, as indicated in the words לחמו בלחמי. This is the way to become worthy of eternal life in the World to Come.

This teaches an important lesson. One should joyfully engross himself in Torah, not wasting his time on food and drink. He should regard Torah as his physical sustenance. By observing the Torah and mitzvot with joy, a person becomes freed from his *Yetzer Hara*, like a king who has been successful in war.

A further similarity between Torah and water is the following. At the beginning of Creation, we find the pasuk (*Bereishit* 1:7), “G-d...

separated between the waters which were beneath the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament.” This is a clear reference to Torah. At the beginning, the entire universe was water, i.e., Torah. Hashem took pleasure in His Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1). But afterward, He separated between the upper waters and the lower waters. The upper waters refer to the deep secrets of Torah, and the lower waters refer to the practical aspects of Torah. “And the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters” (*Bereishit* 1:2) is a reference to the secrets of the Torah. The Well of Miriam refers to the life-giving waters of the Torah.

The Clouds of Glory, which we gained in Aharon’s merit, also hint to Torah. Clouds are symbolic of humility, one of the requirements for attaining Torah (*Avot* 6:5; *Ta’anit* 7a). Our Sages tell us that a cloud constantly hovered over the Beit Hamikdash, for that is the place where humility is most important. Clouds remind us to submit ourselves to Hashem, Whose glory fills the entire world (*Yeshayahu* 6:3).

This, too, was the message of the cloud that constantly rested above the tent of Sara Imeinu (*Bereishit Rabbah* 60:15). Sara was a most humble woman, an honorable princess who dwelt within (*Tehillim* 45:14). She eschewed honor, for she was modest (*Bereishit* 18:9; *Rashi* *ibid*; see *Bereishit Rabbah* 48:18). Therefore, she merited the cloud over her tent.

Simchat Torah refers to all three gifts which Bnei Yisrael were granted in the desert: the Clouds of Glory, the manna, and the well. All three allude to the Torah, which is the antidote against the *Yetzer Hara*.

As the period of the festivals draws to an end, one must resolve to start again from *Bereishit* – the beginning – fighting the *Yetzer Hara* and his associates with the power of Torah. He must fortify himself with *yirat Shamayim*. This will help him overcome all obstacles, bringing him closer to Hashem.

In Summary

- To truly rejoice with the Torah poses a great *nisayon*. Torah is found among the poor, whose circumstances make it difficult to rejoice with the Torah. What is the connection between the end of the Torah and its beginning? Why do we read about the death of Moshe on a day specified for rejoicing? It seems it would be more appropriate to mourn his passing. Alternatively, why don't we celebrate Simchat Torah, on the 7th of Adar, the day of his death?
- Simchat Torah comes specifically at the end of the period of the festivals to teach us the following. If one prepared himself properly before each festival, he has the ability to rejoice, even in poverty. Reading the Torah portion of Moshe's demise reminds us that everyone ultimately dies. Let us take heart and return to Hashem in teshuvah, strengthening our commitment to the Torah.
- The end of the Torah is connected to its beginning. Before his death, Moshe endowed us with a blessing: **זאת התורה** – This is the Torah, which is called “**ראשית** –beginning.” On Simchat Torah, one is reminded not to become haughty, for his end is the grave. He should recommit himself to the ways of the Torah. Likewise, a *chatan* is reminded of the *churban* so that he may start his new life with a fresh commitment to the ways of the Torah.
- Simchat Torah refers to all three miracles that Bnei Yisrael were granted in the Wilderness. The sukkah commemorates the Clouds of Glory. Clouds represent humility, a prerequisite for acquiring Torah. Sara Imeinu had a cloud over her tent, for she symbolized humility and modesty. Manna, the food in the Wilderness, alludes to Torah, our true sustenance. And the well of water is an analogy to the life-giving qualities of Torah. On Simchat Torah, we remember all of these gifts, appreciating that Torah gives us the strength to overcome all adversaries. This is the secret of Simchat Torah. It possesses the quality of renewal, enabling us to overcome the *Yetzer Hara* and come closer to Hashem.

A Practical Application

Torah is called “bread.” One should strive to live by the spiritual sustenance afforded by the Torah, which is hinted to by Simchat Torah. The first step in vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara* is uprooting the temptation for gold and silver. This is done through the ammunition of the Torah.

SHEMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH – CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL

The name Shemini Atzeret (שמיני עצרת), which is also Simchat Torah, encapsulates Hashem’s desire to remain closely connected to Bnei Yisrael. When it is time for the holiday period to come to a close, Hashem requests that Bnei Yisrael should “linger (עצור) with Me another day, for your departure is difficult for Me” (see *Sukkah* 55a; *Rashi, Bamidbar* 29:36; *Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas* 782). What is meant by our departure being difficult for Hashem?

Chazal (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:39) relate that the demise of tzaddikim is difficult for Hashem. As long as they were alive, the world enjoyed their *kedushah* and their tefillot. Everyone learned from them how to serve Hashem. But after their death, everyone feels their absence and mourns their loss. In this way, their *neshamot* become aroused, and they are rejuvenated. Their memory provides protection for the nation.

But it is not enough to merely mourn their passing. The main objective is to follow in their ways. This enables their influence to continue. This is why it is said (*Chulin* 7b) that tzaddikim are greater in their deaths than in their lifetimes. After they have passed on, many are grieved by their demise, which increases their sphere of influence.

During their lifetimes, when they prayed for the nation, they had to exert themselves tremendously for their tefillot to be accepted, in case

there was some sort of prosecution barring their way. But, after their death, they sit and enjoy the glory of the *Shechinah* (*Berachot* 17a). When people mention their names as they learn Torah, their lips move in the grave (*Yevamot* 97a). When they observe how people walk righteously, as they did, they begin to speak in defense of Bnei Yisrael, overpowering all forces of prosecution and iniquity. Hashem rains down abundance of blessing in their merit.

Throughout the holiday period, we enjoyed a special closeness with Hashem. We became accustomed to performing various mitzvot. We heard words of Torah and did complete teshuvah. We expended funds for the holidays and gave *tzedakah* to the poor. We rejoiced on Sukkot and danced before the Sefer Torah. We were close to Hashem, and He was close to us.

Now, at the conclusion of the festivals, we feel a sense of spiritual emptiness. We long for those holy days, when we stood in service before our Father and King, and it is difficult to part with them. Hashem certainly yearns for those days, too. How will we maintain our bond with Hashem until the holidays of Chanukah, Purim, and Pesach arrive? We long to draw once again from the *kedushah* of the *chagim*, purifying our souls.

We find it difficult to relinquish the close bond with Hashem that we so recently enjoyed. Hashem, therefore, enjoins us to spend one more day in His company so that we should be able to draw upon ourselves the *kedushah* of the *chagim*. And although the days of the festivals have ended, their *kedushah* remains. The holiday atmosphere can be extended and further enjoyed. We can continue serving Hashem throughout the rest of the year.

The Continual Influence of the Festivals during the Year

Every person has the ability to take with him the *kedushah* of the *chagim* into the new year. How do we do this? On Rosh Hashanah, we

did complete teshuvah, promising never to sin again. We coronated Hashem as our King (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a). We declared (*Shir Hashirim* 6:3), “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.”

We declared that we are completely devoted to Hashem, in mind and body. We must keep this resolution even after the holiday has ended. We must dedicate ourselves solely for His sake. The emptiness that we feel at the conclusion of the festivals is merely a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*. We must overpower him and reunite with Hashem.

The mitzvot of the month of Tishrei are fresh in our minds. The sound of the shofar continues to resound, causing us to tremble for many days to come. The sukkah alludes to Hashem’s Names, for the *gematria* of סוכה is equal to that of His two Names. Hashem envelops us with the sukkah, shielding us in its merit throughout the rest of the year.

The night of Hoshana Rabbah, when we remain awake doing teshuvah, can also afford us long-term protection. We display our deep and unconditional love for Hashem on this night. This love is similar to that of David and Yonatan (*Avot* 5:16). Therefore, this is the night of David’s *ushpizin*. It is conducive for teshuvah, which we can continue throughout the coming year.

Finally, we arrive at Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, the end and objective of all the holidays. The name *Atzeret* can mean “withheld” (see *Shmuel* I, 21:6). One holds back the *kedushah* of the *chagim*, allowing their influence to continually inspire him.

According to *remez*, Rashi (*Kiddushin* 6a) states that *Atzeret* means “to cling.” Shemini Atzeret gives us the opportunity to unite with Hashem and enjoy this bond during the months to come.

How is this done? Through Torah study. Shemini Atzeret is considered a holiday unto itself (*Sukkah* 47a), at the end of the Yamim Noraim (*Bamidbar* 29:35). It is a time to gain spiritual elevation.

The name שמיני (*Shemini*) hints at the נשמה (soul), which has the same letters as שמונה (eight). It is the eighth day, separate from the seven days of Sukkot, as hinted by the pasuk (*Kohelet* 11:2), “Distribute portions to seven, or even to eight.” It is a day to bond with Hashem through the Torah, as the festival is also the day of Simchat Torah. One who connects himself to the Torah connects himself to Hashem.

Arousing oneself in Torah study is the way to draw the *kedushah* of the *chagim* upon himself. Hashem told us to linger with Him another day in order that, rather than feeling empty after the protracted period of the festivals, we should retain the level of sanctity we achieved during that time. Then we will follow in Hashem’s ways, through keeping Torah and mitzvot.

Now we might understand why we begin reading the beginning of the Torah immediately upon concluding it. The Torah is not a storybook that ends with the last word. The Torah is a way of life and provides lessons for every Jew, at any time. Every week brings another parashah, describing another method to be employed in one’s Avodat Hashem. Torah is renewed each day (*Pesikta Zuta, Va’etchanan* 6:6). Torah teaches us how to withstand our *nisyonot* and renew our Avodat Hashem.

Therefore, as soon as we complete the cycle of the Torah reading, we begin it once again with *Bereishit*. The Torah is called ראשית (beginning) (*Mishlei* 8:22). It is the beginning of the path of every man.

There is no greater blessing than Torah study. The Torah itself arouses each person’s love for it. We begin *Bereishit*, fresh and pure as a newborn. This is all in the merit of *Atzeret*, the day we linger with Hashem and become rejuvenated.

The day we read parashat *Bereishit* is a day of elevation, the influence of which will be felt throughout the coming year. The Baal HaTanya quotes the Baal Shem Tov, who said that the entire year receives blessing in the merit of Shabbat *Bereishit*.

After the period of the *chagim* has passed, a person should feel elevated. It is our mission to become greater with each passing day. This will prevent depression.

Maybe this is the reason we mention Adam's sin on Shabbat Bereishit. We take a lesson from it and see just how much one stands to lose if the beginning is deficient.

One should begin each year infused with a newness of spirit. This enables us to make a good start at the opening of the new year. Then the Torah itself will protect us from all sin (*Sotah* 21a).

In order to ensure that the beginning is good, one must strive to constantly ascend the ladder of spirituality. He should be wary of allowing himself to fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to "cool us off" (*Devarim* 25:18). The *Yetzer Hara* would have us believe that all of the inspiration we gained from the festivals has passed together with the festivals themselves. But this is far from the truth. Parashat *Bereishit* is read at the end of the period of the *chagim* in order to inspire us for the upcoming year.

————— In Summary —————

- Hashem tells us, "Your departure is difficult for Me, linger with Me another day." This can be compared to the demise of tzaddikim, which is so difficult for us. While they lived, they prayed on our behalf; now that they are no longer, who will intercede for us before Hashem? Mourning their passing arouses their *neshamot*, and they continue protecting us. Therefore, tzaddikim are greater in death than in life, because when they plead for us from on High, their prayers are immediately accepted, without being interrupted by the barrier of prosecution.
- Throughout the month of Tishrei, we were exceptionally close with Hashem. The holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Hoshana Rabbah were opportunities to strengthen our bond with Him. At their conclusion, we may feel a sense of emptiness. To counteract this feeling, we must draw from

the *kedushah* of the *chagim*. It is, indeed, difficult to part with them. Hashem, too, finds our departure difficult, and therefore, requests of us to linger with Him for another day. The sound of the shofar still rings in our ears, and the sukkah continues enveloping us in its shelter of faith. The night of Hoshana Rabbah continues to influence us. In this light, we are capable of drawing further from the *kedushah* of the Yamim Tovim which we just experienced.

- How do we draw this *kedushah* upon ourselves? By involving ourselves in Torah, the greatest blessing we could hope for. Torah brings us to *ahavat Hashem*. It is not a storybook, but rather, a manual for living. It teaches us the power of renewal. Therefore, after we have completed the Torah readings on Simchat Torah, we immediately begin with *Bereishit*, to demonstrate that the Torah is constantly new and fresh for us, since it is the model of renewal, the beginning of the entire Creation. One should strive to carve a path of renewal for himself. Parashat *Bereishit* teaches us lessons for the entire year. The sin of Adam Harishon teaches us to avoid sinning and to constantly renew our Avodat Hashem. We should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara* and become “cooled off.” We must constantly ascend and innovate. We stop on Shemini Atzeret and gather the *kedushah* of the *chagim* to help us in our Avodat Hashem during the forthcoming year.

SHEMINI ATZERET – SPENDING THE DAY WITH HASHEM

“The eighth day shall be a restriction for you; you shall not do any laborious work. You shall offer a burnt-offering, a fire offering, a satisfying aroma to Hashem; one bull...”

(Bamidbar 29:35-36)

Rashi explains that the bull and ram offered on this holiday are for the sake of Yisrael. Hashem asks us to linger another day with Him. We are like children taking leave of their father; he tells them that it is

difficult for him to part with them, asking them to remain one more day (*Sukkah* 55b).

This raises several questions.

What will another day in Hashem's Presence accomplish? If our parting after seven days is difficult for Him, how will remaining with Him another day ease the parting?

Hashem's love for Am Yisrael is eternal. Even when we are distanced from Him, His love for us never diminishes. And even after we pass away, He still loves us. As an example of this, Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 11:10) state that Hashem was grieved at Moshe's passing.

Why is the *chag* divided into two parts: the seven days of Sukkot and the eighth day of Shemini Atzeret? Shemini Atzeret is a festival in its own right (*Sukkah* 47, 48). It has its own name and its own tefillot and *korbanot*. This seems to contradict the fact that it is a continuation of the festival of Sukkot, providing us with another day to linger with Hashem.

Why is there no command to be joyous on Shemini Atzeret, as we find by the other holidays?

To answer these questions, let us preface with the following idea. When Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to donate gifts for the building of the Mishkan, the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:2) states, "Let them take for Me a portion." The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 33:1) expounds: "Hashem said, 'I sold you My Torah; I was, so to speak, sold along with it.' This can be compared to king who had an only daughter. He married her off to another king. Her new husband wished to bring his young wife back with him to his home country. Her father said, 'Your wife is my only child. It is most difficult for me to part with her. But I cannot prevent you from leaving with her, as she is now your wife. Do me one favor. Wherever you will live, build for me a small room, so that I might live with you and never part from my child.'

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yisrael, ‘I bequeathed to you the Torah. I cannot part with it, yet I cannot take it away from you. Therefore, wherever you may go, build a small room, so that I might dwell in your midst.’ This is the meaning of the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8), ‘They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.’”

The *Shechinah* still dwells among us, even in this bitter *galut*, after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, our pride and glory. Chazal (*Megillah* 29a) state that this refers to the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, as it says (*Yechezkel* 11:16), “I have been for them a small sanctuary.” Even in the bleakest of times, our Provider and Redeemer has not abandoned us. Yeshayahu (63:9) states, “In all their troubles He was troubled, so an angel from before Him saved them.” Hashem sends His angels to protect us from harm.

We attain a high degree of closeness to Hashem in the month of Tishrei. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Bnei Yisrael become purified from their transgressions, cleansed from the contamination of the *Yetzer Hara*. The spirit of impurity is eliminated from the world. The Yamim Noraim bring atonement and purification of sin (*Vayikra* 16:30), as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 1:18) states, “If your sins are like scarlet they will become white as snow.”

On Sukkot, we strengthen ourselves in *emunah* and protect ourselves in Hashem’s sukkah of peace. We enjoy the *Ohr Hamakif*, which shines upon us from Above. The inner light of the sukkah illuminates our lives. How fortunate are we and how wonderful is our lot!

The four species that we take on Sukkot illustrate our closeness with Hashem. The *etrog* alludes to the Written Torah; the *hadass* alludes to the Oral Torah, and the *aravah* to the *middah* of pleasantness. The *lulav* hints that we should serve Hashem with purity of heart, as we state in *Tehillim* (51:12), “Create a pure heart for me, O G-d.” We see this in the word לולב itself, which spells לו-לב (the heart is to Him). Our task is to serve Hashem with purity of heart and joy, which

demonstrates this purity. Thus the four species hint to the Torah and the 613 mitzvot that it contains.

Through keeping the mitzvot of the *chagim*, one will attain a feeling of completion and closeness to his Creator. He will merit being inscribed and sealed for long, peaceful life.

How great is the joy of Hashem and His angels in the Upper World at the service of Bnei Yisrael, who ascend to greater heights than the Heavenly angels themselves. For this reason, Hashem proclaims, “Your departure is difficult for Me,” for Hashem desires to shower his blessings upon them.

Continuing the Ascent After the Holidays

At the conclusion of Sukkot, we return to our daily obligations. We are liable to fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, who rises against us every day (*Kiddushin* 30b). He never relaxes his grip. We are in danger of losing all the spiritual treasures which we have gleaned throughout the month of Tishrei.

Because of this threat, Hashem has specified one day at the end of the festivals, in order that we might attain the goal of the entire period. However, one must distance himself from pursuing physical pleasures and sanctify his entire being to Hashem. For if one seeks material pursuits, he will not be able to maintain the closeness with Hashem that he has achieved during the festivals, and he is liable to lose everything.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we pray for our wellbeing. We ask to be spared death, plague, and spiritual demise. We do teshuvah, but this is teshuvah from fear of punishment, for our own benefit, and not for the ultimate purpose of serving Hashem for His sake.

Hashem requests that we should linger with Him for another day, so that we should serve Him in a more perfect manner. Instead of serving

Him through the fear inspired by the days of Tishrei, we should serve Him for His sake alone, in order to become close to Him. This is what we say in Tehillim (73:28), “But as for me, G-d’s nearness is my good.”

This is why Shemini Atzeret is a separate holiday. Our spiritual *avodah* on this festival is different from that of the rest of the festivals. There is no mention to be joyous on it, as on other holidays, which are dedicated to the delight of Bnei Yisrael. This is because the purpose of Shemini Atzeret is to completely devote ourselves to Hashem’s service. Only by properly utilizing this opportunity can we hope to retain all the spiritual wealth that we acquired throughout the month of Tishrei.

Conducting ourselves in this manner will save us from the *Yetzer Hara*, who looks for our weaknesses in Avodat Hashem. We will not lose the great heights we reached on Sukkot, as the pasuk (*Devarim* 4:4) states, “But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d – you are all alive today.”

The word עצרת (*Atzeret*) comes from the word עצור (*linger*), as mentioned above. This indicates that we should call a halt to performing our spiritual *avodah* for our own benefit and pleasure and devote ourselves completely to serving Hashem for His sake, without personal interest whatsoever.

In light of this, we can resolve our original questions. Hashem requests that we should linger with Him, because it would be difficult for Him if we were to lose all the spiritual treasures that we gained during the period of the festivals. By acting for Hashem’s sake alone on Shemini Atzeret, we are able to continue our spiritual *avodah* in the correct way throughout the rest of the year.

This is also the reason why there is no command to be joyous on Shemini Atzeret, as on the other festivals. Shemini Atzeret is a day devoted entirely to Hashem. It is thereby distinct from the other holidays. It is a day designated for taking pleasure in Hashem’s glory,

bringing us ever closer to Him. He is especially near to us then, as the pasuk (*Devarim* 4:7) states, “For which is a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as is Hashem, our G-d?” Closeness to Hashem engenders joy. A special command to rejoice on Shemini Atzeret is superfluous. This internal joy is different than the joy of the other festivals, which is the happiness of rejoicing on the festival in a physical way, for our own pleasure, and thus must be commanded.

We are still left with one final question. The pasuk states, “On the eighth day, it will be a holy convocation for you.” If Shemini Atzeret is a separate holiday, why does the Torah call it “the eighth day”? This seems to indicate that it is a continuation of the seven days of Sukkot.

This can be explained according to what we said previously. The number eight always indicates separateness, above all else. We have the seven days of the week, and then the eighth day, apart and above the rest. The Torah calls it “sanctified,” for it is above nature, which is represented by the number seven.

Let us take an example from the mitzvah of *brit milah*. Throughout the first seven days of his life, a boy is uncircumcised. He undergoes his *brit milah* only on the eighth day (*Vayikra* 12:3). Then he becomes sanctified to Hashem, sealed with the symbol of *kedushah*. With the removal of the foreskin, the Divine imprint becomes revealed.

Similarly, Shemini Atzeret is not a continuation of Sukkot, but “the eighth day,” above the laws of nature, apart from the preceding festival. It is a day when we serve Hashem solely for His sake and attain inner joy through feeling close to Him. It is an opportunity to pause, to gather the spiritual blessings we attained during the period of the festivals and ascend in Avodat Hashem.

— In Summary —

- Hashem asks us to remain with Him for another day after Sukkot. What will this accomplish? Furthermore, why is Sukkot divided into two separate

festivals, one of seven days, and the eighth, a holiday unto itself? Also, why is there no command to rejoice on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret?

- We connect to Hashem through the Torah. Hashem, so to speak, sold Himself to us together with His Torah. Even after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the *Shechinah* is with us. It can be found in the Batei Kenesiot and the Batei Midrashot, when we learn Torah. We experienced this level of Avodat Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we became purified of sin and close to Hashem, and even more so, on Sukkot, when we serve Hashem wholeheartedly with the four species.
- After the seven days of Sukkot, Bnei Yisrael are liable to fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, another day was granted to us, to linger with Hashem. This is the eighth day, above the laws of nature. It is a day of complete devotion to Hashem. Closeness to Hashem engenders joy; therefore, the aspect of rejoicing is not mentioned. Since our *avodah* on Shemini Atzeret is to devote ourselves completely to Hashem's sake, rather than acting for our own sake, as we do during Tishrei, this festival is separate from the other holidays. It is above the other seven days of Sukkot. It is a day when we can come closer to Hashem. It is called *Atzeret*, for we are told to halt and garner as much inner strength as we can so that we should be able to continue coming closer to Hashem throughout the year.

LIKE A SERVANT BEFORE HIS MASTER

Evidence of a servant's loyalty to his master is proven when he is set free. If he then states that he is not willing to part with his master, he demonstrates his undying loyalty to him. This is borne out by the slave described in the Torah, who loves his master and wishes to remain enslaved forever (*Shemot* 21:5).

After a month of closeness with us, Hashem finds it difficult to part with us. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:36) states, "On the eighth day... it is an assembly (עצרת)." The word עצרת (assembly) has its root in עצור

(linger). Hashem requests that we linger with Him another day, on Shemini Atzeret, for our departure is difficult for Him.

Just as water reflects a face, so too, do the hearts of men reflect each person's feelings (*Mishlei*). We, too, find it difficult to part from Hashem on the last day of Sukkot. We should approach Hashem, stating that we also find parting difficult. We love the wife He gave us, which is the Torah (*Yevamot* 63a). We love our master, Hashem. And we love our children, the mitzvot. We do not wish to go free. When we remain with Hashem on Shemini Atzeret, it is as if He pierces our ear, which was done to the slave who wished to remain enslaved, in order that we should be eternally connected to Him. This is hinted by the fact that the word רצע (pierced) contains the same letters as עצר (linger). If we are truly connected with Hashem, He is truly connected with us, in an eternal bond.

Only those who linger before Hashem merit feeling this closeness to Him.

It is easy to feel this closeness on Shemini Atzeret, after spending a month in the proximity of Hashem. Now, arriving at Shemini, the eighth level, above the laws of nature, one subjugates himself completely before Hashem, displaying just how difficult it is to part from Him.

One must beware of sin. Even Doeg Ha'adomi, who lingered before Hashem (*Shmuel* I, 21:8), sinned terribly by speaking *lashon hara*, and was severely punished. He was the cause for the murder of the people of Nov, the city of Kohanim. When one vigilantly guards himself against sin, he is able to come close to Hashem.

At the conclusion of the *chag*, we pray Tefillat Ma'ariv of the weekdays. We will have to wait another year in order to experience the *chagim* once again. Everyone is noticeably saddened at the conclusion of the *chagim*.

But there is really no reason for depression at all. The pasuk (*Shemot* 21:6) states, "And his master shall bore (רצע) through his ear with the

awl, and he shall serve him forever.” Through lingering with Hashem on Shemini Atzeret (עצרת), as He requests, we establish our status as His eternal servants.

One cannot compare a slave who wishes to continue serving his master of his own volition to one whose master requests that he remain serving him another day. In the latter case, the master is demonstrating that He is pleased with his servant’s work and wishes to honor him. How much more will his love for his servant grow then, when the servant himself declares that he is prepared to serve his master all of his life, not just for one more day!

This is the essence of Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah. Through Torah, one becomes נרצע (pierced). He becomes נעצר (halted) before Hashem, to become His eternal servant. Torah is the vehicle for true service of Hashem.

The day before Shemini Atzeret is Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Sukkot. During the time of the Beit Hamikdash, on Hoshana Rabbah, they would strike the *aravot* before the Mizbeach (*Sukkah* 45a). Why was this done specifically on the seventh day?

Hoshana Rabbah is the day of David Hamelech’s *ushpizin* (*Zohar* III, 103b). He composed *Tehillim*, praising those who involve themselves in Torah. In order to truly acquire Torah, one must be humble (*Ta’anit* 7a; *Avot* 6:5). When one is humble, he attains *kedushah*.

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:14) tell us that the *aravah* reminds us of the mouth, as the leaves are shaped like lips. Striking the *aravah* branches at the side of the Mizbeach demonstrates utter submission before Hashem. One accepts upon himself to sanctify his lips purely for Torah (see *Yoma* 19b) and not for frivolities. A person reaches this exalted level on the seventh day of the *chag*. Then, on the eighth day, Hashem “bores a hole in his ear,” making him His eternal servant.

The initials of the phrase ביום שמיני חג עצרת הזה (on the eighth day, this festival of lingering) have the same numerical value as the word

בשפה (with the lip), when adding two for the two units. The primary *avodah* of this day is to dedicate one's speech to the service of Hashem.

The word לשון (speech/tongue) contains an important message. In the merit of maintaining their language, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). *Lashon hakodesh* (lit. the holy tongue) is the language of the Torah, which contains Hashem's Names (*Zohar* II, 124a). One's lips should constantly utter words of Torah, all of his life.

One who merits being involved in Torah during his lifetime will continue even after his death. Chazal (*Yevamot* 97a; *Sanhedrin* 90b) state that when a halachah is repeated in the name of a deceased person, his lips move in the grave. This is in the merit of the Torah he accepted upon himself on Shemini Atzeret.

————— In Summary —————

- A servant proves his loyalty to his master when he desires to continue serving him even after he is released. This is what happens on Shemini Atzeret. When the time arrives to part from the festivals, Hashem tells us that our departure is difficult for Him. Bnei Yisrael also find it difficult to part from Hashem and proclaim, "I love my wife (Torah), I love my Master (Hashem), and I love my children (mitzvot)." Hashem then "bores a hole in their ears," and they become eternal slaves. The word רצע (bore) and the word עצר (linger) contain the same letters, for by lingering before Hashem we are proving to Him that we desire to be His eternal slaves.
- One who lingers another day with Hashem merits feeling close to Him. But one must beware of sin. Doeg Ha'adomi lingered before Hashem, but fell in the sin of *lashon hara* and was punished. At the conclusion of the festivals, one should not fear losing the spiritual treasures that he attained throughout this period, for by lingering with Hashem we have become His eternal servants. Hashem desires us, just like a master who favors his loyal servant.

- We prepare for this exalted level on the previous day, Hoshana Rabbah. On this day we strike the willow branches against the Altar. It is the day of David's *ushpizin*. The *aravah* is shaped like the lips. This teaches us to dedicate our speech to Hashem. One of the reasons that Bnei Yisrael merited redemption from Egypt was that they spoke *lashon hakodesh* (the holy tongue/speech). We should speak words of Torah, which is written in *lashon hakodesh*. Torah is acquired through humility. When one strikes the *aravah* before the Mizbeach on Hoshana Rabbah, he subjugates himself to Hashem.

LINGERING WITH HASHEM

The day of Shemini Atzeret is holy and sanctified, to the extent that Hashem exhorts us, "Your parting is difficult for Me; stay with Me another day" (*Sukkah* 55b).

It would seem to make more sense for us to ask Hashem for another day to be together with Him. Why is it Hashem Who finds our parting difficult?

There is another point that requires clarification. Every festival in the Torah is mentioned together with its exact date. For example, regarding Pesach, it says (*Bamidbar* 28:16), "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, it shall be a Pesach-offering to Hashem." Regarding Shavuot, we are told (*ibid.* vs. 26), "On the day of the first-fruits... on your Festival of Weeks..." Concerning Rosh Hashanah, the pasuk states (*ibid.* 29:1), "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month..." About Yom Kippur, the Torah tells us (*ibid.* vs. 7), "On the tenth of this seventh month," and regarding Sukkot, we are told (*ibid.* vs. 12), "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, there shall be a holy convocation for you..."

But Shemini Atzeret is different. The pasuk just says (*ibid.* vs. 35), "The eighth day shall be a restriction for you." We are not told its date.

This seems understandable, since the fact that it is called “the eighth day” indicates that it is connected to the seven days of Sukkot. However, Shemini Atzeret is specified as a separate holiday (*Rosh Hashanah* 4b). Why isn’t its date spelled out, as in the case of the other festivals?

I would like to offer the following explanation. Bnei Yisrael repent on the Yamim Noraim. Yet they also rejoice on the festivals of Tishrei, even though their judgment is being decided then. On Hoshana Rabbah, they do more teshuvah, praying from the depths of their hearts, even though this day is included in Sukkot, the days of rejoicing. They say the Hoshana prayers, and shake the four species one last day, in all directions, even the north, about which the *Navi* (*Yirmeyahu* 1:14) states, “From the north the evil will be released.” Bnei Yisrael accept all of Hashem’s commands upon themselves, with self-sacrifice, because they staunchly believe that “whatever Hashem decrees is for the best.”

Above all, they demonstrate that they find it difficult to part from Hashem, for they do not want to fall into sin again. They display their firm desire to remain connected with Hashem.

When Hashem observes this desire, and their good deeds, He himself says He finds it difficult to part with them. This demonstrates His great love toward them. He silences the prosecution against them, once and for all.

Moreover, He sees that they, too, find it difficult to part from the Shadow of Faith. Therefore, He asks Bnei Yisrael to stay with Him another day.

The Eighth Day, Above and Beyond

The number eight is a level above the laws of nature. When Hashem sees how Bnei Yisrael fear for their future and do perfect teshuvah, He

confers upon them the blessings of the eighth day, the day preceding the Creation of the world, the day designated only for Torah and *kedushah*.

The name *Shemini* alludes to this. Hashem delighted in the Torah before He created the world, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 8:30), “I was then His delight in every way.” This day is elevated above and beyond anything we can imagine.

It is most appropriate that the holiday of Simchat Torah takes place on Shemini Atzeret. This is the day when Hashem showers us with the blessing of Torah, helping us overcome our *Yetzer Hara*. He opens the gates of Heaven and rains down *kedushah*, beyond the laws of nature.

This is how we become white as snow (based on *Yeshayahu* 1:18), clean of all sin. To the extent that one prepares for this day, he merits attaining its blessings.

This is why, in the *Ya’aleh v’Yavo* prayer, we say *Shemini Atzeret hachag hazeh* (this holiday of Shemini Atzeret). It is a festival unto itself, a day which is above the laws of nature. We begin reading the Torah from its beginning on this day, for it begins with the Creation, which was preceded by Hashem’s involvement with Torah.

Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come. Shabbat is the seventh day, connected to the eighth day, the day above the laws of nature. Shabbat is especially blessed by Hashem. This blessing is extended to the six days of the week in the merit of Shabbat (*Zohar* II, 63b).

Sunday, the first day of Creation, is connected to the previous Shabbat and is influenced by its holiness. We should strive to take advantage of this and bring this blessing into our learning on Sunday. However, we find that Sunday has become merely part of the weekend, and people take advantage of this day to go on trips, disconnecting this day from the blessings of Shabbat.

The first day of the week has tremendous potential, since it was the first day of Creation, and thus is most directly connected to the level of eight, beyond the laws of nature. When Shabbat was created, the first day became attached to it. In the *Shir shel Yom* of the first day, we recite, “Hashem’s is the earth and its fullness, the inhabited land and those who dwell in it. For He founded it upon seas...” This day is when Creation began!

But if one isn’t careful, he may lose everything he gained on Shabbat. Therefore, one should strengthen himself on Shabbat, in order to gain access to the good which will be his throughout the days of the week. In this manner, his entire week will be considered one long Shabbat. This is alluded to in the daily psalms, as we state, “Today is the first day of the Shabbat,” “Today is the second day of the Shabbat...”

The connection that one has with Hashem on Shabbat, a taste of the World to Come, enables him to draw down the *kedushah* of the World to Come. Because of this, Hashem finds it difficult to part with him on the eighth day, after Shabbat. When one extends the *kedushah* of Shabbat into the following day by lingering with it and not rushing to send it away, he demonstrates that he feels Hashem’s difficulty in parting with him. Hashem is, so to speak, asking him that they remain together a little longer.

This is the meaning of the phrase, “Your parting is difficult for Me.” One must exert himself in order to reach the level of finding it difficult to part from Shabbat and the festivals. When one attains this level, he becomes a partner with Hashem in Creation.

Conversely, when days are spent devoid of mitzvot, the world is being destroyed. Praiseworthy is one who does Hashem’s will and thereby helps uphold the world every week, internalizing the feeling that it is difficult to part with Hashem after Shabbat and the festivals, when Hashem is especially close to Bnei Yisrael.

In this vein, we can understand how Shemini Atzeret is disconnected from the days of Sukkot. It is called the *chag* of the eighth day since it demonstrates one's desire to remain together with Hashem, on the level beyond nature, and to not give up this connection. It is forbidden to sit in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret, as one may not add on to the mitzvot, and Sukkot has now finished. But on Shemini Atzeret, a person attains even greater spiritual heights without the mitzvot of the festivals. When one devotes himself to Avodat Hashem with all his heart and soul, Hashem does not want to part with him.

———— In Summary ————

- When Shemini Atzeret arrives, Hashem states, “Your parting is difficult for Me.” Shouldn't Bnei Yisrael be the ones making that statement? Furthermore, why isn't the date of Shemini Atzeret spelled out in the Torah, as with all the other festivals?
- When Bnei Yisrael take upon themselves to do teshuvah, celebrating all of the festivals with joy, shaking their *lulav* on Hoshana Rabbah, praying, and showing Hashem that it is difficult for them to part from Him, Hashem takes note and tells them that it is difficult for Him to part with them. He demonstrates His love for them, silencing the prosecutors.
- The eighth day is above the laws of nature, since it is on the level before Creation. Hashem showers down blessing upon Bnei Yisrael on this day. The date of Shemini Atzeret is not specified since the essence of the day is above natural days and dates. Simchat Torah takes place on Shemini Atzeret, when Bnei Yisrael become elevated. It is a separate festival, above nature, and all of nature is nurtured by its sanctity.
- This, too, is the concept of Shabbat, a taste of the World to Come. All the weekdays derive blessing from Shabbat. The seventh day is closely connected to the eighth day. And the first day of the week is connected to the previous seventh day. Thereby, all the days of the week attain *kedushah*.
- One should utilize his time correctly and not squander the spiritual acquisitions that he gained on Shabbat on the frivolities of Sunday. He should

maintain his connection with Shabbat, using his Sundays to ascend spiritually, as well. The first day of the week, the beginning of Creation, possesses tremendous powers.

- When we show Hashem that it is difficult for us to part from the sanctity of Shabbat and Yom Tov, He consequently finds that “your parting is difficult for Me.” We should strive to maintain this connection. One who does so becomes a partner in the Creation of the world.

CHANUKAH



THE CANDLE OF HASHEM IS THE SOUL OF MAN

The Gemara asks (*Shabbat* 21b), “What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn that on the 25th of Kislev, the day of Chanukah, one should neither eulogize the dead nor fast on it. Because when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all of the oil. When the Chashmonaim overpowered them, they sought oil with which to light the Menorah. They found only one small flask of oil which had the seal of the Kohen Gadol. It contained enough oil to burn for only one day, but a miracle occurred, and the oil burned for eight days.”

Why did the Greeks defile the oil in the Beit Hamikdash? Why didn’t they merely lock the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, thereby preventing the Jews from entering and carrying out the Avodah? The Menorah, too, would have remained unlit.

Why was the jug of oil called specifically a פך שמן (flask of oil), rather than a בקבוק (bottle), or something similar? Also, why was the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles established as a festival for generations, just like the rest of our holidays?

The *Divrei Yoel* asks another question. After lighting the candles, we recite the prayer *Haneirot Halalu*, “These candles which we light...” In it we mention that the miracle was performed “through Your holy Kohanim.” We then continue, “And during all eight days of Chanukah...”

What is the significance of mentioning that the Kohanim were the agents of the miracle? Furthermore, what is the connection between the words, “through Your holy Kohanim” and “all eight days of Chanukah?”

The objective of the Greeks was to cause Bnei Yisrael to deny Hashem and His Torah. They even ordered the Jews to write on the horns of their oxen that they “have no portion in the G-d of Israel” (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:2*).

Toward this end, the Greeks desired to nullify the practice of making one hundred *berachot* a day, which increases a person’s *yirat Shamayim* (*Menachot 43b*). This is based on the pasuk (*Devarim 10:12*), “Now, O Israel, what (מה) does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem.” The word מה (what) can also be read as מאה (one hundred). The Greeks knew that with every blessing a Jew makes, praising and thanking Hashem, he brings light upon himself, as it says (*Mishlei 6:23*), “For a commandment is a candle, and the Torah is light.”

The Greeks defiled the oil, hinting to their primary goal of defiling the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael. The word השמן (the oil) contains the same letters as נשמה (*neshamah*). The word פך (flask) is numerically equivalent to one hundred, an allusion to the one hundred daily *berachot*. By preventing the Jews from making their obligatory one hundred *berachot* a day, together with their other decrees, the Greeks hoped to defile their *neshamot* distancing them from Hashem. Chazal thus use the word פך to hint to this idea.

Although sealing the gates of the Beit Hamikdash would have prevented the people from doing the Avodah, the Greeks specifically wanted to defile the oil. They understood that lighting the candles of the Menorah contains lofty concepts, elevating the Jewish soul. Aside from being a positive commandment, there are great secrets hidden within this mitzvah. Through it, all the worlds are illuminated with great light, and abundance of blessing descends on Bnei Yisrael.

The sefer *Kav Hayashar* states the following: Any candle lit for a mitzvah contains unlimited, wonderful innovations. If we possessed *ruach hakodesh*, we would bless the candles and gain tremendous insights by means of these lights. Moreover, a light used for the sake of a mitzvah is comparable to a prophet who publicizes the word of Hashem. The *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 70:134a) brings an example to prove this. The Chanukah candles, lit to commemorate the great miracle, possess tremendous *kedushah*; they have the power to bring justice upon the reshaim (*ibid.*).

With this in mind, the Greeks' purpose in annulling the lighting of the Menorah was in order that Bnei Yisrael would neither merit attaining the level of prophecy nor receive the abundant blessings inherent in the lights.

The sanctified oil that was used for the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash had the potential to bring the Jewish nation to unlimited heights of *kedushah* and *taharah*. This was a thorn in the side of the Greeks. This oil also had the capacity to bring retribution upon them (as the *Kav Hayashar* explains). The Greeks were terrified of the tremendous powers the Jewish people would possess when they lit the Menorah. They thought that, armed with these powers, the Jews would be able to rebel against them.

Therefore, they defiled the oil, which hints at the *neshamah* and the spirit of our nation. [According to *remez*, the letters of the word נר (candle) are the initials of the words נפש רוח (*nefesh, ruach*); and שמן (oil) contains the same letters as the word נשמה (*neshamah*)]. The Greeks wanted to prevent Am Yisrael from gaining the blessings inherent in the lights of the Menorah. Furthermore, they wished to tarnish the *neshamah* of the Jews, by eradicating the practice of saying one hundred blessings a day.

Now we can understand why they defiled all of the oil, instead of just sealing the gates of the Beit Hamikdash. Chazal, with their Divine

vision, used the word פֶּךָ (flask) rather than בקבוק (bottle). They wanted to impart an important message to the people. They did not want the cessation of the lighting of the Menorah to arouse Divine retribution against Am Yisrael, for this would cause Hashem's supervision to be removed from them. By using the word פֶּךָ, which has the *gematria* of one hundred, Chazal were implying that Bnei Yisrael must fortify themselves by making one hundred *berachot* every day.

Established and Observed For Generations

Chazal established Chanukah as a festival for future generations, with its own specific mitzvot, just like the *chag* of Pesach. By examining the matter, we will find similarities between the two.

At Pesach, before Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they were mired in the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). Had they remained there just a little longer, they would have fallen into the fiftieth level of impurity, the point of no return.

They were unable to make provisions for the Exodus (*Shemot* 12:39), “for they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves.” Had they delayed in order to prepare provisions, they would have descended to the fiftieth level, *rachmana litzlan*, and their *neshamot* would have been eternally tainted.

Based on *drush*, the “provisions” which they had not made, refer to merits, which they were lacking at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. It was essential that Hashem remove them hastily from Mitzrayim, in order to prevent them from sinking even lower.

Similarly, at the time of the Greeks, Bnei Yisrael had reached rock-bottom, to the extent that the *neshamah* of the nation had nearly expired. Chazal explain that the Greeks ordered the Jews to write on the horns of their oxen that they had no affiliation with the G-d of Israel. The Greeks defiled the oil in the Beit Hamikdash, annulling the

lighting of the Menorah, and they prevented the daily saying of one hundred *berachot*. All of these decrees lessened the light of blessing available to the Jews. The Greeks dulled their *emunah* and broke the yoke of *Malchut Shamayim* that the Jews were accustomed to bearing.

However, Hashem, in His mercy, preserved a remnant for Am Yisrael, in the form of the House of the Chashmonaim, who were equal to kings (*Gittin* 62a). Only they, with their pure faith in Hashem, were able to light the Menorah and merit the miracle of the oil burning for eight days.

They established the mitzvah of lighting candles for all generations to come. It is a beacon of faith for us. Although gentiles rise against us, modern-day Greeks, who attempt to remove us from our Torah, from mitzvot, and even from Hashem Himself, we can take inspiration from the candles. Hashem always guides us with Divine Providence and will never forsake us.

By establishing Chanukah as a festival for generations, Chazal have ordained the mitzvah of lighting the candles, by which we arouse the Heavenly Attribute of Mercy and thwart our enemies' plots. The Greeks, with their satanic intentions, disappeared from the face of the earth. But Am Yisrael continue to exist.

Through the Chashmonaim

To answer the question of the *Divrei Yoel*, as to why we specify that the miracle of the oil was done through the Kohanim, we might suggest the following. Only the holy Kohanim were loyal to Hashem throughout. They literally risked their lives in order to sanctify His Name. Therefore, they were obligated to light the candles.

Hashem told Moshe (*Bamidbar* 8:2) to tell Aharon, "When you kindle the lights." This is an injunction for the Chashmonaim, who were Kohanim. They were the ones who entered the Beit Hamikdash and

found the pure olive oil, still sealed and hidden underground, not moved from its original place (see *Shabbat* 21b; *Tosafot*, *ibid.*).

This was a hint to Bnei Yisrael of the following. In order to attain purity of thought and mind, compared to pure olive oil, one must not swerve, even an iota, from holy thoughts. This will prevent him from becoming influenced by the gentiles, to the extent that he will even display *mesirut nefesh* for Torah ideals.

This is the connection between “Your holy Kohanim” and “All the days of Chanukah.” It was the Kohanim who sacrificed themselves for the sanctification of Hashem’s Name, in order to consecrate the Beit Hamikdash and light the Menorah. In their merit, the miracle of the oil lasted eight days. The lights burned throughout, illuminating the hearts of Bnei Yisrael with the light of Torah and *taharah*. This was not only a onetime event. On the contrary, every year, the Chanukah lights have the potential to illuminate the entire eight days in the same way (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 709).

Another Kohen in our history who risked his life for the sanctity of Hashem’s Name, was Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon Hakohen. He avenged Hashem’s honor (*Bamidbar* 25:13) with great *mesirut nefesh*. The plague ceased in his merit (*ibid.* 25:8). He merited many miracles (*Sanhedrin* 82b) when he acted for Hashem’s honor at that time. This teaches that when one dedicates himself for the sake of Hashem, he merits miracles. The Chashmonaim similarly sacrificed themselves for Hashem’s sake. The mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights for eight days is accredited to them.

Hashem deals with us measure for measure. Because the Chashmonaim risked their lives for Hashem’s sake, they emerged victorious in the battle against the Greeks. And because they dedicated themselves to find the pure olive oil, an allusion to the *neshamah*, they found the flask of oil. They merited reinstating the obligation of one hundred *berachot* a day and establishing Chanukah for eight days.

Only Mattityahu and his sons, of the Chashmonaim dynasty, merited lighting the Menorah, for they sacrificed themselves for this ideal. Only they preserved the “lamp of Hashem, which is the *neshamah* of a person.” This is their eternal reward.

Therefore, Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 19b) state that, in the future, Chanukah will remain as a holiday, just like Purim. This is in the merit of the Chashmonaim, who dedicated their lives for the sake of *kiddush Hashem*.

In Summary

- Why did the Greeks specifically defile the oil? Why is the container in which they found the oil called a פך (flask) and not a בקבוק (bottle)? Why was Chanukah established as a festival for all future generations? Why do we emphasize that the lighting of the Menorah was done by the Kohanim?
- The Greeks wanted to defile the oil (שמן), for it is an allusion to the *neshamah* (נשמה). They wished to implant *tumah* into the *neshamah* of our nation, effectively cutting them off from Torah and tefillah. Our recitation of one hundred *berachot* a day helps us attain *yirat Shamayim*. This is hinted at in the word פך, which is numerically equivalent to one hundred. Only by means of kindling the Chanukah lights, do we merit revealing the hidden light, the *tikkun* of the *neshamah*, which brings with it prophecy and abundance of blessing.
- For this reason, Chanukah was established as a festival for all generations, just like Pesach. At the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* and were saved just in time. So, too, on Chanukah, Bnei Yisrael were brought to the nadir of impurity by the Greeks. The holy Kohanim, the tzaddikim of the House of Chashmonaim, overpowered the Greeks and conquered them. Chanukah was established for all generations so that we should always have the ability to vanquish those who rise up against us. In the merit of the Chashmonaim, Chazal restored the mitzvah of reciting one hundred *berachot* a day, purifying our *neshamot*. The Chanukah lights hint

to the fact that “the candle of Hashem is the *neshamah* of a person.” We have the wherewithal to become sanctified and pure, without swerving from *kedushah* and from Hashem. This is why Chanukah has been established for all generations.

INCREASING OUR SERVICE OF HASHEM

Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai differ as to how to light the Chanukah candles (*Shabbat* 21b). Beit Shammai is of the opinion that on the first night of Chanukah one should kindle all eight lights. On each successive night, he should decrease the number of lights by one. On the other hand, Beit Hillel states that on the first night he should kindle one light, and then increase the number of lights by one on each successive night.

This raises several difficulties. Why don't we light eight candles on each of the eight nights of Chanukah, to commemorate that the miracle of the oil lasted for eight days? Furthermore, why is the holiday called *Chanukah* rather than *Chag Hamenorah*? This would seem more appropriate, since the miracle applied to the oil with which the Menorah was lit.

Moreover, the Beit Yosef asks a most compelling question. Since there was enough olive oil in the flask to burn for one day, it seems that the miracle occurred only on the other seven days. Why, then, do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, instead of seven?

To answer these questions, let us examine the following pasuk. In the description of Creation, the Torah says (*Bereishit* 1:2), “When the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep.” Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:5) explain that “darkness” refers to the kingdom of Greece, which “darkened the eyes of Am Yisrael with their decrees.” The Greeks banned *Shemirat Shabbat*, the sanctification of

Rosh Chodesh, and the mitzvah of *brit milah*. Why specifically these three mitzvot?

Each of these mitzvot demonstrates how one can renew himself through Torah and mitzvah observance. When one constantly renews his spiritual *avodah*, he comes to a greater understanding that the world was created for him (*Sanhedrin* 37a) and that he is therefore responsible for its upkeep. This is done mostly through learning Torah. The mitzvot of *brit milah* and Shabbat also help him attain this level. *Brit milah* makes a person into a Jew, and Shabbat imbues him with renewed energy every week in order to take on the great responsibility of being one. Thus, through these mitzvot, one goes from strength to strength, fulfilling his purpose in this world.

The word חנוכה (Chanukah) is related to the word חינוך (education). A small child is full of wonder at the newness of all he sees. Similarly, when one does a mitzvah, he should feel as if he is doing it for the first time. One should constantly renew his Avodat Hashem and perform the mitzvot with feeling, not by rote.

The eight days of Chanukah correspond to the eighty years of a person's life (*Tehillim* 90:10). Each day is equivalent to ten years. The first light is equivalent to the first ten years of one's life, the formative years of *chinuch*.

We observe the halachah of candle lighting as Hillel instructed, adding one candle each night. This imparts an important message. Since the days of Chanukah correspond to the years of one's life, he is enjoined to increase his level of Avodat Hashem throughout his life. He should not bemoan his past, but continue his spiritual ascent without cessation.

One must realize that any years granted to him above the standard seventy are a free gift from Hashem. We thank Hashem for the miracle of the oil, which burned for eight days instead of the one day that it

should naturally have burned. Similarly, we request ten more years above the usual seventy, in order to increase our Avodat Hashem, and we must thank Hashem when we are granted this. Thus, all of our years will be dedicated to matters of *kedushah*.

According to this, we can now understand why we add a candle each night, rather than lighting all eight candles every night. This teaches us the importance of innovation and renewal in Avodat Hashem. Everyone can increase his Avodat Hashem. If we would light eight candles each day, a person might infer from this that he has done his utmost, and he has nothing more to add. By adding a candle every night, he realizes that there is always more to achieve. This should inspire him to request an additional ten years of life, so that he should merit adding even more to his previous achievements.

Beit Shammai rules that we decrease a candle each night of Chanukah. This alludes to the fact that one's years dwindle with each passing day, bringing him ever closer to his death. According to this understanding, too, one must ensure to add to his level of Avodat Hashem throughout his lifetime.

We can now reconcile the difficulty of the Beit Yosef. We keep eight days of Chanukah instead of seven, since they correspond to the eighty years of a person's life, in which he strives to constantly ascend in his Avodat Hashem.

The festival is called *Chanukah* and not *Chag Hamenorah* because the Greeks wished to destroy the souls (נשמה) of Bnei Yisrael. We see this from the fact that they did not touch the Menorah, but, rather, defiled the oil (שמן). They wished to cast the world into spiritual darkness by means of their Greek culture. The word יון (Greece) contains the same letters as נוי (beauty). They brought man to the peak of physical beauty, and the lusts which accompany it. At that time, the world stood in danger of being destroyed. Yirmeyahu Hanavi (33:25) proclaims, "If not for My covenant [being studied] day and night, I

would not have instituted the laws of the Heavens and the earth.” Without the covenant of keeping the Torah, the world would cease to exist.

Eisav was steeped in physical passions. The Torah states (*Bereishit* 25:27), “Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field.” When he asked Yaakov to give him the lentil stew to eat, he explained (*ibid.* vs. 30), “for I am exhausted.” He had become tired of laboring in Avodat Hashem, and desired only to fulfill his lusts.

The diabolical plan of the Greeks is hinted at in the letters of the word חנוכה (Chanukah). The letters can be rearranged to spell כהו-נח (they dimmed and relaxed), as well as כהו-חנ (they dimmed and had charm). The Greeks wanted Bnei Yisrael to relax their exertion in Torah and make physical beauty (חן) their goal. They would then be enveloped in darkness. But Bnei Yisrael transformed the potential for negativity into Chanukah. The word חנוכה divided as חנו-כה implies camping (חנו) surrounding Hashem. The *gematria* of כה, adding one for the word itself, is equivalent to Hashem’s Name י-ה-ו-ה. This is the true (חן) of Bnei Yisrael: favor (חן) in Hashem’s eyes.

In order to extricate ourselves from the effects of Greek culture, and increase our Avodat Hashem, we must take this lesson from Chanukah, always seeking to advance in our service of Hashem.

We must constantly add strength to the Divine spark within us and devote ourselves to Hashem’s mitzvot. Chanukah teaches us to continually ascend and renew our level of service to Him. We add a candle each night, corresponding to the years of life that are added on to man’s standard quota, reminding us that we always have more to achieve. May we become enflamed only for His service.

— In Summary —

- Beit Hillel rules that one lights an additional candle on each subsequent night of Chanukah, whereas Beit Shammai rules that one lights eight lights on the

first night, and then subtracts one on each subsequent night. What is the difference? Why don't we call Chanukah *Chag Hamenorah*? The Beit Yosef asks why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, when the miracle did not take place on the first day at all.

- The Greeks wished to uproot the power of renewal from Bnei Yisrael. The name חנוכה (Chanukah) is derived from the root חינוך (education), referring to the freshness and innovation that one should feel in his Avodat Hashem. Therefore, we rule according to the opinion of Beit Hillel, who states that we add another light each night, depicting our upward climb in Avodat Hashem. The eight days of Chanukah correspond to the eighty years of a person's life. If we would light eight candles each day, we would assume we have reached perfection, and we would not attempt to reach greater heights.
- The Greeks wanted to inject into Bnei Yisrael an attitude of כהו-נח, כהו-חנ (dimming and relaxing), defiling their spirituality. This is why they defiled the oil and not the Menorah itself. But Bnei Yisrael transformed it to חנו-כה. They encamped around Hashem. This teaches us to always ascend in spiritual matters, constantly renewing our Avodat Hashem.

THE VICTORY OVER GREEK CULTURE AND IMPURITY

The Gemara asks, "What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn that Bnei Yisrael rested on the 25th of Kislev..." (*Shabbat* 21a). The *Ran* explains that the word חנוכה (Chanukah) spells the phrase חנו-כה (they rested on the 25th). This was the day Bnei Yisrael relaxed from the intensive battle against the Greek army.

I would like to add the following point. The word שמן (oil) contains the same letters as נשמה (soul). The main aspect of the miracle of the oil was that Bnei Yisrael sanctified themselves for Hashem on Chanukah. The word חנוכה (Chanukah) itself alludes to this, for the word חנו (they rested) has the same root as the word מחנה (camp). And

the letters כה-ה of Chanukah have the same *gematria* as Hashem's Name יהוה-וה, adding one for the word itself. All of Bnei Yisrael became one camp, devoted to the service of Hashem.

The Gemara's question "מאי חנוכה – What is the essence of Chanukah?" can now be understood in another light. The Greeks ruled over our nation for fifty-two years, the *gematria* of מאי, adding one for the word itself. The question now reads, "Why did Bnei Yisrael allow the Greeks to rule over them for fifty-two years, before fighting against them?"

The main artillery at our disposal in our battle against the *Yetzer Hara* is the Torah. Chazal (*Kiddushin* 30b) tell us that Hashem created the *Yetzer Hara* and created the Torah as its antidote. As soon as Bnei Yisrael returned to Torah study, they managed to conquer the Greeks. Specifically the Chashmonaim were fitting for this mission, for they were steeped in Torah.

It was most appropriate that on Chanukah, when they "encamped around Hashem," making Him the center of their lives, they overpowered the Greeks and emerged victorious. Torah must be learned in unity and love, as the *Zohar* (III, 73a) states, "The Torah, Hashem, and Yisrael are one."

The Greeks sought to undermine the *sefirah* of *hod*, attributed to Aharon Hakohen. To that end, they nullified the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash, which was done by the Kohen Gadol (*Zohar* I, 261a), specifically the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah.

When the *sefirah* of *hod* is withdrawn, darkness descends upon the world. Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:5) that the words "with darkness upon the surface of the deep" refers to the kingdom of Greece, who darkened the eyes of Yisrael. The *Mesillat Yesharim* explains that darkness means either that something cannot be seen or that it is unclear.

This was the entire objective of the Greeks. They wished to implant ambiguity into the hearts of Bnei Yisrael, causing them to have doubts in their *emunah*. They would then challenge the authenticity of the mitzvot, denying their faith and becoming apostates, *rachmana litzlan*.

Toward that end, the Greeks instructed Bnei Yisrael (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:2; Vayikra Rabbah 15:9*) to write upon the horns of their oxen, “We have no connection with the G-d of Yisrael.” Why especially on the horns of their oxen? The word שור (ox) is numerically equivalent to the word הראש (the head). And the letters of the word קרן (horn) can be divided to spell קר-נ (coldness – fifty). The Greeks wished to confuse their minds, implanting in them coolness toward their Avodat Hashem, until they would descend to the fiftieth level of *tumah, rachmana litzlan*. They would then no longer have any connection to mitzvot.

Furthermore, the Ramban states that the Greeks believed only in what was comprehensible to the human mind. They disregarded all laws that were above their understanding, nullifying them completely. The Torah is full of such mitzvot, such as Shabbat, *milah*, the prohibition against eating pork, and others (*Yoma 67b*).

We mention this in the *Al Hanissim* prayer on Chanukah, where it says that the Greeks wanted “to cause them (Bnei Yisrael) to transgress the **statutes** of Your desires.” This was the battle against those laws which are illogical to the human mind.

Now we see the beauty of the wording of the Gemara: “What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn...” When one asks why he should rest (חננו) and sit in the House of Hashem learning Torah (expressed by כ”ה, as explained earlier), the answer is the following: “Our *Chachamim* learn.” One must study Torah like the *Chachamim*: without asking questions, or having doubts in *emunah*, as the Greeks had. Only in this manner can we hope to vanquish the *tumah* of Greek culture.

I would like to add that covering one's head is a means of obtaining true *yirat Shamayim*. The Greeks forced the Jewish men to go bareheaded. This would defile both their heads and their minds. Their *emunah* in Hashem would become defiled, as well, spoiling the *sefirah* of *hod*. Forcing the removal of their head-covering was the most effective way of “cooling them off” in their *emunah* in Hashem and bringing them down to the fiftieth level of impurity.

One should not imitate those who go to pray at the graves of tzaddikim and immediately afterward remove their *kippah*. They even ride their cars on Shabbat, *rachmana litzlan*. These people are completely cooled off to all things Jewish. Their *emunah* is nothing but a sham, a charade of the Satan. True faith in Hashem comes through wearing a *kippah*.

The word *כיפה* (*kippah*) can be divided into *כפ-יה*. The *gematria* of the letters *כפ* is one hundred. This alludes to the one hundred *berachot* a person is enjoined to make each day (*Menachot* 43b; *Zohar* III, 179a). This is based on the pasuk in *Devarim* (10:12), “מה ה' אלוהיך שואל מעמך” – What does Hashem your G-d, ask of you?” The word *מה* (what) can be read as *מאה* (one hundred). The letters *יה* (of *כיפה*) have the same *gematria* as *הוד* (*hod*). The *tikkun* for the *sefirah* of *hod* is by learning Torah and making one hundred *berachot* daily.

The question “What is the essence of Chanukah?” is asking in what merit did the miracle of Chanukah occur. The Gemara answers, “Our *Chachamim* learn.” Bnei Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of their Torah study, which they began in earnest on the 25th of Kislev, after finding one small flask of pure, untainted oil. The *gematria* of *פך* (flask) is one hundred. The word *שמן* hints to the *נשמה*. And the covering over the flask is an allusion to the head covering, the *kippah*. By these means, the Chashmonaim vanquished the Greeks and their culture and came closer to Hashem.

In Summary

- Regarding the question of the Gemara, “What is the essence of Chanukah?” we might pose the following answer. The word **מַאי** (what) is numerically equivalent to fifty-two, adding one for the word itself. The Gemara is asking, “Why didn’t the Jews fight back against the Greeks for fifty-two years?” It responds that our main artillery is the Torah, employed in our battle with the *Yetzer Hara* and Greek culture. Only after Bnei Yisrael encamped in unity, learning Torah with the *Shechinah* in their midst on Chanukah, were they able to vanquish the Greeks.
- The Greeks annulled the *sefirah* of *hod* by bringing darkness to the world and cancelling the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash. They ordered Bnei Yisrael to inscribe the words “We have no connection with the G-d of Israel” on the horns of their oxen. The word **שׁוֹר** (ox) is numerically equivalent to the word **הִרְאֵשׁ** (the head). And the letters of the word **קֶרֶן** (horn) can be divided to spell **קֶר-נ** (coldness – fifty). The Greeks wished to confuse their minds, implanting in them coolness toward their Avodat Hashem, until they would descend to the fiftieth level of *tumah*, *rachmana litzlan*. Then, they would not accept anything beyond their own understanding. Our Sages’ question, “What is the essence of Chanukah?” is answered by the words, “Our *Chachamim* learn.” The Jewish nation does not question the reason for mitzvot. A Jew keeps Torah and mitzvot whether or not he understands the reason behind them.
- One of the main means of keeping our *emunah* intact is by wearing a *kippah*. The Greeks wished to nullify this practice, for they wanted to defile the *sefirah* of *hod*, confusing the minds of Bnei Yisrael and “cooling off” their Avodat Hashem. Taking off one’s *kippah* damages one’s *emunah*. The question, “What is the essence of Chanukah?” is asking in what merit the miracle occurred. It was in merit of the flask of pure olive oil. The *gematria* of **פַּךְ** is one hundred, alluding to the one hundred *berachot* we are commanded to make daily. The word **שֶׁמֶן** (oil) hints to the *נשמה* (soul), and the fact that the flask was sealed with a cover alludes to the protective powers of wearing a head-covering. After Bnei Yisrael conquered the Greeks in battle, they recommitted themselves to Torah study and the recitation of one

hundred *berachot* daily. This was the impetus by which the Chashmonaim overpowered the Greek kingdom and their culture, and came closer to Hashem.

CHANUKAH AND THE SEFIRAH OF HOD

The Beit Yosef on the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim)* asks why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days. Since there was enough olive oil to burn for one day, it seems that the miracle occurred for only seven days.

He responds by stating that they divided the oil into eight parts. Each day, they poured one-eighth of the oil into the Menorah. And although there was only a small amount of oil burning each night, it burned throughout the night and the following day, until the time came to re-light the Menorah. This answer is borne out by the words of the Gemara that state, “והדליקו ממנו – They lit from it.” Thus, the miracle took place on the first night as well. The Beit Yosef further suggests that even after pouring out its contents, the flask remained full. This is another reason for celebrating eight days of Chanukah.

How could they have divided the oil into eight parts? It was forbidden to place less than a *shiur* (specified amount) into a vessel. Why should they be concerned about having oil for the following nights? Their obligation was to place the specified amount of oil in the cups of the Menorah on the first night.

The discovery of the flask was an open miracle, for it had been hidden among many flasks (according to *Tosafot*) and had remained untouched. They understood that this was Divinely ordained and that Hashem was looking after them (*Tehillim* 33:18). Hashem could have ensured that all of the flasks would remain pure, but in order to drive home this lesson, He saved only one.

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael miraculously discovered this one flask with pure olive oil, they understood that it would miraculously provide enough oil to burn for eight days, until they would be able to obtain fresh olive oil. They realized that they must divide the oil into eight equal parts, or pour some off into a dish. If the flask would become full once again, this would prove that Hashem was performing a miracle for them, enabling them to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah.

In response to the question of the Beit Yosef as to why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, the author of the sefer *Nachalei Shemen* quotes the Arizal. On Chanukah, the *sefirah* of *hod* became rectified, the eighth of the ten *sefirot*. It is most appropriate, then, to establish eight days of Chanukah.

What is the connection between the *sefirah* of *hod* and eight days of Chanukah? Is it simply because *hod* is the eighth *sefirah* that we light Chanukah lights for eight days? As we have seen, the Beit Yosef questions whether the miracle took place for eight days, or only seven.

The Arizal writes (*Likutei Nevi'im*) that the *chitzonim* have a hold on the *sefirah* of *hod*. This is the meaning of the words of the *Navi* (*Eichah* 1:13), “כל היום דוה - sick throughout the day.” The word דוה (sick) contains the same letters as the word הוד (*hod*).

Additionally, when Hashem instructed Moshe to explain the candle lighting in the Mishkan, the pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 8:2), “When you **raise** the lamps.” Surely, it should say, “When you **kindle** the lamps.” The main aspect of lighting the lamps of the Menorah is to raise the level of the *sefirah* of *hod*, extracting it from the clutches of the *chitzonim*. Aharon, representing *hod*, and Moshe, representing *netzach*, have the ability to accomplish this (*Zohar* I, 261a).

Specifically Aharon, who had halted the plague through the power of the *ketoret*, was the one chosen to light the Menorah. He was the embodiment of *hod*, fittingly chosen to extricate it from the impure forces. Only he could correct the *sefirah* of *hod* completely.

The Greeks wished to gain a grip on the *sefirah* of *hod* by defiling all of the olive oil. They desired to draw the prosecution of the *kelippah* and strict justice upon Am Yisrael. This would prevent Bnei Yisrael from raising the level of the *sefirah* of *hod*. The Kohanim would be prevented from lighting the lamps, and Bnei Yisrael would be thwarted in their Torah study. They would eventually fall into the fiftieth level of *tumah*.

But the Greeks were opposed by the Chashmonaim, who desired to sanctify Hashem's Name. They wanted that everyone should recognize the glory of His Kingdom. Therefore, they were worthy of a miracle, and one flask of pure olive oil was found. In this manner, they succeeded in extricating the *sefirah* of *hod* from the control of the *chitzonim*. When Hashem saw their single-mindedness in bringing about a *kiddush Hashem*, He came to their assistance. He caused the oil to burn for eight days, correcting all of the *sefirot* completely, specifically the *sefirah* of *hod*, which is the eighth *sefirah*, according to the Arizal.

This idea helps us resolve the following question of the *Divrei Yoel*. He asks, "What is the connection between the words that we recite in *Haneirot Halalu*, saying that the miracles were wrought 'through Your holy Kohanim,' and the subsequent sentence 'And all the days of Chanukah (these lights are sacred, etc.)'?" The act of lighting the lamps, which was done by the Kohanim, was the catalyst for the mitzvah of eight days of Chanukah, correcting the eighth *sefirah* of *hod*. It was extricated from the clutches of the *chitzonim*, and brought to its rightful place of *kedushah*.

According to *remez*, we might add the following. The Menorah has seven branches and there are eight days of Chanukah, which together equals fifteen, the numerical equivalent of *hod*. When Hashem noted their great desire to raise the level of the *sefirah* of *hod*, He performed an eight-day miracle by providing them with enough oil for the Menorah for every day. Thus the miracle also occurred on the first day.

————— In Summary —————

- The Beit Yosef asks why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days. Since there was enough oil to burn for only one day, it seems that the miracle took place only on the subsequent seven days. He replies that the miracle was either that they divided up the small amount they had into eight equal parts, and the lamps burned throughout the night even though they contained a minimum amount of oil; or the entire flask was emptied each night, yet immediately became re-filled. The words of the Gemara, “They lit from it” alludes to the fact that the flask miraculously contained enough oil to last for eight days.

- How was it permissible to put less than the required amount of oil into each lamp? The fact that they found pure olive oil was itself a miracle. Hashem could have caused them to find many jugs of pure oil. Bnei Yisrael realized that the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the one flask were divinely orchestrated. They therefore understood that Hashem would perform further miracles for them with this oil, and that it would also burn in a miraculous manner, when they would divide the oil into eight parts. This way, each day would bring with it the miracle of the oil burning anew.

- According to the Arizal, on Chanukah, the *sefirah* of *hod*, the eighth *sefirah*, receives its *tikkun*. Aharon Hakohen, the personification of *hod*, was chosen to prepare the lights in the Beit Hamikdash in order to elevate this *sefirah* and extricate it from the *chitzonim*. He had the honor of bringing it into the domain of *kedushah*.

- The purpose of Chanukah is the act of raising the *sefirah* of *hod* from the hands of the impure Greeks. The flask of pure oil alludes to pure thoughts. By lighting eight lights, we elevate all eight days of Chanukah. This is the reason why we attribute the miracle to the Kohanim. The seven branches of the Menorah, plus the eight days of Chanukah equals fifteen, which is the numerical value of **הוד** (*hod*). When Hashem noted their great desire to raise the level of the *sefirah* of *hod*, He performed an eight-day miracle. He provided them with ample oil each day. This is why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days.

THESE LIGHTS ARE SANCTIFIED

Chazal declare (*Eiruvin* 31a) that we must do mitzvot because we were commanded to do them, and not for any personal pleasure. This is the level of doing a mitzvah *lishmah*.

This is the reason that we say, “These lights are sanctified.” Lights refer to mitzvot, as *Mishlei* (6:23) tells us, “For a commandment is a candle and the Torah is light.” The lights of the menorah may not be used for personal benefit, but purely for the sake of the mitzvah. They are sanctified for the mitzvah.

The *neshamah* is compared to a light, as it says (*Mishlei* 20:27), “A man’s soul is the candle of Hashem.” The *neshamah* is holy, for it contains a Divine spark from on High. It may not be defiled by being used for mundane purposes. It must be utilized purely for Avodat Hashem, only to praise Him (as we sing in *Haneirot Halalu* after lighting the menorah).

In order to reach the level of performing mitzvot *lishmah*, one must serve Hashem in purity and holiness, with his entire being. He must exert himself to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. Then Hashem will assist him, as it says (*Shabbat* 104a; *Yoma* 38b), “He who comes to be purified, is assisted.” How many miracles does a person witness on a daily basis!

The first step is to do mitzvot. Then he will realize before Whom he stands and fulfills the mitzvot, as David Hamelech declares (*Tehillim* 16:8), “I have set Hashem before me always.” On the other hand, one who does not do the mitzvot sincerely will find himself facing the challenge of (ibid. 51:5) “my sin is before me always.” Just as the Chanukah lights, an allusion to mitzvot, are holy, so too, are the mitzvot. They must be done purely for Hashem’s sake, *lishmah*.

The previous Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, shlita, asks the following question. Why do we find that people who are estranged from all mitzvot are punctilious about lighting the Chanukah lights, which is merely a Rabbinically ordained mitzvah (*Shabbat* 23a)?

According to what we have previously said, this is quite understandable. Chanukah is infused with a special inspiration for keeping mitzvot, for a mitzvah is compared to a lamp, and Torah is light. The Greeks were intent on eradicating mitzvot and Torah from our lifestyle, but we vanquished them and discovered the flask of pure oil (*Shabbat* 21b). The light of mitzvot shone forth once more from the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash.

History repeats itself. In every generation, there are nations who would like nothing more than to eradicate us from the face of the map, both physically and spiritually. They do this by making harsh decrees against us and trying to dampen our spiritual strength with negative influences.

However, Hashem helps us and gives us leaders to teach us Torah and mitzvot, keeping us separate from the gentile nations. They search from among the broken, defiled jugs for the pure flask of oil (שמן) with which to light the Menorah. They seek to purify the *neshamah* (נשמה) of Bnei Yisrael and help us come close to Hashem.

When a person wishes to become purified, Hashem assists him. His soul becomes aflame, burning with a passion for mitzvot. Bnei Yisrael are said to be as full of mitzvot as a pomegranate is full of seeds (*Megillah* 6a).

Specifically on Chanukah one becomes “fired up” to do mitzvot. His *neshamah*, which is compared to a light, is aroused. The light of the tzaddikim of the generation ignites his enthusiasm for Avodat Hashem.

We find this to be the case with the Chashmonaim. The Greeks chased them out of the Beit Hamikdash. But they searched and found

a small flask of pure olive oil, sealed by the Kohen Gadol. They lit the Menorah with it and merited the miracle that it burned for eight days.

Every year, in the merit of the Torah leaders of our generation, this inspiration for Avodat Hashem is rekindled. It has the potential to bring blessing upon the entire world and enter the heart of every Jew.

Now we see why even simple Jews are prepared to go to great expense in order to perform the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights. They are influenced by the tzaddikim of the generation, being inspired by them to light the candles. After their enthusiasm has been kindled, the fire of their *avodah* continues to burn of its own accord (*Shabbat 21a; Torat Kohanim, Emor*).

Moreover, the enthusiasm that people feel about lighting the Chanukah candles spills over into their other mitzvot, which are compared to lights, causing them to do these mitzvot *lishmah*. This is in the *zechut* of our “kings,” an allusion to the Torah Sages (*Gittin 62a*). This is a personal miracle that takes place for each and every Jew on Chanukah. He does not even have to battle against his *Yetzer Hara*. The tzaddikim help him to triumph.

This is hinted to in the words of *Al Hanissim*, when we thank Hashem “upon the miracles and the battles.” Surely, we should mention the battles first and then the miracles, since the miracles came through the battles.

This question can be resolved in light of what we previously mentioned. A person’s individual miracle does not begin with a battle at all. He is aided by the merit of the tzaddikim. For the miracle to have continuity, one must provide the *zechut* of his own mitzvot, done purely *l’shem Shamayim*.

Shlomo Hamelech, in *Shir Hashirim* (5:2) states, “I slumber, but my heart is awake.” The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:1*) explains that this means that one’s heart is always “awake to keep mitzvot.”

Although he may seem to be sleeping as far as Torah and mitzvot are concerned, deep in his heart there is a spark of wakefulness, the inspiration to connect to Hashem.

At times, this spark of inspiration needs to be kindled in order to be expressed in action. This is accomplished on Chanukah, when one is inspired to sing songs of praise to Hashem and thank Him for all of the miracles done in those days at this time. Every year, at this time, the influence of the tzaddikim ignites others with the burning desire to keep mitzvot.

In order to attain this level, one needs Hashem's help. Were it not for this help, he would never succeed in overcoming his *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52a; *Kiddushin* 30b). If he descends in his spiritual level, Hashem is there to lift him up.

We owe limitless thanks to Hashem for the gift of Chanukah, the opportunity to ascend and become kindled with enthusiasm in order to ascend in Avodat Hashem. But one must be vigilant to make himself into a fitting vessel, capable of containing the positive influences available at this time. To the degree that a person prepares himself to accept blessing, he is given it. Let everyone utilize the opportunity to elevate his soul on these days of wonders and miracles.

————— In Summary —————

- The mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights teaches us that we must accustom ourselves to do the mitzvot for their own sake, *lishmah*. Mitzvot are compared to lights, and are sanctified, like the Chanukah lights. They should be done *lishmah*, and not for one's personal purposes. One must invest much exertion, in purity and holiness, to do mitzvot as perfectly as possible. Furthermore, everyone should know before Whom he stands and performs the mitzvot.
- We find that even the simplest Jews light the Chanukah lights. There is a special inspiration on Chanukah to perform mitzvot. This inspiration comes

from the days of the Chashmonaim, who vanquished the Greeks. Likewise, the tzaddikim in each generation ignite the people with the fervor to ascend in their Avodat Hashem. This is specifically in the area of doing mitzvot *lishmah*, for the candles are an allusion to the mitzvot.

- The Chanukah miracle did not entail a struggle with the *Yetzer Hara*, for the people had the merit of the tzaddikim to help them. Even though a person may seem to be sleeping as far as Torah and mitzvot are concerned, deep in his heart, there is always a spark of enthusiasm for mitzvot. This is in the merit of the tzaddikim, who, with Hashem's help, ignite the people's passion for Avodat Hashem, year after year.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHANUKAH AND PURIM

The Gemara points out that there is a fundamental difference between Chanukah and Purim. Commenting on the pasuk in Tehillim (22:1) that begins "For the conductor, on the *ayelet hashachar*," the Gemara (*Yoma* 29a) states that just as the dawn (*hashachar*) is the end of the night, so too, is the story of Esther the end of the miracles. In fact, Purim is the last miracle to be recorded; the story of Chanukah was not transcribed. The Gemara finds this puzzling since the Chanukah miracle occurred after the Purim story. Surely Chanukah has the status of the last miracle. Why wasn't it written down?

This is especially difficult to understand since the miracle that took place on Chanukah seems to have been greater than that of Purim. On Purim, we experienced physical salvation, for Haman wished to wipe out the Jewish nation (*Esther* 3:13). However, on Chanukah, the battle was for their soul. The Greeks wished to cause Bnei Yisrael to forget Torah by abolishing the mitzvot. They wished to uproot everything spiritual, which has primary importance. Why, then, wasn't Chanukah recorded for posterity?

The answer to this lies in the difference between the two miracles. The salvation of Bnei Yisrael on Purim was complete, for our nation was guaranteed that a rasha such as Haman would never succeed in annihilating Am Yisrael in the future. On the other hand, although the salvation of Chanukah celebrated the victory of the spiritual over the physical, it was not a complete miracle. Greek culture, unfortunately, prevails until this very day.

In our day, there is great pressure to transgress aveirot, such as *chillul Shabbat*, the intermingling of men and women, *bitul Torah*, and the like. We ourselves see that the Chanukah miracle is incomplete. Thus, it could not be recorded for generations. Only with the coming of Mashiach will the hardships we suffer from Greek ideology come to an end, and the miracle will be complete.

Every year, the miracle of Chanukah returns. One is obligated to review the relevant halachot and publicize the miracle. One must remember that the Greeks wished to eradicate Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and *brit milah*, but Bnei Yisrael overpowered them and continued keeping mitzvot.

If we, too, uphold these mitzvot and do complete teshuvah, Hashem will perform miracles for us as well. This will hasten the arrival of Mashiach, and the *galut* will come to an end.

This is alluded to in the names of the parshiyot that are read during Chanukah: *Vayeishev* and *Mikeitz*. *Vayeishev* (וישב) has the same root as the word teshuvah (תשובה). And *Mikeitz* (מקץ) is from the word קץ (end). This teaches that teshuvah will bring the end of our *galut*. The letter מ (numerically equivalent to forty), at the beginning of *Mikeitz*, hints to the words of Rabbi Eliezer, who states (*Sanhedrin* 99a) that Mashiach's rule will be for forty years, culminating with the *geulah*.

This idea helps us understand a basic concept of Chanukah. Why did the Greeks defile the oil instead of simply sealing the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, thereby preventing the Avodah altogether?

In those days, the glory of Bnei Yisrael was at an all-time low. The Greeks ordered the people to write on the horns of their oxen that they have no connection with the G-d of Israel (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:2*). The miracle of the flask of pure oil raised their glory, symbolized by the fact that oil always floats to the top (*Devarim Rabbah 7:3*). The words themselves hint to this: שמן has the same *gematria* as קרנם (their glory). We pray to Hashem, “Our Father, our King, lift up the glory of Your nation, Israel.”

The Greeks desired to defile the oil for two reasons. First, they knew that kindling the lights brought glory to the *Shechinah* and to Am Yisrael. They wanted to annul both of these forms of glory. Locking the gates of the Beit Hamikdash would be insufficient.

Second, the Greeks defiled the oil (שמן) to hint that they would defile the *neshamah* (נשמה) of Bnei Yisrael through abolishing Torah and mitzvot.

But they neglected one small flask of oil. From this pure oil, Bnei Yisrael drew *mesirut nefesh* and *kedushah*. They even ignited the souls of the rest of the nation, infusing everyone with sanctity and purity, ensuring the continuity of Bnei Yisrael. The lights burned for eight days, an allusion to man’s eighty years in this world.

However, the miracle of Chanukah was specific to the times of the Chashmonaim; it was not a permanent miracle like Purim. We are still fighting the battle for spiritual survival today. This is why the miracle of Chanukah is not recorded. Only after Mashiach’s arrival will it be transcribed, since it will then be revealed that *kedushah* always overpowers evil, just like oil always floats to the top.

In Summary

- The miracle of Purim is recorded for posterity, as the story of Esther is considered to be the last of the miracles. Why isn’t Chanukah, which took place at a later date than Purim, also recorded for generations?

- The salvation of Purim was physical and thus complete. But the battle with the Greeks was of a spiritual nature and is not yet over. Greek ideology is prevalent even today. It wreaks havoc among the masses, and will continue doing so until the advent of Mashiach. At that time, Hashem's Kingship will be universally accepted, and the miracle of the spiritual over the physical will be complete.
- Furthermore, the miracle of Chanukah had a special meaning. The Greeks specifically wished to defile the oil. The kindling of the Menorah brought glory to the *Shechinah*, as well as to Am Yisrael. The Greeks wished to prevent this. The word שמן (oil) hints to the נשמה (soul), indicating that the Greeks desired to defile the *neshamah* of our nation, and lower our glory. They wished to spoil our spirit. At Chanukah, the Jews found one small flask of pure olive oil, from which they drew *kedushah*. But the completion of this miracle will take place only with the coming of Mashiach. Then, everyone will acknowledge that this miracle was the greatest of them all, for the power of *kedushah* always prevails.

THE LIGHT OF TORAH

The Chanukah miracle was above the laws of nature. Oil that was sufficient for only one day, burned for eight. The word שמן (oil) is contained in the word נשמה (soul). This imparts an important message. Just as oil always rises to the top, one's *neshamah* surmounts the physical, becoming sanctified and purified, even in the face of the *Yetzer Hara* and his accomplices.

Furthermore, just as oil rises to the top of all other liquids and does not mingle with them, so too, are we capable of living alongside the gentiles, yet remain completely apart.

The *Midrash (Tanchuma, Toldot 5; Esther Rabbah 10:11)* recounts the following narrative. The Caesar remarked how great are Bnei Yisrael that they survive among the seventy nations like a lone sheep among

seventy wolves. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah replied that they survive among the nations of the world only because Hashem is their Shepherd, Who protects them.

Let us try to explain this account. Why was the Caesar so astonished that the Romans did not destroy the Jews who lived in their provinces? The Romans ruled; they had thousands of captives, slaves, and servants in various countries, and they allowed them all to live. Why should they battle the Jews? It wasn't a time of war.

Why didn't the Caesar ask Rabbi Yehoshua where the Shepherd was, and specifically, where He was during the *churban* Beit Hamikdash?

The essence of the Caesar's wonderment was how the Jews were able to uphold the Torah and mitzvot amidst thousands of Romans, who were steeped in immorality. He was astounded that they could preserve their morals and remain apart from the gentiles. Moreover, even at a time when the gentiles mocked their Jewish dress, *payot*, and head covering, they were not insulted.

In general, when one nation is taken captive, the people adopt the custom of their captors. They follow the habits of the place in order to blend in with the host nation. This mindset is expressed by the adage: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Yet, although the Jewish nation was under Roman rule, they kept their own customs, and did not do as the Romans at all!

Rabbi Yehoshua explained to the Caesar that Bnei Yisrael are not governed by nature. They have a Protector, as long as they uphold Torah and mitzvot. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16) guarantee us that as long as the voice of Yaakov (Bnei Yisrael) is heard in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, the hands of Eisav are powerless.

But, if they become lax in Torah and mitzvah observance, Hashem hides His face from them, *chas v'shalom*. Then they are left without

protection and inevitably merge with the nations. This is what happened at the time of the *churban*.

When a Jew learns Torah and performs mitzvot, no one has control over him. His *neshamah* becomes aflame with the fire of Torah (*Midrash Shochar Tov* 16:7), just like oil burns with fire and produces light. No one can negatively influence him.

The Torah scholars “advance from strength to strength” (*Tehillim* 84:8). They have the ability to advance in Avodat Hashem in merit of their Torah study, for Hashem, their Shepherd, protects them from on High.

In our day, thousands of Bnei Torah study day and night in yeshivot, often far away from their families. This is just like Rabbi Akiva, who left home to learn Torah for twelve years, and then returned to learn for another twelve years without even entering his house (*Ketubot* 63a).

There is a similar story regarding the Vilna Gaon, zt”l. He met his sister after they had not seen each other for twenty-five years. After he greeted her, he immediately returned to his Torah studies. These scholars learn Torah with a fiery passion, not allowing the pleasures of this world to distract them.

We find *talmidei chachamim* who ignore all physical pleasures. On the contrary, they rise early and spend all their time in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot (*Pe’ah* 1:1). We don’t find this to be the case with any other nation. It is all due to the Torah.

Torah shields a person from all harm (*Sotah* 21a). Torah protects us both in this world, as well as the Next (*Avot* 6:9). This is attested to by the words of *Mishlei* (6:22), “As you go forth, it will guide you; as you recline, it will guard you...” Our existence, both in this world and the Next, is in the merit of the Torah. In the *zechut* of Torah, the *neshamah* is capable of receiving *kedushah* from under the Heavenly Throne. Our

sefarim teach us that a person has two guardians: Hashem and the Torah.

When a person desists from Torah study, the fire of Torah leaves him, and his *neshamah*, which is compared to the oil, is ineffective to protect him against the pull of the physical. He is liable to become influenced by the frivolities of this world.

This, then, was the response of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah. The power of Torah is paramount. The main aspect of Chanukah is the light of Torah, as the Gemara (*Shabbat* 21a) states, “What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn...” Chanukah represents Torah study.

The *Yetzer Hara* is also called a fire (*Zohar* I, 80a). His mission is to cause people to stumble, until they ultimately forget Hashem. The Gemara (*Yerushalmi*, end of *Berachot*) states, “If you forsake Me one day, I will forsake you for two days.” One who abandons his Torah study for even a short time will eventually forget it.

The Torah promises us reward “if you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them” (*Vayikra* 26:3). Rashi, in the name of the *Midrash (Torat Kohanim, ibid.)* explains that these words command “that you should be laboring in Torah study – שתהיו עמלים בתורה.” In every situation, a person should be engrossed in mitzvot and Torah study. One can keep mitzvot only if he learns Torah. If he does not do so, he “betrays” Hashem. This is hinted to by the fact that the letters of the word עמל (exertion) can be transposed to spell the word מעל (betrayal).

One who exerts himself in Torah study receives Divine assistance above the laws of nature. This was the case at Chanukah. Although there was enough oil for only one day, a miracle caused the oil to burn for eight days. The light of Torah burns in a supernatural way. But one must exert himself in learning Torah. This is the true meaning of “What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn...”

————— In Summary —————

- The miracle of Chanukah hints to the supernal nature of the Jew. This is alluded to by the oil, which always rises to the top. The Jew does not mingle with the gentiles, for his *neshamah* possesses *kedushah*. The Caesar wondered how the Jewish nation can endure among the nations, like a lone sheep among seventy wolves. Rabbi Yehoshua responded that the Shepherd protects them.
- Why did the Caesar think that the Romans would harm the Jews? It wasn't a time of war. Also, why didn't the Caesar ask where their Shepherd was at the time of the *churban*? Rabbi Yehoshua's response, too, is not easily understood.
- The Caesar was referring to the Jew who lives among the gentiles, yet remains apart. He does not get insulted when mistreated. He was asking how this is possible. Rabbi Yehoshua answered that the power of Torah protects the Jews from the plots of the gentiles. Unfortunately, at the time of the *churban*, Bnei Yisrael abandoned the Torah. This allowed the gentiles to prevail over them and destroy the Beit Hamikdash.
- Every Jew is protected by Hashem in the merit of the Torah. But one who neglects the Torah is consumed by the fire of the *Yetzer Hara*. Through the Torah one can distance himself from the frivolities of this world. Rabbi Akiva and the Vilna Gaon are examples of this. Torah grants a person success above the laws of nature, protecting him both in this world, as well as in the World to Come. Only in this manner, can a person come close to Hashem.

Practical Application

The power of exerting oneself in Torah is beyond the laws of nature. A Jew who finds himself among the gentiles should exert himself in his Torah studies, and the gentiles will not harm him. He will overcome their influence, just as he overpowers his *Yetzer Hara*, and thus become closer to Hashem.

THE FULL FLASK OF OIL

The Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b) asks, “What is the essence of Chanukah? They searched, and did not find but one flask of oil.” The author of *Tiferet Shmuel* asks, “Why do our Sages say, ‘They did not find **but** (אבל) one flask of oil’ and not, ‘They found **only** (רק) one flask of oil?’”

Additionally, why didn’t the Greeks destroy the flasks of oil that they found in the Beit Hamikdash? Why did they take the trouble to open the flasks and defile them instead? What is the great secret hidden in the oil which they were aware of, warranting their fear in allowing it to remain pure? Why didn’t the Greeks simply demolish the Menorah?

Let us also try to understand the difference between Purim and Chanukah. On Purim, we are instructed to prepare a festive meal, whereas on Chanukah, we have no such mitzvah. Also, we don’t read the Chanukah story from a Megillah. Why?

The *berachah* that we say when we light the menorah is also enigmatic. We say, “Who made miracles for our fathers in those days, at this time.” What is the connection between “those days” and “this time”?

The objective of the Greeks was to subsume Bnei Yisrael in their culture and cause them to forget the Torah. The Jewish nation’s victory in this area was the main miracle of Chanukah. Why, then, did our *Chachamim* institute the miracle of the oil as the main miracle, and not the fact that Bnei Yisrael overcame the Greeks in their ambition to cause them to abandon their religion?

The fact that a flask that contained oil for just one day produced enough oil to light for eight days is the main factor of the miracle. This encompasses all of the miracles. How? The Greeks knew that Bnei

Yisrael are compared to oil. Just as oil floats to the top of a mixture, so too, Bnei Yisrael do not mingle with the other nations (*Shemot Rabbah* 36:1). Just as oil is readily noticeable in a mixture, likewise Bnei Yisrael are outstanding among the nations.

Oil (שמן) hints to the *neshamah* (נשמה), which contains within it a spark of Divinity, from Above. So, too, are Bnei Yisrael above the laws of nature. The Menorah alludes to the body of a person, for it is made of one hewn piece of gold. A person's body, too, is one piece of flesh. It contains 248 organs and 365 sinews, paralleling the 613 mitzvot (*Makkot* 24a). The mitzvot, too, are one entity, for one mitzvah is dependent on another. When one mitzvah is spoiled, this may cause many others to be damaged, *chas v'shalom*. Whereas, the performance of one mitzvah effects a *tikkun* in all other mitzvot, as well as leading to the performance of more mitzvot, as it says (*Avot* 4:2), "One mitzvah leads to another."

In this vein, just as oil fuels the Menorah, the *neshamah* imbues the body with the strength to keep the mitzvot. This is alluded to in the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 8:2), "When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the lamps cast light." In order for the *neshamah* to shine forth, it must "face" the body, being in harmony with it.

The Greeks did not demolish the Menorah, for they had nothing against the physical existence of the Jew. Their objective was to extinguish the *neshamah* contained within him, alluded to by the oil used for lighting the Menorah, by converting Bnei Yisrael to their beliefs.

The Battle of the Greeks against the Neshamah

The Greeks did not destroy the flasks of oil, an allusion to the physical body. They did not wish to annihilate the Jews. They defiled the oil within the flasks, for this alluded to the *neshamah* of the Jews. They wished to separate the soul from the body. In the *Al Hanissim*

prayer, we say that the Greeks desired “to make them forget Your Torah, and convert them from Your mitzvot.” They desired to cause Bnei Yisrael to abandon their connection with the Torah.

How did they expect to remove the soul from the people? They knew that a person forgets the words of the Torah when he is distracted (*Ta’anit* 7b). Improper thoughts and negative influences distract a person from Torah. The Greeks introduced their culture in order to do this.

Although the Menorah, representing the body, was extinguished, and although the oil, representing the *neshamah*, was defiled, the *kedushah* of Am Yisrael was not destroyed, for one flask remained. This was Mattityahu and his sons, who ensured the continuance of the nation. They rose up against the Greeks, with great *mesirut nefesh* for the sake of Hashem. They knew that somewhere in the Beit Hamikdash, a flask of oil was waiting for them. They knew that Hashem constantly watches over His people (*Tehillim* 121:4), and He would stand by them, helping them find the last drops of pure olive oil. Only one flask remained, teaching us the power of one single *neshamah*.

When Hashem allowed them to find the flask of oil after such great exertion, this hinted to them that they must now exert themselves to increase their Torah and mitzvah performance. We find this to be the case with Rabbi Akiva (*Bereishit Rabbah* 100:11). Until the age of forty, he was totally ignorant of Torah. He eventually became a Torah leader. Had he realized how great his *neshamah* was, he would have begun his Torah odyssey much earlier.

This, then, is the meaning of our Sages’ statement, “They searched, and did not find **but** one flask of oil,” and not, “They searched, and found **only** one flask of oil.” Bnei Yisrael were greatly influenced by the decadent culture of the Greeks. They knew that the discovery of the single, remaining flask of oil was a tremendous miracle, a means of purifying the collective *neshamah* of the nation. The Sages did not want

to use the word רק (only) in connection with the flask of oil, since it alludes to ריקנות (emptiness). This is an inappropriate description of the flask of oil and what it signified.

Bnei Yisrael did not want to be empty. They desired to open the flask and use its contents, immersing their *neshamah* in Torah and mitzvot. They wanted to serve Hashem as a single unit, just as the Menorah was hammered out from one piece of gold (*Shemot* 25:31). They knew that without toiling in Torah, there is nothing but emptiness. Only with Torah is the heart full of holiness and purity, enabling a person to connect with Hashem.

This idea explains the liturgy we recite after lighting the menorah: “These lights are holy, and we may not use them, only see them.” The *neshamah*, alluded to by the oil, may not be utilized for mundane purposes. It is compared to a fire lit for a mitzvah, which may not be used for any other reason (*Shabbat* 22a). The candles, too, hint to the mitzvot, as the pasuk in *Mishlei* (6:23) states, “A mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light.” Mitzvot may not be used for personal pleasure. They are to be performed for Hashem’s sake alone.

When Bnei Yisrael were exposed to the culture of the Greeks, they forfeited a measure of the Divine spark within them. When they found the sealed flask of oil, they realized it contained a message for them. They were being told to remain sealed from outside influences, completely devoted for the sake of Hashem. They needed to open the flask. This referred to opening themselves up to Torah and mitzvot. Were they to disregard this message, the Greeks would have continued impacting them with their hedonistic culture. The *neshamah* of the nation could shine forth only after they detached themselves from the influence of the Greeks.

The reason there is no command to make a festive meal on Chanukah is because Greek culture still prevails. The miracle is not complete, and we have not yet reached perfection. We thank Hashem and praise Him

for the great miracles He performed in those days, allowing us to prevail against negative influences in our times also.

For this reason, too, we have no Megillah reading on Chanukah as we do on Purim. Purim is the last of the complete miracles. The miracle of Chanukah was not complete, for we still experience the effects of Greek culture today. Only when we defeat it completely will our *neshamot* be able to become ignited for Hashem's sake.

———— In Summary ————

- Why do the Sages use the word *but* one flask of oil, rather than *only* one flask of oil? Why did the Greeks go to the trouble of defiling the oil rather than simply destroying the Menorah? Why is there no command to make a festive meal on Chanukah, and why is there no Megillah describing the miracle, as on Purim? What is the meaning of “in those days, at this time”? Why do we celebrate the miracle of the oil rather than the triumph over Greek culture?
- The Greeks had no interest in annihilating Bnei Yisrael; they wished to defile the *neshamah*. Oil (שמן) is an allusion to the *neshamah* (נשמה), and the Menorah alludes to the body. All of the mitzvot are one unit, corresponding to the body parts, which make up one body. Bnei Yisrael's discovery of the flask of pure oil reminded them that Hashem continually watches over them, protecting them and desiring their good. This allowed them to defeat the Greeks. The flask was closed, imparting the message that they must open their *neshamah* to Hashem's service. They must become filled up, which is why the Sages do not say “only (רק) one flask of oil,” which would denote ריקנות (emptiness). They must be filled with Torah and mitzvot, and disconnected from the culture of the Greeks.
- “These candles are holy, and we may not use them.” The candles are the mitzvot, referring to the *neshamah*. The *neshamah*, as well as the mitzvot, may not be utilized for mundane matters, only for Hashem's sake. We have no obligation to prepare a festive meal on Chanukah, for the miracle is still incomplete. Greek culture still prevails today. Only on Purim do we read a

Megillah, for Purim is the last of the complete miracles. We still wait for Hashem's light to become revealed throughout the world. On Chanukah we praise Him for the great miracles He performed in those days, allowing us to prevail against negative influences in our times also. Only when we maintain a closed attitude toward the culture of the gentiles, which is an outgrowth of the Greek culture, like the closed flask of oil, can the *neshamah* within us shine forth.

TO THANK AND TO PRAISE

The days of Chanukah are designated for thanking and praising Hashem. There is no obligation to prepare a festive meal on them, as there is on Purim.

The Admor of Sanz, zt"l, quotes the *Rema* and the *Levush*, who state that we eat a festive meal on Chanukah to commemorate the inauguration of the Mizbeach, which took place then. But it is not connected to the Chanukah miracle.

Why don't our Sages obligate us to have a festive meal on Chanukah, as we do on Purim? The Chanukah miracle was also a physical victory. If Bnei Yisrael would have insisted on upholding the Torah and mitzvot instead of heeding the Greeks, the Greeks would have murdered them.

There is another reason why we should celebrate the miracle with a festive meal. If Bnei Yisrael had succumbed to the message that the Greeks ordered them to write on the horn of their oxen – that they had no affiliation with the G-d of Israel – they would have been annihilated spiritually, leading to their physical destruction. Either which way, the physical survival of the Jewish people was very much at stake.

Moreover, the nation was saved spiritually, since the *neshamah* of the nation remained intact, true to Hashem. Surely, this also merits celebration with a *seudat mitzvah*.

The Rebbi of Sanz, zt”l, suggests that at the time of the Chanukah story, Bnei Yisrael were financially depleted, for the Greeks had confiscated their money (Rambam). Obligating the people to prepare a festive meal would have been in the category of “a decree which most of the public cannot withstand” (*Bava Kama* 79b; *Bava Batra* 60b). They therefore desisted from doing so. But at other times in history, and even in our day, people do have the means to prepare a festive meal. We are then left with the original question: Why didn’t our Sages establish a mitzvah of a lavish holiday meal on Chanukah to commemorate the miracle, instituting songs of praise and thanks to Hashem instead?

Chazal (*Chulin* 91a) relate that when Yaakov Avinu was alone at night, he re-crossed the river in order to retrieve small flasks which he had left behind. Why did Yaakov put himself in danger, travelling alone at night, merely for a few jugs? The *Zohar* (I, *Parashat Vayishlach*) tells us to appreciate every little thing that Hashem gives us, for everything is infused with holiness. Nevertheless, Yaakov Avinu endangered himself by going out alone at night. Shouldn’t he at least have brought one of his sons along with him?

Let us not think we understand the entire episode. The *Zohar* (III, 149b) has very harsh words for the one who believes the words of Torah are merely stories. Every account has a message for all times.

These small flasks, which Yaakov wished to retrieve, contained the same oil with which he had previously anointed the *mizbeach*. Moreover, the word פֶּה (flask) is numerically equivalent to 101, adding one for the word itself. This is to teach a person that even when the going is difficult, and even in hazardous times, he should review his studies 101 times. There is no comparison between one who reviews his lesson 100 times and one who reviews 101 times (*Chagigah* 9b). Only in this manner, will one’s learning remain with him, effecting Heavenly miracles on his behalf.

In the merit of Yaakov Avinu, who learned Torah wherever he was (*Bereishit Rabbah* 95:2, *Tanchuma, Vayigash* 11), and certainly reviewed his lessons 101 times, we merited the discovery of the flask of pure oil. This flask of pure oil also refers to the tzaddikim of each generation.

At the time of Chanukah, tremendous darkness descended upon the world, due to the Greeks, who had defiled the oil (שמן), which symbolizes the *neshamah* (נשמה). Nevertheless, a few tzaddikim remained unsullied. These were Mattityahu and his sons. They went out with *mesirut nefesh* and valiantly fought the Greeks, just as Yaakov had fought Eisav. They extricated the small flask of pure olive oil, just as Yaakov had done.

They merited discovering the flask of pure oil in the *zechut* of the Torah. One who devotes himself to Torah is protected by the Torah (*Sotah* 21a). In this manner, they were able to rededicate the Temple, referring to the hearts of the people.

The main feature of the war against the Greeks was the battle for spirituality and the survival of Torah. Therefore, our Sages established Chanukah as a holiday of a spiritual nature, without the obligation of making a festive meal. This is independent of whether or not the people at the time can afford to do so. The miracle is commemorated exclusively with songs of thanks and praise to Hashem for saving us from Greek culture.

It is extremely difficult to enjoy a meal and exert oneself in Torah at the same time. The Gemara (*Gittin* 70a) warns us not to overindulge in fine foods. The establishing of thanks and praise is in order to increase Torah study, which might be decreased by having a festive meal.

The flask of oil miraculously burned an additional seven days, hinting to the years of a person's lifetime (*Tehillim* 90:10). One must devote his whole life to studying Torah and vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara*. Torah is our ammunition against the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Yaakov, who endangered himself by returning for the small jugs, implanted this trait into his children. It was in the merit of his Torah and *mesirut nefesh* that Bnei Yisrael were able to stand up to the mighty Greeks and overpower them.

The Tikkun of the Sefirah of Hod in the Merit of Yaakov Avinu

The sefer *Nachlat Shemen* quotes the Arizal, stating that on Chanukah, the *sefirah* of *hod* is rectified. Since *hod* is the eighth *sefirah*, we celebrate Chanukah for eight days.

The Arizal explains that the *kelippah* has a hold on the *sefirah* of *hod*. The Greeks, whose spiritual source was rooted in the *kelippah*, defiled the oil in order to gain control over *hod* (הוד). The lighting of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash was a means of bringing glory and splendor (הוד והדר) to Hashem's Name. By extinguishing the Menorah and defiling the oil, the Greeks gained authority over *hod*. The *gematria* of הוד is equal to that of גאווה (pride). Pride belongs solely to Hashem, as it says (*Divrei Hayamim* I, 29:11), "Yours, Hashem, is the greatness, the strength, the splendor, the triumph, and the glory (הוד)." The purpose of the entire Creation is to bring glory to Hashem's Name.

Bnei Yisrael are the foremost channel for the manifestation of Hashem's greatness and glory in this world, as it says (*Tehillim* 68:35), "[His] grandeur is upon Israel as His might is in the skies." Who can elevate and praise Hashem's Name if not Bnei Yisrael? When the Jewish nation walks in the ways of Torah and mitzvot, the *sefirah* of *hod*, Hashem's glory, is perfected, in its full splendor and beauty. The *chitzonim* have no sway over it whatsoever. But, when Bnei Yisrael, *chas v'shalom*, are lax in their Avodat Hashem, the *chitzonim* appropriate the *sefirah* of *hod* for themselves. The *kelippah* gains strength, and Hashem's glory lies in the dust.

Hashem has made this world perfectly balanced (*Kohelet* 7:14). When the force of *kedushah* is in control, the force of *tumah* is weakened, and vice versa. The pasuk (*Shemot* 17:16) states, “For the hand is on the throne of G-d (ה-י): Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.” Hashem’s Name ה-י has the same *gematria* as הוד. It is incumbent upon every person to strengthen himself in his Avodat Hashem and Torah, to overpower Amalek, the source of the *kelippah*. Only in this manner will Hashem’s throne become complete and Amalek powerless. This is the miracle of Chanukah, the rectification of the *sefirah* of *hod* through the defeat of the Greeks.

Since the victory of Chanukah was of a spiritual nature, bringing the *sefirah* of *hod* to its perfection, there is no place for a festive meal. We commemorate the miracle in a spiritual way, with songs of praise to Hashem.

The flask of pure olive oil was discovered through the power of Torah and the merit of Yaakov Avinu, who reviewed his learning 101 times. The following pasuk alludes to this: “Acknowledge invincible might to G-d, Whose grandeur is upon Israel” (*Tehillim* 68:35). The Torah is called “might” (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 2:10; *Zohar* II, 94a). Through the power of Torah it is possible to perfect the *sefirah* of *hod*, vanquishing the Greeks and the kingdom of corruption it epitomizes.

At the time of the second Beit Hamikdash, Rabbi Chanina S’gan Hakohanim stated that the fire of the Mizbeach was never extinguished (*Yoma* 21b). When Bnei Yisrael bring glory to Hashem, *kedushah* does not fall into the hands of the *kelippah*, and the forces of impurity have no control over it. The *sefirah* of *hod* remains intact. This is hinted to by the fact that the seven branches of the Menorah, added to the eight days of Chanukah, equals fifteen, the *gematria* of the word הוד.

The miracle of finding the oil was in the merit of Yaakov Avinu, who risked his life by going out alone on a moonless night (*Zohar* I, 115), to retrieve the flasks of oil. Future generations had the *zechut* to discover

the flask of pure olive oil, untainted by the *kelippah*, due to his *mesirut nefesh*. This was how they defeated the Greeks.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* relate that when Yaakov Avinu was injured in his thigh by the Angel of Eisav, the *sefirah* of *hod* was damaged, as well. This seems difficult to understand; Yaakov Avinu went back to retrieve the jugs of oil with much self-sacrifice, in order to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*. How, then, could the *sefirah* be damaged by this act?

However, Yaakov's actions had some slight blemish, since he went out alone at night, something that a *talmid chacham* should not do (*Berachot* 43b). Hashem is most punctilious with those nearest to Him, and therefore Yaakov was injured in his thigh, the location of the *gid hanasheh*.

Yaakov became aware of his fault and immediately corrected it by taking upon himself and his progeny that they would never eat the *gid hanasheh* (*Bereishit* 32:33). The angel struck Yaakov on the thigh, which supports the body, an allusion to the supporters of Torah. When Yaakov rectified the matter, the *sefirah* of *hod* received its *tikkun*.

Yaakov's going out at night, against the instructions of our Sages, demonstrated an element of arrogance, for he damaged the *sefirah* of *hod* (הוד), which is numerically equivalent to the word גאווה (pride). This damaged the glory of Hashem to a certain degree. Yaakov is the symbol of humility, for his name יעקב means the heel (עקב) of the foot. When Bnei Yisrael humbly listen to the words of our *Chachamim* by not eating the *gid hanasheh*, they correct any defect that Yaakov may have had.

This idea helps us resolve the difficulty of the *Divrei Yoel*, the Admor of Satmar, zt"l. He asks what is the connection between the words "through the hands of Your holy Kohanim" and "And all these days of Chanukah, these lights are holy..." How is the miracle wrought through the hands of the Kohanim connected to the holiness of the lights of the eight days of Chanukah?

We might suggest the following. The Menorah was lit by the holy Kohanim. They lit seven lights on seven branches of the Menorah. Two times seven, adding one for the unit, equals fifteen, the *gematria* of הוד. By lighting the Menorah, they merited rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*, thereby bringing blessing into the world. This is why we emphasize “through the hands of Your holy Kohanim.” They corrected the *sefirah* of *hod*. Nowadays, this is accomplished by learning Torah. We unfortunately, have no Menorah, no Kohen, or Beit Hamikdash.

Since the lights of the menorah that we light represent Torah, they are sanctified. Through Torah learning, the *kelippah* is eliminated. There is no commandment to prepare a festive meal on Chanukah, because the essence of Chanukah is Torah study, completely spiritual.

Lighting the Chanukah lights inspires us with the miracles that took place long ago. It encourages us to do teshuvah. This is hinted at in the words, “These (הללו) lights are holy.” The word הללו is numerically equivalent to דאלול (of Elul), the month of teshuvah. So, too, is Chanukah a time auspicious for doing teshuvah and hastening the *geulah*.

By doing everything for Hashem’s sake, and not deriving personal enjoyment from the lights, which represent the mitzvot, one certainly has a hand in rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod* and hastening the *geulah*.

————— In Summary —————

- The main method of commemorating the miracle of Chanukah is by singing songs of thanks and praise to Hashem. There is no obligation to have a festive meal, as there is on Purim. Why not? The miracle of Chanukah was also physical, for, had Bnei Yisrael disobeyed the Greeks, they would have been destroyed. It seems insufficient to answer that we do not celebrate with a feast since the people at the time did not have the funds with which to make one. Nowadays, this is not a problem.

- Yaakov Avinu returned to collect his small jugs, which had been left on the other side of the river. These jugs hint to the pure flask of oil which was found in the Beit Hamikdash. He implanted within us the strength to extract the pure olive oil from amongst all of the defiled flasks. The word פֶּךָ (flask) is numerically equivalent to 101, adding one for the word itself, teaching that one should review his studies 101 times. Yaakov Avinu did this. In this manner, he taught us to study even in the most difficult situations. Through his merit, the Chashmonaim succeeded in overpowering the Greeks and lit the Menorah in purity. The battle with Greece was a spiritual one, and therefore physical feasting is not an appropriate way to celebrate its victory.
- On Chanukah, the *sefirah* of *hod* receives its *tikkun*. The sum of the seven lights of the Menorah, plus their seven branches, adding one for the entire unit, equals the *gematria* of *hod* (הוה), as well as גאוה (pride). Pride belongs solely to Hashem. And it is Bnei Yisrael's job to glorify His Name in this world. Had they not overcome the Greeks, the *sefirah* of *hod* would have remained under the control of the *kelippah*.
- The salvation on Chanukah was spiritual. The fire of the Mizbeach was never extinguished, for after the defeat of the Greeks, the *sefirah* of *hod* was in its full glory. All this was in merit of Yaakov, who went out alone at night in search of his small jugs. Although his intention was to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*, he was injured, for he transgressed the injunction that a *talmid chacham* should not go out alone at night. To correct this, we do not eat the *gid hanasheh*, demonstrating that we accept the words of our Sages.
- There is a connection between the lighting of the candles and the sanctity of the lights. The Kohanim lit the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash, bringing blessing to the world and rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*. Nowadays, we have neither Kohen nor Menorah. Our *tikkun* is through Torah and *kedushah*. Physical feasting has no place here. We must do complete teshuvah. The numerical equivalent of the word הללו (these – lights) is equal to דאולול (of Elul), the month of teshuvah.
- Through doing teshuvah we can correct the *sefirah* of *hod* and hasten the *geulah*; may it come speedily in our days.

RECTIFYING THE SEFIRAH OF HOD

Chanukah contains the potential to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*, as the Arizal explains. One is also able to correct the *middah* of pride at this time, since the *gematria* of גאווה (pride) is equal to that of הוד (*hod*).

The Greeks acted immorally, like Zimri in the Wilderness, yet demanded the reward of Pinchas (*Sotah* 22b). They were comparable to the pig, who displays his split hooves, claiming to be kosher (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:5). They defiled the Beit Hamikdash. Their intention was to lower the *sefirah* of *hod* and appropriate pride to themselves. Therefore, when we light the Chanukah lights, we rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*, clinging to Hashem in complete humility and subservience.

Chazal (*Sotah* 5) state that Hashem cannot exist together with an arrogant person. Only when we are humble can the *Shechinah* rest among us.

Hundreds of years have passed since the days of the Chashmonaim, yet the *sefirah* of *hod* has not yet been completely rectified. Is there hope for the *geulah*?

This might be the intention of the Gemara's question "What is the essence of Chanukah?" Since we do not know what transpired on Chanukah during the times of the Chashmonaim.

The Gemara's deeper meaning may be the following. How can it be that even though we have the tools to fight the *kelippah*, the *sefirah* of *hod* has still not been rectified? Moshe and Aharon personified the *middot* of *netzach* (eternity) and *hod* (beauty). They were our inseparable shepherds. Had Moshe entered Eretz Yisrael, he would have built the Beit Hamikdash, and it would never have been

destroyed. The Clouds of Glory, which departed together with Aharon, returned in Moshe's merit (*Ta'anit* 9a). Aharon personified the *middah* of *hod*; why has it not yet reached its *tikkun*?

The Gemara explains that we celebrate eight days of Chanukah, when Bnei Yisrael rested from the battle. Therefore, in order to bring a *tikkun* to the *sefirah* of *hod*, we must reach the eighth level, above the seven levels of nature. This is done through unity. When we are unified, we can reach כ"ה – the level of twenty-five, depicted by the twenty-fifth day of Kislev. Adding one for the unit itself, we reach כ"ו (twenty-six), the *gematria* of Hashem's Name ה-ו-ה-י. Then, true light will fill the world. We do not eulogize on Chanukah; we only display joy. This is because Hashem is eradicating the *kelippah* and eliminating death from the world. Chanukah embodies the joy of the World to Come.

We must still try to understand why Chanukah was established in commemoration of the miracle of the flask of oil, rather than to commemorate the victory of the battle against the Greeks.

The Greeks wanted to destroy the spiritual essence of Bnei Yisrael by removing *emunah* from their hearts. They wished to abolish Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and *brit milah* (*Yalkut Me'am Loez, Bamidbar* pg. 92).

They ordered Bnei Yisrael to write on the horns of their oxen with which they ploughed that they have no connection with the G-d of Israel (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:17). They wanted Bnei Yisrael to emphasize the physical, just as they did (*Devarim* 8:14). They wanted them to assimilate into their culture, throwing off the yoke of *Malchut Shamayim*.

The Chashmonaim arose and defeated the Greeks, proving to them that Hashem is the ultimate Warrior (*Shemot* 15:3). Their battle cry was (ibid. vs. 11), "Who is like You among the heavenly powers, Hashem!" Although they were few, they vanquished the many, all due to their

humility. Then, the great miracle occurred. The *sefirah* of *hod* returned to illuminate all the worlds and influence all of the *sefirot*.

As previously mentioned, the *gematria* of הוד is equal to that of גאווה . Let us take a lesson from this, and attribute pride and greatness only to Hashem, never to ourselves. We must be perfectly honest with ourselves, scrutinizing our actions to ensure that they will bring glory to Hashem's Name, rather than bolster our own honor.

This idea is hinted to by the following injunction (*Devarim* 16:20), "Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue." Even if you consider yourself righteous, you have many areas in which to improve. Continue pursuing righteousness and do only good.

Even the Shevatim believed they behaved appropriately when they sold Yosef. Yet, when the moment of truth arrived, they found they had been mistaken, and they declared (*Bereishit* 42:21), "Indeed we are guilty."

A person should always strive for perfection. And even if he has accomplished much, he should know that there is always more to achieve. We find that Yaakov Avinu constantly worked on himself to rise to higher levels in his service of Hashem.

The Gemara's question "What is the essence of Chanukah?" can be explained as "Why wasn't the *sefirah* of *hod* yet rectified?" The response given, that we celebrate eight days of Chanukah, indicates that we do not show any sadness at this time. Rather, we act with joy, clinging to Hashem and exerting ourselves in Avodat Hashem to greater and greater degrees.

We find people who kindle the Chanukah lights only to commemorate the miracle. Or, even worse, unfortunately, we find people who kindle the lights only for the beauty of it. They are woefully mistaken. The Chanukah lights should arouse in us a desire to rectify

the *sefirah* of *hod*, specifically on the eighth day, which transcends the seven days of the natural order.

One who lights simply for the beauty inherent in the lights will eventually emphasize physical beauty, as symbolized by the Greek culture. Conversely, if we kindle the lights in order to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*, we will bring an end to the *galut* and hasten the *geulah*.

The Chanukah lights may not be used for personal pleasure. They are lit on the left of the doorway, opposite the mezuzah (*Shabbat* 22a). We know that the mezuzah provides protection for the Jewish home. The Chanukah lights represent the *neshamah*, the Divine image within a person. This being the case, these lights, too, provide protection for us.

The sefer *Be'er Moshe* quotes Rabbi Chaim Vital, zy" a. He states that we kiss the mezuzah upon exiting our homes, in order to remind us that Hashem protects us from the *Yetzer Hara*. The word יצר (*Yetzer*), with its letters spelled out, reads יוד צדי ריש (*yud, tzadi, reish*). The last letters of these words spell ש-די, the Name of Hashem that is engraved on the mezuzah.

Chanukah has the potential to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*. It is when Hashem's Name can become complete, hinted at in the number twenty-five (חננו-כ"ה). It has the potential to eradicate the *kelippah*, the negative force of the left, which constantly hovers over the lights in order to diminish their power in bringing Hashem's Name to completion.

Chanukah celebrates the miracles which happened then, as well as the *tikkun* of *hod* and the defeat of the *chitzonim*. The days of Chanukah are tremendous. They bring tranquility to the world. The word שלווה (*tranquility*) is numerically equivalent to the Names of Hashem ש-די and י-ה-ו-ה combined, adding one for the word itself.

We light the Chanukah menorah on the left side of the doorway opposite the mezuzah. It is not for the sake of beauty, but for the sake

of raising the glory of Hashem from the dust. The spiritual elevation we gain from lighting the menorah helps us eradicate the *Yetzer Hara*, which is hidden in the Name **ש-ד-י** that is written on the mezuzah. This is hinted at in the word **מנורה** (menorah), whose *gematria* is equal to that of **יצר** (*Yetzer*), when adding one for the word itself.

Conversely, in the Beit Hakeneset, the menorah is placed on the right side of the doorway (*Smak, Terumot Hadeshen* 101). The *Yetzer Hara* in the Beit Hakeneset is on the right, attempting to cause man to stumble in spiritual areas, on man's right side. The congregation in the Beit Hakeneset is enjoined to become unified with one another and with Hashem. This is hinted to by the name **חנו-כה** (they rested on the twenty-fifth), which hints that one should always reside in the proximity of Hashem. Conversely, in one's home, the *Yetzer Hara* is at a person's left side. Lighting the menorah on the left of the entranceway is a means of overpowering the *Yetzer Hara*, bringing the world to the tikkun of *sefirat hod*.

————— In Summary —————

- The days of Chanukah are auspicious for rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*. The Gemara's question: "What is the essence of Chanukah?" is essentially asking "Why wasn't the *sefirah* of *hod* rectified until now?" Moshe and Aharon personified *netzach* and *hod*. Why haven't these *middot* been brought to perfection yet? The Gemara responds that we celebrate eight days of Chanukah, above the laws of nature, which is depicted by the number seven. We do not eulogize on Chanukah; celebrating, instead, in order to demonstrate our joy at this time. We display humility. Pride belongs solely to Hashem. The *gematria* of **גאווה** (pride) is equal to that of **הוד**. The main miracle of Chanukah was the oil which burned for eight days. The main focus of the Greeks was against our spiritual essence, the *neshamah* of Bnei Yisrael. With the victory of the Chashmonaim, the *sefirah* of *hod* received its *tikkun*.

- Every person should make a personal accounting to see how far he has come in effecting this *tikkun*. He should always aspire to perfection. The lights should be kindled for the purpose of bringing perfection to the world, not for the sake of beauty. By lighting the Chanukah menorah to the left of the doorway, one vanquishes the *Yetzer Hara*, located at his left. The mezuzah is located on the right of the doorpost. The mezuzah, too, has the power to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, which is hinted at in the last letters of its name **יוד צדי ריש**, spelling out the Name **ש-ד-י**, which is engraved on the mezuzah.
- In the Beit Hakeneset, we light the menorah on the right side of the entranceway, for the *Yetzer Hara* there is located on the right, intent on causing the congregation as a whole to stumble. The way to overpower him is to become a unified congregation in serving Hashem. This will bring the world to the ultimate *tikkun* and recognition of the Kingdom of Hashem. This too, will rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*. Lighting the Chanukah lights effects this *tikkun*, bringing the final redemption.

THE EDUCATIONAL QUALITIES OF CHANUKAH

The word **חנוכה** (Chanukah) is related to the word **חינוך** (education). On Chanukah, we are instructed to provide our children with pure education, as indicated in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b).

Learning Torah is intrinsically connected to Chanukah, as it says (*Mishlei* 6:23), “For a commandment is a candle and Torah is light.” One should not keep his Torah knowledge exclusively for himself. Rather, he should share it with his family and with all of Klal Yisrael. This is the lesson of publicizing the miracle of Chanukah.

One brings tremendous merit to the public by lighting the Chanukah menorah together with his family members. This leads them to question and probe, until they come to recognize Hashem and the

wonders He has done for us and our ancestors throughout the generations.

One who, *chas v'shalom*, deprives his family of this privilege, distances them from the waters of life. We rule according to Beit Hillel (*Shabbat* 21b), who state that one adds a candle each subsequent night, for this hints to ascending in Torah study and *kedushah*.

The command to add on a light each night hints to the following. One must first “ignite” himself, and then he can “add a light” by educating others to a life of Torah and *kedushah*. One does this for the eight days of Chanukah. The word שְׁמוֹנֶה (eight) has the same letters as נִשְׁמָה (soul). One should include himself among all of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael. One should not consider himself apart from others. Rather, he should attempt to help them. He should do this with joy, for this is the way to bring others under the shade of the *Shechinah*.

This is the reason why Chanukah was established as a festival of thanksgiving and praising, rather than making a festive meal. One would derive joy from such a meal (*Pesachim* 109) and would also be able to thank Hashem in the prayer of *Al Hanissim* in *Birkat Hamazon*. Nevertheless, the main focus on Chanukah is to praise and thank Hashem for His miracles. When we thank Hashem, we should encourage others to do so also, since Chanukah is the time for educating others in coming closer to His service.

This helps us understand why we light the menorah to the left of the doorway. This is to weaken the *Yetzer Hara*, who is intent on spoiling the pure education that ensures the future of our nation. This is hinted at by the fact that the letters of the word חֲנוּכָה are numerically equivalent to חֲנוּ-אל (they found favor with Hashem), including the five letters and adding one for the word itself. Through pure Torah education, we find favor in Hashem’s eyes.

Why does the Gemara (*Yoma* 29a) state that the Chanukah miracle is not recorded? The Bnei Yissachar explains that Chanukah is instituted by the Oral Torah.

The Beit Yosef raises another question. The miracle occurred for seven days. Why, then, do we celebrate eight days of Chanukah? We might also ask why we do not celebrate Chanukah for nine days. Shouldn't one day be designated for the miracle of finding the flask of oil and another eight days for the amount of time that it burned?

From time immemorial, the nations of the world have strived to destroy Bnei Yisrael. But only the Greeks were bent on defiling our nation and causing us to forget the Torah. They wished to abolish Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and *brit milah* (*Yalkut Me'am Loez, Bamidbar* pg. 92).

They ordered Bnei Yisrael to write on the horns of their oxen that they have no affiliation with the G-d of Israel (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 2:2). They attempted to corrupt the hearts of the Jewish children, implanting impurity into them. But the Chashmonaim arose and corrected the *sefirah* of *hod*.

The *Chachamim* instituted the lighting of the menorah according to various specifications. Each aspect is designed to counteract the *tumah* of the Greeks and add *kedushah* and *taharah* to Am Yisrael. There are specific reasons why we light from left to right and add another light each night. We light the menorah in public view in order to publicize the miracle. We are instructed that "each man should light a candle for his household." The last letters of this phrase נר איש וביתו spell the word שור (ox). Our candle lighting weakens the impure force of Greece, who ordered our ancestors to write on the horns of their oxen that they have no connection with Hashem.

Now we can understand why the Chanukah story was never transcribed. It must remain in the domain of the Oral Law, without

boundaries, constantly accruing levels of *kedushah* and renewing itself. Hashem is always providing us with novel ideas in Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 49:6). Mashiach, as well, has Torah novellae to share with us.

The Oral Torah cannot be confined, for till today, we are embellishing on it by adding our own Torah thoughts. We should take a lesson from the self-sacrifice of the Chashmonaim, who defeated the Greeks and rectified the *sefirah* of *hod*. They added levels of *kedushah* to Am Yisrael by their acts.

Moshe Had Difficulty in Fashioning the Menorah

It is hard to understand how Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty in fashioning the Menorah (*Menachot* 29a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:3). He had ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah (*Shabbat* 89a), he spoke with Hashem face-to-face (*Shemot* 33:11), and he understood all of the hidden meanings of the Torah. Why did the making of the Menorah confound him?

The *gematria* of the word מְנוֹרָה (Menorah) is equal to the combined *gematrias* of בן (son) and נר (light), adding one for the word itself. Every son of Israel must elevate himself in Avodat Hashem by means of the light of Torah and mitzvot. The Menorah alludes to the body, and oil alludes to the *neshamah*.

The way to overcome the *Yetzer Hara* is by increasing our Torah study and tefillah, just as we add a light to the menorah each day. Moshe Rabbeinu was puzzled by how a person could overpower his *Yetzer Hara* so easily. Hashem explained to him to fashion the Menorah out of one piece of gold. Moshe threw it into the fire, and Hashem fashioned its form. So, too, are Bnei Yisrael enjoined to begin the job of subduing the *Yetzer Hara*. Once Hashem sees that they truly wish to defeat him, He assists them in finishing the task. The Menorah is powered by the oil, which refers to the *neshamah* and spirituality. So,

too, the body of a Jew is powered by its *neshamah*, ascending in spirituality and clinging to Hashem.

“And Aharon and his sons carried out all the matters that Hashem commanded through Moshe” (*Vayikra* 8:36). Rashi comments that this pasuk praises them “that they veered neither right nor left.” Aharon’s greatness lay in the fact that he did as he was told, without question. Aharon represents the *sefirah* of *hod*.

Applying Rashi’s statement to Chanukah, we learn the following message: When we follow the injunction to place the menorah on the left of the doorway and the mezuzah on the right, “veering neither right nor left,” we will be empowered to weaken the impure forces of Greece and thus rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*.

This is no easy task. It is hinted to by the way the Menorah itself was fashioned: “This is the workmanship of the Menorah, hammered out gold” (*Bamidbar* 8:4). The word *מקשה* (hammered out) has the same root as the word *קשה* (difficult). It is no easy matter to defeat the *Yetzer Hara*. But, if a person fortifies himself with the life-giving waters of Torah (*משקה* = drink), the difficulties will fall away. The Torah will protect him (*Bava Kama* 17a).

The Chashmonaim taught us this lesson when they overcame the Greeks. Therefore, the service of lighting the Menorah was given to the Kohanim, for they are the true servants of Hashem, and they can bring atonement for the nation. Chazal state (*Zevachim* 88b) that each item of the Kohen’s clothing atoned for a different sin, such as *lashon hara*, immorality, bloodshed, and *avodah zarah*. The Kohanim embody good *middot* and thus can rectify these sins. Without good *middot*, the Torah cannot endure, as the Midrash says (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3), “Good *middot* precede Torah.” Only with good character traits can one atone for sins and bring the rectification of *sefirat hod* to completion.

In the prayer of *Haneirot Halalu* that we say after we light the menorah, we emphasize that the miracles were brought about

“through Your holy Kohanim.” The main aspect of the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash was that the Kohanim brought atonement to the people through their Avodah. But nowadays, we have neither Kohen nor prophet; neither Menorah nor Beit Hamikdash. The task rests completely on our shoulders.

We celebrate Chanukah for eight days. The word שמונה (eight) is closely related to שמן (oil). The *gematria* of חנוכה (Chanukah) is equal to that of חן-לב (favor – heart), as well as that of חן-אל (favor – E-l). By means of the *tikkun* accomplished by the Chanukah lights, we find favor in the eyes of Hashem.

Chanukah cannot be recorded in writing, for until this very day we are recording its message in the Torah. The *gematria* of מנורה (menorah) is equal to that of אש (fire). The Torah is compared to fire (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19:18). In the future, the sacrifices will be nullified (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:7), but Torah will endure forever. Education in the ways of the Torah guarantees the elevation of the *neshamah*.

————— In Summary —————

- The word חנוכה (Chanukah) is related to the word חינוך (education). The main objective of Chanukah is to thank Hashem for His wonders. One is enjoined to educate his household to praise and thank Hashem for His miracles, and not keep these feelings within himself. Chanukah is not recorded in writing because it is a product of the Oral Law. We are still, today, rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*, just as the Chashmonaim did so long ago.
- Chanukah celebrates the victory of spirituality. The flask of oil alludes to the *neshamah*, and the Menorah alludes to the body. Torah ignites the spark within us. Moshe did not understand how to fashion the Menorah. His question was how it is possible to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara* and rectify all one’s misdeeds. Hashem told him to make the Menorah out of one piece of hewn gold, completing the job Himself. So, too, although it may seem impossible to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, Bnei Yisrael are enjoined to begin

the task, then Hashem will assist them, thereby rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*.

- In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, this was accomplished by the Kohanim, the model of good *middot*. Nowadays, when we have no Beit Hamikdash, the task of rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod* rests upon the shoulders of every one of us. We must educate our households to a life of Torah and *kedushah*. This is the way to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*. Torah endures forever. Similarly, Chanukah, the *tikkun* of *hod*, will never be abolished. This is an ongoing mission, which we continue by learning Torah amidst *kedushah* and *taharah*.

THE MIRACLE OF CHANUKAH

The Gemara asks (*Shabbat* 21b), “What is the essence of Chanukah?” and answers that “Our Sages learn... Thus they established the 25th of Kislev in the following year, as a festival to praise and thank Hashem.” Rashi explains: The words “מאי חנוכה – What is Chanukah?” ask which miracle established Chanukah as a festival. Rashi answers: They found a flask of oil, sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol.

Thus, the main reason for establishing Chanukah as a festival for future generations was the discovery of the flask of pure oil, sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. Instead of burning just one day, a miracle occurred and it burned for eight days.

Although the first day is not included in the miracle of the burning oil, we celebrate eight days because the discovery of the flask, still sealed and pure, was itself a miracle. All of the flasks had been opened and defiled, and only one remained intact. Therefore, Chanukah was established for eight days of thanking Hashem.

Chazal (*ibid.* 21b) explain that the main aspect of lighting the candles is to publicize the miracle. For this reason, it must be done while people are still found outdoors. After a certain hour, it is too late to perform the mitzvah.

The author of the sefer *Sheirit Yisrael* asks, “Many miracles took place at that time. Yet, we commemorate only the miracle of the flask of oil. Why should this miracle take preference over the others? Additionally, the name Chanukah refers to the fact that they “rested from the oppression of the Greeks” (חנו-כה – they rested on the 25th), see the *Ran*. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate that Chanukah should refer to the *chanukat hamizbeach* (inauguration of the Altar), which was done by the Chashmonaim? What was the essence of the resting here? They had already emerged victorious in war. And it is not a holiday in the literal sense of the word, because labor may be done on Chanukah, as opposed to other holidays.”

Moreover, on Chanukah the concept of publicizing the miracle is greatly stressed, to the extent that we light the menorah where people can see it, and must light it while people are still in the streets. However, we are not required to publicize the miracles connected with the other festivals.

Let us examine the wording of the Gemara concerning Chanukah. Why do our *Chachamim* find it necessary to introduce Chanukah with the question, “What is the essence of Chanukah – מאי חנוכה?” This even requires Rashi’s explanation. Why does the Gemara continue “דתנו רבנן – **That** our Rabbanim learned...” rather than the usual “תנו רבנן – Our Rabbanim learn...”? Why don’t our Sages simply state, “Our *Chachamim* learned that on the 25th of Kislev, we celebrate Chanukah”? We would, of our own, come to the understanding that Chanukah was established because of the miracle with the flask of oil.

Based on what was explained previously, I would like to suggest the following. The Greeks wished to annihilate our nation spiritually. They wished to cause us to forget the Torah and transgress the mitzvot. They wanted Bnei Yisrael to cut off all bonds with Hashem and abolished Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and *brit milah* to this end. They even ordered Bnei Yisrael to write on the horns of their oxen that they

have no connection with the G-d of Israel (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:4, *Yalkut Shimoni, Tazria* 555). The *gematria* of שור (ox) is equal to that of the word הראש (the head). They wished to defile the minds of Yisrael. They wanted to brainwash them into believing that they indeed had no connection with Hashem.

The *neshamah* of a person resides in his brain. The Arizal teaches that the brain is renewed every day, according to the level of the person. The Greeks wished to control the *sefirah* of *hod* and manipulate it to meet their interests. They wanted to wrest the authority over *hod* from Aharon, the representative of *sefirat hod*, by preventing him from lighting the Menorah, thus extricating *hod* from the hands of the *kelippah*. In this manner, they anticipated gaining control over Bnei Yisrael in the spiritual realm.

The greatest miracle that took place at this time was that the heads and the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael were not damaged in the least. No other miracle can compare to this. Thus, the Gemara answers the question of what is the essence of Chanukah by explaining דתנו רבנן – that our Rabbanim learned.

Chazal established eight days of Chanukah to allude to the *neshamah*. The word שמונה (eight) has the same letters as נשמה (*neshamah*). This is a holiday of the soul, for praise and thanks to Hashem. This is why the element of publicizing the miracle is emphasized. We announce to the world that in spite of the great torment which the nations inflict upon us, they can never cause us to forsake our faith.

When we arouse ourselves spiritually, an arousal is effected on High (*Zohar* I, 88a; II, 31b). This arousal subdues the *kelippah*.

It is customary not to do *melachah* as long as the Chanukah lights burn (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 670:1). This is because Chanukah has the status of a holiday. The lights may not be used for personal

reasons. Refraining from work is one way of publicizing the miracle. In this manner, we bring down blessing from Above, and we rectify the *sefirah of hod* in our day.

Victory over the Greeks in the Merit of Emunah

The objective of the Greeks was to distance Bnei Yisrael from Hashem by confusing their minds. Unfortunately, we find the same symptom prevalent nowadays. Many Jews have become assimilated as a result.

Our *Chachamim* had difficulty in pinpointing which specific miracle warranted the establishment of Chanukah as a festival for generations. Many miracles occurred at that time, and the *Chachamim* needed a great measure of *siyata di'Shemaya* in establishing the holiday.

This is the reason for the wording of the Gemara, “דתנו רבנן – that our *Chachamim* learned.” Through exerting themselves to learn the essence of the miracle, they came to the conclusion of חנו-כה (they rested on the 25th). The Greeks wished to separate Yisrael from Hashem. But on Chanukah, we find that Bnei Yisrael are unified with Hashem, reconnecting to Him through the conquest of *kedushah* over the *kelippah*. Bnei Yisrael truly dwelt with Hashem. The name (חנוכה) Chanukah signifies Bnei Yisrael’s encampment (חנו) with twenty-five (כה). They connected themselves to Hashem, Whose Name is numerically equivalent to twenty-six, the sum of twenty-five plus one for the word itself. The word חניה (encamping) is a combination of the words חן - י-ה (favor with Hashem). This is the method for rectifying *sefirat hod* (הוד), which is numerically equivalent to Hashem’s Name י-ה. This is how Bnei Yisrael conquered the Greeks.

This is also how Bnei Yisrael receive *berachah*, as the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 6:23) states, “So (כה) shall you bless the Children of Yisrael.” The word כה (so) alludes to כ”ה (the 25th) of Kislev. And נחו (they

encamped/rested) refers to their resting from the *kelippah* of the Greeks.

Through unity, the prosecution is silenced. When Bnei Yisrael are united, no force can rise against them. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 38:6) state that even if Bnei Yisrael worship *avodah zarah*, as long as they are united, they are safe from prosecution.

Bnei Yisrael always maintain their faith in Hashem. Therefore, our *Chachamim* established eight days of Chanukah. They are like a warrior who does battle with the numerous enemy and emerges victorious. Their *neshamah*, as well as their *emunah*, was returned to its former glory.

Chanukah was established as a symbol of the unity between Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael, which are one (*Zohar* III, 73a). Their minds remained untainted, in spite of all the negative influences of the Greeks. Chanukah is a commemoration of the downfall of the *kelippah* and the resurgence of *sefirat hod*. This is hinted at in the word חנוכיה (Chanukah menorah), which can be split into the following words: חנו – they encamped, נחו – they rested, כה – twenty-five, and יה – Hashem’s Name. Through their reunification with Hashem, they merited the miracle.

The concept of publicizing the miracle is appropriate specifically on Chanukah. One should not maintain a low profile in this case, as the *Navi* (*Michah* 6:8) generally prescribes. By publicizing the miracle, one proclaims that he is prepared to live in harmony with Hashem and to distance himself from the *kelippah*, eradicating it from his heart.

Therefore, the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights applies as long as there are people in the streets. The expression used for this is “as long as there is a foot in the marketplace.” The word “foot” refers to the *kelippah*, which roams about outside. The act of lighting the Chanukah lights at the time when people are found in the street arouses them to do teshuvah, abandoning the *kelippah*, which hinders their Avodat Hashem.

One who wishes to distance himself from the *kelippah* must openly demonstrate his true intentions. He must indicate his desire to distance himself from negative forces and come closer to Hashem with *kedushah* that comes from within. The inside eventually shines forth to the outside world. This is the only means to overcome the *tumah* that roams abroad. His inner sanctity will then shine forth, transforming the outer shell of negativity. In this manner, both his inner and outer worlds will be united to help him come close to Hashem and serve Him wholeheartedly.

————— In Summary —————

- The holiday of Chanukah was established based on the miracle of the flask of oil. It was established for eight days, for, although the miracle occurred only for seven days, the fact that they found the flask in the first place was a miracle as well. The main aspect of the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights is to publicize the miracle. Therefore, we are enjoined to light the menorah as long as people are found in the streets.
- Why was Chanukah established to commemorate the miracle of the discovery of the flask of oil? Bnei Yisrael experienced numerous miracles at that time. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to commemorate the inauguration of the Mizbeach that took place then? Why is it so important to publicize the miracle? This is not stressed on the other festivals. Also, what is the meaning of the expression that we light the menorah "as long as there is a foot in the marketplace"? And why do we begin the section of the Gemara, discussing Chanukah, with the words, "**That** our *Chachamim* learned," instead of merely, "Our *Chachamim* learned"?
- The Greeks wished to uproot the spiritual essence of Bnei Yisrael, causing them to abandon Hashem and be separated from Him. To this end, the Greeks ordered them to write on the horn of their oxen (שׁוֹר) that they have no affiliation with the G-d of Israel. The *gematria* of the word שׁוֹר is equal to that of הִרְאָשׁ (the head). The Greeks wished to contaminate the minds of Bnei Yisrael with their corrupt ideas. They also wished to abolish the *sefirah* of *hod*. The greatest miracle that took place at this time was that the minds of

Bnei Yisrael remained unsullied. They continued to connect with Hashem. The eight (שמונה) days of Chanukah allude to the *neshamah* (נשמה), which stayed pure. Chanukah is a holiday of a spiritual nature. Publicizing the miracle demonstrates how the *kelippah* was eradicated and the *sefirah* of *hod* was rectified.

- Our *Chachamim* were at a loss as to the source of the celebration on Chanukah. They needed to toil in Torah until they came to the following conclusion. Because Bnei Yisrael maintained their unity with Hashem, demonstrating their desire to continue dwelling with Him, Bnei Yisrael conquered the Greeks. The word חנוכה can be split to read חנו כה – they encamped with Hashem. They also rested (חנו) from the *kelippah*, and received Hashem’s blessings. They elevated the *sefirah* of *hod*. All this is hinted to in the word חנוכיה (Chanukah menorah). It can be split into the following words: חנו – they encamped, נחו – they rested, כה – twenty-five, and יה – Hashem’s Name. Through their reunification with Hashem, they merited the miracle.
- Publicizing the miracle is a declaration that one is distancing himself from the *kelippah* and clinging to Hashem. “The foot in the marketplace” is an allusion to the *kelippah*, which disturbs a person’s Avodat Hashem. Lighting the candles ignites one from within, and this spark shines forth to the outside, bringing others close to Hashem, as well.

ENCAMPING WITH HASHEM

The word חנוכה (Chanukah) is related to the word חנו (they encamped), for Bnei Yisrael encamped with Hashem. What is the nature of this encampment?

In the Wilderness, Bnei Yisrael encamped in their tents around the Mishkan. The Mishkan resided in the center; from there, blessing and *kedushah* flowed to all the camps. A tent is a covering. So too, is a *kippah*, which covers one’s head.

It is impossible for one who goes bareheaded to proclaim that he is connected with Hashem and encamps with Him. A *kippah* is the quintessential symbol of *yirat Shamayim*. Chazal (*Shabbat* 156b) instruct us, “Cover your head, so that you should attain fear of Heaven.” One who does not don a *kippah* has withdrawn himself from the camp of Hashem, and is not able to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*.

One of the greatest problems in our day is the removal of the *kippah*. This is, unfortunately, the greatest success of the nations. They claim that they do not accept employees who wear a head-covering. Bnei Yisrael suffer many tests regarding the *kippah*. How remarkable is the reward of those who continue to wear their *kippot*, in spite of the shame that they suffer by doing so. They demonstrate that *yirat Shamayim* is paramount to them.

How tremendous is the benefit of the *kippah*! The letters of *כיפה* (*kippah*) can be rearranged to read *כפ - י-ה*. The *gematria* of *כפ* is one hundred, hinting to the one hundred *berachot* a person is enjoined to make daily (*Menachot* 43b; *Zohar* III, 179a). The letters *י-ה* are numerically equivalent to fifteen, just like the word *הוד* (*hod*). A Jew is instructed to make one hundred *berachot* daily in order to elevate the *sefirah* of *hod* to its proper position on High. In the times of the Beit Hamikdash, when the *sefirah* of *hod* was in its glory, the *kelippah* was diminished.

The laxity that we find nowadays regarding *berachot* stems from the negligence of wearing the *kippah*. This degrades the *sefirah* of *hod*. The Arizal states that the *chitzonim* are in control of *sefirat hod* in our times.

The *tikkun* of *hod* can occur only by refusing to succumb to the Greeks’ plan to overpower Bnei Yisrael by confusing their minds, which are protected by the *kippah*. The nations of the world have followed the Greeks’ devious designs, trying to prevent us from wearing a *kippah*, and striving to confuse our thoughts with their foreign cultures.

This is alluded to by the decree of the Greeks that Bnei Yisrael must write upon the horns of their oxen that they have no connection with the G-d of Israel (*Bereishit Rabbah* 16:4, *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:5). Why were oxen specified, rather than any other animal? The *gematria* of שׁוֹר (ox) is equivalent to that of הִרְאֵשׁ (the head). The Greeks attempted to force Bnei Yisrael to remove their *kippot*. In this manner, their minds would become muddled, and their *berachot* would be defiled, damaging the *sefirah* of *hod*. There is no heresy greater than this.

When we light the menorah, the end of the *berachah* of *She'assah Nissim* says "...in those days, at this time." Greek culture prevails even in our day, damaging Bnei Yisrael. We need *siyata di'Shemaya* to overcome their wily plots.

The horn of the ox hints to another aspect of their diabolical plans. The word קֶרֶן (horn) can be split to read קר-נ (cold – fifty). The Greeks wished to dampen Bnei Yisrael's enthusiasm in their Avodat Hashem. This would bring them to the fiftieth level of *tumah*. They aimed to do this by confusing the Jews' minds with the polluted culture of Greece. Wearing a *kippah* assures one of *yirat Shamayim*, causing the rectification of the *sefirah* of *hod*.

At the Time the Moon Is Covered

The *Oheiv Yisrael* of Apta, zt"l, states that the Books of Life and Death that were opened on Rosh Hashanah are not closed until Chanukah. This is hinted to in the following pasuk (*Tehillim* 81:4) "At the time when the moon is covered, for our festive day." The word כִּסָּה (covered) alludes to the head covering, the *kippah*. The *gematria* of the words בְּכִסָּה לַיּוֹם (when the moon is covered, for the day), referring to Rosh Hashanah, is equivalent to the *gematria* of the phrase אָדָם בְּכִסְלוֹ (a person in the month of Kislev).

Thus, Chanukah is an opportune time for teshuvah. One should utilize these days to connect to and encamp with the *Shechinah*. A

person is given until Kislev to rectify his deeds. At that time, there is a tremendous awakening to teshuvah, in the merit of the miracles done for our ancestors. They nearly assimilated into the Greek culture. But they regained their *emunah*, and their *neshamot* remained intact. The Greeks were unsuccessful in breaking them, for Hashem was on their side.

“At the time the moon is covered, for our festive day” refers to our triumph over Greek culture. This is a spiritual holiday, a time to grow in *yirat Shamayim*. Bnei Yisrael encamped with Hashem and clung to Him.

Publicizing the miracle and proclaiming one’s intention to do teshuvah are critical. One who conducts himself in this manner will surely merit being inscribed for a good year. We celebrate Chanukah with songs of thanks and praise for the gift of teshuvah at this time.

The sefer *Sheirit Yisrael* explains that the words of *Al Hanissim* “and You made a great and holy Name for Yourself in Your world” means that through the revelation of the *sefirah* of *hod*, Hashem’s Name became magnified.

There is no greater way to praise Hashem than to utilize the period between Rosh Hashanah through Chanukah to rectify one’s deficiencies. One thereby demonstrates his desire to “encamp” with Hashem and correct the *sefirah* of *hod*.

Chanukah was established for generations because the cruel plots of the Greeks still prevail in our times, even though the Greeks themselves are long gone.

This is the reason why Chanukah commemorates the miracle of the discovery of the flask of oil. The word שמן (oil) hints to the נשמה (soul). The Greeks, by forcing the Jews to go bareheaded, wished to taint their *neshamot*. But the Chashmonaim overpowered them. They discovered a flask with an unbroken seal of the Kohen Gadol. The word פך (flask)

has the *gematria* of one hundred, alluding to the one hundred *berachot* recited daily (*Menachot* 43b). In this manner, Bnei Yisrael triumphed over the scheme of the Greeks. They maintained the saying of one hundred daily *berachot* with *yirat Shamayim*. Thus, they were able to bring perfection to the *sefirah* of *hod*.

The miracle of finding the flask of pure oil represents deep concepts. The Jewish nation had to remove all of the confusion and corruption placed into their minds by the Greeks. Chanukah is a commemoration of resting from the *kelippah* and encamping with Hashem.

By publicizing the miracle, we are also able to rest from the *kelippah* and ascend in *yirat Shamayim*, thereby rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*. This is the way to bring the world to perfection.

In Summary

- The word חנוכה (Chanukah) is related to חנייה (to encamp). It is a time to dwell with Hashem. In the Wilderness, Bnei Yisrael encamped around the Tent of Meeting. The *kippah* one wears on his head is a covering, just like a tent. One who refrains from wearing a *kippah* cannot connect to Hashem, and cannot attain *yirat Shamayim*. The letters of כיפה (*kippah*) can be rearranged to read כפ-י-ה. The *gematria* of כפ is one hundred, a reference to the one hundred *berachot* recited daily, and also an allusion to the *sefirah* of *hod*. Those who go bareheaded mar the *sefirah* of *hod* and lack *yirat Shamayim*.
- Wearing a *kippah* counteracts the wicked schemes of the Greeks. This brings one *yirat Shamayim*, rectifying the *sefirah* of *hod*. The Greeks desired to confuse and corrupt the minds of Bnei Yisrael. This is why they ordered them to write on the horns of their oxen that they have no affiliation with Hashem. The *gematria* of the word שור (ox) is equal to that of הראש (the head). The word קרן (horn) can be split into two to read קר-נ (cold – fifty). The Greeks wanted nothing more than to “cool off” Bnei Yisrael in their Avodat Hashem and reduce them to the fiftieth level of *tumah*. We are still attempting to correct this damage today.

- “At the time when the moon is covered, for our festive day.” The words “When the moon is covered” allude to the head covering. The *gematria* of the words **בכסה ליום** (when the moon is covered, for the day), which refers to Rosh Hashanah, is equivalent to the *gematria* of the words **אדם בכסלו** (a person in the month of Kislev). This hints that the sealing of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is on Chanukah. A person has until Chanukah to repent. This is the way to overpower Greek culture. This is the reason, too, for publicizing the miracle.
- This is all in the merit of the flask which they found. The *gematria* of the word **פך** is one hundred, an allusion to the one hundred *berachot* that we are enjoined to say every day. In this manner, Bnei Yisrael rectified the *sefirah* of *hod* and ascended in their level of *yirat Shamayim*. This is the essence of Chanukah. **חנו** means “they encamped,” and **נחו** means “they rested.” Bnei Yisrael encamped with Hashem and rested from the impure powers of the *kelippah*. **כה** refers to ascending in *yirat Shamayim*, referring to the Name of Hashem. Only in this manner can we hope to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*.

AMALEK AND THE GREEKS

One of the foundations of Chanukah is the element of harmony and solidarity among Bnei Yisrael. The Gemara states (*Sanhedrin* 27b; *Shavuot* 39a) that all of Bnei Yisrael are responsible for one another. The Torah and Hakadosh Baruch Hu are intertwined.

When Bnei Yisrael are in harmony, they are united with Hashem as well. The *Ran* explains that the essence of Chanukah (**חנוכה**) is that Bnei Yisrael rested (**חנו**) from the war on the 25th of Kislev (**כה**).

If the essence of Chanukah is the fact that they rested from the battle, why was Chanukah established to commemorate the miracle with the oil?

The main aspect of the miracle of the flask of oil lay in the fact that Bnei Yisrael were unified. This brought the *Shechinah* to rest in their

midst. Hashem's Name has the *gematria* of twenty-six, which is also the *gematria* of the phrase זה בזה (together). This was how they succeeded in surmounting the Greeks, who wanted to separate them from each other and remove the *Shechinah* from their midst.

The unity of Bnei Yisrael is hinted to in the word חנוכה itself, which is related to the word חניה (to encamp). כה hints to the Name of Hashem, which has the *gematria* of twenty-six (כה=25, plus one for the word itself). Bnei Yisrael "encamped" as one cohesive unit, thereby causing the Name of Hashem to dwell among them. Then, the great miracle of the flask of oil took place. Oil (שמן) hints to the *neshamah* (נשמה), which became pure at that time.

At *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael did not merit receiving the Torah until they were all united. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:2), "And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain." Rashi quotes Chazal (*Mechilta, Yitro*), "As one man, with one heart." Likewise, on Chanukah, Bnei Yisrael were unable to become illuminated by the miracle until they had "encamped" as one cohesive unit. Only after they had attained this level of חנוכה, could they attain the level of "our *Chachamim* learn," accepting upon themselves the yoke of Torah, and thereby becoming elevated. Without unity, it is impossible to truly accept the Torah.

Now we can explain the nature of Chanukah, and why it was instituted as a festival for generations. Just as we were instructed to remember the episode with Amalek every day, eradicating his name from this world, so too, must we remember the Greeks and their actions.

When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Amalek wished to dampen their enthusiasm for Avodat Hashem. The pasuk (*Devarim* 25:18) says, "That he happened upon you on the way." The words אשר קרך (that he happened upon you) can be read "that he cooled you off." Amalek wished to cool off their enthusiasm, so that they would not be involved

in Torah. It was then that Moshe commanded Yehoshua to choose individuals to go forth in battle against Amalek. Bnei Yisrael triumphed over them. Hashem instructed us to remember Amalek for all generations.

Why was Amalek singled out for destruction? Many nations fought against Bnei Yisrael; we are not commanded to eradicate them, or hold them in eternal disrepute.

Amalek knew they would never succeed in vanquishing Bnei Yisrael, no matter how much ammunition and manpower they had at their disposal. They knew that Hashem is with Bnei Yisrael, and they would emerge victorious despite their small numbers. Why, then, did they attack the Jewish nation? It was merely to “cool them off” in their Avodat Hashem. Hashem knew that there would always be such enemies, throughout the generations, who would attempt to weaken our connection with Him. They may have different nationalities, but their goal is one and the same. They wish to make us lax in our Avodat Hashem.

Bnei Yisrael must be constantly vigilant of anyone similar to Amalek, who intends to influence our minds with wrong ideas, and changes of clothing and language. In every generation, it is incumbent upon us to remember not to follow the Amalekite nation of the time. They wish to confuse the *neshamah*, defiling it with foreign concepts.

Yitzchak Avinu said (*Bereishit* 27:22), “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20) teach us that “when the voice of Yaakov is heard in the Batei Kenesiot, the hands of Eisav have no power.” Amalek’s objective is to introduce foreign influences in order to still the voice of Yaakov. When Bnei Yisrael stop their Torah study, Eisav and his descendants (Amalek) will have the upper hand, and gain full control of him.

The Greeks Were Like Amalek

Amalek's actions are described as follows: "That he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the stragglers (נחלשים) at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d." Bnei Yisrael left Egypt laden with faith (*Shemot* 14:31). Amalek wished to temper their fervor toward Avodat Hashem, as they were on their way to receiving the Torah after emerging from the forty-nine gates of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a).

Amalek wished to weaken their level of Avodat Hashem. The word נחלשים (stragglers) can also refer to נחלשים (weaklings). They wished to weaken Bnei Yisrael in Avodat Hashem when they were "faint and exhausted" from all of the efforts and preparations for the journey in the Wilderness. "And he did not fear G-d" refers to Bnei Yisrael, who did not possess sufficient fear of Heaven, for they had not yet received the Torah. Amalek intended to exploit the circumstances to weaken Bnei Yisrael's *emunah*. They wanted to cool them off, just as one cools off a boiling bath.

Moreover, they wanted to demonstrate to the other gentile nations exactly how one goes about vanquishing the Jews. They wished to depict how one prevents Bnei Yisrael from ascending in Torah and *emunah*. They instilled indifference into their hearts, in order that they should not feel love toward one another. This would prevent them from attaining any level in Torah, mitzvot, or *yirat Shamayim*. All this was in spite of knowing that they would lose the actual war.

Therefore, Hashem vehemently warns us to beware of Amalek and constantly remember his evil deeds. For, although he no longer exists, his diabolical designs continue until this very day. We still find nations who emulate Amalek by issuing harsh decrees against Bnei Yisrael, preventing them from observing Torah and mitzvot.

The Greeks were very similar to Amalek. They, too, issued harsh

decrees against Bnei Yisrael, preventing them from learning Torah. They ordered them to write on the horns of their oxen that they have no affiliation with the G-d of Israel (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:4). They desired nothing more than to weaken their ties with Torah and mitzvot.

The word קרן (horn) is a combination of קר-ג (coldness – fifty). The Greeks wished to cool Bnei Yisrael off and drag them down into the fiftieth level of *tumah*, exactly as the Amalekites did when Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim. They wished to infiltrate their minds with foreign heresies, alluded to in the word שור (ox), which is numerically equivalent to הראש (the head).

The Chashmonaim were inspired by Yehoshua, who fought Amalek with just a small band of men and triumphed. Therefore, they too went out to war against the Greeks, the few against the many. They succeeded in the power of their unity and their Torah learning. (This is hinted to in the phrase, “What is the essence of Chanukah? Our *Chachamim* learn...”)

They found the flask of pure oil (שמן), which hints that they sanctified the soul (נשמה) of Bnei Yisrael, bolstering their *emunah*. Hashem joined them, for Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and Yisrael are one (*Zohar* III, 73a).

Chazal established the mitzvah of kindling Chanukah candles in every generation to remind us of the deeds of the Greeks and of Amalek, and the darkness which they attempted to instill into our nation.

There are nations nowadays who go in the way of Amalek and Greece. But we fortify ourselves with Torah, unity, and *emunah*. Armed with these weapons, we are ready to take them on.

———— In Summary ————

- The foundation of Chanukah is unity among Bnei Yisrael. This is the way to receive illumination from the Chanukah lights. Through being unified, we

become one with the Torah and Hashem. Just as unity was a prerequisite for receiving the Torah, so too, was it a prerequisite for Bnei Yisrael's salvation on Chanukah. The name חנוכה alludes to the fact that they encamped together with Hashem, in the merit of encamping in unity with each other.

- We must also remember the nature of the miracles that we have merited throughout the generations. The Greeks resembled Amalek, who attacked Bnei Yisrael as they left Egypt. Although Amalek knew that they would be unable to vanquish them, they were intent on cooling them off, by making them indifferent to Torah. They wished to contaminate Bnei Yisrael with foreign concepts. Therefore, Hashem commanded us to erase their name and remember their evil designs for all future generations. In every generation, there arise nations who go in the path of Amalek, attempting to distance Bnei Yisrael from Torah and weaken their faith.
- Greece, too, wished to cool off Bnei Yisrael's enthusiasm toward Torah and dampen their *emunah*. But the Chashmonaim recalled the war of Yehoshua against Amalek. They were just a few who vanquished the many. The Chashmonaim were also few in number, yet succeeded in combating the Greeks. The Chanukah miracle was established for generations in order that Bnei Yisrael should always have the wherewithal to stand up to the foreign ideologies of Amalek and Greece and emerge triumphant. This is through the power of unity and Torah study.

LIGHTING THE MENORAH – FULFILLING MITZVOT TO PERFECTION

The *kedushah* of the days of Chanukah overflows into the entire year, illuminating one's way. This is hinted to in the liturgy that we recite when we light the menorah: "These lights are sanctified and we may not use them, but merely see them." We receive illumination from the candles through the sanctity that we have instilled into them.

The candles allude to the mitzvot, as *Mishlei* (6:23) states, "A candle is a mitzvah and Torah is light." One should involve himself in Torah

and mitzvot for their own sake, just as the Chanukah lights are sanctified for their own purpose.

Thus, we can interpret the prayer that we say in the following way: “These candles” refer to the mitzvot. They “are sanctified and we may not use them” means that we have no right to “use” mitzvot for our own end. We may not use them for personal glory. All mitzvot should be done solely for the sake of Heaven, without any personal pleasure involved. We should “merely see them” also reminds us of this, as the pasuk states (*Bamidbar* 15:39), “That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them.” All mitzvot should be done for Hashem’s sake alone.

Similarly, the Ba’al Shem Tov declares that one’s *avodah* must be purely for Hashem’s sake, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 4:35), “There is none beside Him.”

According to this, although the days of Chanukah are behind us, their lesson constantly remains with us. This is alluded to by the use of the present tense when we say, “These are the lights which we kindle.” Even though the lights become extinguished with time, we continue kindling them. We draw the holiness of Chanukah into the rest of the year by continuing to fulfill mitzvot and learn Torah for Hashem’s sake alone.

Let us explain this further. Before doing a mitzvah, one makes appropriate preparations to do it *lishmah*, to perfection, and with *mesirut nefesh*. And after the mitzvah has been completed, one desires to continue doing mitzvot. One should neither avoid doing more mitzvot nor become uninterested in them. One also should also strive to not do mitzvot merely by rote, without intention at all.

This is the concept of Chanukah extending into the rest of the year. After Chanukah, our task is to maintain the lights, an allusion to maintaining our fervor in performing mitzvot. Therefore, we state, “These lights which we kindle... are sanctified.” We do mitzvot purely for Hashem’s glory.

When we light the menorah with these intentions, we demonstrate that even after performing a mitzvah, we desire to continue doing mitzvot, with love. This is in line with the statement of Chazal (*Avot* 2:2), “One mitzvah leads to another.”

Therefore, at the time of candle lighting, a person should accept upon himself to do mitzvot *l’shem Shamayim*. One should not become bored with the mitzvot, rather he should take upon himself to continue to do mitzvot with the same fervor that he lit the menorah.

Before candle lighting, we prepare the wicks. The oil (שמן) alludes to the *neshamah* (נשמה), and the wicks allude to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews in man’s body. The menorah alludes to the body of a person. This hints that one should do mitzvot *lishmah*, uniting both body and soul in their performance. This is how one attains perfection in keeping mitzvot.

The candles are kindled for eight days as a *tikkun* for the *neshamah*, since the word שמונה (eight) has the same letters as נשמה (soul). We add on a light each day, as Beit Hillel rules (*Shabbat* 22b), hinting that we should constantly seek to improve our mitzvot, each person according to his understanding. The greater a person, the more is expected of him, and the greater is the accusation against him if he fails to fulfill his role.

The essential aspects of a mitzvah are the preparation, which Chazal say is even greater than the mitzvah itself, and the desire to continue in the path of spiritual elevation even after the mitzvah is completed. One who does mitzvot with enthusiasm and effort will attain amazing levels in his mitzvah performance.

In Summary

- The *kedushah* of Chanukah continues throughout the year. The way a person does his mitzvot during the year demonstrates the extent to which he felt the *kedushah* within the Chanukah lights. The lights are an allusion to the

mitzvot. Just as the lights must be lit for the sake of keeping the mitzvah, and not enjoyed for any other purpose, so too, must we do mitzvot purely for their own sake, without personal interest at all. They must be performed perfectly, and for Hashem's sake alone.

- Although the Chanukah lights are eventually extinguished, their message continues to inspire us, motivating us to perform more mitzvot to perfection. The preparation before doing a mitzvah, coupled with the desire to continue doing mitzvot perfectly even after it is finished, demonstrate one's love of Hashem.
- The menorah alludes to a person's body. The oil is the *neshamah*, and the wicks are the limbs. This hints that one should do mitzvot *lishmah*, uniting both body and soul in doing them. By behaving this way, one continues his Avodat Hashem with the same devotion to Hashem that he felt when he lit the menorah. He constantly strives to improve his mitzvot and bring a *tikkun* to his *neshamah*. The greater a person, the greater the responsibility he carries. Every person is enjoined to ascend in his mitzvah performance, doing mitzvot *lishmah*, in perfection, each person according to his ability.

VICTORY IN THE MERIT OF THE AVOT

There are many perplexing aspects to the Chanukah story. Although we have previously touched on some of them, there is always more to add, for the Torah has seventy facets.

What, essentially, happened in the war between the Greeks and Bnei Yisrael, the Chosen Nation?

Furthermore, from where did Bnei Yisrael receive their tremendous strength? Logically, it does not make sense that such a small number of people fought and emerged victorious against the mighty Greek empire that ruled the entire world. From where did they obtain this high level of *mesirut nefesh*?

Also, why was the miracle performed specifically through the flask of oil, and not through any other item? Why did the Greeks defile the oil, neglecting just one small flask?

The Greeks understood that lighting the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash brought blessing upon Bnei Yisrael. If they wished to nullify it, why didn't they merely lock the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, or, alternatively, demolish the Beit Hamikdash, preventing the lighting of the Menorah altogether? What was their purpose in defiling the oil instead? And why did they defile the oil, instead of smashing the flasks? Why did the miracle occur for eight days, not more and not less?

In order to explain these difficulties, let us first examine the *mesirut nefesh* of Bnei Yisrael. They inherited their self-sacrifice from the holy Avot – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who implanted a deep-seated faith and *mesirut nefesh* for Hashem into the hearts of their children. They recognized Hashem with an inner understanding. They realized that He alone is the Creator. Strength and Kingship are solely His (*Avodah Zarah* 2b). He is called the “Warrior” (*Shemot* 15:3), and He does good for the righteous and fights against the wicked.

Our Patriarchs, who overcame so many *nisyonot*, in spite of the difficulties involved, demonstrated that not only were they accompanied by Divine assistance, but their entire essence and desire was only for Hashem Yitbarach. They have instilled these elevated traits within us, their descendants.

This is hinted to in the following pasuk (*Bamidbar* 21:18) that mentions the “well that the princes dug.” Chazal expound (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:26): “*Princes* refers to the forefathers. They dug a well of Torah and bequeathed it to their offspring after them.”

The Rambam (*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1) writes, “The basic foundation and the pillar of wisdom is the knowledge that there is a Prime Cause – יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון – Hashem

brings everything into being, in heaven and earth. Whatever one possesses is only from Hashem.

The initials of the first four words of this sefer **יְסוּד הַיְסוּדוֹת וְעִמּוּד** **הַהַכְמוֹת** are an acronym of Hashem's Name. The word **שָׁם** (there) refers to a specific place. Hashem, as we know, has no specific place, for His glory fills the entire world (*Yeshayahu* 6:3).

This means that every object in the world carries within it a spark of Hashem's Name through which it was created. Chazal explain that this world was created with the letter **ה**, whereas the World to Come was created with the letter **ו**. Everything was created with His Name (**הו"ו**). This is a basic principle of the Torah.

The Patriarchs conducted themselves according to this principle. Avraham began studying the world around him. In the morning, he observed the sun in all its glory and believed it to be the Creator. However, when night fell, and the sun went down, he assumed that the moon must be the Creator. Then he noticed the stars and thought they were the Creator. However, the sun rose once again the next day. He then realized that all of these celestial beings must have been created by a Higher Being. He understood that there is one all-encompassing G-d. He is Hashem, the Creator and Supervisor of everything, the One who made the great luminaries. This was the beginning of his *emunah* in Hashem (*Rambam, Hilchot Akum* 1:2). His *emunah* was further strengthened after Hashem extricated him from Ur Kasdim (*Nechemiah* 9:7; *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:13).

Hashem chose Avraham in the merit of his pure faith and *mesirut nefesh*. His children would bring blessing to the entire world. They would be the Chosen Nation and receive His Torah.

Mesirut Nefesh of the Avot throughout the Generations

Avraham instilled his *mesirut nefesh* in his son, Yitzchak, who agreed to be sacrificed on the Altar as an offering for Hashem, without any

questions. Yitzchak thanked Hashem for this great *zechut* by instituting Tefillat Minchah (*Berachot* 26b; *Tanchuma, Chayei Sarah* 5). He handed down this tremendous self-sacrifice to his sons after him. Thus, all of Am Yisrael are prepared to lay their lives on the line for the sake of *kiddush Hashem*.

Yaakov continued this legacy. Although he was employed by Lavan the rasha, he was not influenced by his wicked ways. He sent Eisav the following message (*Bereishit* 32:5; *Bereishit Rabbah* 75:4), “I have sojourned (גרתִי) with Lavan.” Rashi explains that the word גרתִי has the same *gematria* as תרִי”ג, the 613 mitzvot. Yaakov indicated to Eisav that although he had dwelt with the wicked Lavan, he still kept all 613 commandments. Yaakov was “a wholesome man who dwelled in tents” (*ibid.* 25:27), he did not move from the tent of Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 63:10). He was a man of truth (*Michah* 7:20; *Bereishit Rabbah* 70:7). He bequeathed these traits to his children.

Thus, we see that *mesirut nefesh*, *emunah*, the observance of Torah and mitzvot, as well as *kedushah*, were all handed down to Bnei Yisrael from the Patriarchs.

Moreover, even though Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, they did not assimilate with the Egyptians. They did not change their language, their dress, or their names (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). They had perfect simple faith in their Creator. This faith was inherited from the Avot, who fulfilled the Torah even before it was given (*Yoma* 28b).

Now we can understand from where Bnei Yisrael received the strength to sacrifice their lives for Hashem in the days of the Greeks. They fiercely protected their Judaism, which they had inherited from our holy Avot. The Avot dug a foundation for the well of Torah for eternity, for their posterity after them, as it says (*Sotah* 34a), “The deeds of the fathers is a portent for their children.”

In the days of the Greeks, Bnei Yisrael desired to emulate their Avot, who sacrificed their lives for Hashem's Name. Hashem came to their aid and performed miracles for them. The few vanquished the many.

In this vein, we can understand the nature of the battle between Bnei Yisrael and the Greeks. The Greeks had no interest in annihilating Bnei Yisrael. They wished to destroy their souls. They developed culture and the sciences. They were so successful that they captured the world merely by their wisdom. Wherever they set foot, they left death and destruction.

But they were smart enough to realize that they needed to act differently in Eretz Yisrael. They knew that Bnei Yisrael learned Torah, which sharpens the mind. They therefore chose to allow the Jewish nation to live. They believed that the Jews, with their vast knowledge gained through their Torah learning, would assist them in developing their corrupt culture and become one nation with them, aiding them in bringing upheaval throughout the world.

The Mesirut Nefesh of Bnei Yisrael

However, they failed to take into account the firm *emunah* of the Jews, the sons of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Jewish people knew that they had no connection whatsoever with Greek culture. They believed that every person carries a Divine spark within him, imbued with the Torah from the time that he was in his mother's womb (*Niddah* 30b). Faith in Hashem is part of a Jew's makeup. It is impossible to part with the Living G-d. The Jews were not interested in forsaking Torah, the delight of the soul, whose ways are pleasant (*Mishlei* 3:17). Who in their right mind would abandon the Source of life, and follow the corrupt culture of Greece, the pathway to death?

Commensurate with the Greeks' pressure was Bnei Yisrael's opposition. They exhibited tremendous *mesirut nefesh* in resisting the Greeks. The more they compelled them to abolish Shabbat, Rosh

Chodesh, and *brit milah*, the more obstinate Bnei Yisrael remained in observing those mitzvot. This incurred the wrath of the Greeks.

What did the Greeks do? They knew that if they destroyed the Beit Hamikdash, the problem would still exist. Bnei Yisrael would go into exile, but they would still observe the Torah. The Greeks knew that they would never be able to assimilate Bnei Yisrael into their nation. This gave them no peace.

Closing the gates of the Beit Hamikdash would not help. The Jews would simply find another venue for their Avodat Hashem. Therefore, they came up with the following idea. They placed an idol inside the Beit Hamikdash. This would lead Bnei Yisrael to believe that Hashem was no longer with them, *chas v'shalom*. They would despair of His help and cease observing Torah and mitzvot. Thus, they would lose their faith in Hashem.

The Greeks knew that kindling the Menorah brought elevation to the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, they specifically defiled the oil (שמן), for they wished to taint their *neshamot* (נשמות). If the Menorah could not be lit, Bnei Yisrael would descend to their level.

But Hashem had other plans. The *Navi* declares (*Yeshayahu* 8:10), “Plan a conspiracy and it shall be annulled; speak your piece and it shall not stand, for G-d is with us!” Although the Greeks defiled the oil, Hashem performed a miracle and one flask was hidden from them. It remained sealed and pure, concealed from everyone.

When they found this pure flask of oil, Bnei Yisrael were strengthened in their *emunah*, and were able to overpower the Greeks. At first, they had been unaware of the flask, but Hashem had prepared it for their salvation, allowing them to continue their lives of *emunah* and *kedushah*, which had been interrupted for 180 years (*Avodah Zarah* 9a).

A miracle was performed through this small flask of oil, and it burned eight days. The word שמונה (eight) contains the same letters as נשמה

(soul). Hashem was hinting to them that they merited this miracle because they had not sullied their souls with the defiled Greek culture but had remained steadfast in their *emunah*.

Perhaps we can also say that the miracle lasted for eight days for another reason. At the time of the Greeks, Bnei Yisrael were at an all-time low. When the nations witnessed this open miracle that was done for Bnei Yisrael, they had newfound appreciation for their spiritual status. The miracle raised their prestige among the nations.

The *gematria* of the word שמן (oil) is equal to that of קרנם (their glory). Through the miracle of the oil, their glory was raised. In the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer, we supplicate, “Our Father, our King, Raise the glory of Yisrael, Your nation.” We ask to become respected once again, as in the days of the Chashmonaim.

Had the Menorah remained intact, burning as usual, Bnei Yisrael would not have realized that a miracle had taken place. The realization that Hashem had spared one pure flask of oil for them enabled Bnei Yisrael to further elevate their *neshamot* by rededicating themselves to His service. The light from this oil illuminated their way. The sefer *Pituchei Chotam*, written by the tzaddik, Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzeira, zy”a, explains that this light ascended on High and then returned to Bnei Yisrael.

The Greeks did not destroy the Beit Hamikdash; they merely defiled the oil. They did not wish to annihilate the Jews; they wanted them to remain as bodies without *neshamot*. Then Bnei Yisrael would be just like them, and would accept their influence.

But Bnei Yisrael exhibited great *mesirut nefesh* in searching for pure oil and gained tremendous faith from it. Additionally, the Greeks prevented Bnei Yisrael from circumcising their sons, but they again displayed their *mesirut nefesh* in opposing the Greeks, and gave their sons a *brit milah* on the eighth day (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:17; *Megillat*

Ta'anit). Measure for measure, Hashem rewarded them with a miracle, and the oil burned for eight days.

In combating the Greeks, Bnei Yisrael displayed tremendous *mesirut nefesh*, which they inherited from the Avot. The miracle lasted for generations; it took place in those days, yet its effects are still felt at this time.

————— In Summary —————

- How did Bnei Yisrael succeed in overcoming the numerous Greek army? Why was the miracle performed through a flask of oil? How did this flask escape the notice of the Greeks? Why didn't the Greeks simply lock the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, or, alternatively, demolish it? Why did they defile the oil instead of destroying the flasks? Why was the festival established for eight days, not more and not less?
- Bnei Yisrael inherited their *mesirut nefesh* from their holy Avot – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – who had perfect faith in Hashem and followed Him in complete devotion. Avraham searched to reveal the Creator, until he recognized the existence of Hashem. Yitzchak offered himself on the Altar, prepared to sacrifice his life for Hashem. Yaakov, the man of truth, lived in the tents of Torah. Bnei Yisrael inherited their *mesirut nefesh* from these fathers, who dug wells of Torah for them to drink. It was with this *mesirut nefesh* that Bnei Yisrael went into battle against the Greeks and defeated them, in spite of their numbers.
- The Greeks desired to defile Bnei Yisrael with their *tumah*, so that they would become assimilated among them. This would further their culture. There was no point in destroying the Beit Hamikdash; Bnei Yisrael would just relocate and serve Hashem in a different venue. However, Bnei Yisrael vanquished them. The Greeks were intent on defiling their *neshamot*, so they defiled the oil. The words שמן and נשמה contain the same letters. They defiled the oil rather than breaking the flasks, indicating that they would consent to Bnei Yisrael's physical existence, but could not tolerate their spiritual existence. Hashem came to their aid by concealing one small flask from the Greeks.

Bnei Yisrael drew *mesirut nefesh* from the oil. It burned eight days, alluding to the *neshamah*, which remained pure and unsullied. The word שמונה (eight) contains the same letters as נשמה (soul).

- This miracle raised the glory of Bnei Yisrael in the eyes of the nations. The *gematria* of the word שמן is equal to that of קרנם (their glory). The lighting of the Menorah was halted in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that mitzvot must be performed with *mesirut nefesh*. In the merit of Bnei Yisrael circumcising their sons after eight days, in defiance of the decrees of the Greeks, an eight-day miracle occurred. In the merit of our forefathers, and in merit of the flask which remained sealed and pure, they overpowered the Greeks. A miracle took place, which was established for all future generations.

THE APPROPRIATE TIME FOR EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN

“These lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them, but to look at them”

(Chanukah liturgy)

The Gemara states, in the name of Rav Huna (*Shabbat* 23b), “One who lights candles consistently is rewarded with sons who are *talmidei chachamim*.” One who beautifies this mitzvah, doing it in the best possible fashion, merits kosher, upright children. Why is he rewarded that his sons will be *talmidei chachamim*? Why not that he himself will be a great Torah scholar? Furthermore, why is this reward given specifically for the mitzvah of candle lighting, and not for any other mitzvah, such as observing Shabbat or keeping the halachot of Pesach?

Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. The word חנוכה is connected to the word חנוך (education). During the days of the Chashmonaim, Am Yisrael were in spiritual peril. Many of them had left

the fold of Torah and became Hellenists. This was because they had grown up with the heretical teachings of the corrupt Greek culture. The entire objective of the Greeks was to detach Am Yisrael from their heritage, by means of spoiling the pure Jewish education that they had always adopted. In this manner, the nation would be disconnected from Hashem and His Torah. Since it is difficult to change the mindset of older people, the Greeks set their sights on the malleable minds of the young children. After the children would get used to the perverted ways of the Greeks from a young age, they would maintain these attitudes throughout their lives.

To this end, the Greeks built amphitheaters, drawing the Jewish youth to all forms of entertainment and amusement. The Greeks emphasized the beauty of the body and all things physical. Spirituality was categorically dismissed. They even demanded that the Jews write on the horns of their oxen, “We have no portion with the G-d of Israel.” The horn was used as a bottle to feed the babies. With this atheistic doctrine placed before them constantly, they would absorb this malicious message together with their mothers’ milk.

But Hashem took pity on His nation. He gave might to a few tzaddikim, Mattityahu and his sons, the Chashmonaim. They sacrificed their lives to fight the Greeks. Hashem delivered the strong into the hands of the weak and returned the crown of Torah to its former glory. Am Yisrael returned to their pure education, as had been established from time immemorial.

Chanukah revolves around providing our children with pure Jewish education. When one lights the menorah, he should remember to educate his children to Torah and mitzvot, instilling Torah into their pure souls. The candle lighting itself hints to him that he should ignite the candle of their *neshamah*. Chazal teach (*Shabbat* 23b), “One who lights candles consistently, merits sons who are *talmidei chachamim*.” The Chanukah candles light up our path, the path of pure education, based on Torah.

The major part of education begins from a young age. The habits a person is accustomed to from his youth will remain with him throughout his life. 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.” Animals and birds can be trained. Certainly a young child, who possesses the image of Hashem, and whose delicate *neshamah* has not yet become habituated to negative attitudes, has the potential to be guided to a life of Torah and mitzvot. His father surely has the ability to lead him on the road to Hashem. This education will leave a lasting impression.

I know many people who emigrated from Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis to France. Unfortunately, they assimilated with the gentiles and learned their ways. The community had not yet been well-established and did not yet have appropriate schooling, according to true Jewish tradition. They sent their children to the public schools. But, with time, these youths did return to their fathers’ ways, for they remembered the pure education that they received when they were very young.

When lighting the menorah, the halachah is that “once the candle has been extinguished, it need not be re-lit” (*Shulchan Aruch* 673:2). This hints that, in the end, the children will return to the way of Torah and mitzvot. The moment the candle is lit, sparks of the *neshamah* have been ignited. If, *chalilah*, the spark of sanctity will be snuffed out, there is no cause for worry. In the end, it will be re-lit, returning to the way of Torah and mitzvot. A person may already be on his deathbed, but if he has thoughts of teshuvah, he will acquire his portion in the World to Come in a single moment. He remembered the pure education of his youth. Each of us contains a spiritual menorah that we inherited from our father’s home. The day will come when this menorah will light our way. Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 90a), “All of Yisrael are guaranteed a portion in the World to Come.” Every Jew is affected by the *kedushah* that he imbibed when he was very young in his parents’ home.

Chazal enjoin us (*Bava Batra* 60:2), “Adorn yourself and afterward, adorn others.” No father can demand appropriate behavior of his sons, if he himself does not act accordingly. In order to succeed in raising well-educated children, the father must model good behavior. How can a father demand of his son to attend Torah lectures or pray, if he himself is remiss in these areas?! Therefore, in order to educate children, one must first and foremost educate himself and keep a distance from anything inappropriate. He should ensure never to scorn prayer or to speak words of *lashon hara* or *rechilus*. He should improve his ways and behave with good character, so that his sons will take an example from him. Chazal tell us (*Sukkah* 56b) that what a child says in the street is an example of what he hears at home. Children follow their parents’ example. Parents should keep in mind that “actions speak louder than words.”

Now we can understand why one who is consistent with candle lighting merits having sons who are Torah scholars, rather than becoming a Torah scholar himself. In order for his sons to become *talmidei chachamim*, they must see his example of being a Torah scholar. His sons will then inherit their father’s love for learning and continue in his path. Thus, the promise of having sons who are *talmidei chachamim* ensures that he will also rise in his Torah knowledge. This reward is appropriate for one who is punctilious in candle lighting, rather than any other mitzvah, since Chanukah is the time to be careful concerning pure Torah education.

Educating one’s children properly is not a one-time event. In order to instill sound Torah education in our children, we must pursue it with persistence and patience, day in and day out. Every day, the child’s foundation in Torah and *emunah* becomes firmer, until he can stand on his own. The candles teach us this lesson. Just as we add a light on each subsequent night of Chanukah, likewise, we should gradually increase our children’s Torah knowledge, a little at a time, until they are on the right track. And just as the *shamash* lights the

other candles, so too, does the father light the flame of his children's *neshamot*, firing up their enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvot, directing them on the right path.

After the stunning victory of the Chashmonaim, they immediately made their way to the Beit Hamikdash and sought a flask of pure olive oil in order to kindle the Menorah, which portrays pure Torah education. A miracle occurred and the oil burned for eight days. The word שמנה (eight) has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul). The underlying motive of the Chashmonaim was to purify the *neshamot* of the Jewish children, purging them of the effects of Greek culture. Although, according to halachah, it was permissible for them to use defiled oil for lighting the Menorah, they stood their ground and insisted on finding pure olive oil. This was a matter that touched the very essence of their children's Torah education, and they were unwilling to yield one iota. When it comes to educating our children, nothing but the best will do. Hashem helped them find a flask of pure, unadulterated oil, sealed by the Kohen Gadol.

The pure approach of the Chashmonaim is a living will for all future generations. It is our sacred obligation to bequeath the Torah to our progeny in purity, for all future generations. When we take this message to heart, we are guaranteed that the Torah will never be forgotten.

————— In Summary —————

- “One who lights candles consistently is rewarded with sons who are *talmidei chachamim*.” Why isn't he rewarded by becoming a *talmid chacham* himself? Why is this reward specifically for lighting candles, rather than for any other mitzvah?
- Many Jews became Hellenists because they were influenced by the impure culture of the Greeks from the time that they were very young. The Greeks even demanded that the Jews write on the horns of their oxen, “We have no

portion with the G-d of Israel.” The horn was used as a bottle to feed the small babies. With this atheistic doctrine placed before them constantly, they would absorb this malicious message together with their mothers’ milk. To prevent this nefarious notion from taking root in His people, Hashem saved Bnei Yisrael from the Greeks through Mattityahu and his sons.

- The word חנוכה is connected to the word חנוך (education). Chanukah revolves around providing our children with pure Jewish education. When one lights the menorah, he should be inspired to ignite his children’s *neshamot* with pure Torah ideals. Just as an animal can be trained, so can a child. The habits a person is accustomed to in youth will remain with him throughout his life. “Once the candle has been extinguished, it need not be re-lit.” Even if a person has abandoned the ways of the Torah, he may repent on his deathbed, inspired by the teachings of his youth.
- In order to educate children, one must first and foremost educate himself and keep a distance from anything inappropriate. In order for his sons to become *talmidei chachamim*, they must see his example of being a Torah scholar. His sons will then inherit their father’s love for learning and continue in his path. This reward is appropriate for one who is punctilious in candle lighting, rather than any other mitzvah, since Chanukah is the time to be careful concerning pure Torah education.
- Just as we add a light on each subsequent night of Chanukah, likewise, we should gradually increase our children’s Torah knowledge, a little at a time, until they are on the right track. And just as the *shamash* lights the other candles, so too, does the father light the flame of his children’s *neshamot*, firing up their enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvot, directing them on the right path.
- Even though the Chashmonaim could have lit the Menorah with impure oil, they made supernal efforts to find pure oil, since they desired to purify the people of the influence of Greek culture and establish pure education for all future generations. Similarly, it is our sacred obligation to bequeath the Torah to our progeny in purity, for all future generations.

THE DAYS OF SHOAVIVIM



INCREASING OUR EMUNAH

The word *Shovavim* (שובבי"ם) is an acronym for the names of the parshiyot read at this time of year: **ש**מות, **ו**ארא, **ב**א, **ב**שלח, **י**תרו, **מ**שפטים. The Arizal writes (*Be'er Heitev*) that these days are designated for rectification and arousal to teshuvah. They are days of instilling faith in a person's heart, so that he should come to serve Hashem correctly.

What is the special quality of these days? As we know, Chodesh Elul is a month intended for teshuvah, especially since Rosh Hashanah is approaching. Yom Kippur is also a day of teshuvah, the day on which the fear of judgment grips man's heart. That being the case, why do we feel so excited about the days of *Shovavim*? Some people arouse themselves to teshuvah by conducting fasts during these days and abstaining from speaking for set amounts of time. What is the character of these days, which warrant such behavior?

Upon contemplating this matter, we are overcome by gratitude to Hashem, Who gave wisdom to our prophets and *Chachamim* so that they should know how to divide the parshiyot of the Torah in the most wonderful way.

Moreover, Moshe Rabbeinu wrote down the Torah in the language and wording dictated by Hashem, so that each letter contains thousands upon thousands of halachot and insights. Chazal tell us

(*Menachot* 29b) that Rabbi Akiva would expound “mounds of halachot” on every crown of the letters of the Sefer Torah.

The *Mishnah* in *Avot* states (5:22), “Delve in it, and delve in it, for all is in it.” Everything in the world is hinted to in the Torah. Fortunate is the nation who succeeds in revealing an insight or a secret which is hidden in the Torah. Fortunate is the person who lives by the Torah, not veering one iota from its precepts, as the pasuk instructs us (*Devarim* 17:11), “You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.”

To answer our original question about the special quality of the days of *Shovavim*, we must ask another question. Chazal state (*Yerushalmi, Megillah* 4:1; *Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 12:1) that Moshe Rabbeinu established the custom of reading from the Torah on Shabbatot and Yamim Tovim. Ezra enacted the reading of the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays and on Shabbat at Minchah time. Why is it necessary to read the Torah portion in public, and repeat it, year after year? We have a constant obligation to delve in Torah. Chazal teach us (*Torat Kohanim* *ibid.*) that the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow in My decrees” means “that you should labor in the Torah.” The importance of learning is conveyed by many other pesukim in the Torah, e.g., “You should contemplate it day and night,” “This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth,” “You shall speak of them while you sit in your home,” and, “If not for My covenant [being studied] day and night, I would not have instituted the laws of the Heavens and the earth.”

Even though a public reading has special significance, why is it important to read the Torah every week, to the extent that the Torah is divided up according to the weeks of the year? Why isn’t one annual reading sufficient? Also, why are seven people called up to the reading, as opposed to six or eight? (*Megillah* 21a; *Shulchan Aruch* 282:1).

Parenthetically, let us ask another question. Why did Hashem command us to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day and night,

as 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”? The Gemara explains (*Berachot*) that this means the days as well as the nights. Isn’t it enough to remember the Exodus on Pesach, or just once a month?

The Zohar (I, 10b; II, 82a) bemoans those who think that the Torah narrates stories. On the contrary, the Torah is replete with mysteries and lofty matters. Every word of Torah contains sound advice, guiding a person in the proper mode of behavior. It is full of pearls of wisdom, illuminating man’s path.

That being the case, the more elevated one becomes, the higher the level of advice he requires. At every level, the Torah speaks to him. As his spiritual level increases, so too, does his understanding of the concepts of Torah.

How can a person know which advice is appropriate for him? For that, a person must delve in Torah, exerting himself exceedingly. When he does so, he is guaranteed to always receive the correct counsel from it.

On the other hand, if a person feels he is weakening in his Avodat Hashem, and not learning properly, it is an indication that the tools he possesses are not effective in his battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. The goal of the *Yetzer Hara* is to cause a person to stumble and weaken him by putting *nisyonot* in his path. He brings him hardships and troubles, in order to cause him *bitul* Torah and to make him lax in his tefillah and mitzvah observance. In this way, the *Yetzer Hara* weakens his faith, to the extent that he may even entertain heretical thoughts, *chas v’shalom* (*Shabbat* 105b; *Igrot D’Rabbi Natan* 3:2).

The *Yetzer Hara* neglects no one. He wages a constant campaign to cause people to stumble. Chazal state (*Sukkah* 52a), “Whoever is greater than his friend, has a greater *Yetzer Hara*.”

One cannot afford to rely on faith alone to protect him from the *Yetzer Hara*. Nor that his tefillah and *tzedakah* and other good deeds will protect him. He must exert himself in Torah at all times, and then he will merit Heavenly assistance. From the Torah he will learn how to perform mitzvot in the best way possible, without the *Yetzer Hara* interfering. Then, when he confronts the *Yetzer Hara* and vanquishes him, he will be fortunate in this world as well as in the Next.

Now we might understand why Chazal established public Torah readings. People who are not learned may read the Torah at home, out of a sense of obligation, but they often do not truly understand what they are reading. The purpose of reading the Torah is in order to discover insights into the reasons for mitzvot and to expound upon them. One is enjoined to read and re-read the Torah portion, until it becomes part and parcel of his being, and is completely understood.

Aside from learning what transpired to our forefathers, one must uncover the tremendous powers our fathers possessed, with which they battled their *Yetzer Hara*. They constantly waged war with their evil inclinations, until they merited becoming chariots for the *Shechinah* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:7, *Zohar* Part I, 213b). How did they reach this level? By means of toiling in Torah.

As soon as they desired to relax somewhat, in order to learn Torah with peace of mind, they were beset by tribulations. An example of this is Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:1; see *Rashi* on the first pasuk in *Vayeishev*). He desired to live in peace, and immediately was plagued by the misfortune with Yosef. Tranquility is a tool of the *Yetzer Hara*, for by causing a person to feel serene and secure, he finds an opening to enter his heart.

Therefore, Chazal established Torah readings every Shabbat of the year, as well as Mondays and Thursdays, and on Shabbat at Minchah, so that the words of the Torah should enter the hearts of those listening, and they will come to understand new Torah concepts. The

study of Targum is an important tool to help one understand the Torah.

The more one learns, the more one begins to ponder the various subjects in the Torah, e.g., the Creation, the Ten Plagues, *Matan Torah*, etc. Contemplating the events described in the Torah teaches a person tremendous lessons in *emunah* (*Bechorot* 5b). For example, the fact that four-fifths of the people died in Egypt because they did not want to leave (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 1) should make him examine his own level of *emunah*. Likewise, the fact that Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael because of their laxity in Torah study should make him examine his own commitment to learning Torah. Once a person starts to think this way, he receives unbelievable energy to fend off the *Yetzer Hara*. He learns these strategies from the Torah, which helps him in his battle.

The Seven Aliyot

In light of the above, we can now understand why seven people are called up to make the blessing on the Torah. The number six represent the six days of the week, wherein we receive strength and *siyata di'Shemaya* to ward off the *Yetzer Hara*. The seventh *aliyah* represents Shabbat, the seventh day. All negative forces flee in the face of Shabbat, and the *Yetzer Hara* has no hold on us on this day. Shabbat is completely pure and holy, dedicated for the sake of Torah (*Zohar* II, 135b; *Tanna d'Rabbi Eliezer* 1).

Shabbat is literally a portion of the World to Come. On it, a person is capable of reaching lofty heights, whether he is among those who pursue Torah study, or an ordinary person who merely reads the Torah portion. The awe of Shabbat spreads itself upon everyone (*Yerushalmi, Demai* 4:1). Everyone can become elevated on Shabbat, according to his level. Moreover, when the day is utilized properly, in learning and delving into Torah, the blessings of Shabbat overflow onto the weekdays. Fortunate is the one who utilizes Shabbat in this way, both in this world and the next.

There is tremendous significance that an eighth member is called up to the Torah for *maftir*. The number eight represents the level above nature. Kohelet (11:2) states, “Distribute portions to seven, or even to eight.” Eight signifies spiritual matters (see *Kohelet Rabbah* 11:5). After a person has spent his Shabbat appropriately, he has the ability to bring upon himself spiritual abundance, as is alluded to in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 9:1), “It was on the eighth day.” In fact, on Shabbat, a person reaches the elevated level of eight, beyond nature, after hearing and internalizing the lessons of the seven *aliyot* of the Torah. When Motza’ei Shabbat arrives, it is difficult for him to part from the Shabbat and the spiritual enjoyment it affords (*Beitzah* 16).

The Days of Shovavim – A Way of Life for Bnei Yisrael

According to what we have explained above, we can see why the days of *Shovavim* are of such significance. It is because at this time, we read parshiyot that pertain to our everyday life, throughout the days of the year. These parshiyot describe our nation’s descent to Egypt, Pharaoh’s decree to drown the Jewish baby boys, the cries of the people, and the appointment of Yocheved and Miriam as midwives, as well as the *mesirut nefesh* they displayed. They received their recompense measure for measure. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 1:21), “He made them houses.” The Gemara (*Sotah* 11b) explains this to mean houses of *Kehunah*, *Leviyah*, and *Malchut*.

The word בתים (houses) is closely associated with the word בתיה (Batya), who rescued Moshe from the Nile. The word “houses” is written in the plural to allude to the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu is equal in stature to all of Bnei Yisrael (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64). Each Jew merited salvation, their individual “Batya,” for Moshe rescued them all by bringing them the Torah.

In these parshiyot, we find the prohibition against speaking *lashon hara*. Moshe understood that it was this sin that was prolonging the

galut (*Shemot* 2:14). Hashem's revelation to Moshe was in a thorn bush, indicating that He was with Bnei Yisrael in their suffering (*Tanchuma, Shemot* 13), as it says (*Tehillim* 91:15), "I am with him in distress."

We also learn many lessons from what transpired to Bnei Yisrael after *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. They followed Hashem with great *mesirut nefesh*, with no provisions for the journey into the Wilderness (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). They experienced the Splitting of the Sea, the battle with Amalek, the manna (food of angels), and *Matan Torah*. When the Torah was given, the entire world was silent, and the gentiles thought Hashem would return the world to nothingness (*Zevachim* 116a). They approached Bilaam, who told them that Hashem was giving His nation the Torah. How great was the *kiddush Hashem* at that time!

These and more, are the lessons we learn during the days of *Shovavim*. We become inspired to reach heights in Torah, tefillah, and belief and faith in Hashem. We are promised that the *galut* will end, and we will merit *geulah*, as happened in the days of the Exodus from Egypt. Specifically in our time, when the *galut* stretches endlessly, and the pangs of Mashiach are as painful as labor pains, the message of these *parshiyot* strengthen us.

We can learn from the juxtaposition of parashat *Yitro* to parashat *Mishpatim* that if a person wishes to ascend the ladder of good *middot*, fulfilling all the mitzvot (as described in parashat *Mishpatim*), he must first learn the Torah (as illustrated by *Yitro*). Only afterward, is he able to properly keep the mitzvot.

Faith and good deeds alone are not enough. A person needs to toil in Torah. This will stand him in good stead and protect him when he will need it (*Sanhedrin* 99b).

Yet, Torah study alone is also insufficient. One must keep mitzvot, as it says (*Devarim* 5:1), "Learn them, and be careful to perform them." One must learn, as well as do. The *Mishnah* in *Avot* states (1:17), "The

essence is not study, but practice.” Through learning Torah, one comes to observe mitzvot. Both arm a person in his battle with the *Yetzer Hara*.

All of the Festivals Are Mentioned During Shovavim

We can explain further. Aside from the important topics written in these parshiyot, as we explained above, all of the holidays are mentioned there, as well as the mitzvot of tefillin, Shabbat, and *milah*, which are compared to all the mitzvot (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5)

The holidays are included in these parshiyot in the following way: *Yetziat Mitzrayim* alludes to Pesach; *Matan Torah* alludes to Shavuot; Amalek hints to Haman, thus alluding to Purim, and also to the Greeks, alluding to Chanukah, as they, too, desired to destroy the Jewish spirit.

The days of Bein Hametzarim and the *churban* Beit Hamikdash are alluded to in the death of four-fifths of the nation in the plague of darkness. This can be likened to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, because the people were not unified; they exhibited baseless hatred toward one another and spoke *lashon hara* (*Yoma* 9b).

The nation was given fifty days to prepare themselves from the time of the Exodus until *Matan Torah*. They used these days to release themselves from the forty-nine levels of *tumah* to which they had descended when in Egypt (*Zohar Yitro* 39a). These fifty days correspond to the days from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Shemini Atzeret, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, and Simchat Torah, all days of repentance.

Tu bi'Shvat also falls during the period of *Shovavim*. It is a day similar to Rosh Hashanah, since it is the Day of Judgment for produce, thus also hinting to teshuvah.

The days of *Shovavim* enable us to strengthen our *emunah*. The purpose of the Exodus was to strengthen our faith and commitment to

the Torah. It is fitting, then, to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* all the days of the year. The strengthened *emunah* that we gain during the weeks of *Shovavim* energizes the entire year with blessing and holiness.

————— In Summary —————

- The days of *Shovavim* are designated for rectification and arousal to teshuvah. What is their distinction over other days, for example, Elul, the month of teshuvah? Hashem gave our *Chachamim* the wisdom to divide the Torah portions throughout the weeks of the year. Many secrets are involved in this. Also, why do we read the Torah portion in public on Shabbat and on Mondays and Thursdays? And why do we read the portion every single week, instead of once a month, or once a year? Parenthetically, why is *Yetziat Mitzrayim* remembered every day?
- The Torah is not a story-book. Mystical matters are concealed within it. It contains advice on how to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. Only by means of laboring in Torah and doing mitzvot can one learn the messages contained within the Torah. If a person feels himself weakening in his Torah study, it is a sign that he is not obtaining the guidance that he needs from the Torah. He must reinforce his learning even more, so that he will be able to attain the correct level of direction from the Torah.
- Public Torah readings were established in order that even those who are unlearned should hear the reading and glean insights in the Torah. One must be aware of the tremendous attributes of our forefathers, and strengthen himself likewise. Therefore, we read the Torah portion year after year, as well as on Mondays and Thursdays. We want to gain as much benefit from the Torah reading as possible.
- The first six men to ascend to the Torah correspond to the six days of the week. The seventh corresponds to Shabbat, which elevates one spiritually and enables him to attain the World to Come. This holds true for the *talmid chacham*, as well as for an unlearned person. The spirit of Shabbat overflows onto the weekdays. The eighth man called up blesses *maftir*. The number eight signifies a level above nature, a reference to other-worldliness, the World to Come.

- During *Shovavim* we read parshiyot of major significance to our nation, e.g., *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Amalek, *Matan Torah*, the well of Miriam, the Splitting of the Sea, the *lashon hara* of the spies, the *mesirut nefesh* of Bnei Yisrael, and much more. All of these topics contain guidance for strengthening oneself in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, and ascending in mitzvah performance. This is the connection between Yitro and Mishpatim. One must first toil in Torah, and only then can he keep mitzvot properly.

- These parshiyot hint to all the holidays of the year, from Rosh Hashanah until the *churban* Beit Hamikdash. This being the case, on these Shabbatot, there is special *siyata di'Shemaya* to strengthen oneself in *emunah* for all the days of the year. The Torah contains advice to fight the *Yetzer Hara*. The mitzvah to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every single day indicates that its purpose is to strengthen oneself in *emunah*. Thus, the days of *Shovavim* have the special quality that their lessons influence the rest of the days of the year.

THE FOUR PARSHIYOT



PRIORITIZING OUR VALUES

Chazal teach us to read four parshiyot: *Shekalim*, *Zachor*, *Parah*, and *Hachodesh* (*Orach Chaim* 685). Let us try to understand the order of the parshiyot and their practical connection to our everyday lives.

The first is *Parashat Shekalim*. It teaches us that we should remember that money (as depicted by the *shekalim*, the specific coin used in those days) is not all-important, and does not solve all of man's problems. "Money can't buy happiness," as the saying goes. Throughout the generations, we were witness to troubles and suffering which befell those who were wealthy, Jews and non-Jews alike.

A man must realize that the Torah is paramount, the purpose of the entire Creation (*Nedarim* 32a). Money and physical pleasures are secondary. To emphasize this, Bnei Yisrael were told that everyone must contribute a half-*shekel* coin toward the upkeep of the Mishkan. The rich could not increase, and the pauper could not decrease from this fixed amount (*Shemot* 30:15). All were meant to feel equal before Hashem.

Why did the Torah command to give specifically one-half of a *shekel*? This was in order that the people would be encouraged to donate the second half to those poorer than themselves. The paupers were not inferior, as they also had the directive to contribute a one half-*shekel* coin.

Next is *Parashat Zachor*, which comes immediately before Purim. This is to remind a person that even if he knows that Torah is primary, and money is secondary, he should still share his money with the poor. This is one of the special mitzvot of Purim: *matanot la'evyonim*.

We find that Haman himself was involved with *shekalim*, as the pasuk states (*Esther* 3:9), “And I will pay ten thousand silver talents (*shekalim*) into the hands of those who perform the duties.” This was in order to buy the Jews. Achashveirosh, however, refused the money, giving Bnei Yisrael into Haman’s hands free of charge.

We see that money has no intrinsic value at a time of distress. Haman’s decree took place when the nation became lax in Torah study. He told the king (*ibid* 8), “Their laws are different from every other people’s.” He stressed that they had unusual customs (*Megillah* 13b). He saw that there were those who engaged in Torah study, and those who were lax in Torah. These people were also “different” because they made Torah, which is primary, into a minor issue, while granting utmost importance to money, which, in reality, is secondary.

In the end, Haman was bested. How? The Jews’ half-*shekel* donations outweighed his ten thousand *shekalim* (*Megillah*, *ibid.*), for by contributing the half-*shekel*, Bnei Yisrael proved that they now related correctly to money and had made Torah their priority once more.

If a person awakens himself to this truth on the Shabbat of *Parashat Zachor*, then on *Parashat Parah* (the Shabbat preceding Rosh Chodesh Nisan), he is able to become purified of all improper thoughts regarding this world, which occupied his mind up until now. He thereby wards off Hashem’s wrath. The first letters of the words פרה אדומה (the red heifer used in the process of purification) spell the word אף (anger).

Therefore, *Parashat Parah* comes after *Shekalim* and *Zachor* (see *Midrash Rabbah* 19:1). First, one must come to the recognition that

money and material objects are insignificant. Only afterward can he reach a state of purification, which is a result of teshuvah.

By doing teshuvah one becomes like a new person. Renewal is the concept of *Parashat Hachodesh*, which is read on the Shabbat preceding Pesach. He renews his faith in Hashem, and his repugnance toward money, which is a form of idol worship and brings all types of doubts and *nisyonot* upon a person. The pasuk in Mishlei states (30:8), “Give me neither poverty nor wealth.” After becoming purified of sin, a person is refreshed and understands, unequivocally, that material matters are completely marginal.

We learn this from the mitzvah that Bnei Yisrael were given in Egypt to tie the sheep to their bed-posts (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bo; Zohar III, 251*). A miracle occurred, and the Egyptians, who worshipped the sheep, did not react. So, too, one who engages in Torah and mitzvot, maximizing their importance and minimizing the value of money, is worthy of miracles and sees abundance of blessing in everything he does (*Avodah Zarah 19b*).

This is all preparation for the month of Nisan, the “first (lit. head) of all the months” (*Shemot 12:2*). After remembering the worthlessness of money, reconnecting to his fellow man by giving *tzedakah* on Purim, and understanding that Torah is paramount, he purifies himself and is as if born anew. He is certainly worthy of the true *geulah*, freedom from the *Yetzer Hara*, for he is involved in Torah study (*Avot 6:2*). He is also ready for the ultimate physical *geulah*, as we say in Tehillim (79:6), “Pour Your wrath upon the nations that do not recognize You.” How could he possibly make such a statement were he not purified from sin and spiritually renewed beforehand? This would arouse prosecution against him. Rather, by purifying himself and making the requisite preparations throughout the weeks of the four *parshiyot*, a person attains perfection in both material and spiritual matters.

In Summary

- The four parshiyot have a specific order and are wonderfully interconnected. First is *Parashat Shekalim*, teaching us that Torah is paramount and money is trivial. A person is instructed to contribute exactly one half-*shekel* to the Mishkan, and give the other half to the poor, so that he might also become elevated.
- Next is *Zachor*, teaching us to contribute charity to the poor, specifically on Purim (*matanot la'evyonim*). We must internalize the belief that Torah is all-important. Haman accused us of being “different” and lax in Torah, and was thus able to bribe the king with his *shekalim*. The half-*shekel* coins proved him wrong.
- Having integrated this message, one can then become pure, indicated by *Parashat Parah*. He removes Hashem’s wrath from himself and becomes cleansed of all the vanities of this world.
- Afterward, he comes to *Parashat Hachodesh*, when he becomes spiritually renewed. After understanding that money is trivial, and purging himself of all negativity, he becomes like a new person.
- The four parshiyot are preparation for Chodesh Nisan, the “first of the months.” A person is redeemed from the *Yetzer Hara* and merits the ultimate *geulah*. He can then state, “Pour Your wrath upon the gentiles,” for he himself has attained perfection in both the spiritual and physical realms.

SHABBAT SHEKALIM



PREPARING FOR NISAN

Chazal teach (*Shekalim* 81:1) that on the first of Adar, the mitzvah of *shekalim* and the prohibition of *kilayim* are announced to the people. This demands explanation. Why specifically then?

We might be able to answer as follows. On Rosh Chodesh Nisan, the Mishkan was completed (see *Shemot* 40:17). As we know, the Mishkan alludes to a person. One must make himself into a residence for the Presence of Hashem. This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.”

Every person has the ability to become an abode for the *Shechinah*. Each person has within him a Divine spark from Above. Hashem desires to connect with that spark of Divinity inside the person, as it says (*Bamidbar* 35:34), “For I am Hashem Who rests among the Children of Israel.” A person’s very essence is the handiwork of Hashem (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:14).

In order to merit housing the presence of the *Shechinah* within oneself, one must exert himself greatly. He is in need of *siyata di’Shemaya* in order to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, who is constantly looking for ways to ensnare him (*Sukkah* 52a; *Kiddushin* 30b; *Kallah* 2). He tries to cause him to fall into sin, and gives him many tests, in order to prevent him from becoming a Mishkan for Hashem’s Presence.

month of Nisan arrives. Nevertheless, one is capable of overcoming him specifically in the month of אדר (Adar), which is numerically equivalent to הר (mountain), an appellation of the *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52; *Zohar*, Part I, 190b). He can reach heights in Torah, just as the Jews in the days of Purim did (*Esther* 9:27). They accepted the Torah willingly at that time (*Shabbat* 88a). In this manner, a person can merit his personal *geulah* – inferred by the number eight – and merit that the *Shechinah* will rest within him.

The *shekalim* are given specifically in the month of Adar, in order to remind a person that Haman spoke against our nation then, for they did not accept the Torah as was fitting. The words “*Na’aseh v’nishma* – We will do and we will hear” (*Shemot* 24:7) stress that it is not sufficient to fulfill mitzvot; the sound of Torah must be heard, as well.

When can Torah be truly heard? When one rids himself of the *shekalim*, from material matters. For this, a month of preparation is necessary. One needs this time to overcome his declines, arriving at elevation on the eighth day, the month of Nisan, the month of *geulah*.

The prohibition of *kilayim* is connected to this idea. The word כלאים has the same root as the word כלום (nothing). This hints to the fact that money – *shekalim* – is nothing. With this mindset, a person can devote himself to Torah, crowning Hashem as King over all the land. The numerical equivalent of כלאים is equal to that of מלכות (kingdom).

The *Sefat Emet* on the Torah writes the following regarding *kilayim* (*Parashat Shekalim* 634, 637, and 653): As the *Zohar* (III, 86a) states, the word כלאים has the same root as the word בית הכלא (prison). Through their contributions of *shekalim*, Bnei Yisrael became liberated. This is in preparation of Pesach, when we become free from the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*. It is then that a person’s heart becomes complete.

In explanation of his holy words, I thought of saying that this fits with what was previously stated. *Shekalim* are a form of money, a root of

great *nisayon*. The pasuk in Mishlei states (30:8), “Give me neither poverty nor wealth.” The *Yetzer Hara* convinces a person to work excessively for money, convincing him that it is extremely significant, not trivial at all.

By using his time in the pursuit of money rather than for learning Torah, a person is truly trapped by the *Yetzer Hara*. Amalek is the analogy of the *Yetzer Hara* (see *Sanhedrin* 110a; *Tanchuma, Beshalach* 25). He drags a person down, until, without even realizing it, he stands on the brink of the fiftieth level of *tumah*. The person thinks that he is a good, G-d fearing Jew. However, repeating a transgression makes it permissible in his eyes (*Yoma* 86b). He doesn’t even realize that he is sinning.

The prohibition of *kilayim* is announced at this time in order that one should remove the chains of the *Yetzer Hara*, thereby freeing himself from the fifty levels of impurity. This is hinted at in the word itself: כלאים = כלא ים. The combined *gematria* of the letters ך and ם is fifty, alluding to the fifty levels of *tumah*. A person is trapped by the *Yetzer Hara* in the prison of the fifty levels of *tumah*. One must distance himself from love of money, which is inherent in every human being, and build himself anew in the month of Adar. With *siyata di’Shemaya*, he will arrive at Nisan, the month indicating the number eight, above the laws of nature. He will be like a newborn, and the *Shechinah* will rest upon him, just as it rested on the Mishkan.

In Summary

- On the first of Adar, announcements were made regarding the mitzvah of *shekalim* and the prohibition of *kilayim*. Why specifically in Adar? The Mishkan was established in the month of Nisan. A person is compared to the Mishkan, since his sole purpose is that the *Shechinah* should reside within him. How is this possible? Through engaging in Torah study and overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. One strengthens himself in these areas in Chodesh Adar, as

a preparation for the month of Nisan. For seven days, the Mishkan was put up and taken apart, indicating the rises and falls that a person experiences in his spiritual *avodah*. But in Nisan, one arrives at “eight,” above the laws of nature. Then, one merits the *geulah* and having the *Shechinah* rest upon him.

- Therefore, proclamations are made in Adar, to indicate that money (*shekalim*) is worthless. Torah is of primary importance. With Torah, one has the ability to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, who, in the guise of Haman, prosecuted in Adar. In this manner, we are prepared for the month of Nisan.
- The word כלאים has the same root as the word כלום (nothing). This indicates that there is nothing outside of Torah. According to the *Sefat Emet*, the word כלאים is from the root כלא (prison). By making proper preparations, a person merits salvation from the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*, and from the fifty levels of *tumah*. He will then be spiritually prepared for Chodesh Nisan, the *geulah*, and the revelation of Hashem’s *Shechinah*.

THE HALF-SHEKEL – POWER IN UNITY

The Torah’s injunction to contribute a half-*shekel* teaches the importance of bearing responsibility for one another. Chazal state (*Shavuot* 39a), “All of Yisrael are responsible for each other.” Each individual is enjoined to feel “as one man with one heart” in regard to his fellow man.

Chazal relate (*Bava Batra* 10b) that Moshe asked Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “*Ribbono shel Olam!* In what manner will the Jews become elevated?” To which Hashem answered, “By taking a census of them.” This is difficult to understand. How would the nation become elevated specifically through counting them?

Perhaps we can answer with the following idea. The nation was counted by each person donating a half-*shekel* coin. Both the pauper and the rich man brought exactly the same coin. Yet, the pauper did not complain, claiming that the rich person could afford to give more,

and he himself should be allowed to donate less. Likewise, the rich man did not bemoan the fact that only a half-*shekel* was demanded of him. He was not embittered over the fact that he could afford more. They would all bring equal amounts, in perfect unity. In this manner, the nation became elevated.

Additionally, this teaches the message that each person is really only half a person, not a complete entity. Only when he is joined with his fellow man can he become whole. The unity engendered by this realization is what elevates the nation.

With this in mind, we can understand the meaning behind the command for each person to bring a half-*shekel* coin. In order to count the nation, each person could have been instructed to write down his name on a paper in order to verify how many people there were. Or they could have been commanded to bring a sheep, an ox, or an article of clothing. But Hashem wanted everyone to be equal in the mitzvah, no one contributing more or less than his fellow. In this manner, each person would feel his own lack, and the virtues of others. This would promote the desire to help others, and supplement whatever he is lacking. In this way, everyone would perform the mitzvah in unity and joy.

Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty understanding the concept of the half-*shekel* (*Tanchuma Ki Tisa* 9). Therefore, Hashem showed him a coin of fire and told him that this is what they should contribute. How can we understand that Moshe did not know what the half-*shekel* looked like?

Moshe certainly knew what a half-*shekel* was. But he had trouble understanding why each person was commanded to bring one, rich and poor alike. He maintained that the poor people, should, indeed, bring a half-*shekel*, whereas the rich ones should, perhaps, bring a giant diamond, and be counted that way. But the Torah demanded a half-*shekel* from everyone, in order that each person should be equal,

and the nation would be unified. This would raise their stature in the eyes of the nations of the world.

This sheds light on Haman's donation of ten thousand *shekalim* to Achashveirosh (*Esther* 3:9). By choosing *shekalim* to buy out the Jews and annihilate them, he was insinuating that they had not internalized the message of the *shekalim*; they were not unified. He spelt this out to the king by saying, (ibid. 3:8), "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm." Haman stressed that each member of Bnei Yisrael was different from the others; they were not unified "as one man with one heart." Thus, Haman believed that his *shekalim* would tip the scales in his favor.

But when Bnei Yisrael became reunited, the decree against them was rescinded, as Esther told Mordechai (ibid. 4:16), "Go, assemble all the Jews." She wanted to reunite the people. We find that they did, indeed, become as one, and remained that way throughout, as the pasuk testifies (ibid 9:15), "The Jews... assembled." They gathered together with one mind, to do the will of their Creator.

For this reason, it is customary to donate a half-*shekel* to *tzedakah* on Purim, as an illustration of the nation's unity. This reminds the people that only in the merit of unity were they rescued from Haman's hands. Haman himself stated (*Esther Rabbah* 10:4), "Your *shekalim* preceded mine. Your unity stood by you, so that you emerged victorious."

Indeed, the Purim story illustrates how the banner of Judaism was raised through the harmony that reigned among the people. This was in the merit of Esther, who threw her lot in with the rest of the nation.

————— In Summary —————

- Bnei Yisrael became elevated through being counted by contributing a half-*shekel* each to the Mishkan. This is because both rich and poor alike contributed the same amount, increasing the unity of the nation.

- By contributing half a *shekel*, each person realized that he is one half of a whole, promoting the desire to help others and supplement whatever they lacked.
- The half-*shekel* defeated the ten thousand *shekalim* of Haman. His decree to destroy Bnei Yisrael came about because of their lack of unity. Correction in this area, upon Esther's urging, saved the nation from his evil designs.

SHEKALIM TIP THE SCALES IN OUR FAVOR

“On the first of Adar, announcements are made regarding the *shekalim*” (*Shekalim* 1:1). Why were the *Shekalim* collected specifically via a proclamation, as opposed to having collectors go from door to door, to gather the funds directly?

It seems that because this mitzvah entailed a monetary outlay, the people needed to be approached in a conciliatory manner, rather than being directly confronted and charged with the obligation to pay the half-*shekel*.

The word שקלים (*shekalim*) is related to the word משקל (scale). The mitzvah of *tzedakah* tips the scales to the side of merit. By overcoming the urge to refrain from parting with one's hard-earned money, the scales are tipped in a person's favor. He is also protected from misfortune in this merit, as money is sometimes referred to as דמים (blood).

The mitzvah of *shekalim* also hints to unity. When two people contribute one half-*shekel* each, they are combined to become a complete whole. This fosters unity among the nation.

On Purim, we are commanded to send delicacies to others (*Esther* 9:19). Why does the pasuk specify “sending delicacies” rather than “giving delicacies”? *Tzedakah* is greatly valued by Hashem. However, a

higher level of *tzedakah* is to send gifts of food to his friend. This has two advantages. First, the giver sends the delicacies through a third party, obviating any feelings of discomfort that the recipient might feel if he were to receive the food directly from the one giving it. Second, the act of giving originates from the giver himself, rather than because the recipient has requested something from him. This is a much higher level of giving.

One of the mitzvot of Purim is משלוח מנות איש לרעהו – Sending delicacies to one another. The word איש implies a person who feels the needs of another, and provides for him before he turns to him for help. By behaving in this manner in Adar, a person accustoms himself to act similarly throughout the year.

Chazal state (*Ta'anit* 26b), “When Adar arrives, joy is increased.” When the announcements for giving the *shekalim* are made in Adar, and the proclamation enters one’s ears and heart, he overcomes the urge to retain his money, and his joy is thereby increased.

————— In Summary —————

- The *shekalim* were collected specifically via a proclamation. Since the people needed to part with their money, they needed to be approached in a conciliatory manner.
- The word שקלים (*shekalim*) is related to the word משקל (scale). Giving *tzedakah* tips the scales in our favor.
- The mitzvah of *shekalim* hints to unity, since the two half-*shekels* combine to form one whole.
- On Purim, we reach the highest level of *tzedakah* by giving gifts of food to each other. Giving through a third party obviates any embarrassment that might otherwise be caused. It is a higher level of *tzedakah* because they are a donation on the part of the giver, rather than a request from the recipient.

SHABBAT ZACHOR



ERADICATING AMALEK

*“I have remembered what Amalek did to Israel –
[the ambush] he emplaced against him on the
way, as he went up from Egypt”*

(Shmuel I, 15:2)

Hashem commanded Shaul Hamelech to wipe out the entire nation of Amalek from the face of the earth. This is one of the three mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael received upon entering Eretz Yisrael (*Sanhedrin* 20b; *Shochar Tov* 7:7; *Pesikta Rabbah* 12:13).

The Zohar (II, 194b, beginning of *Parashat Vayakheil*) discusses Amalek based on the pasuk (*Shmuel I*, 15:6) “Shaul said to the Keini, ‘Go, withdraw, descend from among the Amaleki, etc.’” Why did Hashem become enraged at Amalek, more than any other nation? It is because the war with Amalek was a war from Above and from below; it was literally a war from all sides.

From the episode with Amalek we learn that a person must be connected to Hashem on all sides. He must be like a ladder standing on the ground, whose top reaches the Heavens (*Bereishit* 28:12), in order to connect the lower world with the Upper World. This is the secret underlying the construction of the Mishkan, as the pasuk states

(*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.”

Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim in a hurry, as it says (*Shemot* 12:39), “For they could not delay, nor (וְגַם) had they made provisions for themselves.” They were at the forty-ninth level of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). The word וְגַם (nor) hints at this, as it is numerically equivalent to forty-nine.

Pharaoh cooperated, by sending them out of Egypt before they reached the fiftieth level of *tumah*, which would have rendered them unfit to ever be released, *chas v’shalom*. He asked that they pray on his behalf (*Shemot* 12:32), for he, too, was a first-born (*Mechilta; Rashi, ibid.*). He knew that were Bnei Yisrael to descend to the fiftieth level of impurity, he, himself, the embodiment of the *kelippah*, would not be able to survive, for there would be no one to connect the Upper and lower worlds.

We find that all the nations of the world who harmed Bnei Yisrael, including Mitzrayim, acted purely out of hatred, not in order to distance them from belief in Hashem Yitbarach. They hate us for being chosen by Hashem from among all of the nations and granted the Torah (*Berachot* 11b). Chazal explain this homiletically (*Shabbat* 89a; *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* 41) stating that Har Sinai was given its name סיני because from there שנאה (hatred) came down to the world.

Amalek did not only hate Bnei Yisrael, but desired to completely sever the connection between them and Hashem, from the lower world to the Upper World. Upon leaving Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael wished to ascend from the depths of defilement, in *kedushah*, from one level to the next. They certainly were engaged in Torah study at all times, even in transit, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 6:7), “You shall speak of them... while you walk on the way.”

Amalek fought against this. They approached our nation with a terrible coldness. Bnei Yisrael were compared to a tub of boiling water.

As soon as one person enters, although he becomes scalded, the waters are cooled off to an extent (*Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 9a). Amalek tried to instill coldness in the hearts and minds of our people, so that they would return to the lowest level of impurity, losing all of the greatness they had acquired at the Exodus and at the Sea, when they stated (*Shemot* 15:2), “This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary.” They wanted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from receiving the *luchot*, by causing them to transgress the Torah’s commandments. Amalek is the worst of all the nations who hated us throughout the generations.

This is all alluded to in the pasuk (*Shmuel* I, 15:2) “אשר שם לו בדרך – [The ambush] he emplaced against him on the way, as he went up from Egypt.” The words אשר שם (he emplaced) are numerically equal to the words ראש קרם (they “cooled down” their minds). Amalek wanted to introduce coolness into their minds. The words “on the way” refers to the time Bnei Yisrael spent learning Torah on their way. The words “as he went up from Egypt” indicate that Bnei Yisrael tried to rise from the forty-nine levels of impurity at the Exodus from Egypt.

Amalek greatly harmed our people. For not only did he “cool off the bath,” empowering the other nations to strike at us, shocked as they were that Amalek had the gall to attack Hashem Himself, so to speak, but Bnei Yisrael were cooled off, as well.

Bnei Yisrael were also amazed at the level of Amalek’s chutzpah. Instead of mocking Amalek, and preparing themselves appropriately for receiving the Torah, they were influenced by the Satan to greatly fear him. They weakened in Torah as a result. This gave power to the negative forces to overpower Bnei Yisrael in the lower world, and then in the Upper World.

Amalek, a descendant of Eisav, was well aware that when the voice of Yaakov ceases from the Batei Midrashot and Batei Kenesiot, Eisav has the “upper hand” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65). This is stated in the pasuk

(*Bereishit* 27:40), “Yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.” Specifically when Bnei Yisrael were preparing to accept the Torah, bringing the world to its *tikkun*, Amalek came to “cool off” the people. The pasuk states (*Devarim* 25:18), “אשר קרך בדרך – that he happened upon you on the way.” The word קרך can also mean “cooled you off.” For this reason, Hashem hates Amalek, who wanted to exploit the blessing of Yitzchak by cooling off Bnei Yisrael’s *emunah* in Hashem “when you [Eisav – Amalek] are aggrieved,” for he knew that Torah is our protection and antidote against the *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52b; *Kiddushin* 30b). How is it possible to withstand the Satan, and triumph over him, without Torah?

Their cruelty was, indeed, enormous, desiring to cut the connection between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. They even wanted to prosecute them for *bitul* Torah. They were compared to a slithering snake that waits at the crossroads, suddenly attacking some unsuspecting passerby (*Tikkunei Zohar* 70, 124b).

Amalek also taught the other nations how to cause Bnei Yisrael to sin. Chazal state (*Sifri* 23:117), “Greater is the one who causes someone to sin than one who murders another, for he has brought him to deny Hashem.” For this reason, Hashem desires to destroy them completely.

During the battle with Amalek, Moshe Rabbeinu lifted his hands toward Heaven. This has special significance. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:11), “It happened that when Moshe raised his hand, Israel was stronger.” Chazal ask (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a), “Was it the hands of Moshe which won the war or lost the war?” By holding his hands up, Moshe silenced the prosecution of Amalek from Above, and Yehoshua weakened the strength of Amalek by fighting the war below.

There is a hint to the victory over Amalek in the words (*Shemot* 17:13), “And Yehoshua weakened (ויחלש) Amalek.” The first four letters ו-י-ח-ל are numerically equal to the word מטה (the staff of Moshe Rabbeinu). The last letter ש alludes to the ס' רבוא (600,000) of

our nation, whom Amalek was bent on destroying, as the *gematria* of עמלק (240) ט (60) = ש (300).

Wipe out the Memory of Amalek

Therefore, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to eradicate all the seed of Amalek. Amalek causes people to sin, cools off their fire for Judaism, weakens the nation, and prosecutes against them from Above and from below. Not only he, but all who go in his way, like the Greeks, Haman, etc., must be destroyed. Instead of encouraging Bnei Yisrael to study Torah with peace of mind, they cause them to sin. They hinder the bounty of Hashem from coming down to the world, and Hashem's kingdom remains incomplete as long as they exist.

Amalek and his ilk desired to destroy Hashem's world. Chazal state (*Tanchuma*, end of *Ki Teitzei*), "Hashem's Name and His Throne are not complete until Amalek will be obliterated." By Amalek and his offspring being wiped out, Hashem's kingship will be fully revealed, and the ultimate *geulah* will arrive.

Shaul sinned against Hashem when he disobeyed the order to kill out Amalek. His kingdom was confiscated (*Yoma 22b; Bamidbar Rabbah 3:2*). Because of his piety, he did not do as he was told (because he listened to the voice of the nation). A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, "Do not be overly righteous." Amalek was given power to wage war against our nation, for they forsook Torah learning for a brief time. This gave weight to the *kelippah*.

At the battle with Amalek, Moshe told Yehoshua (*Shemot 17:9*), "Choose people for us." Chazal explain (*Mechilta* and *Rashi*) that "people" refer to strong men, who fear sin and are not afraid of the *kelippah* of Amalek. They would be successful at the battlefield, with Yehoshua at their head. Moshe Rabbeinu himself would fight from above, raising his hands to achieve victory for his nation. Shaul was remiss and lost out.

On *Parashat Zachor*, we are enjoined to remember the mitzvah of eradicating Amalek because of what he did to us, as it says (*Devarim* 25:17), “Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way, when you were leaving Egypt.” We should also remember this throughout the year. Shabbat, a taste of *Olam Haba*, is the opportune time for overcoming the *Yetzer Hara* and the *kelippah*.

When Mordechai donned sackcloth and ashes in response to Haman’s decree, Esther sent a message to him (4:5), “לדעת מה זה ועל – to learn what this was about and why.” The words זה מה allude to the secrets of the lower world, since their *gematria* is equal to the word מטה (below), when one adds three for the number of letters in the word. The words זה ועל refer to the Upper World, since the words על מה contain the same letters as the word מעלה (above). Esther was trying to ascertain whether there was prosecution from below or Above. Bnei Yisrael were deserving of death for partaking of the feast of Achashveirosh, where they bowed to an image (*Megillah* 12a) and calmly witnessed the degradation of the holy vessels of the Beit Hamikdash, which were used there.

Instead of mourning the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the fact that the vessels were not in their proper place but in Bavel, Bnei Yisrael made merry at Achashveirosh’s feast. This exhibited a certain coldness toward *kedushah*, exactly as Amalek had injected into them in the Wilderness, generations ago. This is alluded to in the words (*Esther* 4:7), “אשר קרהו – all that had happened to him.” The word קרהו contains the word קר (cold). Mordechai explained to Esther that Bnei Yisrael’s coldness toward all things holy is what caused this tragedy. Prosecution was being leveled against the nation from Above and from below.

Mordechai and Esther corrected this flaw. Esther ordered Mordechai (*ibid.* 4:16), “Go, assemble all the Jews.” Mordechai gathered all of the schoolchildren into the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah (*Esther Rabbah*

9:5). This would rectify the defect of *bitul* Torah, which had been brought about by Amalek.

When we read about the deeds of Mordechai and Esther, year after year, specifically on *Parashat Zachor*, there is a special awakening from Above and from below, which triumphs over all prosecution. It is of such magnitude as to be a harbinger of the *geulah*, just as our nation was rescued in the days of Mordechai and Esther.

In light of the above, we might understand why we always mention the name of Mordechai before Esther. The main miracle was wrought through Esther, but Mordechai knew everything that was taking place (ibid. 4:1) and about the accusations against our nation. He therefore produced a remedy before the malady. By not bowing to Haman (ibid. 3:2), a descendant of Amalek and symbol of the forces of impurity, he was able to invalidate the power of the *Yetzer Hara*. Thus, Mordechai certainly deserves first place when mentioning those who acted on our behalf. Esther, on the other hand, was not sure of what to do, and merely asked Mordechai to explain the reason for his mourning.

We can also understand why Haman was in such a hurry to build a gallows on which to hang Mordechai, not waiting to kill him along with the rest of the Jews. He realized all too well that Mordechai was involved in mystical matters, intended to weaken and nullify all accusations from Above and below. Haman therefore made every effort to be rid of him. He did not succeed, for on that very night, the king could not sleep (ibid. 6:1). Likewise, Haman and Mordechai also had trouble sleeping (see *Esther Rabbah* 10:1). The Book of Memoirs was brought before Achashveirosh and it contained the account of Mordechai saving the king from certain death.

In this manner, the entire story unfolded, until, in the end, Mordechai emerged victorious, and Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for himself (ibid. 10:2). Then, all prosecution against Bnei Yisrael was silenced, and the Jews emerged from darkness to light.

————— In Summary —————

- Hashem Yitbarach commands us to remember the deeds of Amalek, above all of the other nations. Why is this so? Because Amalek fought our nation on two fronts: from Above and from below. Conversely, one must attach himself to Hashem “on all sides.”
- The Jews left Egypt in a hurry, in order not to descend to the fiftieth level of *tumah*. Pharaoh cooperated by sending them out, and even requested that they pray on his behalf.
- All of the nations were impressed by the great Exodus from Egypt and didn’t dare attack Bnei Yisrael. Not so Amalek, who “cooled off” our nation, and wanted to sever them from Hashem completely, from Above and from below. For that reason, they are the most despicable of all nations. This is hinted to in the words, “Amalek placed (אשר שם) an ambush against Bnei Yisrael,” which have the same *gematria* as the words קרם ראש (they “cooled down” their minds). They caused Bnei Yisrael to become lax in Torah, allowing Eisav to have the “upper hand.” Amalek displayed untold cruelty toward our nation, similar to a slithering snake at the crossroads.
- When Amalek wanted us to break off all ties with Hashem, they proved themselves worse than one who physically kills another, for it is worse to cause another to sin than to kill him. When Moshe lifted his hands heavenward, and Yehoshua did battle with Amalek, they were fighting on all fronts, Above and below. Had they not fought them, Amalek might have gained a foothold in this world by establishing an empire of wickedness, for they desired to destroy Hashem’s world. Shaul Hamelech’s kingdom was taken from him, for he did not eradicate Amalek completely, due to his extreme humility.
- On Shabbat Zachor and Purim, we are enjoined to remember the deeds of Amalek. Shabbat is a microcosm of *Olam Haba* and contains the spiritual potency to destroy Amalek and remove his charges against us. This is hinted at in the words of Esther to Mordechai, “What this was about and why.” She wanted to find out if there was prosecution against Bnei Yisrael from Above and below. Mordechai replied in the affirmative. Therefore, she directed him

to gather the Jews, in order to unify them and thus remove the accusations against them.

- Mordechai had already effected the beginning of the salvation by refusing to bow down to Haman, the personification of the *kelippah*. Haman built a gallows upon which to hang Mordechai, for he knew that Mordechai was fighting against him in the mystical spheres. In the end, Haman was hanged on the gallows, and all prosecution against Bnei Yisrael ceased.

REMEMBERING AMALEK – NULLIFYING EVIL

“I have remembered what Amalek did to Israel – [the ambush] he emplaced against him on the way, as he went up from Egypt...” (*Shmuel* I, 15:2). This pasuk begins the command to Shaul Hamelech to eradicate all of the seed of Amalek. This is one of the three mitzvot commanded to Bnei Yisrael upon entering Eretz Yisrael (*Sanhedrin* 20b; *Shochar Tov* 7:7).

Even if Bnei Yisrael would forget what Amalek had done to them, Hashem never forgets. He has instructed us not to forget Amalek’s wicked ploys against Hashem and His nation, in his desire that his evil empire should rule the world.

Chazal teach that Hashem’s Name and His Throne are incomplete until Amalek is completely eradicated (*Tanchuma*, end of *Ki Teitzei*). The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:16) that Hashem wages war against Amalek “from generation to generation.” Rashi explains, “From the generation of Moshe until the generation of Shaul; from there, to the generation of Mordechai; and from there to the generation of the Mashiach.”

If one, indeed, succeeds in invalidating the prosecution of Amalek, the embodiment of the *Yetzer Hara*, from Above and below, he will gain

the benefits of the month of Nisan, the month of the *geulah*, as Chazal state (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a; *Shemot Rabbah* 15 and 12a; *Zohar* Part III, 249a), “In Nisan they were redeemed, and in Nisan they will be redeemed once more.”

Furthermore, the miracle of the hanging of Haman took place in Nisan, on the day after Pesach. Mordechai and Esther desired specifically to have Haman hanged on a tree, alluding to the Torah, which is called (*Mishlei* 3:18) “a tree of life for those who support it.” This hinted that Haman wanted to eradicate Torah from Am Yisrael, killing them out and nullifying the supporters of Torah.

“One who comes to purify himself is assisted” (*Shabbat* 104a; *Yoma* 38b). Therefore, our Sages established that on *Parashat Zachor* we should remember the deed of Amalek and Hashem’s instruction (*Devarim* 25:17) to “remember what Amalek did to you.”

A mere recollection of an incident is easily forgotten. For that reason, Mordechai established another level, that of protection. The pasuk describes Purim (*Esther* 9:22) as “days of feasting and gladness, and sending delicacies to one another, and gifts to the poor.” By doing acts of charity with the poor, we are reminded of the *chessed* which Hashem did for us, saving us from the cruel arm of the *Yetzer Hara*, from Above and from below. In this manner, we become strengthened, and, in turn, strengthen the power of *kedushah*. This affords us the ultimate protection against the *Yetzer Hara*.

The aspect of feasting and joy is an intrinsic part of Purim. We find that great tzaddikim were scrupulous in being intensely joyous, reaching the level of not differentiating between “cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai” (*Megillah* 7b). The Satan, observing these festivities, doesn’t know what to make of it. It is not the way of tzaddikim to lose themselves in drinking and excessive joy. He doesn’t know if the joy can be attributed to the merit of Mordechai, or the merit of Haman. He tries to prosecute against us from Above.

But his accusations are not accepted. For, just as on Yom Kippur, the Satan has no permission to accuse Bnei Yisrael, so too, on Purim, which is similar to Yom Kippur, as indicated by its name, his accusations are annulled. On Yom Kippur, the Satan's voice is stilled by means of fasting and prayer; on Purim, this is achieved through feasting and joy. This is why the *kedushah* of Purim is equal to, or even greater than, that of Yom Kippur.

There is another facet to the joy and feasting. Whenever a person does something out of the ordinary, it gives him pause to think why he is behaving this way. When he will contemplate why he is rejoicing on this day, he will remember Haman, the descendant of Amalek, who wanted to annihilate us. This is a form of fulfilling the mitzvah to remember Amalek and all that he did to us.

One must beware to eat and drink on Purim *l'shem Shamayim*. For frivolity and light-headedness while feasting is a recipe for sin. Chazal state (*Avot* 3:17), "Mockery and levity accustom man to immorality."

A good barometer for a person to use in judging whether or not his merriment comes from a pure source is to examine what comes in the wake of this gaiety. If a person continues doing mitzvot, it indicates that his joy resulted from the mitzvah, as the pasuk in *Tehillim* (19:9) states, "The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart." But if not, it was merely empty jollity, without substance. One should ensure that the joy he experiences on Purim is true joy, coming from a pure source. When that is the case, he will be able to remember the significance of the deeds of Amalek and Haman. He will be able, by the power of his *kedushah*, to annul the prosecution of the *Yetzer Hara* from Above and below, emerging from darkness to light.

The Middah of Humility, in Measured Amounts

Let us review the account of Shaul Hamelech, whose kingdom was taken from him because he did not wipe out Amalek.

Shaul had compassion on Agag, the king of Amalek, and on the choice sheep (*Shmuel* I, 15:9). Chazal state (*Yoma* 22b) that Hashem told him, regarding this incident, “Do not be overly righteous” (*Kohelet* 7:33). Shaul had inferred the following: If for the death of one person an *eglah arufah* must be brought, all the more so regarding the death of many people. Nevertheless, how could Shaul disobey the command of Hashem and refrain from killing them?

Additionally, Chazal state (*Yoma*, *ibid.*) that the kingdom of Shaul came to an end, since there was no defect in it. He had no “skeleton in the closet” to keep him in line. On the other hand, Chazal state (*ibid.*, see *Tanchuma, Vayikra* 3) that he was humble, and forewent his honor, escaping a position of authority. How are we to reconcile these two sayings?

Had Shaul been truly humble, that would have been sufficient to keep him in check. Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 10:1), “For everything, there is an end, except for Torah.” Humility has its limits. There are times when one must be humble, and there are times when it is not called for. Shaul was exceedingly humble, considering even the simple creatures to be greater than he. This was the cause of his downfall. It led to him to disobey the words of the *Chachamim*. A Heavenly Voice emanated, stating, “Do not be overly righteous.”

Furthermore, this humility caused him to act arrogantly, in not killing out all of Amalek. It was also the cause of other improper deeds, such as destroying Nov, the city of Kohanim (*Yevamot* 78b). Had he acted in accordance with the knowledge that humility should be measured, he would have hearkened to the word of Hashem, killing out Amalek. His kingdom would have endured.

In contrast, although Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of all men (*Bamidbar* 12:3), nevertheless, he felt his responsibility weigh on his shoulders. He knew how to be a perfect leader, and prayed on behalf of the people. For that reason, he remained a leader until his death.

We learn from here not to be overly smart, and not to be overly righteous. One may not veer from the word of Hashem, or His Sages, to the right or left. In this manner, we become sanctified and connected with Hashem, able to overcome the *kelippah* of Haman, Amalek, the *Yetzer Hara*, and all negative forces.

————— In Summary —————

- Hashem instructs Bnei Yisrael to recall the deeds of Amalek from among all the nations. When Amalek is defeated, all of his prosecutions are null and void. Chodesh Nisan arrives after these accusations are cancelled. This is the month of *geulah*. Haman and his sons were hanged in order to display their retribution for desiring to annihilate Bnei Yisrael, both physically and spiritually.
- Merely remembering what Amalek did is not enough. For that reason, Mordechai established acts – days of joy and feasting, and giving gifts to the poor. This reminds us that we, too, were poor, and Hashem rescued us. Great tzaddikim are punctilious in increasing their joy on Purim, even becoming inebriated. In this way, they confuse the Satan, and he is powerless to accuse us. This is similar to what takes place on Yom Kippur. By eating and drinking in an unusual manner on Purim, a person is led to question what it is all about. Then, he will remember the significance of Amalek’s deeds. All this is possible when our joy comes from a pure source. Only then can *kedushah* spread throughout the world.
- Shaul did not want to wipe out Amalek completely. His kingdom was therefore confiscated from him. He behaved with excessive humility, which was not in place. Had he done his job correctly, he would have eradicated Amalek, thereby preventing him from prosecuting in the Upper and lower worlds. This was what Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of our people, did for us. A person should not be overly righteous, and should not veer from what he is instructed by the Torah and the *Chachamim*. In this manner, the *kelippah*, the symbol of Haman and Amalek; the *Yetzer Hara*; and all negative forces are completely nullified. Then *kedushah* will reign supreme.

SERVING HASHEM WITH PURITY OF THOUGHT

“Shaul, as well as the people, took pity on Agag, on the best of the sheep, the cattle... and they were not willing to destroy them”

(Shmuel I, 15:9)

Shaul disobeyed Hashem’s command to destroy Amalek.

Shmuel chastised Shaul, stating (ibid. vs. 19), “Why did you not obey the voice of Hashem?” Shaul replied, “But I did heed the voice of Hashem... The people took sheep and cattle... in order to bring offerings to Hashem.” Shmuel then responded, “Does Hashem delight in elevation-offerings and feast-offerings as in obedience to the voice of Hashem? Behold! – to obey is better than a choice offering, to be attentive [is better] than the fat of rams.” As punishment, Shaul’s kingdom was taken away, as Shmuel told him, “Because you have rejected the word of G-d, He has rejected you as king!”

Like Adam Harishon before him, Shaul erred in thinking that the means used to serve Hashem are all-important. He thought that even though he had not immediately eradicated Amalek, he would do it later, by offering the animals as sacrifices. But that is not the proper way of doing things, as Shmuel explained. The most important aspect of serving Hashem is doing what He demands of us.

Adam Harishon behaved similarly. He desired to increase the quality of his Avodat Hashem and mitzvah performance. To this end, he ate from the forbidden tree, in order to personally battle the *Yetzer Hara* and emerge victorious. But he went against the command of Hashem, and that was the cause of his downfall.

Hashem then turned to him, and asked (*Bereishit* 3:11), “Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” Hashem was telling him the following, “I would have given you plenty of other mitzvot. Why did you disobey My command and not wait to hear about the other commandments? Was your sole desire to increase mitzvot? Do I want a multitude of mitzvot? I want people to obey My commands, without forfeiting any of them on the altar of personal considerations.”

For that reason, Adam was banished from Gan Eden (*Sanhedrin* 38b; *Tanchuma, Shemini* 8). Adam had good intentions and thus was not put to death, but sent out of Gan Eden, where there is no distinction between good and evil, to a world of physical and material matter. There he was enjoined to “work the earth.” This indicates that outside of Gan Eden it would be easier to distinguish between good and bad.

“Many designs are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of Hashem, only that will prevail” (*Mishlei* 19:21). People think many things which seem correct to them, but in the end, it is the will of Hashem that will endure. This is what is meant by the instruction (*Devarim* 18:13), “You shall be wholehearted with Hashem.” We are enjoined to follow His commandments and not to inquire what the future holds in store. In this manner, one will connect wholeheartedly to Hashem, and Hashem will take him as His portion (*Rashi, ibid.*).

Even if a very great person, who wants to achieve tremendous heights in Avodat Hashem and strengthen his Torah and mitzvot, performs a mitzvah through doing an aveirah, however “small,” he is held accountable for this. Hashem does not desire this type of service.

A person who subjugates his thoughts and actions in consonance with Hashem’s desire, in accordance with the injunction (*Avot* 2:4) to “nullify your will before His will,” is the true servant of Hashem.

Shaul Hamelech's Correction of the Defect with Amalek

Although Shaul Hamelech disobeyed the command of Hashem, he did succeed in correcting the mistake he had committed in the battle with Amalek.

Chazal tell us (*Chagigah* 4b) that when Shaul brought up Shmuel from the dead through sorcery (*Shmuel* I, 28:11), Shmuel told him, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." Rashi explains that "with me," means "in my proximity." Shmuel was, in essence, promising Shaul a portion in Gan Eden together with him.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel* I, *remez* 141b) relates that Shmuel told Shaul, "If you heed my advice and fall by the sword, your death will be your atonement, and you will be together with me in Gan Eden." Shaul accepted Shmuel's advice, and he and his sons were killed. Shaul accepted his judgment willingly, without looking for a way out. Therefore, he merited complete forgiveness, as evidenced by the fact that he merited to be in the proximity of Shmuel in Gan Eden.

Hashem was proud of the way that Shaul accepted his fate, to the extent that He called the angels and told them, "See who I created in My world. In general, when a person attends a banquet, he leaves his children behind, in order to prevent the effect of the Evil Eye. But Shaul went out to war, knowing he and his sons would die, and he brought them all along with him, gladly accepting the *Middat Hadin*" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:7; *Tanchuma, Emor* 2; *Shochar Tov* 4).

"When a man (אָדָם) among you brings an offering to Hashem" (*Vayikra* 1:2). The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Vayikra* 8) asks why the word אָדָם is used to indicate "man," instead of the colloquial term אָיִם. The word אָדָם refers to Adam Harishon, the first man to sin and bring an offering. This indicates that when a person sins, he is enjoined to bring an offering, just as Adam did. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, in his sefer *Be'er Yosef*, asks the following question: What is the Midrash adding by

comparing the person who brings a *korban* to Adam Harishon? What is the connection between the two?

He answers that the main aspect of *korbanot* is the teshuvah a person does, and the regret he feels over his sin. The basis of regret is to acknowledge the magnitude of the sin and the damage he has caused by it. For a sin damages his *neshamah*, his offspring, and the entire world. Recognition of the immensity of the destruction wrought by sin brings a person to complete teshuvah and concern lest he repeat his sin. This is the essence of teshuvah. When this is the case, one repents his transgressions and resolves never to repeat them. His *korban* is accepted by Hashem, as the Rambam writes (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2).

A very clear understanding of the severity of sin and the results of disobeying the word of Hashem can be gained by analyzing the sin of Adam Harishon. By eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he brought death upon all of mankind (*Eiruvin* 18b; *Tanchuma, Va'etchanan* 4).

“Accursed is the ground because of you” (*Bereishit* 3:17). The whole world was cursed by having to labor for their sustenance, as it says (*ibid.* vs. 19), “By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.” Working for a living and the fear of death are the source for all misfortune in this world. They are results of Adam’s sin of eating of the Tree of Knowledge.

The reason for the Torah’s use of the word אָדָם now takes on new meaning. Every person must take a lesson from the sin of אָדָם, the first man. He should ensure that he does not cause destruction to the world by sinning. Rather, he should immediately do teshuvah, admitting his mistakes and sins, and bring a *korban*, coming closer to Hashem. Every sin causes great damage, and the sin of Adam Harishon is the root of all sin.

Therefore, let every person return in complete teshuvah, accepting upon himself the yoke of *Malchut Shamayim*, never returning to his

folly. Then, he will remain a tzaddik in all his ways and devout in all his actions throughout his life in this world.

————— **In Summary** —————

- Everyone is enjoined to choose good and distance himself from *nisyonot*. Shaul Hamelech allowed the cattle of Amalek to live, because, like Adam Harishon, he desired to choose between good and bad, even serving Hashem with the negative forces (for example, Amalek), through *mesirut nefesh*. We find that Shaul corrected his error, recognizing his sin. Hashem was satisfied with his teshuvah. A person must regret his sins and serve Hashem with great *mesirut nefesh*, constantly coming close to Him. In this manner, he will always remain a tzaddik in all his ways and deeds.

SHABBAT PARAH



ERADICATING AMALEK THROUGH TORAH STUDY

Parashat Parah is read on the Shabbat following *Parashat Zachor*, the portion dealing with eradicating the memory of Amalek. It precedes *Parashat Hachodesh*, which refers to renewal, in preparation of Chodesh Nisan, called the “first (lit. head) of the months” (*Shemot* 12:2). It is an opportunity to renew oneself and become close to Hashem throughout the entire year.

Upon analysis, we will discover that the four parshiyot are interconnected. *Parashat Parah* relates to the concept of purity. If a person wishes to be truly pure, he must erase any vestige of Amalek, which is a reference to the *Yetzer Hara* lurking within. Additionally, he must abandon the *shekalim*, an allusion to money, also a type of *avodah zarah* and *Yetzer Hara*. The Torah tells us that money often brings a person to sin (*Devarim* 8:13), an example being the sin of the Golden Calf (*Berachot* 32a).

If a person eliminates this *Yetzer Hara* from himself, he is able to attain *kedushah* and purity (an allusion to *Parashat Parah*), and he will certainly feel a sense of renewal throughout the entire year. This is especially true on Shabbat, when a person receives an additional *neshamah* (*Beitzah* 16a). For, in addition to the purity and renewal which he experiences, he begins to become truly free, going from

strength to strength in *kedushah* (*Tehillim* 84:8), each person on his level.

Another reason for reading *Parashat Parah* after *Parashat Zachor* is the following. In the Torah portions of *Parashat Zachor* and the festival of Purim, which comes on its heels, a person is reminded of the evil which Amalek intended for Bnei Yisrael. The Torah states (*Devarim* 25:18), “That he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost.” Amalek intended to prevent us from learning Torah and keeping mitzvot. We also remember Haman’s evil intentions to annihilate our nation (*Esther* 3:13). This arouses a person to counteract the effect of Amalek and nullify it by strengthening himself in Torah study. The Satan tries to cool off a person’s passion by involving him in the Purim feast and its accompanying merriment. This is as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 32:15), “Yeshurun became fat and kicked.”

For this reason, we read the portion of *Parashat Parah* immediately after Purim. In this parashah, it states (*Bamidbar* 19:2), “This is the decree of the Torah.” We are enjoined to strengthen ourselves in Torah study, which purifies a person from the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara* (see *Berachot* 22a). Furthermore, one must be prepared to die for the sake of Torah. The pasuk in *Parashat Parah* (*Bamidbar* 19:14) states, “This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent.” Chazal explain that the words of Torah endure only in one who is prepared to die over them (*Berachot* 63b; *Shabbat* 83b; *Zohar* II, 158b). Only then can one be assured that Amalek is totally wiped out. Torah study, which protects and saves (*Sotah* 21a), helps a person overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 30b; *Bava Batra* 16a) that Torah is the antidote against the *Yetzer Hara*.

This is hinted at in the words פרה אדומה (the red heifer), which are numerically equivalent to the phrase הפרו אדום (Edom transgressed). Through רפו (a weakening) of Torah study, Edom, the nation of Eisav

פרה ורבה (increases). This is borne out in the pasuk (*Yechezkel* 26:2), “I will be filled, for she was destroyed.” Our *Chachamim* relate that Edom, the empire that destroyed the second Beit Hamikdash, gained power only once the Jewish nation lacked Torah study (*Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 18). Through learning Torah, we void the power of Edom. They and their evil plots are nullified in the face of Bnei Yisrael becoming strengthened and close to Hashem.

The nations of the world mock Bnei Yisrael regarding the statute of the *parah adumah*, for they cannot fathom the reason for this mitzvah (*Tanchuma, Chukat* 7). Why do they choose to make light of this mitzvah in particular? In the name פרה אדומה we find a reference to אדום, one of the names of Amalek, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 36:1,8), “Eisav, he is Edom.” Amalek, the grandson of Eisav, is also called (*ibid.* vs. 16), “Chief Amalek.”

They mock us in order to weaken our resolve to study Torah, which purifies a person. They desire to overpower us, for if not, their entire plan is demolished. For this reason, too, they ridicule the burning of the *parah adumah* for the benefit of one who became defiled (*Bamidbar* 19:8). The act of burning is an allusion to Torah study, for Torah is compared to fire (*Tanchuma, Yitro* 12), as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 33:2), “From His right hand, He presented the fiery Torah to them.” The *parah adumah* was burned outside the camp, likewise, one who is involved in Torah, is as if “outside the camp,” for he separates himself from all materialistic matters. The mockery of the nations of the world is in order to discourage those who learn Torah.

We read *Parashat Parah* precisely on the Shabbat following *Parashat Zachor* in order to remind us that Amalek still exists. He still scorns us, desiring that we desist from Torah study.

The fact that we still find ourselves in *galut* indicates that Hashem’s Name and His Throne are incomplete, and will remain so, until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated (*Tanchuma*, end of *Ki*

Teitzei). We must strengthen ourselves in Torah study, which purifies man, and in this manner overcome our enemies.

The little Amalek within each of us also becomes inebriated at the Purim feast, to the point of confusing “Cursed is Haman” with “Blessed is Mordechai” (*Megillah* 7b). He awaits the end of the merriment to overcome us.

Therefore, one should remember this on *Parashat Parah*, in order to overcome Amalek, uprooting him completely. By nullifying the *kelippah* and the negative forces, we bring an increase of *kedushah* in its wake.

————— In Summary —————

- *Parashat Parah* is read on the Shabbat following *Parashat Zachor* and before *Parashat Hachodesh*, the parashah of renewal for the entire year. All four parshiyot are interconnected. The *shekalim* refer to money, and Amalek is an inference to the *Yetzer Hara*. If one wishes to become purified, he must rid himself of the *Yetzer Hara*, thereby coming close to Hashem, specifically on Shabbat.
- Furthermore, on *Parashat Zachor*, everyone remembers what Amalek wanted to do to Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, we try to subdue him, through Torah study, in order to become close with Hashem. But the Satan tries to cause a person to stumble through feasting and temptation. Therefore, on *Parashat Parah*, a person purifies himself, through Torah, by demonstrating that he is willing to sacrifice himself for it. In this way, he defeats the *Yetzer Hara*. The words **הפירו אדום** are hinted at in the words **פרה אדומה**. This indicates that through strengthening oneself in Torah (in purity, as inferred by the *parah adumah*), he nullifies the evil plot of Edom, and his descendants, Amalek.
- The gentiles ridicule the mitzvah of *parah adumah*, for it contains references to the downfall of Edom and Amalek. They mock the ceremony of the burning of the red heifer, for it alludes to the fire of Torah, which they desire to extinguish. Therefore, it is most fitting to read *Parashat Parah*, to remember that Amalek is very much alive, and we must overcome him with our Torah study. In this way we will subdue the *kelippah* and increase *kedushah*.

NULLIFICATION OF ARROGANCE

In *Parashat Parah*, the pasuk states (*Bamidbar* 19:2), “This is the decree of the Torah... Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish... and someone shall slaughter it in his presence.” At the end of the service, the pasuk states (*ibid.* vs. 7), “And afterwards he may enter the camp; and the Kohen shall remain contaminated until evening.”

How can it be that the very person who is involved with the *parah adumah*, whose purpose is to purify the defiled, becomes impure? (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:1). In addition, it was specifically Elazar Hakohen, a tremendous tzaddik, who became impure through conducting the *parah adumah* service.

Nobody knows the reason for the mitzvah of *parah adumah* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* *ibid.*; *Tanchuma, Chukat* 7). Rashi relates that the Satan and the nations of the world mock us for this lack of knowledge, but Hashem has called it a “statute.” It is a decree before Him, and no one may delve into it.

This being the case, there is a very real fear that the Kohen Gadol sacrificing the cow would become haughty through being the one chosen to perform this service, for he was ultimately responsible for the *kedushah* and purity of the entire nation. Therefore, he himself became defiled, in order to mitigate the arrogance that he might feel. Instead, he would experience a measure of distress over becoming impure through the burning of the cow.

But how could we imagine that Elazar Hakohen, who was a tremendous tzaddik, would entertain thoughts of haughtiness and conceit? The Torah does not differentiate between Kohanim Gedolim. It is known that those who lived during the period of the second Beit Hamikdash were not all worthy of serving in that position (see *Yoma*

9a). They certainly could have fallen into the sin of arrogance. For this reason, the Torah deemed impure all Kohanim Gedolim who were involved in the service of the *parah adumah*.

Similarly, the Torah forbids a Kohen Gadol from marrying a widow. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 21:14), “A widow, a divorcee, a desecrated woman, a harlot – he shall not marry these.” The sefer *Hadar Zekeinim MiBa’alei Hatosafot (Parashat Emor)* explains that he might desire a married woman and think about her while doing the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash. He might pray that her husband die, so that he could take her as a wife. For that reason, he is forbidden from marrying a widow.

Can we suspect the Kohen Gadol of such base thoughts, in the Beit Hamikdash? Specifically Elazar, the son of Aharon. Again, it is because the Torah does not differentiate between Kohanim Gedolim. In the future, there would be Kohanim Gedolim on the level of entertaining such ideas.

— In Summary —

- The *parah adumah* purified the impure. But, on the other hand, it defiled the pure. How could an item used to purify people bring impurity upon the person who offered it, especially a Kohen Gadol as righteous as Elazar, who was a tremendous tzaddik?
- The reason for the mitzvah of *parah adumah* is not known to us. It is a statute without an explanation. There is a fear that the performing Kohen would become arrogant, for the purity of the nation rested on his shoulders. Thus the service rendered him impure, in order to prevent him from entertaining any arrogant thoughts. Even a Kohen as devout as Elazar became defiled by the burnt cow because the Torah does not differentiate between Kohanim Gedolim.
- We find a similarity in the case of the prohibition of a Kohen Gadol to marry a widow. Even though there were many Kohanim who would not entertain improper thoughts while performing the Avodah, nevertheless, the laws of the Torah treat everyone equally.

THE 7TH OF ADAR



MOSHE RABBEINU'S INFLUENCE IN ADAR

The 7th of Adar is the *hilula* of Moshe Rabbeinu, who was known for his love and dedication toward Klal Yisrael. The *Beit Yisrael* quotes his fathers as saying that the month of Adar is an auspicious time for each and every person to reach the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, who was born and passed away on the seventh of the month (*Kiddushin* 38a). In this month, a person is capable of ascending and connecting to Moshe Rabbeinu, who encompassed all of the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64).

Furthermore, the *Beit Yisrael* quotes the statement of Chazal (*Ta'anit* 29a), "When Adar enters, joy is increased." He asks, "Why does it say, 'When Adar **enters**,' and not, 'When Adar comes,' or, 'When Adar arrives'?" The reason is that when Adar is here, a person must **enter** into the month, and in this manner, his joy will be increased."

I thought of adding the following. The words משנכנס אדר (when Adar enters) can be extended to read משה נכנס לאדר (Moshe entered Adar). This means that the spiritual influence of Moshe enters the month of Adar, into the *neshamot* of each and every Jew. In every generation, year after year, there is a spiritual awakening in the world below, in his *zechut*.

Chodesh Adar is a month of unity, and Moshe Rabbeinu is the symbol of unity. Haman accused our nation of being “scattered and dispersed among the peoples” (*Esther* 3:8). He claimed that had they been unified, they would not have been scattered among the gentile nations. He knew that Moshe Rabbeinu had passed away in this month, and saw the disunity of the Jews. Therefore, he assumed that the spiritual power of Moshe Rabbeinu would not be injected in the month, and the Jews would not receive Divine assistance to serve Hashem with joy. Therefore, he thought that Adar presented the perfect opportunity for the downfall of the nation.

But Haman made one mistake. He failed to take into account the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu, which took place in Adar, as well. His birth alludes to the Jew who does teshuvah, who is free of sin like a newborn (see *Yoma* 86b; *Yevamot* 48b). If Bnei Yisrael repent, they immediately enter the month of Adar armed with the power of Moshe Rabbeinu. By means of this awakening from below, a sublime joy comes upon them from Above, and their joy in Adar is, indeed, increased.

Chazal state (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:10) that Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty understanding how to fashion the Menorah. Hashem made it appear miraculously on its own. The question is: Why did Moshe find only the Menorah’s construction difficult to understand? It was made of one chunk of solid gold, just as the *keruvim* were. He had no problem comprehending how to make the *keruvim*. What was the difference between the two?

We can suggest an answer based on what we previously said. Moshe Rabbeinu was famous for his love of his fellow man. His spirit enters the month of Adar, infusing his special qualities into every Jewish person, encouraging him with love. The *keruvim* represented love of one’s fellow man, as the pasuk describes them (*Shemot* 25:20) “with their faces toward one another.” They were two separate forms facing each other, but fashioned out of one piece of gold. They stood above

the Aron, which housed the broken particles of the first *luchot*. Moshe had no problem grasping the concept of the *keruvim*. He realized that the Torah cannot exist in the heart of a person if he lacks love toward his fellow man. But the Menorah, which signified the bounty which comes from Hashem, was difficult for Moshe to understand. He needed Hashem to show him what it was, and even then, the Menorah was formed of its own accord.

We can learn another lesson from the *keruvim*. They were on top of the Aron, in full view, whereas the *luchot* were hidden within it. It is fine to keep one's Torah knowledge hidden. But when it comes to displaying signs of love toward one's fellow Jew, it must be openly revealed.

We find that Moshe likewise had difficulty understanding the concept of the half-*shekel* coin which each person was enjoined to contribute toward the upkeep of the Mishkan, until Hashem showed him a coin of fire (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 9). Here, too, the question begs an answer. Was it so difficult for Moshe to picture a coin? Everyone knew what it looked like. What aspect of the half-*shekel* was difficult for him to understand?

When Moshe was told to collect the half-*shekel* coins from Bnei Yisrael, he was hesitant. How could he demand that they contribute their money? Maybe they would be reticent to donate. Then Hashem portrayed a coin of fire. Fire is an allusion to Torah (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19:18). When Bnei Yisrael are engaged in Torah, "each man helps the other" (*Yeshayahu* 41:6). The coin of fire hinted to Moshe that Bnei Yisrael would donate whole-heartedly, just as two halves make one whole. And if there would be one half left over, Hashem guaranteed that He Himself would complete it, with His coin of fire.

This is hinted at in the word מטבע (coin), which is comprised of the words מ' טבע (40, nature). This hints that although it is natural for a person to dislike parting with his money, through occupying himself

with the Torah, which was given after forty days, his nature changes. He becomes a giving person, who enjoys spending money on mitzvot, wholeheartedly. This is the coin of fire which was shown to Moshe Rabbeinu.

The letters of the word אדר have the same *gematria* as the word הר (mountain), which is an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52a). A person who enters the month of Adar with the intent of surmounting the *Yetzer Hara* becomes infused with joy.

Money and doubts are what “cool off” a person’s Avodat Hashem. The letters of the word כסף (money) form the word ספק (doubt), when we substitute the letter כ' for the letter ק', both are connected to Amalek since ספק has the same *gematria* as עמלק (Amalek). How do we counteract the force of Amalek? The pasuk says (*Shemot* 25:2), “Let them take for Me (לי) a portion.” This refers to the Torah since the word לי (for Me) has the *gematria* of forty, the number of days in which the Torah was given. In the merit of both Torah and *tzedakah*, one’s nature is transformed, and he has the power to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, represented by Amalek. All of this is in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu.

————— In Summary —————

- The 7th of Adar is the *hilula* of Moshe Rabbeinu. All of Bnei Yisrael have the potential to connect with Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal state, “When Adar enters...,” for the spirit of Adar is meant to enter into a person.
- The words משנכנס אדר (when Adar enters) can also be expanded to read משה נכנס לאדר (Moshe entered Adar). The spiritual influence of Moshe Rabbeinu present in the month of Adar is capable of bringing our nation to unity. This is in opposition to Haman’s accusation that we are a scattered, dispersed nation. When we are unified, our joy is increased. Moshe had no trouble comprehending the concept of the *keruvim*, for he easily understood that Torah increases with love for one’s fellow man.

- Hashem displayed a coin of fire to Moshe Rabbeinu. Fire alludes to Torah. When Bnei Yisrael are engaged in Torah, each man helps the other. Adar is an auspicious time for increasing *tzedakah* and reaching heights in Torah, which will ensure us victory over Amalek.

PURIM



THE SPIRITUAL JOY OF ADAR AND PURIM

“When the month of Adar enters, joy is increased” (*Ta’anit* 29a). All the more so is the joy of the month doubled and tripled on *Shabbat Shekalim*, when Rosh Chodesh Adar falls then. For then *Shabbat Shekalim*, Rosh Chodesh, and Shabbat itself all combine to make a three-ply cord, one entity of untold joy heralding the month of joy.

Rabbi Simchah Bunim MiPeshischa is quoted as saying that the preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the actual mitzvah itself. If we prepare ourselves properly for this auspicious Shabbat, we will truly merit great joy, which will influence the entire month.

When a person recites Hallel on Rosh Chodesh Adar which falls on a Shabbat, he is filled with a special happiness. He feels the inherent difference between this Shabbat and the other Shabbatot of the year.

How can one know if he did, indeed, succeed in increasing his joy on this Shabbat, in honor of the month of Adar which it signals? What, essentially, is our job on this Shabbat?

Furthermore, Chazal state (*Shekalim*, beginning of chapter 1) that on the first of the month, announcements regarding the giving of the half-*shekel* “are sounded.” What is the significance of the “sounding” of these announcements? Why don’t Chazal simply say, “On the first of the month, they announce that everyone should bring a half-*shekel*”?

Our Sages compare the holiday of Purim to Yom Kippur. This is evident in the similarity of their names. Superficially, these festivals seem as different from each other as is possible. On Yom Kippur, we fast and pray with tears of supplication, whereas on Purim, we feast and make merry, until we reach the point of inebriation, where we don't realize the difference between "cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai" (*Megillah* 7b).

We previously explained that money is one of the greatest obstacles in one's service of Hashem. Lust for money can lead to heresy. Therefore, one must always remember that money belongs solely to Hashem, as the *Navi* says (*Chagai* 2:8), "Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold."

For this reason, regarding the contributions to the Mishkan, it says (*Shemot* 25:2), "Let them **take** for Me a portion," as opposed to, "Let them **give** Me a portion." For a person never gives to Hashem. Everything he has comes from Hashem. When a person keeps this in mind, he utilizes his financial assets merely as tools for mitzvot, and for nothing else. He never allows his money to blind him.

This is why Chazal tell us that on Rosh Chodesh Adar "they would let the matter of *shekalim* be heard," instead of stating that they would announce the matter of *shekalim*. A person never gives to Hashem, for everything belongs to Him. Money is not paramount. On Rosh Chodesh Adar, the *tzedakah* collectors would arrive, tinkling their *tzedakah* boxes. By hearing the sound of the money jingling, the people would realize that they should act on this sound and give to *tzedakah*. They would come to the understanding that their money was given to them merely as a means of serving Hashem. Similarly, Adar is a month propitious for giving gifts to the poor, so that they, too, may experience the joy of the festival.

Bearing this in mind, a person can honestly assess whether or not he entered Adar with more joy than the rest of the year. For, there is

no pleasure greater than that of bringing joy to the hearts of the downtrodden.

By acting in this way, a person displays his belief that Hashem created and manages the world, and there is none beside Him. The word שקלים (*shekalim*) is numerically equivalent to the phrase בורא העולם ומנהיגו (He creates the world and manages it). He learns that everything comes from Hashem. The phrase מן השמים (from Hashem/Heaven) is also numerically equivalent to שלקים (when adding one for each of the five words: בורא העולם ומנהיגו and מן השמים).

“When Adar enters, joy is increased” (*Ta’anit* 26b). How does one increase his level of joy, and how can he know if he did, indeed, increase his joy in Adar? Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael in Refidim during this month (*Shemot* 17:8). How could they be so brazen as to attack Bnei Yisrael after hearing about all the miracles that were performed for them in Egypt and at the Yam Suf?

Chazal tell us (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 17:8) that the name of the place רפידים indicates that Bnei Yisrael “became weak (רפו) in their level of Torah study.” How did this occur? The word עמלק (Amalek) is numerically equivalent to ספק (doubt). The letters of the word ספק also form the word כסף (money), since the letter ק is interchangeable with the letter כ. When Amalek heard that Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt with tremendous wealth, they decided to attack them, in order to introduce doubt into their hearts. They wanted to convince Bnei Yisrael to prefer gold and silver over the word of Hashem. By weakening Bnei Yisrael’s level of Avodat Hashem, Amalek were able to triumph over them.

When Chazal state that Bnei Yisrael weakened in Torah, they do not mean that they severed all ties with Torah, *chas v’shalom*. However, they began to regard money as an end in and of itself and not merely the means to an end, as it is intended to be. Consequently, Amalek gained a foothold and managed to instill coldness into their hearts. This was only possible because Bnei Yisrael did not engage in Torah,

for Torah is the fire that warms a person's heart (*Ta'anit* 7; *Pesikta, Yitro* 20:2). Desisting from Torah study allowed the frost of Amalek to enter. When one adds the letter ט' (representing the word ספק – doubt) to the word עמלק, the total has the *gematria* of the word קר (cold).

If Bnei Yisrael make an effort to increase their level of joy in the month of Adar and intensify their Torah study, which is the ultimate joy, they will easily overcome Amalek, whose influence is awakened every Adar anew.

Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 88a) that the Jewish nation accepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh. The word אָדָר (Adar) has the same *gematria* as the word הָר (a mountain). This alludes to the *Yetzer Hara*, who is compared to a mountain (*Sukkah* 52a). Thus, when Adar, or the *Yetzer Hara*, enters, we increase our joy, our Torah learning, and thus banish him from our midst. This is hinted to by the mountain of Har Sinai, where the Torah was given to our people. There, our nation, so to speak, married Hashem. Every person is enjoined to remember *Matan Torah*, the day of untold joy for Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael a taste of His goodness, and brought them to the fiftieth gate of *kedushah*. There, He entered their hearts.

Let us now examine the source for disguising oneself on Purim. To do so, we must examine the connection between Purim and Yom Kippur. Why are these two seemingly different festivals compared to each other?

Chazal state (*Makkot* 23b) that the 248 positive commandments are parallel to the 248 organs in a person's body. When a person sins, he damages the organ parallel to that mitzvah. If a person performs a multitude of sins, he may literally lose his Divine image, because he becomes deformed due to transgression.

The generation of Mordechai and Esther deserved destruction, for they committed a terrible sin by partaking of the feast of Achashveirosh. Their essence literally changed for the worse.

Through Heavenly mercy, they repented and once again were deserving of Hashem's shining countenance. Through their repentance they "switched" (ונהפוך הוא) their natures and changed the evil decree to good. We disguise ourselves on this day in memory of this transformation.

When Bnei Yisrael merited a "spiritual makeover," they were certainly overcome with happiness. Even the celestial beings joined in their joy. The entire Purim story was a matter of Hashem hiding His face. Chazal ask, "Where do we find an allusion to Esther in the Torah? It is in the words (*Devarim* 31:18), 'But I will surely have concealed My face on that day.'"

When Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah, the miracle became manifest to all. When tzaddikim disguise themselves, they hide their true greatness, looking just like everyone else, even wicked people, for everyone is "dressed up." It is for this reason that Jews have the custom to wear costumes on Purim. We want Hashem to forgive all of us alike – the righteous as well as the wicked. For all are equal on that day.

As soon as the prosecuting angels arrive, Hashem "dresses up" the reshamim to resemble tzaddikim, just as the tzaddikim disguise their true nature. Then everyone is equally deserving to receive forgiveness. The word תחפושת (disguise) has the same *gematria* as the phrase "מוחל – יהיו חטאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבינו וסולה, – He atones and forgives, even if your sins will be red as scarlet, they will become white as snow."

Our Rabbis compare Purim to Yom Hakippurim, for, just as on Yom Kippur all return to Hashem and He forgives them, tzaddikim and reshamim alike, so too, on Purim, Hashem forgives all iniquities. This is the spiritual joy of Adar and Purim.

———— In Summary ————

- "When Adar enters, joy is increased." If this is true for the entire month, how much more so when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbat, for Shabbat is always a day of increased joy. This is a fitting preparation for the rest of the month.

- How can one ensure that he has, indeed, become more joyful in the month of Adar? Furthermore, what is the significance of making the *shekalim* announcement “be heard”? Why do Chazal compare Purim to Yom Kippur, as Yom Kippur is a solemn day of tefillah, whereas Purim is a day of feasting and merriment?
- Money has a tendency to hinder a person’s Avodat Hashem. Money may become uppermost in importance, not just a means to an end, as intended. When a person is aware that everything he possesses is from Hashem, he uses his money for the performance of mitzvot and *tzedakah*, and will certainly contribute money to the poor during this month. The “sounding” of the money tinkling in the *tzedakah* boxes reminds a person to give *tzedakah*, helping him realize that money is merely a tool to help him serve Hashem. He will then come to the understanding that Hashem runs the entire world.
- Amalek gained a foothold against our nation when Bnei Yisrael made money, in the form of the booty at the Yam Suf, paramount in importance. Amalek injected a sense of coldness into Bnei Yisrael’s service of Hashem. The word אָדָר (Adar) is numerically equivalent to הָר (a mountain), an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*. If the *Yetzer Hara* arrives in Adar, we must make an effort to increase our joy in Torah learning, strengthening ourselves in both the Written and the Oral Torah. In that manner, we will merit vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara* and coming close to Hashem, meriting true joy in Torah, just as the Jews had in the time of Achashveirosh.
- Now it is understood why we disguise ourselves on Purim, and its connection to Yom Kippur. The 248 positive commandments are parallel to the 248 organs in a person’s body. A person who sins damages the Divine image engraved in him. When Bnei Yisrael sinned at the feast of Achashveirosh, they became deformed. After they did teshuvah, they became transformed. The reason we dress up on Purim is to remember this transformation.
- Moreover, when the entire nation is disguised, one cannot distinguish between the tzaddikim and the reshaim, and all do teshuvah. Hashem forgives them all, for they resemble one another. Thus, Purim is similar to Yom Kippur, when everyone repents and asks for forgiveness. This is the spiritual joy inherent in the month of Adar.

WHEN ADAR ENTERS, JOY IS INCREASED

“When Adar enters, joy is increased”

(Ta’anit 29a)

What is the specific joy particular to the month of Adar above that of the rest of the year? Miracles were performed for the Jewish nation throughout the months of the year. Moreover, we are enjoined to serve Hashem with joy at all times, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), “Serve Hashem with gladness.”

Let us offer a few explanations. Our nation experienced a miraculous salvation from the clutches of Haman, who wanted to annihilate us. Bnei Yisrael reacted to his decree by strengthening themselves in *emunah* and elevating their Avodat Hashem. They increased their tefillot and served Hashem with joy, meriting the great miracle that they experienced. The pasuk states (*Esther* 9:1), “And it was turned about: The Jews prevailed over their adversaries.” We intensify our joy in this month as an expression of our appreciation for being saved from Haman’s designs and in elated recognition of the closeness to Hashem which we enjoyed at that time.

Furthermore, Adar precedes Nisan, about which Chazal state (*Rosh Hashanah* 11; *Shemot Rabbah* 15:12), “In Nisan our fathers were redeemed and in Nisan they will be redeemed.” If one enters the month of Nisan brimming with the joy that he amassed during Adar, he is able to liberate himself from the *Yetzer Hara*, which is the true redemption. This is certainly cause for increasing our joy in Adar.

Our Rabbis compare the connection between Adar and Nisan to the connection between Elul and Tishrei. In the month of Elul, everyone

does teshuvah for their previous sins out of fear. They want to arrive at the Yamim Noraim cleansed and pure, facing the new year with a clean slate. Similarly, Nisan is the first of the months, as the pasuk (*Shemot* 12:2) states, “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months.” It is a time when people return to Hashem out of love for all of the miracles He did for us during the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, in Adar, we increase our prayers and *tzedakah* activities out of joy and love of Hashem in anticipation of the month of Nisan.

Adar is a time that is auspicious for doing teshuvah from love. This thought should bring us to even greater levels of joy, for we are coming closer to Hashem. A hint to this is found in the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 1:1), “The night before the fourteenth, we check for chametz.” Chametz, as we know, is an allusion to aveirot. We “seek out” our sins, and regret them, returning to Hashem, as in Elul. For this reason, we are especially happy in Adar.

Last but certainly not least, the joy of Adar flows from the following. In the days of Achashveirosh, Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah once again, this time out of joy (*Shabbat* 88a). The pasuk states (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and took upon themselves.” They confirmed their original undertaking to keep the Torah. Without Torah, the world cannot exist (*Pesachim* 68b; *Nedarim* 32a). However, at *Matan Torah* they had been forced to accept the Torah. The fact that Bnei Yisrael in the times of Esther and Mordechai accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah willingly is cause for the added happiness felt in this month.

Let us explain the acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai with a parable. The son of the king was taken captive by wicked people. After much effort, the king managed to extricate him and bring him to freedom. But then he told his son, “If you do not accept my authority, I will have you killed.” The son did not believe his father. He reasoned, “After all that my father suffered when I was enslaved, and all that he went through to have me released, will he have me killed simply for

disobeying him? Why didn't he stipulate that my release was dependent upon my obeying his word, in the first place? At that point, I would have accepted his authority. Obviously, whatever he tells me is untrue." The son thought that his father's words were an idle threat, to force him into obedience. But, he decided to listen to whatever his father told him, in appreciation for all that he had done for him.

However, one day, the son disobeyed his father and behaved inappropriately. What did his father do? He didn't have him killed, but, rather, delivered him into the hands of wicked men, who enslaved him. They even tried to kill him. At that point, the boy sent a message to his father, begging forgiveness for everything. Now he was ready to undertake whatever his father would demand of him.

This was the case with Bnei Yisrael. In the month of Sivan, when they received the Torah, they did not accept Hashem unequivocally as their Ruler. Therefore, they were punished by Haman and Achashveirosh. But when Hashem delivered them from Haman's hands, they accepted the Torah wholeheartedly, out of free will, with no compulsion whatsoever. They knew that their Father, Hashem Yitbarach, desires their closeness and loves them. This is the cause for the joy of the month of Adar.

————— In Summary —————

- The joy we are enjoined to experience in the month of Adar can be explained in several ways. In this month, Bnei Yisrael were slated to be annihilated. Instead, they were liberated from Haman Harasha and became ever closer to Hashem.
- Adar precedes Nisan, the month auspicious for *geulah*. Adar symbolizes teshuvah done out of love.
- Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah joyfully in Adar, rather than through coercion, as on Shavuot.
- The episode of Purim demonstrates Hashem's love and desire for Bnei Yisrael, which increases our joy.

MERITING HASHEM'S SHINING COURTENANCE

The Purim story is well-known. Haman Harasha decreed annihilation upon our entire nation (*Esther* 3:13), and if not for Hashem's mercy and kindness, he would have succeeded, *chas v'shalom*. But we are faced with a basic question: Didn't Haman know that Hashem would never allow him to harm His nation?

The Ben Ish Chai quotes the *Ir David* (page 31). He states that the nations of the world were not granted the gift of teshuvah. It belongs solely to Yisrael. This is because anything created after the Creation of the world cannot control something which existed before the world was created. Teshuvah preceded the Creation (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4). The gentiles were not given teshuvah, since they were created after the Creation of the world.

This is not the case regarding Bnei Yisrael. Although they were actually created after the world was in existence, the *Ir David* states that Hashem considered their creation before He fashioned the world. He quotes the pasuk in Eichah (5:21), "Renew our days as of old." "As of old" refers to the thought Hashem entertained of creating Bnei Yisrael, long before the world came into existence. Based on this understanding, Bnei Yisrael have access to teshuvah, since teshuvah also existed before the world was created.

Haman took note of the fact that Bnei Yisrael had sinned. Chazal ask (*Megillah* 12a), "Why were Bnei Yisrael worthy of destruction? Because they partook of the feast of Achashveirosh." During that period Hashem concealed His Presence, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 31:18), "But I will surely have concealed My face." This was an outcome of their sin.

Haman decided to take advantage of this time when Hashem was hidden from His people. He understood that Hashem was not protecting them, and that they were easy prey for any enemy. Teshuvah would not help them, since they were not in Hashem's thoughts, as they had been before the Creation of the world, when teshuvah was also in existence. "They are just like any other nation," he thought. "It would be easy to get rid of them."

However, Haman made one basic mistake. Although it was a time of Divine concealment, nevertheless, there were tzaddikim who did merit Hashem's favor, having His face shine upon them. They were Mordechai and Esther, who, in the merit of their righteousness, were able to bring the nation back to Hashem and have His face shine upon them, through their teshuvah.

Chazal ask (*Chulin* 139b), "Where do we find an allusion to Esther in the Torah? It is in the words, But I will surely have concealed My face." Esther managed to remove this partition between Hashem and His nation.

Haman did a service to our nation by decreeing destruction upon them. In response they utilized the power of teshuvah, activated by Mordechai and Esther. In that merit, they received once again the favor of Hashem, and their teshuvah was accepted.

Esther commanded Mordechai (*Esther* 4:16), "Fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day." Through fasting and nullifying their physical desires, Bnei Yisrael would regain the favor of Hashem. Then Hashem would accept their teshuvah, for they would be in His mind again, just as before the Creation. In the merit of their teshuvah, the decree was annulled, for the gates of teshuvah are never locked (*Berachot* 32b).

The punishment that Bnei Yisrael deserved for partaking in Achashveirosh's feast was due to their deficiency in *emunah*. All good

comes to us on account of our trust in Hashem. If Yisrael are lacking in this area, they have no chance of survival, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, Hashem sent Haman Harasha in order to test their level of faith and bring them back to teshuvah, through the decrees that he placed on them.

This is exactly what happened. Haman wanted to inject doubt of Hashem in the hearts of Bnei Yisrael. They had been promised by the *Navi*, at the beginning of their exile, that they were to be redeemed at the end of seventy years. They would return to their land at that time. Now, instead, Haman arrived, declaring all-out war to annihilate them! How could the prophecy hold true?!

Haman wanted to shake their faith in Hashem, having them believe they would never return to their homeland and build the Beit Hamikdash. But Mordechai understood his evil designs. He therefore warned the people not to participate in the feast of Achashveirosh and not to decrease their faith in Hashem. Indeed, in his merit, we regained the direct gaze of Hashem's shining countenance, and all was rectified. We were rescued from Haman in the merit of Mordechai.

———— In Summary ————

- Didn't Haman know that whoever attacks Hashem's people is severely punished? How could he even entertain the thought of annihilating them without retribution? It is stated that the gentiles have no access to teshuvah, for they were created after the Creation of the world, whereas teshuvah is a force that preceded Creation. Only Bnei Yisrael, who were in Hashem's thoughts before He created the world, are capable of utilizing the power of teshuvah. Haman saw that Bnei Yisrael were not going in the ways of the Torah, and they had partaken of the feast of Achashveirosh. He understood that Hashem was hiding His face from them. That being the case, Bnei Yisrael were, so to speak, removed from His thoughts, and teshuvah was no longer available to them. They ate at the party; killing them would be a piece of cake.

- Bnei Yisrael merited the return of Hashem's favor through Mordechai and Esther, who taught our nation to have faith in Him. In this manner, He would once again have them in mind, and they would have access to teshuvah. Their punishment came as a result of their lack of *emunah*. Haman wanted them to think they would never return to their homeland, for seventy years had already passed, and they had not yet been redeemed. Mordechai was aware of all this and enjoined his brothers to put their trust in Hashem and repair the defect in their *emunah*. In that merit, they were saved.

DEFEATING AMALEK IN ADAR

Humility is the hallmark of Adar, for Moshe, humblest of all men (*Bamidbar* 12:3), was born and passed away in this month (*Megillah* 13b; *Esther Rabbah* 7:13).

Conversely, Amalek, the epitome of arrogance, the first one to attack Bnei Yisrael, must be eradicated in this month. That is why we read the Torah portion relating to him on *Parashat Zachor*. The pasuk states (*Devarim* 25:19), "You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek."

The mitzvah of donating the half-*shekel* for the upkeep of the Beit Hamikdash hints to the eradication of Amalek, who is the manifestation of the *Yetzer Hara*. The collection was announced on Rosh Chodesh Adar (*Shekalim* 1:1; *Pesikta Rabbah* 11:1). This mitzvah teaches us to maintain a distance from money, for money brings one to haughtiness. This is alluded to in the word שקל (*shekel*). The *gematria* of ש is 300, equaling that of קר (cold). The other two letters of the word *shekel* – קל – are the last letters in the word עמלק. Amalek was the nation that introduced coldness into the hearts of Bnei Yisrael, preventing them from being humble.

Furthermore, the *gematria* of the word אדר (*Adar*) is equal to that of הר (a mountain). This is a reference to the *Yetzer Hara*, which seems like an insurmountable mountain to the tzaddikim (*Sukkah* 52a; *Zohar*

I, 99b). A tactic of the *Yetzer Hara* is to inject arrogance and conceit into the heart of a person, for an arrogant person is incapable of learning Torah (*Tanchuma, Ki Tavo* 3). Torah was given specifically on a mountain to teach us that Torah is the only antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*.

Har Sinai humbled itself to receive the Torah (*Sotah* 5a; *Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro* 284), for Torah is acquired with humility (*Avot* 6:6). At the time of *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael were forbidden from coming close to the mountain, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:12), “Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge.” This is an instruction to constantly distance oneself from the *Yetzer Hara*, keeping away from *nisayon*.

What was Haman’s intention in casting lots, and what was the significance of the lots falling out on the month of Adar (*Megillah* 13b)?

Bnei Yisrael are above *mazal*. This holds true as long as they learn Torah. Haman thought that since Bnei Yisrael had become lax in Torah study, they were under the dominion of *mazal*. He therefore drew lots to ascertain when would be the most opportune time to annihilate them. Hashem ensured that the lot indicated the month of Adar.

Bnei Yisrael understood that Adar hinted to the mountain (הר), an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*, as explained earlier. Therefore, they strengthened themselves in teshuvah, becoming as pure as the day they were born. *Ba’alei teshuvah* and *geirim* are considered as a newborn, for they are free of sin (*Yevamot* 22; *Ketubot* 47a). This is how they have the ability to die for the sake of Torah (*Berachot* 63b). Moshe’s birth in the month of Adar suggests this process of renewal through teshuvah, which Bnei Yisrael were able to attain through Torah. In this way, they overcame Haman, the descendant of Amalek.

Why did Chazal designate Adar specifically as a month of joy, by asserting that “when Adar enters, joy is increased” (*Ta’anit* 29a)?

Almost all of the months contain festivals; what is so special about Adar?

Hashem preceded the malady with the remedy (*Megillah* 13b). Instead of becoming weak in Torah study, the Jews increased their Torah learning, which led to their increased joy, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 19:9), “The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart.” In this way, they were able to overcome “the mountain,” which refers to the *Yetzer Hara*, in Adar. Chazal state (*Shabbat* 88a) that they accepted the Torah willingly in the days of Achashveirosh, as the pasuk says (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves.” This is another reason for the joy of the month.

———— In Summary ————

- Amalek is intrinsically connected to the month of Adar. We must eradicate him then. This is hinted to by the mitzvah of the half-*shekel*, which was announced on Rosh Chodesh Adar. The *gematria* of 'ש is 300, equaling that of קר (cold). The other two letters of the word *shekel* – קל – are the last letters in the word עמלק.
- Furthermore, the *gematria* of the word אדר (Adar) is equal to that of הר (a mountain). The *Yetzer Hara* schemes to make a person arrogant, the antithesis of Torah, which was given on the humble Mount Sinai.
- Moshe’s birth in the month of Adar suggests the process of renewal through teshuvah, which Bnei Yisrael were able to attain through Torah. In this way, they overcame Haman, the descendant of Amalek.
- By willingly accepting the Torah anew in Adar in the times of Achashveirosh, Bnei Yisrael increased the joy of this month for all time.

NOT STOPPING IN OUR QUEST FOR PERFECTION

Chazal state (*Megillah* 7b), “A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim, to the extent that he cannot distinguish between ‘Cursed is Haman’ and ‘Blessed is Mordechai.’” What do they mean by this statement? And what is significant about the words “cursed” and “blessed” that they are used as barometers to measure a person’s level of intoxication?

The Satan tries to gain a person’s trust. At times, he may convince a person not to sin, in order to cause him to stumble in an even more serious area at a later occasion. Chazal (*Shabbat* 108b) state about the Satan, “Today, he tells you to do this... until the person walks in his ways.”

In every area of *kedushah*, the Satan tries to prevent a person from ascending. Iyov (1:6) states, “The Satan, too, came along with them.” Likewise, Zechariah (3:1) states, “The Satan was standing on his right (of Yehoshua Kohen Gadol) to accuse him.” The Satan tries to thwart all endeavors of *kedushah*.

The Chafetz Chaim asks why the Satan stood to the right of Yehoshua Kohen Gadol; it is known that the Satan always stands to the left of a person.

He answers that at times, the Satan stands to a person’s right, in order to help him overcome his *Yetzer Hara* (i.e., himself). He actually encourages a person to do mitzvot, which will eventually lead to his downfall. Therefore, a person must be extremely wary, and stand guard not to fall prey to the *Yetzer Hara*, for he has many methods to cause a person to sin.

How can a person know whether or not a mitzvah that comes his way is an act of the *Yetzer Hatov*, in which case, he should do it with *mesirut nefesh*, with all proper intentions, or is merely a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, and he must desist from it?

We can employ the saying of Chazal (*Avot* 4:2), “One mitzvah leads to another, and one aveirah leads to another.” By analyzing what comes after this deed, a person can assess whether it came from the *Yetzer Hatov* or the *Yetzer Hara*.

Furthermore, if the opportunity to do a mitzvah comes to a person while he is doing another mitzvah, and this new mitzvah will interrupt his original deed, he should know that this is a tactic of the *Yetzer Hara* since “one who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from (another) mitzvah” (*Sukkah* 25a). When a person is performing a mitzvah, he is building worlds on High. There is no measure to the pleasure he gives Hashem. If he is forced to stop, it is due to the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara*.

“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” (*Avot* 3:7). Why do Chazal specify that he sees a tree, and not, for example, a fruit? What is so distinct about a tree? Furthermore, why does the Mishnah specifically state, “One who walks on the way,” instead of just stating, “One who interrupts his review”? Also, why does one who interrupts his review warrant such strong punishment, to bear guilt for his soul? There are far greater aveirot than this, which do not carry such a heavy penalty.

In the introduction to the sefer *Ilan Hakadosh*, it states that during the execution of a mitzvah, a person must intend to unite the two names of Hashem יה-ו-ה and א-דני. The *gematria* of these two names equal the *gematria* of אילן (tree). This explains the specific use of the

word “tree.” For, if a person halts his learning, he damages the Names equivalent to the value of the letters of the word “tree.”

The reason that the Mishnah specifies “one who walks on the way” can be explained as follows. Either this person was literally walking along and an opportunity to do a mitzvah came his way, or he was learning Torah, which is compared to “walking.” This is borne out by the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3) “If you will follow My decrees.” Rashi explains that this means “That you should be laboring in Torah.” If, *chas v’shalom*, a person halts mid-mitzvah or mid-learning, he damages the Names of Hashem alluded to in the word “tree.”

However, we are left with some difficulties.

If the word “tree” alludes to Hashem’s Names, why does the Mishnah continue, stating, “How beautiful is this plowed field!” Where does a field fit into the picture?

Why is the consequence of this sin that he “bears guilt for his soul” and not that he has damaged the Name of Hashem alluded to in the word “tree”?

Why does the Mishnah specify, “One who goes on the road”? This would seem to imply that one who was sitting and learning and stopped his learning mid-way is not held accountable. Is that the case?

Perhaps we can explain the matter as follows. Chazal are describing the methods of the *Yetzer Hara*. He often encourages a person to do mitzvot. Moreover, he convinces him that with his mitzvot he will perfect worlds, including the two Names of Hashem hinted to by the word “tree.” The person becomes involved in his mitzvah or Torah study, when suddenly the *Yetzer Hara* tells him, “How beautiful is this plowed field.” In essence, he is diverting him from the correct path.

I heard, in the name of a certain Rabbi, that the *gematria* of the word נִר (plowed field), is equivalent to that of זָהוּ עַמְלֵק (he is Amalek),

adding two for the two words themselves. Amalek, another name for the *Yetzer Hara*, tells a person to cease his mitzvah performance and take note of the trees... and then he has him in his trap. “How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field” are mere ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Therefore, a person should know the intentions of Hashem’s Names before doing a mitzvah, and not stop in the middle in order to generate proper intent. Calling a halt to the performance of a mitzvah is nothing but a trick of the *Yetzer Hara* to trip him up. Once he stops the progress of his mitzvah, he has fallen into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara* and literally bears guilt for his soul, for he has sold it to the Satan, *rachmana litzlan*.

It really makes no difference whether the person is walking or sitting. The act of stopping his learning to pay attention to the *Yetzer Hara* causes him to decline to the level of bearing guilt for his soul. Therefore, it does not state that he defames the “tree” of Torah, for it is not a mere defamation, but an outright cause for the destruction of his soul.

We might add the following homiletical explanation. Why is one who stops mid-learning held accountable for his soul’s decline? A person is enjoined to constantly go from strength to strength, striving to reach greater heights (see *Tehillim* 84:8). But, if he stops in the middle of his learning, he is certainly not advancing, and is therefore liable for his soul’s deterioration. The initials of the words **מחיל אל חיל** (from strength to strength) are numerically equivalent to **מ"ט** (forty-nine). One who does not go up, goes down, eventually reaching the abyss of the forty-ninth level of *tumah*. But if one makes an effort to advance, he is able to reach the forty-ninth level of *kedushah*. Adding one for the phrase, he can even reach **נ'**, referring to the fiftieth gate of purity, coming close to Hashem.

Chazal state (*Pesachim* 7b; *Yerushalmi, Berachot* 6:1) that a *berachah* is recited prior to the performance of a mitzvah. This unites Hashem's Name before the mitzvah is actually carried out. If a person wishes to be protected against the *Yetzer Hara*, he must be vigilant regarding two matters. The first is to imbue the mitzvah with proper intent before its execution, and the second is not to stop in the middle of doing the mitzvah, even in order to unite the Heavenly Names. If he were to stop, he would likely transgress some other sin, as one sin leads to another. Postponing the performance of a mitzvah is nothing but the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*. It is likely that when he finally gets around to doing it, it will be too late. Above all, a person is punishable for damaging the holy Names which are alluded to by the word "tree."

This can be what Chazal were referring to in their statement (*Sukkah* 52b; *Kiddushin* 30a; *Zohar* III, 268a), "If this degenerate one meets you, draw him to the Beit Hamidrash." What will be gained by bringing him to the Beit Hamidrash? Can't the *Yetzer Hara* disturb him there, as well?

Chazal mean that if a person encounters the *Yetzer Hara* while he is in the process of doing a mitzvah, he should not stop in the middle. Rather, he should bring him to the Beit Hamidrash. This means that he should continue doing the mitzvah with its correct intentions, and the *Yetzer Hara* will immediately flee for his life, for he was unsuccessful in his mission.

Now we can understand the words of Rava (*Megillah* 7b): "A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim, to the extent that he cannot differentiate between 'Cursed is Haman,' and 'Blessed is Mordechai.'" One must constantly beware of the *Yetzer Hara*, who is called "Haman the Wicked." He often stands at a person's right side, encouraging him to do a mitzvah, intending to disturb his thoughts and intentions in order to prevent him from executing the mitzvah perfectly, thus spoiling it.

In order to be saved from the *Yetzer Hara* and triumph over him, he is enjoined להתבשם בפורי'א – to become inebriated on Purim. He should להתבשם בפירות – refresh himself with the sweet smell of fruits. This refers to mitzvot. Chazal say (*Yoma* 39a) that one who enters a perfume store emerges with a smell of perfume on him, even if he did not purchase anything. One should perfume himself with the fragrance of mitzvot and not cease in the middle of doing them. For, if he does, he will lose the ability of distinguishing between Haman and Mordechai, between the *Yetzer Hara* and the *Yetzer Hatov*.

The word המן (Haman) is numerically equivalent to the two Names of Hashem, mentioned above, when adding four for the number of letters of the Name. The *Yetzer Hara*, also known as Haman, desires nothing more than to make a person stumble in his mitzvah performance so that he should be unable to unite the two Names of Hashem. Therefore, one must make every effort to overpower him.

————— In Summary —————

- “A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he cannot distinguish between ‘Cursed is Haman’ and ‘Blessed is Mordechai.’” The *Yetzer Hara* sometimes changes his position, standing at a person’s right and encouraging him to do mitzvot. He desires to trip him up in the midst of doing the mitzvah. One can gauge whether the suggestion to do a mitzvah came from the *Yetzer Hatov* or the *Yetzer Hara*. If the next act that he does is a mitzvah, it was the *Yetzer Hatov* who persuaded him to do the first righteous act. But if the next act he does is an aveirah, it was nothing but the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, in order to make him sin afterwards. It is forbidden to stop in the middle of doing a mitzvah, for a person builds worlds and unites Hashem’s Names with the mitzvot he does. These Names become defaced, so to speak, when a person follows the *Yetzer Hara*’s plots.
- “One who walks on the road... but interrupts his review, stating, ‘How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!’ bears guilt for his soul.” The *gematria* of the word אילן (tree) is equal to that of the two Names

of Hashem. This interruption is nothing but the *Yetzer Hara's* ploy to prevent a person from uniting the Names of Hashem while doing a mitzvah. Perhaps later will be too late to perform the mitzvah. The Names of Hashem are damaged. Instead, a person should draw the *Yetzer Hara* to the Beit Hamidrash and continue with his mitzvot.

- A person should make sure to unite the Names of Hashem before performing the mitzvah, and not during its performance, so that the *Yetzer Hara* does not gain a foothold over him in the midst of the mitzvah. Chazal teach us that one is instructed to become inebriated on Purim. If the *Yetzer Hara*, also known as Haman, arrives to disturb his service of Hashem, he should immediately “perfume” himself with the scent of mitzvot and Torah, without ceasing. For, if he stops, he will not be able to differentiate between Haman and Mordechai, symbols of the *Yetzer Hara* and the *Yetzer Hatov*. He will be able to continue to study Torah and perform mitzvot perfectly, only if he does not stop in the middle.

THE ESSENCE OF TA'ANIT ESTHER

When Esther heard about the decree hovering over Bnei Yisrael, she sent the following message to Mordechai (*Esther* 4:16), “Go, assemble all the Jews... and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days... and I, with my maids, will fast also. Thus I will come to the king.”

Why did Esther desire to annul the decree specifically through fasting, and not by any other merit, such as *tzedakah*, or prayer and supplication to Hashem?

Bnei Yisrael, in the bitter *galut* following the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, despaired of ever being redeemed. The years stretched on, longer than the seventy years predicted by Yirmeyahu Hanavi, as he had stated (*Yirmeyahu* 29:10), “For thus said Hashem: After seventy years for Bavel have been completed I will attend to you, and I will fulfill for you My favorable promise, to return you to this place.” The

people despaired of ever being redeemed and desired to be like all the other nations, *rachmana litzlan*. Therefore, they partook of the feast of Achashveirosh (*Megillah* 12a), and they deserved to be destroyed.

Even if it is true that they did not actually eat of the meal, and had brought along food from home, their participation in the feast was still considered a sin, as though they had eaten forbidden foods, because they enjoyed the grandeur of the palace, which was steeped in *avodah zarah*.

They also sinned by taking pleasure in Achashveirosh's display of various utensils of the Beit Hamikdash and the clothing of the Kohen Gadol (*Megillah* 11b; *Esther Rabbah* 2:11). This gave power to the negative forces. Achashveirosh, realizing that the Jewish nation was spread about and scattered (*Esther* 3:8), did not believe that they would pay homage to him. But they did come. This increased the power of the *kelippah* and forces of impurity over them.

Achashveirosh saw the Jewish nation as pitiable, wretched and pathetic, due to their long years in exile (*Yevamot* 47a). He displayed his vast riches and the splendor of his kingdom in order to squash their spirits even more. He wanted them to abandon their religion. By vaunting the tremendous difference between his wealth and their poverty, he hoped to break their spirits completely. When they attended the feast, destruction was decreed upon the nation, for they gave strength to the *kelippah*.

For this reason, when Esther heard that Mordechai was wearing sackcloth, she sent a message to him with Hatach (*Esther* 4:5): “לדעת זה מה זה ועל מה זה – To learn what this was about and why.” These words hinted that in order to annul Haman's decree, the Jews must first emerge from their state of depression and arouse themselves to do teshuvah, returning to Hashem. At the Splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael declared (*Shemot* 15:2), “זה א-לי ואנוהו – This is my G-d and I will beautify Him.” Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to fulfill the

Ten Commandments, which were inscribed on the *luchot* on both sides (ibid. 32:15), “מִזָּה וּמִזָּה הֵם כְּתוּבִים.”

Moreover, they were instructed to reveal that which was concealed within them. This is alluded to in the word מה (what), which has the same *gematria* as the word אדם (man), as well as the Name of Hashem יה-וה, when each of its letters is spelled out (*Zohar Chadash, Rut* 102b). By connecting their inner Divine spark with the word זה of the phrase וְאֵלֵינוּ וְאֵלֵינוּ, זה א-לֵינוּ וְאֵלֵינוּ, they will awaken from their slumber and merit salvation. Not only that, but they will attain spiritual elevation. This is hinted to in the words, “וְעַל מַה זֶה.” When the nation connects to the זה – the image of Hashem inside of them, they will ascend, as signified by the word וְעַל, and be redeemed.

Mordechai responded by telling Esther (*Esther* 4:7), “אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ – of all that had happened to him.” The word אֲשֶׁר (of) has the same letters as the word ראש (head). The word קָרָהוּ (happened to him), shares the same root as the word קִרְיוֹת (coldness). Mordechai was telling Esther that the Jewish nation had arrived at the brink of despair, their minds totally “cooled off,” distant from Hashem. It was all because of Haman, the descendant of the one who happened upon him (קָרָהוּ), upon Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness after the Exodus. Amalek were the ones who cooled down Bnei Yisrael, a coldness which allowed our people to partake in the feast of that rasha, Achashveirosh.

Esther responded (*Esther* 4:16), “Go, assemble all the Jews... and fast for me... and I, with my maids, will fast also. Thus I will come to the king...” She told Mordechai that the first step was to gather all the Jews, so that they should hear his words of rebuke. This would unite them and awaken them to teshuvah. They could not be redeemed until they were in harmony with one another (*Tanchuma, Nitzavim* 1; *Yalkut Shimoni, Amos* 549). They would be aroused to repentance by the words of the tzaddik. Teshuvah is paramount, and therefore stated first. Their fasting would be a form of atonement for partaking of Achashveirosh’s banquet.

The sinner must make amends in the area in which he sinned, thereby reconnecting with Hashem. This is what Esther meant by her words (ibid.) “Thus I will come to the king.” With this merit, she would supplicate Hashem on behalf of her people.

From here we see the significance of fasting. Weakening the body is akin to bringing a sacrifice on the Altar (*Berachot* 17a). For, when a person suppresses his physical urges, the light of Hashem is able to shine within him. He is better able to accept *kedushah* from Hashem when he has shed the partition of physicality which usually separates him from his Master. Then, he is able to arouse his heart to come close to Him.

The *Yetzer Hara* is compared to stone (*Sukkah* 52a; *Zohar* II, 263a) and brings a person to despair, until he is like a wall dividing between him and Hashem. Through the power of teshuvah, one can literally smash this stone wall.

This process takes place only when a person humbles himself to Hashem’s will. He goes to Mordechai, symbol of the tzaddik of the generation, in order to hear his words of rebuke, and then to learn Torah from him. He becomes elevated, for he has already been positively influenced by the tzaddik, who is constantly connected to Hashem.

————— In Summary —————

- Let us explain the essence of Ta’anit Esther. Bnei Yisrael, in their bitter exile, despaired of ever being redeemed. They therefore allowed themselves to partake of the feast of Achashveirosh. There, they feasted their eyes on the utensils of the Beit Hamikdash and the clothing of the Kohen Gadol, which were displayed before them. This gave power to the forces of impurity.
- Then, Esther sent a message to Mordechai (4:5) “לדעת מה זה ועל מה זה – To learn what this was about and why.” She was telling him to overcome depression, strengthening the people with the word זה (this), alluding to the

statement Bnei Yisrael made in the Song of the Sea, “זה א-לי ואנוהו” – This is my G-d and I will beautify Him.” She was also referring to the *Asseret Hadibrot*, which were “engraved [on the *luchot*] on both sides – כתובים מזה וּמִזֶּה”. By doing teshuvah they reconnected to the image of Hashem within them.

- Mordechai responded that their troubles were due to Haman, the descendant of Amalek, who “cooled off” Bnei Yisrael. Esther then told him to gather all of the Jews, and they would listen to his words of rebuke. They would also fast as atonement for partaking of Achashveirosh’s feast, since fasting is akin to an offering, as it lessens one’s physicality and elevates his spirituality. When one humbles himself to the tzaddik, he elevates himself spiritually

THE TEN THOUSAND TALENTS OF SILVER

When Haman came to dress Mordechai in order to fulfill the king’s command to parade him around the city, he encountered some children coming from the Talmud Torah. Haman asked, “What are you studying?” They responded, “The parashah of the *omer*.” He then asked, “How big is the *omer*?” To which they answered, “It is a handful (קומץ) of a Minchah offering.” Then he told them, “Your tiny handful outweighed my ten thousand silver talents” (*Megillah* 16a). Haman already foresaw his downfall at the hands of the Jews. This was borne out by his subsequent action, escorting Mordechai through the city on the king’s horse, enrobed in the royal garments.

Let us try to understand what was happening. Why did Haman hinge his success upon the ten thousand silver coins, to the extent that he now realized that his downfall would also be connected to the coins that he had weighed out for the king? Why didn’t he tell Mordechai and the Jewish youngsters, “My decree failed. I cannot annihilate you.” Why did he specifically state that he had failed with the ten thousand coins?

Let us preface our explanation by examining a different subject. On the pasuk (*Shemot* 26:15), “You shall make the planks of the Mishkan,” the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 35:1) states that Hashem created many creations, which were subsequently hidden, since the world was not deserving of them. One of these items is the light that Hashem reserves for the tzaddikim in the World to Come.

The Midrash continues that gold is another item which the world does not deserve to use. But Hashem allowed it to be in this world, for His honor. He allowed man to use it for the glory of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash.

The cedar trees, too, were not deserved, but their existence was also maintained, to bring honor to the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash. This is stated in Tehillim (104:16), “The trees of Hashem are sated, the cedars of Levanon that He has planted.” The word *Levanon* is an allusion to the Beit Hamikdash.

The author of the sefer *Nachlat Eliezer* asks, “The Midrash lists three items which the world did not deserve: the light, gold, and the cedar trees. Yet why was only the light hidden, and not the gold and cedar trees? We know that the entire Creation was made for Hashem’s honor, as the Mishnah states (*Avot* 6), “All that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created in His world, He created solely for His glory.” Yet, the light *was* hidden. Why, then, were gold and cedar trees allowed to exist in this world?”

It seems that there were two reasons why the light was concealed. The first is so that reshamim would not abuse it, utilizing it for impure purposes. We find that in our days, with the little bit of light that we have, there are those who use it for impure purposes. The second reason is so that the righteous Jews will exert themselves to reveal this light and bring it forth.

How is this done? Through learning Torah. For, a mitzvah is like a lamp, and the Torah is light. Through exerting himself in Torah, one

merits to reveal the light concealed therein. Hashem hid this light purposely so that people should study Torah and uncover the light, for without it, the world would not exist.

Now we might understand why Hashem did not hide gold. Although it might have been hidden in order to prevent the wicked from using it unwisely, Hashem allowed it to be part of our world so that it should be used for the Mishkan. In this manner, it was used for a spiritual endeavor and not merely for physical purposes. Instead of people stating (*Devarim* 8:17), “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth,” they will come to the understanding that (*Chagai* 2:8), “Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold – the word of Hashem.” By elevating silver and gold, one ultimately elevates the hidden light which is reserved for the tzaddikim.

Moreover, by wanting to hide gold, Hashem is indicating to us that gold and silver are to be utilized only for the purpose of mitzvot, such as *tzedakah*, helping a fellow Jew, gifts for the poor, etc. These mitzvot bring a person to recognize the greatness of the Torah, and to understand that money is merely a means to an end.

This is what Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma told the person who invited him to live in his town, which was devoid of Torah scholars, “Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold... in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah. And so it is written (*Tehillim* 119:72), ‘I prefer the Torah of Your mouth above thousands in gold and silver.’”

We find many tzaddikim who would not retire for the night with money in their possession. They made sure to distribute it all for *tzedakah*. This was the case with the Maggid of Koznitz, as well as Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz. They simply could not sleep with money in their possession. It is told that Rabbi Chaim of Sanz would give away every last penny to the poor. These accounts demonstrate how these tzaddikim used money for sacred purposes, injecting it with

holiness. In this way, it attained the level of Torah, perfected and sanctified for mitzvot.

With this in mind, we may be able to understand the following. Chazal state (*Menachot* 29a; *Yerushalmi, Shekalim* 1:4) that Hashem showed Moshe a coin of fire, showing him the form of the half-*shekel*, which the nation was instructed to donate toward the Mishkan. Could it be that Moshe Rabbeinu did not know what this coin looked like? Additionally, why wasn't he shown a metal coin that they would actually donate? Why was he shown a coin of fire?

Moshe certainly knew what this coin looked like. What he could not fathom was how Bnei Yisrael could serve Hashem with a physical coin, by means of money. Hashem displayed a coin of fire. This was to hint to Moshe that Hashem desires that Bnei Yisrael should serve Him with fiery enthusiasm for *kedushah*. A fire of love for Hashem should burn in their hearts constantly. They should consider money as secondary, to be used solely for mitzvot, as the half-*shekel* coin donated for the Beit Hamikdash and *tzedakah*. In this manner, money is elevated to a spiritual level. The main objective of gold and silver is to reveal the hidden light by serving Hashem with it.

In light of this, we can understand the following. Before the Exodus, Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to tell Bnei Yisrael (*Shemot* 11:2), "Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels..." This seems to be difficult to understand. For, all this wealth remained with Bnei Yisrael, and nothing was returned to Egypt. Why, then, did Hashem tell them to **borrow** from the Egyptians, and not **take** from them?

Hashem wanted to impress upon the nation that gold and silver is not theirs at all. Money belongs to Hashem alone. If someone does have gold and silver, it is merely on loan to him, and it must take second place to one's Torah study. With this mindset, a person can attain the hidden light of Torah.

Bnei Yisrael got carried away with the booty at the *Yam Suf*, to the extent that Moshe Rabbeinu had to literally pull them away (*Tanchuma Yashan, Beshalach* 16). The glitter of all the wealth at the sea blinded them into thinking that it was an end in and of itself, and not the means to an end.

Then, Amalek came and attacked them in Refidim (ibid. 17:8). This was because they had slackened in Torah and placed undue emphasis on the physical, deeming it paramount. They did not reveal the light hidden in Torah, but were involved in mundane pursuits instead.

Furthermore, Amalek heard that Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt with great wealth. They came to claim their share, as Yitzchak promised to Eisav, their ancestor (*Bereishit* 27:40), “Yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.” They wanted a piece of the pie, and they knew they could get it. But Bnei Yisrael repented and did complete teshuvah. They overpowered Amalek, killing them by the sword, meriting revealing the hidden light.

According to this, we can understand the downfall of Haman, the descendant of Amalek. Bnei Yisrael partook of Achashveirosh’s feast and deserved to be destroyed (*Megillah* 12b). Aside from the sin of participating in the banquet, their sin included taking pleasure in the wealth of Achashveirosh. He displayed the vessels of the Beit Hamikdash, as well as the clothing of the Kohen Gadol, which were taken at the time of the *churban* (ibid.). It was wrong of the Jews to take part in his violation of these holy objects.

For this reason, it was possible for Haman Harasha to come before the king with ten thousand silver talents in order to convince him to allow the annihilation of the Jews. He was hinting that the money itself would bring about their destruction, for pursuit of money is one of the biggest hindrances to Avodat Hashem.

The ten thousand silver talents can be explained according to *remez*: The initials of the words עשרת אלפים ככר כסף (ten thousand silver

talents) have the *gematria* of קי"א (111). This is an allusion to the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 28:8), "For all tables are full of vomit (קי"א) and filth..." This is the table of Achashveirosh, from which Bnei Yisrael took pleasure.

Mordechai was aware of what was happening and wanted to save Bnei Yisrael from physical and spiritual annihilation. He tore his clothes in sorrow. Then he gathered the schoolchildren and learned the parashah concerning the *omer* offering with them. This was to teach them that money is to be used for the service of Hashem. It is for the purchase of *korbanot* and mitzvot. Money is merely a means to an end, and not an end in and of itself. With his handful of barley for the *omer* offering, he succeeded in outweighing the ten thousand silver coins of Haman Harasha.

The word עומר itself hints to this. The letters מ-ר are numerically equal to the word עמלק (Amalek), a reference to the victory of Bnei Yisrael over Haman, a descendant of Amalek. The letters ע-ו of the word עומר are the middle letters of the word מעות (coins). The word מעות, minus the two middle letters, spells מת. Through learning about the *omer* offering with the children, Mordechai nullified the power of Haman's bribe to the king, causing his death and the salvation of the Jewish nation.

In Summary

- When Haman came to dress Mordechai, he found him learning the parashah concerning the *omer* offering with the schoolchildren. He told them, "Your handful of barley outweighed my ten thousand silver coins." Why did Haman ascribe his downfall to money? His victory also would have come about by means of his money.
- The Midrash tells us that a special light is hidden for the future, but gold and cedar trees were not hidden from this world. Everything in the world was created for the honor of Hashem. Yet the light remained hidden, in order that it not be abused, and also so that tzaddikim should reveal it by their own

efforts, and thereby serve Hashem. But we find that gold and cedar trees, also possible conduits for sin, were allowed to be used in this world.

- The reason why gold is permitted in this world is in order that man should use it as a means of serving Hashem, for mitzvot such as *tzedakah*, etc. We find tzaddikim who could not sleep at night if money was in their possession. They gave every last cent to *tzedakah*. Gold was given to us to reveal the light of Torah. This is why Hashem showed Moshe a coin of fire, when demonstrating what the half-*shekel* coin looked like. Moshe could not understand how one could serve Hashem with a physical coin. Hashem showed him a coin of fire, thereby demonstrating to him that one should serve Hashem with the fiery enthusiasm of doing mitzvot with physical objects.
- Bnei Yisrael were blinded by the wealth of the Egyptians after the Splitting of the Sea. They placed emphasis on the material, maintaining that this has uppermost importance. They became lax in Torah, and then Amalek appeared to fight them. They heard that Bnei Yisrael emerged from Mitzrayim with great wealth, and they wanted to cause them to sin through lust for money, making it into the primary goal. Only after Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah, did they merit overpowering Amalek.
- Haman knew that Bnei Yisrael partook of the feast of Achashveirosh, and also enjoyed viewing his vast wealth, including the vessels of the Beit Hamikdash. He realized that they were placing priority on money. He immediately weighed ten thousand silver coins into the hands of the king in order to tip the scales in his favor and receive permission to destroy the Jews. But Mordechai knew about this and gathered the children to learn the parashah of the *omer* offering with them. He taught that money is to be used solely for Avodat Hashem, as a means, and never as an end unto itself. He thereby managed to overcome Haman.

MORDECHAI AND ESTHER – SYMBOLS OF EMUNAT CHACHAMIM

A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim, to the extent that he cannot differentiate between “Cursed be Haman” and “Blessed be Mordechai” (*Megillah* 7b).

This matter requires explanation. Chazal tell us (*Pesachim* 68b; *Beitzah* 15b) that half of every holiday should be devoted to Hashem, and half of it is for our own enjoyment. Why then, do we find that the entire day of Purim is devoted to us, as we are enjoined to become intoxicated and be joyous throughout the day?

Moreover, why did Chazal ordain that one should become inebriated? One who is in a drunken state may not pray and learn Torah or pass judgment in a Torah court (*Eiruvim* 64a).

We are faced with a further difficulty. On Purim, the Jews sinned by partaking of Achashveirosh’s feast, thus deserving destruction (*Megillah* 12b). This gave Haman the power to denounce them before the king. He was in control, for they had slackened in Torah, just as previously, when his ancestor Amalek attacked them in the Wilderness. Haman then came before the king, stating (*Esther* 3:8), “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces... their laws are different.” He was, in essence, saying that they had desisted from Torah study.

One of the conditions of the *berachot* that Yaakov received from Yitzchak was that as long as the voice of Yaakov is heard, the hands of Eisav have no power (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). Here, they slackened in Torah study, nearly giving Haman full authority. However, instead of instituting Purim as a day for constant Torah study, to rectify the sin

of the past, Chazal established it as a day for drinking and merriment. This is quite puzzling.

Chazal (*Makkot* 24a) discuss varying opinions regarding the most critical component upon which the world stands. Chavakuk Hanavi encapsulated all of the views into one sentence (*Chavakuk* 2:4), “The righteous person shall live through his faith.”

Chazal (*Yerushalmi, Horiyot* 1:1) enjoin us to heed the words of our Sages, even if they tell us that right is left and left is right. Also, we are taught (*Pesachim* 108a; *Shemot Rabbah* 3:17) that fear of a teacher should be as great as our fear of Heaven. This means that it is most important to obey the voice of the *Chachamim* and believe in them in every situation.

Bnei Yisrael did not listen to Mordechai, who forbade them from attending Achashveirosh’s banquet. Earlier, Bnei Yisrael were taken into exile in Bavel because they failed to pay heed to the words of the prophet Yirmeyahu. They had even killed the prophet Zechariah in the Beit Hamikdash. They threw Yirmeyahu into a pit, because they refused to listen to his words of gloom, preferring the rosy predictions of the false prophets.

The way to correct this fault is by obeying the words of the *Chachamim*, even if we do not understand their reasoning. This is the message of Purim. Therefore, even though we may not comprehend why the Sages instituted the mitzvah to become intoxicated on Purim, we must still obey them and do as they instruct.

We are instructed not to waver from the words of our Sages even if they state that right is left and left is right. This is similar to the instruction of becoming intoxicated to the point of being unable to differentiate between “cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai.” Mordechai is a symbol of the right, and Haman is of the left, as the *Yetzer Hara* is said to stand on the left of a person.

This quality of trust in the words of our Sages was manifest in Esther Hamalkah. Although it entailed tremendous self-sacrifice, Esther heeded Mordechai's order to go before the king and supplicate on behalf of Am Yisrael.

Why was the act of coming before Achashveirosh deemed dangerous? There are two reasons for this. First, whoever came before the king without prior invitation was subject to death (*Esther* 4:11). We find that Vashti angered Achashveirosh and earned an early death. Second, Esther did not reveal her nationality (*ibid.* 2:10), and this could have triggered Achashveirosh's wrath, to the point of putting her to death.

Indeed, we find (*Megillah* 15b; *Midrash Shochar Tov* 22:2) that when Esther came before the king, he ordered to have her killed, until she prayed (*Tehillim* 22:2), "My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?" An angel immediately came and bestowed her with especial charm, and she found favor in the king's eyes.

We see that Esther did all that Mordechai instructed her, putting herself at great risk. The *Megillah* attests to this (*Esther* 2:20), "Esther continued to obey Mordechai, just as when she was reared by him." Even though she was the queen, and not obligated to heed his words, she did so nonetheless. Esther wanted Bnei Yisrael to take a lesson from her. Just as she obeyed Mordechai, even though she was not required to do so, all the more so, should they hearken to his word.

In the end, Mordechai and Esther rectified everything. The Sanhedrin agreed with their rulings of reading the *Megillah*, giving *mishlo'ach manot* and *matanot la'evyonim*, reading the portion regarding the half-*shekel*, and feasting and joy.

This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Esther* 9:27), "The Jews confirmed and undertook." A revolution took place. Whereas beforehand they had disobeyed the word of Mordechai, now they did

teshuvah and heeded his every word, even what they did not understand. This is the concept of *emunat Chachamim* – to obey the words of our *Chachamim* in every situation.

If one becomes inebriated on Purim, as our *Chachamim* instituted, the day becomes for him like Yom Kippur, and he receives atonement. This is astounding! A person's sins are forgiven merely by means of him drinking, even without learning Torah.

I witnessed an incident that drives home the concept of believing in our Sages, even if they tell us that right is left and left is right. A woman, in her sixth month of pregnancy, returned from a doctor's visit and asked me for a *berachah*, after being assured by her doctor that all was fine. I suddenly instructed her to go to the hospital and undergo further tests. The woman laughed, "My doctor already told me that everything is alright; what's the point of going to the hospital?" She asked if she should go back to the doctor's office. I stood my ground, telling her not to return to the doctor, but to go to the hospital for further testing. Then I kept quiet, in order that she should realize the severity of the matter.

The woman listened to me and travelled to the hospital for further testing. At once, the top physicians were summoned to her bed, and she underwent emergency surgery, because she and her unborn child were in mortal danger. The doctors induced her and, *Baruch Hashem*, delivered the baby, whole and healthy. He was kept in the hospital for approximately three months, until he was a full nine months. I was the *sandek* at his *brit*.

From here we see the tremendous power of faith in the words of the *Chachamim*. I had no intention of saying what I did, but the words emerged from my mouth like a prophecy. In their merit, both the lives of the mother and her child were saved.

From this incident, we learn that only the Sages know what the true right is and what the true left is. For, at times, the left switches to the

right in order to save the life of a Jew. One who transgresses the words of the *Chachamim* deserves death. The *Chachamim* are guided by Hashem to know when to say that right is right, and when to say that right is left. They receive special *siyata di'Shemaya*, in order to be able to help Klal Yisrael.

————— In Summary —————

- Chazal enjoin us to become inebriated on Purim. This seems a most strange instruction, for one is forbidden from praying, learning Torah, or judging in a drunken state. Haman found the opportunity to defame us when we were lax in Torah study. Instead of establishing Purim as a day for Torah study, it was established as a day for drunkenness. How can we understand this?
- Bnei Yisrael live by the credo of *emunat Chachamim*. We obey the advice of our Torah Sages, even when we do not understand it. We rectify the sin of the past by drinking and becoming inebriated, even if it is difficult for us to comprehend the reasoning behind it. In this manner, we show faith in the words of our *Chachamim* and do as they command. Esther displayed a great measure of *emunat Chachamim* by obeying Mordechai and appearing before the king, even at great peril to her life. From her, Bnei Yisrael took a lesson to listen to the words of the wise. In this merit, they corrected their aveirah of partaking in the feast of Achashveirosh, against the directives of Mordechai.
- This is how Purim, even with its drinking and feasting, is likened to Yom Kippur, and all sins are forgiven on it. It is in the merit of faith in the *Chachamim*, who are the only ones who truly know right from left. We must obey them, even without understanding their reasoning, for they are told what to say by Hashem, and are guided by Him to lead Bnei Yisrael.

THE REMOVAL OF THE RING

“And it came to pass in the days of Achashveirosh”

(Esther 1:1)

Achashveirosh was an oppressive despot. His wickedness did not fall short of Haman’s. Chazal tell us (*Megillah* 11a) that Achashveirosh’s name alludes to his evilness. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha says that the name אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ contains the word שְׁחוֹר (black). Achashveirosh blackened the faces of Bnei Yisrael like the bottom of a pot. This is a reference to the terrible torment in which he placed them. Rabbi Berachiah notes that his name is similar to the word הַכְחִישׁ (deny). This refers to the great hunger the Jews endured under his rule, due to lack of food. Rabbi Levi says he gave them bitter grasses to eat.

Rabbi Tachlifa says that the name אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ is an acronym for the term אַחִיו שֶׁל רֹאשׁ (brother of the head or important one). This indicates that he was a comrade to Nevuchadnezzar in wickedness. Our Sages further expound that merely by recalling his name, one’s head (רֹאשׁ) ached. The words “he is *the* Achashveirosh” teach us that he remained evil from beginning to end. Achashveirosh was in agreement with Haman regarding the annihilation of Am Yisrael, as Rashi comments (*Megillah* 14a), “One should know that Achashveirosh also planned to eradicate them.”

I was asked by students of the yeshiva why, then, was the decree only to destroy Haman? Why was only he punished by Hashem by being hanged from the gallows with his ten sons? Why don’t we find Achashveirosh receiving a punishment fitting his crime?

The yeshiva students suggested the following explanation. The pasuk in Mishlei (14:34) states, “Charity will uplift a nation, but the kindness of regimes is a sin.” The Gemara relates (*Bava Batra* 10b) in

the name of Rabbi Nechuniah, “Just as the sin-offering atones for Am Yisrael, so does charity atone for the gentiles.” A majority of the *Chachamim* did not accept his interpretation, preferring to say that the pasuk means that charity of a non-Jew is considered iniquitous, for it is offered only for self-aggrandizement. Nonetheless, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said that he concurred with Rabbi Nechuniah. The charity of the nations atones for their sins. Achashveirosh’s lavish banquet provided meals for the needy. This good deed spared him retribution.

Achashveirosh certainly did not intend to give charity by holding his banquets. Nevertheless, it was considered a good deed, for the mitzvah of *tzedakah* does not require intent. Examples of this are the mitzvot of *leket* and *shikchah*, about which the pasuk says (*Devarim* 24:19), “So that Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your handiwork.” Rashi explains, in the name of the Sifri, that even though this mitzvah was performed without intent, because he forgot his produce in the field, yet he is blessed for it, how much more so will one who acts intentionally in giving to the poor be blessed. Rashi continues, saying that this verse teaches that if a coin fell from one’s hand and a poor person found it and supported himself with it, the one from whom it fell is blessed because of it. Thus, although Achashveirosh certainly did not intend to provide sustenance for the poor, this mitzvah protected him from punishment.

Let us explore this idea further. Chazal tell us (*Megillah* 12b), “For what reason did Am Yisrael deserve destruction in that generation? Because they partook of the feast of that rasha.” At the feast, Achashveirosh appeared to be a most magnanimous ruler, thoughtful and considerate. But Chazal enlighten us to his true colors. His seemingly good deeds were rooted in rancid sources. He had only wicked, personal motives. Therefore, the pasuk specifies, “he is *the* Achashveirosh.” He remained wicked throughout. Just as he tormented the Jews at the end, so was his beginning full of evil intent.

What was Achashveirosh's true intention in holding the banquet? He knew that the day of Bnei Yisrael's redemption would arrive, and he would go under. Therefore, he decided to cause Bnei Yisrael to sin at his feast. This would prevent their salvation. He understood that Hashem hates immorality. Therefore, he ensured that the banquet would be spiced up with immoral and illicit opportunities, in order to arouse their *Yetzer Hara* and cause them to sin in the most abominable transgressions of the Torah.

Mordechai knew very well what Achashveirosh intended. He knew Achashveirosh wanted to induce the *Middat Hadin* to prosecute his people. He therefore stood at the breach and publicly forbade the nation from attending. But they paid him no heed. Rabbi Yishmael says that 18,500 Jews went to the palace. They ate and drank and made merry, transgressing serious sins.

How can such twisted motives be included in the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, protecting him from punishment? The feast was full of atrocity and abomination. Its entire objective was to uproot the Torah from our people, and it almost accomplished this goal. The question remains: Why wasn't Achashveirosh punished as Haman was?

Perhaps we can explain with the following thought. Achashveirosh was the catalyst for Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah. Through him, they came closer to their Heavenly Father. This was the *zechut* that protected him from punishment. The pasuk states (*Esther* 3:10), "The king removed his signet ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman." Rabbi Abba bar Kahana says (*Megillah* 14a), "Greater was the removal of the ring than forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied to Bnei Yisrael." All these many prophets were unable to bring the nation to do teshuvah, whereas the removal of the ring was capable of this. In the wake of Achashveirosh's acquiescence with Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews, they fasted and prayed and wore sackcloth, supplicating their Father to accept their teshuvah and save

them. They even merited accepting the Torah anew, this time out of love, as the pasuk states (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves.” Chazal expound (*Shabbat* 88a), “They confirmed what they had already undertaken.” Previously, they had accepted the Torah out of compulsion, now they accepted it from their own free will. These merits redounded to Achashveirosh’s credit, and therefore protected him.

Haman Harasha also had a hand in bringing Bnei Yisrael closer to their Heavenly Father in teshuvah. But don’t forget that Haman descended from Amalek, whose entire essence is rooted in deep hatred toward Am Yisrael and the holy Torah. He was the one who initiated the diabolical plot to annihilate the Jewish nation. Therefore, Hashem repaid him measure for measure, having him hanged on the gallows he himself had built.

We might add that Achashveirosh did, indeed, receive retribution. It was in the form of severe anguish, harsher than death. Although he continued living, he witnessed the tremendous salvation of the Jewish nation. He may well have preferred death over this life. At the end of the Megillah, Am Yisrael had the upper hand. They evoked fear in the hearts of the gentiles, as the pasuk attests (*Esther* 8:17), “Many from among the people of the land professed themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.” Am Yisrael gained honor and respect in the eyes of the gentiles. Mordechai stood at their head, elevated in their eyes, as the pasuk says (*ibid.* 9:3), “All the officials... exalted the Jews, for the fear of Mordechai had fallen upon them. For Mordechai was now pre-eminent in the royal palace, and his fame was spreading throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordechai grew increasingly greater.” When Achashveirosh observed the prestige of the Jews, as he himself was left forsaken and forgotten, without regard or reputation, he was certainly filled with untold anguish. This was sufficient punishment, a miserable living death.

May it be Hashem's will that just as He performed miracles for our forefathers, so will He do for us, and rescue us speedily with the final redemption, Amen.

————— In Summary —————

- Why was only Haman punished for his evil plot against Bnei Yisrael? We know that Achashveirosh was in agreement with him and was just as evil as he was.
- One explanation is that Achashveirosh provided the Jews with free food at his banquets, even though he held them without any charitable intentions whatsoever.
- Conversely, his real motives were to entice Bnei Yisrael to sin, since the banquets provided many opportunities to transgress the Torah.
- Another explanation is that he was the catalyst for the teshuvah of Bnei Yisrael. When he removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman, he caused the nation to turn to their Father in Heaven and correct their deeds.
- Haman was punished, even though he also had a hand in bringing Bnei Yisrael back to Hashem in teshuvah, since he was a descendant of Amalek, who must be wiped out.
- Achashveirosh received a punishment worse than death when he witnessed the eminence of the Jews and their leader, Mordechai.

CLEAVING TO THE SHECHINAH THROUGH CLEAVING TO TORAH

*“There was a Yehudi man in Shushan the capital
whose name was Mordechai, son of Yair, son of
Shimmi, son of Kish, a Yemini”*

(Esther 2:5)

The Gemara makes a startling distinction. The word *Yehudi* implies that Mordechai was from the tribe of Yehudah, whereas the word *Yemini* denotes that he descended from Binyamin. Which was it? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains that Mordechai’s father was from the tribe of Binyamin, while his mother came from Yehudah. The Gemara continues describing his name. *Son of Yair* (יאיר) indicates that האיר ישראל (he enlightened Yisrael). *Son of Shimmi* (שמעי) means that Hashem heard (שמע) his prayers. *Son of Kish* (קיש) means that he knocked (הקיש) on the gates of mercy, and they were opened before him.

I would like to explain this pasuk homiletically, for there are seventy ways of explaining the Torah. Chazal say (*Ketubot* 110b) that whoever lives in the Diaspora is considered as if he lives without Hashem. Obviously, his Judaism is in constant peril, for he can easily learn from his neighbors and walk in their evil ways, *chalilah*. Living in a gentile country poses a physical threat to him, as well, for without Hashem’s Presence to protect him, he is vulnerable to the dangers of the world.

How, indeed, do people living in *chutz la’aretz* expect to preserve their Judaism and remain close to Hashem? It is only by means of Torah study. Whoever toils in Torah merits closeness with Hashem and His *Shechinah*. Torah is comprised of Hashem’s Names. By cleaving to Torah one merits that (*Bamidbar* 23:21) “Hashem, his G-d, is with

him.” Hashem’s *Shechinah* is with him even in *galut*, protecting him from all harm.

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, when Am Yisrael were in a foreign land, they abandoned the ways of the Torah. Slowly but surely, they assimilated with the gentiles and learned their wayward ways. It should come as no surprise that they agreed to attend Achashveirosh’s banquet, eating together with gentiles. More than 18,500 Jews participated in this party, whose entire purpose was dissoluteness and debauchery. They violated Mordechai’s ruling that no Jew may attend. They came to the banquet and partook of forbidden food and wines, *rachmana litzlan*.

Bnei Yisrael distanced themselves from Hashem and His Torah, and therefore were in the category of “whoever lives in the Diaspora is considered to live without Hashem.” Hashem left them to their own devices. But as soon as His supervision was removed, misfortune came upon them in the form of Haman Harasha, who wished to categorically annihilate all of the Jews, young and old, children and women alike, in one day. Without the *Shechinah*’s protection, they were left vulnerable. When Am Yisrael perceived the calamity that had befallen them, they realized their only option was to arouse their hearts to their Heavenly Father. They understood that their previous ways had been destructively wrong. They returned to Hashem wholeheartedly. Hashem, for His part, returned His Divine protection to them. The *Shechinah* sheltered them from Haman and his evil machinations.

There is one way to protect oneself from the perils of living in the Diaspora. That is by learning Torah. One who cleaves to the Torah is considered as cleaving to the *Shechinah*. Hashem is close to him, protecting him from all harm.

Let us now explain the pasuk describing Mordechai’s lineage. Whoever wishes to be called a Yehudi, even in a foreign land, must be a Yemini. He must cling to the Torah, which is called the right side

(*yamin*). The Gemara (*Berachot* 6a) states that the pasuk in Yeshayahu, “Hashem has sworn by His right hand” refers to Torah, as the pasuk in Devarim says, “From His right hand, He presented the fiery Torah to them.” One who “holds Hashem’s hand,” setting aside fixed times for Torah study on a daily basis, trying his best to observe the mitzvot with all their details, even when he is among the gentiles and beset with *nisyonot*, is guaranteed that Hashem’s *Shechinah* will rest upon him. He will be granted *siyata di’Shemaya* in all he does. This man certainly is not considered to be without a G-d. His involvement in Torah draws down the *Shechinah*, protecting him from physical and spiritual damage alike.

One who cleaves to Hashem even in foreign lands will become a *son of Yair*. Hashem will enlighten his eyes in Torah wisdom. He will be the *son of Shimmi*, for Hashem will hearken to his prayers and grant his requests. And he will be the *son of Kish*, for when he raps at the gates of Heaven, they will open before him. This is all in the merit of his being a Yemini. He holds fast to the Torah, called *yamin* (right), and he is protected by it.

We can learn from Esther that one who goes in Hashem’s ways and obeys the Torah is guaranteed Hashem’s protection. No mishap will occur through him. Vashti was demoted from her position because she disobeyed the king’s order to come to the feast. He became angry at her, and had her put to death. Esther was chosen in her place. But Esther also disobeyed the king’s word. When he repeatedly asked her the name of her nation, she adamantly refused to reveal it, for Mordechai had instructed her to remain silent. The pasuk says (*Esther* 2:10), “Esther still told nothing of her kindred or her people, as Mordechai had instructed her.” Achashveirosh should have gotten angry with her, for that was his reaction to recalcitrant wives. But we are taught (*Mishlei*), “When Hashem favors a man’s ways, even his foes will make peace with him.” Not only did Achashveirosh not become angered by Esther’s actions, but he loved her intensely, as the pasuk

states (*Esther* 2:17), “The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found more favor and kindness before him than all the other maidens; so that he set the royal crown upon her head.” Whoever follows the path of Torah will never lose out and will never be harmed.

In truth, Esther could have questioned Mordechai’s reasoning. She knew that she would probably be considered a rebel for not revealing her nationality. Had she incurred the king’s wrath, all would have been lost! But Esther also knew that she was not allowed to question Mordechai’s ruling, or doubt its credibility. She resolved to accept his decisions, come what may. This is in line with the pasuk that states (*Devarim* 17:11), “You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.” Chazal expound (*Yerushalmi, Horiyot* 1:1), “Even if they will tell you that right is left and left is right, you must obey.” Esther was certain that no misfortune would befall her when she obeyed the voice of Mordechai, who spoke according to the Torah. This is confirmed by the words of the Megillah (*Esther* 2:20): “Esther continued to obey Mordechai.”

Chazal further tell us (*Megillah* 12a) that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s disciples asked him why Bnei Yisrael deserved the decree of extermination in the times of Mordechai. He asked them to think of the reason. They said it was because the Jews partook of Achashveirosh’s feast. This always puzzled me. Where do we find that the punishment for partaking of forbidden foods is punishable by death? It is only one of the negative commandments of the Torah, warranting lashes if transgressed, not death.

I thought that maybe the point of their iniquity was not that they ate forbidden foods, but the *chillul Hashem* that resulted from their actions. Chazal tell us (*Megillah* 12a) that Achashveirosh used the forum of this feast to display the holy utensils of the Beit Hamikdash. He even had the audacity to don the clothing of the Kohen Gadol! The gentile attendees probably looked scornfully at their Jewish

compatriots. They must have been shocked to see how the Jews could attend a gathering, where all they held sacred was openly defiled, with not a word of protest. What a desecration of Hashem's Name!

Rabbeinu Yonah, in his sefer *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (4:4), writes, "There is one sin which the soul cannot atone for. Only upon death, when the soul leaves the body, can the soul be cleansed of this offense. It is the sin of *chillul Hashem*. Yeshayahu Hanavi states (22:14), "This sin will never be atoned for until you die." Since Bnei Yisrael were involved in *chillul Hashem* by attending the banquet, they deserved death, *rachmana litzlan*.

But just as soon as Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah and accepted the Torah upon themselves willingly and with love, their sin of *chillul Hashem* was forgiven. They were considered to have died and been resurrected. Up until now, they were reshaim, considered dead. After doing teshuvah, they were considered tzaddikim, alive. They were as if born anew.

Another perspective on their sin and subsequent atonement is the following. There is another way to atone for a *chillul Hashem* aside from death. As atonement for causing desecration to Hashem's Name, one should attempt to sanctify Hashem's Name in the world from now on. This will bring him a measure of forgiveness. Rabbeinu Yonah continues (ibid. 4:5), "Even for this iniquity, which has no remedy as other sins do, one can find a cure by causing a *kiddush Hashem* in the world. By making Hashem's Name glorious among others, one can earn atonement. By transforming his deeds to positive ones, he can make amends for his wrongdoings."

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, the nation merited sanctifying Hashem's Name through the wonders and miracles that Hashem performed for them. Hashem rescued them from their enemies' hands, and His Name was exalted by means of the miracles He wrought for our nation. Bnei Yisrael's esteem, likewise, rose in the eyes of the gentiles. In the wake of Bnei Yisrael's triumph over their enemies, many gentiles

wished to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*. The pasuk states (*Esther* 8:17), “Many from among the people of the land professed themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.” Am Yisrael succeeded in bringing glory to Hashem’s Name, thereby atoning for the terrible *chillul Hashem* of partaking of Achashveirosh’s feast.

In Adar II 5771, I visited the Jewish communities of China in order to bring them inspiration. I met the Rav and Gaon, Rabbi Yonah Metzger, shlita, the Chief Rabbi of Israel. In one of his public addresses, he asked the following question. Why is Purim celebrated in Yerushalayim on the 15th of Adar, in contrast to everywhere else, where it is observed on the 14th?

To strengthen the question, Haman’s entire charge against our nation was that Am Yisrael were dispersed among the nations, lacking unity. Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate to fix Purim on the same date for everyone, to atone for this lack of unity?

I thought of the following resolution. Each of our festivals originally took place in Yerushalayim. Many of the mitzvot of Pesach, Sukkot, and Shavuot were done in the Beit Hamikdash. Examples are the *korbanot*, the *nisuch hamayim* on Sukkot, and *bikurim* on Shavuot. On Chanukah, as well, the Beit Hamikdash played a central role, since the miracle of the flask of pure olive oil took place there. In contrast, Purim is the only holiday that occurred outside Eretz Yisrael. Rav Amram Gaon states that this is the reason why we do not recite Hallel on Purim. However, just as Yerushalayim had a special distinction over all other cities concerning the festivals, so too, Chazal wanted to distinguish Yerushalayim regarding the miracle of Purim. Therefore, they designated the 15th of Adar, rather than the 14th, as the day to celebrate Purim there. This would grant distinction to Yerushalayim, demonstrating how significant it was in the eyes of the *Chachamim*.

In the future, the miracle of Purim will continue to be remembered in Megillat Esther, even though the rest of the *sifrei nevi'im* will be

annulled. Similarly, all the *korbanot* will be nullified, apart from the *korban todah*, offered to express one's gratitude to Hashem.

We feel tremendous gratitude to Hashem for the fact that He smote Haman and his sons, preventing them from executing their cruel plot to destroy our people. Surely, as the nation brings the *korban todah* in Yerushalayim, there should be a distinct connection between the holy city and Purim, whose mitzvah is joyful celebration in gratitude for Hashem's salvation. This is another reason why our Sages established a separate day for celebrating Purim in Yerushalayim.

May it be Hashem's will that just as He performed miracles for our forefathers, so will He do for us, bringing the final redemption, speedily in our day, Amen.

————— In Summary —————

- Mordechai was called a *Yehudi* as well as a *Yemini*. Chazal say (*Ketubot* 110b) that whoever lives in the Diaspora is considered lacking a G-d. They are threatened both spiritually and physically. In the days of Mordechai and Esther, Bnei Yisrael assimilated with the gentiles and distanced themselves from Hashem and His Torah.
- Whoever wishes to be called a *Yehudi*, even in a foreign land, must be a *Yemini*. He must cling to the Torah, which is called the right side (*yamin*). He will then merit Hashem's protection.
- He will also become a *son of Yair*. Hashem will enlighten his eyes in Torah wisdom. He will be the *son of Shimmi*, for Hashem will hearken to his prayers and grant his requests. And he will be the *son of Kish*, for when he raps at the gates of Heaven, they will open before him.
- Esther obeyed Mordechai's directives, placing her life in danger by not revealing her nationality to Achashveirosh. She steadfastly clung to the directives of this Torah Sage.
- Bnei Yisrael deserved the decree of extermination because they went to the feast of Achashveirosh. Although the punishment for partaking of forbidden

foods warrants only lashes, they deserved to die to atone for the *chillul Hashem* that they made by attending the feast. When they did teshuvah, they merited the many miracles of the Purim story, which brought glory to Hashem's Name, atoning for the *chillul Hashem* that they had previously made.

- In Yerushalayim, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar instead of the 14th, in contrast to everywhere else. This is puzzling. Haman denounced the Jews for being disunified. It seems that it would be more appropriate for all Jews to keep Purim on the same day. Each of the festivals is intrinsically connected to Yerushalayim. Likewise, Chazal wanted to distinguish the festival of Purim by enacting that it should be celebrated there on a separate day.

BNEI YISRAEL VS. HAMAN HARASHA — KEDUSHAH VS. TUMAH

Rabbi Yisrael Malul, Rosh Metivta of Yeshivat Pinto in Manchester, asked me the following. First, is there any connection between the manna (מַן), which Bnei Yisrael ate in the Wilderness for forty years (*Shemot* 16:35) and Haman Harasha (חַמָּן)? Also, why did Pharaoh regret sending the Jews out of Egypt, as the pasuk (*ibid* 14:5) states, “What is this that we have done that we have sent away Israel from serving us?” It seems that Pharaoh sent the Jews out of Egypt willingly, after all of the plagues. Is there a connection between these two forces of evil, Pharaoh and Amalek?

I would like to suggest the following explanation. Amalek's attack came on the heels of our nation casting doubt upon the word of Hashem regarding the manna. The pesukim (*ibid.* 16:26-27) state, “Six days shall you gather it, but the seventh day is a Shabbat, on it there will be none. It happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find.” There were those who specifically went out to collect the manna on the Shabbat, causing a

great *chillul Hashem* by their lack of faith in His word. They succeeded in injecting doubt into the hearts of the nation.

Bnei Yisrael transgressed the command of Hashem forbidding them from gathering the manna on Shabbat. They had already received a double portion of manna on Erev Shabbat, and on Shabbat none fell, as had been predicted. Their punishment was measure for measure. Just as they had doubted the word of Hashem, they were attacked by the nation that denies the word of Hashem.

Moreover, they doubted Hashem's omnipotence. They said (*Shemot* 17:7), "Is Hashem among us or not?" Chazal expound (*Tanchuma, Yitro* 3) that they said, "'If He knows our thoughts, we will serve Him; if not, we won't.' Then the dog (an appellation for Amalek) came and bit them."

They brought retribution upon themselves, in the form of Amalek, who blasphemed the Name of Hashem (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:5, *Pesikta Rabbah* 7:3; *Zohar* II, 65b). Amalek was the initiator of such actions, as the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 24:20) attests, "Amalek is the first among nations." Their influence is felt throughout the generations.

Amalek's attack on Bnei Yisrael is compared to a person jumping into a boiling bath (*Tanchuma, Yitro* 3). The water is now that bit cooler, inviting others to jump in also. Likewise, Amalek's presumptuous attack on the Jewish people lowered their status in the eyes of the nation, inviting their attack.

The juxtaposition of Amalek's arrival with the gathering of the manna on Shabbat points to another reason for their arrival. Rabbi Yehudah states (*Shabbat* 118b), "If Bnei Yisrael would have kept the first Shabbat, no nation would have been able to gain a foothold over them." He learns this from the proximity of the pesukim (*Shemot* 16:27, 17:8), "It happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather... Amalek came."

From the time that doubt of the word of Hashem entered our nation's consciousness, it was decreed that whenever Bnei Yisrael would be lax in *emunah*, a descendant of Amalek would appear to bring them back to the right track.

This is exactly what took place in the days of Achashveirosh. Bnei Yisrael partook of his feast, despite Mordechai's warnings to refrain from attending. At that time, destruction was decreed upon them, *rachmana litzlan* (*Megillah* 12a). But the people did not heed Mordechai's advice and attended the banquet. In fact, Haman had advised Achashveirosh to prepare a banquet for the Jews with the express purpose to entice the nation to sin, thereby having a claim against them before Hashem, for Hashem detests immorality (*Esther Rabbah* 7:18).

Mordechai begged his people not to attend the banquet, but they paid him no heed. They went to the feast, for Haman had already injected them with doubts as to the veracity of Mordechai's advice.

This flaw in *emunah* is the connection between the manna (המֶן) in the desert and Haman in the Purim story. Bnei Yisrael wavered in their faith that the manna would not fall on Shabbat, to the extent that they went out on Shabbat to collect it. Then Amalek attacked. Similarly, Bnei Yisrael displayed a lack of *emunah* by not heeding the words of Mordechai, the greatest of the tzaddikim of his time (*Esther Rabbah* 6:7) and a member of the Sanhedrin (*Megillah* 13b). They attended and transgressed sins, causing a breakdown in the general level of *emunah*. Their actions brought Haman, of the tribe of Amalek, to attack them.

This sheds light on the actions of Pharaoh Harasha. At first, he literally chased the Jews out of his country, but later, he had a change of heart. Why? At the Exodus from Egypt, he did not imagine that Bnei Yisrael had subdued the *kelippah*. However, when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, "they emptied Egypt" (*Shemot* 12:36). The word וינצלו (they emptied) is similar to the word מצולה – deep waters, which are empty

of fish. Bnei Yisrael completely wiped out Egypt. This means that they totally subdued the *kelippah*. The Egyptians felt that their deity had no more power.

Pharaoh understood that this had occurred because Bnei Yisrael had left his land. Until now, the *kelippah* had gained sustenance from Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. After their departure, all the negative forces of Egypt were weakened. They were all transformed to the force of *kedushah*. His words (*Shemot* 14:5), “מה זאת עשינו” – What is this that we have done?” allude to the *Shechinah*, as well as to the Torah (*Menachot* 53b), which are both called *זאת* (*Zohar* III, 56 and 62). The Egyptians were bemoaning their fate, “How is it that we allowed the *Shechinah* and the Torah to triumph over the *kelippah*? We are left powerless. We must pursue Bnei Yisrael, with our Angel at our side. Then, Bnei Yisrael will be afraid, and we will manage to inject doubts in *emunah* into their hearts. They will fear that maybe only in Egypt, Hashem has the power to protect them, but not in the barren, uncivilized Wilderness. In this manner, we will be able to regain our negative powers.”

Although Bnei Yisrael had reservations regarding their journey in the Wilderness (see *Shemot* 14:1), they did not despair. They were certainly terrified of the mighty Egyptian army, but this did not diminish their level of faith in Hashem. On the contrary, they turned to Him in tefillah and redoubled their *emunah*, as it says (*Shemot* 14:31), “And they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.”

Every Jew is commanded, all the days of his life, to remember the day he left Egypt (*Devarim* 16:3), as well as what Amalek did to us after we left. They are really one and the same. Both Pharaoh and Amalek desired to inject doubts in Bnei Yisrael’s *emunah*, in order to overpower them and cool them off. However, where Pharaoh failed miserably, for Yisrael were strong in their faith and entered the sea with trusting hearts, Amalek succeeded somewhat, for Bnei Yisrael were weakened in Torah. But, in the end, Bnei Yisrael triumphed over them, as well.

At the Exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael were strong in *emunah*, as they demonstrated by entering the sea without hesitation. However, their *emunah* was subsequently weakened by the people going to collect manna on Shabbat. The manna was a gift from Heaven, in order to help Bnei Yisrael, the Generation of Wisdom, learn Torah without any worry regarding their sustenance. However, by going out on Shabbat to collect it, they demonstrated their lack of trust in Hashem's word, and even questioned "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" At that point, Amalek attacked. Bnei Yisrael brought this attack upon themselves through the lack of *emunah* that they expressed. Even though they ultimately overcame Amalek, the rest of the world had already been cooled off in their belief in Hashem.

See how wily is the *Yetzer Hara* in his evil designs to introduce uncertainty in the minds of the Jewish people. I once witnessed a man who came to our yeshivah to use the *mikveh*, one Erev Shabbat, bareheaded. When I asked where his *kippah* was, he innocently answered that he'd left it at home...

Every person has a *Yetzer Hara* as well as a *Yetzer Hatov*. The *Yetzer Hatov* tries to bring a person to the proper path, even though he may slip at times. He tries to convince a person to do another mitzvah and to do teshuvah. But if someone sins purposely, the *kelippah* gains nourishment from the sin.

We also see that specifically at the time that a person truly desires to do teshuvah, even going to the *mikveh* to immerse, the *Yetzer Hara* arrives on the scene, to trip him up. If he does not manage to sway his resolve in serving Hashem, at least he convinces him to forget his *kippah*. This is in order that the person should not do a complete teshuvah, bringing his level to the opposite extreme of where he was before. A person constantly finds himself in the middle, standing between the *Yetzer Hatov* and the *Yetzer Hara*. He is enjoined to choose the correct path, as the pasuk (*Devarim* 30:19) states, "You shall

choose life.” The *Yetzer Hara* is also doing the will of Hashem. One may become confused as to which path to pursue (see *Eiruvin* 13b). The *Yetzer Hara* is referred to as “very good” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 9:8). What is he to do?

He should strengthen himself in total belief in Hashem. He should battle with the *Yetzer Hara*, whose sole purpose is to trip him up and destroy him. Hashem will surely come to his aid, when He sees that he seriously wishes to act correctly. In the future, Hashem will slaughter the *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52a; *Zohar* I, 190b), and everyone will be able to elevate himself in *emunah* and Avodat Hashem.

(Concerning the man who came to the *mikveh* without his *kippah* on Erev Shabbat, since he did not intend to do anything wrong, but innocently believed that there was nothing wrong with not wearing a *kippah*, his immersion was surely accepted by Hashem. However, he did not fulfill the mitzvah in the best way possible. He would have been able to feel the *kedushah* of Shabbat better if he had worn a *kippah*.)

————— In Summary —————

- We can explain the connection between the manna (מַן) which Bnei Yisrael ate in the Wilderness and Haman Harasha (חַמָּן הָרָשָׁא) in the following way. Bnei Yisrael doubted Hashem’s word that the manna would not fall on Shabbat, and therefore, some of them went out to gather it on Shabbat. Immediately afterwards, Amalek attacked. Similarly, in the time of Haman Harasha, Bnei Yisrael had questions in their *emunah*, because they partook of the feast of Achashveirosh, in spite of Mordechai’s warnings. This gave rise to Haman, a descendant of Amalek, who desired to annihilate them. When Bnei Yisrael are lax in their faith, the nations of the world overpower them.
- Pharaoh sent Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. But, afterward, he regretted this action, for he discovered that the power of the *kelippah* had become weakened. Then he understood that as long as Bnei Yisrael had been in Egypt, the negative forces had been nourished by them. Now that they had

left, only *kedushah* reigned, and the *kelippah* was ousted. He chased Bnei Yisrael in order to introduce doubts in their hearts. In this manner, he hoped to triumph over them, reintroducing the *kelippah* into their midst. But Bnei Yisrael did not succumb; they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant, and gained victory over Pharaoh.

- Both *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and the battle with Amalek introduced doubts in *emunah* in the hearts of Bnei Yisrael. The *Yetzer Hara* desires to cause a person to stumble. Even if he does not completely succeed, he tries to weaken his *emunah*. On the other hand, the *Yetzer Hatov* tries to encourage a person to repent and do mitzvot. One's job is to choose the correct path, to see the *Yetzer Hara* for what he really is, and fight him tooth and nail. Then, Hashem will help him, and he will merit coming close to Him with perfect faith.

SHABBAT HAGADOL



THE SECRET OF SHABBAT HAGADOL

There are many explanations given as to why Shabbat Hagadol (The Great Shabbat) is called by this name. The *Tur Orach Chaim* and other commentaries give a few reasons. I would like to contribute my own thoughts.

I read in a *sefer kodesh* that the word נִסָּן (Nisan) comes from the word נִסִּיּוֹן (test). The great test which Bnei Yisrael had in Egypt was that they were commanded to tie the Egyptian gods, the sheep, to their bedposts (*Shemot Rabbah* 11:4) before the eyes of the Egyptians. They put their very lives in danger, without fearing repercussions, for they had faith that Hashem would save them.

Furthermore, Shabbat has its own *nisyonot*. Acts which are permitted to be done during the weekdays are forbidden on Shabbat, even small things, such as carrying and *muktzeh* (*Shabbat* 7:2). Chazal state (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5) that Shabbat is compared to all of the mitzvot. In that case, the first Shabbat that Bnei Yisrael kept was very great, for it was considered as though they kept all of the mitzvot on it.

This was a tremendous *nisayon*, for all at once, they were forbidden from doing so many things. They merited salvation in this *zechut*. Chazal guarantee (*Shabbat* 118b), “If Yisrael would keep two Shabbatot, they would immediately be redeemed.”

This Shabbat is called “great” since it is equal to two Shabbatot, which effected Bnei Yisrael’s redemption. Until then, they were not familiar with Shabbat. Here, they suddenly were compelled to keep Shabbat, a real test of faith, especially as it was bound with tying a sheep to their bedposts.

Thus, these are two reasons for this Shabbat being called *Shabbat Hagadol*. The first is that this was the very first time that Shabbat was given to the Jewish nation, and keeping Shabbat is compared to keeping all the mitzvot. The second is that this Shabbat was equal to two Shabbatot, for it effected their redemption.

The *avodah zarah* of Egypt was the שׂה (sheep). The word שׂה is numerically equivalent to the word הקר (the cold one). This refers to the *Yetzer Hara*, who “cools off” a person’s heart vis-à-vis his Avodat Hashem. The Egyptians cooled off the hearts of Bnei Yisrael, so that they would not believe in Hashem. For that reason, they were ordered to tie the sheep to the כרעי המיטה (the bedposts). As is known, the letters כ’ and ק’ are interchangeable. The word כרעי can be read as קרעי, from the root of קר (cold). The mitzvah was given to Bnei Yisrael in order to correct the coldness which the Egyptians had injected into their hearts.

Chazal (*Berachot* 5a) further tell us that if the *Yetzer Hara* approaches a person in order to convince him to sin, he should remind him of the day of death. This is a very effective way of combating the *Yetzer Hara*. The bed hints at the bed upon which a deceased person is carried for burial. In Morocco, we would call the coffin a “bed.”

Thus this mitzvah hints that every person should bear in mind his day of death, overcoming his *Yetzer Hara* by picturing himself tied to the posts of his deathbed. One who truly wishes to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, is granted special assistance, as Chazal state (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is helped.” All beginnings are difficult.

But if a person is determined and begins to battle his *Yetzer Hara*, Hashem assists him in defeating it.

Additionally, the *gematria* of the word $\eta\psi$ is equal to that of the word $\tau\psi$ (spirit/demon), adding one for the word itself. This is a hint to the *Yetzer Hara*, who plunders ($\tau\psi$) a person, trying to usurp his spiritual treasures. But every person is enjoined to “tie him to their bedpost.” The strength to do this is given to a person who remembers his day of death, for all lusts and desires fade away at the thought of death.

On Shabbat Hagadol, we read in the *haftarah* (*Malachi* 3:4), “Then the offering of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem.” It ends with the words (ibid., vs. 23) “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet... And he will turn back [to G-d] the hearts of fathers with [their] sons.” What is the connection between the coming of Eliyahu and Shabbat Hagadol?

At the conclusion of every Pesach Seder, we say, “Next year in Yerushalayim.” Why do we say this? Doesn’t it give credence to the heretics, who claim that we say this every year, yet have still not been redeemed? We haven’t returned to Yerushalayim, and it has not been rebuilt. Mashiach and Eliyahu have not arrived. What is the point of this prayer? It seems like we are uttering a falsehood.

We read the *haftarah* containing the tidings of Eliyahu’s arrival on Shabbat Hagadol in order to teach us that since we have not yet been redeemed, it is a sign that we have not yet reached perfection and done complete teshuvah.

We find that in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael did teshuvah, remembering the day of death. They tied the *Yetzer Hara* (in the form of the sheep) to their beds, and were immediately redeemed. For this reason, we mention the arrival of Eliyahu. It is to remind us that if he hasn’t yet come, we still have what to work on.

We must gird ourselves against the *Yetzer Hara* specifically on this Shabbat, since it is called *Shabbat Hagadol* (The Great Shabbat) and

has special strength. The merit of Eliyahu will hasten the redemption. This is as Chazal guarantee (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a), “In Nisan they were redeemed, and in Nisan they will be redeemed.”

This Shabbat is auspicious for teshuvah. It is close to Pesach, when we check for chametz and nullify it. This is an allusion to examining ourselves for sins and doing teshuvah for them.

“In the *light* (אור) of the King’s countenance is life” (*Mishlei* 16:15). We merit life by checking scrupulously for chametz on the night of the 14th of Nisan, which is called the *light* (evening) of the 14th (אור לילי"ד). This is the way to merit the light of Mashiach, a scion of the House of David. Moreover, the *gematria* of דוד (David) is also 14.

All this is true when we withstand the *nisyonot* of Chodesh Nisan. The name of שבת הגדולה (The Great Shabbat) hints at this, for its letters can also spell תשובה גדולה (great teshuvah.)

Based on this, it would seem appropriate to call the Shabbat preceding Pesach *Shabbat Teshuvah* rather than *Shabbat Hagadol*, for it is a time auspicious for doing teshuvah. But because it is a happy time, reminding us of all the miracles wrought on our behalf in Mitzrayim, the great teshuvah of the day is merely hinted at. This is teshuvah out of love and joy.

How are we able to reach this lofty level of doing teshuvah from love and joy? By means of the light of the candle, which alludes to Torah and mitzvot. The pasuk in *Mishlei* states (6:23), “A mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light.” By the light of the Torah, we examine ourselves for chametz and cleanse ourselves of aveirot, purifying our *neshamot* from any dross or dregs.

The garment of the *neshamah*, namely, the body, also requires cleansing. It also needs purification from sin. We do this by loving our fellow Jew as ourselves. We increase our *tzedakah* during these days, such as contributing toward the *kimcha d’Pischa*.

It is customary for the Rabbi of the congregation to give a sermon on *hilchot* Pesach on Shabbat Hagadol. This is a form of Torah study, the light of the candle. This hastens the *geulah*, as Chazal teach that Torah study brings the redemption.

Now it is clearly understood why we read about Eliyahu's arrival. For, if we have not been redeemed and have not merited returning to Yerushalayim, it is a sign that we have not yet done complete teshuvah. We have lost a year, for now we will have to wait another year, in anticipation of Nisan, the month of *geulah*. If we wholeheartedly do teshuvah, though, the *geulah* can arrive at any time throughout the year.

The month of Nisan is propitious for salvation. Haman's decrees were nullified in Nisan, and he was hanged on the 16th of that month. As soon as Bnei Yisrael returned to Hashem, they were rescued from his clutches. If we do likewise, we will merit the future redemption, which should come speedily in our day, Amen.

———— In Summary ————

- The Shabbat preceding Pesach is called *Shabbat Hagadol* – *The Great Shabbat*. I would like to offer the following reasons. The name נִיטָן (Nisan) shares the same root as the word נִסִּיּוֹן (test). Bnei Yisrael withstood a great test when they tied the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians, the sheep, to their bedposts. Furthermore, keeping Shabbat is compared to keeping all the mitzvot. Thus, when Bnei Yisrael observed their first Shabbat in Egypt, it was a very great act. It brought their salvation. We are told that were we to keep two Shabbatot, we would also be redeemed. Therefore, this Shabbat is “great,” for it equals two ordinary Shabbatot.
- The word שֶׁה (sheep) is numerically equivalent to the word הִקָּר (coldness). The *Yetzer Hara* “cools off” a person's heart. The Egyptians, likewise, “cooled off” Bnei Yisrael's hearts toward Avodat Hashem. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to the bedposts, an allusion to one's deathbed. The way

to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, who is constantly bent on destroying a person, is to tie him to the bed, i.e., remind him of the day of death.

- The *haftarah* of Shabbat Hagadol relates the tiding of Eliyahu regarding the *geulah*. Likewise, at the Pesach Seder, we say, “Next year in Yerushalayim,” even though we have not yet been redeemed. This reminds us that we must improve ourselves in order to merit the *geulah sheleimah*. Overpowering the *Yetzer Hara* is the way to merit redemption. This type of teshuvah is through love and joy, in memory of the miracles that happened at the Exodus. This is achieved by keeping Torah and mitzvot, through self-examination and nullification of chametz (a reference to aveirot), as well as increasing one’s *tzedakah*. We should be inspired toward these ends through the Torah sermons that we hear on Shabbat Hagadol. The light of the candle refers to David Hamelech, the father of Mashiach. The month of Nisan is propitious for the *geulah*, illustrated by the fact that Haman’s downfall took place then. If we utilize these days appropriately, we will merit the *geulah sheleimah* and the ultimate *tikkun*, Amen.

GUARDING ONE’S SPEECH AND EYES

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael (*Shemot* 12:3), “They shall take for themselves – each man – a lamb for each father’s house, a lamb for the household.” The lamb was the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians (*Shemot Rabbah* 11:4). Although Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to their beds, the Egyptians said nothing. This was a great miracle, and for this reason, this Shabbat is termed *Shabbat Hagadol*.

What was so amazing about the fact that the Egyptians saw what the Jews did and kept quiet? They had just suffered through nine plagues, becoming utterly humbled. They certainly were deathly afraid. What could they have said? What was the great miracle in their remaining silent?

Let us go back in time, to the days when Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt. Chazal recount (ibid. 1:30) that Moshe Rabbeinu wondered why Bnei Yisrael deserved to be enslaved in Egypt. They had not changed their names, their language, or their mode of dress (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5); why was this exile decreed upon them?

Finally, when one Jew wished to speak *lashon hara* against him, because he had killed the Egyptian, Moshe understood. He called out (*Shemot* 2:14), “Indeed, the matter is known!” He now understood the cause for all their tribulations. It was because they had slanderers among them. Due to the disgraceful aveirah of *lashon hara*, they were enslaved in Egypt.

Throughout the course of the plagues, Bnei Yisrael tried to rectify this shortcoming, guarding their mouths from evil speech.

Hashem repays a person measure for measure (*Shabbat* 105b; *Nedarim* 32a). When Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to their bedposts, the Egyptians should have been in an uproar. But because they had refrained from forbidden speech, the Egyptians, too, kept quiet and did not utter a word. For, had Bnei Yisrael not purified their speech, the Egyptians would have raised a hue and cry. Since Bnei Yisrael had learned the art of keeping quiet, the Egyptians could not open their mouths to say anything and did not lift a finger against them. This was the miracle.

The goal of Shabbat Hagadol is to correct the sin of *lashon hara*. Although Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* at the time of the Exodus (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a), the *tikkun* they enacted in the area of *lashon hara* was the beginning of their spiritual ascent.

This can be compared to one who arrives at the *mikveh* while it is still being filled with water. Can he immerse before it is full? Not at all. There must be forty *se'ah* of water in order for a *mikveh* to be deemed kosher (*Pesachim* 109b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:17).

Likewise, although Bnei Yisrael had begun to correct the sin of *lashon hara* while yet in Egypt, this was only the beginning of a long process of self-purification until they received the Torah.

Shabbat Hagadol often falls on the Shabbat when we read parashat *Metzora*. The connection is clear. *Tzara'at*, which is discussed at length in this parashah, comes upon a person due to the sin of *lashon hara*. Chazal state (*Vayikra Rabbah* 16b) that the word מצורע (one who is afflicted by *tzara'at*) is a combination of the two words מוציא רע (one who speaks derogatory words). Shabbat Hagadol teaches us not to speak *lashon hara*. In this *zechut*, we will merit miracles, just as our ancestors did in the land of Egypt.

Kedushah Is in the Eyes

We can continue, by saying that Shabbat Hagadol is an auspicious time for guarding one's eyes and not looking at inappropriate sights. The eyes are the first organs to be involved in any sin. They are the cause of many aveirot. One who desires to maintain the purity of his soul will be wary regarding sins of the eyes.

The Midrash (*Pliah*) states, "One who eats fish on Shabbat is saved from Gehinnom." This is a wonderful play on words, since it literally says "One who eats fish on the day of fish is saved from fish." The *gematria* of the word דג (fish) is seven, alluding to the seventh day of the week, the "day of fish." Thus, one who eats fish on Shabbat is spared the ד"ג – an acronym for the phrase דין גהינום (the judgment of Gehinnom).

What is so unique about fish that it has the power to save one from being judged worthy of going to Gehinnom? At the time of the Flood, all creatures upon the earth were destroyed, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 7:22), "Everything that was on dry land died." But the fish in the sea remained alive. All of the land creatures perished, for all were corrupt and cohabited with other species. The entire generation was

unbridled in their wickedness. The animals had observed the depravity of mankind, thereby damaging their eyes. Thus, they also fell to the lowest level possible. But the fish in the sea guarded themselves and did not contaminate their vision, even though their eyes are always open. For that reason, they were saved from destruction.

Let us take a lesson from the fish. Although they are mere creatures, they safeguarded their ways and protected their eyes from seeing improper sights. All the more so should we, thinking people, be careful with what we see.

For that reason, we are told, “One who eats fish on the day of fish is saved from the judgment of Gehinnom.” Shabbat is the foundation of the entire Creation, a day propitious for elevation in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. If, on that day, a person eats fish, taking a lesson from the fish, which guarded their eyesight, he will be spared the horror of Gehinnom and merit Gan Eden.

According to this, we can understand the pasuk in Kriyat Shema that we say three times a day, “Lest (פן) your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve other gods” (*Devarim* 11:16). The eyes are the agents of sin. The word פן (lest) is numerically equal to the word עין (eye). This indicates that if a person stumbles into seeing an inappropriate sight, his heart becomes drawn after it, and he will then sin. Hashem warns us to be extremely vigilant not to begin this process, by protecting our eyes.

If a person, indeed, protects his eyes, Hashem puts His watchful eye on him, as it says (*Tehillim* 33:18), “הנה עין ה' אל יראיו” – The eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him.” The word יראיו (those who fear him) has the same root as the word ראייה (sight). This teaches that Hashem protects the person who protects his eyes and does not look at inappropriate sight. He is repaid measure for measure, and will merit goodness and blessing all the days of his life.

With this in mind, we can resolve the following contradiction. We are told (*Tehillim* 115:16), “As for the Heavens, the Heavens are Hashem’s,” yet elsewhere it states (*Iyov* 25:2), “He makes peace in His heights.” If the Heavens belong to Hashem, why does He need to make peace there? He is the Master.

If a person is not careful to keep Torah and mitzvot, he is held liable. But if he does teshuvah, Hashem has patience and forgives him. Therefore, one who watches his eyes will be watched by Hashem, Who makes peace on High and does not allow the prosecuting angels to cast charges against him.

This is the power of Shabbat Hagadol. The number of letters in the name שבת הגדול is equal to the number of words in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 33:18), “הנה עין ה' אל יראיו למיחלים לחסדו” – Behold, the eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him, upon those who await His kindness,” adding one for the phrase itself. The name שבת הגדול is also numerically equal to the phrase “היזהר בעין ולשון” – Beware of the eyes and the mouth,” adding one for the phrase itself. Thus, we see that Shabbat Hagadol is an auspicious day for protecting one’s eyes and tongue.

Moshe Rabbeinu was careful to protect his eyes in Egypt. In the plague of locusts, it says (*Shemot* 10:6), “And he turned (ויפן) and left Pharaoh’s presence.” The Admor of Belz explains, “Pharaoh saw he was no match for Moshe. He therefore tried to overpower him with the power of *tumah*, which he wished to employ through his gaze.” This is the explanation of the usage of the word ויפן (and he turned) here. It can be divided into two words וי (Woe unto me) and פן (lest). Moshe was indicating that it would be disastrous for him (וי) if he would sin with his eyes (עין), which have the same *gematria* as the word (פן). He did not want to be overcome by the forces of *tumah*. Therefore, he immediately turned on his heel and left Pharaoh’s presence, so that Pharaoh could not defile him. How much more so should we be careful to protect our eyes.

I think that the ruling of the Kabbalists not to look into a mirror (see *Ohr Yakar* of the *Ramak*) is for the following reason. By looking into a mirror, a person comes to preen himself, and this can lead him to the depths of doom.

We find proof to this in the Gemara (*Nedarim* 9a). A *nazir* from the South approached Shimon Hatzaddik, asking him to remove his beautiful, long hair. He had seen his reflection in the river and was overcome by his *Yetzer Hara*. He felt that the pleasure of his good looks was severing his connection with Hashem. Therefore, he immediately vowed to remove all his plaits of hair.

If this *nazir*, holy and pure, felt he was losing his Divine image, all the more so, should we, simple people that we are, be afraid to look into a mirror, so that we should not stray from the correct path. Likewise, we must be exceedingly vigilant to refrain from viewing forbidden sights. We should make sure to look only at holy things, and in this way, we will remain holy all the days of our life.

On the other hand, we should learn from the women who contributed the mirrors for the Mishkan. At first, Moshe Rabbeinu was hesitant about accepting them (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 9). But Hashem instructed him to take them, stating they were a sincere contribution. These righteous women were donating that which was most dear to them. Their action teaches that we must be prepared to dedicate our entire beings to Hashem. What is most precious to us should be sanctified for His Name.

This is the power of Shabbat Hagadol. The first letters of the words שבת הגדול are the initials of the phrases: שמירת העינים – guarding the eyes, שמירת הלשון – guarding the tongue, and שמירת הברית – guarding the *brit*. The words שבת הגדול (Shabbat Hagadol) are numerically equal to the phrase שלשון זהב לך (That you have a tongue of gold). A true servant of Hashem guards his speech. On Shabbat Hagadol, one should

be inspired to take the lessons of the day and increase the way he guards his tongue and eyes.

May Hashem help us in this holy service. In that merit, our eyes will behold Hashem's redemption of His people, when Yisrael will rejoice, speedily in our days, Amen.

In Summary

- On Shabbat Hagadol, Bnei Yisrael took the sheep, the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians, and tied them to their bedposts. The Egyptians witnessed this, but did not protest. What was the great miracle here? The ugly aveirah of *lashon hara* was rampant among Bnei Yisrael, contributing to their extended exile. They eventually corrected this transgression. Because they refrained from speaking derogatorily about one another, they were rewarded measure for measure by the fact that the Egyptians were prevented from protesting their actions.
- Another reason why Shabbat Hagadol is called by this name (The Great Shabbat) is because rectifying one's speech is the beginning of effecting a *tikkun* in all forty-nine levels of impurity. The words שבת הגדול are numerically equal to the phrase שלשון זהב לך (That you have a tongue of gold). This is also the connection between Shabbat Hagadol and פרשת מצורע (*parashat Metzora*), the Torah portion which is often read on this Shabbat. The word מצורע can be divided in two, מוציא רע (speaking derogatorily). By watching our speech, we merit great miracles.
- Shabbat Hagadol is also a propitious time for guarding one's eyes, the agents of sin. For this reason, Chazal tell us, "He who eats fish on Shabbat is spared the judgment of Gehinnom." All of the creatures in the time of the Flood corrupted their ways through misusing their eyesight and were destroyed. But the fish, although their eyes are constantly open, did not become corrupt. If one takes a lesson from the fish, and strengthens himself on Shabbat Hagadol, he will be spared the judgment of Gehinnom.
- The eye seduces the heart. In the Shema that we recite three times a day, we are taught not to follow our eyes, "lest (פן) your heart be seduced and you

turn astray and serve other gods.” The word פן (lest) is numerically equivalent to the word עין (eye). The next words are יפתה לבבכם (your hearts be turned). A person’s heart is turned after his eyes. Therefore, it is critical to protect one’s eyes. Shabbat Hagadol is the appropriate time for this. If one is careful in this area, Hashem will watch over him. He will also silence all prosecutors in the merit of this person’s teshuvah.

- We find that Moshe did not want Pharaoh to defile him and turned away from him (ויפן). It is as if he said, “Woe unto me (וי) if I would sin with פן, alluding to my eye (עין), which has the same *gematria* as the word פן.” Therefore, Moshe left his presence immediately.
- Similarly, avoiding looking in a mirror helps one avoid the pitfalls of physical allurements. The *nazir* from the South was afraid of losing his Divine image and approached Shimon Hatzaddik, asking him to cut off his locks of hair.
- On the other hand, Hashem instructed Moshe to accept the mirrors of the Jewish women, for they wished to donate that which was most dear to them. This was a sincere contribution.
- By guarding one’s speech and eyes, one merits great miracles, like those of our fathers in Egypt.

A Practical Lesson

Every person should take a personal lesson from the fish, who did not sin with their eyes. We should also strengthen ourselves in *shemirat halashon*. One should refrain from looking into a mirror, in order not to preen himself, for this can lead to serious aveirot. What is precious to us should be dedicated to Hashem. One should devote himself to the service of Hashem, and not to personal pleasure. One who strengthens himself in these matters merits Hashem’s open miracles.

THE GREATNESS OF SHABBAT HAGADOL

“On the tenth of the month they shall take for themselves – each man – a lamb...”

(*Shemot* 12:3)

The tenth of the month was on a Shabbat. Why were Bnei Yisrael instructed to take a lamb specifically on Shabbat?

Furthermore, why were they told to take the lamb on precisely the tenth day of the month, and not on any other day? Hashem could perform a miracle on any day. (See Chazal’s statements regarding this in *Pesachim* 96a; *Mechilta*; *Rashi*, *Shemot* 12:6).

Moreover, why is this Shabbat, the Shabbat immediately preceding Pesach, called “Shabbat Hagadol – The Great Shabbat?” All Shabbatot are great and holy. In the Friday night *zemirot*, we sing, “It is a holy day from its inception until its culmination.” What is unique about this particular Shabbat?

Chazal state (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bo* 191, 198) that a miracle took place when Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to their bedposts. Although the Egyptians saw their *avodah zarah* being denigrated, they merely gritted their teeth, but were powerless to do a thing. However, countless miracles took place in Mitzrayim; why wasn’t any other day of the week designated as “great,” in honor of the great miracle which transpired on it?

Bnei Yisrael sank to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* in Mitzrayim (*Zohar*, *Yitro* 39a) and worshipped idols there (*Shemot Rabbah* 16:2). In order to merit redemption, Hashem gave them the mitzvah of Shabbat (in addition to the mitzvot of *korban* Pesach and *brit milah*).

Their *mesirut nefesh* involved tying the sheep to their beds, before the eyes of the Egyptians. In this merit, they would be redeemed. The tenth of the month was chosen as it alludes to the Ten Commandments which they would accept at Har Sinai. In the merit of Shabbat and the Torah, they would be redeemed.

This Shabbat had to be kept with great *mesirut nefesh*. This was hinting to the nation that the Torah, in which merit they would be taken out of Mitzrayim, must also be kept with utmost self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice, coupled with acting swiftly (the way in which they left Mitzrayim) would merit their redemption.

Furthermore, Shabbat is equal to all of the mitzvot in the Torah (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16; *Zohar* II, 89a). Shabbat is therefore very great. This is the reason why the Shabbat before Pesach is called *Shabbat Hagadol*, for the entire Torah is included in this Shabbat.

Every Jew merits an abundance of blessing on every Shabbat of the year. Every Shabbat involves *mesirut nefesh*. One must close his business, often incurring a loss. But the one who has trust in Hashem is not persuaded by the counsel of the *Yetzer Hara*. He fills his pockets with the bounty of Hashem, for Shabbat pays back those who keep it (*Beitzah* 16b), and abundance of goodness is his always.

Tying the sheep to the bedposts on Shabbat Hagadol in Mitzrayim indicated that Bnei Yisrael had subdued the *kelippah* (see *Zohar* I, 166). This was done on the tenth of the month, conferring upon them the merit to receive the Ten Commandments. Their Avodat Hashem would have been deficient had they refrained from carrying out this command. In the merit of performing Hashem's orders with self-sacrifice and agility, demonstrating their submissiveness to Hashem, they merited a great miracle.

The word שׁה (sheep) is composed of the initials of שבת הגדול – Shabbat Hagadol. The last letters of the words שבת הגדול are

numerically equal to 430, the number of years that Bnei Yisrael lived in Egypt (*Shemot* 12:40). For that amount of time, Bnei Yisrael were steeped in *avodah zarah*, worshipping the sheep, the idol of Egypt. But when Shabbat Hagadol arrived, they took the idols and sacrificed them as a *korban*, ceasing their idol worship and effecting a *tikkun* for their previous actions.

The night of Pesach contains tremendous spiritual powers. It is called “a night of watching.” Chazal tell us that the negative forces are powerless against Bnei Yisrael on this night (see *Bava Kama* 60a; *Pesachim* 109b). It is necessary to recite only the first paragraph of Kriyat Shema before retiring (*Rema* 481:2).

The spiritual power of this night confers *kedushah* upon a person and protects him from the forces of evil on every night of the year. Chazal state (*Zohar* III, 282b) that whoever is scrupulous to refrain from chametz on Pesach is guaranteed that he will not sin throughout the year. This is in merit of the greatness of this night.

The Shabbat preceding Pesach is great, as well. Bnei Yisrael received two gifts at that time: Shabbat and Torah, which have the ability to influence all the Shabbatot of the year.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon a person to sanctify himself on Shabbat Hagadol and consecrate it solely for Hashem’s sake. Every Shabbat of the year is holy and dedicated to Hashem; nevertheless, one derives physical pleasure on Shabbat, as well. The *neshamah yeteirah* gets pleasure from the festive food and drink of the day (*Beitzah* 16a; *Rashi*, *ibid.*). This Shabbat, though, must be consecrated solely for the sake of Hashem. All of one’s negative traits, including his *Yetzer Hara*, should be slaughtered on the altar of *mesirut nefesh* and alacrity. His lot, then, will be good in this world as well as in the next.

We can learn this concept from the holiday of Pesach. We consecrate that night for Hashem, even though it is essentially holy. We make

many preparations prior to the holiday, such as checking for chametz, nullifying it, and burning it (*Ran, Pesachim 2a*). These acts indicate the destruction of the Satan and all negative forces. After such preparations, we truly feel the holiness of the atmosphere, the *kedushah* of the night of our redemption.

The power engendered on this night subdues the *kelippah* throughout all the subsequent nights of the year. It is known that the *kelippah* is in control at nighttime (*Zohar II, 163b; 3:200a*). If the forces of evil are restrained during the nighttime hours, how much more so can they be vanquished during the daytime, the day of Shabbat Hagadol, whose light brightens the rest of the Shabbatot of the year!

Hashem beseeches us to halt our activities for one day (*Sukkah 55b; Sifri, Bamidbar 55*). He tells us, “Give me one Shabbat in which all Shabbatot will be corrected.” This is done through *mesirut nefesh*, by means of acting with alacrity and humility.

If we would just consecrate this Shabbat for Hashem’s sake, we could correct all of the defects in the rest of the Shabbatot and merit blessing for the future.

————— In Summary —————

- Why is the Shabbat preceding Pesach called *Shabbat Hagadol*? Aren’t all Shabbatot “great,” full of merit and auspicious for great things? If we say that it is because of the miracle that took place on that day, we know that miracles take place all the time. Why were Bnei Yisrael commanded to take a sheep on Shabbat, precisely on the tenth of the month? We know that they were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* and were in need of immediate salvation. They received the mitzvah of Shabbat, which they would keep with great self-sacrifice and alacrity. In this merit, they would be elevated. Tying the sheep to their bedposts was an act of *mesirut nefesh*. The tenth day of Nisan alluded to the Ten Commandments, which they would receive in the merit of their self-sacrifice. Shabbat is equal to all the mitzvot.

- Therefore, this Shabbat, with its overt display of *mesirut nefesh*, is called *Shabbat Hagadol*. From the abundance of blessing which comes down in the wake of their *mesirut nefesh*, the rest of the Shabbatot of the year receive bounty. Bnei Yisrael did all they were instructed to, with *mesirut nefesh*, swiftly and with humility. The word **שה** is comprised of the initials of the phrase **שבת הגדול**. The last letters of **שבת הגדול** are numerically equivalent to 430, alluding to the number of years that Bnei Yisrael spent in Mitzrayim, when they were forced to serve idols. On Shabbat Hagadol, they merited making a completed *tikkun* and vanquished the negative forces of Mitzrayim.
- Just as Pesach can influence the entire year for the good, because of its greatness, so too, does the Shabbat preceding Pesach have the potential to influence all other Shabbatot of the year, physically as well as spiritually. If a person consecrates this Shabbat for the sake of Hashem, with *mesirut nefesh* and alacrity, he will receive goodness in this world as well as the next. The *kelippah* will have no control over him, and he will be able to rectify any flaws he may have made on the other Shabbatot of the year.

LEARNING SELF-SACRIFICE FROM THE SACRIFICES

Bnei Yisrael were wallowing in the forty-ninth level of impurity in Mitzrayim (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). Hashem commanded them (*Shemot* 12:21), “Draw forth and take for yourselves one of the flock.” Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 16b) explain that this means that they should “withdraw their hands from *avodah zarah* and take for themselves sheep for a mitzvah.”

Bnei Yisrael desisted from *avodah zarah*. Moreover, the Egyptians did not stop them from tying the sheep, their idols, to their bedposts; rather, they began fighting among themselves (*ibid.* 11:4). This great miracle is one of the reasons for calling the Shabbat before Pesach *Shabbat Hagadol*.

In parashat *Tzav*, we find that Hashem told Moshe (*Vayikra* 6:2), “Command...” Rashi there explains that the word, “Command” means, “Hurry them up,” and is used only on occasions where a monetary outlay is required. In this case, Hashem was commanding the nation regarding the *korban olah*, which involved a monetary expense. (Note: The Rav, shlita, gave this *derashah* on a Shabbat Hagadol that fell out on parashat *Tzav*.)

The sefer *Divrei Yoel*, written by the Admor of Satmar, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, asks the following question. Many mitzvot of the Torah involve monetary expenditure, such as the four species, etc. Why is the word “command” used only in regard to the *korban olah*?

We can ask another question on this pasuk. Why does it say, “Command Aharon and his sons” regarding the *korban olah*? The outlay of funds fell on the shoulders of Bnei Yisrael. Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate to have stated, “Command Bnei Yisrael”?

One who has the quality of *mesirut nefesh* triumphs over his *Yetzer Hara* and grants victory to the *Yetzer Hatov*. There is some level of *mesirut nefesh* in every endeavor, for the *Yetzer Hara* constantly tries to divert a person from his goal. He tries to persuade one to pursue glory or self-aggrandizement, or postpone an opportunity to do a mitzvah, until it is completely neglected.

This is the meaning of the verse (*Tehillim* 44:23), “For Your sake we are killed all the time.” One who succeeds in performing mitzvot, in spite of the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*, is truly sacrificing himself for the sake of Hashem.

The Beit Yosef is an example of this. The *Maggid Hakadosh* appeared to the Beit Yosef and taught him secrets of Torah wisdom. The sefer *Maggid Meisharim* was a result of this. The *Maggid* promised the Beit Yosef that he would merit giving up his life to sanctify Hashem’s Name. However, we know that the Beit Yosef passed away in a natural

manner. The *Imrei Emet* explains that through his constant victory over the *Yetzer Hara* he merited sacrificing his life for Hashem's sake every single moment that he lived. This can truly be called sacrificing one's life to sanctify Hashem's Name.

How does one manage to attain this exalted level of *mesirut nefesh*? Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair states (*Avodah Zarah* 20b) that alacrity brings one to vigilance. When one acts with alacrity and vigilance in Avodat Hashem, he merits attaining *mesirut nefesh*.

This idea helps us understand Rashi's comment that Bnei Yisrael needed to be urged on to bring the *korban olah*. Since this *korban* required a monetary outlay, Bnei Yisrael had to be encouraged to give the money quickly. By acting with alacrity, they would be demonstrating *mesirut nefesh* and would not feel the monetary lack that was entailed through bringing this *korban*. The *korban* Pesach required similar *mesirut nefesh* from Bnei Yisrael.

In order to act with alacrity and vigilance, a person must be engrossed in Torah study. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 26:3), "If you will follow My decrees." Rashi explains that this means, "You should exert yourselves in Torah study." For, if one toils in Torah and performs mitzvot, he reaches the level of doing mitzvot perfectly, through alacrity and *mesirut nefesh*. Without Torah, this is not possible.

The pasuk says (*Vayikra* 6:2), "היא העולה על מוקדה" – It is the burnt-offering [that stays] on the flame." The letter מ (numerically equivalent to forty) in the word מוקדה is written small in order to hint to the forty days that Moshe was in *Shamayim*, receiving the Torah (*Menachot* 99b). Its diminished size hints to the *middah* of humility, for Torah is acquired only through humility (*Ta'anit* 7b; *Derech Eretz Zuta* 8).

The small letter מ teaches us another lesson. It is an open letter. One who wishes to acquire Torah knowledge must be open to learn from

others, as well as to teach words of Torah to others. Although he may be praised and honored for his vast Torah knowledge, he should not let it get to his head; he should always remain small and humble, constantly adding to his storehouse of wisdom.

This was the purpose of the *korbanot*, and the vocation of Aharon, the Kohen Gadol. Aharon was the agent who brought Bnei Yisrael closer to their Father in Heaven (*Zohar* III, 20a; *Imrei Moshe* of the *Beit Yisrael* of Gur.) Aharon would create harmony between people. He worked day and night toward this goal, with great *mesirut nefesh*, bringing them closer to Hashem. For this reason, the pasuk states, “Command Aharon.” Every person can learn from Aharon how to offer himself to Hashem, performing mitzvot with alacrity and self-sacrifice.

One must never feel that Hashem has abandoned him. The *korban* was left on the Altar “all night until the morning.” This teaches that even if a person experiences suffering, causing his life to be bleak as the night, he should continue serving Hashem to the best of his ability, until He has mercy on him and illuminates his life like the morning sun.

————— In Summary —————

- Why does Rashi apply the rule that one is required to act with alacrity when performing mitzvot that involve monetary outlay specifically to *korbanot*? There are many other mitzvot that involve monetary expense, why are we not commanded to act with alacrity when doing these mitzvot also? Why were Aharon and his sons commanded to bring the *korbanot*, and the rest of the nation were not? Wasn't the entire nation ultimately responsible for bringing the *korbanot*?
- From here we learn a basic foundation in the concept of *mesirut nefesh*. It is a great act to vanquish one's *Yetzer Hara* through *mesirut nefesh*. In this manner, one is considered as sacrificing his life for Hashem's sake on a daily basis. One attains *mesirut nefesh* through acting with alacrity and vigilance. For this reason, Rashi states that one should hurry to do mitzvot which

involve a monetary outlay, since through acting swiftly one attains the level of *mesirut nefesh*. Taking the sheep for the *korban* Pesach required tremendous *mesirut nefesh* from Bnei Yisrael.

- One reaches a level of alacrity by exerting himself in Torah study and mitzvah performance. True acquisition of Torah is attained only through humility, as demonstrated by Moshe Rabbeinu. However, in order to learn Torah and teach it to others with true humility, one must also act with *mesirut nefesh*. For that reason, Aharon and his sons were commanded to act with alacrity, since alacrity leads to *mesirut nefesh*. Aharon was the one who brought the hearts of Bnei Yisrael closer to their Father in Heaven. Much *mesirut nefesh* is demanded in the service of Hashem. From Aharon we learn to act with self-sacrifice and speed, literally offering ourselves on the altar of Hashem's Name. And even if one experiences difficult times, he should not despair, but keep on going, until he merits seeing the light of day.

BNEI YISRAEL RENEWS ITSELF LIKE THE MOON

In the *haftarah* of Shabbat Hagadol we read (*Malachi* 3:5), "I will draw near to you for the judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers; against the adulterers; against those who swear falsely." Chazal tell us (*Chagigah* 5a) that when Rabbi Yochanan would reach this pasuk, he would weep, stating, "Is there any hope for a servant whose Master rushes to judge him?" Indeed, why does Hashem judge them immediately, without giving them the chance to repent?

We are aware of all of the miracles wrought for our fathers in Mitzrayim. Furthermore, we know that Hashem will fulfill His promise (*Malachi* 3:10), "והריקותי לכם ברכה עד בלי די" – And I will pour out upon you blessing without end." The word די (end) is numerically equal to the word דוד (David Hamelech, forebear of Mashiach). Hashem promises to send us Mashiach. Knowing this, why don't we do

teshuvah? Why do we continue angering our Creator, asking why Mashiach has not yet come?

The *haftarah* ends with the pasuk, “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet...” We are enjoined to do teshuvah before the arrival of Mashiach. We read this on Shabbat Hagadol, the Shabbat preceding Pesach. We proclaim then, “Next year in Yerushalayim!”

It is all dependent upon us. If we truly repent, we will become great, as alluded to in the name *Shabbat Hagadol*.

Based on this, let us examine what we read on Shabbat Hachodesh, the Shabbat which comes two weeks before Shabbat Hagadol and Pesach (*Shemot* 12:2): “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months.” The very first mitzvah Bnei Yisrael received as a nation was to bless and sanctify the new month. After being given this mitzvah, they were told to take the sheep for the *korban* Pesach. Let us try to understand the connection.

Chazal tell us (*Pesikta d’Rabbi Kahana* 5:14; *Tanchuma, Shemini* 11) that Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty comprehending the shape of the moon at its renewal. Hashem demonstrated to him how it looks. It seems puzzling that a man as great as Moshe required this visual aid.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Bnei Yisrael had worshipped idols while in Egypt. Thus, he couldn’t fathom how they could gain access to Hashem’s Presence. Hashem told him that although it is true that they served idols, they must be brought close to Him and taught to serve Him. How? By their constantly being placed in a situation of *nisayon*. By overcoming temptation, they defeat their *Yetzer Hara* and merit the *geulah*.

Moshe Rabbeinu could not comprehend how withstanding tests makes a person become like one born anew, his sins completely wiped out. He also had trouble with the fact that the moon is often invisible,

being called מארה (luminary, with the letter ׳ missing) (*Zohar* I, 33). How can one bless the moon when it is not always seen?

Therefore, Hashem showed him the moon in its renewed state. A full moon is like a new creation. He was signifying to him that a person who sins is lacking, like the moon, which is often covered up, lacking its fullness. But if he does teshuvah, he can become recreated, like a new being, and become a great luminary once again. He is renewed like the moon, which, each month, admits that it sinned and was punished by becoming small (*Chullin* 60b). It, so to speak, does teshuvah, and becomes renewed once again.

Similarly, Bnei Yisrael can also become renewed. Tying the lamb to their bedposts was an allusion to binding up the *Yetzer Hara* and conquering it. In this merit, they were worthy of the *geulah*.

Bnei Yisrael count their months according to the moon (*Sukkah* 29a). The word לבנה (moon) comes from the word לבן (white), as Yeshayahu Hanavi said (1:18), "If your sins are like scarlet they will become white as snow." One should take a lesson from the moon. For, even though it may be incomplete at times, it has the capacity to rise up and become perfectly pure, hastening the *geulah*.

Thus it is appropriate that sanctifying the new moon is the first mitzvah of the Torah. The power of the month of Nisan helps to hasten the redemption, for it is a month of miracles. And if we withstand the tests of the times, and return in teshuvah, we become transformed to ראש, the head, and חדש, new. Nisan, more than any other month of the year, is auspicious for miracles.

This, then, is the connection between the month of Nisan and sanctifying the new moon. But if a person does not do teshuvah, and does not renew himself, he will have to face Heavenly justice, as stated in the *haftarah* of Shabbat Hagadol.

The *Imrei Yoel* states the following. The moon's orbit has no specific point where it starts or ends, unlike the orbits of the sun and the stars.

Moshe was perplexed by this also. Hashem explained to him that the moon is different from all other heavenly bodies. Its lack of direction points to the fact that it is created solely to testify to its Creator. It is proof to the entire world that this world is run by a Manager.

“Bnei Yisrael have no *mazal*” (*Shabbat* 156a). The Jewish people are not dependent on any specific galaxy. They have free choice. Their fate depends only on whether or not they will heed the word of Hashem. If they go in His way, He showers upon them unlimited blessing. They are compared to the moon, which does not follow a specific route. Bnei Yisrael forge their own destiny according to their deeds.

This is illustrated by Shabbat Hagadol, which falls in the month of Nisan, the head of the months. For, the lesson of the moon is not lost on Bnei Yisrael, who constantly strive to become ever greater, as hinted by Shabbat Hagadol.

————— In Summary —————

- In the *haftarah* of Shabbat Hagadol, it states that Hashem hastens to judge and punish the wicked, and He prevents them from repenting. Why does Hashem judge them immediately, without giving them the chance to repent? Bnei Yisrael are aware of all the miracles which took place in Egypt and know that Hashem showers unlimited blessing upon them, the ultimate of which is the coming of Mashiach. If they ask where he is and when he is coming, it is an indication that they have not yet done sufficient teshuvah. This warrants punishment. The main purpose of a person is to do teshuvah and anticipate Mashiach’s arrival. Shabbat Hagadol is a propitious time for this, as the end of the *haftarah* attests, “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet.” If Bnei Yisrael do teshuvah, they will become elevated.
- The first two mitzvot our nation received were sanctifying the new moon and tying the sheep to their bedposts. Moshe Rabbeinu was perplexed regarding the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon. He did not know how Bnei Yisrael would withstand future tests. The sanctification of the new moon teaches that they will be able to do this through teshuvah. Bnei Yisrael are compared to

the moon, which renews itself. Counting the months by the moon indicates that they constantly cleanse themselves from sin. Nisan is the head of the months, for it is auspicious for *geulah*, through the ascent one has made through doing teshuvah.

- Bnei Yisrael are compared to the moon, since it has no set orbit in which it travels. They have the freedom to choose the proper path on which to go. They have no set road, for they carve their fate according to their choices. Shabbat Hagadol alludes to the greatness one can reach when he chooses to go on the right road and become a truly great person.

PESACH



THE FIRST OF THE MONTHS

“This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months...” (*Shemot* 12:2). The sanctification of the new moon was the first mitzvah our nation received (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 187).

What is the significance of “the beginning of the months”? There is a dispute between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer regarding whether the world was created in Tishrei or in Nisan (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a). What is the advantage of Nisan over Tishrei? Also, what is meant by the wording, “It shall be **for you** the first of the months”? For whom is it, and for whom is it not?

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 15:12) proclaims Nisan as the month designated for the redemption of Bnei Yisrael. Any distress they experience during this month is merely the beginning of their salvation. *Akeidat Yitzchak* took place in Nisan. This act seemed to herald the demise of Am Yisrael. But it was specifically through that act that the seeds of the birth and *geulah* of Am Yisrael were planted.

In this month, too, Yaakov Avinu received the blessings from his father, Yitzchak (*Pesikta d’Rabbi Eliezer* 32). And although Yaakov feared his father’s wrath at discovering his disguise, in which case he would incur a curse (*Bereishit* 27:12), just the opposite transpired.

Blessing flows to our people, till this very day, through the blessings that Yitzchak bestowed on Yaakov.

In addition, Chazal tell us (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a; *Shemot Rabbah* 15:12; *Zohar* II, 120a) that: “In Nisan they were redeemed, and in Nisan they will be redeemed.”

For this reason, Nisan is appointed as the first month of the year. The word שנה (year) indicates התיישנות (aging), which has the same root as the word שונה (changing, growing old). On the other hand, the word חודש (month) indicates חידוש (novelty). All the laws of nature, as well as those above nature, renew themselves in the merit and for the sake of Bnei Yisrael. The month of Nisan is particularly appropriate for this message because of the renewal that takes place in the natural world at this time. It is a time propitious for wondrous miracles and for the *geulah*, whose light shines forth during this month, year after year.

The nations of the world count their months according to the solar calendar, without any concept of renewal. Conversely, the Jewish nation counts its months according to the lunar calendar, injecting each month with the power of renewal.

This, then, is the reason for Nisan being termed, “the beginning of the months.” The month of Nisan is the beginning of the miracles and *geulah* of Am Yisrael, specifically “for you,” and not for the nations of the world.

Hashem designated the month of Nisan as the first of the months for the redemption, for Bnei Yisrael begin to count toward *Matan Torah* then. The Torah preceded Creation (*Bereishit Rabbah* 8:2). Torah is paramount, above all other creations. “There is nothing new under the sun,” as the saying goes. But above the sun, there is a concept of novelty. This is the power of Torah, which was created before the sun. Bnei Yisrael merit this because of their perfect faith in their Creator. Through this, they are constantly renewed.

A new chapter in the history of Bnei Yisrael opened before them in the month of Nisan. From now on, their lives would be directed by Hashem, rather than being under the jurisdiction of the Egyptians. They would now live a life of Torah, *yirat Shamayim*, *emunah*, and mitzvah observance.

For this reason, we are enjoined to remember our emancipation from Egypt (*Devarim* 16:3). In this manner, our level of *emunah* is increased. Furthermore, remembering brings to action (*Menachot* 43b). By remembering our previous redemption, we will merit future wonders and miracles, above the laws of nature.

The name of the month alludes to this. The word נִסָּן (Nisan) is similar to נִסִּים (miracles). In Nisan, Bnei Yisrael were miraculously redeemed from Egypt, being saved from the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). Had they been allowed to fall to the fiftieth level, they would have been beyond rescue.

The word נִסָּן also alludes to the great gifts in store for our nation. Bnei Yisrael merited miracles (נִסִּים), as well as receiving the Ten Commandments (י' = ten), after fifty (נ') days of preparation. Before receiving the Torah, our nation was bare of mitzvot. Therefore, Hashem gave them two mitzvot: the blood of the *korban* Pesach, and the blood of *milah* (*Mechilta Bo; Pesikta d'Rabbi Eliezer* 29). This was to save them from the prosecuting angels, who claimed that “they serve idols just like the Egyptians.”

These two mitzvot testified to their strong faith in Hashem and their *mesirut nefesh* to fulfill His mitzvot. They were the catalyst which enabled them to emerge from the *tumah*, and reach the gates of *kedushah*.

However, “a mitzvah protects one for a short time, whereas Torah protects one eternally” (*Sotah* 21a). Bnei Yisrael needed to receive the entire Torah, not merely these two mitzvot. How would they be able to

endure the prosecution of the negative forces without the power of Torah? For that reason, Hashem gave them the Torah. It is one of the greatest gifts our nation has ever received. Although they were bereft of mitzvot at their departure from Egypt, their tremendous faith in Hashem and in Moshe awarded them their redemption.

Why were Bnei Yisrael commanded to put the blood on their doorposts? Hashem certainly knew which houses belonged to the Jews. The very name of the holiday, Pesach, alludes to the “passing over” of Hashem in Egypt. Why was this necessary? Moreover, why did Hashem give them two mitzvot, *korban* Pesach and *milah*? Wouldn't one mitzvah have been sufficient? This question is strengthened by the fact that Bnei Yisrael didn't circumcise themselves completely, but only began the act of *milah* (*Zohar* II, 6a, 40a; *Darash Moshe* pg. 265). They completed the mitzvah in the Wilderness, prior to *Matan Torah*.

Furthermore, Chazal state (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 470:1) that the firstborn fast on Erev Pesach, in memory of the miracle that they were spared from the plague of the firstborn. This is difficult to understand. It would seem more appropriate for the firstborn to make a feast, not a fast. Besides, it would be more fitting for this commemoration to be held on the fifteenth of Nisan – the day of Pesach itself, when the plague of the firstborn actually took place. Why is this remembrance made on the fourteenth, a day earlier?

Bnei Yisrael displayed their dedication and love toward Hashem by following the command to put the blood on the thresholds of their homes, an act of *mesirut nefesh*. The mitzvot of *korban* Pesach and *brit milah* likewise denote *mesirut nefesh*. *Brit milah* signifies sacrifice of the body, and the *korban* Pesach, sacrifice of one's money. They did not complete the circumcision process at the time of the *brit*, for they were not yet ready for that. Later, before receiving the Torah, they corrected this (*Zohar* III, 271b). By following Hashem's command to do these two mitzvot in Egypt, they proved to all that they were completely

subjugated to Him, separate from all other nations, fulfilling Hashem's desire out of pure faith in Him and His mitzvot. Thus, these two acts of *mesirut nefesh* merited that they should be redeemed in a supernatural way, by Hashem passing over their homes.

Now we might understand why the fast of the firstborn takes place on Erev Pesach. For the main part of the miracle wrought for them in Egypt actually took place before the night of the fifteenth. They submitted themselves to Hashem through *milah* and *korban* Pesach, displaying their *mesirut nefesh* and firm faith in Him.

This fast, then, is testimony to their subservience to Hashem even before the holiday of Pesach took place, already on the fourteenth of the month. One who abstains from food and drink is humbled before Hashem and considered to have offered a sacrifice (*Zohar* II, 119b). This is the reason why the *bechorot* fast rather than feast.

With this in mind, we can understand why Nisan should be counted as the first month rather than Tishrei. Although Tishrei is also an auspicious time for miracles and salvation and strengthening one's *emunah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a), it is a month propitious for doing teshuvah out of fear. Nisan, on the other hand, is propitious for doing teshuvah out of love of Hashem. The Beit Yisrael of Gur, zt"l, often states this idea.

This is the concept of *emunah*, submission, and nullification of one's self, through *mesirut nefesh* to Hashem. The Chida states that in the *zechut* of the preparation one makes to do a mitzvah, combined with the sweat and toil that one expends while doing it, one's sins are forgiven, for his heart is subjugated to Hashem.

The *gematria* of the word פסח is equal to that of אמונה בא-ל אחד (faith in the One G-d). In the merit of their faith on Pesach, they were saved from the negative forces. Instead of falling into a trap (פח), they merited the wonderful holiday of פסח, the letter ט' alluding to the 600,000

members of Bnei Yisrael at their exodus. Their enemies quashed, our nation was led out of Egypt to liberation.

————— In Summary —————

- Chodesh Nisan is the “beginning of the months.” What is the significance of this? There is a dispute whether the world was created in Nisan or in Tishrei. Furthermore, why does the pasuk stress “for you”? For whom is this month not the first? Why is it more appropriate for Nisan to be counted as the first of the months, rather than Tishrei?
- Nisan was the beginning of the *geulah*, for that is when *Akeidat Yitzchak* took place and also when Yaakov received the *berachot*. The word חֹדֶשׁ (month) has the same root as the word הַתְּחַדְּשׁוּת (renewal). The nations of the world count their years according to the solar calendar, while the Jewish people count according to the lunar calendar. It is fitting that Nisan is the beginning of the year specifically for Bnei Yisrael, and not the gentile nations, since Bnei Yisrael strive to constantly renew their Avodat Hashem.
- In the month of Nisan, Bnei Yisrael began a new life of Torah, *emunah*, and *mesirut nefesh*. Therefore, they were enjoined to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Through remembering, their level of *emunah* becomes strengthened. Remembering brings to action. The name נִסִּים alludes to נִסִּים (miracles). The nation experienced miracles, one of which was emerging from the forty-ninth level of *tumah* to *kedushah*, in preparation for receiving the Torah. The two mitzvot of *korban Pesach* and *brit milah* were granted to them, for they had not yet received the Torah. It was in the merit of these mitzvot that they were worthy of later accepting the Torah.
- What was the significance of the command to put blood on the threshold of their homes? And why the necessity for the two types of blood, that of the *korban Pesach* and that of *milah*, especially since they did not even complete the process of circumcision until later? Why did Hashem “pass over” their houses? And why do the firstborn fast on Erev Pesach? It would seem to be more appropriate for them to feast in commemoration of the miracle of their salvation. Moreover, wouldn't it be more appropriate for them to fast on the fifteenth of the month, when their liberation actually took place?

- All of this is in order to demonstrate our nation's *mesirut nefesh*. The letting of blood is a form of self-sacrifice. Hashem skipped over their homes in a supernatural manner, to indicate that Bnei Yisrael are above the laws of nature. The blood of the *korban* Pesach implies monetary sacrifice, and *brit milah* denotes bodily sacrifice. After they completed the mitzvah of circumcision in the Wilderness, they merited receiving the Torah. The firstborn sons fast in order to demonstrate their *emunah* and submission to Hashem. The objective of Pesach is to strengthen our belief in Hashem.
- Thus, Nisan has the following advantage over Tishrei in being counted as the first of the months. The month of Tishrei is propitious for doing teshuvah from fear, whereas Nisan is propitious for doing teshuvah from love, joy, and submission to Hashem. It is a month of unlimited self-sacrifice. This is what enabled the *geulah* of Bnei Yisrael, releasing them from servitude to liberation.

CONTEMPLATING CREATION AROUSES FAITH IN HASHEM

“This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year”

(Shemot 12:2)

The very first mitzvah which Bnei Yisrael received, while yet in Egypt, was the command to sanctify the new moon. Hashem wished to ingrain the foundation of faith in their hearts, so that they would fully believe that He created this wonderful world. Contemplating the moon and its hosts of stars would impress them with the beauty of nature. Their hearts would be full of faith as they faced the glaring reality of Hashem's might. This would instill *yirat Shamayim* in their hearts as well, as the *Navi* Yeshayahu states (40:26), “Raise your eyes on High and see Who created these.”

Furthermore, David Hamelech tells us (*Tehillim* 19:2), “The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the firmament tells of His handiwork.” In order to increase one’s level of *emunah* in Hashem, he must lift his eyes upward and contemplate the heavenly hosts. This intensifies one’s *ahavat Hashem* and *yirat Shamayim*. Naturally, merely looking at these elements of nature will not automatically bring one to fear of Heaven. It is necessary to admire nature and allow its intrinsic beauty to radiate Hashem’s Presence upon our lives. Only He Alone created all this. Hashem commanded us to sanctify the new moon every month in order that we lift our eyes heavenward and ponder the wonders of Creation. This will increase our level of *emunah*.

The moon is a magnificent metaphor for Am Yisrael. At the end of each month, it wanes, only to wax once again, at the beginning of the next month. Bnei Yisrael endure untold suffering in this bitter exile. The nations are determined to wipe out the Jewish nation. But Bnei Yisrael are resilient. Hashem rescues them from their difficulties, renewing their youth, and they burst forth once again, just like the moon. The Jewish nation will live forever, in spite of their terrible tribulations. In contrast, mighty nations that were considered world empires are now extinct, all but forgotten from the annals of history. *Baruch Hashem*, our nation endures eternally, outliving our enemies. Contemplating the waxing and waning of the moon endows one with perfect faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Who loves His nation with an everlasting love and will never forsake them.

How is one able to take these messages from the wonders of Creation? Only after he disconnects himself from the frivolities of this world. As soon as he detaches himself from materialism, he is material for spirituality. His *neshamah* has become purified, and studying the heavenly bodies increases his *emunah* in Hashem. But if he wallows in the pursuit of physical pleasures, he corrupts his mind. It becomes too coarse to appreciate the fineness of Creation. This might be the reason

for jumping and dancing during the ceremony of *kiddush levanah*. It is an act of detaching oneself from earthliness and striving to reach greater heights. Afterward, blessing the new moon will bring him to greater levels of *emunah* and *yirat Shamayim*.

After Am Yisrael received the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon and became greater believers, they were prepared to sacrifice their lives for His mitzvot. Immediately after giving this mitzvah, Hashem commanded them to take the sheep, the deity of Egypt, in order to sacrifice it as the *korban* Pesach. They tied the sheep to their bedposts and slaughtered them before the Egyptians. They did not fear the wrath of their countrymen, for their faith in Hashem was perfect. They even smeared the blood of the sheep upon their doorposts, as they had been commanded, without fear of retribution.

From where did Am Yisrael draw such boldness? It was in the *zechut* of the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month, which they had previously received. It infused them with such complete faith in Hashem that they were prepared to sacrifice their very lives in order to bring the *korban* Pesach. They did not fear the Egyptians in the least, and performed the mitzvah with alacrity and joy.

The *Navi* states, “Raise your eyes on High and see Who created these.” The initials of the words **מי ברא** (Who created) spell the word **בם** (in them). This refers to words of Torah, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 6:7), “**וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם** – You shall speak of them.” One who lifts his eyes to study the wonders of Creation is suffused with *emunah* in Hashem. The power of this elevated state facilitates Torah study with love and self-sacrifice.

If one succeeded in becoming impressed by the beauty of nature, he must certainly have first separated himself from physical passions, purifying his mind. Otherwise, he would not have merited contemplating nature appropriately, as we mentioned above.

Distancing oneself from materialism is a short step away from fulfilling the mitzvah of “You shall speak of them.” This refers to ascent in Torah through sweat and toil. It is impossible to attach oneself to materialism and Torah at the same time. The author of *Chovot Halevavot* writes (*Sha’ar Cheshbon Hanefesh*) that just as it is impossible for water and fire to co-exist, so is it impossible that love of this world and love of the Next World co-exist in the heart of the believing Jew. A definite division must be made between them. One who merits making materialism loathsome in his eyes will certainly merit rising in Torah and toiling in it appropriately.

The *korban* Pesach also teaches us how to distance ourselves from physicality and “pass over” it. Why did Hashem command the offering of the *korban* Pesach in the Beit Hamikdash? It is understandable that the *korban chatat*, which was offered as atonement for a specific sin, was delegated to the Beit Hamikdash. However, it would seem more fitting to sacrifice the *korban* Pesach, which was required to be eaten by all family members together, in the privacy of one’s own home.

Perhaps we can answer as follows. The word Pesach denotes “passing over,” as the Torah states that Hashem passed over the houses of the Children of Israel. If a person is enticed to sin or enjoy a materialistic pleasure, he should not allow himself to be ensnared in the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. He should rather “pass over” this passing pleasure and ascend in spirituality. This will help him avoid falling into sin. The *korban* Pesach was offered specifically in the Beit Hamikdash so that he should learn this lesson. If he, indeed, takes this message to heart, he will avert the need to come to the Beit Hamikdash frequently in order to offer the *korban chatat*. He will have mastered the art of sacrificing his own pleasures upon the altar of Hashem’s will, “passing over” his own desires. This will protect him against all forms of sin. This is the objective of bringing the *korban* Pesach in Yerushalayim.

————— In Summary —————

- The very first mitzvah which Bnei Yisrael received, while yet in Egypt, was the command to sanctify the new moon. By contemplating the wonders of nature, one increases his *emunah* and *yirat Shamayim*.
- The moon is a metaphor for Am Yisrael. Although we endure tremendous suffering at the hands of the gentiles, and at times are almost destroyed, Hashem renews us like the new moon. Conversely, world powers of ancient times have disappeared.
- In order to increase one's *emunah* through contemplating Creation, he must disconnect himself from the frivolities of this world.
- In Mitzrayim, after receiving the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to bring the *korban* Pesach. Their strengthened *emunah* enabled them to fulfill this command and sacrifice the deity of the Egyptians.
- "Raise your eyes on High and see Who created these." The initials of the words **מי ברא** (Who created) spell the word **בם** (in them). When one is infused with *emunah* by contemplating the natural world, he naturally learns Torah with increased love of Hashem.
- The *korban* Pesach was brought in the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. Since we are commanded to eat it with one's family gathered together, why was it not offered in the privacy of one's own home? The word Pesach denotes "passing over." When one is enticed to sin, he should pass over his desire and ascend in spiritual matters.

CHECKING FOR CHAMETZ BEFORE PESACH

The days preceding Pesach are days of introspection and making resolutions. One should use these days to ponder the mitzvot he is given then, and try to understand their meaning. Through this, he will

come to positive conclusions. These are days of elevation, or *chas v'shalom*, descent.

The Torah commands us to destroy all chametz before Pesach. Simply nullifying all of one's chametz is sufficient, according to the Torah (*Pesachim* 4b). However, our Sages say that one must also check for chametz (*ibid.* 2a, in the Mishnah.) All chametz must be categorically removed from one's domain, in order to avoid the temptation of finding chametz and desiring to consume it on Pesach. Our *Chachamim* therefore stated that one must rid himself completely of all chametz and destroy it (*ibid.* 6b).

The physical act of burning the chametz is a reference to the eradication of what chametz represents spiritually. The main act of searching for and destroying chametz does not involve the chametz in one's house, in his attic, garage, office, or car, but the chametz in his mind and in his heart. He should expunge from within himself all vestiges of the *Yetzer Hara*, which is pure unadulterated chametz. He should uproot from his heart all bad character traits that he has become accustomed to.

Just as physical chametz requires actual burning, so too, it is insufficient to merely eliminate aveirot from his mind and his heart, but he must search for them, and rectify them completely, in order that he should never repeat them. He must completely cleanse himself. This is the perfect preparation for Pesach.

On Pesach, every person should feel that he is totally destroying his bad *middot* and his sins, just like on Yom Kippur. The holiday of Pesach is the symbol of freedom. On Pesach, our nation was liberated. It is called "*zman cheiruteinu* – The time of our liberation." Chazal teach (*Avot* 6:2; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:21), "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of the Torah." Through Torah he is able to eradicate the spiritual chametz in his heart, freeing himself of the *Yetzer Hara*.

At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bnei Yisrael were at an all-time low, wallowing in the forty-ninth level of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). But on Pesach they were extricated and brought to the heights of spirituality, to the extent that our Sages tell us (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 15) that at the *Yam Suf*, a servant woman saw more miracles than later prophets were able to see. They received the mitzvot of the *korban* Pesach, as well as *milah*, as the *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 16:6) proclaims, “Then I passed you and saw you wallowing in your blood.” The removal of the foreskin alludes to their elimination of the *Yetzer Hara* and *tumah*. They attained the level of submission to Hashem represented by Shabbat Hagadol, tying the *avodah zarah* of Mitzrayim to their bedposts (*Tur, Orach Chaim*, ch. 470).

In this manner, they demonstrated to one and all that they were bound to Hashem and not the *Yetzer Hara*. They left Egypt without any provisions, for they had trust in Hashem, Who would see to their needs.

We are enjoined to remember the day we left Egypt all the days of our life (based on *Devarim* 16:3). Indeed, numerous times a day, we remember our Exodus from Egypt.

It is not sufficient to remember it only one day a year, on Pesach. One who wishes to truly associate himself with our nation’s creation, their trials, and their connection with Hashem, must remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day, as well as every night. Chazal teach us (*Berachot* 12b) that the words, “**All** the days of your life” means at night, as well. In this manner, one comes to the understanding that Hashem is watching over us at all times. He will realize that there is none like Hashem, Who responds to our cries.

We are living in difficult times, yet every day we witness Hashem’s miracles. We must believe that Hashem never removes His protection from His nation (*Tehillim* 111:4). Therefore, every day, we must remember the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Chazal state (*Pesachim*

116b), “In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he left Egypt.” We should take a lesson from our ancestors in Egypt, who, from the lowest level possible, ascended the ladder of spirituality, until they reached the level of angels.

————— In Summary —————

- Before Pesach, a person must resolve to improve his actions. According to the Torah, it is enough to nullify one’s chametz, but our Sages have commanded to search for it, as well. This is not only in regard to physical chametz, but also, and mainly, in regard to spiritual chametz. One must work to correct his aveirot and bad *middot*, and distance himself from the *Yetzer Hara*. In this manner, he will become elevated and close to Hashem.
- Before Pesach, Bnei Yisrael abandoned *tumah*, depicted by the *avodah zarah* of the sheep, and also circumcised themselves. They tied the sheep to their bedposts and bound themselves to their Creator. We should act similarly. Every person is enjoined to remember the day of our Exodus from Egypt, every day of our lives. In this way, he can learn the lessons taught by the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and strive to be like our ancestors. We should strive to overcome the powers of *tumah* and the *Yetzer Hara* and come closer to Hashem.

BURNING THE CHAMETZ — ELIMINATING BAD HABITS

At the beginning of *Masechet Pesachim*, the *Tosafot* writes (2a, beginning with the words “On the eve of the fourteenth”) that the entire purpose of checking for chametz is in order that one should not come to eat chametz on Pesach, out of habit. Chametz is not like other prohibitions, which are always forbidden. Since a person is accustomed to eating chametz throughout the year, if he would come across it on Pesach, he would be liable to eat it out of habit, forgetting

that it is Pesach. Therefore, he must search for any vestige of chametz, in order to remove all obstacles from his path, so that he should not inadvertently sin.

This teaches us how great is the power of habit. For, even though it is well-known that chametz is prohibited on Pesach, and that possessing even a minute amount is a very severe transgression, (*Pesachim* 30a), our Sages enacted that we should search for it, and not rely on the Torah's allowance of nullifying it, fearing lest one forget and eat it out of habit.

Therefore, before Pesach, our *Chachamim* commanded us to check all cracks and crevices in order to find and burn any remnants of chametz (*Rambam, Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah* 3:1). Likewise, one must examine his actions every day, uprooting and burning out all bad habits from his heart.

LESSONS FROM THE NAMES OF PESACH

*“The entire Congregation of the assembly of
Israel shall slaughter it in the afternoon”*

(*Shemot* 12:6)

Chazal tell us (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 430) that the Shabbat preceding Pesach is called *Shabbat Hagadol* because of the great miracle that occurred then. Bnei Yisrael were commanded on that day to take one sheep for each family and tie it to the bedpost, in preparation to slaughter it on the 14th of Nisan. When the Egyptians observed how the Jews disgraced their deity, slaughtering it and eating its flesh, they were full of fury and wanted to completely destroy them. Hashem performed miracles on behalf of His people, and they remained unharmed.

An incident that occurred in Arab countries in the year 5771 illustrates the tumult that must have erupted due to the slaughtering of the sheep. A Christian leader wished to mock Islam. He publicly burned the Koran. The entire Muslim world was up in arms. Pandemonium and protests broke out, loudly decrying this act.

Bnei Yisrael took the sheep, the sanctified idols of the Egyptians, and publicly slaughtered and consumed them. These were the very same Jews who had recently been wretched slaves, submissive to their Egyptian taskmasters. Here they came and scorned the sheep, deity of the ruling race. The name *Shabbat Hagadol* attests to the great miracles performed on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, protecting them from the wrath of the gentiles.

However, wouldn't it be more appropriate to call the Shabbat preceding Yom Kippur *Shabbat Hagadol*? This is the day when everyone rouses himself spiritually, and his heart is filled with *yirat Shamayim*. On this Shabbat each person surely examines his deeds and seeks ways to improve himself. He does complete teshuvah, in order to prepare himself fittingly for the great day of Yom Kippur. One does not usually attain this purity of soul on other Shabbatot of the year. Why, then, is this Shabbat not called *Shabbat Hagadol*?

The Torah is very stringent concerning the prohibition of chametz on Pesach. One is enjoined to check every crack and crevice, nullifying any and all forms of chametz. But our *Chachamim* do not suffice with the mitzvah of the Torah. They commanded that we burn any remnants of chametz in our possession, fearing lest one may come across a tasty-looking piece of chametz on Pesach and eat it (see *Pesachim* 6b). This would seem sensible regarding large amounts of chametz. But why are we required to search out and burn even a crumb long-forgotten in some far corner? Do we really suspect that someone would want to eat it?

In order to address these questions, let us first study the names of this holiday. The names given for Pesach, in their correct order, can serve as trailblazers to pave our path in Avodat Hashem.

We begin with *Chag Ha'aviv – The Spring Festival*. The spring is when all the foliage becomes renewed. The trees turn green and the flowers blossom. The entire world becomes rejuvenated. A person, at times, wishes to turn over a new leaf. He wants to open a fresh page in his spiritual life, improving himself and walking the road of righteousness. How is this done? By means of *Chag Hamatzot – The Festival of Matzot*. The word מצות (matzot) is similar to the word מצוות (mitzvot). On the pasuk (*Shemot* 12:17), “You shall safeguard the matzot,” Chazal say (*Mechilta*) in the name of Rabbi Yoshiah, “Do not read matzot, but mitzvot. Do not let a mitzvah that comes your way go sour.” The first step in the journey to the House of Hashem is to first and foremost attach oneself to Torah and mitzvot.

To reach this strong connection, one must take the lesson from the name *Chag HaPesach – The Festival of Passover*. He must “pass over” all materialism. If a person is constantly attracted to the pleasures of this world, he will never manage to acquire Torah and perform mitzvot properly. One who is enslaved to the pleasures of his body and is not prepared to forego them, constantly chasing fleeting frivolities, will never be capable of harnessing himself with the reins of Torah and mitzvot. He will not agree to submit himself to the yoke of the King of the world. But if he is wise enough to distance himself from earthly pleasures, “passing over” physical pursuits, and overcoming the *nisyonot* strewn on his path, his way will be paved before him, connecting him with the Creator. He has become liberated of the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*, freed from the frivolities of this world. He will thereby become attached to Torah and mitzvot. The pasuk states (*ibid.* 12:27), “It is a Pesach feast-offering to Hashem.” By passing over the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*, he will merit becoming sanctified to Hashem.

This is the essence of Pesach. A person frees himself from the bondage of his *Yetzer Hara*, distancing himself from him as much as possible. For if he were to allow him even a small foothold in his territory, the *Yetzer* will end up becoming his master, *chalilah*. Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22), “At first, the *Yetzer Hara* is weak like a female. Afterward, he gains strength like a male. At first, he is like a guest. But afterward, he becomes the landlord.”

Now we might understand why the Torah is so scrupulous regarding even a small crumb of chametz on Pesach. Chametz symbolizes the *Yetzer Hara*, which must be eradicated at all costs. If even a tiny smidgen of the *Yetzer Hara* resides within a person’s heart, it will eventually overtake him completely. Chazal tell us (*Sukkah* 52a) that the *Yetzer Hara* begins as a thin spider’s web and eventually becomes as thick as wagon ropes. The *Yetzer Hara* never rests on his laurels, always attempting to rope us in as his slaves. It is therefore every person’s obligation to thoroughly examine his “cracks and crevices” for any trace of impurity and eradicate it completely. Any suggestion of sin should be burned, and any negative character trait purged from within him. For although the *Yetzer Hara* starts off small, we cannot fathom the proportions he can acquire.

The Shabbat preceding Pesach is auspicious for the name *Shabbat Hagadol*. It is then that a person perceives the proper path he should take to ensure his walking safely in his Avodat Hashem. For if he merited a spiritual awakening and wishes to start a new chapter in his spiritual story, the equivalent of *Chag Ha’aviv*, when all of nature is renewed, he must connect himself closely with *Chag Hamatzot*, representing the mitzvot, which he will attain in the merit of *Chag HaPesach*, “passing over” the passing pursuits of physicality. He will do this with love and joy, all the while maintaining his distance from chametz, the embodiment of the *Yetzer Hara*. This will enable him to acquire the tools to facilitate his spiritual ascent throughout the rest of the year. The glow of Pesach already begins on Shabbat Hagadol,

illuminating one's way on the path of *kedushah*, liberated from the tentacles of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Furthermore, these days provide preparation for the long-awaited day, the day of *Matan Torah* on Shavuot. No pain, no gain, as the saying goes. One who truly wishes to wear the victor's crown of Torah is required to do battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. Tireless effort is needed in order to reach great heights.

A man once met me and began pouring out all his woes. He had no place to live; he had no means of support; and was generally in a bad state. He turned to me pleadingly, asking how he could improve his lot.

I told him that I thought he suffered from the trait of laziness. As long as he would sit idly, he would not accomplish a thing. I suggested that he rise with alacrity every morning and go out to work, living from the fruit of his labor. This would bring him fulfillment, and *bisiyata di'Shemaya*, his condition would improve. Man is born to work. Without toil, there are no gains.

In contrast, I met a man from Syria who immigrated to Venezuela. He had started off as a wretched pauper, who had suffered many failures. But he never gave up. He decided he would take whatever work came his way, in order to provide himself a livelihood.

Every day, he would pass by the place where the factories would dispose of their leftover fabrics. He collected pieces of fabric that still looked good. He would bring them home, and he and his sons would fashion these fabrics into men's ties. They would sell these ties for a profit. Slowly but surely, his condition improved. He upgraded the quality of his ties and eventually opened a store. Hashem helped him tremendously, and he ultimately became one of the wealthiest men in the country.

These tales show us that a little self-motivation goes a long way. If this applies in materialistic matters, how much more so in spiritual

ones. How much must man exert himself in order to merit acquiring Torah! The great people of our nation merited acquiring their status through exhausting efforts to sanctify their souls and purify their minds. They agreed to forego worldly pleasures. They fought a mighty battle with their *Yetzer Hara* and therefore merited reaching the summit of the mountain of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

Even in my own life, I see the truth of this. Through the merit of my holy ancestors, I have been able to establish Torah institutions throughout the world. But only with much sweat and toil. Throughout the year, I sacrifice myself to bring the word of Hashem to every Jew, no matter where. In order to increase the glory of Torah throughout the world, I am constantly travelling. This saps my energy and precludes normal sleeping patterns. For a large part of the year, I hardly get to spend time with my wife or my children, may they live and be well. Yet I am driven by the mission to spread Torah all through the world and broaden the borders of *kedushah*. This is very likely my *tikkun*, the reason why I came into the world.

The very generous donations which we manage to distribute to the needy also do not come easily. This year (5771), once again with Hashem's *chessed*, we succeeded in arranging a *kimcha d'Pischa* distribution. Thousands of families in various locations, both in Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora, were assisted in this way. Wherever we heard there was a need, in France, Argentina, and many other countries, we tried to meet it however possible.

Do not entertain the thought that the funds for these drives come effortlessly. I must meet with various philanthropists, scattered throughout the world. It is my job to convince them to contribute toward our cause. I teach them the virtues of charity. *Baruch Hashem*, my efforts pay off, and I see success in my labors.

I am not, *chalilah*, relating all this in order to publicize my good deeds. It is to teach others that in order to achieve positive results in

one's Avodat Hashem, he must put in effort. He cannot sit still, for only through planting with tears will one reap with joy. During these exalted days, days of preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, one must exert himself to improve his character and perfect his ways in order to merit wearing the crown of Torah.

I know of many people who put in long hours of work every day. But, unfortunately, when it comes to Torah, they're a closed book. They have no strength left for toiling in Torah and mitzvot. On the contrary, in spiritual matters, they are lazy, unwilling to expend the necessary energy for Avodat Hashem. Good business deals soak up all their stores of diligence and alacrity, so by the end of the day, they're finished.

This is obviously not the right way to act. Hashem desires that people put minimal effort into worldly matters, satisfying oneself with little. But in matters of Avodat Hashem, the sky's the limit. One should constantly aspire to reach greater and greater heights, as much as he is able, in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

On one of my trips to the USA, I met a wealthy man. He came to me for a blessing. I asked him whether he dons tefillin or observes Shabbat.

"I don't even have time to think of such things," he answered simply. "From dawn to dusk, I am involved in business."

I didn't give up, and pressed on. "Think rationally. In the five minutes it takes you to put on tefillin each morning, you are bonding with your Maker. This is the most profitable deal, earning you a portion in eternity. You should know that all the blessings you enjoy in life come from Hashem. What a shame it is that you don't try to connect with Him in some way..."

The man heard me out and went on his way. After a long time, he came to me again, this time with his wife. I asked him how he was

faring. He told me that his fortunes suddenly took a downward turn, leaving him with hardly anything. But almost in the same breath, he said the following: “I came to thank the Rav, shlita, for after our first meeting, I began putting on tefillin every day. The words of the Rav made an impression on me. After being scrupulous with the mitzvah of tefillin, I began to be scrupulous with other mitzvot, as well. *Baruch Hashem*, my entire family has become transformed. We have all undergone complete teshuvah, and I have fixed times every day for Torah study. I came to show my gratitude to the Rav, who enlightened my eyes and paved the path of teshuvah before me.”

His wife added, “It is true that we are bereft of all our physical wealth. But we are loaded down with spiritual riches. This is the wealth that brings in its wake true happiness. The way of Torah suffuses us with real joy. With all of our previous wealth, we never reached the level of happiness we have now.”

This is the story as it transpired. Every word transmitted the message that it is worthwhile for a person to invest his main energies in Avodat Hashem, in Torah study and mitzvah observance. Only they will grant him true happiness. A life of Torah does not end with a person’s passing on. It escorts him to the World to Come, granting him tremendous reward. But apart from what awaits him in the Next World, he eats of the fruits of his labor even in this world, as well.

I would like to add the following comment. The man who had been demoted from his wealth did not complain at all about his loss. He had no grievances against Hashem, *chas v’shalom*. He did not wonder why, after accepting the yoke of Torah upon his shoulders, instead of finding blessing in his fortunes, the opposite took place. After he began to see what a Torah life is all about, he appreciated its sweetness, as the psalmist says in Tehillim (34:9), “Contemplate and see that Hashem is good; praiseworthy is the man who takes refuge in Him.”

In Summary

- Why is the Shabbat preceding Pesach called *Shabbat Hagadol*? It would seem more appropriate to call the Shabbat before Yom Kippur by this name, in anticipation for this great day. The Torah is very stringent concerning eliminating chametz from our possession. Why did the *Chachamim* add on the command to burn the chametz?
- These questions can be answered by examining the names of the festival. It is called *Chag Ha'aviv*, representing the renewal of nature, which inspires a person to renew his Avodat Hashem. In order to turn over a new leaf in his spiritual story, he must relate to Pesach as *Chag Hamatzot*, a time to increase his mitzvah performance. This is hinted by the similarity of the word *matzot* to *mitzvot*. He will achieve this by taking the lesson from the name *Chag HaPesach*, passing over material pursuits and pursuing a spiritual ascent.
- On Shabbat Hagadol, one takes these important messages to heart and commits himself to incorporating them in his life.
- In order to achieve one's goals, he must expend the necessary effort. No pain, no gain. One's main efforts should be invested in his Avodat Hashem. Then, he will gain tremendous reward in the Next World and enjoy the fruits of his labors in this world, as well.

REMEMBERING THE EXODUS EVERY DAY

Chag HaPesach is also called *Chag Hageulah – The Festival of Salvation*, and *Chag Hacheirut – The Festival of Liberation*. Our ancestors were released from Egyptian bondage to freedom and from physical labor to spiritual liberty.

For that reason, every member of the Jewish nation is obligated to remember the day of our liberation from Egypt all the days of his life (based on *Devarim* 16:3). This applies even though he himself was not there, for, had our fathers remained in Egypt, we would still be in

bondage. Our ancestors' redemption from Egypt means that we are spared the travails of being there.

This commandment raises several questions:

Why did the Torah command us to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day, instead of a few times throughout the year, as we do on the other holidays?

Why do we remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* on every holiday? What's the connection between the Exodus and the Yamim Tovim?

How can we compare our state of freedom and liberty to the situation of our ancestors, enslaved in a foreign land?

“It is a night of anticipation for Hashem; a protection for all the Children of Israel for their generations” (*Shemot* 12:42). The night of Pesach was not a night of protection only in Egypt, but for every generation.

However, this is only on condition that a person awakens himself to feel the slavery of our people in those days. He can truly feel the freedom if he puts himself in their place, enslaved to foreign taskmasters. As a slave he would not be able to keep Torah and mitzvot at all. Only upon liberation does he become a free man, able to develop a relationship with Hashem. By contemplating these things, he brings himself to appreciate the liberation from Mitzrayim.

But if one does not feel the slavery and all of its accompanying hardships, always seeing himself as a free man, what type of freedom will he experience on Pesach?

Therefore, we should make appropriate preparations before the holiday. We should put ourselves into the mindset of slaves, in order that we may feel the freedom. Even great tzaddikim are enjoined to make this type of preparation. The appreciation of freedom is aroused within a person only after he prepares himself as he should. One who

does not do so will become even more enslaved and will not merit true freedom.

How does one prepare himself for true freedom? It is through exerting himself to the utmost before the festival. Through cleaning his house from any trace of chametz, he feels a real sense of servitude and drudgery. When Pesach finally arrives, he experiences the liberty which comes in the aftermath of hard physical and emotional labor.

Through *emunah* in the miracles of Pesach, he remembers *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. And even though he himself was not there, his *mazal* took part in it, rendering him a person who left Mitzrayim.

Before Pesach, a person prepares himself to feel the slavery. On Pesach, he feels the freedom from bondage. And after the holiday, the impression made by the Exodus from Egypt should remain with him. Without preparing oneself, he is unable to appreciate the miracle of our Exodus, lacking a basic tenet in our belief in Hashem.

How, indeed, can a free man feel as though he were enslaved and was now emancipated? He knows he was never in bondage. Is he meant to fool himself into thinking he was once a slave and now became free?

One who is a true servant of Hashem constantly examines those things which could hinder his Avodat Hashem. This, in essence, is the miracle of Pesach. We must realize that we were slaves to Pharaoh Harasha, the embodiment of the *Yetzer Hara*, and then became free from his control and subject to the authority of Hashem. After being set free, we were able to serve Hashem, something denied to us during our years in Egypt.

But one who views himself as a free man, never experiencing this feeling of *kedushah*, is unable to fulfill the injunction of Chazal that “in every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he left Egypt.”

The author of the sefer *Ma'archei Lev* writes, "One who views the time of Mashiach superficially, sees only that each person will sit under his grape vine and fig tree (an allusion to physical comforts) (based on *Michah* 4:4). But the truth is that the period of Mashiach will be a time of living on a spiritual plane."

The Ramchal states that the tzaddik in *galut* lives as though Mashiach has already arrived. How is this? Just as in the times of Mashiach, all will live spiritually, likewise, the tzaddik lives his life on a spiritual level even in these days of exile.

With this in mind, we can say that by means of the physical labor which a person does in order to eradicate chametz, he can relate to the harsh conditions our forefathers experienced in Egypt. In order to savor the freedom, one must put himself through the exile. Only in this way can he truly appreciate becoming a free man!

How do we experience this feeling of complete servitude? The Gra states that wherever the word "obligated" is used, it refers to a literal obligation. The obligation here refers to searching out every last morsel of chametz in every crack and crevice. When one searches on his hands and knees to find every forgotten crumb of chametz, one truly feels like an indigent slave. Only afterward, at the Seder table, where he sits like a king, does he feel a real sense of freedom.

Based on this, we can answer our previous questions. It is specifically on Pesach that Hashem commands us to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* all the days of our lives. This is so that one should feel the slavery and the freedom every day, and constantly connect with Hashem.

Thus, all of the holidays are related to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, for we are commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day of the year.

Above all, this is the connection between those days and today. For, although we are free people, we must constantly remember the

bondage of our fathers in Egypt, so that we might feel the freedom every moment of our lives. In this manner, we will merit the future *geulah*, may it come speedily in our days, Amen.

————— In Summary —————

- Every Jew has an obligation to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every single day. Why are we commanded to do this daily? Why do we remember the Exodus on every holiday? What is the connection between the days of Egyptian bondage, and our times, when we are free people?
- Pesach is a night of protection for all generations. In order to feel true freedom, one must first contemplate the exile in Egypt. This is done through prior preparation. Even great tzaddikim must make this preparation before the Pesach holiday. Through the intensive physical work before Pesach, one can truly feel the servitude. He will then experience the liberation. When one has *emunah* in Hashem, he will experience freedom from his *Yetzer Hara*.
- How does one feel the slavery that our ancestors experienced in Egypt? After all, he is a free man. If a person lives on a spiritual plane, like the tzaddikim, it is possible to feel the slavery to the *Yetzer Hara*, as well as emancipation from it. When one searches for the crumbs of chametz, like a pauper searches for food in the garbage bins, he truly feels humbled, and afterwards, will merit liberty. Therefore, we must constantly throughout the year, including the holidays, remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. This is the connection between those days and these days. With this feeling, we will merit true freedom and the future *geulah*.

NISAN — THE MONTH OF REDEMPTION

We already mentioned our obligation to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Chazal state (*Pesachim* 16a), “One is obligated to see himself as if he went out of Egypt.” The Gra considers this a positive commandment. In all honesty, how can a person be obligated to feel this way, as

though he himself left Egypt? We were never slaves; how can we be taken to task for not seeing ourselves as though we left Egypt?

Chazal state (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a), “In Nisan, they were redeemed, and in Nisan they will be redeemed.” The entire month of Nisan, and especially the Seder Night, is protected from the negative forces (*Pesachim* 109b), an auspicious time for *geulah*.

But it is still difficult to understand why the redemption took place specifically in Nisan and not during another month. One might suggest that it is because in Nisan the angels arrived at Avraham’s tent with the tiding of Yitzchak’s birth, on the following Pesach (*Bereishit Rabbah* 48:12). However, Nisan had already been designated to be the month in which the *geulah* would take place many generations before this.

Why is Nisan the beginning of the months? Why is Nisan protected from negative forces? Why is it called *The Month of Spring*, and Pesach called *The Spring Festival*?

Perhaps we can answer with the following thought. Mitzvot must be done with proper intent (*Rosh Hashanah* 28b). They must be experienced and felt. This is the purpose of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. It is insufficient to remember the story as a once-upon-a-time occurrence. One must live through the story, so that it enters his mind and his heart. He must feel how much our ancestors suffered in Mitzrayim, and that if they had not been redeemed, he himself would still be there, enslaved and embittered.

Retelling the story of our Exodus instills belief in Hashem in our hearts. Since the *Yetzer Hara* always tries to weaken our level of *emunah*, when Pesach comes, we can recharge ourselves with *emunah*, with vigor and enthusiasm. By telling over the story of the Exodus, and feeling as though he himself was emancipated from Egypt, one will become tremendously inspired to believe wholeheartedly in Hashem.

The name ניסן (Nisan) has the same root as the word נסיון (test). The month of Nisan is a testing ground to examine how each person will

view the rest of his year. Will he, indeed, be a free man, liberated from the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*, or will he still be under his influence?

Nisan, being the first of the months, is auspicious for strengthening one's *emunah* in Hashem and bringing the *geulah*. One who recharges his spiritual batteries in Nisan is withstanding the test of the month. He will be re-energized, and will be able to ascend in his Avodat Hashem during the rest of the months of the year. But this is on condition that he feels as though he himself left Egypt.

In order to experience the slavery and redemption, one should strive to imagine what actually happened there. I have heard of various tzaddikim, such as Rabbi Moshe Mordechai MiLelov, zt"l, who would carry sacks on their shoulders and call out the pasuk (*Shemot* 12:34) "Their leftovers bound up in their garments upon their shoulders." They felt as though they themselves had just left Egypt.

It is also told that one time, the Chafetz Chaim was seen laughing out loud. When asked for an explanation, he said, "I am learning about the plague of lice, and imagining the Egyptians scratching themselves all over. This makes me laugh." It is important to relate to the bondage of our nation in Egypt and their subsequent redemption.

For that reason, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel states (*Pesachim* 116b in the Mishnah), "Whoever did not say the following three things on Pesach, has not fulfilled his obligation. They are: Pesach, matzah, and maror." The author of the sefer *Yeshuat Hashem* questions this. We never find that one must mention the mitzvah before he actually carries it out. Furthermore, we never see that one is considered as not having fulfilled his mitzvah obligation if he has not mentioned the mitzvah beforehand.

But here it is different. Remembering these three things helps us to feel that we ourselves left Mitzrayim. Mentioning them out-loud helps us to feel their import in our hearts. This is a most vital point of Pesach.

We find, in the Pesach Haggadah, that our *Chachamim* would remain awake, retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* all night long. What took them so long? This is in line with what we said previously. They felt as though they themselves had just been liberated from slavery, and as if they had themselves experienced fantastic miracles this night. They spoke of *emunah*, which gave them the power to become freed from the shackles of Pharaoh, the human form of the *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, they dwelt on relating the details of the Exodus all night long.

The *Beit Yisrael* of Gur quotes the Gemara (*Pesachim* 6b): “Two things are out of a person’s domain, yet the pasuk implies that they are in his domain. One of these is chametz from the sixth hour (before Pesach).” Chametz, he says, is a hint to the *Yetzer Hara*. On Pesach, everyone has the ability to rule over his *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem has brought us close to Him. We have the ability to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara* and empower ourselves with *emunah*. This is the true joy of Pesach.

On Pesach, the angels predicted Yitzchak’s birth, which would take place the following Nisan. They alluded to the fact that he would withstand a נִסּוּן (test) in the month of נִסָּן. Just as Avraham withstood ten *nisyonot* (*Avot* 5:3), so too, would his children have the ability to withstand trials and renew their Avodat Hashem. Then, the *kelippah* will have no control over Bnei Yisrael, for the night of Pesach will be a night of protection from all negative forces.

Now we can understand why this month is called *The Month of Spring*. In the spring, everything blossoms, the trees burst forth with buds, wearing a youthful look. A person suffers many *nisyonot* in his youth. When one does teshuvah, he brings himself back to the years of his youth and is rejuvenated.

Unfortunately, nowadays, we find many adults, some of them well on in years, who cannot withstand temptation. They emulate the young, wearing youthful garments, in order that they should feel young. They

also wear short clothes, not in the spirit of *tzeniut*, succumbing to temptation in order to be fashionable. But there are those who refuse to give in to temptation. They withstand *nisyonot* admirably, just like our ancestors in Egypt. They merit special *siyata di'Shemaya*.

At the Seder table, we recite the passage “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” We are now free men. But a wealthy man who is blinded by his wealth and does not feel the *galut*, is not free at all, but a slave to his *Yetzer Hara*.

Chazal state (*Esther Rabbah* 7:25) that Hashem told the Shevatim, “You sold Yosef into slavery. You, too, shall become slaves.” The rectification for this is unity. On the night of Pesach, all remember our previous slavery, rich and poor alike. This is the way to break the *middah* of arrogance, which is so despicable. One’s heart becomes broken, and he comes closer to Hashem.

Unity is an asset in withstanding a *nisayon*. One who helps his fellow Jew also hastens the *geulah*. On Pesach night, we eat חרוסת (*charoset*). The letters of חרוסת stand for חרות ט', an allusion to the 600,000 Jews who emerged from slavery to freedom (since the letter ט' has the *gematria* of 60).

We dip the maror into the *charoset* (*Pesachim* 10:3) to indicate a combination of the wealthy (as depicted by the rich *charoset*) and the poor (as depicted by the bitter maror). All should live in unity. In this manner, we remember the days of bondage and beseech Heavenly mercy for each other. May Hashem redeem us speedily, in His great mercy.

———— In Summary ————

- Why were we redeemed from Egypt specifically in the month of Nisan? How is it possible to command us to feel as though we were liberated from Egypt? We are free men who never knew bondage. And although the month of Nisan

is auspicious for *geulah*, why is it called *The Month of Spring*? Why is it the beginning of the months of the year? What is unique about this month?

- The purpose of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is not in order to retell a story that happened once-upon-a-time, but something which must enter our minds and hearts. In this manner, one becomes inspired to come close to Hashem. The word נִסִּים has the same root as the word נִסִּיּוֹן (test). This month is a test of sorts, evaluating if a person is a truly free man, or if he is under the dominion of his *Yetzer Hara*. If he has true *emunah* in the face of his tests in Nisan, he will be able to increase his *emunah* throughout the year.
- One must actually feel the bondage and the liberation contained in the month. Therefore, it is incumbent to mention “Pesach, matzah, and maror” on the night of Pesach, in order to fulfill one’s obligation. The main aspect of the holiday is to literally feel as though he had been released from slavery. Our *Chachamim* stayed awake all night long, retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, in order to truly experience the slavery, and thus became truly free. By doing so, one conquers his *Yetzer Hara* and merits the *geulah*.
- Chodesh Nisan is unique, for it is a month of *nisayon*. Avraham Avinu withstood ten trials, and was informed of the birth of Yitzchak in the month of Nisan. *The Month of Spring* refers to the youthful vibrancy available to those who withstand *nisyonot*, while they are young. However, one should not act like those who succumb to the temptations of the times and emulate the young and foolish.
- An important aspect of Pesach is unity. Both rich and poor partake of the Seder table. We remember the days of deprivation even during the days of plenty. We remember those less fortunate than ourselves and show compassion toward the poor, desiring to help those in need. By demonstrating unity in this way, we truly feel the bondage and the redemption, and emerge from slavery to salvation. May Hashem help us glorify His Name and hasten the redemption.

MATZAH – SYMBOL OF HUMILITY

Regarding the mitzvah of eating matzah, the pasuk states (*Devarim* 16:3), “For seven days you shall eat matzot... bread of affliction.” Regarding the mitzvah of eating the *korban* Pesach, the pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:8), “They shall eat the flesh... roasted over the fire – and matzot, with bitter herbs shall they eat it.”

There seems to be a paradox at play on this night. On the one hand, a person feels that he is a truly free man, the son of the King (see *Pesachim* 99b), in a truly elevated state. On Pesach, people set their tables royally, with expensive, fancy dishes and beautiful tablecloths, as is stated in the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 472:2). On the other hand, he is enjoined to eat matzah, the “bread of affliction.” This is so that, despite all the pampering and pleasures, one’s heart should become broken through, like the middle matzah, and he should feel true humility and submission.

We are commanded to check for chametz in every crack and crevice (*Pesachim* 2a). The chametz refers to severe sins which one may have done. The cracks and crevices refer to lesser sins, which a person hardly feels at all. Chametz refers to the *Yetzer Hara*, which Chazal (*Berachot* 17a) call the “yeast in the dough.” After a thorough search for chametz, one is ready to nullify any chametz he may still have on his property. This can also refer to nullification of self, a form of humility. Without humility, a person cannot attain any level of serving Hashem. After nullifying his chametz, he can nullify himself before Hashem. According to the Written Torah, simply nullifying the chametz is sufficient to fulfill the mitzvah (*Pesachim* 4b).

Eating matzah signifies the exertion necessary to acquire the *middah* of humility. Matzah is hard to chew and takes a long time to digest. So too, one must exert himself to attain the *middah* of humility. Moreover,

a person becomes humble through suffering, as depicted by the bitter herbs.

I remember, a number of years ago, toiling excessively to clean the house for Pesach. I checked for chametz numerous times, being scrupulous with all the mitzvot involved, large and small alike. I spent many nights searching for chametz and destroying it, until Erev Pesach arrived.

When I got home from the Beit Hakeneset on Pesach night, I could barely make it up the five flights of stairs to my apartment, for I was exhausted from all of the hard work. When I walked in and saw the brightly lit house, the sanctity of the Yom Tov was palpable. I felt a tangible sense of *kedushah*, which I had never felt before. I thought to myself that all the efforts I had invested were worth these few minutes of feeling a taste of the World to Come.

When I looked at the Seder plate with the matzot, I told myself, “The essence of the entire holiday is the matzah and maror. Chazal teach (*Pesachim* 116b), ‘Whoever does not say (or eat) three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation.’ They are the basics of remembering the affliction and bitterness which our forefathers endured in Mitzrayim.

“If so,” I asked myself, “wasn’t all of the trouble I went through in honor of the holiday, and all of the self-sacrifice involved, worth it just in order to see the matzot and maror on the set table? Surely, it is in their merit that we feel a sense of spiritual elevation.”

A saying of Chazal immediately came to mind. The Mishnah in Avot (1:17) states, “Not study, but practice is the main thing.” All of the preparations for the *chag* are merely in the category of study. The practice, the outgrowth of study, is the fulfillment of the mitzvot of eating the matzah and maror. These are what enable us to feel a taste of the World to Come. What is their inherent *kedushah*?

A person slaves to clean his house before Pesach, ridding it of any vestige of chametz. Even an aristocrat, one who never felt the feeling of servitude, comes to the Seder table and recites the passage (*Devarim* 6:21) “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” How can he feel this, when he never experienced any type of slavery in his life?

When a person works to clean his home of chametz, and sacrifices himself toward that goal, he gains an understanding of the labor our fathers endured in Mitzrayim. He is better able to appreciate the miracle of their salvation. All of the pre-Pesach preparations help to humble a person before Hashem, allowing him to serve Him in the best way possible.

“His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem” (*Divrei Hayamim* II 17:6). Only this type of arrogance is accepted. Any other form of haughtiness is an abomination (*Mishlei* 16:5). One who aggrandizes himself over others is not a servant of Hashem but a slave to Pharaoh, the embodiment of the *kelippah*.

A Jew is different from a gentile in every respect, even in thought and in deed. For every facet of the Jewish person has great significance in serving Hashem.

One who invests effort into a mitzvah becomes a servant of that mitzvah, so to speak. Chazal state (*Eiruvin* 31a; *Yerushalmi*, end of *Terumot*) that mitzvot were not given for pleasure, but rather, as a yoke. One who makes himself a servant of Hashem feels an ethereal joy, literally a taste of the World to Come. When he brings satisfaction to his Creator by fulfilling His mitzvah, he becomes elevated through the *kedushah* of the mitzvah. The sense of elevation he is granted from *Shamayim* is a taste of the World to Come.

Sweating in exertion to do a mitzvah indicates that one is a true servant of Hashem. If he sweats in submission to Him, he merits untold abundance of blessing, and his sins are forgiven. He becomes holy and has no connection to the *kelippah*.

The sefer *Noam Elimelech* states that before performing a mitzvah, a person should do teshuvah. The abundant blessings showered upon a person who does mitzvot can be attained only by one who is free of sin.

Humility and Submission Are the Basis for Avodah

A person attains *kedushah* only through self-nullification and toil in Torah. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 19:18), “You shall love your fellow as yourself.” Rabbi Akiva (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4) proclaims that this is a fundamental principle of the Torah. In order to teach Torah to a fellow Jew, one must first develop a strong love toward him, to enable himself to share his Torah knowledge with him.

In order to attain this level of love of others, one must nullify his own desires. He must truly feel his friend’s burden and not be arrogant about his own Torah knowledge (*Avot* 6:6). One who desires to learn must act with submission, in order to be able to accept Torah from his friend.

Another virtue in being humble is that such a person is included in “those who are insulted but do not insult, they hear their shame, but do not react” (*Shabbat* 88b; *Gittin* 36b). Even when this person’s colleague annoys him, he does not respond or get angry, but humbles himself before him. There is no submission greater than this; it is a sound basis for reaching great heights.

We find a similar concept regarding the month of Nisan, the month of miracles. It is also called the “beginning of the months” (*Shemot* 12:2). If one properly relates to the miracles wrought for our forefathers in the month of Nisan, he will merit feeling the miracles of all the months of the year, and receive abundance of *kedushah* from Hashem, as it says, “So that you will remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (*Devarim*

16:3). One draws *kedushah* from the miracles of Pesach, and the illumination of the salvation in Nisan will shine forth the entire year.

It is incumbent to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* during the day as well as the night. This is learned from the wording of the phrase “all the days of your life.” The words “the days of your life” refers to the days; “all the days,” refers to the nights (*Berachot* 12b). Every single day of a person’s life, he should feel as though he has experienced his own personal exodus, as though he is being emancipated from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*.

By keeping alive the memory of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we arouse ourselves to combat the *Yetzer Hara*, who desires to enslave us each day anew. We emerge from his bondage to true liberation.

This is as Chazal state (*Pesachim* 116b), “In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he came out of Egypt.” We have an injunction to feel as if we ourselves left Egypt. This is difficult to understand. Why does the Torah stress that one is obligated to feel as if he were a slave and became free? He was never a slave. How can he be commanded to feel that he was?

When one prepares for Pesach by working hard to rid his house of chametz and then nullifying it, he experiences what it must have felt like for our ancestors in Egypt, who were slaves. By taking this thought further, he realizes that if they had not been redeemed, he himself would be a slave there now.

The Torah states that merely nullifying the chametz orally is sufficient (*Pesachim* 4b). But our Sages are not satisfied with that. They demand that we search for chametz. This is in order to experience the feeling of real slavery, and the *geulah* which follows.

An important feature of preparing for Pesach is extending assistance to those less fortunate than ourselves. When one checks for chametz, he comes to the realization that there are those who have nothing to

check for. In Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael elevated the lost *nitzotzot* to greater levels of *kedushah* by helping one another. At the beginning of the Seder, we state, “All who are hungry, should come and eat...” Humbly giving *tzedakah* to the poor, and helping him in his hour of need, in spiritual as well as in physical areas, is one of the main aspects of the *geulah*.

The purpose of Pesach is for one to become sanctified and submit himself to Hashem. He should acknowledge that he is different from the gentiles, as the pasuk says (*Shemot* 12:27), “You shall say, ‘It is a Pesach feast-offering. Hashem passed over the houses of the Children of Israel... in order to save Bnei Yisrael, when He smote the Egyptians.’” Hashem distinguished between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians. This is the essence of Pesach, and is alluded to in its name פֶּסַח. Hashem passed over the פ, an allusion to the 600,000 members of Bnei Yisrael, and He destroyed the snare (פֶּחַ). These are the Egyptians, compared to an ensnaring trap (*Tehillim* 91:3).

We should feel as though we are ready for Hashem to save us and smite our enemies. In this way, the following pasuk will be fulfilled (*ibid.* 124:7), “The snare broke and we escaped.”

In order to be eligible for this, we are obligated to remain apart from the rest of the world. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu told the people (*Shemot* 12:22), “No man shall leave the entrance of his house until the morning.” They should remain within the shelter of their homes, not mingling with the gentiles. They should go out only to the Beit Hamidrash for Torah study and tefillah. This is the way to become truly free people.

When one acts in this manner, he will merit an abundance of Heavenly blessing, bringing him closer to Hashem. The spiritual elevation that he has gained on Pesach will accompany him always.

————— In Summary —————

- We are commanded to eat matzot on Pesach. This is the bread of affliction, eaten together with the maror. Together, they symbolize humility and submissiveness. This is specifically when all feel like royalty. We must check for chametz, in a thorough manner, nullifying it, as we nullify ourselves before Hashem. We are enjoined to chew on the hard-to-digest matzah, which hints to Torah and humility, which are hard to come by.
- When a person prepares for Pesach in the correct way, he attains a level of *kedushah* and feels a taste of *Olam Haba*. By working hard to clean his house of every last vestige of chametz, he experiences a taste of the slavery that our ancestors endured in Egypt. It also rids him completely of arrogance. Thus, he becomes a servant only to Hashem.
- The perspiration which accumulates from his exertions to do the mitzvot, washes away all of one's sins. He becomes worthy for an abundance of Heavenly blessing, which rains down upon a person who has done teshuvah and is free of sin.
- Rabbi Akiva said, "The dictum *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* is a fundamental principle of the Torah." One who shares his Torah knowledge with others humbles himself before them. Likewise, disciples humble themselves before their teacher. One who acquires the trait of humility is in the category of "those who are insulted, but do not respond." One who is humble before his fellow man will surely be humbled before Hashem.
- This is the fundamental nature of Chodesh Nisan, the month of miracles. We must remember the miracles that took place in Egypt, as well as the Exodus. Every person should feel as though he himself went out of Egypt. By feeling this, he can understand something of what our forefathers endured. In this manner, he will prepare for the holiday thoroughly by examining himself, just as he examines his home for chametz. He will nullify any negative traits that he possesses, just as he nullifies any chametz that he finds, thus subjugating himself to Hashem's will.
- One should also help his fellow Jew, as we state at the Pesach Seder, "All who are hungry, should come and eat."

- We must serve Hashem in our distinct way and refrain from mingling with the nations. This is alluded to in the command Bnei Yisrael were given in Mitzrayim, not to leave their homes on the night of Pesach. Complete subservience to Hashem enables a person to attain *kedushah*.

RETELLING THE STORY OF THE EXODUS

Aside from the many mitzvot involved in the holiday of Pesach, such as *korban* Pesach, eating matzah and maror, etc., there is another mitzvah, which is particular to this holiday. It is the mitzvah of retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The pasuk (*Shemot* 13:8) states, “You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.’” Rashi explains that one tells over the story “in order to fulfill Hashem’s mitzvot, such as Pesach, matzah, and maror.” Why don’t any of the other holidays carry the directive to discuss the reason for the festival?

All of the holidays which we commemorate are connected to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. For, had we not been redeemed from Egypt, we would not merit celebrating any of the festivals. Nisan is the first of the months (*Shemot* 12:2), and Pesach is the head of all festivals. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to retell the story of the Exodus on Pesach.

Moreover, the Torah enjoins us to narrate the events of the Exodus in detail. In this manner, we will imagine as though the episode were taking place before our very eyes. We will truly feel as if we are being liberated here and now. This is, in fact, our obligation (*Zevachim* 116a).

There is good reason for placing remembrances of the *korban* Pesach, matzah, and maror on the Seder plate. It is so that when we tell over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we literally feel as though we are at this very moment being redeemed from Egypt. The story was not a legend of the past, but is unfolding right now, and we are a part of it.

Rambam writes (*Sefer Hamitzvot*, Mitzvah 157), “We are commanded to retell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* on the eve of the fifteenth of Nisan, at the beginning of the night, each according to his ability. Whoever adds and expounds on the miracles that Hashem did for us, describing the horrors which the Egyptians inflicted on our nation, and glorifying Hashem Who avenged His people, is praised. Our Sages state, ‘Whoever increases his narrative of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is praiseworthy.’”

The *Minchat Chinuch* finds this difficult to understand. For, every night, we remember the Exodus from Egypt, in the tefillah of Ma’ariv (*Berachot* 1:5). How is the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus on the night of Pesach different from stating it on every other night of the year, to the extent that the Rambam enumerates the narration on the night of Pesach as a separate mitzvah?

On every night of the year, the mitzvah is to merely mention *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. A short statement in the evening prayer suffices. Conversely, on the night of Pesach, there is a special commandment to recount the entire episode, from its beginning to its conclusion. Therefore, one who speaks at length about *Yetziat Mitzrayim* on the night of Pesach is praiseworthy, for he embellishes this most important mitzvah.

There is an additional difference between retelling the story of the Exodus at the Seder and remembering the Exodus on all other nights of the year. Throughout the year, a person is instructed to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. On the night of Pesach, though, the mitzvah is to tell others what took place, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 13:8), “You shall tell your son.” The intention is to share the story with those who do not know it. Rabbi Yishmael Hakohen writes this in his sefer *Hegyonei Halachah*. Rabbi Avraham ben HaGra also mentions this.

In light of this, it is understandable why the Rambam considers the retelling of the Pesach story as a mitzvah in its own right, separate from the mitzvah of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every night of the

year in the Evening Prayers. When Pesach, matzah, and maror are lying in front of a person, the feeling of liberation is much more tangible. Then, one will tell over the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* in an entirely different manner.

The Admor MiLelov, zt”l, and others, would carry sacks on their shoulders on Seder Night, to demonstrate how Bnei Yisrael left with (*Shemot* 12:34) “their leftovers bound up in their garments upon their shoulders.”

Rabban Gamliel states (*Pesachim* 10:5), “Whoever did not say these three things on Pesach, has not fulfilled his obligation. They are: Pesach, matzah, and maror.” This is difficult to understand. These items are mentioned in the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Why do they need to be mentioned separately, to the degree that one who does not do so, has not fulfilled his obligation?

The *Maharsha*, the *Tzalach*, and the *Aruch L’ner* strengthen this question. We do not find that any mitzvah must be explained before one performs it. It is sufficient to make a *berachah* before doing so. Yet, before eating the *korban* Pesach, matzah, and maror, apart from making the *berachah*, we must explain why we do each mitzvah. (Nowadays, we are unable to eat the *korban* Pesach, since we do not yet have the Beit Hamikdash. Instead, we explain the reasoning behind the mitzvah and point to the shank-bone, which is a remembrance of the *korban* Pesach.)

Rabban Gamliel’s perspective explains these difficulties. He is of the opinion that even if someone describes the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* in detail, all night long (as we do when reciting the Haggadah), he is still obligated to mention these three items at the Seder table. One who did not manage to discuss the entire story of the Exodus from Egypt can fulfill his obligation by mentioning these three items, and explain why we eat them. This is because these items contain both elements of bondage and elements of freedom.

Furthermore, when one lifts these items into the air, he reaches the level of a truly free man, as though *Yetziat Mitzrayim* were happening at this moment, before his eyes. He is an active partner in it, with all his organs.

The Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 477:1) rules that one should be careful to eat the *afikoman* before *chatzot*. The *Mishnah Berurah* (4) explains that this is because it commemorates the *korban* Pesach, which was consumed before *chatzot* (*Zevachim* 5:8). One should ensure that at least the first *kezayit* of matzah, which we make a *berachah* on, should be eaten by *chatzot*.

The reasoning behind this is clear. In order to feel the imminence of the *geulah*, as if it were taking place here and now, one must perform the mitzvah at the same time that our ancestors did it in Egypt, as they were rushing to leave. This will help him feel as though he himself is going out of Egypt.

Based on this, we can settle the difficulties of the *Maharsha*, the *Tzelach*, and the *Aruch L'ner*. The mitzvah of retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is fundamentally different from other mitzvot. Regarding other mitzvot, the objective is the act of performing the mitzvah, rendering a *berachah* over the mitzvah and its performance adequate. However, when we recount the details of the Exodus, each part of it requires explanations and reasons in order that we should experience the redemption ourselves. The explanations are an intrinsic part of fulfilling the mitzvah. Thus, before eating the *korban* Pesach (see note above), matzah, and maror, we must explain what each of them signifies. This is the way to physically feel the *geulah*.

————— In Summary —————

- On Pesach, we have the mitzvah to relate the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. We are not commanded to describe the reason behind any other holiday. We describe the Exodus in detail, since all of our festivals are essentially

connected to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. If we had not been redeemed from Mitzrayim, we would not be able to commemorate any of them.

- Telling over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* on the night of Pesach is a tool to help us feel the slavery and the freedom. The Rambam states that this is a mitzvah in and of itself, separate from the daily mitzvah of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Every evening, we are instructed to mention the Exodus from Egypt. On Pesach night, the mitzvah entails describing and discussing the events of the Exodus, so that one actually feels as if he was enslaved in Egypt and then redeemed. Additionally, on every night of the year, the mitzvah is merely to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim*; on Pesach, it is to tell it over to others.
- Therefore, Rabban Gamliel stated that one must mention three things on Pesach. They are the *korban* Pesach, matzah, and maror. We are instructed to explain the reasons behind these mitzvot as well, something we are not commanded concerning any other mitzvah. If one left out a part of the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, he can make up for it by mentioning these three items. In this way, he will feel as though he himself left Mitzrayim.
- The *afikoman*, as well as the first *kezayit* of matzah, is eaten only until *chatzot*, in order for a person to imitate Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, who partook of the matzot before *chatzot*, the hour of their liberation.
- The purpose of explaining the details of everything that took place for our ancestors is so that we ourselves should feel the slavery and the liberation. Thus, we will feel as if the *geulah* were taking place here and now.

PESACH AND MATZAH — SYMBOLS OF SUBMISSION TO HASHEM

One should study the halachot of Pesach from thirty days before the festival (*Pesachim* 6b; *Megillah* 29b). Why specifically thirty days beforehand, rather than a week or two before the holiday?

Furthermore, why is the Shabbat preceding Pesach called *Shabbat*

Hagadol? Also, there are many names for this festival, such as *The Festival of Our Freedom*, Why do we use the name *Pesach* in particular? Maybe a more appropriate name would be *The Festival of the Exodus*?

We have another difficulty here. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:39), “Nor had they made provisions for themselves.” Bnei Yisrael knew they would be leaving Egypt on the fifteenth of the month. Why, then, didn’t they prepare food for the way? Chazal state (*Mechilta, Shemot* 13:19) that as soon as Pharaoh heard about the death of the firstborn, he feared for his life, for he, too, was a firstborn. He immediately sent out Bnei Yisrael. They had no time to prepare provisions.

However, the women of Bnei Yisrael gave birth to six babies at once (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:8). With so many mouths to feed, it is very hard to understand why they did not prepare food for their trip.

In Praise of Kosher Food

I would like to preface my answer with a story that happened to me on one of my trips. On a plane ride, I noticed a Jew wearing a large Magen David on his chest. He ate the regular fare – non-kosher airline food. He wine and dined in this manner, not bothering to check for any *kashrut* symbol whatsoever.

Truth be told, I didn’t start a conversation with him, because he was sitting in first class, together with a group of friends. But I did ask the stewardess, loud enough for him to hear, if there was kosher food for the Jewish passengers. To my dismay, she replied that the Jewish passengers had not ordered special food. Furthermore, my order had been forgotten. I raised a hue and cry about how irresponsible it is to forget to order kosher meals. I wanted the man to hear this exchange. I wanted him to hear me complain about this, and maybe reconsider his ways. Maybe he’d realize that he is no less a Jew than I am, and that he, too, is commanded to eat only kosher. Unfortunately, he

merely laughed at me and continued enjoying his non-kosher meal with his cronies.

Later on in the flight, I asked this Jew for a match. He asked me where I was travelling to. Was I going on vacation or to a Jewish community? I answered him that, *Baruch Hashem*, I was travelling to a small Jewish community, where the people exert themselves to keep Torah and mitzvot as best as they can. I would never take a vacation unnecessarily.

We continued discussing Judaism and *kashrut*. I impressed upon him the importance of a person guarding himself in all situations. I explained how important it is to protect one's body from the defilement of forbidden foods and non-Jewish wine. These things block up the mind and the heart (*Yoma* 39a). They form a partition between a person and Hashem, distancing him from Hashem, without him even realizing.

But this Jew stood his ground. "Even though I eat non-kosher foods, I believe in Hashem and in tzaddikim," he began. "I also don tefillin every morning, and I eat strictly kosher food at home." I explained to him that it is impossible to believe in Hashem without believing in Torah and mitzvot. This is simply false faith. It is not possible to be connected to Hashem by wearing tefillin, when the mind and the heart are defiled with forbidden foods. And one can't be a believer only at home, eating strictly kosher there, while being an apostate on the street, eating whatever one desires.

After a two-hour-long discussion, the man asked me where I live. I answered, "Lyon." Upon hearing that, he jumped up from his seat, and asked, "Do you know a certain Rabbi Pinto? My father often visits him." I replied, "You have been sitting beside him these past two hours, engaged in discussion..." He immediately became ashamed and began stammering, "I apologize for eating non-kosher food in your presence. From today, I will try to eat only kosher food."

I told him, “Don’t you see how ashamed you are to have been caught eating non-kosher food in front of me, simply because you have heard of me? Had you known who I was from the start, you wouldn’t have dared to put that stuff near your mouth the entire flight, even if it were to stretch out for a few days. If so, how can you have the boldness to say that you believe in Hashem, yet still eat non-kosher foods? Hashem is everywhere, even in one’s innermost rooms!

“This is an act of the Satan, who makes a person say that he believes in Hashem and gets him to wear tefillin every morning. In reality, he causes a person to become distant from true belief in Hashem in his mind and heart. The result is that a person is close to Hashem in theory, but his heart is not a believing heart (based on *Tehillim* 78:37).”

I then explained to him why Hashem does not want us to eat forbidden foods. There are many reasons for this. In my opinion, the overriding reason is that this is the will of Hashem. He wants us to keep away from eating certain animals and to eat only of others. Only He knows the underlying reason for this.

Even those animals that are permitted must be slaughtered according to halachah. What is the purpose of ritual slaughter? The animals which are permitted for us to eat submit themselves to being slaughtered so that we may consume them and have the strength to serve Hashem. Thus they are the vehicle to bring us closer to Him. They know that through being slaughtered according to halachah, they are fulfilling their purpose in Creation. We should take a lesson from them to likewise submit ourselves to Hashem.

This lesson is stressed by the prohibition to eat blood, the symbol of arrogance. The numerical equivalent of the word גאווה (arrogance) is fifteen. The *gematria* of דם (blood), when one adds one for the word itself, is forty-five, three times fifteen. The *gematria* of the word אדם (person) is also equal to forty-five. A person learns to nullify his arrogance by taking a lesson from the animal, which is slaughtered

according to Hashem's will. One's pride should be channeled only to the service of Hashem, as the pasuk states (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 17:6), "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem."

This concept is alluded to in the name *man*. The word אדם (man) contains within it the word דם (blood), which must be restrained, in order that a person should not become conceited, angry, jealous, or filled with hatred toward others. This is also hinted in the Name of Hashem ה-י, which has the same *gematria* as the word גאווה (pride). Pride belongs solely to Hashem.

This Name of Hashem (ה-י) is contained in the words איש (husband) and אשה (wife). Only Hashem may wear the cloak of pride (*Tehillim* 93:1). He is the one who created man and wife. When they quarrel, the *Shechinah* leaves them (*Sotah* 17a), and they are left with nothing but fire. (When one removes the letter ם from the word איש and the letter ה from the word אשה, the word שא – fire remains.)

One who refrains from eating forbidden foods is spared all of the negative traits inherent in non-kosher animals and acquires the good traits of the kosher ones.

Thirty Days for Annulling Arrogance

Thirty days are necessary for learning the halachot of the festival, in order that we should arrive at the holiday on the fifteenth of Nisan, completely virtuous.

The word גאווה has the *gematria* of fifteen. Another thirty makes the total of forty-five, the *gematria* of אדם. This hints that during the thirty days from Purim until Pesach, a person has the opportunity to purge himself of undue pride, alluded to in the chametz, the "yeast in the dough" (*Berachot* 17a). When Pesach arrives, a person is able to attain a level of self-negation. This is hinted at by the thin matzah, analogous to humility. In this manner, he can also change the nature of his blood, heating it up toward Avodat Hashem instead of physical pleasures.

On Shabbat Hagadol, Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep, the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians, to their bedposts, before the eyes of the Egyptians (*Zohar* III, 251b). The Egyptians did not utter a word in protest. This is a reference to one's binding himself to Hashem. Specifically the sheep was chosen for this to teach us that just as it goes submissively to its calling in the slaughterhouse, we should submit ourselves before Hashem, obliterating all forms of pride from our hearts.

The Shabbat before Pesach is called *The Great Shabbat* since, through tying the sheep to the bedposts, Bnei Yisrael became great by nullifying themselves before Hashem, attaining the exalted *middah* of humility.

When Hashem came to smite the Egyptians' firstborn, on the night of Pesach, He took note of the blood on the doorposts of the Jews. The threshold of the house indicates haughtiness. When Bnei Yisrael sprinkled the blood on the threshold of their homes, they demonstrated their desire to succumb entirely to Hashem, yielding completely to His will, in humility. Their connection to Him is through the mezuzah, which has the Name of Hashem upon it, fixed on the doorposts of every Jewish home.

Hashem understood that they were submitting their very blood, their passions, to Him. In that merit, He passed over their homes. Thus, the holiday is specifically called *Pesach* to recall the humility of Bnei Yisrael, in which *zechut* Hashem passed over their homes. This was the foundation and preparation for accepting the Torah on the sixth of Sivan.

Moreover, matzah symbolizes humility, whereas chametz refers to puffed-up haughtiness. Because Bnei Yisrael were entrenched in forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a), they were told to eat matzah, which would cause them to become humble.

Now we can understand why they did not prepare provisions for the journey. They were at such a level of submission that they nullified

their entire being before Hashem. He had not instructed them to prepare food, so they did not. They followed him in the uncultivated wilderness (*Yirmeyahu 2:2*) with complete faith and submission. Hashem remembers this act to our credit throughout the generations.

Additionally, Bnei Yisrael heard what was permissible for them to eat on Pesach, and what was forbidden. They behaved as they were told. And although they had not yet received all the mitzvot, they kept the two mitzvot of *korban Pesach* and *brit milah*, which they were given then (*Mechilta, Bo 12:6*). In this merit, they left Egypt. This was all due to their tremendous humility.

Only one who eats kosher is able to perfect himself in this way. This is referred to in parashat *Shemini*, the parashah dealing with forbidden foods. The word שמיני (Shemini) has the same root as the word שמן (oil). This is a fat substance, hinting to arrogance. One should learn to be like שמיני (eighth), a level above that of nature. By distancing himself from consuming forbidden foods, which stuff up the mind and the heart, a person becomes pure and humble.

One is supposed to sanctify himself even in those things which are permitted to him (see *Yevamot 20a*). In this manner, he will merit reaching the eighth level, above nature. He will consume only kosher foods, and his heart will be “elevated in the ways of Hashem.”

The forbidden foods listed in parashat *Shemini* allude to the *kedushah* and *taharah* which we receive when we eat kosher foods. This is the way to merit Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

————— In Summary —————

- Why is it incumbent on us to learn the halachot of Pesach thirty days before the festival? Why is the Shabbat preceding Pesach called *Shabbat Hagadol*? Why is the holiday called *Pesach* and not any other name? Why didn't Bnei Yisrael prepare provisions for the journey, since they were aware that they would be redeemed on the fifteenth of Nisan?

- On a plane trip I once took, a Jew sat beside me, eating non-kosher food. When I engaged him in conversation, it turned out that he donned tefillin and ate kosher at home. I explained to him that forbidden foods clog the mind and the heart. He was ashamed to eat non-kosher in my presence. All the more so, should he have been ashamed to eat forbidden foods before Hashem, Whose presence fills the world, and Who sees his abominable acts. Hashem desires that we eat only kosher foods, which bring us close to Him.
- Kosher animals, which bow their heads to be slaughtered for Hashem's sake, instill within us the traits of submissiveness and humility before Hashem. We are prohibited from consuming blood (דם) since its *gematria* is three times the *gematria* of arrogance (גאוה), adding one for the word itself. The *gematria* of the word אדם (man) is also three times the *gematria* of גאוה. Pride belongs to Hashem alone, and we may take pride only in our Avodat Hashem.
- The Name of Hashem is found in the words איש and אשה. When they quarrel, Hashem's *Shechinah* leaves them, and they are left with אש (the fire of contention). One who is scrupulous to eat only kosher foods, is spared negative character traits, such as conceit, jealousy, and anger. He submits himself to Hashem.
- Thirty days plus fifteen, for the fifteenth of Nisan, equal forty-five, the numerical equivalent of אדם. This is three times the *gematria* of גאוה. During the thirty days between Purim and Pesach, one is able to annul the *middah* of arrogance and attain humility. Therefore, on Pesach, we eat thin matzah, an allusion to humility.
- Tying the sheep to the bedposts connected Bnei Yisrael to Hashem. They learned the *middah* of humility from the sheep, who submits to its slaughter. Sprinkling the blood on the threshold, which symbolizes haughtiness, demonstrated that they surrendered everything for His sake and wished to act with humility.
- Bnei Yisrael did not prepare provisions for the trip, acting with utter humility, since they had not been commanded by Hashem to take food with them. Instead, they fortified themselves, in an uncultivated land, with firm faith. They were not afraid that they would be left with no food; Hashem would surely provide for them.

- The subject of forbidden foods is recorded in parashat *Shemini*. This is a hint that one should strive to behave on the eighth level (שמיני) – above the laws of nature. Conversely, one should not be arrogant, represented by the fats (שמן). One should conduct himself with holiness and humility. We learn this from the *korban* Pesach and matzah, sanctified foods. By eating foods of *kedushah*, one attains humility, submission, and holiness. One also reaches great levels of Torah and *yirat Shamayim* by doing so.

HUMILITY – THE FOUNDATION FOR THE GEULAH

Chazal state (*Pesachim* 6a; *Megillah* 29b; *Avodah Zarah* 5b), “They ask and interpret the halachot of Pesach, from thirty days before the holiday.” From the wording of this statement, we learn that even if a person knows all of the laws and has no questions, he is nevertheless enjoined to ask and clarify. We likewise learn that one is instructed to teach others, in order that they, too, are aware of all the halachot. What is the purpose of all of this?

The Zohar (II, 40) states that when one retells the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Hashem rejoices, to the extent that He calls over the angels so that they may hear the story of our redemption. They also rejoice over the salvation that Hashem wrought for our people. They thank Him for all of the miracles which He wrought for us. This demands explanation. Why does Hashem need the testimony of the angels? Furthermore, why do they praise Hashem only after they hear the Jewish nation telling over the story of the Exodus? Do they not praise Him every day, regardless of what we say?

Additionally, how can we understand that after Bnei Yisrael were vigilant with *milah*, kept themselves chaste from immorality, and did not change their names, their language, or their clothing (*Bamidbar*

Rabbah 20:21a, *Pesikta Zuta Shemot* 36a; *Shochar Tov* 114:4), they still reached the abyss of the forty-ninth level of *tumah*? One cannot state that they fell to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* due to *avodah zarah*, for they were coerced into serving idols.

It is because they sinned by speaking *lashon hara*. Chazal state (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:30) that when Moshe realized that *lashon hara* was rampant among the nation, he understood that this was the cause of their bondage, as he exclaimed, “Indeed the matter is known” (*Shemot* 2:14). But how can it be that after long hours of physical, back-breaking labor, they had time to talk *lashon hara*, which brought them to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*?

Besides, we find that they corrected the sin of *lashon hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Emor* 657). If they did, indeed, rectify the matter, why did they continue spiraling downward to the forty-ninth gate of impurity?

It is also difficult to comprehend how they remained at the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, almost at the fiftieth, even after sacrificing the *korban* Pesach, which symbolizes unity (*Shemot* 12:6).

It is known that arrogance is the mother of all sin. The entire purpose of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was to eradicate this bad trait from Bnei Yisrael, so that they should behave humbly, thereby meriting receiving the Torah after forty-nine days.

As long as Pharaoh, the embodiment of the *kelippah*, was around, the impure trait of arrogance held sway. Pharaoh boasted of his power before Moshe and Aharon. He gained nourishment from the forty-nine levels of *tumah* to which Bnei Yisrael were subjected. All the Egyptians followed suit. It was only at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, when they proclaimed, “Who is like you among the heavenly powers, Hashem!” that his pride was deflated before Hashem. The word ׀ (who) has the *gematria* of fifty. Once Pharaoh recognized Hashem, the fifty levels of *tumah* were nullified.

In Egypt, although Bnei Yisrael guarded themselves in many areas, they still spoke *lashon hara*. The *kelippah* associated with arrogance still clung to them, dragging them down.

For this reason, Hashem forbade them from leaving their homes during the plague of the firstborn (ibid. 12:22). It was so that they would not hear Pharaoh screaming and take pity on him. He was the symbol of haughtiness, the head of the *kelippah*. In the moments prior to the Exodus, they still had not managed to purify themselves of arrogance, in spite of all the good *middot* which they possessed.

Hashem passed over their houses to indicate the following. Just as one bends over when someone passes over him, so too, should Bnei Yisrael “bend themselves,” gaining greatness in the attribute of humility.

Hashem wanted them to attain this level through their own efforts. He was afraid that if they saw Pharaoh, they would be negatively influenced. This is why they were told to “take” the sheep and the hyssop bundle. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to take these items on their own, without any interference from Pharaoh, the head of the *kelippah* and forces of evil.

When a person tells over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Hashem rejoices with the angels. They see that this person has corrected the iniquity of arrogance and is becoming elevated in humility.

The objective of leaning at the Pesach Seder is to display submission to Hashem, taking pride only in one’s closeness to Him. This night of protection indicates something hidden and concealed, alluding to one who is humble, concealing his virtues. This is the antithesis of Pharaoh and his ilk, who are full of false pride.

This thought is frightening. Only after a person corrects his flawed pride and acquires humility are Hashem and the angels satisfied with him. Only then can he be redeemed from *galut* and merit the *geulah*,

for only then has he eradicated all *avodah zarah* from his heart, as they were told (*Mechilta Bo*): “Remove your hands from *avodah zarah*, and take for yourselves sheep of mitzvah.” The first letters of the words זרה עבודה (idol worship), spell the word עז (brazen). One must rid himself of haughtiness and brazenness, in order to attain true humility.

Hashem delights in a person who works on himself to develop the attribute of humility. He calls the angels to bear witness. Even though he himself did not take part in the Exodus together with our forefathers, he feels as if he did. This gives added power to the Heavenly beings, enabling them to praise Hashem and glorify Him.

It is amazing to note how much Hashem values Bnei Yisrael when they behave with humility, proclaiming His praises. He calls to the angels, in order to demonstrate the heights man can reach by developing the *middah* of humility. For, we were redeemed after perfecting this *middah*, invalidating the *kelippah* of arrogance.

With this in mind, we can understand the incident with Amalek. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:8), “Amalek came and battled Israel in Refidim.” Chazal explain that this hints that Bnei Yisrael slackened in their level of Torah study. This came about because they displayed arrogance by relying on themselves. They sinned, and the sin of pride reared its ugly head. This drew Amalek, the prime example of arrogance, against them. Amalek cooled them off to Torah and mitzvot.

This teaches that one who is haughty invites the *Yetzer Hara* to overcome him. Only by acting with humility can he rectify his iniquities. One who acquires this attribute will merit witnessing the wondrous miracles of Hashem and will be redeemed, just as when we left Egypt.

————— In Summary —————

- Chazal’s injunction to inquire into and interpret the halachot of Pesach teaches that even one who knows the halachot should learn them again and

teach them to others. Why is this so? Also, when a person tells over the story of our Exodus, Hashem invites the angels to witness it. At that time, they burst forth in Hashem's praises for the great miracles He did. Why especially then do they praise Him? And how can we understand that although Bnei Yisrael kept themselves apart from all iniquity, they still descended to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*? It was because they spoke *lashon hara*. Yet, even after correcting this, they remained at their low level, nearly beyond rescue.

- Pride is the mother of sin. Although Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim guarded themselves from sin, they were affected by Pharaoh, the epitome of the *kelippah* and arrogance. He intended to harm our nation so greatly that they would forever remain in his dominion. Hashem, though, had other plans. He wanted Bnei Yisrael to rectify this iniquity, attaining the *middah* of humility, which would render them worthy of accepting the Torah. Therefore, He commanded them to remain indoors during the plague of the firstborn. This ensured that they would not be influenced by Pharaoh's *middah* of arrogance, when they would hear his screams. Although they had already corrected the sin of *lashon hara*, they still had to work on eliminating arrogance, in order to merit *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.
- By relating the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, one becomes humble. Hashem rejoices with the angels over this. For this reason, even one who knows the halachot of Pesach is charged to ask and interpret the halachot, a sign that he is sincerely humble. The very fact that Hashem passed over the Jewish homes demonstrated humility, for one has to bend down for another to pass over him. The idea behind the exhortation to refrain from *avodah zarah* also hinted to Bnei Yisrael that they should be humble. If a person is haughty, his *Yetzer Hara* will eventually provoke him to sin, as in the case of Amalek. Only one who behaves with humility sees miracles and is saved from all suffering.

SECRETS OF THE SEDER NIGHT

The fifteen *simanim* of the Seder night contain great hidden meanings. Rashi (*Machzor Vitri*) explains that these fifteen signs were established in this specific order to teach us how to serve Hashem. This is a summary of his words:

Kadesh – To start with, a person must sanctify himself with alacrity, as we are enjoined to “sanctify yourself by that which is permitted to you” (*Yevamot* 20a).

Urchatz – Washing the hands. This teaches us that we must wage war with the *Yetzer Hara* with *mesirut nefesh*.

Karpas, Yachatz – Taking out the matzah and breaking it. This teaches us that we must break our *Yetzer Hara* at the time of performing a mitzvah. We must make sure to do this for altruistic reasons, not for self-aggrandizement or personal honor.

Maggid – By preparing oneself properly through the previous acts, he can properly relate the story of the Exodus. When relating the Haggadah, he literally lives the experiences of the past. It is not merely a story, but an occurrence he is taking part in, here and now.

After this, he is able to say, “*Ha lachma anya* – This is the bread of affliction.” He can literally point a finger at the matzah, as if bearing witness that this is the very bread our fathers ate in Egypt.

One should bear in mind that the *Yetzer Hara* is constantly seeking ways to cause him to stumble, and even kill him. (*Sukkah* 52a; *Kiddushin* 30b). This is the reason why we break the middle matzah. Just as Bnei Yisrael merited redemption by eradicating the *kelippah*, so too, if we rid ourselves of the *Yetzer Hara*, accepting upon ourselves the yoke of the *Yetzer Hatov*, we will merit redemption.

The word כרפס (*karpas*) is a combination of the words ס' פרך. This hints to the number of Bnei Yisrael (600,000) who did backbreaking labor (פרך) in Mitzrayim. "Egypt enslaved the Children of Israel with crushing harshness" (*Shemot* 1:13). The Gemara states (*Sotah* 11a) that the word בפרך (with crushing harshness) is a combination of the words בפה רך (with soft words). They originally began to draw the Jews into labor by promising them payment. They spoke sweetly, until the nation became used to the hard labor. This is the method employed by the *Yetzer Hara*. He entices a person into his trap by his smooth speech, until he has him in his pocket. The Gemara states (*Sukkah* 52b; *Bereishit Rabbah* 22:11) that at first the *Yetzer Hara* is merely a guest; in the end, he becomes the landlord. We must constantly stand at the frontlines, battling the *Yetzer Hara*, until we conquer him and follow the *Yetzer Hatov* in his stead.

If we contemplate the meaning of the actions of this great night, we will perceive the kindnesses of Hashem in every detail of our lives.

Bnei Yisrael, by their own merit, did not deserve to be redeemed, for they were embedded in forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). Four-fifths of the nation had perished in the three days of darkness (*Shemot Rabbah* 14:3). These were the reshaim, who had no interest in leaving Egypt. Bnei Yisrael were found faulty, with no merit to their credit.

However, Hashem had mercy on His people and gave them two mitzvot: the blood of Pesach, and the blood of *milah* (*Mechilta Bo* 12:6). These mitzvot proved to all that although they were in the depths of defilement, they were entering into a treaty with Hashem. In the merit of these mitzvot, they would be worthy of the Splitting of the Sea.

Dipping the vegetable in the salt water is a hint to *Kriyat Yam Suf*, when Bnei Yisrael willingly went through the salty waters. They were considered to have immersed themselves, rendering themselves holy and pure. When they passed through the waters of the sea, it was as

if they were immersing in the *mikveh*. Thus, they had the *zechut* of *milah* and immersion. In this manner, Hashem protected His nation from the prosecution of the gentile nations and their agents on High, and He took them as His portion.

This is alluded to in the word **כרפס**, which is numerically equivalent to the words **רך אסף**, adding one for the word itself. Although Bnei Yisrael were still **רך** (young) in their position as His people, nevertheless, Hashem **אסף** (gathered) their shame and prevented any prosecution against them.

Specifically on this night we remember the great kindness of Hashem, which never ceases. For on this night, although we were sunk in the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, and we were able to ascend to great heights.

The Mesirut Nefesh of Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim

Bnei Yisrael displayed a great measure of self-sacrifice in Egypt. The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*Hilchot Pesach* 430:1), “The Shabbat preceding Pesach is called *Shabbat Hagadol* because of the miracle which took place then.”

What was the miracle? It is known that on Shabbat Hagadol, Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep, the *avodah zarah* of Egypt, to their bedposts, as they were commanded. The Egyptians questioned them about this, and Bnei Yisrael explained what they were doing. The Egyptians were seething, but could do nothing about it. This demonstrated a tremendous amount of *mesirut nefesh* on the part of Bnei Yisrael.

Yet, the Egyptians continued mocking Bnei Yisrael, not allowing them to leave the country. The fact that Am Yisrael did not respond also demonstrated a level of *mesirut nefesh*.

The word **מיטה** (bed) hints to the fact that Bnei Yisrael were subduing the forty-nine (**מ"ט**) levels of impurity to the dominion of

Hashem (ה-י). This took place on Shabbat, hinting that utilizing the *kedushah* of Shabbat and acting with *mesirut nefesh* enables a person to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. Thus, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt.

The Blood of Pesach and Milah vs. the Yetzer Hara

“Then I passed you and saw you wallowing in your blood” (*Yechezkel* 16:6). This is the blood of Pesach and *milah* (*Mechilta* 21).

The sefarim ask what was the reason for these two types of blood, and why was it necessary to sprinkle the blood of the *korban* Pesach on the doorposts and on the threshold (based on *Shemot* 12:7)? Wasn't tying the sheep to their bedposts enough to subdue the *kelippah*? Why did they sprinkle specifically the blood of the *korban* Pesach on their doorposts, rather than the blood of *milah*?

There are two types of *Yetzer Hara*, which a person is charged to combat at all times. The first type attempts to instill foreign thoughts into a person's mind. In this manner “the eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the sin” (*Rashi, Shelach* 15:39).

The second type attempts to cause a person to stumble through using physical pleasures that are essentially permitted, in forbidden ways. If one overindulges in permitted pleasures, he will eventually indulge in the forbidden. This causes *bitul* Torah. It becomes a vicious cycle.

The Torah wants a person to vanquish both kinds of inclinations. Therefore, Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the merit of both the blood of Pesach and the blood of *milah*. The blood of Pesach combats the *Yetzer Hara* of materialism, for the consumption of the blood of a *korban zevach* is a forbidden physical pleasure. The blood of *milah* combats the *Yetzer Hara* that influences the mind. By guarding the *oht brit kodesh*, a person is called *kadosh* (*Zohar* 1:162). He subdues the *kelippah* in his mind and is able to think proper thoughts.

A person should know that one is dependent on the other. It is not possible to attain purity of thought when one does not limit his physical pleasures in any way, e.g., if he is a glutton.

Therefore, one must act with *mesirut nefesh* and sacrifice both of these tendencies, which constantly attack him. He must know that the blood of each individually is insufficient. Therefore, the *Navi* states, “In your blood you shall live... in your blood you shall live.”

Because Bnei Yisrael behaved with *mesirut nefesh*, Hashem commanded them (*Shemot* 12:25) not to leave their homes until morning. Chazal state (*Bava Kama* 62a), “Once permission is granted to the destroyer, he does not distinguish between the tzaddik and the rasha.” They were commanded to remain indoors in order to stay safe. In the merit of their *mesirut nefesh*, Hashem granted them that night as a night of protection for all generations (*Shemot* 12:42).

“I recall for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land” (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). Through their *mesirut nefesh*, Bnei Yisrael were considered a “youth,” one who never tasted sin.

Based on this, we can understand why Bnei Yisrael had to sprinkle the blood on their thresholds and doorposts. Hashem certainly knew which homes contained Egyptian firstborn sons (see *Bava Metziah* 61b) and which were Jewish. Why did the Jews need to sprinkle the blood?

Hashem wanted to teach us a lesson for life. Just as He “passed over” Bnei Yisrael and did not harm them, so too, should each of us “pass over” the bad and choose only good.

How does one reach this level? Only through great *mesirut nefesh* can he distinguish between an aveirah and a mitzvah. One must become inspired by his own efforts in order to warrant Hashem’s mercy. After this “awakening from below” there will be an “awakening from Above,” and he will be treated with the Attribute of Mercy (*Zohar* I, 7b; 88a).

We see just how severe was the claim against Am Yisrael by the very fact that Hashem had to skip over their homes. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:13), “When I shall see the blood, and I shall pass over you.” Whenever a harsh decree is made against a person, the strict hand of justice wishes to harm him. If he then acts with *mesirut nefesh*, he awakens Heavenly mercy, and Hashem “passes over” him, preventing the Attribute of Justice from harming him. The *korban* Pesach required tremendous *mesirut nefesh* on the part of Bnei Yisrael. The blood sprinkled on their doorposts and thresholds alluded to this *mesirut nefesh*.

One must be scrupulous to distance himself from anything forbidden. Forbidden pleasures have the power to arouse the Attribute of Justice, which can literally destroy him.

The Gemara recounts that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s disciples asked him why the Jews deserved destruction in the time of Achashveirosh (*Megillah* 12a). He asked them to answer their own question. They said it was because the Jews partook of the feast of that rasha. Later, they added that it was because they bowed to the idol in the time of Nevuchadnezzar.

Achashveirosh lived much later in history than Nevuchadnezzar. Why would the people be punished now for a sin they had committed so many years earlier?

In the time of Nevuchadnezzar, the people were coerced into sinning, as in Mitzrayim. However, generations later, they sinned without being compelled. At the time of Achashveirosh’s feast, most probably the masses of gentiles wore a symbol of *avodah zarah* on their clothing, as Haman Harasha did. Everyone who entered the banquet hall was required to bow to these idols, but they were not compelled. And even those who did not partake of the banquet, still sinned by not keeping away from the forbidden. They brought evil upon themselves, as if they

actually bowed down to the idols. For this, they deserved destruction, *rachmana litzlan*.

From here we see just how careful one must be to stay away from anything that is forbidden. We must do all we can to awaken Heavenly mercy, so that Hashem protects us from all harm.

The way to do this is by serving Hashem with *mesirut nefesh*, like Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, who sprinkled the blood of the *korban Pesach* on the threshold and the doorposts. In this way, we will merit the final redemption, speedily in our days.

— In Summary —

- The *simanim* of the Seder refer to sublime matters. They are part of the war a person wages against his *Yetzer Hara*. At first, he must sanctify himself in Avodat Hashem. Afterward, he washes his hands, an allusion to vanquishing his *Yetzer Hara* through *mesirut nefesh*. The *Yetzer Hara* is bent on causing a person to stumble. But one who pursues perfection will manage to crush him. This is similar to breaking the middle matzah. The word כרפס contains the words ס' פרך. These are the 600,000 Jews who endured back-breaking work (פרך) in Egypt. The word בפרך (with crushing harshness) is a combination of the words בפה רך (with soft speech). The *Yetzer Hara* lures a person with his sweet talk. But one who overcomes him can become sanctified and purified before Hashem.
- The greatness of the night of Pesach lies in the fact that Bnei Yisrael did not deserve to be redeemed. But, in the merit of the blood on their doorways, a demonstration of self-sacrifice, Hashem passed over their homes and saved them. The forces of destruction were out that night, prepared to kill everyone. Bnei Yisrael put the blood on their doorposts, thereby overpowering the Attribute of Justice with their *mesirut nefesh*.
- They needed the benefit of the blood of *korban Pesach* as well the blood of *brit milah*, for there are two kinds of *Yetzer Hara*. One attacks a person's mind with improper thoughts, and the other tries to lure him into his trap with physical pleasures. The blood of the *korban Pesach* combated the tendencies

of the pursuit of pleasures, whereas the blood of *milah* combated the tendencies of impure thoughts. In this way, they “lived through their blood.” This night became a night of protection for all generations.

- Hashem did not need a sign to distinguish between the homes of the Egyptian firstborn and the Jewish homes. Placing the blood on the doorposts was necessary in order to teach us a lesson. It was similar to tying the sheep to the bedposts. They were both expressions of *mesirut nefesh*, intended to crush the *Yetzer Hara*. This can be done only by keeping our distance from things that are prohibited, which would arouse the Attribute of Justice against him. By acting with *mesirut nefesh*, one merits Heavenly mercy and can overcome the Attribute of Justice and merit the final redemption.

MAKKAT BECHOROT – EXTRACTING THE NITZOTZOT OF KEDUSHAH

“I shall go through the land of Egypt on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt...”

(Shemot 12:12)

The youngest child is often the most cherished by his father, as we find with Yosef (*Bereishit* 37:3). He was most beloved to Yaakov, for he was the child of his old age. If so, why did Hashem prefer to kill out the firstborn Egyptians, rather than the younger children?

The Zohar (I, 261b; III, 262a) asks why *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is mentioned fifty times in the Torah. An explanation is given there, but I would like to offer my own.

The Egyptians knew that Bnei Yisrael’s task in Mitzrayim was to extract the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that had fallen into the clutches of the *kelippah* at the time of Adam’s sin of eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

In order to make their task all the more difficult and prevent them from succeeding, the Egyptians injected specifically the firstborn sons, the important members of the nation, with *tumah*. They succeeded in investing defilement into all firstborn sons, even the Egyptian firstborn outside Egypt. In this way, Bnei Yisrael could never escape Egypt. They would fall into the abyss of the fiftieth level of *tumah*, with no hope of ever being rescued.

Hashem took note of this and wanted to help Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, He killed out all of the Egyptian firstborn sons, even those who were not in Egypt at the time (*Mechilta Shemot* 12). He also killed out all firstborn sons who were not Egyptians but were in Egypt at that time, as it says, “There was not a house where there was no corpse” (*Shemot* 12:30).

This also refers to the fact that Hashem eradicated the *kelippah*, which is called a “corpse.” The reason why *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is recorded in the Torah fifty times is to allude to the fifty levels of *tumah*. Hashem fought the Egyptians in order to get rid of the *kelippah*, and remove His nation from bondage to freedom, thereby rectifying the fifty levels of impurity.

However, we are faced with a question. Pharaoh said to Moshe, “Do not see my face any more; for on the day you see my face, you shall die!” (*Shemot* 10:28). He threatened Moshe with death if he were to come before him again. Why wasn’t Pharaoh afraid of the last plague, *makkat bechorot*? He himself was a firstborn; wasn’t he afraid of dying?

Pharaoh thought that Hashem could not differentiate between the impure firstborn sons and the others. Pharaoh reckoned that even if Hashem were to kill out the Egyptian firstborn, there would still remain many firstborn in Egypt who would escape this plague. Through their influence, Bnei Yisrael would be trapped in Egypt forever.

Furthermore, Pharaoh arrogantly stated (*Yechezkel* 29:3), “Mine is the river, and I have made myself [powerful].” With this mindset, he

could not fathom how Hashem could distinguish between the firstborn who contained impurity, and those that did not.

Hashem is omnipotent, and He knows exactly who is a firstborn, and who is not (*Bava Metzia* 61b), as it says (*Tehillim* 136:4), “To Him Who alone performs great wonders.” There are things which only Hashem can do. Only Hashem knows who is really a firstborn.

For this reason, Hashem Himself traversed the land of Egypt, killing out the firstborn among them. *Tehillim* states (*ibid.* vs. 10-11), “To Him Who smote Egypt through their firstborn... and brought Israel forth from their midst...” Through the death of the firstborn, Hashem took them out of Egypt, together with all the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* which they had managed to extract from there.

The daughters of Bnei Yisrael remained pure and did not allow themselves to become defiled by the Egyptians, for they were righteous. Had this not been the case, the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael, too, would have been smitten, *chas v’shalom*. The *kelippah* would not have been eradicated, and the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* would not have attained rectification.

This is the reason why *makkat bechorot* was the last of all the plagues. It was the final means of separating the *nitzotzot* from the defilement of Egypt, enabling them to attain their *tikkun*.

Chazal state (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 15:9) that Bnei Yisrael were divided into three groups at the *Yam Suf*. One group prayed for salvation, the second desired to enter the water, and the third wished to return to Egypt. Why wasn’t Hashem angered by this third group? Did they not believe in Him? Had they not witnessed the miracles He had done for them up until this time?

They wanted to return to Egypt *l’shem Shamayim*. They understood that if Pharaoh was chasing after them this indicated that they had not

yet finished extracting all of the *nitzotzot* from Egypt. Therefore, they desired to return there, in order to finish the work.

For that reason, Hashem did not get angry with them. On the contrary, Yirmeyahu Hanavi extols their virtues in following Him in the Wilderness, in unchartered territory (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). Had He been angered by them, He would not have shown such pride in their behavior.

The waters of the sea split, and Bnei Yisrael entered them, preempting the need to return to Egypt. The *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* were completely corrected in *makkat bechorot*.

“Pharaoh rose up at midnight, he and all his servants...” (*Shemot* 12:30). Rashi explains, “Pharaoh rose up from his bed.” What does Rashi add by these words; what significance is there in knowing from where he arose, from his bed, or from his chair? Also, why does Rashi say “from his bed” and not “from his sleep”?

The Admor of Amshinov answers the following. From here we see the arrogance of Pharaoh. Although he was promised that *makkat bechorot* would take place at midnight, he didn’t stay awake. He went to sleep, calm and secure. This is why Rashi emphasizes “from his bed.”

Rashi could have said “from his sleep” in order to convey Pharaoh’s haughty attitude. Pharaoh had seen that everything that Moshe Rabbeinu had promised would happen had actually taken place, down to the last detail. How, then, could he be so arrogant as to go to sleep at such a crucial time?

Even if he did not pay heed to Moshe’s words due to his great pride, he still should have feared what would come next. Imagine a prophet whose words come true. He tells a person that all of his sons will die on a certain night, at midnight. Would this person be able to go to sleep peacefully in his bed?

However, Pharaoh's reasoning was faulty. He thought that Hashem was unable to distinguish between the seed of a firstborn and others. If this is the case, he surmised, Bnei Yisrael had descended to the fiftieth level of *tumah* and would forever remain in Egypt. They would not leave this night, and here would be their end. He considered the sacrifice of a few thousand firstborn Egyptians a small price to pay in order to ensure that Bnei Yisrael would remain there forever.

Moreover, by going to bed, Pharaoh attempted to cause Bnei Yisrael to despair in the fulfillment of Moshe's predictions. They certainly were aware of the fact that this was the night of *makkat bechorot*, when they would be released from bondage to freedom, from darkness to great light.

But if they would suddenly hear that Pharaoh had gone to sleep as if nothing earth shattering was about to take place, this would instill despair in their hearts. They would stop believing what Moshe had told them and cease having *emunah* in all the miracles. Without believing whole-heartedly in Hashem with *mesirut nefesh*, the danger of remaining in Mitzrayim would be very real.

In truth, the exact opposite took place. Bnei Yisrael paid no heed to the rumors. Instead, they prepared for this great night. Maybe the reason Hashem had them remain indoors was so that they would not hear that Pharaoh had gone to sleep, just as on any other night, and come to despair. Although Pharaoh knew his end was near, he desired to make Bnei Yisrael give up, but Hashem did not allow this.

From here, one should learn that even the tiniest crack left open before the *Yetzer Hara* can cause untold harm, as Chazal state (*Avot* 2:4), "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die."

When Pharaoh heard that all of Egypt's firstborn sons were perishing, including those of the maidservants, and even those of other nationalities who were in Egypt at the time, yet not one of the Jews had

died, he realized he was fighting a lost cause. The protecting Angel of Egypt in Heaven was also dead. All of the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* had been extracted and elevated. Now he feared for his skin, for he himself was a firstborn. Pharaoh had no strength left to fight, as his Heavenly Angel had already been vanquished.

This, then, is the reason for Rashi's wording "and Pharaoh rose-from his bed." The word *ממטתו* (from his bed) is a combination of the words *מ"ט מתו* (forty-nine died). This is an allusion to the forty-nine levels of *tumah* which were defeated, preventing the Satan from attacking Bnei Yisrael. He also witnessed the might of Hashem, Who could distinguish between those who were firstborn and those who were not. At this point, he begged for his life from Moshe and Aharon.

"For Hashem is waging war for them against Egypt" (*Shemot* 14:25). Hashem eradicated all of the firstborn, together with the *kelippah*, allowing the brightness of the holy *nitzotzot* to shine forth.

— In Summary —

- Why did Hashem specifically kill out the firstborn of Egypt, rather than the youngest? It is often the youngest child who is most cherished by his father. Why is *Yetziat Mitzrayim* mentioned fifty times in the Torah?
- The Egyptians knew that Bnei Yisrael's task in Egypt was to extract the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah*. In order to prevent this, they instilled their firstborn, as well as other firstborn sons, with *tumah*. In this manner, they believed that Bnei Yisrael would never manage to extract all of the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* present in Egypt, and would therefore remain there forever. But Hashem had mercy on His people, discriminating between the firstborn and others. He struck only the firstborn, thereby eradicating the *kelippah* and purifying the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah*. For this reason, *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is recorded fifty times in the Torah. It refers to the fifty levels of *tumah* which were corrected by *makkat bechorot*.
- Pharaoh believed that Hashem was unable to distinguish between the firstborn and others. He likewise bragged that He controlled the Nile and that

he was a self-made man. With this mindset, he did not think that Bnei Yisrael would manage to bring all the *nitzotzot* to their *tikkun*, and would therefore have to remain in Egypt. But Hashem rectified everything. The firstborn of Bnei Yisrael were saved, in the merit of the Jewish daughters, who were righteous. Everything obtained its *tikkun*.

- Before *makkat bechorot*, Pharaoh went to bed as usual, in order to cause Bnei Yisrael to despair of redemption, by not believing the words of Hashem and Moshe. He assumed that they would never make the appropriate rectifications and would therefore remain forever in the fiftieth level of *tumah* in Mitzrayim.
- However, Hashem knew exactly who was a firstborn and who was not, and He smote the *kelippah*. Now Pharaoh realized that all forty-nine levels of *tumah* had lost their power. The *kelippah*, as well as Egypt's Angel on High, were powerless. Pharaoh then feared for his life and therefore beseeched Moshe and Aharon for salvation. Hashem destroyed the firstborn, and in this way, the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* were extracted in *makkat bechorot*.

EXPERIENCING THE EXODUS

“In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he left Egypt” (*Pesachim* 116b). One must believe that not only were our forefathers redeemed, but we ourselves were redeemed from Mitzrayim. A basic foundation of our faith is that we believe that Hashem rescued us from there and chose us to be His nation from among all of the other nations.

How can someone who was never enslaved envision himself being saved from Egypt? [Although we mentioned this subject in previous essays, there are seventy ways to interpret the Torah...]

One who truly loves Hashem has the ability to experience the Exodus. By contemplating the deeds and kindnesses of Hashem, one

can attain a clear understanding that every detail of our daily lives is an act of *chessed* of Hashem.

“Whoever is wise let him note these things, and they will comprehend the kindnesses of Hashem” (*Tehillim* 107:43). The wise man is the one who reflects on the kindnesses of Hashem. Merely hearing about, or seeing the beauty of Hashem’s miracles, will deeply impress a person. He might be far from belief, but by seriously studying the miracles he will feel excitement and ebullience in Hashem’s wonders. In this manner, he will cleave to Hashem with all his might.

When a person contemplates *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, he becomes emotionally involved in that event, although he himself was not there. By reflecting on what happened then, he feels as though he was redeemed together with his fathers, and Hashem chose him personally to be His servant, a part of the Chosen Nation.

Had his ancestors not been redeemed, he himself would not be a free man. Furthermore, with this mindset, he can relate to the suffering of our fathers as slaves in Mitzrayim, and feel as though he himself were enslaved. Who can see his father oppressed in slavery and feel like a free man?

One attains this level by having firm faith in the Creator. It demands great preparation. For that reason, we mention *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day. Additionally, one learns the halachot of Pesach before the holiday (*Pesachim* 6a). This helps a person to feel the exile and the Exodus from Egypt.

“In every generation, a person is obligated **to see** himself as though he left Egypt” (*Pesachim* 116b). The words “to see” emphasize that this should be literal. Just as one who looks into a mirror sees his actions clearly in front of his eyes, so too, should a person’s belief in *Yetziat Mitzrayim* be clear and concrete. He should have a deep-seated

knowledge that he himself was actually in Egypt. He was a slave together with our ancestors, and he was freed together with them.

“To see himself as having left Mitzrayim” can also mean “to show himself how he left.” A person is enjoined to show himself how things were then, at the time of slavery, and how life is today, after we gained our freedom. Only this approach can bring a person to truly connect with Hashem.

For this reason, Hashem started his address to the Jewish nation at *Matan Torah* with the words (*Shemot* 20:2) “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.” The Exodus from Egypt is the foundation of our faith throughout the generations. It brings us to believe in Hashem in everything we do. We believe that the *geulah* took place then, and we are free men today because of it. We believe that each individual was rescued from the *kelippah* and became liberated. One who does not firmly believe this, is still a slave to the *kelippah*.

Therefore, we are charged with relating the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* to the young children (*Shemot* 13:8), “And you shall tell your son.” The minds of children are clean and pure, and they can understand these things. Everything goes into their clear hearts. Truth is tangible, whereas falsehood eventually wears away. Chazal state (*Ketubot* 12b), “Something which is definite is preferable to something which is doubtful.”

This is why the Torah goes to great lengths to warn us about eliminating chametz. The directive to nullify and destroy chametz is mentioned numerous times. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:15), “You shall nullify the leaven from your homes.” Also (*ibid.* vs. 19), “For seven days, leaven may not be found in your houses.” And (*ibid.* 13:7), “No chametz may be seen...”

Chazal state (*Pesachim* 21b), “Chametz which existed throughout Pesach (unsold), is completely forbidden.” The great emphasis placed

on distancing oneself from chametz is in order to feel the freedom of Bnei Yisrael in being chosen as Hashem's nation. The act of eliminating chametz is how Bnei Yisrael grew into a nation.

This is hinted to by the fact that the letters of the word *חמץ* (chametz) can be interposed to spell *צמח* (plant). In order to grow in one's Avodat Hashem, one must subjugate his pride, as alluded to in the puffed up chametz, only to Hashem. The growth which results will bring one to become chosen by Hashem.

As an example, I would like to recount an incident that happened to me. After the Pesach holiday one year, I stood at the bus stop, waiting for the bus to Paris, where I was supposed to be the *sandek* at a *brit*. Suddenly, a gentile-looking woman approached me, and asked, "Why, after the Passover holiday, do many Jews refrain from shaving, and grow beards?" I asked her why this should interest her, to which she responded, "I am a Jew, and this is the first year that I have kept the Passover holiday." I answered her question, and we parted ways.

This was a woman who had never asked questions before. Why did she suddenly feel consumed by this question about Judaism? When a person begins the process of growth on Pesach, as a kosher Jew, observing the holiday according to halachah, he draws from the *kedushah* of the holiday. It influences him to grow and become elevated throughout the year. If he encounters difficulties along the road, he is not ashamed to stop any Jew and ask his questions.

This woman had never before shown interest in her Jewishness, neither caring about the ways of the Jewish people nor asking about their customs. But now, after having tasted the good taste of Pesach, without allowing chametz to enter her lips, she had subjected herself to her Creator. She began to feel that she, too, was redeemed from Egypt, and began to blossom and thrive as a true Jew in every aspect. Therefore, she started asking questions about things that she did not

understand. This was all a result of her abstaining from chametz in the required manner.

Refraining from Chametz Leads to Elevation

Although a person may flourish as a true Torah Jew, feeling connected to Hashem every day of the year, if he is scrupulous to abstain from even a speck of chametz on Pesach, it has the power to bring him to teshuvah. He is compared to a newborn who has not tasted sin.

The Arizal states that one who is careful about chametz on Pesach is guaranteed not to sin during the rest of the year. If one is careful neither to eat nor find in his possession any chametz (חמץ) at all, he will begin to blossom like a plant (צמח).

Once, as I stood at the front of the Beit Hakeneset, speaking about *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, I noticed a man laughing, as if he was mocking me. I was very perplexed. How could it be that a person who eats matzah on Pesach and nullifies all his chametz beforehand would doubt the validity of an explanation regarding the miracles that happened to our ancestors? Furthermore, this was a regular member of the synagogue. He prays three times daily, mentioning *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day. He also recites the Song of the Sea. How could he scorn these matters?

I think this is easy to understand. It could be that this person is not scrupulously careful with chametz on Pesach. This is liable to cause a weakening in his faith and in belief in these miracles. A Jew's growth process begins on Pesach, when he is vigilant regarding even a speck of chametz.

For this reason, the Torah is replete with warnings concerning chametz. By being scrupulous in this matter, one nullifies himself before Hashem. And just as plants need water in order to sprout, so too, does a person need the waters of Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a) to allow

him to grow and flourish as a kosher Jew, becoming a new person.

One is affected most by the Torah when he humbles himself. The Gemara states (*Sotah* 21b), “Words of Torah exist only in one who nullifies himself.” Chametz, on the other hand, is an allusion to the puffed up and proud.

When a person submits himself to Hashem, and considers how Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, he realizes they were like chametz, empty of Torah and mitzvot, as the *Navi* states (*Yechezkel* 16:7), “But you were naked and bare.” Then he acknowledges the miracles that Hashem did for our fathers in rescuing them, allowing them to flourish anew, becoming like matzah.

Each holiday has its special characteristics. Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment; Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. The holiday of Pesach has its unique aspects. There is the injunction to tell over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The *Shelah Hakadosh* tells us that this is hinted at in the word פֶּסַח, which is an acronym for the words פה סח (a speaking mouth). There is the prohibition of chametz, and the mitzvah to eat matzah, as well as learning the halachot of the festival.

The essence of Pesach is for a person to cleanse himself from chametz and enter the realm of matzah. And just as a *niddah* becomes purified by entering a kosher *mikveh*, so too, one who desires to come close to Hashem must cleanse himself from chametz and remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* through deep contemplation. In this manner, no sin will come through his hand. He will grow as Hashem wishes, going from strength to strength. He will feel as though he literally left Egypt, and he will be illuminated with *kedushah* from on High.

————— In Summary —————

- Every person is obligated to see himself as though he left Egypt. How can he feel redemption if he was never enslaved? This is by means of contemplating

the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Learning about Hashem's miracles in a superficial matter is not enough. Only by deep contemplation can one connect to the events and realize that we and our fathers were slaves. Now we became free men. This is by means of strong faith in Hashem. This demands prior preparation. For this reason, it is incumbent upon us to learn the halachot of Pesach. This is the reason for the wording "to see." One must see each detail clearly, and also show himself what the slavery was like and how his life is now, after redemption.

- Keeping one's distance from chametz also alludes to this. The letters of the word **חמץ** also spell **צמח** (a plant). One who is scrupulous concerning chametz is like a newborn. He asks about everything, as all aspects of Judaism interest him. He grows as Hashem wishes. In this way, he becomes a true member of the chosen nation. But if he isn't careful about chametz on Pesach, he will continue having doubts in his faith. He will remain like chametz, and will not thrive. Let us remember what transpired with our fathers in Mitzrayim, who were devoid of all Torah, but were then redeemed. Whoever truly feels this will blossom in his Avodat Hashem and will be rescued from Mitzrayim.
- The unique aspects of Pesach include telling over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, learning the halachot of the holiday, and, most importantly, refraining from chametz. Through Torah study, one becomes like a newborn and blossoms in the way of Hashem. One attains this level by distancing himself from chametz. He goes from strength to strength, and Heavenly blessings will be showered upon him.

MATZAH VS. CHAMETZ – BNEI YISRAEL VS. THE EGYPTIANS

“They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt, for they could not delay”

(Shemot 12:39)

From this pasuk, it would seem that the reason that Bnei Yisrael baked matzot was because they were hurried out of Egypt, and their dough did not have a chance to rise. This is perplexing, for we know that Bnei Yisrael were commanded by Hashem to eat matzot and not chametz, as the pasuk states (Shemot 12:20), “You shall not eat any leavening.” How can we say that if not for the Egyptians chasing them out, Bnei Yisrael would have eaten chametz? Hashem had commanded them to eat only matzah! This was not connected to their hurried departure from Egypt.

A tremendous miracle was performed for Bnei Yisrael. On the one hand, Hashem commanded them to refrain from all leavened bread. They were instructed to nullify all of the chametz in their possession and to prepare themselves for spiritual growth, to the extent that they would become completely purified and worthy of accepting the Torah. We find (Vayikra 18:4) that all the sick were healed at *Matan Torah*, for it is not fitting to give the Torah to sick people.

This is in accordance with the statement of Chazal (*Makkot* 24; *Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei* 2): A person has 248 organs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot. When one violates a mitzvah, he is, in essence, damaging a part of his body. Since Bnei Yisrael corrected

every aspect of themselves in anticipation of receiving the Torah, they were certainly healed of all their maladies at *Matan Torah*.

On the other hand, the Egyptians hurried Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order that they would not have time to bake matzot. In this manner, they would leave without matzot, and without mitzvot (similarly spelled). When dough is not baked in time, it rises and turns to chametz. The Egyptians wanted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from baking matzot so that the dough they would take with them would turn to chametz.

Thus, Bnei Yisrael were faced with a test. Hashem could have commanded them to bake their matzot a few days in advance, with peace of mind. This way, they would have had proper matzot upon leaving Egypt, without being disturbed by the Egyptians.

But this is not what happened. Hashem instructed them to bake the matzot at the last minute. This was to teach them that their moment of growth was precisely when the Egyptians received the last plague.

Hashem told them that when the Egyptians would arrive, hurrying them out of the land, they should pay them no heed and not be swayed by their great wealth. Bnei Yisrael should not allow themselves to be bribed, but should continue doing their sacred duty of baking matzot, as they had been commanded. They should not abandon their dough, allowing it to become chametz, as the Egyptians desired.

While it seemed that Bnei Yisrael were rushing their matzah baking because of the Egyptians, as the pesukim state (*Shemot* 12:34, 39), “The people picked up its dough before it could become leavened... for they were driven from Egypt, for they could not delay,” this was not the case. The matzah was baked entirely according to the word of Hashem.

From all of the above, we see the great wickedness of the Egyptians. Even when they themselves were suffering, they wanted to prevent the Jews from fulfilling the mitzvah of matzah. This was their objective in

rushing them out of the land. They wanted to deny Bnei Yisrael the opportunity to renew themselves through keeping this mitzvah. Then, instead of venting His anger on the Egyptians, Hashem would be angry at the Jewish nation, preventing their redemption.

We see another example of the evilness of the Egyptians. Moshe Rabbeinu searched for the coffin of Yosef, for Yosef had instructed the nation to remove his remains when they left Egypt (*Bereishit* 50:25). But he could not find the coffin anywhere, until Serach bat Asher brought him to the river, pointing out its exact location (*Sotah* 13a). The Zohar (*Beshalach*) states that he withdrew it from the river by means of the Ineffable Name.

This is hard to comprehend. The Egyptians were rushing the Jews out of the land, giving them no time to tarry. They did not even have time to prepare provisions for the journey. But the Egyptians knew that as long as Bnei Yisrael did not have Yosef's coffin with them, they would not leave Egypt. Why didn't they reveal its location to Moshe, in order to speed things up?

This demonstrates their wickedness. They knew that Bnei Yisrael were bound by their vow to Yosef to remove his coffin at their departure. They therefore purposely rushed them, offering them wealth and clothing (*Shemot* 12:35), literally chasing them out. This was all in order that they not take Yosef's coffin with them, thereby breaking their promise to him. This would evoke Hashem's anger, and He would refrain from splitting the sea for them.

In fact, it was in the merit of Yosef's bones that the sea split (*Bereishit Rabbah* 87:8). The pasuk states (*Tehillim* 114:3) that the sea saw Yosef's casket and then split. Had Bnei Yisrael not removed his bones, the sea would have remained in its place, forcing them back to Mitzrayim and slavery, forever after.

The pasuk in Mishlei says (10:8), "The wise of heart will seize good deeds." Moshe Rabbeinu was a wise man. He purposefully busied

himself with finding Yosef's coffin so that Bnei Yisrael would be able to take it with them, out of Egypt. He understood the evil machinations of the Egyptians regarding the matzah baking and the removal of Yosef's remains. He nullified their intentions and redeemed the nation from Egypt, from the depths of *tumah* to the heights of *kedushah*.

————— In Summary —————

- From the pesukim, it seems that the reason for the rushed manner in which Bnei Yisrael baked the matzot was because the Egyptians hurried them, preventing their dough from rising. But in truth, it was only because of Hashem's command to eat matzot.
- A miracle took place at that time. On the one hand, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to bake matzot, and not eat chametz, in order that all their organs should be complete at the time of *Matan Torah*. Yet, on the other hand, the Egyptians hurried them out of the land, in order that they should not manage to bake matzot, preventing them from fulfilling this mitzvah, and effectively causing them to be enslaved in Egypt forever. However, Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to pay no heed to the Egyptians and to bake the dough into matzot. They should do this because it is the will of Hashem, not because of the Egyptians' machinations. In this way, they would flourish and thrive, and become fitting recipients for the Torah. The Egyptians were devious in their wickedness, but Hashem forestalled their plans.
- We find that the Egyptians tried to prevent the removal of Yosef's coffin from Egypt, as well. They hurried the Jews to leave the land and did not reveal the whereabouts of his casket, for they knew that without it, the Jews would be unable to leave Egypt. They wanted the Jews to break their promise to Yosef, causing them to remain in Egypt forever, *chas v'shalom*. But Moshe was a wise man. He annulled the evil intentions of the Egyptians. With the help of Serach bat Asher, he located the casket and redeemed the Jewish nation from Egypt, from *tumah* to *kedushah*.

MATZAH – ELIMINATING PRIDE

The Zohar (II, 40b) states that the mitzvah of burning chametz before Pesach is derived from the pesukim (*Shemot* 12:34) “The people picked up its dough before it could become leavened...” and (ibid. vs. 19) “Leaven may not be found in your houses.” Chametz represents the *Yetzer Hara*, whereas matzah represents the *Yetzer Hatov*.

Let us try to understand the connection between chametz and matzah to the *Yetzer Hara* and the *Yetzer Hatov*.

Also, let us try to understand the reason we are commanded to eat matzah on Pesach and refrain from chametz. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 12:15), “For a seven-day period shall you eat matzot.” Also (ibid. 19-20), “Leaven may not be found in your houses... you shall not eat any leavening.” The reason we eat matzot is because of Hashem’s command. But from the following pasuk (*Shemot* 12:39), it would seem otherwise. There, it states, “They baked the dough... into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay.” This seems to say that they left Egypt hurriedly, and thus their dough did not have a chance to rise. [See *Matzah vs. Chametz – Bnei Yisrael vs. the Egyptians.*]

Additionally, why did Bnei Yisrael, immediately upon their departure from Egypt, need to have a reminder of the bread of affliction that they ate in Egypt? Why didn’t Hashem wait until after they had left Egypt and then command them that in future years they should bake matzot and eat them on Pesach, in memory of that night of protection when they left Egypt?

It was necessary for Bnei Yisrael to slaughter the sheep for the *korban* Pesach and eat it on that night, to demonstrate to the Egyptians that their gods were dead and they could not do anything about it

(*Shemot Rabbah* 16:2). But the command to eat matzot, in commemoration of the slavery in Egypt, could certainly have been delayed until the following year.

There are two versions of the passage we recite at the beginning of the Seder. Some say, “This is the bread of affliction,” while other say, “This is **like** the bread of affliction.” The Rabbinical authorities (see *Magen Avraham* and *Mishnah Berurah* 473:6) state that one version was used before the *churban* Beit Hamikdash, and the other, after.

Additionally, what is the reason for leaning at the Seder? It seems particularly arrogant to lean before Hashem.

Let us try to elucidate. It is known that pride is the source of all sin. Chazal tell us that Pharaoh epitomized this trait. He even had the audacity to tell Moshe and Aharon (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?” He was full of himself, and had no room for Anyone else.

In order to merit leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael had to eradicate the *kelippah* of pride. This explains the order of the mitzvot of Pesach. First of all, we must annul the chametz, which is puffed up and haughty, alluding to arrogance. A person must excise conceit from his heart, leaving it free to be elevated in the ways of Hashem (see *Divrei Hayamim* II, 17:6). Bnei Yisrael took their dough with them out of Egypt “before (טרם) it could become leavened.” This hints that one should refrain from haughtiness, since the *gematria katan* of the word טרם (before) is equal to that of the word גאווה (arrogance). In this way, he can offer his entire being to Hashem, singing His praises, and bringing pleasure to Him.

How awesome are the words of the Zohar (II, 40b). It says that when Bnei Yisrael retell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, this empowers the Heavenly assemblage, who, in turn, give strength to their Master. Further (III, 7b), it states that Bnei Yisrael lend support to their Father

in Heaven, just like a king gains prestige when he is praised and thanked. All fear him, and his honor is raised in the eyes of all.

In order to reach this amazing level of adding power and prestige to Hashem, one must make prior preparation. He must nullify the chametz, which refers to arrogance, and strengthen his humility and subservience to Hashem. Matzah is thin, alluding to humility. Hashem takes pleasure in this person, and this empowers Him, so to speak.

By taking their dough before it could rise and become chametz, Bnei Yisrael were illustrating the defeat of Mitzrayim, the seat of conceit. Although the Egyptians were dealt heavy blows with the plagues, they still lorded over the world with their haughtiness.

Hashem desired that upon leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael would eliminate any trace of arrogance from their hearts, for Hashem cannot exist together with the proud of heart (*Sotah* 5a). In this way, they would accept upon themselves His authority before receiving the Torah, which is acquired through humility (*Ta'anit* 7a). The Torah praises Moshe, our loyal shepherd, for his unequaled level of humility (*Bamidbar* 12:3). Only after excising arrogance from their hearts, could Bnei Yisrael be released from the grip of the *Yetzer Hara* and be bound to the *Yetzer Hatov*.

Hashem does not suffice with the eradication of external haughtiness. He wants us to eliminate any tinge of internal pride, as well. For this reason, even a trace of chametz is forbidden on Pesach.

Furthermore, simply getting rid of chametz is not enough. We must also check for any vestige of chametz in our possession, in order that we not come to eat it on Pesach (*Pesachim* 4b; 6b). Likewise, merely annulling pride is insufficient; we must destroy it completely. If not, it will continue to rear its ugly head, wreaking havoc upon a person.

This is what is meant by the words, "The people picked up its dough." Bnei Yisrael "picked themselves up" from the ugly trait of

arrogance and attained the most exalted level of “before it could become leavened.” Their Avodat Hashem of eradicating arrogance from their midst began before they left Mitzrayim. They ate matzah while yet in Egypt to indicate their humility and subservience to Hashem.

This can also be explained homiletically. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to leave Egypt “before (טרם) it (the dough) could become leavened.” The last and first letters of the word טרם (before) are מ”ט. This alludes to the forty-nine levels of *tumah* that Bnei Yisrael emerged from on that Pesach. It can also be read as מת (dead), since the letters ט and ת are often interchangeable. In this vein, the word טרם also hints at תרומה (donation). It is as if Bnei Yisrael brought an offering to Hashem by following Him into the Wilderness with no provisions except for their trust in Him. From the depths of the forty-nine levels of *tumah*, they emerged with a donation for Hashem.

The Zohar states that burning the chametz is a positive commandment. It alludes to the uprooting of arrogance and the acquisition of humility. One’s heart may be elevated only in the ways of Hashem.

With this in mind, we can understand why we recline at the Seder table. After we have expunged all traces of arrogance from our hearts, implanting humility and self-nullification in its place, we can attain the level of elevating our hearts in the ways of Hashem. Then we are permitted to recline, for we have earned the status of the sons of kings.

Only after this preparatory stage, can we begin counting the Omer, preparing for the holiday of *Matan Torah*. During each of the forty-nine days of the Omer, we correct another level of *tumah* (*Zohar, Parashat Emor*). We finally enter the gates of *kedushah*. In this manner, we nullify all negative character traits, and the Torah can endure within us.

The commandment of ridding their homes of chametz (*Shemot* 12:19) was a preparation for baking the matzot. Before leaving Mitzrayim, Bnei

Yisrael were instructed to nullify and destroy all vestiges of chametz and place the blood of the *korban* Pesach on their thresholds.

Bnei Yisrael had to eradicate any trace of arrogance, as depicted by Pharaoh, from themselves. They were ordered to go to the opposite extreme and internalize humility. Their being driven out of Egypt alludes to the injunction to drive out this ugly trait and embrace the trait of humility instead.

According to this, we can understand Moshe's injunction (*Shemot* 12:21) "Draw forth or buy for yourselves one of the flock..." Chazal explain (*Mechilta; Yalkut Shimoni, ibid.*), "Draw your hand from *avodah zarah*, and take for yourselves sheep for a mitzvah." Arrogance is a very real form of idol worship. The initials of the words עבודה זרה (idol worship) spell זר (brazen). The Mishnah states (*Avot* 5:20), "The brazen one goes to Gehinnom." The haughty person is brazen, possessing no shame whatsoever.

Chazal state (*Nedarim* 20a; *Zohar* III, 257a) that whoever has no shame indicates that he did not stand at Har Sinai. The purpose of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was that Bnei Yisrael should receive the Torah. Therefore, Moshe told the people to draw back their hands from brazenness and humble themselves.

One of my disciples pointed out that this may be a reason why Chazal (*Pesachim* 7b) enjoin us to check for chametz not by the light of the sun or the moon, but by the light of a candle. A candle sheds a small amount of light, and one must bend down in order to reach the cracks and crevices. This helps one feel humble.

One who fails to correct the fault of arrogance has no exit from Egypt. Our forefathers nearly reached the fiftieth level of *tumah*, the point of no return. Only by correcting their sins, did they divest themselves of impurity and merit *kedushah* and *Kabbalat HaTorah*. Therefore, before a person becomes "leavened," he must make the

effort to take pride only in Avodat Hashem. In this way, he will serve Hashem with both humility and pride.

The word חמץ hints to this. One who corrects his *middah* of arrogance is left with מ"ח (forty-eight) levels to work on. This is the way he will arrive at 'צ, an allusion to perfect tzaddikim.

This is in line with the explanation of the Admor MiAlexander, zt"l, in his sefer *Tiferet Shmuel*. He writes that the passage where we proclaim "All who are hungry (דיכפין) shall come and eat" refers to all who are bent over in humility. The word דיכפין has the same root as כפוף, which means "bent over." All sins are sourced in arrogance. Only one who is truly humble can come and partake of the matzah, an allusion to humility, and submit himself to Hashem with no airs of conceit.

Now we might understand the discrepancy in the terms used in different Haggadot: "This is the bread of affliction," and "This is **like** the bread of affliction." In the early days, our fathers knew how to tell the story of the Exodus, truly feeling the exile and redemption. The Torah scholars who were in Bnei Brak, who told the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* all night, were an example of this (see *Tosefta, Ketubot* 105a). They were able to say, "This is the bread of affliction." On our pitiful level, however, we can only say, "This is **like** the bread of affliction." We aspire to the level of our fathers who literally felt the suffering and the *geulah* which followed. Today, we say, "This is the bread of affliction," so that we, too, should feel the pain and eventually be able to feel the exhilaration of the Exodus.

May it be Hashem's will that we feel the *galut*. Then, we will try to mend all breaches between man and his fellow man, for each will feel the suffering of his friend. In this manner, we will feel the suffering of our forefathers, as well as the suffering of the *Shechinah*. We will then merit witnessing great miracles, as in the days of the redemption from Mitzrayim, Amen.

In Summary

- “The people picked up its dough before it could become leavened.” The Zohar states that this refers to the prohibition of having chametz in one’s possession on Pesach. Chametz represents the *Yetzer Hara*, whereas matzah represents the *Yetzer Hatov*. What is the connection? Also, the pasuk states that they made matzah because there was no time for the dough to rise. Was that the reason for the commandment to eat matzah?
- Why did Bnei Yisrael keep Pesach immediately upon leaving Egypt, and not wait for the following year? Why do we recline at the Seder table? This seems particularly conceited. Lastly, what is the reason for the two versions mentioned at the beginning of the Seder: “This is the bread of affliction,” and “This is like the bread of affliction”?
- Bnei Yisrael had to completely eradicate the character trait of arrogance before leaving the land of Egypt. Chametz is a physical metaphor for arrogance, all blown up. Matzah, on the other hand, alludes to humility, thin and plain. At the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to immediately eliminate all traces of haughtiness, leaving only pride in Avodat Hashem. The Zohar states that when we relate the Pesach narrative, we inject power into the Heavenly assemblage. This requires prior preparation. Arrogance must be eradicated, completely destroyed, just as we burn the chametz. This is the way one attains humility. After one reaches this level, he is entitled to recline at his Pesach Seder, for his heart is elevated only in the ways of Hashem, and he is compared to royalty.
- The concept of destroying the chametz and eating matzah on this night is that Hashem wants us to eradicate internal, as well as external arrogance. For if not, arrogance will continue rearing its ugly head. The last and first letters of the word טרם (before) spell מ"ט, since Bnei Yisrael corrected the forty-nine levels of *tumah* and entered into the sphere of *kedushah* at their departure from Egypt. In this manner, they were able to make a תרומה (donation/gift) to Hashem by following Him into the Wilderness with no provisions except for their *emunah*. Moshe instructed the people, “Withdraw your hands from *avodah zarah*.” The initials of the words עבודה זרה (idol worship) spell עז (brazen). The brazen one is enjoined to forsake his arrogance and become

humbled. For this reason, we say “All who are hungry,” for the word דיכפין (hungry) has the same root as כפוף, which means “bent over.” This is the ultimate way to partake of the matzah.

- This is the explanation of the two versions of the passage: “This is the bread of affliction,” and, “This is **like** the bread of affliction.” Our fathers were able to actually feel the suffering of our ancestors and the subsequent joy of redemption. We can only imagine what it was like. But if we go in their ways, we too, can feel the pain of our fellow man, the pain of *galut*, and the suffering of the *Shechinah*. We will then merit the final redemption, replete with wonders and miracles, just as we witnessed in the days of our Exodus from Egypt.

THE VIRTUE OF BELIEF IN YETZIAT MITZRAYIM

In the Pesach Haggadah, we recite the words of the Torah (*Shemot* 13:8), “And you shall tell your son on that day.” The word והגדת (and you shall tell) has the same root as the word אגודה (bundle). This alludes to our obligation to bind our children to faith in Hashem. In this manner, we will succeed in vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara*.

We find an account in the Haggadah (see *Tosafot, Ketubot* 105a) regarding Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Tarfon, and Rabbi Akiva, who were seated at their Pesach Seder in Bnei Brak. But the story itself is not mentioned. We are just told that they recounted the details of the Exodus from Egypt.

The story itself is that they themselves lived *Yetziat Mitzrayim* with their 248 limbs and 365 sinews. In order to be able to relive the story of the Exodus, one needs tremendous *emunah*. They retold all that had occurred during the 210 years of Bnei Yisrael’s bondage in Egypt, until their disciples came to inform them that dawn had broken and the time for Kriyat Shema had arrived. Dawn is a metaphor for faith, as the

pasuk states (*Eichah* 3:23), “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

The disciples also conveyed the message that only through Torah and tefillah is *emunah* established in one’s heart. Kriyat Shema alludes to Torah (*Menachot* 99; *Zohar* III, 228a). Kriyat Shema is also an integral part of prayer, alluding to prayer in its very name, since the word שמע is an acronym of the names of the three daily prayers: ערבית, מנחה, שחרית – Shacharit, Minchah, and Ma’ariv. Moreover, the Kriyat Shema prayer contains the parashah of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Their disciples were telling them: “True, until now you were experiencing the wonders of our forefathers in Egypt. But the time has come to recite the Kriyat Shema, wherein is mentioned *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, which every Jew has the daily obligation to remember.”

THE ROOTS OF HUMILITY

In the Pesach Haggadah, we recite (*Yechezkel* 16:7), “I made you as numerous as the plants of the field; you increased and grew, and you came to have great charm... you were naked and bare.”

Hashem wants us to be humble like the low-growing plants of the field. But if we “increase and grow” in arrogance and conceited charm, even if our pride is based on holy endeavors, we will find ourselves naked and bare of mitzvot, *rachmana litzlan*.

After Pesach, is the month of Iyar, a month of light (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a). We have the ability to draw light from Hashem during this time. Specifically during the days of Sefirah, we read the Torah portion of parashat *Kedoshim*. Hashem tells us (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:9), “My holiness is greater than yours.” This statement should prevent any feelings of arrogance.

In retribution for their negative trait of arrogance, Bnei Yisrael were subjected to the low level of the forty-nine gates of *tumah* in Egypt (*Zohar, Yitro 39a*).

The importance of eradicating the *middah* of arrogance is illustrated by the following stories. The Ben Ish Chai once desired to purchase a cornfield. He said that only the bent stalks were good, but not the standing ones, for they depict arrogance. A Rav once spent a good few hours checking for chametz in a completely empty room. They said he was really checking the chambers of his heart for any vestiges of arrogance. He wanted to ensure that he would not fall into its trap and eventually become bare and bereft of true Avodat Hashem.

Chametz hints at arrogance. That is why it is forbidden on Pesach. We are enjoined to eat the thin matzah, alluding to humility. This will remind us of our sojourn in Egypt, when we were reduced to eating poor man's bread. Bnei Yisrael were punctilious in maintaining their Jewish names, language, and mode of dress. These were special symbols to remind them of their prestigious past and that they were the sons of the holy Avot. Even in their downtrodden state in Egypt, this thought kept them from complete despair.

SHEVI'I SHEL PESACH



THE BIRTHDAY OF FAITH

Why is Shevi'i shel Pesach singled out with its own name? It is, after all, part of the holiday of Pesach. It is not a separate festival like Shemini Atzeret, which comes after Sukkot, which warrants the blessing *Shehecheyanu*. Although it is true that the sea split before Bnei Yisrael and they entered it on that day (*Mechilta, Beshalach*), the entire holiday was replete with miracles. Why then, is this day singled out from among the others?

The *Yismach Yisrael*, in explaining the writings of the Arizal, states that love and illumination are an intrinsic part of the holiday of Pesach. But they are not revealed until the last day.

It is known that one acquires a *middah* after spending seven days toiling in it. Seven days correspond to the seven planets, each symbolizing a different attribute. When one exerts himself in a specific trait for seven days, he instills this *middah* into his being.

For that reason, Shevi'i shel Pesach brings into actuality the potential instilled in the first day. It can be compared to a birth after pregnancy. For, on the seventh day, all of the love that the nation acquired on the night of the Seder, the night of *kedushah*, becomes a part of them.

Moshe Rabbeinu told the nation (*Shemot* 14:13), "Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem." This indicated that they should stand fast

and hold onto the spiritual illumination that they received on the first night of the festival. Then, it would be firmly rooted in them by the time they would reach the seventh day.

Moshe told Bnei Yisrael that they would see Hashem's salvation "that He will perform for you **today**." This alludes to the fact that if Bnei Yisrael maintain their spiritual service all seven days of the festival, **today** (Shevi'i shel Pesach) they would merit seeing the luminosity of Hashem's salvation. They would then be enveloped with ethereal light.

It would seem that the *middah* they toiled to obtain was the trait of *emunah*. The way to acquire *emunah* is through self-nullification and subjugation before Hashem.

Bnei Yisrael were commanded (*Shemot* 12:20), "You shall not eat any leavening." Chametz refers to conceit, honor, and jealousy. Engaging in any form of these negative character traits is forbidden for seven days. Through nullification of these traits and submitting themselves to Hashem's will for the duration of seven days, Bnei Yisrael would surely attain *emunah* in Hashem.

The Torah describes Bnei Yisrael's acquisition of the Egyptians' wealth upon leaving Egypt, and the fact that they did not prepare provisions for themselves (*ibid.* 12:39). This was the beginning of strengthening their *emunah*. Hashem kept His word to Avraham (*Bereishit* 15:14), "Afterwards they will leave with great wealth."

Not only that, but no dog whetted its tongue against Bnei Yisrael when they were involved in emptying out Mitzrayim of its wealth (*Shemot* 11:7). The dogs did not bark or frighten the Jewish people.

Great faith was displayed by the Jewish nation in taking the booty of the Egyptians, without preparing provisions for their trip. When *emunah* is implanted in a man's heart, he is like a newborn, or convert, free of sin (*Yevamot* 22a; *Bechorot* 47a). He feels a sense of security and

fulfillment in his faith. Hashem is satisfied with him. The word שביעי (seventh) has the same root as the word שבע (satisfied).

For seven days, Bnei Yisrael had to work on *emunah*, until they attained the level of (*Shemot* 14:31) “They had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” On the seventh day, when they completed their *tikkun*, they absorbed further lessons concerning the attribute of faith. It must be consistent and persistent. And even if one’s tefillah is not readily accepted, one must continue onwards with his faith, “travelling on” with his supplications, not just praying at the standard set times.

Hashem taught them, too, that without Torah there is no *emunah*, for Torah supports *emunah*. One should never place his faith in himself, until his dying day.

Shevi'i Shel Pesach Is Compared to Shabbat

I would like to add that Shevi'i shel Pesach is like Shabbat, the seventh day of the week. *Shemittah*, likewise, is the seventh year, as the pasuk states (*Vayikra* 25:4), “The seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land.” The Jubilee year comes after seven *Shemittah* years. This is the foundation of our *emunah*.

The main aspect of Shabbat is belief that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, as it says (*Shemot* 20:11), “For in six days Hashem made the Heavens and the earth... and He rested on the seventh.” Therefore, all work is forbidden on Shabbat. One is enjoined to believe that Hashem will compensate him for his loss of income due to Shabbat observance. Chazal state (*Beitzah* 16a), “All of a person’s needs are allocated for him from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Hakippurim, apart from expenses of Shabbat...” Whoever adds to his Shabbat expenses, receives additional funds from Hashem.

Unfortunately, in our day, we see many Jewish businesses which thrive on Shabbat, just as during the week. Sometimes, they even earn

more on Shabbat than during an ordinary weekday. This is all a ploy of the Satan. One who truly trusts in Hashem will be supported by Him. But one who does not place his trust in Hashem, and opens his business on Shabbat in order to support himself, is simply stealing the money from Hashem. Could it be that Hashem would grant him profit for opening his business on Shabbat?!

The pasuk states (*Shemot* 23:12), “Six days shall you accomplish your activities, and on the seventh day you shall desist.” What does the Torah want to tell us with this? One must work on perfecting his *middah* of *emunah* during the six days of the week, so that by the time the seventh day comes, it is implanted deep in his heart. This *middah* is one of the most difficult to acquire. One must spend his entire life working on it. *Shemirat Shabbat* is equal to all the other mitzvot (*Yerushalmi Berachot* 1:5; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16). For this reason, keeping Shabbat demands an added level of faith, above that required for other mitzvot.

Working relentlessly on the *middah* of *emunah* brings a person to fulfill all of the mitzvot, as it says (119:86), “All of your commandments are faith.” The *Navi* (*Chavakuk* 2:4) similarly states, “The righteous person shall live through his faith.” On Erev Pesach, Bnei Yisrael began the task of strengthening their *emunah*, and worked on it throughout the holiday, until they reached perfection on the seventh day.

Now we can understand why the seventh day of Pesach is given its own name. It was the culmination of the period when Bnei Yisrael infused themselves with *emunah*. They had no reason to fear Pharaoh, head of the *kelippah*, or any other evil. Yet, as long as they had not yet witnessed the miracle of the sea splitting, they were afraid. Moshe told them, “Stand fast and you will see the salvation of Hashem.” Once they saw the dead Egyptians, they were placated.

While still in Egypt, Moshe told the nation to withdraw from *avodah zarah* and draw forth a sheep for the mitzvah (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot*

195; 206). Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to their bedposts (*Zohar* III, 251a). The word *שׁוֹ* (sheep) has the same *gematria* as the word *הֶקֶר* (the coldness). They were enjoined to bind and slaughter the coolness of heart that opposes *emunah*. *Emunah* means eradicating *avodah zarah* from one's heart. The foundation of *emunah* of Shevi'i shel Pesach is "passing over" our past, eradicating *avodah zarah* from our hearts.

Hashem always helps those who work on their *emunah*. So it is on Shabbat, and so it is on Pesach, specifically on Shevi'i shel Pesach, when Bnei Yisrael merited special illumination.

Every festival has a specific spiritual inspiration upon which it is based. According to the words of the Arizal, the seventh day of Pesach gains its spiritual potential from the first day of the festival. It is akin to a birth after being in the womb of the preceding days of the festival.

Shevi'i shel Pesach is the birthday of *emunah*. The pregnancy is the preparation one makes to arrive at *emunah*. Shevi'i shel Pesach brings forth spiritual strength, which, in turn, illuminates the entire year.

————— In Summary —————

- Shevi'i shel Pesach is singled out from among all of the other days of Pesach, even though it is really part of the holiday. The Arizal explains that the attribute of *emunah* is instilled into the holiday on the first day of Pesach. Toiling to acquire *emunah* throughout the festival is similar to undergoing a spiritual pregnancy. On the seventh day, his efforts "bear fruit," and the trait of *emunah* is born, becoming his personal acquisition.
- Moshe Rabbeinu told the nation, "Stand fast." He told Bnei Yisrael that they should hold tight to their status as people who witnessed Divine revelations through submission to Hashem. With the power of their faith, they defeated the Egyptians.

THE CULMINATION OF PESACH

Shevi'i shel Pesach is the signature seal of all of the days of Pesach. It is written in *sifrei kodesh* that Shevi'i shel Pesach is the most important day of the festival. How is this so?

Also, what is unique about this day, when Bnei Yisrael entered the *Yam Suf* and were saved by Hashem splitting the sea? (*Mechilta, Beshalach*)

Why did Hashem choose to finish off the Egyptians by drowning them in the sea? Furthermore, why did Hashem tell Moshe (*Shemot* 14:15), “Why do you cry out to Me?” Why should he not pray to Hashem?

Shevi'i shel Pesach is special in that it is the day we take delight in Hashem's coronation upon the world. Hashem did not want to associate His Kingship with the killing of the Egyptians. Therefore, He extracted Bnei Yisrael from their midst (*Devarim* 4:34), removing them from serving the Egyptians.

The fact that not one Jew remained in all of Egypt is in itself a great miracle. Even those in far-flung regions were not forgotten. And even those who thought that they would never see the light of liberation, considered as gentiles and slaves without Torah, were all brought miraculously to one place, from where they left Egypt.

This is hinted at in the word רַעַמְסֵס (*Ramses* – one of the cities which Bnei Yisrael built in Egypt). The letters of the name spell out a message. רַע means bad, and מ"ס is the acronym for the *kelippah*. Specifically from the hotbed of negative forces, ס' (sixty) ten thousands (600,000) of Bnei Yisrael emerged to accept the Torah, given after Moshe was in *Shamayim* for מ' (forty) days (*Menachot* 99b). The power

of the *kelippah* was finally subdued in the face of *kedushah*, in the *zechut* of *Kabbalat HaTorah*.

This was all on the first day of Pesach. On the seventh day of Pesach, Hashem wreaked vengeance on His enemies and their angels. Then, He was crowned as King upon the entire world. This is the fulfillment of the pasuk (*Shemot* 15:18), “Hashem shall reign for all eternity.”

Moshe Rabbeinu reassured Bnei Yisrael that they had no reason to fear the Angel of Egypt. Hashem Himself hardened the hearts of the Egyptians so that they should pursue the Jewish nation, in order to bring about their downfall (*Tanchuma Beshalach* 7). He did this in order to avenge His honor, for Pharaoh had said (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?” At the Splitting of the Sea, they were singing a different tune. They proclaimed (*ibid.* 15:11): “Who is like You among the Heavenly powers, Hashem!” Chazal expound on this, stating that Hashem will eventually rule upon the entire land (*Yalkut Shimoni, Beshalach* 250).

This is all on condition that Bnei Yisrael remain steadfast in their *Avodat Hashem*. For when they are steady and stable in their course, without vacillating, they bring might and power to the nation (see *Tehillim* 68:36). They grant Hashem the power to take revenge upon the nations of the world. Then they witness His salvation, for He is spared further desecration. If Hashem’s Name is profaned, it is our fault. It is because we are not secure in our service of Him. Everything depends upon the *Avodat Hashem* of Bnei Yisrael.

On *Shevi’i shel Pesach*, Hashem became King over Bnei Yisrael and the entire world. Moshe Rabbeinu told the people that they would see the salvation “אשר יעשה לכם היום – that He will do with you this day.” The letters of the word לכם (with you) also spell the word מלך (king). For on the seventh day of Pesach, Hashem truly became King, and Bnei Yisrael became connected to Him (*Otiot d’Rabbi Eliezer* 1). There can be no king without a people (*Kad Hakemach, Rosh Hashanah* 70:1). Bnei

Yisrael's connection to Hashem is complete only through their steadfastness and persistence in their *avodah* and fear of Heaven.

The day that Bnei Yisrael witnessed the dead Egyptians upon the shore of the *Yam Suf* (*Shemot* 14:30) was the great day when Hashem ruled over the entire world. Many measures of greatness were granted to Bnei Yisrael then. Through their strong desire to receive the Torah after forty-nine days, they would establish an eternal bond with Hashem Yitbarach. (Both of His Names are numerically equivalent to the word מֶלֶךְ, adding one for the word itself.) They would also be connected to the Ineffable seventy-two letter Name. This is a great kindness of Hashem. The word חֶסֶד (kindness) is also numerically equivalent to seventy-two (see *Zohar* II, 1b).

Similarly, they would be connected to the Ten Commandments, which they would receive afterward from Hashem Himself. This proved that they were on an elevated level. This is hinted to in the words “that He will do for you today – אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם.” The *gematria* of these words, adding one for each phrase, equals the *gematria* of the words יִּדְבָרוּת (the Ten Commandments) and שֵׁם ע”ב (the seventy-two letter Name).

The bond that we establish with Hashem is alluded to in the name of Shevi'i shel Pesach. The initials of the first two words of שְׁבִיעִי שֶׁל פֶּסַח have the *gematria* of six hundred, the same as that of the word קֶשֶׁר (bond).

Moreover, “He (Pharaoh) took six hundred elite chariots and all the chariots of Egypt” (*Shemot* 14:7). In the merit of the bond between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem, these six hundred chariots, the epitome of שֶׁקֶר (falsehood), which also has the *gematria* of six hundred, suffered defeat at the sea. Bnei Yisrael give might and majesty to Hashem when they become close to Him.

In the remaining letters of the words, the seventy-two letter Name of Hashem is hinted at, along with the forty days which Moshe spent in

Shamayim, receiving the Torah, and the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the ten Sefirot (see *Tikkunei Zohar* 17; 31a). Their entire creation was in the merit of Torah. This took place when Bnei Yisrael subjugated themselves to Hashem's sovereignty on Pesach in Mitrayim, when He passed over their homes (*Shemot* 12:23).

The Power of Torah and Tefillah at the Yam Suf

We find that Hashem silenced Moshe's prayers. But we don't find that Moshe even prayed. We can say that his proclamation (*Shemot* 14:13) "Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem" was a form of prayer.

Hashem responded (*ibid.* 15), "Why do you cry out to Me?" He meant to say it was not the time to pray at length, for every moment that went by denoted a lack of His sovereignty. It was a time most auspicious to reinstate Hashem's Kingdom over the entire world, preceded by Bnei Yisrael's travelling. They would strengthen themselves in Torah, traversing its length and breadth.

Torah provides a person with more power than tefillah does. Our Sages state (*Avot* 1:2), "The world depends on three things – on Torah study, on *avodah* (prayer), and on kind deeds." Torah is first and foremost, and only afterward is tefillah (*Ta'anit* 2a). Only by the power of Torah does one reach elevation in tefillah.

Hashem asked Moshe why he saw fit to cry out to Him. Hashem told him to speak to Bnei Yisrael, telling them to continue preparing to receive the Torah and become involved in its mitzvot, for this how they merited leaving Egypt. They were stable in their mitzvah observance, without adding or subtracting from it, as the pasuk adjures us (*Devarim* 4:2), "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it."

Hashem saw fit to destroy the Egyptians specifically at the *Yam Suf* and not inside their homes. It was at the *Yam Suf* that Bnei Yisrael

reached an elevated level of *emunah*. In the merit of Torah and tefillah, they overpowered the *kelippah* of Egypt. Therefore, Egypt's downfall took place when the waters came crashing down upon them, for it was there that Bnei Yisrael's faith brought them salvation.

Seudat Emunah on Shevi'i Shel Pesach

Many devoted Jews would prepare a festive meal after Shevi'i shel Pesach, which is called *Seudat Mashiach*. The Sephardim in Morocco and the eastern countries have the custom to prepare a *Mimouna* meal after the holiday. The word *mimouna* is derived from *emunah*. My father, zy" a, used to say that Pesach is the festival of *emunah*. We believe that Hashem will send the *geulah*. And although we have not been redeemed at the beginning of this Chodesh Nisan, meriting the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, and offering the *korban* Pesach, we continue believing that the *geulah* will arrive.

The basis for these festive meals is *emunah* in Hashem and the redemption, when the world will receive its complete *tikkun*, and Hashem's Name will be recognized. This custom was established immediately after Pesach, to teach us that Shevi'i shel Pesach is the day upon which Hashem is coronated upon the entire world, just as our ancestors crowned Him as their King in Mitzrayim and at *Kriyat Yam Suf*.

Shevi'i shel Pesach is an auspicious time to resolve to become sanctified and closer to Hashem, like a servant before his master, and like a slave before his king, the King of the world.

If we are not redeemed on this day of Hashem's coronation, it is our fault, for our devotion is not yet complete. Therefore, immediately after the festival, we take pleasure with our King and continue serving Him, believing that the redemption is near.

We begin this connection with Hashem at the beginning of the festival, and maintain it throughout. We also begin counting the Omer

up to the day of *Matan Torah*, the day upon which were given the Ten Commandments, which rectify and connect all worlds, alluded to in the ten *sefirot* (*Zohar* III, 69a; *Sefer Yetzirah* 14). We resolve to continue strengthening our connection to Hashem after the festival.

Moreover, the ten *sefirot* are hinted at in the words שביעי של פסח. The word פסח is numerically equivalent to קמח (flour). Chazal state (*Avot* 3:21), “If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour.” In this manner, we continue raising our level of *emunah* even after the holiday.

After Shevi’i shel Pesach, we continue upholding our connection with Hashem. It is a bond which will never be broken. With perfect faith, we await the Mashiach to make his appearance, speedily in our days. This will bring about the rectification of the entire world, and all will believe in the Kingship of Hashem.

————— In Summary —————

- Shevi’i shel Pesach is the most significant day of the entire holiday of Pesach. On the first day of Pesach, Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, but their *tikkun* was not complete. But on the seventh day of Pesach, Hashem became King upon the entire world. Only when we are steadfast in our Avodat Hashem can Hashem rule over the world. If the nations do not accept His rulership, we are to blame. The *gematria* of the two letters 'ש' of פסח של שביעי equals six hundred, the same as the *gematria* of the word קשר (bond). This is the bond we enjoy with Hashem, in the face of the שקר (falsehood) of the Egyptians, represented by the six hundred choice chariots at the sea. This also alludes to Torah, given after forty days, and also the ten *sefirot*.
- Hashem instructed Moshe not to increase his tefillot. Only with the power of Torah and *emunah* could they defeat the Egyptians. This is the secret behind the *Seudat Mashiach* and *Mimouna* festivities after the festival. These express our *emunah* in Hashem and in the future redemption, when the entire world will recognize the Kingship of Hashem and come to its final *tikkun*.

THE LASTING INFLUENCE OF PESACH

“This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you”

(*Vayikra 9:6*)

Chazal ask (*Torat Kohanim*, *ibid.*), “What is it that they were commanded to do? It is to remove the *Yetzer Hara* from their hearts, and be of one heart and mind to do the will of Hashem.”

Chametz alludes to the *Yetzer Hara*. It is “the yeast in the dough,” preventing a person from serving his Creator. When we eliminate chametz from our possession for seven days, it hints to combating the *Yetzer Hara*. We then have the ability, after the holiday, to continue with the *kedushah* gained on it, to defeat the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the entire year.

The Shabbat following Pesach, which is often parashat *Shemini*, has the power to affect the person throughout the rest of the year, giving him strength to vanquish his *Yetzer Hara*. The *Beit Yisrael* of Gur writes the following on this subject (*Shemini* 5712, first essay). His words are as follows.

It is incumbent upon a person to strengthen himself on the first Shabbat, as this will empower him during the rest of the year to nullify the *Yetzer Hara* after the spiritual salvation of Pesach. The Gemara states that from the sixth hour of Erev Pesach onward chametz may not be in a person’s domain (*Pesachim* 6b). The *Chidushei HaRim*, *zt”l*, expounds on this: Whatever is not under a person’s control, will be under the control of his *Yetzer Hara*. Pesach is a time that is propitious for claiming control over all areas of one’s being.

Much effort and exertion is necessary in the days of Pesach, in order to conquer the *Yetzer Hara*, and annul this force for the entire year. The day after Pesach, the eighth day of the Omer, indicates a level above nature. This day is auspicious for drawing *kedushah* upon oneself. One should exert himself on the Shabbat following Pesach, yearning for the days of Pesach that have just passed. This awakening from below will arouse a spiritual awakening from Above (*Zohar I*, 88b), influencing the entire year.

Our task on the Shabbat following Pesach is to bring oneself back to the spiritual level that he enjoyed during the seven days of the festival. During these days, he refrained from chametz, the quintessential reference to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Berachot 17a*).

On Pesach, every person can take an example from the thin matzah and learn to be humble. This requires working on one's *middot*. Hand-made *shemurah* matzot allude to the physical work of nullifying the chametz.

The difference in the *gematria* of the word *חמץ* (chametz) and the word *מצה* (matzah) is three. This hints to the three chief traits which take a person out of this world. They are: jealousy, lust, and honor (*Avot 4:21*). These negative characteristics spoil a person. Our main mission on Pesach is to eradicate these traits from ourselves.

One who refrains from eating chametz on Pesach is able to rectify his character traits and transform himself from the state of chametz to the state of matzah. In this merit, he conquers his *Yetzer Hara*, who wishes to destroy him. The greater the person, the greater is his *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah 52a*). This is our assignment during the seven days of Pesach. One who serves Hashem properly nullifies his *Yetzer Hara* and is as if born anew, as the Arizal states.

The Power of Elevation After Pesach

On Pesach, a person transforms himself from chametz to matzah, nullifying all negative traits in preparation for the eighth day. How is it possible, after Pesach, to revert back to chametz, an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*? Chametz is corrupt, representing the negative character traits between man and his fellow man. Even Yom Kippur cannot atone for these types of sins, until a person mollifies his friend (*Yoma* 85b). How can he return to his former evil qualities?

After a person has corrected himself on Pesach and elevated himself from the level of chametz to that of matzah, even nullifying the *Yetzer Hara* of jealousy, lust, and honor, he is considered to be on the level of Pesach. The letters of the word פֶּסַח spell פה סח (a speaking mouth). This alludes to the expression סח לפי תומו (speaking in all innocence), meaning that he walks with perfect innocence before Hashem.

This person reaches such a high level that even if these negative traits confront him after Pesach, he has the wherewithal to distance himself from them. This is in line with Hashem's command to man (*Bereishit* 2:17) "Do not eat from it." If during Pesach a person keeps his distance from chametz, representing negative character traits, and nullifies his *Yetzer Hara*, then after Pesach, he will surely be able to stay away from bad character traits, and they will not influence him in the least.

Not only that, but it was worthwhile creating the entire world for this person. The Gemara states (*Sanhedrin* 37a) that a person should say, "The world was created for me." The entire Creation was just in order to give us mitzvot (*Berachot* 6b). The word *Bereishit* is explained as: "For Bnei Yisrael, who are called 'The first of His crop'" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1; *Rashi*, *ibid.*).

On the one hand, a person may feel that he is unworthy of having the entire world created for him. This can cause him to feel humble

and negate his own desires. On the other hand, he is enjoined to think that the entire world was created in his honor. But one must be careful not to allow this attitude to cause him to feel arrogant.

One should view the entire world as his possession, deposited with him to safeguard. If he damages anything, he in essence damages himself. This being the case, how can he aggrandize himself over others, or be jealous of them? That would be like showing off to himself or envying himself.

When one takes this message to heart, he eradicates these negative character traits, maintaining the level of matzah throughout the year.

Here it is appropriate to quote the holy words of the Admor MiKlauzenberg, zt”l:

“We find people who undertake to engage in Torah study and do the will of the Creator. They begin their resolution with great enthusiasm but, in the end, are unsuccessful. This is astounding. Chazal state (*Shabbat* 104a; *Yoma* 38b), ‘He who comes to be purified, is assisted from *Shamayim*.’ Why do they meet with defeat?

“This concept is also applicable concerning Torah (*Sanhedrin* 26b). Why do we find that the doors are sometimes closed to those who wish to learn?

“Upon contemplation, we find that those who desire to study, or do Hashem’s will, say, ‘I will study,’ ‘I will do teshuvah,’ etc. He leaves Hashem out of the equation. What is a person, after all, and what is his life worth? He will be returned to a place of dust, worms, and bugs (*Avot* 3:1). One who truly desires to learn Torah, or do teshuvah, should not rely on his own merit, but should include himself among Klal Yisrael. He should implore Hashem for mercy, for only as part of the congregation can he hope to achieve.

“For this reason, we say, ‘Return **us** to Your Torah, and bring **us** close to Your service,’ not, ‘Return **me**... bring **me** close.’ Alone, a

person is worthless. He can succeed only when he is part of the group.”

We find many examples of the use of the word “I” in reference to Hashem. For example, “I am Hashem your G-d,” “I am Hashem Who took you from the land of Egypt,” “I am Hashem Who sanctifies you,” “I and not an angel, I and not a Seraph.”

Only in reference to Hashem is it fitting to use the word “I.” Only He is deserving of pride. “Hashem has reigned. He has donned grandeur” (*Tehillim* 93:1). Hashem cannot exist in this world together with the arrogant (*Sotah* 5a; *Arachin* 16b). An arrogant person can never ascend spiritually, or come close to Hashem.

How delicate is the balance a person must maintain between the firm faith that the entire world was created for him (“for me the world was created”) and, on the other hand, “What am I and who am I? Nothing but mere flesh and blood.” How fine is the line he must walk between these two mindsets.

When a person contemplates this, he will eradicate the *Yetzer Hara* from his heart and resolve to serve Hashem with perfect fear. Shevi'i shel Pesach is most propitious for this, as he has already eliminated all vestiges of chametz from his heart by then.

Hillel Hazakein teaches (*Avot* 1:14), “If I am not for myself, who am I?” Every person must exert himself to become the perfect “I” for whom the entire world was created.

This then, is a person’s mission in this world. On the one hand, he should feel as though the entire world was created in his honor, on the other hand, he should feel humbled to the extent of “Who am I and what am I?” This will prevent him from having feelings of pride. The pasuk in Mishlei states (16:5), “Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem.” A person is nothing at all, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit*

3:19), “For you are dust and to dust shall you return.” This approach will help a person humble himself before others.

The Essence of Renewal – Unity and Self-Nullification

In order to forge a bond of closeness with Hashem, one must be at one with his fellow Jews.

This is illustrated by Aharon. When he came to offer a sacrifice in the Mishkan on the eighth day of its inauguration, he waited for a fire to descend, but none did. He then told Moshe, “Maybe it is because I sinned with the Golden Calf” (*Tanchuma*, end of *Tetzaveh*). It is astounding that Aharon Hakohen, who was anointed High Priest, the chosen one of Hashem, should think this way about himself.

Aharon was on an exalted spiritual level. Although he was the holy one of Hashem, the tzaddik upon whom the entire world rested and in whose merit the Jewish people were protected by the Clouds of Glory (*Ta’anit* 9a), he nullified himself, and stated that maybe the fire did not come because of his part in the sin of the Golden Calf. He acted *l’shem Shamayim* concerning the Calf, stating, (*Shemot* 32:5), “A festival for **Hashem** tomorrow,” “For Hashem and not for the Calf” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10:3). Still, he assumed responsibility for the lack of Hashem’s Presence, when the fire did not descend, and would not cast aspersion upon Bnei Yisrael.

Moreover the pasuk states (*Vayikra* 9:23), “And they went out and they blessed the people.” What was this blessing of Moshe and Aharon? “May it be Hashem’s will that the *Shechinah* rest on the work of your hands and may His grace be upon us” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 417; *Rashi; Targum Yonatan*.) Through his actions, he brought down the *Shechinah* to rest upon them, and he blessed them that the *Shechinah* be present in their deeds.

Aharon was self-effacing and considered himself the same as any other member of Klal Yisrael. For that reason, he blessed them that in

their merit the *Shechinah* would rest on the Mishkan. This is alluded to in the “eighth” day, for the number eight denotes a level above nature, a level reached through humility and submission.

Let us return to our original pasuk: “This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you” (*Vayikra* 9:6). When a person removes all personal motivations and humbles himself perfectly before others, then Hashem appears before Bnei Yisrael.

This was Aharon’s mission. He added levels of greatness to his Avodat Hashem and made boundaries around Hashem’s mitzvot (*Avot* 1:1). The early Chassidim, who were involved in self-flagellation, acted similarly (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 2:2). They distanced themselves even from what was permitted to them, attaining perfect humility and subservience to Hashem. Only in this manner is the *Yetzer Hara* uprooted from man’s heart, allowing him to attain true *yirat Shamayim*.

In Summary

- The Shabbat after Pesach has the special quality of empowering and revitalizing one’s Avodat Hashem for the entire year. This is because everyone has nullified the chametz, an allusion to the *Yetzer Hara*, and drawn close to Hashem. We are able to attain these levels when we are unified. If a person learns Torah, but does not manage to inject vitality into his life, it is because he has not uprooted the *Yetzer Hara* and does not live in unity with his fellow Jews.
- The removal of chametz allows us to eradicate the negative traits of jealousy, lust, and honor. Afterwards, *kedushah* descends upon a person, and will affect him throughout the year. Even though he reverts back to eating chametz after Pesach, these bad character traits have no influence upon him any longer, for he has become sanctified with an elevated level of holiness. He is likened to one for whom the entire world was created, and he himself must safeguard Hashem’s creatures, himself included.

- Most setbacks in Torah and teshuvah are due to arrogance, when a person is concerned only with his own self. Hashem is the only One deserving of pride, and only He can use the term “I.” Therefore, each person must behave with humility, yet also believe that the world was created for him. Striking the perfect balance between these two mindsets will help one attain humility and enable him to eradicate the *Yetzer Hara* and come close to Hashem.

SEFIRAT HAOMER



PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH

“You are to count from the morrow of the rest day, from the day you brought the Omer-offering”

(*Vayikra 23:15*)

Before performing the mitzvah of counting the Omer, we make the following blessing: “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding the counting of the Omer.” We count for forty-nine days, until the long-awaited day of *Kabbalat HaTorah*, the festival of Shavuot.

We also have another counting. This is the weekly count toward Shabbat. Each day, at the end of Shacharit, preceding the *Shir shel Yom* we state, “This is the first day until Shabbat...” But this counting is done without a *berachah*. Our Sages state that this act is in fulfillment of the command to remember Shabbat every day of the week. Similarly, when a woman counts the seven clean days of her purification process, she does not precede it with a blessing. Why, then, are we required to make a blessing before we count the Omer, every single day?

Sefirat Haomer is a focal part of the preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. Without proper preparation, which includes character improvement, Torah study loses some of its value. One who is full of

negative traits cannot acquire Torah or attain *yirat Shamayim*. Since the preparation process is an integral part of accepting the Torah, and the days of Sefirat Haomer are designated for this preparation, the *kedushah* of these days is immeasurable. Reciting a *berachah* before counting these days demonstrates our recognition of their special significance.

Moreover, we do not suffice with one blessing for all of the Sefirah days. Rather, every day, we recite the blessing anew. Each day of Sefirah is a separate unit. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter wrote that the forty-nine days of Sefirah are parallel to the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah (*Avot* 6:6). Every day, a person should confront another negative trait of his and vanquish it. In its stead, he should establish a positive character trait. When he finally reaches the forty-eighth day, he will have reached perfection. The forty-ninth day should serve for a general review of all of his acquisitions. Each day of Sefirah contains its own individual, spiritual service. Each day is unique and opportune for mending a specific *middah*.

Kabbalistically, each day of Sefirah alludes to a different aspect of the ten *sefirot*, making it specific and different from all the other days. Every day has tremendous power. Proper preparation is required in order to receive the Torah.

For this reason, if a person forgot to count the Sefirah one evening, he is forbidden from counting with a *berachah* anymore. He must continue counting the Sefirah, but without the prior blessing. This is because each of these days contains indescribable value to help man rectify his *neshamah*. Forgetting to count the Sefirah of one of these exalted days indicates that he does not recognize their significance. Had he truly appreciated them, he would undoubtedly not have forgotten to count. This is why Chazal penalized him from continuing his count with a *berachah*.

Reading the Haggadah at the Seder is also a form of preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, teaching us lessons in proper living. We begin by saying, “*Ha lachma anya di achalu avahatana* – This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate.” The Haggadah begins in Aramaic, a language foreign to us. This contains a message for us. We should observe the Torah and mitzvot even if we do not fully understand their implications. A mitzvah may be as clear as Aramaic to us, but we are enjoined to fulfill it nonetheless. The most basic principle of Torah is that we accept all of it with love. And even if we do not understand the subtleties therein, we agree to observe all of its mitzvot unquestioningly.

As the story of the Haggadah unfolds, we read, “In the beginning, our fathers were idol worshippers, and now Hashem has brought us close to His service.” Why do we mention our forefathers, who originally served idols; isn’t this something to hide rather than announce?

Here, too, lies a lesson for all time. We inherited from our forefathers the trait of loyalty. Just as our forefathers devoted themselves wholly to serve idolatry, unwilling to part with it, so too, are we enjoined to be attached to Torah and mitzvot. After Hashem brought us close to His service, we cleave to the Torah with all our might, never wanting to part from it.

As we recite the passage “This is what stood by our fathers and us,” we have the custom to hold a cup of wine in our right hand and lift it. The matzot are covered at this time. Wine symbolizes freedom. Therefore we drink it while reclining, in the manner of kings. On the other hand, the matzah is called “the bread of affliction,” for it represents our slavery in Egypt. We cover the matzot when lifting the wine, so that it should not decrease from our feelings of freedom.

I think these acts also contain a message for us. The wine and the matzot actually teach us the same lesson. We drink the wine to feel a sense of liberation from the *Yetzer Hara*, free from the snare of his

traps. And we eat the matzah to signify our bondage to Hashem, serving Him with all our hearts, like a loyal servant who attends to his master wholeheartedly.

Unfortunately, there are those who confuse these two forms of servitude. They feel free of the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, yet are indentured servants to their *Yetzer Hara*. This is the exact opposite of what is expected of us. One should shake himself free of the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara* and completely devote himself to bear the burden of Torah and mitzvot. One who succeeds in walking this path is considered the truly liberated man, for “the truly free man is the one who is involved in Torah.”

The Torah demands us to transmit these lofty concepts to our children, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 13:8), “And you shall tell your son on that day, saying.” One of the main purposes of this night is to instill pure faith and love of Hashem in our children, which will stimulate them to fulfill His mitzvot enthusiastically. There is no doubt that one who attempts to educate his sons in the way of Torah, exciting them with faith in the Creator, will certainly also himself draw spiritual inspiration and love of Hashem. He brought merit to his sons, but he first and foremost brought merit to himself, his most important “child.”

When the son asks the four questions, his father is obligated in his reply to expound on the miracles that Hashem wrought during *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. His response, called a תשובה, alludes to the concept of teshuvah. With his response, the father attempts to transmit a sense of affection for mitzvot to his son, which will then purify his *neshamah*. As the father conveys these warm words, he too, is influenced by them to improve his deeds and do teshuvah.

The most fitting way to prepare for *Kabbalat HaTorah* is by beginning on Pesach. One should examine his actions and consider where improvement is necessary. He should ensure that his children, too, aspire to reach greater heights in Torah and mitzvot. This will bring

both father and sons to the festival of Shavuot, deserving and worthy of the long-awaited moment, the time of *Kabbalat HaTorah*.

Our *Chachamim* established a second day of the festival for those who reside outside of Eretz Yisrael. This is called *Yom Tov Sheini shel Galuyot*. Our Sages state (*Ketubot* 110b) that whoever lives in *chutz la'aretz* is like one who lives without Hashem. But I think that one who tries to celebrate Pesach with love and awe, and preserves the sanctity of the festival even on the second day, is protected from the *tumah* of *chutz la'aretz*. Eternal love of Hashem will rest in his heart, through fulfilling His Torah and mitzvot appropriately.

The main feature of Pesach was the slaughtering of the sheep, the Egyptian deity, refraining from any form of serving *avodah zarah*. Hashem commanded Moshe (*Shemot* 12:21), “Draw forth and buy for yourselves one of the flock.” Chazal explain (*Mechilta*) that Bnei Yisrael were to withdraw their hands from *avodah zarah*. The fact that those in *chutz la'aretz* celebrate an extra day of the festival, conducting another Pesach Seder, increasing their narration of the Exodus and Hashem’s miracles, implies that they observe His command to the fullest degree. They slaughter all forms of present-day *avodah zarah* and display limitless love for Hashem, connected to Torah and mitzvot by unbreakable bonds.

I heard that when a certain Admor decided to emigrate to Eretz Hakodesh, he seemed saddened by the prospect of leaving *chutz la'aretz*. When asked about this, he replied, “Ascending to Eretz Yisrael is the right thing to do, for the Land is inestimably greater than any other.” But he realized he would be lacking a significant amount of holidays that are celebrated only in the lands of the *galut*. He added, “On every festival, I merited an added day of *kedushah* and connection with the *Shechinah*, but in Eretz Yisrael, there is only one day for the festival. I will be missing the second day.”

What a level of *ahavat Hashem*! Such a Jew certainly cannot be considered an idol worshipper! Chazal surely were not referring to this type of person, who loves Hashem with all his heart and clings to His mitzvot.

May it be Hashem's will that all our deeds and the deeds of our children be for His sake, to bring us to love and fear Him all the days of our lives, Amen.

————— In Summary —————

- Why do we make a *berachah* before counting the Omer? We do not make a *berachah* when counting the days toward Shabbat. Likewise, a *niddah* does not make a *berachah* before counting her clean days.
- The days of Sefirat Haomer possess tremendous *kedushah* since we prepare ourselves for *Kabbalat HaTorah* on them. Reciting a *berachah* before counting the days demonstrates our recognition of their special significance.
- We make a separate *berachah* for each day, since each day is a separate unit. The forty-nine days of Sefirah parallel the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah; the last day is used to review all of his acquisitions during this time. Moreover, each day of Sefirah alludes to a different aspect of the ten *sefirot*, which we rectify during this time. Thus, if one forgets to count, he is prohibited from making the *berachah* for the remaining days, since he obviously did not fully appreciate the significance of each day.
- The Haggadah also prepares us for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. At the Seder, we drink wine as a symbol of freedom. This is freedom from the *Yetzer Hara*. The matzah signifies our bondage to Hashem. The truly free man is one who is involved in Torah.
- The Torah demands us to transmit these lofty concepts to our children, as the *pasuk* states (*Shemot* 13:8), “And you shall tell your son on that day, saying.” When one inspires his children through the telling of the Exodus, and instills *emunah* in their hearts, he too becomes inspired.

- One who lives in *chutz la'aretz* is said to be without a G-d. However, one who tries to celebrate Pesach with love and awe, and preserves the sanctity of the festival even on the second day, is protected from the *tumah* of *chutz la'aretz*. Those who slaughter all forms of present-day *avodah zarah* and display limitless love for Hashem are connected to Torah and mitzvot by unbreakable bonds.

LAG BA'OMER



THE GIFT OF RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI

*“You ascended on high, you have taken captives,
you took gifts of man”*

(Tehillim 68:19)

The Arizal explains that when Moshe Rabbeinu was in *Shamayim*, after receiving gifts from the angels, he also took “a captive.” He took the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. This is alluded to in the word שבי (captive), as it is the acronym of his name: שמעון בר יוחאי.

What is so exclusive about the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that Moshe Rabbeinu felt compelled to extract it from on High as a captive? Why couldn't it come into this world like every other person's *neshamah*?

The *Tikkunei Zohar* (27:98a) states that the *neshamot* of tzaddikim were created before the Creation of the world. But there are select *neshamot*, which, due to their tremendous *kedushah*, are captured by the *kelippah* as soon as their human form is conceived. Much time elapses before the power of *kedushah* can rescue them and bring them to rectification and the place where they belong.

Moshe Rabbeinu feared that due to its great *kedushah*, the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would be captured by the *kelippah* as soon

as it entered this world. For that reason, he did not wait, but took it with him when he ascended to *Shamayim*. He safeguarded it from all misfortune, so that it would not fall into the clutches of the *kelippah* upon entering this world in a human body.

With this deed, Moshe Rabbeinu accomplished a one-time act, which would never again take place in this world. He brought a *neshamah* into the world, and taught it all the secrets of the Torah. In this manner, he guarded it all the days of his life. Only after his death, did he return it to its Heavenly abode and continue to protect it from on High.

For this reason, it was specifically Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who revealed deep, hidden secrets of the Torah. He was the first one to ever disclose these secrets (*Zohar* I, 963; 179b). This was because he had learnt Torah from the mouth of Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Because Rabbi Shimon's *neshamah* was captured by Moshe, whenever Hashem spoke with Moshe and revealed Torah secrets to him, Rabbi Shimon was also privy to them. He heard them from Hashem Himself, just as Moshe did. Therefore, he merited revealing secrets and deep mysteries. These were the very secrets which he had heard from Hashem throughout the forty years that he was under the authority of Moshe.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's level of *kedushah* was phenomenal. The Midrash states (*Bereishit Rabbah* 35:2; *Midrash Tanchuma* 36:8; *Zohar* III, 15a) that a rainbow never appeared in his day. (A rainbow is a sign that the generation deserves destruction, if not for Hashem's vow never to bring another flood.) All of the angels humbled themselves before him (*Zohar* Part I, 24a). Even Hashem Himself came to listen to his words of Torah, deriving great satisfaction and becoming praised thereby (*ibid.* 3:296b).

The ultimate redemption will arrive in the merit of the study of the *Zohar* (*Zohar, Bamidbar* 124b). Only with the advent of Mashiach's

times, will there be a revelation of the Torah's secrets, as recorded by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

Let us further explain the words "You took gifts of man" (*Tehillim* 68:19). These gifts are the tzaddikim, specifically the *neshamah* of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes. Moshe Rabbeinu extracted this *neshamah* from on High, receiving it as a gift. This is alluded to in the words of the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 15a), "סתם מתניתין רבי מאיר" – When there is no name mentioned in the Mishnah, the statement is attributed to Rabbi Meir." The word מתניתין (Mishnah) is similar to מתנה (gift).

If we carry this thought one step further, we can conclude that the *neshamot* of all those in the category of מתניתין, those who learn the Mishnah, i.e., all Torah students, were extracted by Moshe, and taught Torah by him.

According to this, we can understand Chazal's statement (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1) that Moshe Rabbeinu was aware of everything that future Torah scholars would expound. Since he removed them from their Heavenly abode in order to teach them Torah, he heard their Torah novellae as they offered them to him.

Although the *neshamot* of all tzaddikim were given to Moshe Rabbeinu as a gift with the Torah, Moshe had to take the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai into captivity. Rashbi was the secret of all Creation, and for him the world was created (see *Zohar* Part I, 22a), as it says in the hymn sung on Lag ba'Omer: "Let us make man was said about you." There was a great danger in allowing him to be born into this world, like a regular human, as stated above. Therefore, he required special attention.

"You took gifts of man" can also refer to the Shabbat and Torah, for they are the secret gifts which Hashem has bestowed upon us (*Shabbat* 10b, 88b; *Beitzah* 16a; *Zevachim* 116a). Moshe Rabbeinu took these gifts, as well, together with the "man." This means that he combined

Torah and Shabbat with those who would uphold them. This was in order to teach them the word of Hashem.

Shlomo Hamelech teaches (*Mishlei* 4:2), “לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורת אל” – תעזובו – For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” The word לקח (teaching) can also mean “taking.” This pasuk can be understood to say that the “taking” that Moshe Rabbeinu took as a gift, i.e., the *neshamot* of the tzaddikim, was in merit of the Torah which “I gave you.” The *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, though, was taken in a different manner. It was captured and hidden away, in order to protect the generation in the future.

We are taught that “one who hates gifts will live” (*Mishlei* 15:27). How can we understand that Moshe Rabbeinu accepted gifts when he was in *Shamayim*?

The gifts he received were none other than these lofty *neshamot* of the future tzaddikim, together with Shabbat and Torah. This is in accordance with Chazal’s statement (*Zohar* III, 73), “Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Torah, and Yisrael are one.” This is because Moshe Rabbeinu received Bnei Yisrael together with the Torah. For that reason, whenever a Jew is engaged in Torah study, he merits a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu becoming attached to him.

For this reason, Moshe is called the leader of all Bnei Yisrael (*Rambam, Hilchot Akum* 1:1; *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh, Devarim* 27:1), even those who were not in his generation. He received the entire nation as a gift, especially the tzaddikim who are involved in Torah study.

Torah and Shabbat need people to observe them. Without a nation, there is no one to engage in Torah study or keep Shabbat. Likewise, there is no one to testify that Hashem created the world and rested on the seventh day (*Shemot* 20:11).

Only through desisting from labor on the seventh day, and involving oneself in Torah study, does a person bear witness before the whole

world that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Creator (*Rabbeinu Bachya, Shemot 31:16*, in the name of the Midrash).

The wording of the phrase “You took gifts of man” is perplexing. Why are the words, “of man” used instead of “for man”? The word באדם (of man) is spelled with a ך, which has the *gematria* of two. The word “gifts” is written in the plural form, hinting at both Shabbat and Torah. The letter ך also alludes to the two sections of the Torah, the Written Law and the Oral Law.

Only by means of the Written Torah combined with the Oral Torah can a person fulfill mitzvot perfectly. This is especially true concerning the mitzvah of Shabbat, which is impossible to observe according to halachah without the aid of the Oral Law.

After Moshe Rabbeinu bested the angels in the argument for the Torah, he was entitled to take one item as a gift. He chose the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The angels were wary of allowing the Oral Torah to be given over to humans, for when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would be born, all of the secrets of the Torah would be revealed. Therefore, when Moshe triumphed, he immediately captured the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and only afterward, did he take the gifts for the rest of Klal Yisrael.

May it be Hashem’s will that in the merit of studying the Torah taught to us by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Mashiach will come speedily. The Zohar states that the *geulah* will arrive in the merit of the study of Zohar, and then Hashem will be One in the world, Amen.

— In Summary —

- The Arizal states that when Moshe Rabbeinu was in *Shamayim*, he captured the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai since he feared for its future. Rabbi Shimon’s *neshamah* received permission to reveal secrets of the Torah. Moshe feared that due to its great *kedushah*, it would fall into the clutches of

the *kelippah*. Therefore, he extracted it and took it with him into this world. Indeed, when it was with Moshe Rabbeinu, it merited learning many Torah secrets from him, and even from Hashem Himself, when He revealed them to Moshe.

- Moshe Rabbeinu also extracted the *neshamah* of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, as well as the *neshamot* of all tzaddikim who would delve in Torah, both in the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This is alluded to by the word **בְּאִדָּם** (You took gifts of man). The letter 'ב' refers to the two sections of the Torah: the Written Law and the Oral Law. All mitzvot must be upheld, specifically the mitzvah of Shabbat, for it testifies to the Creation of the world. Although Moshe received all these priceless gifts, he took the *neshamah* of Rashbi into captivity, in order to protect the Torah's secrets.

RABBI SHIMON AND RABBI YEHOSHUA BEN LEVI

The Gemara (*Ketubot 77b*) recounts that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi requested to see his portion in Gan Eden before his death. Then Eliyahu Hanavi proclaimed, “Make way for the son of Levi! Make way for the son of Levi!”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi entered and came upon Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was sitting upon thirteen golden thrones. Rabbi Shimon asked him, “Are you the son of Levi?”

To which Rabbi Yehoshua answered “Yes.”

He continued, “Was a rainbow sighted in your day?”

He answered, “Yes.”

“If so,” stated Rabbi Shimon, “You are not bar Levi, and you do not deserve to hear the declaration that I hear. The rainbow is nothing but a display of the vow that Hashem will never destroy His world. A

perfect tzaddik has no need for this display, and therefore no rainbow is sighted in his lifetime” (*Rashi*, *ibid.*).

The Gemara concludes by stating that in actuality, never was a rainbow seen during the life of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. The reason he stated that there had been a sighting of a rainbow was due to his exceeding humility in not considering himself a tzaddik.

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 35:2) has a slightly different version of this account:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Eliyahu Hanavi found a difficulty with a Torah teaching of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. They decided to ask him to explain his intention. Eliyahu Hanavi entered Rabbi Shimon’s cave. Whereupon, Rabbi Shimon asked, “Who is with you?”

To which Eliyahu responded, “The Torah giant of the generation, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.”

Then, Rabbi Shimon asked, “Was a rainbow seen in his day?”

To which Eliyahu replied, “Yes.” Rabbi Shimon stated, “If so, he is not worthy to come before me.”

Could it be that due to his humility, Rabbi Yehoshua would say a blatant untruth and state that a rainbow had been sighted in his day, when, in truth, it had not? Additionally, everyone in that generation could attest to the fact that there had not been a rainbow in Rabbi Yehoshua’s day. How could he say otherwise, when anyone could deny it? (*Bechorot* 36a; *Rosh Hashanah* 22b).

Also, why did Rabbi Yehoshua see fit to humble himself in this way, and why did Rabbi Shimon categorically reject him from his presence?

During the time of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a rainbow never appeared in the sky (*Bereishit Rabbah* *ibid.*; *Midrash Shochar Tov Tehillim* 36:8; *Zohar* III,15a). The merit of Rabbi Shimon protected his

generation. He stated that he had the ability to save the entire world from the strict hand of justice, from the days of Avraham Avinu, until the days of Mashiach.

During the days of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, a rainbow did appear, but his influence to protect the generation was so great that the people would immediately do teshuvah upon their sins, and the rainbow would disappear. Thus, it was as if no rainbow had appeared.

Rabbi Yehoshua assumed that this had also taken place with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. He figured that a rainbow had appeared, but immediately disappeared as the generation did teshuvah. This can be likened to a person who goes out on a rainy day, armed with an umbrella. The rain comes down, but the umbrella protects him. This does not mean that it is not raining. Similarly, there may have appeared a rainbow in Rabbi Shimon's day, but his *zechut* caused it to vanish. Due to his tremendous humility, Rabbi Yehoshua did not want to say that it was his merit that protected his generation.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, had a different policy. He maintained that simply stating that a rainbow appeared in the sky implies that the generation is not worthy, and this arouses prosecution against Am Yisrael. For this reason, he refused to see Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, for he deemed him a prosecutor of our people.

Therefore, Rabbi Shimon told him he was unworthy (according to Rashi), for he prosecuted against the generation. On the other hand, a tzaddik who protects his generation, defending them from all accusation, and influencing them to do teshuvah, avoids the necessity of a rainbow.

According to this explanation, Rabbi Shimon held that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi should not have acted with excessive humility. Stating that a rainbow was sighted brings accusations against our nation. Now we can understand the words of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

————— In Summary —————

- Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi whether or not a rainbow had been sighted in his time. When he answered in the affirmative, Rabbi Shimon declared that he was not eligible for the title “Bar Levi.” According to the Midrash, Rabbi Shimon refused to speak to him at all for this reason. This was in spite of the fact that, according to the Gemara, a rainbow had not actually been seen in Rabbi Yehoshua’s day. He stated that there had been one merely out of humility. He did not want to take the credit for protecting the entire generation, as did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Why, then, was Rabbi Shimon so strict with him?
- It seems that in the generation of Rabbi Yehoshua, according to the Midrash, there had indeed been a rainbow, but it immediately vanished since the people repented due to his influence. This is the reason he stated that there had been a rainbow in his time. Out of true humility, he refused to say that he had protected the generation, influencing them to do teshuvah, which removed the rainbow. Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, was of the opinion that if a rainbow had appeared in the sky, but immediately vanished due to the influence of the tzaddik of the generation that protected the people, it is considered as if there was no rainbow. In that case, stating that a rainbow did appear would arouse prosecution against the nation. Misplaced humility can cause untold damage. This is why he refused to see Rabbi Yehoshua.

THE VIRTUE OF SUBJECTING ONESELF TO THE TZADDIK

Lag ba’Omer is the day of the *hilula* of the holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Zohar III, 127b, 296b; *Birkei Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* 493:4), who is buried in Meron. Only a few days earlier, on the 14th of Iyar, is Pesach Sheini, the day of the *hilula* of the *Tanna*, Rabbi Meir Ba’al Hanes. [It is not certain that this is the actual date of his passing, but it has become accepted to celebrate it then.] This is quite perplexing.

Why specifically during the days before *Matan Torah*, do we celebrate the *hilulot* of these two Torah giants?

In the days of Sefirah, we prepare ourselves for *Matan Torah*. Torah includes both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. We try to make ourselves deserving of them, so that we can truly accept them on Shavuot. Both sections of the Torah are interconnected. One who denies one part of the Torah is considered denying all of it, and is equal to an idol worshipper (*Kiddushin* 40a; *Sifri, Shelach* 15:22).

It is critical that one attaches himself to both the Written and the Oral Torah, as opposed to those who believe in the Written Law alone. One must ensure that he prepares to accept the Torah in the most perfect way.

One of the ways to do this is by cleaving to a tzaddik. The tzaddik's influence is so far-reaching that it has the ability to bring a person to perfection. He is thus able to accept the Torah with all his heart and soul, free from negative thoughts and full of joy.

This is why every person is obligated to connect with the tzaddik of his generation, who is considered a living Sefer Torah, holy and constantly connected to Hashem. The influence of the tzaddik, and the Torah wisdom that he gives over, move a person to confess his sins as his heart breaks within him in teshuvah. He will then purify himself from the influences of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Moshe told the nation (*Vayikra* 9:6), "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do." On the eighth day of the inauguration, the day of the consecration of the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael wanted Hashem to rest His *Shechinah* upon them. They wished to come close to Him. Moshe Rabbeinu explained to them that the way to do this is by clinging to the tzaddik with utmost submission, for "a heart broken and humbled, O G-d, You will not despise" (*Tehillim* 51:19).

He was telling the people that they must annul their *Yetzer Hara* completely, fully repenting the sin of the Golden Calf, as the pasuk

(ibid. 15) states, “Sinners will return to You.” Then the *Shechinah* would literally rest within them. Since Moshe and Aharon were the tzaddikim of the generation, the ones who prayed that the *Shechinah* would rest upon the nation, they were the ones who linked the nation with Hashem.

Regrettably, today we lack the Beit Hamikdash and the *korbanot*, as well as the service of the Kohanim. However, Hashem, in His kindness, has sent us great tzaddikim who are able to influence us. Connecting to them is a wonderful means of preparing for *Kabbalat HaTorah*.

A person must connect to both sections of the Torah, the Written Law as well as the Oral Law. This is why precisely before *Matan Torah* we celebrate two *hilulot*, similar to weddings, of the great *Tanna'im*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes.

Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes represents the Written Torah, as we are taught (*Sanhedrin* 86a) that when the name of the Sage is not mentioned in the Mishnah, it is attributed to Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai represents the Oral Torah, as he revealed many secrets and hints in the hidden parts of the Torah. By means of connecting with both of these tzaddikim, one is capable of receiving both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, coming ever closer to Hashem.

The Arizal finds a hint to this in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 68:19) “You ascended on High, you have taken captives, you took gifts of man.” The word *שמעון* (*captives*) is the acronym of Rabbi Shimon’s name: *שמעון בר יוחאי* (Shimon bar Yochai). We might add that the words *דא מאיר* (this is Meir) can be derived from the words *מתנות באדם* (gifts of man). The word *מתנות* is similar to *מתניתין* (Mishnah), as previously mentioned, referring to Rabbi Meir and the Written Torah that he represented. Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes was called by this name, for he was saved by means of a miracle. He was not influenced by the negative character traits of his mentor, Elisha ben Avuyah, who had defected from the ways of the Torah. This is because Rabbi Meir filtered the Torah he

gleaned from his teacher. He ate the fruit and discarded the shell (*Avodah Zarah* 18a). Moshe Rabbeinu rescued him from on High, when he ascended to receive the Torah.

Moshe Rabbeinu was able to extract these tzaddikim, who studied the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. He was able to protect them and preserve them. Their source was the *neshamah* of Adam Harishon, as is hinted by the words “you took gifts of **man** (מתנות באדם).”

In our day and age, when difficulties abound and each generation has more troubles than the previous one (*Pesikta Rabbah* 15:15), we have forgotten much Torah, and it is hard to prepare properly for the festival of *Matan Torah*.

But Hashem has done a wonderful act of *chessed* with us. By connecting to these two Torah giants, who represent the two different sections of the Torah, we are suffused with tremendous joy. This joy has the power to eradicate the *kelippah*. Through these tzaddikim, we bond with Hashem and are able to prepare ourselves in the requisite manner for *Matan Torah*.

After the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the darkness of defilement has descended upon the world. But these *Tanna'im* are capable of lighting up our lives, helping us to prepare for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, and bringing the *Shechinah* into our midst. This will surely prevent the Torah from being forgotten and help us merit the final redemption.

The negative influences of the society in which we live affect us tremendously. If not for the merit of these two days of *hilula*, we would never be able to properly receive the Torah and escape the tentacles of the *Yetzer Hara*. How fortunate are we to have this opportunity to connect with these two tzaddikim, through whom we can prepare ourselves well for connection with Hashem and His Torah on Shavuot.

Rashi writes, in the name of Chazal (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19:17) that at *Matan Torah* Hashem greeted Yisrael like a *chatan* greets his *kallah*. If

we wish to reach the level of *chatan* and *kallah*, we need prior preparation. Then Hashem will come toward us.

Based on this, we can understand Chazal's words (*Bava Metzia* 85b): "How great are the deeds of Chiya. He would trap deer and slaughter them. From their skins, he would prepare parchment. He would write out the Torah on the parchment and teach it to Jewish children."

What was so great about his deeds? Furthermore, why did he need to slaughter the deer? He could have simply sold them and purchased prepared parchment, or, better yet, complete Torah scrolls? Also, what is meant by the expression "the deeds of Chiya?"

Rabbi Chiya wished to impart a lesson to all future Torah teachers. In order to teach children properly, ensuring that the Torah would enter their minds, much *mesirut nefesh* is required. It is not enough to trap an animal and buy parchment with the earnings. One must slaughter his *Yetzer Hara*. Then he will be free of all flaws and capable of transmitting Torah to the next generation.

This is what is meant by "Chiya's deeds." More than what he taught, it was the deeds that he did as preparation for teaching children that are worthy of mention. A teacher must both prepare himself and the student with great self-sacrifice in order to be able to take the requisite lessons from the Torah.

————— In Summary —————

- One must submit himself to the tzaddikim of the generation, for the tzaddik influences the people positively in order to accept the Torah. This was Moshe's message to Bnei Yisrael when he told them, "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do." Doing a great act of preparation beforehand will properly prepare one for *Matan Torah*. This is the reason that we observe the two days of *hilula* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness during the Sefirah period. They represent, respectively, the

Oral Torah and the Written Torah. They enable us to eradicate the *Yetzer Hara* from our hearts.

- By preparing ourselves in this way, we are able to receive the Torah once again. This is similar to a wedding in which Hashem comes toward our nation like the *chatan* who greets his *kallah*. The “greatness of the deeds of Rabbi Chiya” was that he himself prepared each step on the path to Torah study, with perfect intentions. He made sure to slaughter the deer correctly and write the Torah scrolls himself. Only by means of properly preparing oneself to receive the Torah, increasing unity and submitting oneself to the tzaddik, can one overcome his *Yetzer Hara*.

SHAVUOT



PREPARATIONS FOR KABBALAT HATORAH

The days of Sefirah are days of preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. Without preparation, it is not possible to reach one's goal – receiving the Torah. Only one who exerts himself and puts effort into arriving at a specific objective achieves it.

Imagine a person who wants to arrive at a certain place. He will never get there if he has not made appropriate preparations for the trip. He must purchase a ticket, etc. Likewise, without proper preparation, a person will never attain any level in his service of Hashem.

The main element of preparation is exertion. For this reason, when Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, Amalek attacked them. Although they were in the midst of preparations for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, counting the days of Sefirah, they did not apply themselves sufficiently in learning Torah. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:1), “ויחנו ברפידים – They encamped in Refidim.” Chazal say (*Bechorot* 5b; *Sanhedrin* 106a) that the word רפידים has the same root as the word רפו (they weakened). This indicates that Bnei Yisrael became weak in their Torah study. This sin drew Amalek to attack them, for when one is not diligent in his learning, the Satan, also known as the *Yetzer Hara*, or Amalek, steps in (*Zohar* Part II, 42a; Part III, 281b).

This thought is based on a quote of Rabbi Shimon in Avot (3:7), “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.”

Although a person interrupts his study in order to praise Hashem for His beautiful handiwork, as Tehillim (104:24) states, “How abundant are Your works, Hashem,” he held accountable. Why is this so?

Because he has been trapped by the *Yetzer Hara*. When he finds a person exerting himself in Torah study, he cannot cause him to sin. Therefore, he arrives in a cunning manner, telling him, “Look at this beautiful tree! Give praise to the Creator of the world for it.” This is how he causes a person to slacken in his toil in Torah.

A person must not allow himself to be persuaded. For if he gives in just a little bit, the *Yetzer Hara* will continue to seek ways to draw him, slowly but surely, away from his learning.

Chazal explain that the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3), “If you will follow My decrees” means that you should toil in Torah. Only by exerting oneself in Torah learning is one able to observe the mitzvot. And then all other suffering will be resolved.

This is the reason why we read parashat *Bechukotai* before Shavuot. Our life source is the Torah. Only through exertion in Torah can our problems be settled. This is as the Torah promises (ibid. 26:6), “A sword will not cross your land.”

There is a famous story of a simple Bedouin who lived in a tent all his life. He would draw his water from the well. He once had occasion to visit the city. There he observed a man turn the knob of a faucet and, lo and behold, a shower of water rained out! He became extremely excited and asked to buy the faucet at any cost. He intended to bring it back with him, so that he could have water available whenever he

desired, without going to the trouble of drawing it from the well. The man told him, “Do you believe that the faucet produces water? Not at all! When the faucet is connected to a pipeline, and the pipe draws water from a source such as a river, then the faucet is effective in allowing the water to stream out. But without a water source, the faucet is worthless.”

Likewise, in order to receive the Torah on Shavuot, we must exert ourselves in learning Torah. Then, we may merit the abundance that rains down from Heaven on the festival of the Giving of the Torah. Conversely, one who distances himself from Torah, the source of living waters, is compared to a faucet that is not connected to a water source.

Based on this, we can understand the words of Yehudah ben Teima (*Avot* 5:23), “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 words are puzzling. A person is a disciplined being, with intellect and understanding. One strives to possess good *middot* and be soft-spoken. Why is he told to change his character, in order to make himself like an animal?

This teaches that even the simplest, quietest person needs to exert himself in order to reach these levels of “bold as a leopard,” etc., in order to serve Hashem. This is what is required from us in order to do the will of our Father in Heaven. Transforming one’s nature demands much exertion. This is especially true because the *Yetzer Hara* strives to prevent him from reaching his goal.

From all this, we learn that the main component of our preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah* is enormous effort. This must be done in the days of Sefirah. For then, one transforms himself from old to new, from being under the influence of *tumah* to that of *kedushah*. And just as a *niddah* is scrupulous in all the details of halachah in order to become purified,

so must a person be punctilious in all his actions, ensuring that they are in accordance with halachah.

One who makes appropriate preparations is forgiven for his sins. He becomes a new person on Shavuot. The word שבועות (Shavuot) is similar to the word תשובה (repentance). He transforms himself by the power of repentance.

The Rambam rules (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2) that a *ba'al teshuvah* is forgiven for all his sins, specifically for the sin of *bitul* Torah. Chazal are very stringent concerning the sin of wasting time from Torah study, as they state (*Ta'anit* 5b), "There are three types [of people] over whom Hashem bemoans every day. One is the person who could have engaged in Torah study, but did not."

The Gemara states (*Shabbat* 32b) that a person who wastes time from Torah study will bury his children. It says (*ibid.* 33a) that sword and looting, disease and drought, and eating but not feeling sated are all punishments for *bitul* Torah. The rains cease because of it (*Ta'anit* 7b). Why does *bitul* Torah warrant such severe repercussions?

The word שבועות is related to the word שבועה (a promise). When Hashem descended in order to give us the Torah, our entire nation cried out "We will do and we will obey" (*Shemot* 24:7). All of humanity was included in this promise. The gentiles were obligated to keep the seven Noachide laws at this time (*Yevamot* 48b) and not prevent Bnei Yisrael from keeping mitzvot. How great is their sin if they prevent us from doing mitzvot! Hashem will punish them for this. Likewise, this injunction applies to each and every Jew, even if he sleeps the entire day of Shavuot.

This can be compared to a person who enters a perfume-filled room. Upon his exit, some of the fragrance lingers on him, even if he did not do anything while in the room, and he did not intend to become perfumed by the scent. Likewise, *kedushah* descends to the world on

Shavuot. Everyone is affected by this *kedushah* and by the promise we made at *Matan Torah*.

For this reason, Chazal enjoin us (*Berachot* 5a), “If a person sees that suffering has come upon him, he should examine his actions, as the pasuk states (*Eichah* 3:40), ‘Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.’ If he searched, but did not discover anything, he should ascribe his suffering to *bitul* Torah. This is as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 94:12), ‘Praiseworthy is the man whom G-d disciplines, and whom You teach from Your Torah.’” When a person does not expend effort and exertion in Torah study, suffering comes upon him.

The Torah was given in the desert, an abandoned place, to teach that whoever wants to, may take it (*Pesikta Zuta, Terumah* 25:16). We might add that just as one must provide for himself before setting out into the desert, so too, must one make appropriate preparation before embarking on the journey through Torah. Exertion in learning is one of the forms of preparation for Torah.

The *Anshei Kneset Hagedolah* established the reading of parashat *Bamidbar* before Shavuot, saying, “Count and halt. Read parashat *Bamidbar*, which records the numbers of Bnei Yisrael (*Bamidbar* 1), and then halt, and celebrate the *chag* of Shavuot, the holiday of culmination (*atzeret*).”

In order to know the amount of something, it must be counted. In order to properly count Bnei Yisrael, they must exert themselves in Torah study. In that manner, they will merit *Kabbalat HaTorah*, ascending to higher levels in Torah knowledge. This idea also explains the connection between parashat *Bechukotai* and parashat *Bamidbar*.

This may be the reason why Rabbi Akiva’s disciples died between Pesach and Shavuot (*Yevamot* 62b). They did not invest enough efforts into being unified. The Gemara (*ibid.*) states that they did not respect each other properly. It takes much effort for people to attain the level of being “as one man with one heart” (*Mechilta; Rashi Shemot* 19:20).

By way of *remez*, we might say that the *gematria* of the word גיעה (exertion) is equal to that of פה אחד (one mouth, i.e., united) and to the *gematria* of the phrase חגו חגיכם (celebrate your festival). Only through expending the effort to be united can unity reign among the nation. Only then can Shavuot be celebrated.

— In Summary —

- In the days of Sefirat Haomer, one must exert himself in preparation for Shavuot – *Kabbalat HaTorah*. For only if a person makes appropriate preparations will he feel the blessing of *kedushah* which comes down to the world on this holiday. When Bnei Yisrael prepared for *Matan Torah*, they did not exert themselves appropriately, and that is the reason why Amalek was allowed to attack them and cause them to sin.
- For this reason, Rabbi Shimon states that one who walks on the road while reviewing a Torah lesson but interrupts his review to marvel at Hashem’s wonders, bears guilt for his soul. This is because he has ceased exerting himself in his learning. This is liable to cause him to stop learning altogether. Chazal explain the pasuk, “If you go in My statutes,” to mean, “You should toil in Torah.” Only by applying oneself to learning Torah is it possible to keep mitzvot and be redeemed from suffering. In order to exert oneself in Torah, he must change his character. If he is bashful and quiet, he must work on the trait of boldness in regard to Torah study. This is the meaning of “be bold as a leopard.”
- When one has made fitting preparations for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, his sins are erased, just like those of a *ba’al teshuvah*. Specifically the sin of *bitul Torah*, whose punishment is severe. This is due to the vow that the entire Creation swore when the Torah was given. The word שבועות (Shavuot) has the same root as the word שבועה (a promise), and is also related to תשובה (repentance). For this reason, parashat *Bamidbar* is read before Shavuot. For just as one does not enter the desert without having prepared provisions, so too, one is commanded to begin his journey in Torah, which was given in the desert, only after having properly prepared himself beforehand.

THE EARTH FEARED AND SUBSIDED

“From heaven You made judgment heard; the earth feared and subsided”

(Tehillim 76:9)

Chazal teach (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9) that when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wished to give His commandments to Bnei Yisrael, the entire Creation was silent. The birds did not chirp, babies did not cry, and the animals did not call out.

Why was it necessary to have utter silence at *Matan Torah*? Couldn't Hashem just as well have given His Torah while the world continued in its natural order?

Moreover, if complete stillness was mandatory, why do we find that there was tremendous noise at *Matan Torah*, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:19), “The sound of the shofar grew continually much stronger; Moshe would speak and G-d would respond...”? Also, we read (*ibid.* vs. 16), “On the third day... there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful...” On the one hand, total silence was necessary. Yet, at the same time, the Torah was given amidst roaring thunder.

Hashem wanted to impress upon Am Yisrael the magnitude of the responsibility resting on their shoulders. If they would not accept the Torah, or, alternatively, slacken in their Avodat Hashem, the entire world would be in danger of returning to nothingness.

Silence signifies the *Yetzer Hara*, whose job it is to silence a person in his service of Hashem. He endeavors to confuse man in his task in this world. He accomplishes this by bringing daily suffering and

problems upon a person. In this manner, he tries to quiet man's service of Hashem, if even only for a brief period of time.

Then, when a person remains without Torah study, only under the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* (*Sukkah* 52b), who has cooled him off in his Avodat Hashem, the world is in great danger of collapsing. For the entire Creation is only upheld in the merit of Torah, as Yirmeyahu Hanavi says (33:25), "If not for My covenant [being studied] day and night, I would not have instituted the laws of the Heavens and the earth."

The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 1:31), "ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי" – And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." Chazal ask (*Avodah Zarah* 3a; *Shabbat* 88a), "What is the reason for the extra letter 'ה' in the word הששי (the sixth)? It signifies a specific "sixth day." This is the sixth of Sivan, the day of *Matan Torah*. Hashem made a condition with the Creation and stated, "If Yisrael accept the Torah, you will endure. But if not, I will return you to nothingness."

For that reason, Hashem silenced the entire world for a few moments, indicating the tremendous damage which would result from the silencing of the voice of Torah. He also wanted the nations of the world to observe this.

He hinted to them, as well, that the main purpose of accepting the Torah is to accept it in one's heart. That is where the *Yetzer Hara* resides (*Berachot* 61a). He lies in ambush in man's heart, trying to bring about his downfall. The Gemara states (*Sukkah* 52b), "A man's inclination overcomes him daily, desiring his death." This is based on the pasuk (*Tehillim* 37:32), "The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him."

It is known that the heart holds man's secrets, for the heart is hidden from outsiders. The Gemara states (*Pesachim* 54b) that a man has no idea as to what is going on in his friend's heart. In the heart, complete silence reigns.

Therefore, silence reigned at *Matan Torah*. Man's main goal in life is to perfect his *middot* and combat the *Yetzer Hara*, the paradigm silent killer, who always steals into his heart. The pasuk describes this as (*Melachim I*, 19:11-12), "Hashem is not in the earthquake... [but in] a thin, still sound."

We can explain that the shofar sounds at *Matan Torah* allude to the hardships that beset a person. The *Yetzer Hara* takes advantage of man's suffering and uses it to test him, by shaking his *emunah* in the Creator, to see if he will "cool off" his level of Avodat Hashem.

The solution to this is found in the Torah. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:19), "The sound of the shofar grew continually much stronger; Moshe would speak and G-d would respond to him with a voice." Although there is much suffering, referred to as the "sound of the shofar," a person must realize that this is all part of the order of things. What is incumbent upon him is "Moshe would speak." Meaning, he must continue his Avodat Hashem. He must accept the Torah upon himself, not allowing the world to fall into danger, *chas v'shalom*.

Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 5a) that if a person experiences suffering and examines his deeds but finds no fault in them, he should ascribe his suffering to *bitul* Torah. This will bring an end to his troubles. And if not, he should know that his hardships are afflictions of love, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 3:12), "Hashem admonishes the one He loves." *Bitul* Torah is the main area of combat with the *Yetzer Hara*. Our mission is to vanquish him.

The *gematria* of the words ארץ יראה ושקטה (the earth feared, and subsided) is the same as that of כי אתה נושא בעול כבד (for you bear a heavy burden). The juxtaposition of both noise and silence at the time of *Matan Torah* points to the tremendous responsibility placed on our shoulders, as mentioned before. If Bnei Yisrael accept this responsibility, they will merit length of days, and the world will endure.

In Summary

- We find a paradox at *Matan Torah*. On the one hand, there was utter silence, yet, at the same time, the Torah was given amidst tremendous noise. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 88a) questions this, based on the words, “The earth feared and subsided.” If it feared, why did it subside? And if it subsided, why did it fear? Silence hints to the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries with all his might to silence man in his mitzvah observance. In this manner, Hashem wanted to convey to Bnei Yisrael the great responsibility resting on their shoulders if they would slacken in their Torah study. Torah study upholds the world.
- Man’s main job in this world is to work on his *middot* and fight the *Yetzer Hara*. This is the most important aspect of *Kabbalat HaTorah*. Externally, a person might look fine, but if he has allowed iniquity to enter his innermost being, quite the opposite is true. He can be likened to a fruit, which seems attractive on the outside, but is rotten at the core. The noise at *Matan Torah* hints to the suffering that man endures, which tests him to see if he will weaken in his Avodat Hashem. One must overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, accepting Torah upon himself in spite of all the noise, which are the personal hardships he endures.

THE SECRETS OF TORAH

Chazal state (*Shabbat* 88a; *Shemot Rabbah* 29:9) that at *Matan Torah*, the entire Creation was still. Why was this so?

Let us try to understand a very deep concept regarding *Kabbalat HaTorah*. The basis of Torah is Kabbalah, the mystical aspect of the Torah. Secrets are revealed only to those who are responsible and can keep them. It is forbidden to reveal a secret to one who cannot keep it. Only those distant from the pleasures of this world can be relied upon to maintain a secret. When Hashem revealed the secrets of the Torah, the entire Creation was silent.

One reason why one may not charge money for teaching Torah is that once he has been paid, he is enslaved to the pleasures of this world, and is therefore forbidden from learning the secrets of the Torah. This is hinted to by the fact that the *gematria* of the word חנם (free of charge) is the same, adding one for the word itself, as זה הוא הסוד (this is the secret).

One must express his gratitude to Hashem Yitbarach for revealing to him the secrets of Torah. The word קבלה (Kabbalah) has the same root as the word לקבל (to receive). Bnei Yisrael merited receiving the secrets of Torah, and this was considered to their credit. Moreover, the word קבלה has the same *gematria*, adding one for the word itself, as the word לקח (teaching). Shlomo Hamelech teaches (*Mishlei* 4:2), “כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם – For I have given you a good teaching.” This “good teaching” is the secrets of Torah. Hashem did us a great service by delivering to us the secrets of Torah together with the revealed Torah. It would have been sufficient for us to have received only the Written Torah. But we would not have attained perfection in that case.

This can be compared to a person who gives a showcase to his friend. It is full of beautiful golden vessels. But he neglects to give his friend the key. The secrets of the Torah are the keys to understanding the Torah. We must not be ingrates and ignore the wonderful gift which Hashem has bestowed upon us by revealing to us the secrets of the Torah. We must demonstrate responsibility and still our desire for earthly pleasures, even going to the extent of refusing payment for toil in Torah.

Why, indeed, did Hashem feel the need to reveal secrets of the Torah to His nation? Even without this, they believed in Hashem, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 14:31), “They believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.”

Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael exclaimed “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” (ibid. 24:7). This was before they even knew what would be demanded of them. For

this, they were called an impulsive people, who speak before they hear (*Shabbat* 88a). They certainly were not aware of the Torah's secrets at that point. Why, therefore, did Hashem reveal His secrets to them?

It seems that they were coerced into accepting the secrets of the Torah, as Chazal state (*Shabbat* 88a; *Avodah Zarah* 2b; *Zohar* 125a) that Hashem held Har Sinai over them like a barrel, and said, "If you accept the Torah, fine. But if not, here will be your graves." This was in spite of their elevated level of *emunah*.

Where there are external forces at play, which disturb a person and influence him negatively, silence is necessary. Secrecy and quiet are required to still the tumult of earthly pleasures. One must protect himself from outside influences, like a fortified wall which cannot be breached.

Therefore, despite their great *emunah*, Bnei Yisrael accepted the revealed and the concealed aspects of Torah. They preserved the secret parts, to protect them in times of turmoil, when the outside influences would seem unbearable.

Regarding *Matan Torah*, the pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:16; 18-19), "On the third day... All of Har Sinai was smoking... its smoke ascended like the smoke of the furnace... The sound of the shofar grew continually much stronger." Chazal expound upon this (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 286), "At the time of *Matan Torah*, the land trembled." There was great noise at the Giving of the Torah (*Shoftim* 5:4). Conversely, we find that the entire universe was silent, as mentioned above.

These Midrashim complement each other. At first, there was great noise. But Hashem did not want this noise to continue. Bnei Yisrael were liable to become habituated to the noise, i.e., the outside influences, which can cause much damage. Therefore, when Hashem said the Ten Commandments, the entire world was silenced.

From here we see that the force of habit can be detrimental. It is easy to become accustomed to sin. There is an incident related about a

rabbi in London who once passed by a store with a mezuzah on its doorpost, which was open on Shabbat. He was in shock, and began protesting vociferously. After passing by this establishment for many weeks, the element of shock wore off, until he did not even stop upon passing it... He and others simply became accustomed to seeing the store open on Shabbat, and they were not concerned by it, *rachmana litzlan*.

Habit allows a person to repeat a sin until he does not even think that there is anything wrong with it. But one may not allow himself to fall into the rut of bad habits. He must overcome negative tendencies, specifically with the power of Torah. Torah protects and shields (*Sotah* 21a), and the sound of Torah nullifies external noises and negative influences.

The Zohar states (*Acharei Mot* 73a) that the Torah, Hashem, and Yisrael are one. If the Torah contains secrets, so too, do Am Yisrael. Each Jew contains the Name of Hashem within him. Every Jew is called by the name יהודה (Yehudah), which is a compilation of the Name of Hashem יה-ו-ה-י and ך' (for the four letters of the Name). The word יהודי (Jew) has the same *gematria katan* as the Name of Hashem יה-ו-ה-י.

Hashem is shrouded in secrecy, and we will never fathom His ways. He sees, but is not seen. He has no body; no beginning or end (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah* 1:7). He can be recognized only through His Torah. Likewise, every Jew is a mystery. Only through Torah can he navigate his way in the world. This is a fundamental principle in life.

People challenge: “How do the *talmidei chachamim* help to uphold the world with their Torah study? They aspire only to advance their own knowledge. Why, then, should we feel obligated to support them?” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 28:2).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, zt”l, has a ready response. If people would be aware of just how many harsh decrees a *talmid chacham* nullifies by

the power of his Torah, for Torah protects and shields (*Sotah* 21a; *Kiddushin* 82a), they would lavish the *talmid chacham* with all their wealth and try to emulate him.

In Summary

- The Torah's secrets were revealed when silence reigned in the universe, even though at first there was great noise. This was in order that Bnei Yisrael would learn that they must be quiet, i.e., desist from earthly pleasures. In this manner, their *emunah*, too, would remain intact.
- *Matan Torah* teaches us to avoid falling into the rut of habit and overcome our natural tendencies with the power of Torah. The sound of Torah nullifies external noise, the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*, and protects and shields.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOUNTAIN

At *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael “stood at the bottom of the mountain” (*Shemot* 19:17). Chazal explain (*Rashi*, *ibid*; *Shabbat* 88a) that Hashem placed the mountain above Bnei Yisrael like a barrel, and told them, “If you accept the Torah, fine. But if not, here will be your graves.”

This is quite puzzling. Why did Hashem find it necessary to force Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah? Bnei Yisrael had already agreed to accept the Torah, by stating (*Shemot* 24:7) “We will do and we will obey!” Additionally, why did He frighten them specifically by placing the mountain over their heads; couldn't He have chosen some other way to force them into acceptance?

Even were we to say that originally they had not accepted the Torah whole-heartedly, still, what is the value of forced acceptance? Where was their free choice?

When Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, the *Yetzer Hara* had no power over them (*Shir Hashirim* 1:15). They had prepared themselves,

sanctifying themselves from the impurity of Mitzrayim, for the past forty-nine days. It was not necessary for Hashem to place the mountain above their heads in order for them to agree to receive the Torah. They were not under the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* in any way.

So, why did Hashem hold the mountain over them? The *Yetzer Hara* is compared to a mountain (*Sukkah* 52a; *Zohar* I, 99b). Therefore, Hashem uprooted it when the time came to give the Torah. He was thus demonstrating that although the *Yetzer Hara*, called a mountain, was not disturbing them at the time, they must maintain their level of involvement in Torah at all times. Otherwise, the *Yetzer Hara* will regain his strength and prove to be a difficult adversary.

Our greatest tool in combating the *Yetzer Hara* is Torah. Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 30b) that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Bnei Yisrael, “My son, I created the *Yetzer Hara*, and I created Torah as its antidote. If you are engrossed in Torah, you will not be delivered into his hands, as the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 4:7), ‘If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven.’ But, if you do not immerse yourselves in Torah, you will be delivered into his hands. This is what is meant by the continuation of the pasuk: ‘Sin rests at the door.’”

Hashem held the mountain over their heads to hint to Bnei Yisrael that if they did not arm themselves with Torah, here would be their graves, for the *Yetzer Hara*, compared to a mountain, would once again attack them and cause their spiritual deaths. Without Torah, they would find no refuge. They would be like reshaim, who are called dead even in their lifetimes (*Berachot* 18b; *Bereishit Rabbah* 39a). They would extract their sustenance from their graves, the physical garb of the *kelippah*. The *Yetzer Hara* is all-encompassing, allowing no escape for those caught in his grip.

Although Bnei Yisrael proclaimed “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” (We will do and we will obey), they could never have fathomed the awesome level of evilness that the *Yetzer Hara* embodies and just how dangerous he

really is, had Hashem not made such a display of raising the mountain above their heads. By doing so, Hashem also indicated that He had completely uprooted the *Yetzer Hara* from them, enabling them to begin a new page in their lives.

When Bnei Yisrael cried out (*Shemot* 19:20) “Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do,” it was before *Matan Torah*, when the *Yetzer Hara* still resided inside them. However, Hashem wanted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from claiming that this statement was said under duress, through the coercion of the *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, He had them repeat it after *Matan Torah*. Now, after they were free of all evil, they could reach the active level of performing good deeds (*Tehillim* 34:15).

We might add that the language used here “כפה עליהם הר כגיגית – He held the mountain above them like a barrel” can refer to a *כיפה*, which is a dome or a canopy. After Hashem explained to them that the mountain is symbolic of the *Yetzer Hara*, which had been removed from their hearts, He used it as a *chuppah*, under which to sanctify Bnei Yisrael with the Torah.

He thereby hinted to them that the *Yetzer Hara* must be subdued into submission. About the *Yetzer Hara* it is stated (*Bereishit* 6:5), “Every product of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always.” The *Yetzer Hara* should be transformed into an asset, to help man serve Hashem properly. Rather than man fear him, he should fear man. We find this to be the case with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (*Ketubot* 77b), who ruled over the Angel of Death.

All the Neshamot of Bnei Yisrael Were at Har Sinai

Chazal explain (*Shabbat* 146a) that all of the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael, even those not yet born, were present at Har Sinai. This is indicated in the pasuk (*Devarim* 29:14), “With whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our G-d, and with whoever is not here with us today.”

They all encamped around the mountain, and they all proclaimed, “We will do and we will obey!” They promised to uphold the Torah (*Shavuot* 39a). Both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given at Sinai (*ibid.*)

There were two *Tanna'im*, who, in spite of their great and holy stature, were essentially different in their methods of Torah study.

One was Rabbi Meir. The Gemara relates about him (*Sanhedrin* 86a), “When a Mishnah is not accredited to a specific individual, it was stated by Rabbi Meir.” He enlightened the world with his Torah learning (see the Mishnah, halachah, etc.) His name alludes to this, for *Meir* means that he “brought light” to the Sages in the realms of halachah.

The second was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. He became famous as the one who enlightened the world by revealing hidden secrets of the Torah.

Each one had phenomenal knowledge of Torah. Yet each pursued a different path in explaining the Torah, for there are “seventy faces” to Torah (*Otiot d’Rabbi Akiva*). The Torah was preserved in their merit. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said (*Shabbat* 138b) that we have a guarantee of this, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 31:21), “It shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring.”

These two Torah giants were at Har Sinai, as well. They, too, accepted the Torah from Moshe Rabbeinu, who received it directly from Hashem. Therefore, the Torah states (*Shemot* 19:2), “ויחן שם ישראל – Yisrael encamped there.” The word שם (there) is an acronym for שמעון (Shimon) and מאיר (Meir).

We might add that the phrase “opposite the mountain” teaches us an important lesson. The role of Chava, the first wife, is described in the Torah with similar words (*Bereishit* 2:18): “I will make him a helper

opposite him.” The Gemara expounds (*Yevamot* 63a), “If he merits, she will be a helper; if he does not merit, she will be opposite him.”

The similarity between these two phrases hints to the similarity of their meaning. If a person merits, i.e., immerses himself in Torah study, withstanding all temptations of the *Yetzer Hara*, his Torah learning will provide him with the stamina to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. But if he does not apply himself to his studies, this mountain of a *Yetzer Hara* will be “opposite him,” accusing him at every opportunity. Furthermore, the words כנגד ההר (opposite the mountain) have the same *gematria* as the words בהם נהגה יומם ולילה (we will delve in them day and night).

In Summary

- At *Matan Torah*, Hashem placed the mountain above the heads of Bnei Yisrael. Although the *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to a mountain, had been uprooted from their hearts at the time, He wished to inform them of his existence. If they would become lax in their Torah observance, he would immediately pounce upon them. Once under the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*, there is no hope for escape. And even though they exclaimed, “We will do and we will obey,” they could not fathom the great danger posed by the *Yetzer Hara*.
- The word כפה (placed above) is related to the word כיפה (dome, canopy), hinting to a chuppah. In this manner, Hashem sanctified us to Him. He also hinted that we must subordinate our *Yetzer Hara*, until he obeys our orders, and then he can be used as a vehicle for *kedushah*.
- The words ויהן שם (they camped there) hint to the great *Tanna'im*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and Rabbi Meir. Each of them played a pivotal role in preserving Torah for all generations. The word שם is proof that they, too, stood at Har Sinai, for it is an acronym of their names, שמעון ומאיר.
- The words “opposite the mountain” allude to the following: If a person merits, i.e., learns Torah and stands up to his *Yetzer Hara*, he will have the wherewithal to combat and vanquish it forever.

THE SOUNDS AT HAR SINAI

“The entire people saw the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain” (*Shemot* 20:15). The shofar’s blast at Har Sinai resounds in our hearts throughout the generations.

The Torah continues, explaining that the purpose of the awesome sound of the shofar was (ibid. vs. 17) “so that awe of Him shall be upon your faces.” What would be the benefit of that fear, if it would be felt only in that generation? Certainly, this sound is heard even nowadays. Chazal relate in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (*Avot* 6:2), “Every single day, a Heavenly Voice emanates from Har Chorev, proclaiming and saying, ‘Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah.’”

This sound heard at Har Sinai resounds even in the hearts of the reshaim. Every single Jewish *neshamah*, without exception, was at Har Sinai, as it says (*Devarim* 29:14), “Whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our G-d, and with whoever is not here with us today.” All were present at Har Sinai, those who had already been created, as well as those who had not.

The tzaddikim know how to utilize the *kedushah* inherent in this sound, which emanates from their hearts. When they are involved in Torah, it helps them to produce Torah novellae. It provides them with the genuine pleasure of Torah study. Every tzaddik has a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu within him (*Zohar* III, 216b), and is able to reach great heights in Torah by means of this voice resounding in his heart.

Conversely, the reshaim exploit this power for evil, thereby strengthening the *kelippah*.

For that reason, it is crucial to distance oneself from negative influences, as our Sages instruct us (*Avot* 1:7). Words of heresy give the *kelippah* a foothold and bring untold suffering upon a person.

Furthermore, the *kelippah* gains power over the words of *kedushah* which the tzaddikim utter. Scorning the words of a tzaddik is like scorning the words of Hashem, *chas v'shalom*, for He stands at the side of the tzaddik. This is attested to in the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:19), “Moshe would speak and G-d would respond to him with a voice.”

This is why we visit tzaddikim and ask for their *berachot* and advice. Their words have tremendous power. A tzaddik decrees, and Hashem fulfills, as Iyov (*22:28*) states, “You would utter a decree and it would be done.” Hashem’s voice speaks from their throats.

The Gemara relates (*Sanhedrin* 98a) that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked Mashiach when he would be arrive. Mashiach replied, “Today.” After the day passed with no sign of him, Rabbi Yehoshua complained to Eliyahu Hanavi that Mashiach had not spoken the truth. Eliyahu told him that Mashiach was referring to the pasuk (*Tehillim* 95:7), “Even *today*, if we but heed His call!” We must obey the Torah leaders, for the *Shechinah* speaks from their mouths, just as it did at Har Sinai.

The statement (*Eiruvin* 13b; *Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:4) “These and those are the words of the living G-d” refers to the various interpretations of Torah, each scholar explaining it as his *neshamah* received it at Har Sinai.

One has the ability to break the *Yetzer Hara* by means of the great strength that he received at Har Sinai. David Hamelech describes this strength (*Tehillim* 29:4-9): “The voice of Hashem [comes] in power! The voice of Hashem [comes] in majesty! The voice of Hashem breaks the cedars... the voice of Hashem cleaves with shafts of fire. The voice of Hashem convulses the wilderness.”

The wilderness mentioned here refers to the following. It alludes to the *kelippah*, who resides in the wilderness (*Zohar* II, 157a-b), fearful of

Hashem's voice. It also refers to a person who makes himself humble like the wilderness (*Midrash Aggadah, Chukat* 21:19) and is involved in Torah, which was given in the wilderness. The wilderness is an abandoned place, and therefore, whoever wishes, can come and take the Torah that was given there (*Pesikta Zuta, Terumah* 25:16). The *gematria* of the word מדבר (wilderness) is equal to that of דרך טובה (the correct path), for properly utilizing the opportunities presented by the wilderness is the right choice for man to make.

The voice Bnei Yisrael heard in the desert helped them attain *yirat Shamayim*. A man's mission in this world is to preserve that voice. If he feels his level of *yirat Shamayim* weakening, he must make an effort to restore it, before it dissipates completely. Exertion in Torah study and submission to the *talmidei chachamim*, through whose mouths the *Shechinah* speaks, is the way to preserve one's fear of Heaven.

This is the point of contention with the *Yetzer Hara*, who is bent on having a person forget this voice that he heard at *Matan Torah*. Thus, the Greeks endeavored to have us forget the Torah. We must maintain our *yirat Shamayim*, for "the beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem" (*Tehillim* 111:10).

Similarly, we find that the generation of Mordechai did not want to obey his instruction to refrain from partaking of Achashveirosh's feast (*Megillah* 12a). But, at the end, it states (*Esther* 9:27), "The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves, and their posterity." Ultimately, they accepted his rulings without question.

The Voice of Torah vs. the Yetzer Hara

We find many frightening accounts of the *Yetzer Hara's* attacks against man. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 32:25), "When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip." The Zohar (I, 171a) recounts in the name of Rabbi Shimon: "Come and see just how devious the *Yetzer Hara* was in his confrontation with Yaakov. He

knew the dictum (ibid. 27:22) ‘הקל קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו’ – The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.’ Therefore, he searched all over in order to find a way to silence Yaakov’s voice. He found him surrounded by strength. On his right, Yaakov had the *zechut* of Avraham, hinting at the *middah* of *chessed*, and on his left, was the *zechut* of Yitzchak, an allusion to the *middah* of *gevurah*. He took note of the *middah* of Torah, which Yaakov himself embodied. At that point, the *Yetzer Hara* became fearful and realized he could not overpower him.”

What did he do? He struck the socket of his hip. The hip refers to the supporters of Torah. He reasoned that if they would be weakened, Torah would have no future. Without the sound of Torah, Eisav would gain the “upper hand.”

When Yaakov perceived this, at the morning dawn, he grabbed hold of the Angel, and defeated him. The Angel blessed Yaakov, and admitted to the sale of the *berachot* (made previously with Eisav).

We see from here that the battlefront of the war with the *Yetzer Hara* is Torah study. This is the “voice of Yaakov.” The *Yetzer Hara* would like to see this voice (קול) become weak (קל).

The *Yetzer Hara*’s main attack is to thwart the sound of Torah studied at night. When a person is tired, the *Yetzer Hara* gains power. One should exert himself to overcome his fatigue and study Torah. *Yirmeyahu* (33:25) states, “If not for My covenant with the day and with the night, I would not have established the laws of the heavens and the earth.” This covenant refers to the Torah, and applies at night, as well as during the day.

One has the potential to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. He is supported on all sides (see above Zohar). But when the *Yetzer Hara* sees he is fighting a losing battle, he reinforces himself by causing him to feel tired. Weariness, as well as weakness due to daily troubles, causes a

person to neglect his Torah learning. One must take care to prevent this from happening. He must guard himself against the *Yetzer Hara* by never allowing the voice of Torah to cease.

It says about Shlomo Hamelech: “Behold the resting place of Shlomo, with sixty myriads of Israel’s mighty encircling it. All of them gripping the sword, skilled in battle, each with his sword ready at his side, lest he succumb in the fears of night” (*Shir Hashirim* 3:7-8).

Shlomo Hamelech (שלמה המלך) constantly studied Torah. In this way, he ensured that his resting place would be שלמה (complete). From here we learn that a person must spend all his time learning Torah, even at night. The “fears of night” are the legions of the forces of impurity and those who bring damage on the world (*Zohar* III, 21b). They awaken at night and seek ways and means of weakening Torah study.

The number sixty is equivalent to ten times six, the *gematria* of the letter ך. One must strengthen himself in his Torah study (the voice – קול – of Yaakov), ensuring that the letter ך is not missing from the word קול, rendering it קל (weak). Our Sages praise one who is engrossed in Torah study at nighttime. They say (*Chagigah* 12b), “Whoever is involved in Torah during the night is granted a thread of *chessed* by Hashem during the daytime.”

As long as one’s Torah study is of the caliber of “Moshe would speak and G-d would respond with a voice,” meaning, in the true spirit of Torah, it will aid him in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara*, who constantly waits in ambush, as it says (*ibid.* 16), “The sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered.” One can overcome the *Yetzer Hara*.

When the *Yetzer Hara* sees that he cannot gain control over the Torah teachers, he tries a different tactic. He weakens the Torah supporters, i.e., the Torah students, and in this way, the teachers lose their strength, for there is no king without a nation (*Kad Hakemach, Rosh Hashanah* 70:1).

When a Torah scholar notices that his disciples do not heed his words and are not making headway in their studies, he despairs, for he does not see the fruits of his labor. But both the teachers, as well as the disciples, must realize that this is all a direct continuation of Yaakov's battle with the Angel of Eisav, the embodiment of the *Yetzer Hara*. Yaakov was able to vanquish the *Yetzer Hara*, although the *Yetzer Hara* attacked him at night, when the *Sitra Achra* is in control. Likewise, we can overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, in the merit of our Avot.

The Gemara relates (*Eiruvin* 54b) that Rabbi Preida had a student who could not understand the lesson until it was explained to him four hundred times. One time, their learning was interrupted, for Rabbi Preida received a message that he was needed later on for a mitzvah. The pupil could not grasp the lesson taught that day.

When Rabbi Preida asked his charge why he had not understood the material after the usual four hundred times, the student responded, "From the time that my master was notified that he would need to later do a mitzvah, my attention was diverted. I was afraid that at any given moment you would leave to do it. Therefore, I could not concentrate on my learning."

Rabbi Preida instructed him to pay full attention to the lesson, and after repeating it another four hundred times, the student understood it.

A Heavenly Voice was heard, asking Rebbi Preida what he would prefer as a reward: to live for another four hundred years, or that both he and his entire generation would merit the World to Come. He chose the second reward. Hashem then told the angels to give him both rewards.

It seems that the purpose of drawing Rabbi Preida away from his student with the new mitzvah was a ruse of the *Yetzer Hara*, in order that Rabbi Preida would get angry at his student. Otherwise, how could

it be that after so many reviews the student still did not comprehend the lesson? The *Yetzer Hara* wished to instill despair into Rabbi Preida's heart, and in this way, the disciple would also lose heart, and both of them would cease their Torah study. Instead of the sound of Torah (קול), there would be a cessation or lessening of Torah (קל).

But Rabbi Preida fortified himself and repeated the Torah lesson another four hundred times, until the student grasped the material. He did not become angry at all, and thereby merited such incredible reward.

The Gemara states (*Chagigah* 9b), "One cannot compare a person who reviews his lesson 100 times, to one who reviews his lesson 101 times." The 101st time is when the *Yetzer Hara* tries his utmost to disturb a person. When one learns 101 times, it rectifies the damage done to the hip-socket of Yaakov (*Bereishit* 32:26). This is hinted to by the fact that the word כף (socket) has the *gematria* of 101, after adding one for the word itself.

Yaakov fought against the Angel of Eisav in order to strengthen his descendants when they would in the future lose hope and weaken in their Torah study, due to the tribulations and *nisyonot* placed before them by the *Yetzer Hara*.

When a person truly wishes to give Hashem pleasure, through taking pains to learn Torah at night, then even if he goes to sleep, he does so only in order to recharge his batteries and gain strength to continue in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara* the next morning. His intentions are solely *l'shem Shamayim*.

Such a person retires at night in order to renew his energy to continue serving Hashem. The pasuk states (*Eichah* 3:23), "They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness!" The Ari explains, "Every morning brings with it the potential to increase one's level of Avodat Hashem with renewed vigor."

When a person goes to sleep, he engages in a battle with his *Yetzer Hara*. He washes his hands upon awakening in the morning (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 4*), thereby removing the *tumah* that clung to him during this battle.

It is imperative that a person engage in Torah study immediately upon arising in the morning. He should either learn Mishnayot, Gemara, or recite the *korbanot*, which is also a form of Torah study. All of these ensure that Yaakov's voice is constantly heard. He should do so even before praying, since the struggle with the *Yetzer Hara* continues from the nighttime.

“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn” (*Bereishit 32:25*). The word for dawn is שחר, which can also be read as שחור (black), hinting to the *kelippah* (*Zohar II, 149b*). It is at this point that the Angel tells a person that he has triumphed over him, as it says (*ibid. 32:26 and 29*), “He perceived that he could not overcome him... you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome.” In the daytime, Yaakov emerges victorious, and Eisav's hands are weakened.

Chazal advise us (*Sanhedrin 72a; Bamidbar Rabbah 21:5*), “One who comes to kill you, rise up to kill him.” The Ben Ish Chai says in the name of the *Ba'alei Mussar*: “The one who comes to kill you” is the *Yetzer Hara*. “Rise up to kill him” means that one should arise early in the morning and involve himself in Torah study. In this way, he instills Torah into the night as well as the day.

The *Shelah* (quoted in *Mishnah Berurah 1:2*) expounds on the injunction to learn Torah both night and day.

Anyone connected to Hashem has this ongoing battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. It takes place during the daytime, as well as at night, both before one goes to sleep and while he is sleeping. When the *Yetzer Hara* observes that a person is connected to Hashem, he tries to disturb him

through bad dreams and the power of impurity. As soon as a person arises in the morning, he must wash himself of his influence and continue the battle. He must ensure that he remains free of the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* during the day.

Making one's voice heard in Torah study, the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b), is the way to triumph over him.

Even if someone makes sure to wash his hands in the morning, thereby ridding himself of the impurity of the nighttime battle with the *Yetzer Hara*, if he does not connect the nighttime with Torah learning by day, the impression of the battle remains. This may affect him later in the day.

Conversely, Yaakov's victory over the Angel of Eisav took place in the morning, due to his connecting the day with the night through learning Torah. When the morning dawned, the Angel saw that he could not vanquish him.

————— In Summary —————

- All of the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael were at Har Sinai. The voice which sounded then resounds in the heart of every Jew, each and every day. The tzaddikim know how to utilize it in order to ascend in Torah. Conversely, the reshaim exploit it to give power to the *kelippah*, which receives its nourishment from *kedushah*. For this reason, it is crucial that one avoid people and places of ill repute. He abets the *kelippah* by his participation in questionable activities. Therefore, we go to tzaddikim, to get advice and seek their blessing. The voice of Hashem speaks from their throats.
- By means of this voice, a person can vanquish his *Yetzer Hara*. This is why the *Yetzer Hara* tries so hard to cause a person to forget this inner voice of *kedushah*. Of paramount importance is Torah studied by night, for that is when the *kelippah* is in control. Only through Torah can one expect to defeat it. The ideal way is to connect the night with the day in Torah study. This brings one tremendous reward. This was the underlying factor in the struggle

of Yaakov with the Angel of Eisav. We must take a lesson from Yaakov Avinu.

- Even if it seems that a person does not see the fruits of his labor in his Torah study, it is only a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*. He must reinforce his level of Torah study, without allowing despair to set in. Rabbi Preida teaches us never to give up; he taught his disciple the material four hundred times, until he understood the lesson.
- Netilat yadayim of the morning removes the *tumah* which adhered to a person due to the nighttime battle he waged against his *Yetzer Hara*.

ACCEPTING THE TORAH

“This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent”

(Bamidbar 19:14)

Chazal state in the name of Reish Lakish (*Berachot* 63b; *Shabbat* 83b), “Words of Torah endure only in the one who sacrifices himself for them.”

This thought is alluded to in the phrase מתן תורה (*Matan Torah*). The initials spell the word מת (dead). In order to merit comprehending the enormity of the wonderful gift called Torah, one must dedicate his entire being to it, “killing himself” over it. Only in this manner, can he subdue his *Yetzer Hara*.

But if, *chas v’shalom*, a person does not devote himself to this pursuit, the last letters of the words will haunt him. They are נה, which are preceded in the Hebrew alphabet by the letters דם (blood). This refers to the *Yetzer Hara*, who conducts himself with the strict hand of justice (*Zohar* I, 255a). Then, the Torah will be a burden instead of a bequest.

The *gematria* of the word *מת* is 440, equal to that of *בבית י-ה-ו-ה* (in the house of Hashem). One who is engrossed in Torah study, spending his days in the Beit Hamidrash, merits basking in Hashem's favor, kindness, and mercy (*בחן בחסד וברחמים*), as well as the amazing, concealed light (*אור גנוז ונפלא*). Each phrase also has the *gematria* of 440. Conversely, one who does not involve himself in Torah study receives the punishment of the last letters *נה*, which have the *gematria* of fifty-five, just like the word *בחמה* (in anger). He will be dealt with the strict hand of justice.

Although Bnei Yisrael cried out, "We will do and we will obey!" (*Shemot* 24:7) at *Matan Torah*, they did not yet appreciate the value of Torah. They made their proclamation out of their tremendous love for and faith in Hashem.

They had no concept of the nature of this hidden gift that they were about to receive. They did not comprehend its importance in maintaining the world (see *Rashi, Bereishit* 1:1). Specifically, they did not realize just how much effort is required to invest in learning in order to really take pleasure in it.

Tosafot state in the name of Rabbeinu Tam (*Shabbat* 88a) that Bnei Yisrael were coerced into accepting the Torah. The Midrash relates that when the time came for Moshe Rabbeinu to call Bnei Yisrael to receive the Torah, he found them asleep.

Chazal (*Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 494) quote the Zohar, which states that the pious ones of previous generations would remain awake throughout Shavuot night, learning Torah. This was in order to rectify the fact that Bnei Yisrael were asleep when the time came to receive the Torah. They did not yet appreciate the value of Torah.

However, this is puzzling. Any thinking person would realize that the numerous preparations made before *Matan Torah* obviously had a purpose. Bnei Yisrael had counted the fifty days of Sefirat Haomer and

had been ordered to make intense preparations in honor of the upcoming event. They were forbidden to have marital relations for three days prior to *Matan Torah* (*Shemot* 19:15) in order to sanctify themselves before hearing the voice of Hashem. How could they conceivably have slept the night before? Where was their enthusiasm and excitement to hear the word of Hashem?

From here we see that as long as a person is not involved in Torah, he remains indifferent toward it. And even if he has faith in Hashem, this faith is lacking. Torah and Hashem are one and the same (*Zohar* III, 73a).

Therefore, although Bnei Yisrael agreed to accept the Torah, it was a superficial acceptance, which did not result from an in-depth understanding of what Torah is all about. For that reason, they slept the night before. They did not appreciate the greatness of Hashem and His Torah. Their spiritual preparations for *Matan Torah* lacked true feeling.

That is why Hashem found it necessary to coerce them to accept the Torah by holding the mountain above their heads like a barrel (*Shabbat* 88a). He told them, “If you accept the Torah, fine. But, if not, here will be your graves.” Because the Torah was not an intrinsic part of them, it would be easy for them to change their minds regarding their acceptance of it.

A person might believe in Hashem, but if he does not exert himself in Torah study, he will achieve nothing. Even his former faith may vanish. Only Torah can guide a person to the true path in Avodat Hashem.

“You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart” (*Devarim* 6:5). How is it possible to truly love Hashem? By following the directives of the pesukim that follow: “And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart” (ibid. vs. 6). One who studies Torah as he

should will merit the continuation of the pasuk: to “teach them thoroughly to your children” (ibid. vs. 7). Such a person will have the *zechut* to pass on his Torah knowledge to the next generation.

Much time elapsed before Bnei Yisrael understood the value of Torah, and that it is only the Torah that protects them. Whenever they sinned and did teshuvah, Hashem forgave them in the *zechut* of their efforts in Torah study.

For example, in the generation of Mordechai and Esther, Bnei Yisrael deserved to be destroyed, for they had partaken of Achashveirosh’s feast (*Megillah* 12a). Although they wanted to do teshuvah, Hashem did not accept it until they took upon themselves the yoke of Torah study. Then, the merit of Torah protected them. This taught them the great value of Torah, which provides protection to all who learn it (*Sotah* 21a).

I Created Torah as an Antidote

When Haman Harasha wished to present a charge against Bnei Yisrael, he thought of the pasuk (*Bereishit* 27:22) “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” Chazal state (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20) that as long as the voice of Yaakov is heard in the Batei Kenesiot and Batei Midrashot, the hands of Eisav have no control.

Therefore, he told Achashveirosh (*Esther Rabbah* 7:18), “Their G-d hates immorality. Command them to attend your feast. They will eat and drink and do as you wish.”

When Mordechai heard about this, he immediately forbade them from attending Achashveirosh’s banquet. He understood that Bnei Yisrael were invited only in order to bring them to sin. This would give the *Middat Hadin* the power to prosecute against them in *Shamayim*. Unfortunately, they did not heed his words and attended the feast.

Rabbi Yishmael asserts that 18,500 Jews attended the banquet hall. They ate, drank, and became depraved. There was almost no hope for

them to do proper teshuvah, for they had neglected their Torah study, thereby negating the condition upon which their entire existence depended.

This charge against them was nearly successful, *rachmana litzlan*. But Bnei Yisrael understood the gravity of the situation, and realized their salvation was contingent on themselves. Only through Torah, which had been their inheritance for hundreds of years, whose taste they had long-forgotten, would they merit salvation.

Therefore, they immediately, and with a full heart, accepted the yoke of Torah. The Gemara relates in the name of Rava (*Shabbat* 88a) that they re-accepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh, as it says (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook...” They confirmed that which they had previously undertaken to uphold, i.e., the Torah.

The *zechut* of Torah shielded them, and Haman’s decree was annulled. When Yaakov’s voice rings out in the Batei Midrashot, the hands of Eisav are powerless.

In spite of all of the preparations which Bnei Yisrael made after they left Mitzrayim, and in spite of the great virtues they acquired as “the Generation of Wisdom” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:1), nevertheless, they did not yet have a proper understanding of Hashem and His Torah. This is because they had not yet received the Torah, gaining the perfection which comes from exerting oneself in it.

Nowadays, after *Matan Torah*, everyone can recognize the intrinsic value of Torah. We have the ability to reach perfection through it. The Gemara states (*Kiddushin* 15a) that the Torah, so to speak, stands waiting in the corner. Whoever wishes may learn it. It is up to us to take the opportunity to grow in Torah and mitzvot.

For this reason, when we remain awake Shavuot night and learn Torah in preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, we certainly should feel inspired to accept the Torah anew.

Every year, when Shavuot comes, the voice that spoke to Bnei Yisrael resounds. We, too, were present at that event, also hearing the voice from the fire (*Shabbat* 146a). And although at that time we accepted the Torah through compulsion, in the days of Mordechai and Esther, we accepted it through free will.

From Pesach, we must begin making preparations for Shavuot. It is on Pesach that we nullify chametz, the symbol of the *Yetzer Hara*. Chametz also symbolizes the *middah* of arrogance. We acquire the *middah* of humility, depicted by the matzah, the bread of affliction. We begin counting the Omer, spending these days in correcting our character traits.

If a person finds that even after all of his preparations, he still does not feel a yearning for Torah, it is a sign that a tinge of arrogance still rests in his heart. Torah is acquired only through humility (*Ta'anit* 7a). The Midrash states (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah*) that Torah is like water. It flows from a high place to the lowest level.

Notwithstanding all of the necessary preparations for receiving the Torah, we find people who prefer to travel to resorts for the Shavuot holiday. They are making a major mistake. As Shavuot draws nearer, so must we increase our preparations for the festival. The way to do this is only by constant Torah study. How can one truly feel *Kabbalat HaTorah* when relaxing in a hotel atmosphere on Shavuot?

“G-d has made the one as well as the other” (*Kohelet* 7:14). When one studies Torah, the elixir of life, with humility, he merits its blessings. Torah is compared to water (*Bava Kama* 17a), as the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 55:1) calls out, “Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.”

Conversely, there are “dead waters.” These are the waters of the sea. Whoever spends the holiday at a seaside resort will be adversely influenced by the negative elements there.

An example of this is the Dead Sea. People go there for all sorts of remedies. But they don't realize the great danger inherent in these

waters. Although one cannot drown there, the water is extremely harmful if it enters the eyes or ears.

Not so are the everlasting, true waters of Torah. Torah is entirely beneficial, providing life and healing for those who learn it (*Eiruvin* 54a).

The Chafetz Chaim, zya"a, states that the *Yetzer Hara* is not concerned with a person's fasting or praying. His main goal is to prevent a person from learning Torah.

It is not enough to study Torah. One must also perform the mitzvot written in it. The Gemara states (*Kiddushin*), "How great is study, for it brings to action." What is the point of preparing oneself from Pesach to Shavuot, when at the same time, one is not cognizant of his behavior with his fellow man, thereby ignoring the command (*Vayikra* 19:18) "You shall love your fellow as yourself"? This subject requires improvement specifically in the days of Sefirah, the days when Rabbi Akiva's disciples died because they did not grant each other appropriate honor.

One must be aware of his mission in this world. He must strive to become connected to Hashem with his entire being. Conducting a multitude of fasts and self-flagellations might not be the way. These may, on the contrary, merely be ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*, who propels him to do these things in order to prevent him from learning Torah.

On the other hand, a person should not err in his Torah study, as did Rabbi Akiva's disciples. One needs to acquire true knowledge of what Hashem desires of him. During these days between Pesach and Shavuot, one should prepare himself through intensive Torah study and by fulfilling the mitzvot with humility.

In Summary

- The statement of Chazal that Torah endures only in one who sacrifices himself for it is alluded to in the first letters of the words מתן תורה. They

spell **מת**. This means that one must “kill himself” over Torah. When Bnei Yisrael exclaimed “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” it was from their love of Hashem. However, there was an element of coercion in their acceptance of the Torah, since they had yet to find out the nature of this precious gift, for they had not yet tasted its sweet taste. Without exerting oneself in Torah, it is impossible to appreciate its true value.

- In spite of their extensive preparations, Bnei Yisrael were able to sleep the night before *Matan Torah*. Appreciation for the Torah was not yet instilled in them. It was only in the days of Mordechai and Esther, when Haman almost destroyed them, that Am Yisrael finally realized that only the *zechut* of Torah can bring salvation. It was then that they accepted the Torah from their own free choice, through true love.
- Today, when we understand the value of Torah, more is expected of us. If we fail to engross ourselves appropriately in its study, we are held accountable. Conversely, if we make appropriate preparations, we will feel tremendous inspiration when the day of *Kabbalat HaTorah* arrives. We must beware the trait of arrogance, which disturbs our *Kabbalat HaTorah* and dampens our enthusiasm toward the precious gift of the Torah.

TORAH – THE PRECIOUS GIFT

The angels were opposed to the Torah being given to Bnei Yisrael. They came before Hashem, crying out, “Do You intend to give this precious gift, which was hidden here for 974 generations before the Creation of the world, to people 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 (*Tehillim* 8:5)?” In spite of all their arguments, Hashem did not heed their charges, and bequeathed the Torah as a gift to Am Yisrael (*Shabbat* 88b).

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai states (*Berachot* 5a), “Hashem granted three gifts to Bnei Yisrael. They are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World to Come.”

How can Torah be called a “precious gift”? It is full of prohibitions and punishments. Bnei Yisrael can claim that they are not interested in a gift containing so many warnings.

Furthermore, they were forced into accepting the Torah (*Shemot* 24:7). Where do we find that someone is forced to accept a gift?

“If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time...” Rashi explains, in the name of Chazal, that “following Hashem’s decrees” means exerting oneself in Torah.

In order to feel true pleasure in keeping the mitzvot, truly appreciating their value, one must be involved in Torah study. Chazal state (*Avodah Zarah* 5b), “A person should relate to words of Torah as an ox and a donkey who bear burdens.” Then, he will merit abundance from Hashem, as well as *siyata di’Shemaya* to do the mitzvot (of the Land), which are contingent on rain. This is in accordance with the statement (*Makkot* 10b), “In the way a person desires to go, there he is led.”

This is the meaning of Hashem’s declaration, “I have a precious gift, called ‘Torah.’ It affords endless pleasure.” But a person cannot attain Torah by mere desire (*Bava Kama* 2a). In order to truly know the Torah and everything which is hidden within it, one must invest much toil and exertion, and truly long to cleave to the Torah.

Such a person becomes a vessel for Torah. All of his life’s desires revolve around the axis of Torah. He has implanted within himself Chazal’s message (*Avot* 5:25) “Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it [the Torah] for everything is in it.”

Only the person who sacrifices himself for the Torah (*Bamidbar* 19:14) becomes capable of understanding how great is this gift which Hashem has bestowed upon us. But if a person does not exert himself to acquire Torah, and simply waits for it to enter his heart, he will have

to wait a very long time. The Torah will become a burden for him. And even though he may do mitzvot, such as giving *tzedakah*, and has perfect faith in the tzaddikim, he does it all superficially and not whole-heartedly. How can someone believe in the words of the tzaddikim, while at the same time neglecting the mitzvah of exerting himself in Torah?!

When a person applies himself accordingly, he attains an appreciation of the value of Torah. Because Bnei Yisrael had not yet involved themselves in Torah study at Har Sinai, they had to be forced into accepting the Torah.

This can be compared to one who does not know the value of precious gems. He considers them simple stones. He certainly will not bother to collect them if he were to come across any. But one who appreciates their value will exert himself to collect them, shining and protecting them as they deserve.

In Summary

- The angels were opposed to the Torah being given to Bnei Yisrael. However, in spite of their claims, Hashem did give them this precious gift. How can the Torah be called a “precious gift”? It seems to restrict a person, bringing punishment on those who transgress. We find that Bnei Yisrael did not accept the Torah of their own volition.
- In order to understand Torah and taste its sweetness, one must exert himself in its study, like an ox and a donkey, who willingly take up their burdens, to the extent that it becomes a part of him. Hashem forced the Torah upon Bnei Yisrael since they had not yet tasted it, and were as yet unable to appreciate its true worth.

THE THREE DAYS OF RESTRICTION

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow’” (*Shemot* 19:10). With this directive, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to separate from their wives for two days. However, when Moshe repeated Hashem’s words to the nation, he said (ibid. vs. 15), “Be prepared after a three-day period.” Chazal state, in the name of Rabbi Yosi (*Rashi*, ibid.; *Shabbat* 87a), that Moshe added a day.

How are we to understand that Hashem considered two days sufficient for preparation and purification for *Matan Torah*, whereas Moshe decided that one more day was necessary?

The Gemara asserts (*Sotah* 13b) that a mitzvah is attributed to the one who concludes it. This is because the closer one is to its culmination, the more the *Yetzer Hara* endeavors to prevent him from completing it.

Even if the *Yetzer Hara* realizes that he cannot avert the actual doing of the mitzvah, he tries to deter the person from performing it with joy and love. He discourages him from sacrificing himself for the sake of the mitzvah. Alternatively, he injects an element of arrogance and honor-seeking into the mitzvah, thereby damaging its perfection.

Therefore, the closer one arrives to the conclusion of a mitzvah, the more careful he must be, building fences between himself and his *Yetzer Hara*.

This can be done by means of connecting to Hashem, through working on the forty-eight *middot* by which the Torah is acquired (*Avot* 6:6). In this manner, the mitzvah he is performing becomes part of the larger picture of Torah and mitzvot, and will be done perfectly, for the sake of Hashem.

After Bnei Yisrael rectified the first of the forty-seven days of Sefirah, they were awarded the status of kings. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 23:15), “וספרתם לכם – You shall count for yourselves.” The letters of the word לכם (for yourselves) can be transposed to spell מלך (king). A king is able to break through any obstacles he meets when going to war (*Pesachim* 101; *Bava Batra* 100). So too, through counting the Sefirah, Bnei Yisrael surmounted their *Yetzer Hara*, as it says in *Avot* (4:1), “Who is strong? One who subdues his personal inclination.” They had almost reached the pinnacle of perfection.

Nevertheless, there was a very real likelihood that, specifically at this stage, the *Yetzer Hara* would interfere, preventing them from receiving the Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* would be able to damage Bnei Yisrael by inducing them to sin through lust.

Therefore, Hashem ordered them to distance themselves from their wives for the span of forty-eight hours. The *gematria* of forty-eight is מ"ח, alluding to the brain (מוח), which controls a person's actions, as well as to the forty-eight *middot* by which Torah is acquired. Bnei Yisrael were ordered to erect a boundary between themselves and anything connected to physical temptations. The Satan persecutes at a time of danger (see *Tanchuma, Vayigash* 1), and they needed to be cautious even with what is permitted. They had to ensure that they would not engage in activities which were not *l'shem Shamayim*.

Moshe added another twenty-four hours to their separation. He mandated three days of distance, totaling seventy-two (ע"ב) hours in all. This is an allusion to חסד (kindness), which has the *gematria* of seventy-two. The seventy-two hours bound them with Hashem, Who always acts with compassion toward His people, in the merit of His seventy-two letter Name (*Zohar* III, 276b).

Moshe's intention was that as a result of this added day Bnei Yisrael would be holy, similar to their Creator (see *Shabbat* 133b), Who did kindness with them by redeeming them and giving them the Torah with

compassion. And even though their souls departed when they heard the voice of Hashem, He immediately revived them (*Shabbat* 88b).

We might say that Moshe Rabbeinu added a day in order that the women would also be pure, for Hashem would be speaking to them, as well. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:3), “So shall you say to the House of Yaakov.” This refers to the women. The men and women were both pure of mind and soul, in preparation for receiving the Torah.

This extended separation afforded them more Heavenly mercy, and abundance of blessing. Hashem would always remember this extra day of separation, for they sanctified themselves through that which was permitted to them (*Yevamot* 20a).

— In Summary —

- Moshe added a day of separation before *Matan Torah*. Why did he find this necessary? Hashem commanded that Bnei Yisrael separate themselves from their wives for two days prior to *Matan Torah*. The closer one arrives at concluding a mitzvah, the more obstacles the *Yetzer Hara* places before him in order to prevent its completion, or at least to damage it in some way.
- There was a fear that after counting forty-seven days of the Omer, they would capitulate to the *Yetzer Hara*, who would prevent them from receiving the Torah by inducing them to sin through lust. Therefore, Hashem gave them restrictions for two days. These forty-eight hours parallel the brain (מוח), which has the *gematria* of forty-eight. In this manner, the mind, which controls the emission of seed, would become sanctified at *Matan Torah*. It also alludes to the forty-eight ways of acquiring Torah.
- But Moshe believed that another day of separation was in order. Seventy-two hours parallel נדפ, which has the *gematria* of seventy-two. It would give Bnei Yisrael more of a chance to connect to Hashem, Who is always compassionate. It also provided the opportunity for the women to become purified, for they, too, would hear the voice of Hashem.

TORAH STUDY – THE PURPOSE OF MAN

When Moshe ascended to *Shamayim* to receive the Torah, the angels complained to Hashem, “What is a man of flesh and blood doing among us?!”

Why were they so shocked? Didn’t they hear that Hashem was giving the Torah to Bnei Yisrael? They themselves were present at *Matan Torah*. Additionally, what was their purpose in calling Moshe a “man of flesh and blood”?

The angels did not mean to disparage Moshe by calling him this. On the contrary, at *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael rose above the level of angels. The angels do Hashem’s will, but they are not connected to the world of materialism. They have no body and therefore no *Yetzer Hara*, bent on causing them to transgress Hashem’s word at any given moment. However, Bnei Yisrael accepted upon themselves to do the will of Hashem, even while living a corporal existence, and faced with the *Yetzer Hara*.

Since, at the time of *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael desired to rise ever higher, even above their natural confines, their souls departed (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 6:3). They had become elevated above the level of angels.

It is said of Moshe (*Tehillim* 68:19), “You ascended on High, you have taken captives.” This is proof that Moshe bested the angels in their debate. His victory was two-fold, for he defeated them on their own territory and captured the Torah for Bnei Yisrael.

The angels protested that Moshe’s virtues were greater than theirs, and that he had taken the Torah. Therefore, they asked Hashem to remove him from *Shamayim*.

This teaches us the exalted nature of Torah. One should appreciate the great importance of learning Torah. When one is learning Torah, Hashem pays attention only to him. This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:9), “I will turn My attention to you, I will make you fruitful and I will increase you.” Hashem deals with people measure for measure (*Sanhedrin* 901). If someone leaves his business in order to study Torah, so too, does Hashem, so to speak, leave everything else, and tend to him.

How is it possible for Hashem to leave the world and focus on only one person? Wouldn't the world collapse if that were the case?

One who learns Torah is a partner with Hashem in Creation. That being the case, everything exists in the merit of the person who learns Torah. Chazal state (*Avot* 1:2), “The world depends on three things – on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on kind deeds.” The Torah scholars actually uphold the world.

However, he must still be vigilant in the war against the *Yetzer Hara*. At first, the *Yetzer Hara* may encourage a person to learn Torah and perform mitzvot. This is in order that the person should relax and become less alert. He is pleased with his spiritual situation. Then, he easily falls into the grip of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Alternatively, the *Yetzer Hara* might attack him in the following way. We are taught (*ibid.* 3:7) that “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 is responsible for his life.” It would seem to be a mitzvah to marvel at Hashem's creations. But instead, it is a sin, for it is all a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, who wishes to disturb his Torah study. He is held accountable, for if he was able to heed the voice of the *Yetzer Hara*, he should have paid attention to the *Yetzer Hatov*.

Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim received a tremendous awakening, but they were still far from perfect. They had evil within them and related to good and bad equally. On the one hand, they preserved their language and way of dress (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5; *Pesikta Zuta Shemot* 7:6). On the other hand, they were on the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a).

Hashem did not hold them accountable for this, because it was beyond their control. On the contrary, He helped them filter out the filth and become holy.

This is the reason why they left Mitzrayim speedily. “They could not delay” (*Shemot* 12:39). Good and evil controlled them. Had they remained in Egypt, they would have sunk to the fiftieth level of *tumah*, the point of no return.

However, Hashem considered Bnei Yisrael’s following Him into the wilderness a “kindness.” This is expressed by Yirmeyahu Hanavi (2:2): “I recall for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me into the wilderness...” Why was following Hashem out of Egypt deemed a “kindness” on the part of Bnei Yisrael? On the contrary, we should be thanking Hashem for redeeming us. Had He not extricated us then, all future generations, including ourselves, would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

According to what was previously mentioned, Bnei Yisrael were at a level where good and evil were equal in their eyes. They seemingly had no reason for choosing good over bad. The fact that they took superhuman pains to follow Hashem out of Egypt was proof that they had vanquished their *Yetzer Hara*.

This is the *chessed* with which Hashem credits us. This is the act that motivated them to continue ascending. When they finally arrived at *Matan Torah*, they were at an exalted spiritual level, for “the consequence of a mitzvah is a mitzvah” (*Avot* 4:2).

TORAH IN THE WILDERNESS

[FROM A LECTURE IN HONOR OF ORDAINING TORAH SCHOLARS AS RABBIS, IN THE KOLLEL “YISMACH MOSHE,” ON SHAVUOT EVE]

“Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month... after their Exodus from the land of Egypt”

(*Bamidbar* 1:1)

Why was it necessary to recount where and when Hashem spoke to Moshe? Additionally, what is the reason for the lengthy phrase “in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting”?

Based on the words of the Zohar (II, 191b; 183b), a spirit of impurity hovers over the wilderness. This force of impurity injects hatred between man and his Creator. The way to combat this *kelippah* is by means of Torah study in the Beit Hamidrash, referred to here as “the Tent of Meeting.”

Chazal explain (*Makkot* 11a) that the word וידבר (He spoke) connotes speaking harshly. This teaches that only by means of the harsh words of Torah can a person vanquish the impure forces, hinted at in the word “wilderness.” This is done in the modern-day “Tent of Meeting,” i.e., the Beit Hamidrash (*Megillah* 29a).

As a result of this, a person will be compared to החדש השני (the second month). The word שני (second) has the same root as the word שינון (sharpened). The words of Torah will be sharp and clear in his mouth (see *Kiddushin* 30a). The phrase “after their Exodus from the land of Egypt” means that one will then merit liberation from the *kelippah*, alluded to by “the land of Egypt.”

However, merely spending time in the Beit Hamidrash without exerting oneself in Torah study will not help a person surmount his *Yetzer Hara*. In order to learn properly in the Beit Hamidrash, one must make preparations. He must remove all thoughts of haughtiness and jealousy, and humble himself like the wilderness, acting with total self-effacement.

The Gemara states (*Nedarim* 55a; *Tanchuma, Vayakheil* 8) that the Torah was given in the wilderness, an abandoned place, in order to teach us the following lesson. Just as the wilderness is public property, so too, are words of Torah accessible to all who wish to acquire them.

“In my heart I have stored Your word, so that I would not sin against You” (*Tehillim* 119:11). Only when the heart is full of Torah and pure of all extraneous elements, is it protected from sin. This is why Hashem commands (*Bamidbar* 15:39): “[Do] not explore after your heart and after your eyes.” When one is vigilant in protecting his heart and his eyes, he is protected from sin. He will be saved from falling into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Today, you have received Rabbinic ordination. *Baruch Hashem*, we have merited that the kollel *Yismach Moshe*, named after the holy tzaddik, my Father and my Teacher, zt”l, has produced righteous *talmidei chachamim*. They have guided the Jewish people in the proper path and influenced them with the light of Torah.

The pasuk in *Mishlei* (6:23) states, “A commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light.” With this light, Hashem covered Adam Harishon in order to protect him from the *Yetzer Hara*. The *Zohar* (I, 36b; II, 229b) finds an allusion to this in the pasuk (*Bereishit* 3:21), “ויעש ה' אלוה-ים – לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם – And Hashem G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.” Before they sinned, they wore garments of אור (light), but after their sin, these were changed to garments of עור (skin).

Whoever wishes to be spared from the fire of Gehinnom would do well to cloak himself with Torah, the “garments of distinction” (*Zohar* I, 66a).

When a person is cold, he bundles up under his blankets for warmth. Similarly, when a person sees his *Yetzer Hara* trying to “cool him off” in his Avodat Hashem, he must redouble his efforts in Torah, until he is completely covered by it, and this way, he will be saved from his *Yetzer Hara*. (This can be inferred from the pasuk in Devarim (25:18) which describes the attack of Amalek: “אשר קרך בדרך” – That he happened upon you on the way.” The word קרך can also mean, “cooled you off,” from the root קר – cold.)

A person who receives Rabbinic ordination demonstrates that he lives purely for the sake of Torah. The Torah will certainly protect him. The fire of Torah will certainly ensure that his Avodat Hashem never cools off. This is hinted to by the fact that the word סמיכה (Rabbinic ordination) is similar to the word שמיכה (blanket). He will receive the ability to ordain others, as well, preventing them from becoming cooled off in their Avodat Hashem. He brings them under the cloak of Torah, affording them its protection.

The one part of the body not covered by a blanket is the head. The garment which protects the head is the *kippah*. The reason for this is that the brain should not, for even a moment, cease to be connected with Hashem. One must constantly go “from strength to strength” (*Tehillim* 84:8), continuously cleaving to Hashem. One must be careful not to allow an improper thought to enter one’s mind, for that can damage his entire being.

Only after death, is the person’s entire body covered, including his head. For at that point, the head has reached perfection. He merits being wrapped in the “garments of distinction,” and the Satan is powerless against him.

But, during one's lifetime, his head is not covered by a blanket. He has much work to do. Each person must inspire his friend to grow spiritually, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 41:6), "Each man would help his fellow, and to his brother he would say, 'Be strong!'"

May it be Hashem's will that the merit of my holy ancestors protect you. In the merit of the *kedushah* of the festival of Shavuot may you receive an abundance of sanctity and blessing.

————— In Summary —————

- The Torah specifies the details of the place and time that Hashem spoke to Moshe. The reason for this is to teach us that the *kelippah*, who resides in the wilderness, tries to implant hatred between man and his Creator. The Tent of Meeting is the venue for his conquest. This is the Beit Hamidrash. But merely remaining in the Beit Hamidrash will not do the job of defeating the *Yetzer Hara*. One must learn the lesson of the wilderness and humble himself. When he is in the Beit Hamidrash, he should cloak himself in the garment of Torah, completely immersing himself in it.
- One who merits Rabbinic ordination demonstrates that he has dedicated his life to the Torah. He also has the ability to ordain others. He can ensure that they never become "cooled off" in their service of Hashem. The word סמיכה (Rabbinic ordination) is related to the word שמיכה (blanket). One should constantly make sure that his head is covered with a *kippah*, indicating that he is always connected to Hashem.

THE TASTE OF TORAH

***“This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt,
drink water in small measure”***

(Avot 6:4)

This requires explanation. What is the connection between the type of food a person eats and acquiring Torah?

We find that the manna which fell in the Wilderness tasted of whatever the person chose. This is referred to in the pasuk in Tehillim (106:15) “He gave them their request” (*Tanchuma, Beha’alotcha 15; Zohar II, 62a*).

The reason for this miracle was in order that with the taste of each food, the person would comprehend the secrets hidden within it. It is not possible that Hashem created various tastes so that people should simply gratify their passions when they eat. In every food there is a hidden secret, which becomes revealed to the person upon tasting that food appropriately, if he is on an elevated spiritual level.

By eating the manna, Bnei Yisrael were able to understand the secrets within it. Chazal state (*Mechilta, Beshalach 17; Tanchuma, Beshalach 20*), “The Torah was given only to those who ate manna.” This means that those who partook of the manna were able to taste the secrets inherent within it, and become elevated thereby.

There were three categories of those who ate the manna (*Yoma 75a*). The first group wished to experience all the tastes of the world contained within it. They desired to become aware of Hashem by partaking of it. The pasuk in Tehillim (104:24) refers to this type of connection with Hashem in the words “How abundant are Your works, Hashem.”

Hashem invested unique tastes in food. Each carries deep mystical secrets within it. By eating *l'shem Shamayim*, a person can aspire to comprehend these secrets, without the negative consequences of lustful eating.

The Torah (*Shemot* 16:15) relates that “the Children of Israel saw and said to one another, ‘It is food!’ – for they did not know what it was.” They tried to extract as many flavors as possible from it, for the manna had the potential to bring them to the fiftieth gate of *kedushah*.

The second group wanted to eat the manna in the condition that it fell. They did not want to interfere in the hidden realms. This is in line with the statement (*Rashi, Bamidbar* 19:2), “It is a decree from before Me, you do not have the right to question it.”

These people did not desire to taste the many flavors of the manna. They overcame their inclination to seek the secrets of Hashem. They fully believed that whatever Hashem does is good (*Sanhedrin* 28b), and everything is created for a reason. Their eating the manna was solely an act of “eat bread with salt, etc.,” without looking for reasoning and seasoning.

The third group wanted to eat the manna just like a person eats ordinary food. These were the ones who later complained (*Bamidbar* 11:5-6): “We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge; the cucumbers... But now, our life is parched, there is nothing; we have nothing to anticipate but the manna!”

It is difficult to understand their complaint. After witnessing all of the miracles in Egypt (*Mechilta Beshalach* 2), how could they desire to exchange the manna, which was spiritual sustenance, with mere physical food?!

And why did they specifically desire those foods that they had enjoyed in Egypt? Weren't there even more delectable dishes to be found in other parts of the world?

They knew that by tasting all feasible flavors through the manna, they were able to discern the specific secret contained in each food. Therefore, they craved to consume ordinary foods, and make the appropriate *tikkun* for each one. By doing this, the food would become elevated to the level of the spiritual. In this manner, they would become closer to Hashem.

They had previously eaten these foods in Egypt without being aware of their inner spiritual secrets. For this, they felt regret. They wished now to bring a *tikkun* to those foods, by eating them again, but this time with proper intent.

But Hashem was not pleased with their claim. The pasuk states (ibid.11:10), “The wrath of Hashem flared greatly.” Their grievance was an act of the Satan. Had their intentions been purely *l’shem Shamayim*, they would never have descended to the level of complaining and feeling anger and dissension. They should have understood that partaking of the manna enables one to attain amazing spiritual heights, nullifying all personal pleasure, only after forty years of consuming it.

The fact that this episode ended in argument and animosity is proof that their intentions were faulty (*Nedarim* 48a; *Gittin* 66a). This entire episode was a ploy of the Satan. They assumed that one can attain many levels at once, but this led to their downfall, for (*Avot* 4:2) “one sin leads to another.”

Often, the Satan encourages a person to perform a mitzvah, but causes him to feel anger, which destroys the mitzvah. Without even realizing it, the person does an aveirah in place of the mitzvah.

The Zohar (I, 27b) teaches that one who becomes angry is compared to an idol worshipper. The *Yetzer Hara* might convince a person to go to the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah, but once there he may fall into his trap by disturbing others from learning, or feeling proud about his own level of learning.

In order to acquire Torah and its hidden secrets, a person must live by the injunction “Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure.” When one begins to eat delicacies, investigating the secrets of each taste, he is liable to stumble into sin, just as those in the Wilderness, who ate the manna for the wrong reasons.

But if one eats in order to have the strength to serve Hashem properly, and for no other reason, he will have the potential to rise spiritually.

When he eats something especially tasty, he should not delve too much into its taste. He should conduct himself for the sake of Heaven. Then, his actions will be considered lofty. And even if he consumes the most delightful cuisine, he will not do so to fill his innards, but solely for Hashem’s Name. In this manner, he will merit to receive the Torah.

Previous tzaddikim did not pay attention to what they were eating. The *Ba’al HaTanya* was once served very salty food, yet he did not taste its offensive taste at all, for he had completely overcome the lust for food.

In Summary

- Chazal teach that in order to acquire Torah, one must suffice with bread and salt, etc. I would like to explain this, based on the manna which Bnei Yisrael ate in the Wilderness. There were those who complained, “Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish, etc.” How could it be that after all the miracles they witnessed in the Wilderness, they preferred the physical food of Egypt over the spiritual sustenance of the manna?
- After tasting the various tastes which the manna had to offer, they reached the level of understanding the secrets contained within each food. Therefore, they wanted to taste again the foods that they ate in Egypt, in order to bring a *tikkun* to what they had damaged in the past. This would be a means of coming closer to Hashem.

- But Hashem was angered by this. It was all a ruse of the Satan, who wanted to embroil them in quarrel and dissention. They should have understood that only after consuming the manna the entire forty years of their sojourn in the desert, would they reach the level of understanding the secrets contained within each food. They should have been satisfied with what they were served. Food is not an end in itself; it is merely a tool to help a person in his Avodat Hashem. Only through frugality in eating can one discover the secrets of the Torah.

THE GIFTS OF TORAH AND SHABBAT

The Torah is referred to as a wonderful gift, as the Gemara (*Zevachim* 116b) relates, “Hashem had a wonderful treasure in His treasure house, hidden for 974 generations before the Creation of the world. He wished to bestow it on His children, as the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 29:11), ‘Hashem will give might to His nation.’” Rashi explains (*ibid.*) that “might” refers to Torah, the strength of our nation.

In the *zechut* of Torah, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim, as we read (*Shemot* 3:12), “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain.” Rashi expounds, “You will receive the Torah on this mountain, and this will be the redeeming merit for Bnei Yisrael.”

Likewise, we find (*Beitzah* 16a) that Hashem told Moshe, “Moshe, I have a magnificent gift in My treasure house, and it is called *Shabbat*. I wish to bestow it on Bnei Yisrael. Go and notify them.”

Why is Shabbat mentioned as a separate gift? Isn’t it included among the mitzvot of the Torah, the original gift of Hashem to His people?

We might suggest that Shabbat is not considered to be included in the gift of the Torah. When Moshe ascended on High to receive the Torah, the angels approached Hashem with the following complaint,

“How can You give this wonderful gift, which was hidden on High for 974 generations before the Creation of the world, to mankind?!” (*Shabbat* 88b). Why did they argue against Bnei Yisrael receiving one precious gift, and not two? They certainly were aware of the two gifts hidden in *Shamayim*. Why did they not oppose the gift of Shabbat being granted to Am Yisrael?

Hashem knew that Bnei Yisrael would proclaim “*Na’aseh v’nishma.*” This is because they contain a Divine spark within them (*Zohar* II, 96b). They are His people and His heritage (*Tehillim* 94:14). Throughout the generations, there would always be tzaddikim who uphold both the Written and Oral Laws.

Shabbat is certainly included among the mitzvot of the Torah. However, Hashem classified it as a separate gift in its own right. This is to teach us that Shabbat is equal to all of the other mitzvot (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:2; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16). There are mitzvot which we are commanded to observe in the weekdays, and there are mitzvot which are specific for Shabbat. Furthermore, there are mitzvot which depend on a specific place, and cannot be performed elsewhere.

Hashem taught Moshe Rabbeinu an important point by offering the Shabbat as a gift separate from the Torah. Although *Shemirat Shabbat* is incorporated in the Torah, it has a special quality. One who observes Shabbat is considered to observe the entire Torah, even those mitzvot which he would otherwise not have the opportunity to fulfill.

Moreover, one who observes Shabbat is forgiven his sins, even the sin of idol worship (*Shabbat* 118b). This demonstrates just how great the mitzvah of Shabbat is. It is worthy of being called a “precious gift” in its own right.

This may be understood by the following parable. There was once a king, who won many battles and defeated mighty enemies. Tremendous armies felt at his feet like flies. He ruled his own country without any assistance, in the most efficient way possible.

At the outset of an upcoming war, the king called his generals together. He told them, “It is true that in the past I waged all wars alone, without any help whatsoever. In spite of that, I sustained you and constantly showered you with gifts.

“In the upcoming battle, I request of you to go out on your own. Fight for my sake with all your might. I will provide you with the best weapons possible, so that you don’t have difficulty overcoming your enemies.”

He pointed out to them the most sophisticated weaponry, which he recommended they use. In this manner, they would defeat their enemies quickly and easily. Then he departed, promising a huge reward for their victory. He did all this despite the fact that he could have taken care of the entire matter on his own.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is a Warrior (*Shemot* 15:3). He is One and His Name is One. He created the world, and He upholds it without any assistance. On the contrary, although His creations sin, He maintains and sustains them, sending them all sorts of blessings, free of charge.

He specifically does kindness with Am Yisrael. He protects them from their enemies, who constantly rise up against them on all sides. In particular, at their Exodus from Egypt, He performed many miracles on their behalf and chose them to be His beloved nation from among all of the nations (*Shemot* 19:5).

At *Matan Torah*, Hashem transferred responsibility for upholding the world into the hands of Bnei Yisrael. He warned them that they would have to combat the *Yetzer Hara* with their own strength.

Because the *Yetzer Hara* is an angel, and difficult to defeat, Hashem placed in their possession a most effective weapon. This is the Torah, as the Gemara states (*Kiddushin* 30b) that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yisrael, “My son, I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.”

Additionally, out of His deep love for Bnei Yisrael, Hashem revealed that within this state-of-the-art armament, there is an extremely sophisticated weapon, with which one can combat the *Yetzer Hara* most effectively. This is Shabbat, whose *kedushah* is so great that it radiates *berachah* and *kedushah* throughout the entire week (*Zohar I*, 75b).

If the mitzvot are weapons against the *Yetzer Hara*, keeping Shabbat is the atom bomb in our arsenal. This is why Hashem separated Shabbat from the rest of the mitzvot. Shabbat is equal to all of the mitzvot combined (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:2; Shemot Rabbah 28:16*).

The *kedushah* of Shabbat is a sample of the *kedushah* of the World to Come (*Zohar I*, 1b; 48a). For that reason, the angels had no objection to Bnei Yisrael tasting of this pleasure. It is Hashem's day of rest (*Shemot 20:10*), and He desires that the entire Creation takes pleasure in Shabbat.

Therefore, the angels only opposed the giving of the Torah. They preferred that the Torah would remain in *Shamayim*, and Bnei Yisrael would receive only the mitzvah of Shabbat. When Bnei Yisrael would observe Shabbat, they would be considered as having kept all of the mitzvot of the Torah. Also, Shabbat would help them combat the *Yetzer Hara*. This is certainly more preferable than giving them the Torah, if it would not be properly honored. Then they would forfeit both the mitzvah of Shabbat and the Torah.

Moshe had a ready rejoinder for the angels. In order keep Shabbat properly, he explained, Bnei Yisrael need the Torah. The Torah helps us combat the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the week. Without Torah, they would never be able to properly observe Shabbat, the equivalent of the rest of the mitzvot.

Hashem classified Shabbat in a separate category from the rest of the Torah. When Moshe was in *Shamayim*, He told him (*Shabbat 88b*),

“Hold on to my Throne of Glory, and give them a reply.” The word for “reply” is תשובה, which contains the word שבת (Shabbat). Only through Torah, are Bnei Yisrael able to properly observe Shabbat, and thus do teshuvah.

————— In Summary —————

- There were two precious gifts hidden on High before the Creation of the world. They are Torah and Shabbat. The angels voiced their objection to the Torah being given to Bnei Yisrael. But we do not find that they objected to the granting of Shabbat to Bnei Yisrael. Why is this so? Additionally, why is Shabbat singled out from among all of the mitzvot? Isn't Shabbat included in the mitzvot of the Torah?
- Hashem wished to impress upon us the importance of the *kedushah* of Shabbat, which renders it equal to the rest of the mitzvot. By proper Shabbat observance, one is considered to have fulfilled all of the mitzvot, even those that he cannot personally fulfill. Therefore, the angels did not object to Shabbat being offered to Am Yisrael. Specifically so, because Shabbat is the day of rest for Hashem, and He desires that the entire Creation should also rest on Shabbat.
- But when it came to the Torah, the angels did object. They claimed that it was sufficient for Bnei Yisrael to observe Shabbat, which would be considered as having fulfilled all of the mitzvot, and would protect them from the *Yetzer Hara*. They were afraid that if Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, they would scorn it, thereby forfeiting both Torah and Shabbat, leaving them empty-handed. Moshe Rabbeinu countered that Am Yisrael need the Torah in order to combat the *Yetzer Hara* throughout the days of the week. Only then would they be able to observe Shabbat properly.

THE TORAH WAS GIVEN TO MAN

The Gemara relates in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (*Shabbat* 89a) that when Moshe descended from Har Sinai, the Satan came before Hashem, demanding to know where the Torah was. Hashem answered, “I gave it to the Earth.”

The Satan came to the Earth, demanding to know where the Torah was. The Earth responded (*Iyov* 28:23), “[Only] G-d understands its way.”

The Satan approached the Sea, but it denied having received the Torah. Then the Satan arrived at the Depth. The Depth said (*ibid.* 14), “It is not in me.”

He returned to Hashem, relating that he had searched everywhere for the Torah, but could not find it. Then Hashem told him, “Go to the son of Amram.”

He approached Moshe and demanded to know where the Torah was. Moshe responded, “Who am I that Hashem should give me His Torah?”

Our Sages (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9) expound on the pasuk (*Amos* 3:8) “A lion has roared; who will not fear?” They state that when Hashem gave the Torah, He silenced the entire universe, those in the Upper Worlds and those in the lower worlds. The entire Creation reverted to nothingness, as it was beforehand. The birds did not chirp or fly, the animals did not make a sound, and the angels did not move. The Seraphim did not praise Hashem, and the sea did not flow. The entire Creation was still. Then Hashem called out (*Shemot* 20:2), “I am Hashem your G-d.” Great wonders were revealed to Bnei Yisrael together with this mighty voice.

The entire world shook at *Matan Torah* (*Sifri, Berachah* 32:2). When the Babylonians heard the thunderous sounds, they gathered together

and approached Bilaam. They told him that Hashem must be destroying the world. Bilaam responded that Hashem had promised that He would not bring another flood (*Bereishit* 9:11). They asked him what the noise was all about. He told them that Hashem was giving His nation the Torah. It appeared in four languages: Hebrew, Latin, Arabic, and Aramaic, and 22,000 chariots descended with Him (see *Zohar* II, 226b).

The *Ohr Chadash* asks how it is possible that the Satan did not know what was taking place. Even a blind man felt the thunder and the noise that shook up the world when Hashem revealed Himself in His full glory, giving the Torah to Yisrael.

The Tosafot (*Shabbat* 89a) ask this question. They answer, according to the Midrash, that Hashem prevented the Angel of Death (the Satan) from prosecuting when the Torah was being given. He did not allow the Satan to argue against Bnei Yisrael receiving the Torah by claiming that they would sin with the Golden Calf a mere forty days later.

Why did the Satan ask Hashem where the Torah was? If he did not find it in *Shamayim*, he should have deduced that it was on Earth.

And even if on the day of *Matan Torah*, Hashem silenced the voice of the Satan, so that he would not be able to prosecute Bnei Yisrael, why couldn't he locate the Torah afterward? Certainly, the sound of Bnei Yisrael learning Torah could be heard in all the spheres.

Also, why did Hashem refer the Satan to Moshe Rabbeinu? Was Moshe the only one who had received the Torah? All of Bnei Yisrael were at *Matan Torah*, and everyone heard Hashem proclaim "I am Hashem, your G-d."

Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem held Har Sinai above the heads of Bnei Yisrael like a barrel (*Shabbat* 88a). He told them, "If you accept the Torah, fine. But, if not, here will be your graves." Rav Acha bar Yaakov says that this is a proof that they did not want to accept the Torah.

(Rashi says, “If they would be taken to task for not upholding the Torah that they had agreed to accept, they would have a ready answer. They could state that they had accepted the Torah under compulsion.”) Rava says that they did accept the Torah willingly, in the days of Achashveirosh. (Rashi comments that they did so out of gratitude for the miracle performed on their behalf.)

How could Bnei Yisrael claim that they accepted the Torah through compulsion; hadn't they exclaimed (*Shemot* 24:7), “Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey”?

From here we learn a fundamental principle. It is impossible to accept something wholeheartedly without knowing its value. Although Bnei Yisrael proclaimed “*Na'aseh v'nishma*,” the act of accepting the Torah was still considered compulsory. In order to properly prepare oneself for a mitzvah, it is imperative to learn about it and understand it in all its intricacies. Once a person recognizes its importance, he can hope to fulfill it correctly.

Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu established the custom of learning the laws of the upcoming holiday. One learns the halachot of each *chag* as it approaches (*Megillah* 32a). This enables us to keep the mitzvot to perfection.

We see from here the power of proper preparation. Bnei Yisrael did not comprehend the tremendous worth of the Torah, due to the fact that they had not yet received the Torah, to the degree that their proclamation of “*Na'aseh v'nishma*” was lacking. However, by making the minimal preparations for receiving the Torah, elevating themselves during the seven weeks prior to *Matan Torah*, Hashem nullified the Satan (*Zohar* Part I, 52b). The Satan did not even realize that the Torah was being given to Bnei Yisrael, and did not hear the great tumult taking place in all the worlds at *Matan Torah*.

But when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, the Satan regained his former position (see *Zohar* above). It was then that he

discovered that the Torah was missing from *Shamayim*, for it had already been given. Its rays of *kedushah* were gone from Heaven, and he did not discern them on Earth, either.

When a person damages Torah and mitzvot, he does not bring darkness to himself alone (*Zohar* III, 28b). He damages his surroundings, as well, to the extent that Torah observance is not apparent (ibid. 122a).

Even if such a person learns Torah, his *yirat Shamayim* is deficient. Shlomo Hamelech teaches that *yirat Shamayim* is the purpose of man (*Kohelet* 12:13), “The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man’s whole duty.” Moreover, the Gemara informs us (*Berachot* 6b) that whoever has *yirat Shamayim*, his words are heard. Conversely, if one lacks *yirat Shamayim*, even his words of Torah go unheeded.

When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, the luminaries dimmed, to the extent that there was no longer any trace of *Matan Torah*. Therefore, the Satan could not discern where the Torah was.

Let us take a lesson from here. We must recognize the severity of the danger we are in. When we witness harsh decrees, or prosecution against *talmidei chachamim*, *rachmana litzlan*, it is an indication that our Torah study is lacking. It is only then that the Satan has permission to prosecute. But when Bnei Yisrael learn Torah with *yirat Shamayim*, the Torah protects them from all harm (*Sotah* 21a).

Moshe Rabbeinu’s Greatness at Kabbalat HaTorah

How could it be that the Satan did not notice the luminosity emanating from the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu, leader of Bnei Yisrael, who was not connected at all with the sin of the Golden Calf?

Moreover, the *Zohar* (II, 236) states that when Bnei Yisrael worshipped the calf, Moshe removed his tent from among them and

erected it outside the camp, for he saw the *Yetzer Hara* walking among them. He understood that *kedushah* cannot co-exist with *tumah*. Certainly, the Satan could have felt the *kedushah* emanating from Moshe's tent.

From here we see the incredible humility of Moshe Rabbeinu. He succeeded in concealing his Torah knowledge and its accompanying rays of *kedushah* within himself, far from all eyes. Even the Satan could not discern them. The angels, as well, were unaware of his tremendous level. Only Hashem Himself knew just how elevated Moshe really was.

When Moshe ascended to *Shamayim* (*Shabbat* 88b), the angels asked Hashem, “מה לילוד אשה בינינו – What is a person of flesh of blood doing here?” The *gematria* of the word מה is forty-five, equal to that of אדם (man). It is also the numerical equivalent of the Name יהוה (when spelled out in full: יהוה-והא, and adding one for the Name itself). The angels were asking how Moshe had attained their level, when he was, after all, a person of flesh and blood. How was he able to contain the elements of man, angel, and the Name of Hashem within himself?

Thus, Hashem did not tell the Satan that he had given the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. He merely directed him to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was equivalent to all of Bnei Yisrael (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64).

With this in mind, we might be able to understand the statement of Chazal in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai (*Bava Metzia* 114b), “The graves of the gentiles do not emit *tumah*.” This is based on a pasuk in *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 34:31), “Now, you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Man.” Only Am Yisrael is called *Man*. Why is this so? Are the nations of the world compared to animals?

Only a person who contains within him the Name of Hashem is considered the ultimate *Man*. Hashem blew of Himself into his nostrils (*Tanya* 282, in the name of the *Zohar*).

Moreover, Bnei Yisrael have the advantage of their Torah study. The Torah states (*Bamidbar* 19:14), “This is the teaching regarding a *man*

who would die in a tent.” Chazal expound (*Berachot* 63b), “Torah endures only in one who sacrifices himself for it.”

Notwithstanding their exalted level, Bnei Yisrael do not hold highly of themselves. They are called אדם, from the word אדמה (ground). This is a reference to their humility, a trait that they absorbed from Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah testifies about him (*Bamidbar* 12:3), “Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person...” Although he was on the most lofty level imaginable, equivalent to the entire Bnei Yisrael, Moshe maintained the greatest level of humility possible (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:64).

Therefore, Bnei Yisrael earned closeness with the Torah and Hashem Yitbarach. The Zohar (*Acharei Mot* 73a) states, “Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

Conversely, the nations of the world do not merit the title *Man*. They removed themselves from this league, through their actions. Their arrogance, coupled with their lack of Torah to guide them, has prevented them from inclusion in this category (*Bereishit Rabbah* 83:4).

From here we see how an aveirah darkens a person’s path. The light of Torah no longer illuminates his way. The *kelippah* gains strength to prosecute against him in *Shamayim*. On the other hand, we note how preparation for a mitzvah distances the *Yetzer Hara* from a person, so that he cannot interfere in the mitzvah.

————— In Summary —————

- At *Kabbalat HaTorah*, the entire world shook. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why the Satan asked Hashem afterward, “Where is the Torah?” How was he kept in the dark about what was going on in the entire world? Also, how can we say that Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah through fear and coercion after they had proclaimed “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” of their own accord?
- It is impossible to accept something wholeheartedly, without recognizing its

value. Therefore, although Bnei Yisrael cried out “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” their acceptance of the Torah was considered compulsory, for they did not yet realize its true worth. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that their preparation for receiving the Torah was deficient, they still managed, through its power, to remove *tumah* from themselves, eliminating the Satan. He was not even aware that the Torah was being given.

- The *Yetzer Hara* returned only after Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf. The Satan desired to continue with his work. Therefore, he searched for the Torah. When he did not find it in *Shamayim*, he looked throughout the Earth. Nowhere could he discern the great light of Torah. When a person damages a mitzvah, he brings darkness to his surroundings, to the extent that Torah learning in that place is not noticeable. The Satan could not perceive the *kedushah* of Moshe Rabbeinu’s Torah knowledge. This was because, in his tremendous humility, he succeeded in concealing the light of his Torah within himself. Only Hashem could appreciate his spiritual level.
- The angels questioned, “What (מה) is a man of flesh and blood doing among us?!” They hinted that although Man carries the Name of Hashem within him (since the *gematria* of מה is forty-five, the same as the *gematria* for the Name of Hashem יהוה-וה-י), he is still flesh and blood. Why aren’t the gentiles called *Man*? Only one who contains the aspect of Hashem’s Name within him may be called *Man*.

ACCEPTING THE TORAH IN EVERY PLACE AND AT ANY TIME

“Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem... You shall convoke on this very day – there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves”

(*Vayikra 23:16:21*)

The Torah does not mention the date of the Giving of the Torah as the sixth of Sivan. It merely states that it should be celebrated after the seven weeks of counting the Omer. Why isn't the central theme of the day, the Giving of the Torah, mentioned at all?

Furthermore, why don't our Sages require that every so often, a person make the journey to Har Sinai, the site of *Matan Torah*, where Hashem rested His glory?

Hashem's *Shechinah* rested upon Har Sinai for only a few days. When Am Yisrael left the site, the *Shechinah* left with them, leaving no vestige of *kedushah* whatsoever. As long as Hashem's Presence filled the mountain, all were forbidden from approaching it. The cattle were restrained from grazing there. As soon as the *Shechinah* departed, all were permitted to ascend the mountain (*Shemot* 34:3; 19:3).

There is no fixed place and there is no fixed date for Torah study. Wherever a person finds himself, and any time he desires, he is capable of learning. Wherever he is becomes instantly transformed into a miniature Beit Hamikdash (see *Megillah* 29a). It becomes similar to Har Sinai on the day the Torah was given.

Had Hashem left behind a remnant of *kedushah* on Har Sinai, people would mistakenly believe that only there is it possible to merit blessing, *kedushah*, and elevation in Torah.

Therefore, the Torah clearly indicates that the *kedushah* of Har Sinai was temporary. Any place where a person would subsequently learn Torah would become sanctified and receive the same abundance of holiness which enveloped Har Sinai at the Giving of the Torah.

For this reason, as well, the date of Shavuot is not clearly spelled out. Any time a person wishes to learn becomes like the day of *Matan Torah*. This is in line with the statement of Chazal: “Every day, they (words of Torah) should be new in your eyes, as though you just received them at Har Sinai, and were just commanded to fulfill them” (*Pesikta Zuta, Va’etchanan* 6:6).

Moreover, when Bnei Yisrael reaffirmed their covenant with Hashem before Moshe died, he adjured them (*Devarim* 27:9), “Be attentive and hear, O Israel: This day you have become a people to Hashem.” However, this was not the day that they received the Torah. This statement was made at the end of their forty-year sojourn in the desert. From here we learn that Torah is as precious to those who learn it as it was on the day it was given on Har Sinai.

We find that Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkinus began learning Torah at the age of twenty-two (*Aderet d’Rabbi Natan* 6). Nonetheless, after a few short years of learning at the feet of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, he became his star disciple. He was called by his teacher a “cemented cistern that does not lose a drop” (*Avot* 2:9).

Who is greater than Rabbi Akiva (*Sanhedrin* 68a), his disciple? Until the age of forty, he was an ignoramus (*Bereishit Rabbah* 100:11; *Aderet d’Rabbi Natan* 6). He took a lesson from a hole created in a stone from drops of water constantly dripping onto it from above. He said, “If the soft [water] can pierce the hard [stone], then certainly, words of

Torah, which are hard as iron, can penetrate my heart of flesh and blood.”

He became a *talmid chacham* of incredible stature. He was a treasure packed with Torah knowledge (*Gittin* 16a). The angels wished to repel him, but Hashem held them back, stating, “Leave him be, for he is permitted to utilize My honor” (*Chagigah* 15b).

Our history is replete with examples of people who overcame the constraints of time and place to grow in Torah. At any given time, and in any given place, a person has the potential to begin learning Torah, just as at Har Sinai.

The Torah was written on stone (*Shemot* 34:1). This teaches us that even a person whose mind and heart are hard as stone, full of the frivolities of this world, will be influenced by the Torah once he begins to learn it.

The Gemara relates (*Shabbat* 104a; *Megillah* 2b; 3a) that the letters מ (mem) and ס (samech) on the *luchot* remained in place in a miraculous way. They should have fallen, since they were completely disconnected from the *luchot*. This teaches us a lesson for life. A person may find himself “locked in” on all sides, with no way out, surrounded by troubles and problems. However, as soon as he sets his mind to learning Torah, with the zest described in the pasuk in Tehillim (119:97), “O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation,” the Torah will become his shield and support, helping him to overcome all obstacles, just like the letters מ and ס were miraculously supported within the *luchot*, which represent the Torah.

The letter ס alludes to this support, since its name סמך is related to סמיכה (support). This hints that even if a person is at the brink of despair, the Torah has the ability to revitalize him and strengthen him so that he not fall. The pasuk (ibid. vs. 116) alludes to this, “Support me according to Your promise that I may live, disgrace me not in my

hope.” Further (vs. 117), it states, “Sustain me that I may be saved, and I will always be engrossed in Your statutes.” When a person is engrossed in Torah, he is guaranteed that Hashem will support him.

In Summary

- Why didn't the Torah specify Shavuot as the day on which the Torah was given, and only states that *Kabbalat HaTorah* must be celebrated after the seven weeks of Sefirat Haomer? Furthermore, why was the *kedushah* of Har Sinai temporary, instead of lasting for all generations?
- This teaches that it is possible to acquire Torah at any time and in any place. We find, throughout our history, people who became aroused to study Torah at an advanced age. Nonetheless, they merited becoming Torah giants. Torah was recorded on stone to hint to a person that even if his head is as hard as stone, he is capable of acquiring Torah.

WHO HAS CHOSEN US FROM AMONG THE NATIONS

*“Take a census of the entire assembly of the
Children of Israel according to their families,
according to their fathers’ household”*

(Bamidbar 1:2)

The Midrash relates (*Yalkut Shimoni* 684) that when Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, the nations of the world became envious of them. They demanded to know why the Jewish people were being favored above all of the nations, chosen to come close to Hashem. Hashem silenced them by telling them to bring their proof of lineage, as the pasuk in Tehillim states (96:7), “Render unto Hashem, O families of the peoples,” just as Bnei Yisrael had, as the above pasuk testifies.

The author of the sefer *Vayechi Yosef* asks: What exactly was the grievance of the gentiles? Aren't we told (*Rashi, Devarim 33:2*) that Hashem offered the Torah to all of the nations of the world, but they refused it? Only Bnei Yisrael accepted it unquestioningly, as the pasuk states, "Whatever Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear." What, then, was their charge? Furthermore, how is the Torah connected to one's lineage? The Mishnah specifically states (*Avot 2:17*), "Apply yourself to study Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance."

I would like to suggest that the gentiles were not aware of the extraordinary significance of the Torah. They mistakenly believed that the Torah is nothing but a code of laws, just like any other. One who transgresses these laws is punished, and one who upholds them is rewarded. But they did not recognize the hidden essence of Torah. They did not realize that one who is engrossed in Torah study merits closeness with the *Shechinah*. The Zohar states (*Vayikra 73*), "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and Yisrael are one." One who accepts the yoke of Torah becomes beloved and prominent in Hashem's eyes.

This was something that the nations did not comprehend. When the gentiles observed how Bnei Yisrael were cherished by Hashem because they accepted His Torah, chosen from among all to be His favored people, they were consumed by envy, desiring to receive such royal treatment themselves. Their main complaint was that Bnei Yisrael merited coming closer to Hashem in the *zechut* of Torah, and were now more beloved to Him than they could ever hope to be.

Hashem silenced them by ordering them to bring their book of lineage, just as Bnei Yisrael had done. This was in order to show them that Bnei Yisrael are cherished by Hashem because they preserve their pedigree. They follow in the footsteps of their forefathers, devoting their lives to fulfilling Hashem's mitzvot for the sake of Hashem and His Torah.

Even in the depravity of Egypt, Bnei Yisrael maintained their purity of soul as much as possible, not changing their language, names, or mode of dress. They also guarded themselves against immorality, as the pasuk says (*Shir Hashirim* 4:12), “As chaste as a garden locked, My sister, O bride.” They were worthy of being named after and associated with their holy fathers. They deserved Hashem’s unbounded love. But the gentiles had long abandoned their spiritual ties with the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. They rejected their ways, choosing instead the path of perversion. This path, though, is full of and thorns and brambles. Amidst the jungles of their lives, they lost their lineage, and had no claim to becoming the chosen nation.

For this reason, the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 1:2) uses the words “שאו את ראש – Take a census.” The word ראש means *head*. Hashem was telling Bnei Yisrael, “I love no other creation more than you. Just as I am the Head of everything, so have I made you the head.” This is in line with the pasuk in Tehillim (148:14), “וירם קרן לעמו – And He will have exalted the pride of His nation.” The initials of the words וירם קרן לעמו spell the word קול (voice). This is a reference to the voice of Torah, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit*, 27:22), “The voice is Yaakov’s voice.” Am Yisrael are worthy of the title *head*, for they continue in the ways of their fathers, sacrificing their lives for Torah, and the sound of Torah constantly resonates among them. The *Tanna* tells us (*Avot* 3:14), “Beloved are Bnei Yisrael, for a cherished utensil (Torah) was given to them; it is indicative of a greater love that it was made known to them that they were given a cherished vessel.” We are cherished immensely by Hashem because we uphold His Torah.

Naturally, accepting the Torah must be accompanied by possessing proper character traits. The *Tanna* states (*Avot* 3:17), “If there is no *derech erez*, there is no Torah.” One who possesses inappropriate character traits, specifically the trait of arrogance, the root of all evil *middot*, cannot acquire Torah. There is a hint to this in the parashah dealing with the Kohanim. The pasuk states (*Bamidbar* 3:9), “You shall

present the Levi'im to Aharon and his sons – presented, presented are they to him – from the Children of Israel.” My disciple, HaRav Yechiel ben Moshe, asked why the Torah uses the double language of *presented*? Furthermore, who did this act and for what purpose?

I replied the following: We know that the Levi'im took the place of the firstborn to serve in the Mishkan, as the pasuk states (ibid. 3:12), “Behold! I have taken the Levi'im from among the Children of Israel, in place of every firstborn, the first issue of a womb among the Children of Israel.” Rashi expounds, “For the service had been performed by the firstborn, but when they sinned with the Golden Calf, they were disqualified. And the Levi'im, who did not participate in the idol worship of the Golden Calf, were chosen instead of them.”

However, there was a very real fear that the Levi'im would become arrogant, since they had been chosen from among all of the tribes to serve in the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, the pasuk reminds them that they were presented to Hashem by Bnei Yisrael. They were merely filling the posts of the firstborn. They should not, *chalilah*, become haughty due to their high station.

The Levi'im were the ones most in need of this warning, for they were the ones who carried the banner of Torah, teaching Am Yisrael the proper mode of behavior. Moshe said about them (*Devarim* 33:10), “They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael.” Torah cannot co-exist with arrogance. Torah is compared to water, as the pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 55:1), “Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.” The Gemara explains (*Ta'anit* 7a), “How are words of Torah compared to water? Just as water flows downward, so does Torah exist only in one who humbles himself.” The Levi'im were warned not to lord over their fellow Jews, for they were only substitutes for the firstborn.

This parashah is read close to Shavuot, the time of *Matan Torah*. One merits receiving the Torah commensurate with the preparations he

made beforehand. Pious and righteous men used to prepare themselves for this festival just as they would prepare themselves for Yom Kippur. The *sefarim* state that every year on the holiday of Shavuot, the same Heavenly lights radiate once again, just as they illuminated the world at *Matan Torah*. An abundance of spirituality once more descends upon the world. It is a time most auspicious for receiving the Torah anew, amidst perfect teshuvah.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* writes that just as on Rosh Hashanah mankind is judged for children, life, and sustenance, so is he judged on Shavuot for spiritual matters. On that day it is decreed how much the light of Torah will influence him. When a person prepares himself by improving his character, he becomes a fitting vessel for Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

The sanctity of these days can affect each and every Jew, even those who are estranged from Hashem. If he will only arouse his heart to breathe life into the pure spark that has become extinguished in his soul, taking a small step toward accepting the Torah, there is no doubt that Hashem will come to his aid, and he will be influenced by the great light which shines forth at this time.

I once found myself in Argentina a few days before the festival of Shavuot, 5571. I was hosted by the holy community, which, with Heavenly assistance, we had a share in establishing. *Baruch Hashem*, it is today a vibrant center of spirituality. The members of the community constantly strive to reach greater heights in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. A member of the community approached me, together with a business associate. He asked me to bless his partner's daughter, who was very sick.

In general, I write out my blessings to Jews on a piece of stationery of our holy institutions, which has a picture of my holy grandfather, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, zt"l, as well as the pasuk, "Please, G-d, heal her now" (the tefillah that Moshe prayed on behalf of Miriam, his sister)

printed on it. Due to the sanctity of the page, I write out my blessings for gentiles on a plain sheet of paper.

This time, though, I mistakenly began writing my blessing to this non-Jew on one of our pieces of stationery. The man who had brought his friend pointed out my error, and I halted immediately. His associate saw me cease mid-writing and asked his friend what had stopped me. The man explained my time-honored custom not to write out a blessing for non-Jews on stationery of the institutions, for they are not aware of the sanctity of the page. Suddenly, the man responded, "My mother is a Jewess!" I was very moved, and replied, "Well, that makes you a Jew, as well. It was pre-ordained on High that I write out the blessing on the sheet of the institution."

The man was very impressed by what had occurred and was joyous at discovering that he, too, was a member of the chosen nation. His joy quickly dissipated, though, at the realization that his children were non-Jews, for he was married to a gentile woman. He became grief-stricken at the predicament in which he now found himself. He was obligated to sever all contact with his wife, and his relationship with his entire family would now have to undergo a severe shift. His only option was to convert them all according to halachah, bringing them under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

His great distress touched my heart, and I told him the following: "In a few days, it will be the festival of Shavuot, the time of Receiving the Torah. A great measure of spirituality illuminates the world at this time, through the blessing of these sanctified days. They are capable of cleansing one's soul, if one prepares himself properly to make himself a fitting vessel."

I parted from him with warmth and blessed his daughter with a complete recovery. I sincerely hope that my heartfelt words entered his heart to awaken him to return to Hashem and open a new page in his life as a kosher, loyal Jew.

May it be Hashem's will that we all arouse ourselves to love and fear Hashem, observing His mitzvot all of our days.

————— In Summary —————

- When Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, the nations of the world became envious of them. Hashem silenced them by telling them to bring their proof of lineage. What was the point of this? Moreover, why were the nations jealous? They had also been offered the Torah by Hashem, but had refused it.
- The gentiles did not recognize the hidden essence of the Torah. They mistakenly believed that the Torah is nothing but a code of laws, just like any other. They didn't realize that one who is engrossed in Torah study merits closeness with the *Shechinah*, as it says, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and Yisrael are one." They were jealous that Bnei Yisrael were the Chosen People, closer to Hashem than they could ever hope to be.
- Hashem silenced them by ordering them to bring their book of lineage, just as Bnei Yisrael had done. This was to prove that Bnei Yisrael followed in the path of their holy forefathers and had not abandoned their ways. They thus merited receiving the Torah. This was not true concerning the gentiles.
- Accepting the Torah must be accompanied by possessing proper character traits, as it says, "If there is no *derech erez*, there is no Torah." One must be especially careful to avoid becoming arrogant. Torah is compared to water. Just as water flows downward, so does Torah exist only in one who humbles himself." This lesson is taught by the presentation of the Levi'im. They were presented by Bnei Yisrael to remind them that they were taking over the position that should have belonged to the firstborn.
- Every year on the holiday of Shavuot, the same Heavenly lights radiate once again, just as they illuminated the world at *Matan Torah*. On Shavuot, it is decreed how much the light of Torah will influence him. When a person prepares himself by improving his character, he becomes a fitting vessel for Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

MOSHE'S BATTLE WITH THE ANGELS

“G-d spoke all these statements, saying”

(Shemot, 20:1)

The Gemara relates (*Shabbat* 88a) that when Moshe ascended to Heaven, the ministering angels asked Hashem, “What is a human being doing among us?” He replied, “He has come to receive the Torah.” They then countered, “How can You be willing to give this treasure, which was hidden for 974 generations before the Creation of the world, into the hands of flesh and blood?!”

Hashem ordered Moshe to provide a fitting response. Moshe clutched the Heavenly Throne and proclaimed, “What does it say in the Torah that Hashem wishes to give us? ‘You shall not kill,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal.’ Do you have any feelings of envy? Do you have any inclination to steal? Do you have any inclination at all?!”

The angels were immediately silenced into submission and proclaimed, “Hashem, our Master, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth.”

The angels were not disturbed in the least by the fact that a human being could ascend to their world. The Gemara relates (*Chagigah* 14b) that four holy *Tanna'im* entered *Pardes* and ascended to Heaven by means of verbalizing the Ineffable Name. Surely Moshe Rabbeinu, who knew all the secrets of the Torah, was able to ascend to Heaven, as well. Rather, the angels wanted to know what Moshe's purpose was on High. Even after Hashem told them that he had come to receive the Torah, they were not appeased. They demanded that Hashem retain His glory in Heaven. They felt that the Torah could influence the people on earth just as well from its Heavenly abode. The sun, for example,

pursuing the passing pleasures of this world. One day, as they were listening to words of inspiration, something stirred inside them. The words impacted them to come close to Hashem. Suddenly, a change was discernable in their lifestyle. After some time, they were able to erase their past completely. They became completely transformed into perfect tzaddikim and *yerei Hashem*. They became spiritually sanctified.

The Torah has the power to change a person of flesh and blood into a spiritual entity, similar to the angels. Therefore, we may never write off any Jew. No one is beyond hope. If they would only be given a taste of Torah, they would have the resources with which to reach the peak of perfection. This applies on condition that one wants to arouse his heart and preserve the enthusiasm for *kedushah* which was ignited therein.

With great *siyata di'Shemaya*, we merited, in Shevat 5771, to arrange a gathering in Marseille for inspiration in Torah and mitzvot. A tremendous amount of people participated, over seven thousand strong, many of them unfortunately far from a life of Torah. Nevertheless, they felt an affiliation with Torah-true Judaism. These Jews are traditional and believe in Hashem, but they never merited studying Gemara. I am overwhelmed with emotion at the memory of the *kiddush Hashem* that took place at the closing of this gathering, after the *shiurei Torah* were delivered. The entire assemblage stood up as one, and declared, with utmost intensity, "*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad.*" Their voices resonated far and wide, and the tears kept flowing from their eyes. There is no doubt that thoughts of teshuvah filled their minds.

This is the way of the Jew. As soon as his *neshamah* discovers the beauty of Torah, it immediately becomes aroused to return to the ways of its ancestors and to its Heavenly Father. At that moment, the vulgar body which had been mired in the muck of materialism is drawn to

follow the spiritual light that the *neshamah* discovered, and becomes transformed as well. If this person will wisely continue to fan the flame that was kindled in his heart, he will merit reaching the level of the ministering angels, pure and free of all things physical.

At that celebrated ceremony, a broadcaster of a popular radio station in Marseille took the stand. He recounted his moving story, which did not leave one dry eye in the entire audience. This is the story he told.

His young son was diagnosed with cancer, *rachmana litzlan*, growing sicker with each passing day. The doctors despaired of his recovery and informed his family that there was nothing more that they could do. A good friend of this man, a dear Jew by the name of Michael Ben Shushan, suggested he receive a blessing from the grandson of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy" a. In the merit of his forefathers, the *berachah* of Rabbi David, shlita, would surely be accepted. This man had no idea who this Rabbi David was and had never heard of the wonders of his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim. Nonetheless, he agreed to go.

He told the Rav of his son's sad state. The Rav responded, "True, the doctors have given up hope. But you should know that Hashem can do anything. Let us increase our prayers, and He will surely have mercy." The Rav gave the young boy his heartfelt blessing, with great concentration, that in the merit of his ancestors, he should have a speedy recovery.

With Hashem's kindness, the blessing of the tzaddik had effect. In a most miraculous manner, the boy regained vitality. His condition improved from day to day, and *Baruch Hashem*, he is today hale and hearty! It is superfluous to mention what a great *kiddush Hashem* ensued. Everyone saw with their own eyes that there is a Creator Who can do anything. The message was sharp and clear. The life of every creature is in His hands. We must always have faith in Him, for those

who trust in Him merit His salvation, as David Hamelech tells us (*Tehillim* 32:10), “As for one who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him.”

Returning to our original discussion, we can explain Moshe’s response to the angels in another way. The Torah clothes a person in spiritual garb. By means of observing the 613 mitzvot, a person merits wearing 613 garments. These sanctified garments protect him from the arrows of the *Yetzer Hara*. Each mitzvah and every additional word of Torah study provides a person with another layer of protection against the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara*.

This is why Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 114a) that a *talmid chacham* who has a stain on his clothing deserves to be put to death. This indicates that if his spiritual clothes become soiled due to sin, or stained due to a laxity in Torah study, they lose their efficacy in protecting him from the dangers of the *Yetzer Hara*, who constantly lies in ambush. He deserves to be put to death for placing himself in spiritual danger. The Gemara states (*Kiddushin* 30b), “Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, ‘I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created Torah as its antidote.’” Torah study wraps a person in protective layers, keeping out the cold finger of the *Yetzer Hara*, his spiritual enemy.

This was Moshe’s rejoinder to the charge of the angels “What is a human being doing among us?” He answered, “Why do we have a *Yetzer Hara* within us? Why does this Angel of Evil walk among people, intent on diverting them from the path of goodness and ensnaring them in his trap? He is an angel made of fire, while they are mere mortals of flesh and blood. They are most in need of the Torah, the spiritual cloak which can protect them from harm. But the angels on High have no *Yetzer Hara*, and therefore do not require this special protection. It is *people* and not angels who deserve to have the Torah.”

The *Navi* Yechezkel states (34:31), “אדם אתם – You are man.” Chazal expound (*Yevamot* 61a), “אתם קרויים אדם, ואין עכו”ם קרויים אדם – You are

called *Man*, but the nations of the world are not called *Man*.” The letters of the word אמת can be transposed to spell אמת (truth). This alludes to the Torah, the ultimate truth. The word אדם is numerically equivalent to the Name יהוה, when each letter is spelled out and adding one for the word itself. By means of Truth, one merits becoming a man. One who is involved in Torah is cloaked in the garb of Torah, comprised of Hashem’s Names, and merits the title *Man*. But the nations of the world, who are not connected to the Torah, neither possess this spiritual garment nor the illumination of Hashem’s Names shining upon them, for they are not called *Man*.

Parashat *Yitro* begins with the words (*Shemot* 18:1), “And Yitro heard.” Rashi expounds, “What report did he hear that had such a great effect on him that he came [and joined the Jewish people]? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.” Yitro felt the lack of the spiritual garb which would grant him the title *Man*. He heard that at the Splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael became especially close with Hashem and merited seeing the *Shechinah*. They all proclaimed, “This is my G-d and I shall built for Him a Sanctuary!” This exalted moment was a spiritual garb against the *Yetzer Hara*. They would never forget the experience.

When Yitro heard about the war with Amalek, who attacked Bnei Yisrael after they became weak in their Torah study, he realized that one who is lazy and lackadaisical with his Torah studies stains his spiritual garb so that it can no longer provide protection from the *Yetzer Hara*, personified by Amalek. Such garb is similar to an expensive suit that is wrinkled and discolored. It does not flatter its wearer in any way and serves no purpose whatsoever.

Yitro immediately came to join Bnei Yisrael in order to study Torah, for he wished to wear the cloak of spirituality that it provided, to gain protection from the *Yetzer Hara*. May we all merit wearing spiritual garments, beautiful and becoming.

————— In Summary —————

- The angels objected to Moshe taking the Torah for Bnei Yisrael. Moshe countered that angels are spiritual beings without a *Yetzer Hara* and therefore do not need the Torah. Man, however, has a *neshamah*, which is a spark of the Divine. Learning Torah helps a person empower his *neshamah* over his physical being, ridding itself of all spiritual dirt and defilement, until it eventually transforms the body itself into something divine.
- We should never underestimate the value of every Jew. The Torah has the potential to change a person of flesh and blood into a spiritual entity, similar to the angels. This is the power of the *ba'al teshuvah*.
- The Torah clothes a person in spiritual garb. By means of observing the 613 mitzvot, a person merits wearing 613 garments. These sanctified garments protect him from the arrows of the *Yetzer Hara*. Angels do not possess a *Yetzer Hara*, and thus do not require protection against him. Man does possess a *Yetzer Hara*, thus he is the one who needs the Torah's protection. This was Moshe's argument against the angels.
- Bnei Yisrael are called *Man*, but the nations of the world are not called *Man*. The letters of the word אַתָּם (You) can be transposed to spell אֱמֶת (truth). This alludes to the Torah, the ultimate truth. Through keeping the Torah, Bnei Yisrael become the true *Man*.

THE THREE WEEKS



AHAVAT CHINAM – RECTIFICATION FOR THE DESTRUCTION

Chazal tell us that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of the sins of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (*Gittin* 55b). There was a man who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza. When he made a festive meal for the Sages, his messenger accidentally invited Bar Kamtza instead of Kamtza. When the man saw his enemy, he banished him from the banquet amidst great disgrace. The Sages attending the banquet did nothing to stop him.

Bar Kamtza then went and informed on the Jews to the Roman emperor, saying, “The Jews rebelled against you.” He told him that he could ascertain that for himself by sending an offering to be sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash. He would see that the Jews would refuse to sacrifice it. Bar Kamtza made a blemish on the calf, rendering it unacceptable as a *korban*. Thus began the series of events which led to the *churban*.

The Roman general Neron shot arrows in different directions, but they all flew in the direction of Yerushalayim. When Neron reached Yerushalayim, he asked a child what he had learned that day. The child replied that he had learned the verse (*Yechezkel* 25:14) “Then I will place my vengeance in Edom in the hand of My people Israel.” Neron said, “Hashem wants to destroy His house and then wipe His hands on

me [punish me].” Neron escaped and converted. Rabbi Meir descended from him, about whom our Sages say, “He would light up the eyes of Israel in halachah” (*Eiruvin* 13b). Later, the emperor sent Vespasian to Yerushalayim to destroy the Beit Hamikdash.

This account of the events leading up to the destruction presents several difficulties.

First, the period in which the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza occurred was a time of major political upheaval. Many events could be considered the causes of the destruction. In what way was the provocation caused by the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza more powerful than other provocations, to the extent that it is considered the major cause of the destruction?

Second, the fact that the friend and the enemy shared the similar names of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is surprising and calls for our attention.

Third, it seems strange that the story about Neron Caesar is written here. After all, it was not Neron who ultimately destroyed the Beit Hamikdash. Neron escaped the armed forces and converted, while Vespasian and his friends took over the dirty work of destroying the Beit Hamikdash. In this case, the story about Neron is tangential to the destruction. Why was it included in the Talmudic account of the events leading up to the destruction? It seems that the narrative about Kamtza and Bar Kamtza should be immediately followed by that of Vespasian.

The entire story and the way it is told can help us gain a deeper understanding of the destruction and exile, and also teach us what steps are necessary to bring about the redemption.

In the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, we find that not only they, but in fact, many people, acted in a way that invited destruction. This is indicated by the word בר (Bar), as in בר קמטצא (Bar Kamtza), which has the same letters as the word רב (many.) This indicates that all of

the people who sat at the banquet and did nothing to stop the ugly scene taking place before their eyes can be called “Bar Kamtza” as well. They saw the host’s hatred for Bar Kamtza, but did not protest. The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of this kind of baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*).

This is evidenced by the fact that Bar Kamtza informed not only on the host, but on all the people sitting at the banquet. The people who did not protest were also ultimately punished, as our Sages say, “Whoever is able to protest but fails to do so is also punished, and the sin is ascribed to him as well” (*Shabbat 54b*). They were just as culpable for the destruction as Bar Kamtza. Thus, there were many Bar Kamtzas at the banquet.

This is what the Gemara means by saying “Yerushalayim was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.” Because of one Kamtza and because of “Bar” (i.e., many) Kamtzas, who did not protest, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed. Everyone realized that Bar Kamtza was willing to make peace with the host. The host’s refusal to make peace was a blatant demonstration of *sinat chinam*.

After being cast out, Bar Kamtza went to the king and informed on the Jews. The Midrash says that this refers to “the King of the Universe.” He turned to Hashem and complained about the Jewish people, telling about their painful lack of unity (*Yalkut Shimoni, Esther 1057*). It is only through unity that the Jewish people are redeemed (*Tanchuma, Nitzavim 1*), and as such, without unity, they are not worthy of having a Beit Hamikdash. He told Hashem that by their disunity they were assaulting Hashem, blemishing their own G-dly image. By making a blemish in the animal sent by the emperor for an offering (קרבן), he demonstrated that the Jews were even blemishing the Torah, through which a Jew becomes close (קרוב) to Hashem.

Since they did not love each other, they were not worthy of the Beit Hamikdash. That is why the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, and that

is the meaning behind the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. The similarity between the names indicates that Bar Kamtza was actually the “name” of all the people who sat there and did not protest; the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of all of them.

Now we can understand why the incident concerning Neron Caesar is included in the account of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. We know that Hashem precedes the remedy to the ailment (*Megillah* 13b); He always gives warning before meting out punishment. As such, before Hashem destroyed the Beit Hamikdash, the “light of the world” (*Bava Batra* 4a), He needed to prepare the building that would stand after the destruction, as Chazal say (*ibid.* 3b), “A person should not destroy a Beit Hakeneset until he builds another one.” This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Eichah* 2:8), “Hashem resolved to destroy the wall of the daughter of Tzion. He stretched out a line.” Chazal expound that before Hashem destroyed the first Beit Hamikdash, He was already planning the second Beit Hamikdash.

Hashem in His wisdom saw fit that the next Beit Hamikdash would have its origin in a non-Jew, from whose descendants would come a great Jew. This would be the *Tanna* Rabbi Meir (whose name מֵאִיר means “light” – אור), who would light up the world with his wisdom, just as the Beit Hamikdash brought light to the world. Neron’s name (נרון) hints at this since the word נר means “candle,” and it says (*Mishlei* 6:23) that “a mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is light”. Neron was, in fact, a vehicle to restore light to the world. This is why the account of Neron is told within the very account of the destruction.

The story about Neron also teaches us a powerful lesson about repentance. Neron escaped and converted, since he heard that the Jewish nation ultimately awaited a glorious future, and Hashem would avenge the Edomites who had harmed them. He probably even told Bnei Yisrael that Hashem had sent him to destroy the Beit Hamikdash, yet he had refrained from doing so because he realized that Hashem

would then punish him. This is why he merited being the forebear of Rabbi Meir.

Yet Bnei Yisrael failed to learn the lesson from Neron. They saw what a destructive effect their hatred was having. Even though they witnessed the host's great hatred for Bar Kamtza, they did not protest at all. They even laughed at Bar Kamtza's disgrace. They realized that the Beit Hamikdash would be destroyed because of their sins, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 10:34), "And the Lebanon will fall by a mighty one," but still failed to repent. That is why Hashem sent Vespasian and his soldiers to destroy the Beit Hamikdash.

The Jewish people should have been awakened to repent upon observing Vespasian with his mighty army. We find that Nevuchadnezzar and Nevuzaradan came up to Yerushalayim many times with the intention of destroying the first Beit Hamikdash, but did not destroy it. Hashem sent them to cause Israel to repent (*Sanhedrin* 96b).

Chazal tell us that Nevuzaradan himself repented (*Gittin* 57b). The prophet Zechariah had predicted the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The wicked Jews hated him for this, and thereby had him killed, in the Beit Hamikdash itself. The fact that Zechariah was a Kohen as well as a prophet, and was killed in the Beit Hamikdash, caused great anger in Heaven. For that reason, Zechariah's blood could not be stilled, and it boiled constantly.

When Nevuzaradan entered the Beit Hamikdash, he was met by the scene of the blood of the prophet Zechariah bubbling on the floor of the Beit Hamikdash. He shed copious amounts of blood, in order to avenge Zechariah's blood. When he saw that Zechariah's blood was not appeased, he repented. But the Jewish nation failed to be awakened by this, and so the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, and the Jews were sent into exile in Bavel.

We see from this that baseless hatred was the cause of the destruction. Only unity and brotherly love will give us the merit to see the Beit Hamikdash once again. This idea is elucidated by the following Gemara.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 81), “Every generation which did not merit the building of the Beit Hamikdash is considered equivalent to the generation in which it was destroyed.” Why is this so? And why did Rabbi Shimon speak about the generation as a whole? Would it not be more to the point to talk about the individual, for example, “Whoever did not merit having the Beit Hamikdash built in his days...?”

Moreover, we should ask the following. Rabbi Shimon said of himself that his righteousness was enough to exempt the entire world from judgment (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 16:3). Our Sages say that in times of trouble it is possible to rely on the merit of Rabbi Shimon (*Berachot* 9a; *Shabbat* 45a). Why was his merit not sufficient to exempt the world from judgment and bring about the building of the Beit Hamikdash? If so, his generation would also be considered as if the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed in it.

The word דור (generation) has the same letters as the word ירד (go down), as in, “Go down [to Egypt]” (*Bereishit* 42:2). In Kabbalah, this word is known to hint at the concept of *tikkun hanitzotzot*. Bnei Yisrael went down to Egypt to elevate *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* buried there. The word דור can also be understood to mean “allocation.” Man is given a certain amount of time in which to correct and repair his soul and elevate holy *nitzotzot* by learning Torah and doing mitzvot.

Now it becomes clear why Rabbi Shimon used the word דור (generation) rather than saying “whoever” or “in his days.” The *tikkun* needs to be for a person’s entire דור – his entire lifetime – the time he has been allocated to live in this world. If a person did not rebuild the Beit Hamikdash during his lifetime, it is as if he destroyed it. Man is like

a miniature Beit Hamikdash; if he does not build himself, it is as if he destroys his own personal Beit Hamikdash.

In addition, even if a person did bring his entire generation to a higher level and became great in Torah, there is still a complaint against him for not having actually rebuilt the Beit Hamikdash. This is what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai meant when he said that he could exempt the entire world from justice. He could exempt his generation from being judged for past sins, but enabling the Beit Hamikdash to be rebuilt was beyond his ability. As great as he was, he was yet an individual, and no individual has the same power as that of a whole generation. This is because the entire generation is responsible for fixing the individual's wrongdoings. Therefore, as long as the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt, the generation is held responsible.

All of the above teaches us the great importance of unity. If we all join together as one to improve our actions and work to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, we will, indeed, merit returning to our Land and seeing the Beit Hamikdash standing in Yerushalayim in all its splendor.

In Summary

- Our Sages tell us that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Yet many disastrous events happened during that period. Why is the incident concerning Kamtza and Bar Kamtza considered to be the main cause of the destruction? Also, how can we explain the similarity between their names? Why is the story of Neron brought as part of the sequence of events leading to the destruction? He didn't actually have a hand in destroying the Beit Hamikdash.
- We might answer as follows. The letters of the word בר (as in Bar Kamtza's name) also spell the word רב (many). This alludes to the fact that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed not only because of Bar Kamtza, but also because of the "many – Bar" Kamtzas who were sitting at the banquet and failed to

protest Bar Kamtza’s disgrace. Bar Kamtza informed the “king,” the King of the universe, telling Him that His nation was disunited and unworthy of having a Beit Hamikdash. Although Hashem did destroy the Beit Hamikdash, He ensured that His people would be provided with light to guide their way through the exile. This is why the story about Neron is brought here. The word נר (included in the name of Neron – נֶרוֹן) means “candle,” as Neron was the forebear of Rabbi Meir, who “lit up the eyes of Israel” with his Torah wisdom. The Torah’s light will continue to guide our way throughout the exile, and lead us to the redemption.

- The great power of unity can be seen from the words of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who said that every generation (דור) which did not merit the building of the Beit Hamikdash is considered equivalent to the generation which saw its destruction. Why is this so? And why did Rabbi Shimon speak about the individual, rather than about the generation? The word דור has the same letters as דרד (go down), implying the allotment of man’s days, which were given to him in order to rectify the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah*. When we fail in this, it is as if our own personal Beit Hamikdash is destroyed in our lifetime, since we failed to become the “living Beit Hamikdash” that we could have become.
- Rabbi Shimon was capable of exempting his generation from judgment for past sins, yet making it worthy of a new Beit Hamikdash was beyond even his ability. No individual, great as he may be, is able to do this. Only the unity of our nation as a whole can regain us the Beit Hamikdash.

AHAVAT YISRAEL

Bar Kamtza informed on the Jewish nation to the emperor, saying that they were rebelling against him (*Gittin* 55b). As proof, he suggested that the emperor send an offering to be brought in the Beit Hamikdash. He would see that the Jews refused to sacrifice it.

The emperor thought that this would be a good test, and sent a three-year-old calf with Bar Kamtza, to bring to the Beit Hamikdash. On

the way, Bar Kamtza made a blemish between the calf's eyes. It was a blemish which renders a sacrifice unacceptable only to the Jews. Some of the Sages thought that it should be sacrificed, but Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas objected, and his opinion was ultimately accepted. This was another significant step in causing the destruction. Rabbi Yochanan later said, "The humility of Zechariah ben Avkulas caused our House to be destroyed, our Temple to be burnt, and exiled us from our land."

This arouses the following questions. Why did the emperor choose to send specifically a three-year-old calf, as opposed to any other offering? Also, why did Rabbi Yochanan hold Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas guilty for his humility? His refusal to bring the offering was seemingly the only course of action considered acceptable by the Torah, in light of the prohibition against sacrificing blemished animals. He also fulfilled the mitzvah of not killing a person who blemishes a sacrifice, by objecting to the Sages' suggestion to have Bar Kamtza put to death for blemishing the emperor's offering. Where was his mistake?

Furthermore, in *masechet Gittin*, we find many harrowing stories of tragedies that happened during that time. The following are various examples of this. Women ate their children; a rich woman searched for semolina, but died of hunger (ibid. 56a); four hundred boys and girls were captured for degradation and cast themselves into the sea (ibid. 57b); men, women and children were murdered by the sword or choked to death; the captives were led away in chains (*Midrash Eichah*).

There are similar stories that took place during the time of the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. Nevuzaradan, the chief executioner, saw the blood of Zechariah boiling on the Beit Hamikdash floor. He murdered the members of the major and minor Sanhedrin, men, women, and Torah scholars. The blood was quieted only after he murdered children on that spot. Then he repented.

We are familiar also with the story of the exiles' encounter with the Yishmaelites. When the Jews were being led from Eretz Yisrael to Babylon, the Yishmaelites approached them with a "humanitarian gift," salted fish and bulging flasks, seeming to contain water to quench their thirst. The Jews ate the fish and then opened the flasks to drink, but instead of water, air escaped from the flasks, filling their insides until they perished (*Yalkut, Eichah* 1:193). How great could the sin of Bnei Yisrael have been that they deserved such terrible punishments? What is the lesson that we can learn?

Bnei Yisrael sinned by having baseless hatred for one another, and that was the cause of the destruction. Brotherly love was a forgotten ideal, and no one respected his neighbor. The flames of dispute destroyed any good that was left within them. Yet none of this awakened Bnei Yisrael, and Bar Kamtza went to inform to the emperor. Major tragedies started to befall them, as a warning signal as to where they were headed. When they failed to heed these messages, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, and the people were sent into exile.

This background helps us understand the answers to the above questions. Firstly, Bnei Yisrael are a three-tiered nation (*Shabbat* 88a), composed of Kohanim, Levi'im, and Yisraelim. This is the significance of the three-year-old calf, which the emperor sent. It hints that the Jewish people are like a *korban* (קורבן), as they also need to come near (קרוב) to their Father in Heaven. If they fail to do so, it is as if they blemish themselves, which is why troubles befall them.

A man must pave a road for himself in this world. He needs to know when to pull on the rope from the one end and when to pull from the other.

Regarding the trait of humility, we know that a man must be exceedingly humble, as it says (*Mishlei* 16:5), "Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem." On the other hand, we sometimes need to utilize the trait of pride, as it says (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 17:6), "His

heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem.” One must recognize the function of different character traits, and understand when each trait is appropriate. For example, the trait of humility is praiseworthy. Yet, on the other hand, if we fail to exercise pride when necessary, this in itself might be detrimental to living peacefully with other people. Sometimes a person’s very humility, or so-called humility, can cause pain to others.

This was the problem with the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas. He realized that the Jewish people were in enormous danger. It would certainly have been in place to rule leniently, allowing the calf to be sacrificed despite its blemish, in order to stave off the emperor’s wrath. However, he failed to take into consideration the nation’s good and safety since unity was a forgotten goal in his days. In prohibiting the offering, he jeopardized the Jewish nation’s welfare. Chazal teach (*Pesikta Zutra, Vayechi* 50:16) that it is permissible to veer from the truth for the sake of peace – internal peace and peace with the government. There were enough choices as to how to accomplish this. A halachic loophole could have been found, which would have made it possible to sacrifice the calf. Alternatively, a different calf could have been sacrificed in its place.

It is possible that this is what Chazal meant by the statement (*Bava Metzia* 30b) “Yerushalayim was destroyed only because the people were rigid in upholding the law.” That is exactly what Rabbi Zechariah did, when he failed to go ahead and realize his responsibility to authorize a change, insisting, instead, on the need for unswerving obedience to the letter of the law. Sacrifices symbolize humility and submission. Unfortunately, in this case, both the sacrifice and Rabbi Zechariah’s humility were blemished. Instead of focusing on the prominence of the law and the smallness of any human being who wishes to change that law, Rabbi Zechariah should have had much greater respect for his fellow Sages, and realized their ability, authority, and responsibility to make changes when necessary.

This is the reason that Rabbi Yochanan said that it was the humility of Rabbi Zechariah that brought about the destruction. His perception of the insignificance of man led him to disregard his fellow Sages' words, and to act against the good of his nation. This caused the sacrifice to remain in a state of blemish, because everything was done according to the strict letter of the law. This was the cause of the destruction.

Understanding this can shed great light on all the stories about the destruction.

The people ate the flesh of their children, since the lack of *ahavat Yisrael* was so great that even mothers failed to have mercy on their children. When the rich woman looked for semolina flour, she didn't find any in all of Yerushalayim, since no one looked out for her, as people were no longer considerate of each other. Similarly, the four hundred boys and girls who threw themselves into the sea did so since there was not a single person who tried to rescue them from their plight. They were left with no choice other than to jump into the water.

The fact that they jumped into the water also hints at another reason for the destruction, "Because of their forsaking My Torah" (*Yirmeyahu* 9:12). The Torah is compared to water. Since the nation had forsaken the Torah, they let go of their connection with Hashem. The Zohar says (*Acharei Mot* 73a), "Torah, Hashem, and the Jewish people are one." The torture and murder of men and women was made possible since there was no love between one another. In the times of the first Beit Hamikdash, the Sages did not try to calm Zechariah's blood, because they wanted this miraculous phenomenon to serve as a constant reminder that the troubles that beset the people were due to their sins. In fact, Zechariah's murder itself was a result of their failing to heed his words, another demonstration of their lack of unity.

When the Yishmaelites gave the Jews sacks that were bloated and empty of water, it was a hint that the Jews had become empty of value,

empty of Torah and mitzvot, since Torah is compared to water. This is what brought about the destruction.

Yirmeyahu walked after the exiles crying. Indeed, there was so much to cry about regarding the low spiritual state which the Jews had reached, causing them such pain and sorrow.

We see that the destruction was caused by *sinat chinam*. Only through unity and brotherly love will we succeed in rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash.

How great is the power of unity and love! The episode of Yosef and his brothers teaches us a lesson in this. After the brothers sold Yosef, they made a pact among themselves that no one would disclose Yosef's whereabouts to their father. They included Hashem Himself as a partner in the oath (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeishev* 142; *Rashi, Bereishit* 37:33). The fact that Hashem consented to be a partner in this oath is a sign that they were truly united as brothers and acted with pure intentions.

Of course, we might ask how Yosef's brothers could be considered the paragons of brotherly love. The very fact that they sold Yosef proved that they did not love him as a brother. On the pasuk "They travelled from here" (*Bereishit* 37:17) the Midrash comments, "They distanced themselves from brotherliness" (*Tanchuma; Zohar* I, 184a). We find the answer in the fact that Yosef, too, was included in the oath. They made him promise not to return to his father. It is amazing to see that he consented with them and cooperated in their plan. This indeed shows the power of unity.

We find two sayings in *masechet Ta'anit*, the Talmudic tractate which deals with mourning. "When the month of Av begins, joy decreases," and, "When the month of Adar begins, joy increases" (*Ta'anit* 26b). It makes sense for the first saying to be written in this tractate, which deals with mourning, but why does the saying about Adar appear in it

also? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to write it in *masechet Megillah*, which deals with Adar and Purim?

“When Adar begins, joy increases.” We are especially happy on the days of Purim, as it says (*Esther* 9:22), “To observe them as days of feasting and gladness.” We might ask what this happiness on Purim is all about; why do we rejoice on Purim? The wicked Haman told Achashveirosh (*ibid.* 3:8), “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples...” Haman’s words implied that Bnei Yisrael deserved to die since they lacked unity.

The Jewish people were quick to repair this fault. When Esther told Mordechai to gather the Jews, she intended that he would reunite them (*ibid.* 4:16). When the Jews did reunite, they became ערבים for one another once again (*Shavuot* 39a). The word ערבים has a double meaning – it means both “responsible” and “sweet, pleasant.” This implies that the Jews reassumed responsibility for one another, and also started to be pleasant to each other again. When Jews are united, Hashem dwells among them, and then no nation has the power to touch them.

After Bnei Yisrael said “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” Hashem suspended Har Sinai above their heads and told them, “If you receive the Torah, fine, and if not, you will be buried here” (*Shabbat* 88a). Why did Hashem need to give them such a drastic ultimatum? Hadn’t they already consented to accept the Torah?

Hashem wanted to show His nation that being willing to accept His word was not enough. Before they could receive the Torah, they also needed to be utterly united. Standing under the mountain together, Bnei Yisrael had the strongest experience of unity imaginable. That is what made it possible for them to receive the Torah.

While this unity was forced on them at Har Sinai, after the Purim miracle occurred, they united themselves of their own volition. Our

Sages say, “They accepted it again in the time of Achashveirosh, as it says (*Esther* 9:27), ‘They observed and accepted.’ They observed that which they had already accepted, to be united together with brotherly love.” This is what caused Haman’s evil decree to be abolished.

Why is it so important to Hashem that we be unified with one another?

Hashem wants to be part of us, as we see from the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:18), “You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am Hashem.” This means: “I am Hashem, included amongst you.”

Now we understand that the exhortation to be happy in Adar fits perfectly in *masechet Ta’anit*. The Gemara there discusses the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. It is important to point out that the destruction was caused by lack of unity, the same unity which characterizes the month of Adar and the joy we feel then. By being unified, we will merit having the Beit Hamikdash rebuilt.

Chazal say, “When the month of Av enters, joy decreases.” When joy is absent, one is in a similar state to mourning. He has no room in his heart for petty hatred or quarrelling. On the contrary, his mourning helps him reflect and take heart. He realizes how petty hatred is and resolves to maintain his love for every person.

Chazal are teaching us that now, during the days of *galut*, and specifically during the days when the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, we must display love toward our fellow Jew and live in unity. In this way, the *galut* will be changed into redemption, sorrow to joy, mourning to festivity. Then, Hashem will reveal Himself to us in the glory of His Kingship, showing His mercy by returning to Zion. And then we will sing a new song as we ascend to the Beit Hamikdash. May this happen speedily in our days.

————— In Summary —————

- In the story about Bar Kamtza, the emperor sent a three-year-old calf to be sacrificed. Since Bar Kamtza made a blemish in it, Rabbi Zechariah decided not to sacrifice it. What was the symbolism in sending a three-year-old calf? And why did the Sages find fault in Rabbi Zechariah's refusal to sacrifice the calf? After all, the halachah prohibits sacrificing blemished animals.
- Why did such terrible suffering befall the Jewish people during the period of the destruction of both Batei Mikdash, as we see from the awful stories that took place, and the fact that Yirmeyahu lamented so bitterly?
- Bnei Yisrael were full of hatred for one another during that time. Hashem sent them many warning signals to make them repent. The three-year-old calf symbolized the Jewish nation, which is made up of the three categories of Kohanim, Levi'im, and Yisraelim. The Jewish nation needed to become close (קרוב) to Hashem, which is the purpose of a sacrifice (קרבת). The incident with Rabbi Zechariah taught an important lesson about misplaced humility and the importance of taking initiative.
- All the stories about the tragedies that took place during the time of the destruction share the element of lack of concern for one another. The flour which the woman was unable to find hints to the flour which Sarah used to prepare bread for her guests. Lack of concern for one another is what made murder, torment, and starvation possible. The children cast themselves into the water to hint that the destruction was also brought about because Torah study, which is compared to water, was lacking. The bloated flasks of the Yishmaelim hinted that the Jewish people were bloated, but empty of Torah and mitzvot.
- These stories teach the tremendous importance of unity. This is what will bring about our redemption. The reason that the statement "When the month of Adar enters, joy increases" is written in *masechet Ta'anit*, which deals with mourning, is to remind us that the Jewish people were saved from annihilation in Haman's time because they became a unified entity once again.

ALL YOUR DEEDS SHOULD BE FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN

“Yerushalayim was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza” (*Gittin* 55b). Thus began the sequence of events which led to the destruction.

How is it possible that the Sages sitting at the meal did nothing to stop the host from shaming Bar Kamtza? By not allowing Bar Kamtza to remain even after he offered to pay for the entire banquet, the host demonstrated outright cruelty and caused Bar Kamtza immeasurable shame. Since the Sages did nothing to save Bar Kamtza from his plight, does that mean they were also filled with baseless hatred?

Suggesting that they pretended not to notice would imply an even greater fault. When a person sees a crime unfolding but decides to look away and does nothing to prevent it, it proves that he does not care. We are prohibited by the Torah from acting in such a way (*Vayikra* 19:16): “You shall not stand aside while your fellow’s blood is shed.”

I believe the Sages’ actions can be better understood based on the following. It seems that there are two types of tzaddikim in the world. The first kind is characterized by their aspiration to fulfill Hashem’s will, while setting aside their own personal interests.

An example of this is the story of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, who went to fulfill the mitzvah of redeeming captives. When he reached the River Ginai, he requested that it split itself so that he could cross. The river replied, “You are going to fulfill Hashem’s will, and so am I. Maybe you will succeed in doing what Hashem wants from you and maybe not, but I will certainly succeed.” Rabbi Pinchas replied, “I order you to split for me, and if you fail to do so, I will command that no water ever flow through you again.” Then the river split for him.

This exchange, and the fact that the river actually did split for Rabbi Pinchas, shows that true tzaddikim always strive to fulfill the will of Hashem. They do so wholeheartedly, without taking their own interests or pleasure into consideration. This is the reason that they are willing to forfeit even their lives for Hashem's sake, without fear.

In contrast, there are so-called "tzaddikim" whose goal in life is to fulfill the will of others. They actually have their own good in mind, as they wish to be liked and admired by all. They try to please the next person, even if they realize that his position is wrong.

This can help us understand the events that happened at the banquet. The Sages sitting there were obviously of the second type, who cared about their public image. Although they did study Torah, they refrained from speaking out against wrongdoing, because they were concerned about what people would think. The Sages did not rebuke the host for shaming Bar Kamtza, because they wanted to find favor in his eyes.

If it is so clear that the Sages were simply trying to preserve their good image, and their silence was not a sign of approval of Kamtza's actions, why did Bar Kamtza feel so strongly that they didn't care? Why did he take revenge in such a drastic way?

We know that the job of a Rav and leader is to exercise authority over the community, influencing and guiding the people to do what is right. If the Sages sitting at the banquet would have fulfilled their job properly, their influence would have elevated the behavior of the people living in Yerushalayim. They would never have been able to sit idly by, especially when the Sages were sitting amongst them.

Yet here we see the exact opposite. It was with the Sages present that a man found the audacity to shame his friend, and no one did anything to stop him. This shows that the host had not received any positive influence from the Sages. Even they kept silent, causing Bar

Kamtza terrible pain. They displayed callousness by not caring enough to speak up and make a difference. That is why Bar Kamtza went and informed to the emperor, setting into motion the beginning of the destruction.

Why did the Sages not fulfill their task of giving reproof? The root cause was baseless hatred. This is hinted by the very words שנאת חנם (baseless hatred). By combining the first and last letters, we get the words שח מת. The word שח is the root of the word שיחה (conversation). The word מת means “dead.” This indicates that the level of communication within the Jewish people deteriorated to the point that it contained no holiness, no positive strivings or constructive reproof; it was full of slander, demonstrating their baseless hatred toward one another. When that is the case, death is the result. Not speaking up was a symptom of the broader disease of not caring for each other. This is what made Bar Kamtza feel that the Sages were not bothered by what was happening, impelling him to inform on the Jews to the Roman emperor.

The story’s continuation illustrates that the Sages were motivated by their concern for their own image, rather than by their sense of responsibility for the nation. Bar Kamtza maimed the sacrifice that the emperor sent with him (*Gittin* 56). The Sages saw the blemish and wanted to sacrifice it anyway, to preserve unity between the Jews and Rome. Then Zechariah ben Avkulas said, “They will say that we sacrifice blemished animals.” Ultimately, the animal was not sacrificed, and the Beit Hamikdash was sacrificed instead. Upon this it is said, “The humility of Zechariah caused the destruction.”

If we ponder the matter, we realize that they should have sacrificed the animal in order to keep peace with Rome. But the Sages heeded the advice of Zechariah, in his mistaken humility, and did not bring the sacrifice. This is because among the Sages, too, there was no peace, and one did not regard the opinion of the other. Each acted upon his

personal motives of finding favor in the eyes of others, rather than acting for the sake of Hashem. This is what brought about the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Beit Hamikdash.

A person should live by the motto of “I am certainly going to fulfill the will of my Creator.” When Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair went to redeem captives, he had the ability to change the course of nature and make the river split. This is because he was acting for Hashem’s sake. The mitzvah of redeeming captives brings glory to Hashem.

If one is not motivated to act for the sake of the honor of Hashem, only sorrow and damage ensue. As an example, we see that Zechariah ben Avkilus did not take into account the opinion of the other Sages and acted according to his own understanding. This is what caused the destruction. It is vital to strive to do that which brings honor to Hashem, without being stubborn in our opinions, or being concerned about what people will say. This will lead to the redemption.

————— In Summary —————

- In the story about Bar Kamtza, it seems strange that the Sages did nothing to prevent the host from shaming Bar Kamtza. Since they realized what was happening and decided to ignore it, they were guilty of the prohibition of “standing aside while their fellow’s blood was being shed.”
- Some tzaddikim are true tzaddikim and act for Hashem’s honor alone, placing their personal interests aside. There are other “tzaddikim” who only appear to be tzaddikim, but act in accordance with what they feel will win them approval. This prevents them from speaking up when Hashem’s honor is at stake. In the story of Bar Kamtza, even though the Sages who sat at his banquet were scholars, it was more important to them to find favor in their host’s eyes than to speak up against his wrong actions. That is why Bar Kamtza felt that they did not care. The people were not influenced by the Sages for the good, since the Sages themselves were infected with the plague of *sinat chinam*. This brought about the destruction.

CORRECTING OUR MIDDOT DURING THE THREE WEEKS

The three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and Tishah b'Av are known as בין המצרים (*Bein Hametzarim*), after the pasuk in Eichah (1:3) which describes how Yerushalayim was overtaken by all its enemies: "All her pursuers overtook her **in dire straits** (בין המצרים)." This implies that these three weeks are a time in which our true enemy, the *Yetzer Hara*, pursues us and tries to make us stumble and fall. In these days we should be especially vigilant to work on our *middot* and learn Torah, being especially careful to increase unity and *ahavat Yisrael*. This will make us worthy of the redemption.

Every person needs to make a serious accounting during this period and examine whether his Torah learning and good deeds are up to par. If he sees that he is lacking, he should do whatever he can in order to fill the void. We should feel like a person walking on a narrow bridge, veering neither right nor left. The entire world is a narrow bridge. The *Yetzer Hara* has so many ways to trip us up. That is why it is so important to walk the straight and narrow path so as not to fall into his trap.

The most important points to focus upon during this time are unity and *ahavat Yisrael*. We see that when the Beit Hamikdash was standing, and the multitudes would crowd to the Beit Hamikdash during the festivals, no one ever complained of not having room to bow down there, or not having a place to sleep in Yerushalayim. Even though it was very crowded, no one complained, since they loved each other and made room for one another. Hashem even performed miracles so that there would be enough space.

Being unified also brings joy to Hashem. Since the time of the destruction, Hashem does not experience true happiness. This is

indicated by the fact that these days are called “days of exile.” Not only is the period of the destruction called “exile,” but our times are, as well. The Satan constantly prosecutes against the Jewish nation, claiming that there is no reason to redeem us, as we have not yet fully repented (*Shemot* 33:3).

The title *בין המצרים* (in dire straits) also connotes distress and mourning. Hashem mourns over the fact that His children are yet in exile. Chazal say (*Berachot* 3a) that every day, Hashem cries over His children and says, “Woe to Me, for I have exiled my sons. Woe to the children who have been banished from their Father’s table.”

In addition, we might say that the term *בין המצרים* hints at *מצרים*, the land of Egypt. When the Jews were in Egypt, the Satan also spoke against them, saying that they should not be saved, since they served idols. Chazal record a great argument which took place in Heaven over whether or not to redeem Bnei Yisrael. We ask Hashem to preside and save us from our present exile, just as he took us out of Egypt. We might also say that the word *גלות* (exile) is related to the word *גילוי* (revelation) as, throughout our exile, we long for Hashem to reveal Himself in His glory and bring the final redemption.

By what concrete means can we bring about the *geulah*? What can each one of us do to bring the *geulah* closer? We have discussed at length the need for working on our *middot*, being unified, and having *ahavat Yisrael*. I would like to focus on a particular point which demonstrates the importance of unity: the issue of making and keeping promises.

Many people tend to make good promises, sometimes about issues which relate to their dealings with other people, and sometimes about matters connected to religious observance. Yet, unfortunately, these promises often remain unfulfilled. The fact that Hashem keeps promises, no matter what, should teach us how important it is to do so. If not for the fact that Hashem had kept his promise to Avraham

Avinu to free his children from Egypt, there would have been no Jewish nation!

Our survival throughout the *galut*, and our hope for the future, are also contingent upon Hashem's promise to our ancestors. Hashem told the Jews in the desert (*Vayikra* 26:44), "While they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not have been revolted by them, nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them... for I am Hashem their G-d." Hashem will keep our nation alive even in the worst times of persecution. Furthermore, the pasuk goes on to say, "I will remember for them the covenant of the ancients." The Targum says that this is talking about Hashem's promise to our forefathers to bring an end to our fourth and final exile. Even if we may fail to be faithful to our covenant with Hashem, to keep the Torah as we promised at Har Sinai, Hashem will still keep His promise with us. We, as His nation, should certainly learn from His example, and keep our promises to Him and to one another!

Our holy sefarim tell us that when one makes a promise but fails to keep it, he will be severely punished, by *galut* or other more severe punishments. Failing to keep a promise is a sign of a lack of *yirat Shamayim*. We often find women who experience great spiritual awakening while standing next to a tzaddik's grave and promise to begin covering their hair from that day on, yet fail to keep their promise. They find it too difficult to uphold their resolution, because of their concern over what their neighbors will say. But aren't they concerned about what Hashem will say? Or about how they will look in the eyes of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov when the final day of reckoning arrives? Apparently, they weren't really awakened to begin with.

It is extremely important to keep promises, even if they were made with ulterior motives in mind. As Chazal say (*Pesachim* 50b), "When one does something with ulterior motives, he will eventually come to do it *l'shem Shamayim*." By keeping promises, we both demonstrate

unity and even increase Klal Yisrael's unity. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, when we keep a promise to another person, we show that we care about him. When we keep a promise to Hashem, we indicate that we care about our relationship with Him. The converse is also true. When people feel that we are reliable, they like and respect us, and it sets the cornerstone for good relationships. When people are able to trust each other and live peacefully together, it brings Mashiach closer.

If only we could bring the *geulah* easily. Every person should pray fervently that Hashem should bring an end to our exile and send Mashiach soon. We must also do teshuvah. Unfortunately, there is a wall that stands between us and our Father in Heaven, as the *Navi* Yeshayahu says (59:2), "Your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d." There is a boundary, created by sins, which makes it difficult for us to repent and come close to Hashem.

How can we break down this wall? The Torah tells us (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "Do not explore after your heart and after your eyes." The Gemara states that the heart and eyes are the two most powerful agents in causing us to sin (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:6). If we but succeed in guarding them, we will manage to overcome all of our shortcomings. The wall will start to crumble, and the *geulah* will be nearer than ever.

Some people think that the way to break down this wall is to go and ask for blessings from tzaddikim, or to pray by the graves of tzaddikim. But if they are not interested in improving, what is the point of these actions, which actually do express a quest to come close to Hashem?

People go to tzaddikim for two reasons. This first is as follows. One of the ways that the *Yetzer Hara* has to placate the *neshamah's* yearnings is to give it a small taste of what it is yearning for. When a person goes to tzaddikim, or to the graves of tzaddikim, he is imbued with a feeling of spiritual achievement, but the *Yetzer Hara* will

continue to hold as much sway over him as he did previously. Second, there is a spark of yearning within the Jewish soul that cries to break through the boundaries between himself and Hashem. When a person goes to a tzaddik's grave, he pours out his heart and feels the boundaries fall away. Then he feels better. But afterward, he goes back to his rebellious ways, due to the force of habit, since the *Yetzer Hara* has not been completely eradicated from within him. That being the case, it seems that all of his pleading is only superficial. The wall of separation is still erect and the consequences of his negative actions still affect him.

When the Jews went up to the Beit Hamikdash for the festivals, no one said that the space was too narrow for him. This means that no wall remained between them and Hashem. They came to the Beit Hamikdash with the purpose of breaking down the wall entirely. They merited experiencing ten different miracles (see *Pirkei Avot* 5:5), since they purified their sight, and, as a result, their hearts were also purified.

In the Hebrew phrase “מעולם לא אמר אדם צר” – No one ever complained that the space was too narrow,” the first letters of each word have the same numerical value as the words עין and לב combined. This teaches that their eyes and hearts were entirely pure, due to the unity amongst them. We should learn from their example to increase our tefillah and teshuvah. Likewise, we should improve our level of unity.

The great power of unity is illustrated by the Generation of the Dispersion. They built a tower which reached the Heavens (*Bereishit* 11:4). The Midrash explains (*Bereishit Rabbah* 38:6) that they built stilts to reach the Heavens so that they could actually ascend and fight with Hashem. Even though this was a very great sin, Hashem did not destroy them. He only scattered them throughout the world, as it states (*Bereishit* 11:7-8), “Come, let us descend and there confuse their

language... And Hashem dispersed them from there over the face of the whole earth.” Hashem scattered them because He saw how powerful they were when unified. If only they would have utilized their unity to serve Hashem, how much they would have achieved!

Furthermore, in the generation of the evil King Achav, a generation of idol worship, the soldiers would always emerge victorious from battle. This is because they never spoke evil against each other. On the other hand, the armies of David and Shaul would often lose in battle, since there were people among them who slandered and spoke against each other. Hashem helps even those who worship idols, if they are unified! Let us learn the lesson from this.

Likewise, the *Navi* says (*Hoshea* 4:17), “Ephraim is attached (חבור) to idols, let him be.” Even when Bnei Yisrael are attached to idols, Hashem will have patience with them if He sees that they are חבור (unified).

This raises an interesting question. Before Hashem destroyed the first Beit Hamikdash, He said, “If only they had left Me, yet kept my Torah” (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7). But if Hashem and the Torah are one (*Zohar, Acharei Mot* 73a), how is it possible to forsake Hashem while keeping the Torah?

Hashem says to Bnei Yisrael, “Even if you don’t want to believe in Me, I will stay at your side, on condition that you keep the Torah’s commandments. Keeping the mitzvot will keep you unified and help you live peacefully together. Then I will dwell amongst you as well. Once that happens, loving Me will come naturally.”

Because the generation of Achav refrained from *lashon hara*, they emerged victorious in battle. Moreover, they greatly revered the Torah. We see this from Chazal’s statement (*Sanhedrin* 101b) that another reason for their success in battle was that King Achav did not want to give the Torah to the king of Aram; he valued the Torah enough to want

to keep it. On the other hand, the soldiers of King David demonstrated lack of unity when they spoke *lashon hara*. Speaking *lashon hara* is a blatant transgression of the Torah itself. They eventually turned away from Hashem altogether. As such, Hashem turned away from them and they lost in battle, time and again. This teaches the tremendous power of unity.

Only through the *middah* of unity will we merit the final redemption. We find that in the first blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei, even though all of the forefathers are mentioned, we close the blessing with the mention of Avraham Avinu, who exemplified the trait of kindness. Chazal say regarding Avraham, “You will be the one whose name is mentioned in the closing.” The *geulah* will come through the attribute of kindness, unity, and brotherly love exemplified by Avraham. Chazal teach (*Tanchuma Nitzavim* 1; *Yalkut Shimoni, Amos* 559) that Mashiach will come only when we are all united as one.

Especially during the Three Weeks, when we feel the pain of the *galut*, it is important to work on unity. During this period, in which the Satan works so hard to find fault with us, we need to show him that we are unified. This way, despite whatever other failings we may have, he won’t be able to say a word against us.

The Three Weeks is not a time for making special requests of Hashem, as it is a period without *mazal*. Our task during these days is to mourn the destruction and attempt to restore unity, work on our *middot*, and do complete teshuvah, through purifying our eyes and heart. Then we will merit the complete redemption.

————— In Summary —————

- The Three Weeks is known as a time that is predisposed to misfortune. The Satan has more power and tries particularly hard to make us stumble during this time. This is why we need to exercise extra vigilance in overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. We can learn a lesson from the unity which prevailed when the

Jews came to Yerushalayim for the festivals. If we do so, it will bring joy to Hashem, Who also mourns over the destruction and exile. By keeping promises that we make, we can build mutual trust and harmony, which, in turn, will bring Mashiach closer.

- We find that King Achav's armies used to win in battle, as the soldiers were unified. In contrast, the soldiers of King David used to lose, since there were slanderers among them. Hashem tells the Jewish people that even if they become distant from Him, they should be careful to keep the Torah. The Torah will guide them to live in harmony with one another, and then Hashem will return to dwell within them, and the redemption will come.

BECAUSE THEY FORSOOK MY TORAH

In Yirmeyahu Hanavi's prophecy regarding the destruction (9:11-12), he reveals its cause: "For what reason did the land perish and become parched like a desert, without a passerby? Hashem has said, 'Because they forsook My Torah.'" What is meant by "they forsook My Torah"? Chazal explain that the people did not make a blessing before learning Torah.

It would certainly seem strange to suppose that the Jews who lived in the time of the Beit Hamikdash and witnessed its glory could possibly stop learning Torah. Furthermore, the statement of Chazal that they did not make a blessing before they learned proves that they did learn. Can neglecting to make a blessing beforehand be tantamount to abandoning the Torah altogether?

Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b) that the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because the nation had transgressed the three cardinal sins of idol worship, adultery, and murder. What caused them to fall to such a low level?

The Torah is called the elixir of life (*Eiruvin* 54a; *Yoma* 72b). Studying it fills a person with constant vibrancy and joy. Not only that, it is equal

to all the other mitzvot. “A man eats its fruit in this world, and the capital remains for him in the World to Come (*Pe’ah* 1:1). Yet, everything which gives us pleasure requires a blessing. Chazal say (*Berachot* 35a), “Whoever enjoys a food without making a blessing first, is considered as one who steals from Hashem.”

This should also apply to Torah study. When one derives enjoyment from Torah study, he needs to make a blessing. If he fails to do so, he is compared to a person who “steals from Hashem.” Conversely, if one does not enjoy his learning or feel the spiritual energy which it contains, the reason would be that he failed to make the blessings first. Had he made the blessings, his heart would have been open to more involvement and understanding, to realizing much greater strength in learning, and to actually feeling the life-giving power which the Torah contains.

It may be possible to feel a certain degree of pleasure in learning even when one learns without making a blessing. Yet the real connection to Torah will be lacking. When this connection is lacking, a person can stumble greatly and do the most serious sins, since a person who does not study can find many loopholes in halachah, permitting him to act as he pleases.

This is the reason that Torah is compared to food. When someone is very hungry, he’s thrilled to finally be able to eat, and makes a blessing with great *kavanah*. He can actually appreciate the food. Similarly, a prerequisite to Torah study is the ability to feel that “it was given today” (*Pesikta d’Rav Kahana* 12:21). Making a blessing before learning enables one to enjoy the Torah’s good taste, to study with appetite and joy.

When a person takes a break from learning to go home and eat, and later returns to the Beit Hamidrash, it is important to reawaken this feeling of renewal. One should try once more to imagine that the Torah had just been given at Har Sinai, and rejoice in the fact that Hashem

has made it possible for him to sit and study. This enthusiasm can actually bring him to the level of emotion and awe which were felt at Har Sinai. He should not think that his study in the afternoon is a mere continuation of the morning's study, since the break he took might have caused him to lose the spark of energy and inspiration which fueled him in the morning.

Just as we need to make a *berachah* every time we eat, learning Torah is no different. We must make a *berachah* upon learning every morning anew. Only great tzaddikim have the ability to constantly stay attached to Hashem and the Torah, even when they eat.

Now we can understand why the omission of making a blessing before learning served as the catalyst for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The Jewish people thought they were on the level of tzaddikim. Therefore, they did not make the *berachot* every time they sat down to learn. Yet this was a mistake, and it caused them to “derive enjoyment from the Torah without a *berachah*,” a type of enjoyment which, by its nature, lacks connection with Hashem.

This is what led them to be haughty, which, in turn, leads a person to transgress the three cardinal sins. Since they had become distant from the Torah and Hashem, it was imperative that they make a *berachah* before learning, to revive the connection. As they failed to do so, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed. In order to correct this, we need to be careful to always make a *berachah* before learning. This will connect us to the Torah and enable us to benefit from its life-giving energy at all times.

————— In Summary —————

- Chazal say that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed since Bnei Yisrael “forsook the Torah.” Yet, it does not seem to make sense that the Jews who lived in the time of the Beit Hamikdash and witnessed its glory could possibly stop learning Torah. Chazal explain that their sin was the failure to make a

blessing before learning. Why was that enough to warrant the destruction? And was that sin powerful enough to make the Jews fall so low that they actually transgressed the three cardinal sins?

- The Torah is called the elixir of life, and is compared to food. Just as if one eats without making a blessing, it is considered that he “stole from Hashem,” and he does not benefit from the food, so too, if a person learns without making a blessing, he is unable to experience the joy of learning, or to connect to the Torah and Hashem.
- In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, the Jewish people thought that they were on the level of tzaddikim, who don’t need to renew their connection to Torah every time they sit down to learn. This led them to become haughty and transgress the three cardinal sins, which brought about the destruction. In order to rectify this, we should be careful to always make a *berachah* before learning. This will enable us to benefit from the Torah’s life-giving energy and experience true joy in our learning, which, in turn, will hasten the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

TORAH AND UNITY – THE ROOTS OF REDEMPTION

The Mishnah says (*Ta’anit* 26a), “When the month of Av enters, joy decreases.” The Satan prosecutes mercilessly in this month, and an extra measure of Divine protection is needed against him. At the same time, it is important to realize that when one utilizes the month of Av to mourn properly for the Beit Hamikdash, he earns Divine protection throughout the year. Chazal say (*Chagigah* 5b), “On the eve of Tishah b’Av, Hashem enters a place which no angel is permitted to enter, and there He cries and mourns over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and Israel’s exile, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 13:17), ‘My soul will cry in its hidden chambers.’”

How can the world exist if Hashem withdraws, so to speak, in order to mourn? How can it survive for even a moment without His protection? On the eve of Tishah b'Av, the darkest night of the year, the Jewish people need Hashem's protection more than ever, as it says (*Tehillim* 121:4), "Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps, the Guardian of Israel."

When one mourns over the destruction together with Hashem, he becomes extremely close to Him. He is protected, and the Satan can do nothing to harm him. Whoever mourns over the destruction merits Hashem's close protection, as Hashem Himself wants to join in his mourning, for His glory is also in exile, together with the Beit Hamikdash.

When Hashem was ready to give us the Torah, He said to Moshe (*Devarim* 4:10), "Gather the people to me and I shall let them hear my words." This indicates that it was the ingathering and unity of the Jewish people which made it possible to give them the Torah. These are the two goals we are striving to attain: Torah and unity. The day of Tishah b'Av rectifies the sin of *bitul* Torah, and Tu b'Av brings back the spirit of unity. In Yeshayahu's famous prophecy of comfort (40:1), "נחמו עמי – Be comforted, be comforted, My people," the word נחמו is repeated to imply two comforts: one for the sin of *bitul* Torah, and one for restoring unity. When we strive and long for these two forms of correction, we earn Hashem's special protection.

Based on this understanding, we can explain the following pasuk in parashat *Va'etchanan*. Hashem told Moshe to tell the Jewish people (*Devarim* 5:26), "Return to your tents." Which tent is Hashem referring to?

When the Jewish people heard Hashem's voice addressing them, they were extremely afraid. They requested of Moshe that he convey Hashem's words to them instead, so that they would not die (*Shemot* 20:16). Yet is it well known that when a person studies, Hashem's voice

can truly be heard speaking from his throat. The Jewish people were asking Moshe “Is it indeed possible to remain alive after seeing Hashem’s voice emit from the mouth of a human being?” To this, Hashem answered, “Return to your tents. If you have succeeded in recognizing that one who studies has such tremendous power that he is even capable of correcting the destruction and bringing about the redemption, you can return without fear to the ‘tent of Torah’, to study in the Beit Hamidrash. The Torah brings life to man, not death; it earns man special protection.”

In a similar vein, Moshe Rabbeinu said, “I implored Hashem at that time, saying (לאמור)...” (*Devarim* 3:23). The words “at that time” allude to fixing times for Torah study. When a person learns Torah, he comes to recognize Hashem. Then, לאמור – Hashem “speaks” to him and helps him understand the Torah.

It is the Torah that connects a person to Hashem. Although he may have many good deeds to his credit, the ultimate means of connection to Hashem is Torah. We are told (*Devarim* 4:4), “But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d – you are all alive today.” Cleaving to Hashem is life, and the Torah is the source of life.

Before Moshe’s passing, he exhorts Bnei Yisrael (*ibid.* 7:7), “You shall observe the commandment (mitzvah), and the decrees and the ordinances that I command you today.” Why is the word “commandment” written in singular form, whereas “decrees” and “ordinances” appear in the plural?

Decrees and ordinances are two individual categories, comprised of many mitzvot. Yet “mitzvah,” commandment, is written in the single form. One single mitzvah, when performed properly, comprises the essence of all the mitzvot. If we perform a mitzvah perfectly, we merit rectifying different levels of Torah, increasing unity, and bringing about the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

————— In Summary —————

- In the month of Av, we minimize joy, and Hashem Himself bewails the destruction. If the Jewish people lament the destruction as well, they become connected to Hashem and protected by Him. The Satan is prevented from harming them. The Torah was given when all of the Jewish people were united. Tishah b'Av restores the aspect of Torah, and Tu b'Av restores the aspect of unity. The prophet Yeshayahu repeats the word נִחְמוּ, in order to indicate that we will be consoled in both of these ways.
- When Bnei Yisrael are involved in Torah study, Hashem's voice can, so to speak, be heard speaking from their throats, and they are able to cleave to Hashem. After the Torah was given, Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish people, "Return to your tents," to keep on learning Torah, since Torah gives us life. The words "at that time, stating..." means that when a person sets aside times for Torah study, he is rewarded with "stating" Hashem's word, which guides him on his way and protects him. Our connection to Hashem is primarily through Torah.
- The word "mitzvah" is written in the singular form, whereas "decrees" and "ordinances" appear in the same pasuk in the plural form. While "decrees and ordinances" refer to many individual mitzvot, the word "mitzvah" is mentioned here in the singular form to allude to the fact that one single mitzvah, done properly, comprises the essence of all the mitzvot. This corrects the sin of *bitul* Torah and promotes unity, and, ultimately, brings about the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

YAVNEH AND ITS SAGES

The Gemara recounts (*Gittin* 56b) that when Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai met Vespasian, the Roman general, he greeted him by saying, "Greetings to you, your majesty!" He saw through Divine revelation that Vespasian was about to become emperor, even though at that time he was only general-in-chief. Indeed, news immediately arrived that the

previous emperor had died, and that Vespasian was to take his place. In admiration of Rabban Yochanan's foresight, Vespasian offered him a reward. Rabban Yochanan requested that Yavneh and its scholars should be spared, Rabban Gamliel's family should be kept alive, and a doctor should be provided for Rabbi Tzadok.

However, Rabban Yochanan was criticized for his request. Rabbi Yosef, and some say Rabbi Akiva, applied the following pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 44:25) to him, "He makes wise men retreat and their knowledge foolish." He should have asked for Yerushalayim to be spared! Yet Rabban Yochanan was convinced that such a request would never be granted, and as a result, he would be left without any form of salvation for his people. This is why he asked for Yavneh and its Sages, which was a lesser request.

This Gemara requires a great deal of explanation. How could Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai have had the audacity to request that the emperor spare Yavneh and its Sages, thereby ensuring the continuity of Torah study, without fearing for his life? Rabban Yochanan knew quite well that the Romans' purpose in all of their decrees against the Jews, both before and after the destruction, was to tear the nation away from Torah and mitzvot.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai once said that everything that the Romans did in Eretz Yisrael was for their own benefit (*Shabbat* 33b). When they built their bridges, their roads, and their stadiums they had no intention of making life easier for the Jews. On the contrary, their stadiums and circuses were antithetical to the Jewish way of life; they only served to assimilate the Jews into the Roman culture and make them forget the Torah. That was the Romans' goal. When they laid siege on Yerushalayim and prepared to conquer it, their aims were no different.

The Gemara relates (*Avodah Zarah* 2b) that when the time will come for all the nations to be judged, Hashem will ask the Romans, "What

did you do?” They will answer, “We built many marketplaces and bathhouses, we amassed much silver and gold, and we did everything for the Jewish people so that they would be able to learn Torah.” Hashem will tell them, “Foolish ones! You did everything for your own benefit.”

Thus, for Rabban Yochanan to make such a request of the emperor would seem to constitute a blatant rebellion against the Romans, who strove to gain world power and spread their anti-Torah culture throughout the land, as they had in other countries. Didn’t Rabban Yochanan realize that his request could easily have angered the emperor? It would be hard to believe that the emperor would consent to spare the Torah scholars.

Before we begin to explain what Rabban Yochanan’s intentions were when he made his request, let us pose an additional question. Why was the center of Torah learning built in Yavneh, in such a remote location? Would it not have been more appropriate to build it in Yerushalayim, or in one of the other major cities?

Chazal say (*Yevamot* 103a; *Zohar* I, 141a; *Pesikta Zutra, Vayeitzei*), “The good of evil-doers is bad for the righteous, because they do not act wholeheartedly for the benefit of the righteous; they have only their own benefit in mind...” Our Sages say, “Cursed are the evildoers; even their good actions are faulty” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 7:4; 9:9).

Rabban Yochanan intentionally made a request that did not seem too great, as he realized that whatever benevolence he might succeed in procuring from the Romans would be tainted with evil intentions. Therefore, he made a request that was seemingly small and insignificant, and indeed, Vespasian was not aware of its import. Had Vespasian realized the significance of sparing Yavneh and its Sages, he would not have agreed.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai requested that Yavneh and its Sages should be spared, in order to rebuild a great edifice of Torah after the

churban would take place (*Megillah 27a*). Vespasian, on the other hand, scoffed at the idea of such a remote location being the place for the resurgence of the glory of Torah. For that reason, he acquiesced.

Although the emperor hated the Jews and wished to obliterate Torah study, he had several reasons for believing that nothing would come out of his granting Rabban Yochanan's request. Firstly, in his mind, it seemed very unlikely that Jews would go to learn in Yavneh after the destruction. He believed that under the Roman conquest the Jews would certainly be influenced by the Roman culture and lose interest in learning Torah altogether. Even if they would want to learn, they would realize that Torah study was prohibited by the Roman government, and therefore be afraid to go to learn in Yavneh.

In addition, if people would stop going to Yavneh for the reasons mentioned above, the population remaining in Yavneh would eventually grow old and die out. The Torah would have no continuity, as no young scholars would come to take the place of those who died. Yavneh would not become a thriving, pulsating Torah center, resounding with the voices of the young and old studying Torah. Without the Torah study of young children, the nation could not exist (*Shabbat 119b*), and the Torah would be forgotten.

Moreover, Yavneh was a tiny place, far from any major population center. Its very distance and lack of urban conveniences would prevent people from going to learn there. Vespasian didn't think that such a remote and rural place could ever develop into a significant Torah center. He agreed to grant Rabban Yochanan his request, because he thought that doing so would not thwart his own goal, the eventual eradication of Torah study.

Rabban Yochanan knew what Vespasian was thinking. He knew that he would not be arousing the emperor's wrath or endangering himself by making this clever request. As soon as the request was granted, the

generation's Sages began laying the groundwork for a national Torah center in Yavneh.

“Many designs are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of Hashem, only it will prevail” (*Mishlei* 19:21). Vespasian had many calculations as to why Yavneh could never become a Torah center, but Hashem’s will prevailed. “There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Hashem” (*ibid.* 21:30). If the emperor thought that by granting the request, he could trick the Jews out of everything, he was mistaken. Every one of his calculations could be refuted, and the issues which seemed to be barriers actually served to facilitate the Torah’s dissemination.

Vespasian thought that after the destruction, the Roman conquest would prevent the Jews from learning in Yavneh. He thought they would be afraid to transgress the law against Torah study and be so influenced by Roman culture that they would not even be interested in learning. He failed to realize that Am Yisrael has a severe prohibition against being influenced by non-Jewish culture, as it says (*Vayikra* 18:3), “And do not follow their traditions.” Making them lose interest in Torah would be no easy feat.

Rabban Yochanan knew that not only would the Jews not be influenced by the Roman culture, on the contrary, they would even risk their lives to learn Torah in Yavneh. After staying there to complete their study course, they would then go around the country to teach their brothers Torah, even though by doing so they would be risking their lives. Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon used to “gather assemblies in public and teach the Jewish people Torah,” until the Romans arrested him and had him burned to death (*Avodah Zarah* 18a).

Vespasian thought that only elderly scholars would remain in Yavneh, and, once they died, there would be no one to take their place. He did not realize how many young scholars would come to Yavneh against all odds, fighting to preserve the lifeblood of Torah throughout

the generations. The thriving of Torah study which developed in Yavneh far surpassed the emperor's wildest expectations.

Above all, Vespasian was mistaken in his evaluation of the city's very essence. He thought that it was nothing but a remote village, where nothing lasting could ever develop. He did not know that the letters of the name יבנה (Yavneh) can be rearranged to spell בניה (building). Rabban Yochanan asked for Yavneh, because he knew that the foundations of everlasting Torah study could be built there.

When the Beit Hamikdash stood, its holiness filled the soul and spirit of every Jew, bringing him close to his Creator. Once the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, a void was created. How could it be filled? Chazal say (*Berachot* 8a), "From the day that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, Hashem has nothing in His world but the four *amot* of halachah." After the destruction, nothing but the Torah remained to quench the people's thirst and satisfy their feeling of longing to connect to Hashem.

As such, the Jews were willing to risk their lives for the Torah. They overcame all odds to go to Yavneh and fill the void. When a person is empty of holiness, he can only rebuild himself through Torah, as Chazal say (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7, *Peticha Eichah Rabbah* 2), "The light of the Torah brings him back to the proper path." The Torah is the light and life of our nation, and especially when we lack the Beit Hamikdash, only the Torah keeps our nation alive.

Sure enough, after the destruction, many Sages risked their lives to go and study in Yavneh and spread Torah. The Gemara relates that Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Nechemiah, and Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yossi Haglili all went to learn in Yavneh. The first who spoke there was Rabbi Yehudah, who said (*Berachot* 63b), "Moshe Rabbeinu distanced himself only twelve *mil* from the encampment, and yet the Torah says (*Shemot* 33:7), 'Whoever sought Hashem would go out.' All the more so, can we laud scholars who go from city to city and

from country to country to study Torah.” Going to Yavneh was comparable to going to the Tent of Meeting in Moshe’s time.

The Gemara also states that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who spoke against the Romans, said, “Heaven forbid that the Torah be forgotten by the Jewish people, as it is written (*Devarim* 31:21), ‘For it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring.’” We see that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, and all the Sages who followed him, succeeded in their goal.

Indeed, Rabban Yochanan realized how much would be gained by asking for Yavneh and its Sages, and he knew that the emperor would hardly have qualms about granting his request. The phrase כרם יבנה וזכמיה (the vineyard of Yavneh with its Sages) has the same *gematria katan* as תורה לכל עם ישראל (Torah for the entire Jewish nation), adding one for the phrase itself.

Rabbi Yosef considered Rabban Yochanan foolish for not asking for Yerushalayim instead. Rabbi Yosef realized that Vespasian appreciated that Rabban Yochanan had informed him that he was about to become emperor. He saw how impressed he was by Rabban Yochanan’s wisdom, and that he wished to express his gratitude. Couldn’t Rabban Yochanan have taken advantage of this moment of goodwill to ask for the most important thing – Yerushalayim?

Rabban Yochanan realized that the emperor wouldn’t agree to such a request. Yerushalayim and the Beit Hamikdash are the heart of the Jewish nation, and naturally facilitate Torah learning. It was true that the emperor wanted to show Rabban Yochanan a token of his appreciation, but to grant the Jewish people their stronghold and capital was too much to ask. This is why Rabban Yochanan made a minor request, Yavneh and its Sages, and indeed, Vespasian acceded to his request.

In addition, Rabban Yochanan realized that the Romans had made Vespasian their emperor because they wanted him to conquer

Yerushalayim and destroy it. Asking the new emperor to spare Yerushalayim would mean asking him to betray his nation's expectations. Also, all of the signs were pointing at the city's imminent destruction; it was clear that the decree could no longer be cancelled. Rabban Yochanan realized that it would be futile to request that the emperor and his legions pack their bags and head back to Rome. The nation's only hope lay in Yavneh and its Sages.

This is hinted to in the pasuk that Rabbi Yosef applied to Rabban Yochanan (*Yeshayahu* 44:25), "He makes wise men retreat (אחור) and their knowledge foolish." The word אחור, simply understood as "back, retreating" can also mean "later, far ahead." Rabban Yochanan looked ahead and saw the direction that the people of Yerushalayim were taking; he knew that it was only a matter of time before the social decadence, baseless hatred, and other wrongs that filled the city would lead to its destruction (*Shabbat* 119b; *Yoma* 9b). He knew that even if the emperor would spare Yerushalayim, the salvation would be temporary. He would only be buying time. Soon, a different general or nation would again lay siege to the city and succeed in destroying it. What would then ensure the continuity of Torah study?

Rabban Yochanan also realized that there was no hope of building Torah in Yerushalayim, since one of the very reasons for its destruction was the people's disrespectful attitude toward Torah scholars, and disregard for Torah study (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 18; *Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Zutra* 1).

Since there was no future for Torah in Yerushalayim at that time, an alternative location needed to be found. A new home for Torah would need to be built, in order to fill the void created by the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. He requested Yavneh, and the emperor granted his request since he did not believe that anything would come out of it. The emperor did not realize that even in the blackest times of Jewish history, Hashem watches over His people and ensures that the Torah

lives on eternally within them, never to be forgotten from the mouths of their children.

In Shir Hashirim (8:1), Shlomo Hamelech says: “He to Whom peace belongs had a vineyard in the populous [Yerushalayim]; He gave the vineyard over to guardians; each will bring a thousand gold coins with its fruit.” The Jewish nation is Hashem’s “vineyard,” and after the destruction of Yerushalayim, the vineyard was transferred to Yavneh, to be tended by the “guardians,” the Sages of the generation. Each one of them would raise a great many students, who would go out and spread the Torah’s light.

————— In Summary —————

- Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked Vespasian to spare Yavneh and its Sages, and Vespasian acceded to his request. Rabbi Yosef felt that Rabban Yochanan was foolish in making such a minor request, when he could have used the opportunity to ask for Yerushalayim. How could Rabban Yochanan even have had the audacity to make his request, when he knew that the Romans were opposed to Torah study? Surely his request would be viewed as rebellious.
- Rabban Yochanan made this request since he knew the emperor would grant it. Even though the emperor might have seemed benevolent by allowing him to make a request, he was still evil and would never agree to spare Yerushalayim. Vespasian only consented to spare Yavneh since he was convinced that the Jews would have absolutely no benefit from it. The emperor failed to realize the wisdom of Rabban Yochanan’s request.
- Vespasian did not believe that anyone would actually go to study Torah in Yavneh, since doing so would constitute rebellion against the Roman decrees. On the contrary, he expected that the Jews would be influenced by the Roman culture and lose interest in Torah study altogether. He thought that only elderly scholars would remain in Yavneh, and that there would be no one to take their place after they died. In addition, because of Yavneh’s remoteness, he did not think it could ever become a national center of Torah.

- Vespasian didn't realize that the Jewish people are commanded to go to great lengths to preserve their distinction and avoid being assimilated by non-Jewish culture. However, he was proved wrong. They founded a community in Yavneh and passed the Torah down to the next generation, besides risking their lives to teach Torah to their brethren. Rabban Yochanan's plan succeeded beyond expectation, as is evidenced by the Torah's continuity until this very day.

EXILING ONESELF TO A PLACE OF TORAH

When Rabban Yochanan escaped Yerushalayim in order to meet with the emperor Vespasian, one of the requests that he made in response to the emperor's offer was that Yavneh and its Sages be spared. The emperor granted his request.

Why did the emperor grant a request which would enable the Jews to continue learning, thus rebelling against the Roman decree? We dealt with this question at length in the above essay, *Yavneh and its Sages*. Yet there is still place to elaborate on the emperor's mistake in agreeing to grant this request.

Chazal say (*Avot* 4:14), "Exile yourself to a place of Torah." In order to acquire Torah, one should leave his original location and go to a second place; after applying himself to his studies in the new location, he will succeed.

Vespasian thought that after the destruction, and after being persecuted and tormented, the Jews would have no inner strength left to set out for Yavneh and re-immense themselves in Torah study. He agreed to spare Yavneh, since he did not think anyone would have the spirit to go there. Why was he mistaken?

The willingness to travel away from home, leaving behind all its comforts, is deeply rooted in the character of our nation. We remain

unshaken by the troubles and persecutions which often threaten to overtake us. In addition, once a person takes the first step in showing his desire to learn, Hashem fortifies him with the enthusiasm and strength needed to continue, as it says (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to purify himself is aided from Above.” Whoever acts for the sake of Hashem’s glory, receives special Heavenly help. In actuality, there was no doubt that the Jews would exile themselves to Yavneh despite the persecutions they had experienced, and nothing would stand in their way.

Let us cite several examples and sources which demonstrate the importance and benefit of “exiling oneself to a place of Torah.”

Nowadays, a person can succeed in studying Torah only if he uproots himself and goes to study in a yeshiva or another Torah center. In the seventh of his forty-two explanations on the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3) “אם בחוקותי תלכו” – If you will walk in my statutes,” the Or Hachaim writes as follows:

“This can also be understood based on our Sages’ dictum, ‘Exile yourself to a place of Torah.’ One must move from place to place in order to study Torah. The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5) relates that everyone used to travel away from home in order to study Torah; one person would even travel six months in one direction and six months back in order to spend one day immersed in Torah study. This is why the Torah says “אם בחוקותי.” If you are interested in acquiring Torah wisdom (referred to as *חוקותי*) it is necessary *תלכו* – ‘to walk, to go,’ i.e., to exile oneself to a place of Torah. In order to be able to learn undistracted, one should not learn at home, since then he will be distracted by his family’s needs. Instead, one should leave his father and mother and go to a Torah location.”

We see that the Torah itself exhorts us to go to study in a Torah location. When one tries to learn in his native city, even if it is also a center of Torah, he is automatically at a disadvantage. The Mishnah in

Pirkei Avot (4:14) says, “Do not say that it [the Torah] will come after you.” The commentators there explain that a person can succeed in his learning only if he travels away from his home. In his own city, his involvement with his family and friends is liable to prevent him from properly focusing on his learning. On the other hand, when he goes to a place where no one knows him, he can more easily succeed.

This concept can help us understand a frightening account regarding Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 147b) relates that he went to Porgita and Diumsit, which were vacation resorts, and his heart was drawn after wine and bathing. He forgot his studies. When he stood up to read from the Torah, instead of reading (*Shemot* 12:2) “החדש הזה לכם – This month shall be for you the beginning of the months,” he substituted a different letter in each word and read, “החרש היה ליבם – Their heart has become deaf.” The Rabbis prayed that Hashem have mercy on him, and his learning came back to him.

This story seems very puzzling. Rabbi Elazar ben Arach was considered the greatest of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s disciples. Rabban Yochanan said that he was “like a mighty fountain” and that his opinion held more weight than that of all of the other disciples put together. He discovered the secrets of *Ma’aseh Merkavah* on his own, and when he discussed them, even the angels came to hear. Is it possible that such a holy *Tanna* would go to a vacation resort in order to enjoy pleasures such as eating, drinking, and bathing, while setting aside his learning?

It seems that his intention was not to enjoy the pleasures of this world for their own sake. Chazal tell us (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 14:6) that when the Rabbis finished learning from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Elazar told his friends, “I will go to Diumsit, a beautiful place with sparkling water.” They said, “We will go to Yavneh, a place where there are many scholars who love the Torah.”

Rabbi Elazar hoped that his colleagues would come with him to Diumsit to study, since he was the most prominent among them. He asked that they join him in Diumsit, his wife's city, and there they would be able to continue their studies. Yet his associates told him, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah. Let us go the city of Yavneh to learn. You won't succeed in learning in your wife's city and neither will we, since family and friends will cause distractions." Rabbi Elazar did not accept their opinion. He went to his wife's city, but his friends were right. His wife and family took him away from his learning; he was drawn after worldly matters and pleasures.

The Midrash (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:7) elaborates on this story. "Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students. For as long as he lived, they studied under him. When he died, his disciples went to Yavneh, but Rabbi Elazar ben Arach went to his wife's city, Diumsit. He waited for his colleagues to join him. When he saw that they did not come, he wished to go and join them, but his wife objected. She asked, 'Who needs whom?' He replied, 'They need me....' He listened to her and remained [in Diumsit] until he forgot his studies."

At first, Rabbi Elazar thought that his colleagues should follow him, since he was the most prominent scholar. Yet when he saw that they refrained from doing so, he realized that he would not be able to study without them, and missed them very much. He wished to go join them. Yet his wife held him back by saying that he should not go after them, even though they were in a "place of Torah." Since they were the ones who needed him, and not the other way around, they should be the ones to come to him. Because Rabbi Elazar listened to his wife and stayed with her in Diumsit, he forgot his learning. When he returned to Yavneh, he regained his learning, thanks to his colleagues' prayers on his behalf. He began to exhort others, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah."

Rashi expounds upon this: "Do not say that it will follow you" – do not say that disciples will come to you in your own location and that

will be enough for you, “since your colleagues will cause it to remain with you” – by learning with others at your own level, you will be able to retain your learning. “And do not rely on your own wisdom” – do not assume that you will be able to persevere because of your intellectual gifts. Only through exile to a place of Torah will a person be spared from the distractions of family and friends. Only in this way will he grow in Torah learning. This principle applies to all generations.

We find that Rabbi Akiva exiled himself and went to study Torah. He returned with twenty-four thousand students. This shows that when one leaves his place, he is not the only one to benefit; his ability to educate students is also greatly enhanced.

When we examine the matter, we see that Hashem has abundant goodness in store for those who exile themselves to a Torah location, as well as for those who encourage others to do the same.

Chazal say (*Berachot* 17a), “Hashem made a greater promise to women than he did to men... women receive reward for allowing their husbands to go away to learn, since that is what enables them to succeed in their studies.” Chazal say that in the future, Hashem will shower down life-giving dew and resurrect those who studied Torah during their lifetime. Thanks to this special dew, they will rise, and merit basking in the light of Hashem (*Yerushalmi, Megillah* 83:6). This is what is referred to by the pasuk, (*Yeshayahu* 26:19), “For Your dew is like the dew that [revives] vegetation.” By means of dew, a metaphor for Torah, they will merit the hidden light of the World to Come.

Just as the morning dew gives vitality to the world of nature, so too, the Torah is a life-giving dew to the one who labors in it. This dew also gives life to those who keep Shabbat. This is hinted to by the fact that there are thirty-nine forms of *melachah* prohibited on Shabbat, equal to the numerical value of the word שבת. It is well-known that Shabbat is equivalent to all of the mitzvot (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 1:5; *Shemot Rabbah* 25:16).

Rashi explains that the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:3) “If you will follow in My precepts” means to “labor in Torah.” One who does so will in the future merit to be resurrected with the special life-giving dew of the Torah that he labored in during his life. How can one truly “labor in Torah”? Through exiling himself to a place of Torah. For, then he will not be plagued by the distractions that can take a person away from the Torah. This is hinted to by the exhortation “הוי גולה – exile oneself to a place of Torah,” since the *gematria* of the letters of the Hebrew words is the same as that of the word טל together with the Name of Hashem יהוה-וה-י. When a person exiles himself to a place of Torah, Hashem will shower him with the dew of the resurrection when Mashiach comes, allowing him to enjoy the special light which He reserves for the righteous.

All women who make it possible for their husbands to go to study Torah, and to immerse themselves in it, will also be resurrected by this dew. This is their reward. It is possible that the *Navi* Yeshayahu hints at this when he says (*Yeshayahu* 32:9), “O strong women, rise” – your strength in enabling your husbands to go to study Torah will give you the merit to rise when Mashiach comes.

Not only they, but all people who facilitate Torah learning will merit rising at the resurrection of the dead. This is because they actually make it possible for “places of Torah” to exist. The words “הוי גולה – Exile yourself to a place of Torah” have the same *gematria*, when one adds one for the term itself, as the phrase “כי טל אורות טלך” – For the dew of light is Yours, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.”

This sheds light on a Midrash concerning Yaakov Avinu. Immediately after we read that “Yaakov settled,” indicating that he was finally able to dwell in tranquility, the upsetting story about the sale of Yosef began. The Midrash states (*Bereishit Rabbah* 4:3) that Hashem asks, “Is the reward which awaits tzaddikim in the World to Come not enough for them, that they wish to dwell peacefully in this world as well?”

There is a concept of distancing oneself from the comforts of his home in order to succeed in Avodat Hashem. Since Hashem desires that tzaddikim come close to Him, he sometimes presents them with disturbances which compel them to leave their place in order to study Torah. When a person is far away from the comforts and distractions of home, he can succeed greatly in Avodat Hashem.

Since the time of Yavneh, this has been the secret of the Torah's continuity. Vespasian could never have fathomed how great the power of the Jewish people would be when they would choose to sacrifice their lives and exile themselves to a place of Torah. Thanks to that power, the Torah lives and thrives within the Jewish people until this very day.

———— In Summary ————

- Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai requested that Yavneh and its Sages should be saved, and the emperor Vespasian granted his request. He did so since he was convinced that nothing would come of it. The Jews would never risk their lives to go and learn in the distant town of Yavneh. However, he did not know the fundamental importance of “exiling oneself to a place of Torah.” This is the force which keeps the Torah alive throughout the generations.
- Rabbi Elazar ben Arach went to “a place with beautiful waters” and forgot all of his learning. He thought that since he was the most prominent Sage, his colleagues should be the ones to join him, as opposed to his going to join them, and he refrained from “exiling himself to a place of Torah.”
- Rabbi Akiva became a great Rabbi and raised twenty-four thousand disciples, all in the merit of leaving everything behind to go away to learn Torah.
- Women receive their main reward for allowing their husbands to exile themselves to a place of Torah. They receive the same reward as their husbands, who will merit being resurrected by Hashem's special dew when Mashiach comes. In fact, anyone who helps and sustains those who leave everything behind in order to study will be resurrected.

- It is not good for the righteous to dwell tranquilly in their place. Only by uprooting oneself to a place of Torah can one succeed in Avodat Hashem. This is the secret power of Rabban Yochanan's request, "Grant me Yavneh and its Sages." This is the power that has kept the Torah alive throughout the generations.

REBUILDING THE BEIT HAMIKDASH

"The sin of the earlier generation was revealed, and the end of their exile was also revealed. The sin of the later generation was not revealed, and the end of their exile was also not revealed" (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 1:1).

The sins that caused the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash were well-known, and the duration of the first exile was revealed as well. Yet the sin that led to the second destruction was not revealed, and correspondingly, the length of our present exile was also concealed from us.

However, don't we all know that the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (*Yoma* 9b)? How can Chazal say that we do not know why it was destroyed?

An additional question can be asked. Chazal say that Hashem laments, "If only they had left Me but kept my Torah, for the Torah's light would have brought them back to the proper path" (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7, *Petichah Eichah Rabbah* 2). How is it possible to "leave Hashem" while keeping the Torah? Doesn't keeping the Torah automatically bring one close to Hashem?

When we ponder the subject of the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash, we see that it was indeed caused by baseless hatred among Bnei Yisrael. Although the scholars learned Torah, they did not uphold its teachings. The essence of Torah learning is that it be done

through humility and submission. This is derived from the manner in which Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah at Har Sinai.

When the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Har Sinai and received the Torah, they were in a state of total humility and submission. Har Sinai itself merited to be the chosen mountain because it was humble (*Sotah* 5a). The first Mishnah in Pirkei Avot tells us, “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai.” This hints to us that Moshe Rabbeinu also learned the importance of humility from Har Sinai. Through humility, the Jews were able to acquire the forty-eight special traits (*Avot* 6:5) which enable one to absorb the Torah’s wisdom.

During the time of the second Beit Hamikdash, the Jews learned Torah, yet without humility and submission. Every person felt that he was more important than his friend. Instead of the Torah scholars bringing peace to the world as they should, they brought arguments and baseless hatred. We read, “All of your children (בניך) will be students of Hashem,” and Chazal say, “Do not read בניך (your sons), rather בוניך (your builders).” Yet the Torah scholars in that generation were not builders; instead, they wrought destruction.

How did this situation come about? Every person saw only his own greatness, and not his friend’s. They sought only to put each other down, instead of attempting to respect one another. Consequently, it was never even possible to settle an argument.

We even see that they failed to have respect for their great master and teacher, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (*Gittin* 56b). When Rabban Yochanan wished to escape Yerushalayim, he asked his students to carry him out on a bed, covered like a dead man. The zealots wanted to shove and stab him, to ensure that even if the disciples were lying, Rabban Yochanan would not leave Yerushalayim alive. Yet the disciples opposed this, claiming that were they to do so, the Romans would say that the zealots had shoved him and stabbed him!

This requires explanation. What would make the Romans think that anyone had shoved Rabban Yochanan? If the zealots were to stab him, the Romans would see that, and be able to build their own hypotheses. But if they were only to shove him, how would the Romans even know?

The hatred between people during that time was so great that even amongst the zealots who guarded the city there were most certainly spies who would go and tell the enemy about everything which went on within the city walls. Accounts of zealots pushing Rabbis around would definitely be included. They had no regard for the lives of their brethren, and certainly not for the Rabbis.

This is the reason that Rabban Yochanan requested of the emperor to spare Yavneh and its Sages. He knew that by establishing a new center of Torah learning in Yavneh, he would succeed in restoring proper Torah study, as well as respect for Torah scholars. The Torah would help the Jewish people live peacefully with one another, and there would no longer be baseless hatred. The existence of a Torah center in Yavneh would actually sow the seeds for the redemption.

These thoughts can help us answer our original question: How can we possibly say that “the later generation’s sin was not revealed” when we know that their sin was their baseless hatred for each other? The answer is that their hatred for each other was hidden. Everyone was too proud to let others see that he was actually being driven by baseless hatred. All of their arguments were under the guise of “arguments for the sake of Hashem,” and concealed from the public. No one wanted others to see how corrupt he actually was.

This situation led to the destruction. Correspondingly, Hashem concealed the length of our present exile, leaving its end undetermined and contingent upon our actions. Just as the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred, it can only be rebuilt once we exhibit and show unconditional love for one another.

The prophet Yirmeyahu (9:12) states that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed “because they forsook My Torah.” Torah can be acquired and sustained only when humility is present (*Ta’anit* 7a). In the time of the second Beit Hamikdash, the Jews used the Torah to promote their own personal interests. This is the antithesis of humility! Chazal say that unlearned Kohanim used to purchase from the Romans the right to serve as High Priests, for their own self-aggrandizement.

Hashem’s declaration “If only they had left Me but kept my Torah” can be understood as follows. The Torah has two parts: Mitzvot which involve one’s relationship with Hashem, and mitzvot involving one’s relationship with his fellow man. Hashem said that He could forgive His people for disregarding their relationship with Him, if only they would keep the mitzvot between man and his fellow man. Yet, since they acted cruelly to one another, disregarding their fellow man’s status as the purpose of Creation, they caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

Conversely, the Gemara describes the generation of Achav, who used to win wars even though they were idol worshippers (*Yerushalmi, Pe’ah* 1). They merited this because no one spoke evil of another; they treated each other with respect. Hashem is willing to forgive us for sins against Him, but He does not forgive us when we wrong one another.

Similarly, in the time of the first Beit Hamikdash, the people worshipped idols publicly, but they did not speak evil of one another. “Their sin was revealed, and the duration of their exile was revealed.” Since they did not speak evil of one another, their sins were atoned for by a relatively short exile, the length of which was previously revealed.

Yet, during the second Beit Hamikdash, *sinat chinam* and *lashon hara* were rampant. The people outwardly showed love to each other, but inwardly hated each other, and their actions were based on their own ulterior motives. Therefore, the end of their exile was not revealed. Only through *ahavat chinam*, unconditional love, which is felt inside

the heart, as well as demonstrated outwardly, can the exile finally come to an end.

We see that baseless hatred and pride go hand-in-hand. This is why Hashem said that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because the people left the Torah. Without demonstrating humility in their relationships with one another, any Torah that they might have learned lacked foundation.

Chazal say (*Midrash Tehillim* 17), “Every generation which does not merit the building of the Beit Hamikdash is considered as if the Beit Hamikdash was actually destroyed in its time.” As long as the Beit Hamikdash remains in ruins, it is a sign that the sin that caused its destruction has yet to be rectified. Every single Jew is responsible, since every Jew is responsible for one another (*Sanhedrin* 27b; *Shavuot* 39a). Once we restore harmony in our relationships, we will merit the redemption.

————— In Summary —————

- Regarding the generation that lived at the time of the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash, Chazal say, “Since their sin was concealed, the duration of their exile is also undetermined.” Yet how can we say that their sin was concealed, when we know that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred? Also, why does the prophet Yirmeyahu say that the cause for the destruction was because they “forsook My Torah”?
- The answer is that the people’s hatred for one another was concealed. Their pride prevented them from openly displaying their hatred for one another. On the outside they respected each other, while in their hearts they hated each other. We see from the story about Rabban Yochanan’s escape from Yerushalayim that there were most probably spies among the zealots who used to convey inside information to the enemy, a blatant example of hatred. They failed to learn the true meaning of humility from Har Sinai, and thus were unable to be connected to the Torah that they learned. Once they lacked

humility and their interpersonal relationships lacked harmony, to the extent that they even slandered one another, Hashem was no longer willing to forgive them. In order to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash we must increase our love for one another. Through this, we will merit the final redemption.

HASTENING THE REDEMPTION

Due to our many sins, we are still in exile. We still mourn Yerushalayim. Every person needs to maintain a connection with Eretz Yisrael. Even when we are in the Diaspora, our hearts always long for Eretz Yisrael. By longing for Eretz Yisrael, we are connected to the light and blessing which Hashem pours forth upon the Land.

Chazal say (*Ta'anit* 30b) that one who mourns over Yerushalayim will merit seeing it in its glory. Hashem “poured his wrath on sticks and stones” (*Eichah Rabbah* 4:14). Eretz Yisrael and Yerushalayim were punished because of our sins. As such, we see that it is our actions that will make it possible for the Beit Hamikdash to be rebuilt. We pray and implore Hashem to speedily rebuild His house, and never again destroy it.

Nevertheless, let no one think that since the *geulah* has not yet arrived, maybe Hashem has abandoned Yerushalayim. Not at all! The pasuk states (*Zechariah* 1:17), “He will choose Yerushalayim once again.” There are those who try to capture Yerushalayim from its enemies, perhaps thinking that Hashem has abandoned her.

Zechariah tells us that this is not the case. Hashem will once again choose Yerushalayim, for He never deserts it. Even if we feel that this is far from happening, this is not true. The *geulah* is very close. Mashiach is waiting for the moment when he will be sent to redeem us. “And even though he tarries, I will await his coming every day.” We must await his arrival each and every day, through correcting our actions and repairing our ways.

Alas, the world has entered a state of despair. So many years have gone by, and Mashiach has still not come. Let us not lose hope. In earlier generations, we find two righteous men, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and the holy Baal Shem Tov, who asked Mashiach, “When will his honor arrive?” (*Sanhedrin* 98a; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Tehillim* 852). Mashiach responded, “Even today, if we but heed His call” (*Tehillim* 95:7). This means that Mashiach has been waiting for many years, anticipating the day he can reveal himself to us. The matter is completely in our hands.

There have been many righteous men who had the ability to bring Mashiach. An example is the *Chozeh MiLublin*, zt”l. He conferred with other great men, such as Rebbi Mendel MiRiminov, zt”l, and Rebbi Yisrael MiKoznitz, author of *Avodat Yisrael*, zt”l. This was in order to hasten the redemption. Unfortunately, the *Middat Hadin* prevented this from happening. Not only that, but these great men passed away just at that time. Why was this so?

The coming of Mashiach is not dependent on the individual. Society at large must make every effort to accelerate the redemption. We must truly desire it, and only then will Mashiach come. This is inferred by the words of Eliyahu Hanavi to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, “היום אם בקולו” – Today, if **we** but heed His call.” The verb is written in the plural form, teaching that if we truly heed His word, without any hesitation, then we will merit Mashiach’s arrival. We must pray for the *geulah* from the depths of our hearts, because the voice of Yaakov is heard when he truly wants the coming of Mashiach.

As long as Am Yisrael is in exile, and our enemies seek ways to capture Yerushalayim, it is an indication that our Torah learning is lacking. This is the cause for the delay in Mashiach’s arrival. A man once told me, “I’m not interested in Mashiach coming at this time.” When I asked him why not, he responded, “I recently bought a new house, and I haven’t begun to enjoy living in it yet...” The voice of Yaakov in his Torah learning is not complete. This contributes to the

continued *galut*. The days of *galut* themselves are the test to see if we have corrected whatever we need to correct, and if we have perfected ourselves for the coming of Mashiach.

Let no man think that because we have our own country, we are free of the *galut*, and there is no need to anticipate Mashiach's arrival. This is a blatant falsehood. We are still in exile, and all our enemies wish to annihilate us and seize Yerushalayim. Her freedom will come only with the arrival of Mashiach. Only then will Am Yisrael be truly free of its enemies.

How, indeed, can we hasten the redemption? The Zohar states (*Parashat Va'etchanan*) that Torah learning hastens the redemption. The letters of the word משיח (Mashiach) also form the word ישמח (he will be glad). We know that it is Torah that truly gladdens a person's heart, as it says (*Tehillim* 19:9), "The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart." Moreover, we are taught (*Esther* 8:16), "The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor." According to the Midrash (*Megillah* 16b) "light is Torah." These pesukim indicate that only by means of the light and joy of Torah can Mashiach make his appearance. Then we will be truly happy.

Another merit for Mashiach's coming is unity. We find that before *Matan Torah*, Am Yisrael was "as one man with one heart" (*Mechilta, Yitro* 19). In this merit, they were able to nullify the *Yetzer Hara* and be worthy of entering Eretz Yisrael. They could have influenced the Land to such an extent that the *churban* would never have taken place, and the final redemption would have come. However, the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf and descended to the level of fighting and dissention. Once the unity of Am Yisrael was shattered, the *Yetzer Hara* obtained a foothold among us.

We see the value placed upon unity from the Torah itself. Yosef Hatzaddik gave a negative report to his father about his brothers (*Bereishit* 37:2). This was because he suspected them of severe

transgressions (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1). What happened next? The brothers spoke about Yosef, and he, in turn, spoke about them, and this *lashon hara* brought about our fathers' exile in Egypt. After they made peace among themselves and unity reigned, Bnei Yisrael merited to be redeemed from there. The fact that they removed the bones of Yosef upon leaving Egypt (*Sotah* 12) is proof of the unity that they maintained once again, since they fulfilled the promise that they had made with him (*Shemot* 13:19).

Moreover, when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he sent wagons to his father (*Bereishit* 45:27). What was the significance of this? The letters of the word עגלות (wagons) are the same as ע' גלות (seventy, exile). Yosef was indicating to his father that the exile will end only after all seventy nations will leave us alone. This will occur only through our learning Torah and maintaining unity. We have no other refuge from this *galut*. Although we have some measure of unity, we still need the merit of learning Torah in unity.

Now we understand why Yaakov sent Yehudah to Egypt before him (*ibid.* 46:28), to establish a place of learning and teaching in Goshen (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 21). Why couldn't Yaakov wait until he himself came down to Egypt, and then open a yeshivah? What was so urgent?

This can be explained according to what we said above. Yaakov heard that the Shevatim were united once again. That being the case, it was incumbent upon them to have the merit of Torah learning, as well. He did not want to waste a moment. Preparations for Torah learning also hasten the redemption. Yaakov had reason to be happy upon seeing the wagons which Yosef had sent. The עגלות (wagons) hinted to the topic of the עגלה ערופה, which they had been learning together before they were separated (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3). Yaakov understood from this that Torah was being learned even in Egypt, and that it would surely bring about the redemption.

When Yaakov called his sons to him, in order to bless them before his passing, it says (*Bereishit* 48:1-2), “Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov...” He was telling them that if they wanted to know what would transpire at the End of Days they must learn Torah and maintain unity. They would then merit the final redemption. This is alluded to in the word *האספו* (assemble yourselves), which can also mean “add on.” Yaakov was telling them to “add on hours of Torah learning.” The word *הקבצו* (gather yourselves) denotes unity. Through Torah learning and unity, the ultimate *geulah* will arrive.

Not long ago, a Jew who both learned Torah and involved himself in many mitzvot was beset with many difficulties. He approached me with the following question, “Why do I have so many problems?”

I replied, “Do you often travel by plane?” The man responded in the affirmative. Then I continued, “During the flight, are you busy learning Torah?”

To which he answered, “I have a hard time concentrating during the flight.”

“So what do you occupy yourself with during the flight?” I continued.

His response was, “During the flight, I’m thinking of business projects, how to expand my operations... which transactions would be lucrative...”

At this point, I told him, “For business purposes, you have enough power of concentration, but not for Torah learning?! Don’t you know what it says in the Shema: (*Devarim* 6:7), ‘You shall speak of them... while you walk on the way’? One has an obligation to learn Torah while he is traveling also, and not think only about his physical needs.”

I continued, explaining to him that Eisav came to battle Yaakov “on the way.” It says (*Bereishit* 32:4, 33:1), “Then Jacob sent angels...”

behold, Eisav was coming, and with him were four hundred men.” Why did Eisav come especially *on the way*? Because when one is on the road, it is very difficult to concentrate on learning. Yaakov feared that perhaps, due to the wanderings of the road, he may have wasted a moment of Torah learning, and this might have led to him speaking *lashon hara*. This is why Eisav came at this time. All misfortunes occur when there is a lack of diligent Torah study.

On the other hand, if we make sure to learn on the way, all our problems disappear and the *Yetzer Hara* has no hold over us. Furthermore, when we learn Torah during difficult times, and we go in the way of the Torah, feeling unity and love for one another, we can hasten the *geulah*, and bring Mashiach, who will save us from our plight and rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, our glory, speedily in our days.

— In Summary —

- As long as we are still in exile, we must connect to Eretz Yisrael. The eyes of Hashem are upon Eretz Yisrael, and our eyes are also upon it, even if we reside in other lands. We thereby merit receiving the bounty which Hashem showers upon Eretz Yisrael. One who mourns the destruction of Yerushalayim merits seeing its salvation. We must pray for this to take place imminently.
- “Hashem chose Yerushalayim.” Hashem has never forsaken Yerushalayim. The final redemption is up to us, according to our actions. There is no room for despair! Mashiach himself has told us when he will be coming: “Today, if we heed His voice.” Everything depends upon the actions of the general public. “If we heed” (תשמעו) is written in the plural form to tell us that the masses must unite in order to bring the *geulah*. Mashiach’s delay is proof that the voice of Yaakov is not heard in the study of Torah, because Torah learning brings the *geulah* closer, as does unity among the nation. This is especially so regarding Torah learning during difficult times. This is the way that redemption will come.

TISHAH B'AV



TISHAH B'AV VS. VACATION

The Gemara (*Ta'anit* 30a) says that “all of the laws that apply to mourners also apply on Tishah b’Av... it is forbidden to read in the Torah, Prophets and Scriptures, or to study Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halachot, and Aggadat. One reads *kinot*, *Iyov*, and the sections of Yirmeyahu that describe the destruction. Children refrain from Torah study on Tishah B’Av, as it says (*Tehillim* 19:9), ‘Hashem’s word is just and gladdens the heart.’” This halachah is universally accepted by all of the halachic authorities (see *Shulchan Aruch* and commentators).

At first glance, this law seems very surprising. The Torah tells us in many places that the world exists only in the merit of Torah study. For example, the word *בראשית* (*Bereishit*) teaches that the world was created for the Torah, which is called *ראשית* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:6). The prophet Yirmeyahu (33:25) asserts that the rules of nature function only because of Torah study. Hashem says, “If not for My covenant [being studied] day and night, I would not have instituted the laws of the Heavens and the earth.” We are taught (*Shabbat* 88a) that “Hashem made a condition with Creation: If the Jewish people will accept the Torah, well and good, if not, the world will be returned to emptiness.”

There are many statements of Chazal that support this idea. It says (*Tanchuma, Ki Tavo* 3), “The world cannot stand without Torah,” and

(*Tanchuma, Ha'azinu* 3), “The world cannot exist without Torah,” also (*Avot* 1:2), “The world stands on three pillars: on Torah...” When the Torah discusses the Creation of the world, it says (*Bereishit* 2:4), “These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created (בהבראם). This can also be read as בה' בראם – He created the world “for the five,” for the Five Books of Moses.

If Torah study is so fundamental to the world’s existence, how can we be mandated to allow the entire day of Tishah b’Av to go by without Torah study?

This question is strengthened by the fact that Yirmeyahu tells us explicitly that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people forsook the Torah. Obviously, in order to have the Beit Hamikdash rebuilt, we need to strengthen and intensify our Torah study. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to spend Tishah b’Av in study, in order to rectify the sin that caused the destruction?

There are two answers to this question. First, we know that the Torah is our life. In truth, there is no greater pain than that caused by the lack of Torah study. By refraining from Torah study on Tishah b’Av, we experience this pain, as retribution for forsaking the Torah in the time of the Beit Hamikdash. At the same time, though, we continue to yearn for the Torah. This longing and yearning is considered equal to Torah study itself, since, if we would be permitted to learn Torah on Tishah b’Av, we certainly would. Chazal (*Kiddushin* 40a) say that if a person plans to do a mitzvah but is prevented from doing it against his will, he is rewarded as though he actually did the mitzvah. Therefore, when we refrain from learning Torah on Tishah B’Av against our will, it is reckoned in Heaven as if we did learn Torah, and the world continues to have merit for its existence.

The second and main reason for not learning Torah on Tishah b’Av is as follows. When we must spend the entire day without learning, it makes us realize how different this day is from any other day of the

year. The Beit Hamidrash is hushed, without Talmudic discussion and argument, without the discovery of new ideas, and without the sweet sounds of Torah learning. This is all because the Jewish people abandoned the Torah in the time of the Beit Hamikdash. We notice this and realize how serious it is.

This omission of Torah study on Tishah b'Av has the power of inspiring a person to strengthen himself in Torah study afterwards. Torah gives life to those who study it, and brings us closer to the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

Upon acknowledging these truths, each person will certainly strengthen himself in Torah study to the best of his ability, in order not to prolong the *churban*. We know that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of laxity in Torah learning, as it says, (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 18), “Yerushalayim was destroyed only for the sin of [not learning] Torah.” Each and every person must try to be involved in Torah study, which gives him life (*Avot* 6:7), as it is the elixir of life (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Chazal say (*Ta'anit* 31a), “From this time onwards, one should increase” – after Tishah b'Av, one should try to study more Torah. How paradoxical it is to see that this is the very time that everyone goes on vacation! People choose this time for rest and relaxation. This is the prime time for breathing fresh mountain air and strolling by the seaside. Instead of learning the lesson from Tishah b'Av and the preceding days of mourning, and increasing our Torah study, people look to make the most out of the summer's pleasures. The Torah's call is all but forgotten.

To our merit, we can say that the small amount of Torah that we do succeed in learning, even when it's so hot outside, has much greater value in Hashem's eyes than the Torah that we learn in the hospitable conditions of the rest of the year. “One mitzvah performed amidst difficulty is worth a hundred mitzvot performed without difficulty.”

Chazal say (*Avot* 5:26), “The reward is in proportion to the exertion.” Throughout the generations, our rabbis have praised one who makes the effort to labor in his learning during vacation, when the trial is so great. The Chatam Sofer said about himself that he achieved greater erudition and more depth of understanding than his colleagues in the merit of learning Torah during the breaks between the daily yeshivah sessions and during vacations.

The Hebrew word for vacation חופש shares the same root as the word חיפוש (search). “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem” (*Eichah* 3:40). Vacation is an ideal time for stepping back to judge the quality of our actions and our Torah study of the past year. It is the ideal time to increase our Torah study and to purify our actions. This is the period in which we can prepare ourselves for the month of Elul, the month in which we are actively involved in preparation for Rosh Hashanah.

There are many sources that teach us about the great value of studying Torah particularly at a time when a person might be exempted from doing so. These thoughts are simply mind boggling.

“David fled and escaped, and came to Shmuel at Ramah. He recounted all that Shaul had done to him, so he and Shmuel went and stayed at Noyat (נויית)” (*Shmuel* I, 19:18). Chazal ask (*Zevachim* 54b), “What is the connection between Ramah and Noyat? Why are the two places juxtaposed?” They answer that this pasuk should be understood based on its deeper, Midrashic meaning. While David and Shmuel dwelled in Ramah, they immersed themselves in the study of Torah, which is called “נוי – the beauty of the world.” At the very time when Shaul and his soldiers were chasing after David, in pursuit of his life and his position on the throne, David Hamelech set his worries aside and found the courage to learn Torah.

At the very time that his life was endangered by the powerful king Shaul, whose soldiers were waiting in ambush for him everywhere, he

found time to sit and learn together with Shmuel and uncover the Torah's secrets. Chazal say that during that night, David learned with Shmuel more than an experienced disciple learns in one hundred years. It is amazing to think what can be attained when a person learns amidst hardship and danger!

This teaches us that it is impossible to ever be “free” of Torah study. “Had your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction” (*Tehillim* 119:92). On days off, during vacation, and even in times of danger, persecution, and conflict, we have the responsibility to study Torah.

David Hamelech was in terrible danger that night. His life-threatening situation could have easily exempted him from Torah study. Yet, at that very time, he chose to immerse himself in Torah study. We know that “the reward for a mitzvah is in accordance with the difficulty involved,” and David’s reward was that the fountains of Torah and wisdom poured forth their treasures before him.

Torah that a person learns during vacation is an elixir of life. In addition, a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* results when others see yeshivah students sitting and learning while out in the mountains, with the sun beating down mercilessly. People are greatly inspired by this, and are motivated to learn more themselves. Thus, the power of Torah is increased in the world (*Kiddushin* 40b).

It is no coincidence that the days of mourning for the Beit Hamikdash, which was destroyed because we forsook the Torah, occurs at the same time as the summer vacation, when it’s so hot outside and everyone goes on vacation. [בין המצרים] actually has the same *gematria katan* as בין הזמנים...]

Despite the timing, we need to remain on guard and remember to set times for Torah study. When Rabbi Elazar ben Arach went to spend time by “the pleasant waters,” in the holiday resort where his wife was

from, he forgot all of his learning. We must strengthen ourselves in Torah study, remembering that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of weakness in Torah study. When we do so, we will merit witnessing the building of the next Beit Hamikdash, speedily in our days.

————— In Summary —————

- We are prohibited from learning Torah on Tishah b'Av. Yet we see from Chazal that the world exists in the merit of Torah study. How can we be commanded to refrain from Torah study throughout the entire day of Tishah b'Av? Furthermore, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people forsook the Torah. We would think that Tishah b'Av, the day set aside for mourning over the Beit Hamikdash, would be the ideal time for increasing Torah study.
- Chazal teach us that in this case, our yearning for Torah has the same value as actual learning. Since we are prevented, against our will, from studying on Tishah b'Av, the world still retains its right to exist. In addition, when we refrain from learning on Tishah b'Av, we are reminded that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of our weakening in Torah study. This will help us renew our commitment.
- Particularly at this time, when it is so important to fortify ourselves with the study of Torah, the summer intercession starts and everyone goes away on vacation. We should stress the merit of those who learn despite the heat, when it is especially challenging to concentrate. There is special reward in store for those who study Torah when it is difficult. The Hebrew word for חופש (vacation) shares the same root as the word חיפוש (search). Vacation is an ideal time for stepping back to judge the quality of our actions, and to embark on the road toward teshuvah, which we will be travelling during the month of Elul and the Yamim Noraim.

A Practical Lesson

When a person makes the effort to study Torah during vacation, he himself benefits, and others do, too. They take a lesson from him and

also make the effort to learn, despite the many summer distractions. From David Hamelech we learn the importance of strengthening oneself in Torah study even in a time of danger. The reward for studying amidst distractions is very great, as the reward for a mitzvah corresponds to the effort involved in doing it.

THE MO'ED OF TISHAH B'AV

Chazal call Tishah B'Av a *mo'ed*, a holiday, based on the pasuk in Eichah (1:15), "He proclaimed a set time (*mo'ed*) against Me." For this reason, we refrain from saying *tachanun* on Tishah b'Av, just as on all holidays (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 554:4*).

This is difficult to understand. When a person is in mourning for a relative, he reduces his mourning when Shabbat or a holiday comes. He washes and changes his clothes, and the whole spirit of mourning is toned down. How can Tishah b'Av be a holiday and at the same time a day of lamenting and tears? How is it different from other holidays?

There is a fundamental difference between a holiday that falls during the period of mourning for a relative, and the holiday of Tishah b'Av. When one mourns for a relative, he knows that he will never see him again. Only because of the holiness of Shabbat or the festival does he subdue his outward expressions of mourning. However, Tishah b'Av is intrinsically different. It has the potential of being transformed into a day of rejoicing, if the sin that caused the mourning is corrected completely.

The term *mo'ed*, which the *Navi* uses to describe Tishah b'Av, is derived from the future nature of this day. It is in order to remind us that even though we spend Tishah b'Av in mourning over the destruction, it can instantly become a day of great celebration if only we "search our ways and return to Hashem." If one sanctifies his

actions and subdues his *Yetzer Hara*, he will become a new person, with renewed ability to appreciate *kedushah*. When every one of us sincerely attempts to do teshuvah, Mashiach will come.

There is nothing that causes a person greater joy than being released from the “exile” in which he finds himself. When a person sins, he is considered to have been exiled from the house of his master. When he repents, his Master, Hashem, brings him back and forgives him, showering him with great affection. After all, even more than the servant yearns to return to his master, the master wants his servant to come back to him. The day he returns is a day of rejoicing for both the master and the servant.

When the *Navi* says that Tishah b’Av is called a *mo’ed*, he is actually saying that Hashem invites each and every person to change Tishah b’Av into a day of rejoicing by doing teshuvah. There is nothing that gives Hashem greater joy than when a person who has gone astray returns to Him and celebrates this spiritual redemption together with Him. Even on Tishah b’Av, Hashem is happy when He sees a person searching his ways in order to do teshuvah, and attempting to reach spiritual perfection by sanctifying himself with that which is permitted. This person will feel satisfaction in his good deeds, and his entire being will become sanctified. He will be like an overflowing spring in his Avodat Hashem.

While one mourns the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash on Tishah b’Av, he can look beyond the element of mourning, since he knows that he may soon be redeemed. Everything depends on his actions. Through repentance and good deeds, a person can end the mourning and transform Tishah b’Av into a day of celebration.

This concept can be expanded based on a Kabbalistic insight. The last letters of the words “קרא עלי מועד” – He proclaimed a set time against me” have the *gematria* of fifteen, the same as Hashem’s Name (יהוה). This Name corresponds to the *sefirah* of *hod* (הוד), which also has

the *gematria* of fifteen. The Arizal teaches that since the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the *sefirah* of *hod* has been trapped by the *chitzonim*. Yirmeyahu describes Yerushalayim as “sick – דוה – throughout the day” (*Eichah* 1:13). When rearranged, the letters דוה (sick) spell הוד (*hod*) (see *Zohar, Ra'aya Meheimana* III, 243a).

Hashem is hinting to Bnei Yisrael that although the *sefirah* of *hod* is in the hands of the *chitzonim*, He will not allow them to celebrate. On the contrary, He calls Tishah b'Av a holiday. This is a proof to all that the true salvation for Am Yisrael is not far off. At the appropriate time, when Mashiach will arrive, the *sefirah* of *hod* will be removed from the hands of the *chitzonim*, and it will be a true holiday. Although this *sefirah* is now in the dominion of the *chitzonim*, Hashem celebrates this day, and even calls it a holiday in order to impress upon them the power of celebration inherent in this day.

The intrinsic nature of Tishah b'Av being a holiday is indicated by the fact that we do not say *tachanun* on it. This is in order that the *chitzonim* should not rejoice over the fact that they still maintain the *sefirah* of *hod* in their jurisdiction. As soon as Bnei Yisrael do teshuvah, this *sefirah* will be removed from them.

Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation, as the pasuk says (*Shemot* 17:16), “כי יד על כס י-ה מלחמה” – For the hand is on the throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.” Because the forces of impurity have dominated over them in the *sefirah* of הוד (*hod*), which is numerically equivalent to י-ה, Hashem exhorts Bnei Yisrael to fight His battle against Amalek in every generation, until this *sefirah* is released.

Yitzchak Avinu told his son, Yaakov (*Bereishit* 27:22), “The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.” When the sound of Torah emits from the mouth of Yaakov, the hands of Eisav have no power against him (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). At that time, Eisav cannot

control the *sefirah* of *hod*, which is the eighth *sefirah*. Likewise, when Bnei Yisrael maintain the sanctity of the *oht brit kodesh*, which is the secret of the eighth day, when *brit milah* takes place and the foreskin is cut away, the *chitzonim* are completely weakened in regard to the *sefirah* of *hod*.

From the day of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, when the *chitzonim* have maintained dominion on the *sefirah* of *hod*, Hashem tells us not to despair. He Himself has called Tishah b'Av a festival. Even with the *chitzonim* in control, Hashem Himself guards His nation. He urges us to learn Torah, for this is the rectification for the destruction, and this is the *hod*, the majesty and beauty, of the Jewish nation.

However, Hashem does mourn in secret, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 13:17), “My soul will cry in hidden chambers.” Externally, Hashem shows no sign of worry at the loss of the *sefirah* of *hod*. On the contrary, He displays happiness before the *chitzonim* by calling Tishah b'Av a holiday. But Hashem does mourn that the *sefirah* of *hod* has fallen into their hands in secret (בבתי גוואי) (*Chagigah* 5a). The pasuk in *Yirmeyahu* continues by saying that Hashem “mourns in secret because of your (Bnei Yisrael’s) haughtiness – מפני גוה,” which refers to גאוותן של ישראל (Jewish pride), which was minimized at the time of the *churban*. Hashem weeps for the desecration of His Name and for the exile of the *Shechinah*, as well as the exile of the Jews who were banished from their Father’s table (*Berachot* 3).

The fact that Hashem calls Tishah B'Av a *mo'ed* and mourns the destruction in secret is a kindness on His part. He displays joy on this day in order to shield His people. By not showing outward signs of sadness, He confuses the *chitzonim*. They are thereby unaware of the power that they wield by controlling the *sefirah* of *hod*. Would they know this, they would try with all their might to destroy the Jewish nation, G-d forbid.

Hashem grieves in secret. He mourns His nation and the powers of impurity which reign in Heaven. For this reason, we must strengthen ourselves in Torah. This is the *hod* (beauty) of our nation. This is the rectification of the *churban* Beit Hamikdash. And this is what will ultimately bring the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, speedily in our days.

————— In Summary —————

- Tishah b'Av is called a *mo'ed*, a festival, and for that reason, we do not recite *tachanun* on this day. Why, then, do we mourn? The usual reason for mourning, is that one will never again see the one over whom he is grieving. This is not the case with Tishah b'Av. If a person truly repents, this day will be transformed into a day of rejoicing. It is therefore called “a festival,” in regard to its future status.
- According to Kabbalah, the last letters of the words “קרא עלי מועד” have the *gematria* of fifteen, the same as Hashem's Name יה-י. The word הוד also has the same *gematria*. The Ari teaches that from the time of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the *sefirah* of *hod* is in the power of the *chitzonim*, as it says, “כל היום דוה” – Mourning all day long.” The letters of the word (דוה mourning) can be transposed to spell the word הוד (*hod*). Hashem is telling us, “Even if the *sefirah* of *hod* is in impure hands, I call this day a festival. This is so that the *chitzonim* will not celebrate. Only we will celebrate, when the day will come that the *sefirah* of *hod* is, once again, in our jurisdiction.”
- Yet, in secret chambers, Hashem mourns for the lack of *hod*, the degradation of His people, their exile, and the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, we must strengthen ourselves in Torah study, because that is the הוד, beauty, of our nation, and the rectification for the *churban*. In the merit of Torah study, may the Beit Hamikdash be speedily rebuilt, and the *sefirah* of *hod* return to Am Yisrael.

A DAY FOR SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING

“You shall designate cities for yourselves, cities of refuge they shall be for you, and a person who kills shall flee there – one who takes a life unintentionally”

(Bamidbar 35:11)

The Gemara teaches, in the name of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov, that the road junctions had signs pointing in the direction of the cities of refuge, so that the murderer would know in which direction to escape. Rav Kahana asked, “Why does the Torah say, ‘Prepare the way for yourself’? To teach that we should make this preparation” (*Makkot* 10b).

We see how the Torah has compassion for one who kills unintentionally, in order to protect him from being killed by the family of the victim. Signs were erected everywhere, so that the murderer would be able to reach the city of refuge with maximum speed. The Rambam says (*Hilchot Rotze’ach* 8:5), “The Beit Din is responsible to provide clear directions to the cities of refuge, to repair them and to widen them. They are required to remove all obstacles, so that those who need to escape to the cities of refuge will not be detained in any way.”

It is extraordinary to note how Hashem is concerned for the welfare of man, even more than for His own honor. Despite the obligation to go up to the Beit Hamikdash three times a year, there is no explicit requirement to erect signs directing the pilgrims to Yerushalayim, even though they came from all over the world. However, there is an obligation to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge in order to protect the murderer from being killed.

[I heard that my esteemed teacher, Harav Shammai Zohn, asked this question. It is possible that the explanation is in his name. Yet, if I thought of the same explanation that he did, I thank Hashem for directing me to the truth.]

It is well-known that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of the baseless hatred that existed among the Jewish people (*Yoma* 9b) and because they failed to have respect for one another. This is the reason that the Torah portions of *Matot-Masei*, which discuss the laws dealing with unintentional murders and the cities of refuge, are always read before Tishah b'Av (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 13:2). By noting how Hashem has concern even for murderers, to the extent that He cares for their well-being even more than for His own honor, we will also be inspired to show more concern for one another. Seeing Hashem's abundant, unconditional love for His children, even for those who have gone astray, should awaken us to emulate that love in our relationships with one another.

When a person sins and is deserving of death, Hashem already considers him as if he is no longer alive. Yet Hashem, in His great mercy, still keeps him alive. We should certainly learn a lesson from this for ourselves and forgive a person who wronged us, even continuing to care for him. It goes without saying that if a person did not do anything against us, or if he wronged us unintentionally, we should certainly display love toward him.

We can learn the severity of baseless hatred from the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, who caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Although the Sages present at the banquet could have easily protested against the terrible way that the host was treating Bar Kamtza, they preferred to remain silent. Hashem repaid them measure for measure (*Sanhedrin* 90a) and caused that it would be one of the Sages who would object to offering the emperor's sacrifice, because of its blemish, ultimately leading to the destruction and the cessation of sacrifices altogether.

We see from here that it does not help to study Torah if this study does not affect one's actions. When one studies the mitzvot of the Torah, the purpose is to be able to later observe these mitzvot all the more scrupulously. What value can study have if it has no effect on a person's actions? Chazal say (*Bava Kamma* 17a), "Great is Torah study, for it leads to action." The Chafetz Chaim writes in his introduction to the *Shulchan Aruch* that although every Talmudic topic which a person learns awards him with the mitzvah of learning Torah, even topics which deal with laws that are not pertinent in our times, he should focus on learning in order to translate his learning into action.

Chazal say (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:9) that it is actions that earn one atonement for his sins. We learn that teshuvah and good deeds serve as a shield in the face of evil. The *Navi* Yirmeyahu says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because the people forsook the Torah. Even though the people learned Torah, they failed to do what was written in it. This is why it is considered that they "forsook the Torah," losing its protection when troubles befell them.

We see the same concept in the case of Kamtza. There were great Sages present, who knew a great deal of Torah. However, since they did not object to Bar Kamtza's being shamed, they caused a tremendous *chillul Hashem*. The scene which unfolded there can easily be termed an example of forsaking the Torah.

We learn that on Tishah b'Av, it is forbidden to read in the Torah, Prophets and Scriptures, or to study Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halachot, and Aggadot. This is because "Hashem's word is upright, and brings gladness to the heart" (*Tehillim* 19:9), and on Tishah b'Av we need to mourn over the destruction. Yet it still seems strange that there is a prohibition against learning Torah on Tishah b'Av, since the whole reason for the destruction is that the Jewish people forsook the Torah. It would seem that the best thing to do on Tishah b'Av would be to study Torah all day!

We learn Torah throughout the year in great depth and discover many new insights. However, we sometimes fail to learn the lesson it contains of “loving our neighbor like ourselves,” which is a fundamental principle of the Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 24:7). We sometimes fail to treat one another with respect, and may even hate one another. What value does such Torah study have?

This is the reason that our Sages instituted that we should not study Torah on Tishah b'Av. It will make people stop and think about why Torah study is prohibited on this day, and be aroused to repent.

The name ט' אב (Tishah B'Av) has the *gematria* of twelve, corresponding to the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This hints to us that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed since the nation's Torah study failed to help them reach the goal of unity. Instead of each person having respect for one another, they hated each other and rejoiced at one another's downfall. Because of the tragedies that resulted from their baseless hatred, and because they failed to translate their Torah study into action, we mourn on Tishah b'Av.

Chazal say, “If there is no Torah, there is no *derech erez*, and if there is no *derech erez*, there can be no Torah.” True, learning Torah is a mitzvah in and of itself, as it says, “You should contemplate it day and night.” Nevertheless, this is but one of 613 mitzvot, and the mitzvot have thousands of details, which cannot be fulfilled by Torah study alone. Some of these mitzvot involve man's relationship with Hashem, and some involve his relationship with his fellow man.

Torah Is Acquired by Sharing the Burden of One's Fellow Man

When the Jewish people used to bring their complaints before Moshe Rabbeinu, he said, “How (איכה) can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?” Chazal say that there were three people who prophesied using the word איכה (how?):

Moshe, Yeshayahu, and Yirmeyahu. Moshe said (*Devarim* 1:12), “איכה – How can I bear alone.” Yeshayahu said (1:21), “איכה – How the faithful city has become a harlot!” Yirmeyahu said (*Eichah* 1:1), “איכה – Alas! She sits in solitude.” What do we learn from this? Rabbi Levi said that this can be compared to a woman who had three servants. One saw her when all was going well with her, one saw her when she acted recklessly, and one saw her when she was sullied by sin.

Moshe Rabbeinu saw the Jewish people when they were at their very best, Yeshayahu saw them when they were straying, and Yirmeyahu saw them in their desolation.

Rabbi Yehudah said the word איכה always implies reproof. Rabbi Nechemiah said it always denotes lament, as we find that when Hashem called out to Adam Harishon, he said (*Bereishit* 3:9) “איכה – Where are you?” meaning “אוי לך – Woe unto you!”

In the weekly pamphlet *Hameir*, the author raised a question over Rabbi Nechemiah’s interpretation of this word. We can understand Rabbi Yehudah’s interpretation that איכה implies reproof in all of the above situations. However, Rabbi Nechemiah’s interpretation that איכה implies lament seems only to apply to the context in which Yirmeyahu used it. When Moshe said איכה, he had just finished comparing the Jewish people to the stars of the heavens. Was he lamenting over the fact that the Jewish people were burdensome? Petty behavior would seem to warrant reproof, not lamentation.

When Moshe said “איכה,” he was both rebuking the nation, according to the explanation of Rabbi Yehudah, and lamenting their sorry condition, according to the explanation of Rabbi Nechemiah. The more a person recognizes Hashem and comes close to Him, the more is expected of him. If he fails to serve Hashem with his full potential, we can tell him, “Woe to you for wasting your potential. You were given a wonderful opportunity to serve Hashem, and you let it slip through your fingers.”

The generation that lived in Moshe's time was called the "Generation of Knowledge," who "saw Hashem's glory with their own eyes" (*Bamidbar* 14:14). Why didn't they make greater efforts to grow in their service of Hashem, instead of constantly quarreling? Why didn't they appreciate the great gift that they had been given, instead of standing in long lines to have Moshe arbitrate their many quarrels? Their state was certainly something to grieve about. When Moshe said "איכה," he wished to point out to his generation that they had reached a sorry condition. They should have invested greater effort in fighting the *Yetzer Hara*, and less in arguing with one another! The fact that they failed to do so was something to lament.

We find that Moshe reproved the Jewish people for the fact that despite all of his efforts on their behalf, they failed to serve Hashem properly, as he expected of them. They should have at least demonstrated their gratitude by living peacefully with one another. Moshe's cry of איכה was a fitting expression of grief.

However, Hashem cares for human beings even when they sin against him, as He is the *Ba'al Harachamim* (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:15). Moshe could certainly complain about the fact that he needed to carry the burden of Bnei Yisrael, with all their contentions, on his own. Moshe said that he himself was incapable of helping them, if they would not cooperate with him. He knew that they had the potential of reaching the level of angels, as they had when the Torah was given (*Zohar* I, 63b).

Moshe Rabbeinu was the right person to give them the reproof of איכה. Since he himself set a shining personal example, he was the one who could tell them to devote themselves to Torah and to make sure that their Torah study bore fruit in the practical realm. We see that he constantly fulfilled his role of being the loving shepherd of the Jewish people. A few pesukim earlier, he said (*Devarim* 1:6), "Hashem, our G-d, spoke to **us** in Chorev," as though all Am Yisrael were prophets like

himself. Due to the overwhelming love that he had for the Jewish nation, he equated the rest of the Jewish people with himself.

Chazal say that when a Torah student is exiled to a city of refuge, his teacher is exiled with him. This is indicated by the Torah's directive (*Devarim* 19:5) that the murderer "shall flee to one of these cities and live." If his teacher is not with him, his life cannot be considered "life" (see *Makkot* 10a; *Rambam, Hilchot Rotze'ach* 7:1). This is difficult to understand. Must the teacher suffer in exile because the disciple killed unintentionally?

By going out of its way to alleviate the hardship of the murderer's exile, the Torah teaches us a very important lesson. Just as Hashem is concerned for the murderer's welfare even more than for His own honor, requiring us to erect clear signs directing the murderer to the cities of refuge, He also expects us to show similar concern for one another. The teacher needs to exile himself together with his student, since doing so has the power to ease the murderer's ordeal.

We learn from Hashem to go out of our way to help another person, and do whatever we can to minimize his pain, if only to a slight degree.

The Torah teaches us to actively invest time, effort, and resources in doing kindness for one another. Only by doing so can we hope to repair the sin of baseless hatred which led to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Unfortunately, the generation that lived at that time failed to emulate the great concern that Hashem has for every Jew. They did not deduce the lesson that the Torah seeks to teach us by requiring the teacher to exile himself with his student. They did not realize the futility of studying Torah and being considered a "scholar" if one fails to live by what he learned and truly care for his friends and disciples.

Instead of sitting on the ground on Tishah b'Av, mourning the destruction and being upset about not learning on this day, one should

rather take heart and reflect over the destruction that he himself sometimes causes, perhaps even on Tishah b'Av itself, by failing to care for others. Chazal say (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 1:1), “Every generation that does not merit seeing the Beit Hamikdash rebuilt, is like the generation in which the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed.”

We can go even a step further and say that if a person does not examine his deeds and try to mend his ways, then he will be taken to task for the lack of Torah study he incurred on Tishah b'Av. After all, the reason that we refrain from learning on Tishah b'Av is so that we can step back and examine our behavior. But if we do not make this spiritual accounting, it means that we have wasted a day of Torah study for no reason. This is no small matter.

On the other hand, when one does set aside his personal interests in order to help another Jew, he gives Hashem tremendous pleasure. By looking past his own interests, and displaying unconditional love toward his fellow Jew, he merits that Hashem overlooks all of his wrongdoings, as it says (*Rosh Hashanah* 17; *Megillah* 28a), “One who overcomes his natural tendencies, all his sins are overlooked.” He is even considered to be rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash and will merit seeing it in all its future glory.

In Summary

- Signs were posted to help the unintentional murderer reach the cities of refuge easily and quickly, in order that he would not be killed by the relatives of the victim. Conversely, the road to Yerushalayim had no signs pointing to the Beit Hamikdash to help those traveling there for the festivals. This is because Hashem is concerned for the welfare of His children, even more than for His own honor. Thus, when someone dies, we are required to interrupt our learning, whereas it is forbidden to stop learning in order to build the Beit Hamikdash. We should take a lesson from this.

- Learning Torah is not enough; we must apply its teachings practically. Actions have the power to protect us from evil. In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, the Jews learned Torah but failed to act accordingly, and as a result, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed. This is why Yirmeyahu asserts that the destruction was caused because the Jewish people “forsook the Torah.” They learned Torah, but failed to implement its directives.
- Although it might seem appropriate to learn Torah on Tishah b’Av, in order to correct the wrong of our forefathers who “forsook the Torah,” we are required to refrain from learning. By doing so, we should stop to think about why the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, and take a lesson from this. The name **בן 'ט** has the *gematria* of twelve, corresponding to the Twelve Tribes. Once all sects of the Jewish nation are united, Mashiach will be able to come.
- When a Torah student needs to escape to a city of refuge, his teacher is exiled with him. Hashem cares for the honor of every person, and we should learn from Him. If one does not take this lesson to heart on Tishah b’Av, then he wastes a day of Torah study for no reason, which is no small matter. On the other hand, when a person looks past his own interests to care for his fellow Jew, Hashem also overlooks all of his wrongdoings, and he will merit seeing the Beit Hamikdash standing in all its glory.

EVERY DAY HAS A CURSE

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said, in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua, that from the day that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, no day goes by without a curse... Rava said, “Every day has a greater curse than the preceding day, as it says (*Devarim* 28:67), ‘In the morning, you will say, who can give back last night! And in the evening you will say, who can give back this morning!’” (*Sota* 48a; 49a).

What is the reason for this daily curse, which is said to accompany us since the destruction?

The Vilna Ga’on explains that when the Beit Hamikdash was

standing, two *tamid* offerings would be offered every day. The world exists in the merit of the sacrifices (see *Zohar* I, 58b; 254). Now that the Beit Hamikdash no longer stands, and we are unable to offer sacrifices, the world is lacking a fundamental element for its existence. Just as a body cannot survive without food, the world cannot properly survive and thrive without sacrifices. This is the reason that “no day goes by without a curse.”

After the destruction, our Sages instituted tefillot to take the place of sacrifices. This is in accordance with the words of Hoshea, who says, “Let our lips substitute for bulls” (*Hoshea* 14:3; see also *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21; *Shir Hashirim* 4:12). Through prayer, we can restore some of the spiritual energy which the sacrifices generated.

The obvious question is, if tefillot can indeed take the place of sacrifices, why does every day have its curse? The answer can be found in these words: “Every generation that did not merit the building of the Beit Hamikdash is considered as if they themselves destroyed it” (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 1:1). Even though we may learn Torah and pray with great devotion, as long as the Beit Hamikdash lies in ruins, the *Shechinah* is still in great pain. There is no greater curse than this.

The Maharal of Prague expounds on this (*Netzach Yisrael* 22; *Netivot Olam* 1, *Netiv Ha'avodah*, Part D). He writes that our world is sustained by the Upper World. Even though the Beit Hamikdash, which served as the conduit through which this sustenance was brought to this world, is no longer standing, the reality of this world being sustained by the Upper World still exists. This is a very deep concept.

Therefore, whoever does not merit to have the Beit Hamikdash built in his lifetime, despite the fact that he prays all of the tefillot that were instituted in place of the sacrifices, is obviously not worthy of receiving the bounty and goodness which the Beit Hamikdash brings to the world. We even feel this lack of bounty, to the extent that we can see

the fulfillment of the pasuk (*Devarim* 28:67) “In the morning, you will say, ‘Who can give back last night!’ And in the evening you will say, ‘Who can give back this morning!’”

Now we can understand the discussion between Rava and Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel. When Rava heard Rabban Shimon’s assertion, he added, “When a person does not take away the curse, and replace it with blessing by building the Beit Hamikdash, the curse on the next day is even greater.” This can be compared to a person who is seriously ill. If a day goes by without a trace of improvement, he will inevitably be worse on the next day.

This teaches us the importance of increasing one’s prayers and Torah study. Although we see that the Beit Hamikdash has yet to be built, we should not slacken in our efforts. On the contrary, each person should try to strengthen himself and feel that he alone is responsible for building the Beit Hamikdash. Just as the early tzaddikim never relaxed their demands of themselves, constantly striving to deepen their understanding of Torah and nourish their connection with Hashem through prayer, we should also assume personal responsibility for acting to merit the redemption.

The Maharal, in *Gevurot Hashem*, discusses the connection between the Torah and the Beit Hamikdash. “The main organs in man’s body are the heart and the brain. The heart is the source of life, whereas the intellect dwells in the brain. Similarly, the Beit Hamikdash and the Torah are the focal points of the world. Just as the heart, which is in the center of the body, provides the rest of the body with life, the Beit Hamikdash is in the ‘center of the world’ and provides the rest of the world with vitality, energy, and blessing. Likewise, just as the brain is the intellectual center of the body, the Torah is the ‘intellect of the world.’

“We see that the Torah and the Beit Hamikdash are the primary entities, and they always accompany each other. The Beit Hamikdash

constitutes the ultimate expression of perfection and harmony in the material world, whereas the Torah is the ultimate expression of intellectual perfection. Therefore, we always say, 'May the Beit Hamikdash be rebuilt speedily in our time, and give us a portion in your Torah.' We ask Hashem to give us a portion in something which is true reality, and not empty pursuits."

We see that without the Beit Hamikdash, there is no world, and all the more so is man incomplete without it. This is a terrible curse, since as long as the Beit Hamikdash lies in ruins, the world is beset with troubles.

We might ask why Hashem allows curse to come to the world. Does Hashem want us to suffer? Rabbi Meir says that when a person experiences suffering, the *Shechinah* says, "My head and arm are heavy" (*Sanhedrin* 46a); this expresses the fact that Hashem suffers along with him. Likewise, in *Tehillim* (91:15), we find that Hashem says, "I am with him in distress," However, man's attributes cannot be compared to Hashem's (*Berachot* 5a; *Shabbat* 127a). Although we may try to express our empathy for a friend who is suffering, we do not always truly feel his pain. Hashem, in contrast, experiences the person's suffering as if it were His own. Why, then, does He allow each day to have a greater curse than the preceding one?

It seems that the goal of our suffering is to awaken us to repent for our sins. It is a great gift from Hashem, as it enables us to repent in this world, and thereby merit limitless goodness and blessing when Mashiach comes, and in the World to Come.

"Hashem remembers and praises the deeds of the righteous and upright... He says, 'Why is the world not filled with people as righteous as Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, and David?' He mourns over His children in exile, just as a father mourns over his children" (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah*, chapter 6).

Shlomo Hamelech instructed the entire nation to contribute toward

the maintenance of the Beit Hamikdash. Since he himself was so wealthy, why didn't he take care of the funding on his own?

He wished to give every single Jew a share in the merit. The word **בדק** (maintenance) also spells **דבק** (glue). By everyone joining together in providing the funds, the Jewish people became united as one, as implied by the word **דבק**. Shlomo Hamelech wanted to unite the nation in their Avodat Hashem.

Since we no longer have the Beit Hamikdash, each one of us needs to make a **בדיקה** of himself, a spiritual maintenance check. By searching our actions and making the requisite improvements in our behavior, we will be able to cleave to Hashem (**דבק**) even in our difficult times.

May Hashem rebuild His Beit Hamikdash soon, and may we merit that the *Shechinah* should rest upon us, and we will truly be able to cleave to Him.

———— In Summary ————

- Chazal say that from the time that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, no day goes by without a curse, and every day has a greater curse than the preceding day. This is because the sacrifices brought in the Beit Hamikdash sustained the world, just like food sustains a person. After the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, this sustenance for the world is now lacking, which is felt as a curse. Our Sages instituted daily prayers to sustain the world instead. Why isn't that enough to prevent suffering?
- Chazal say that if a person does not merit having the Beit Hamikdash built in his generation, it is as if he himself destroyed it. Even when one learns Torah and prays with devotion, it is still considered as though the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed in his time. There is no greater curse than that. The Beit Hamikdash is the source of blessing; there can be no true blessing without it. This can be compared to a malady that is not cured, which grows worse from day to day. The aim of suffering is to awaken us to repent and come closer to Hashem. If we do, we will merit enjoying true closeness with Hashem with the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

TORAH STUDY BONDS US WITH OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

“Who is the wise man who will understand this?”

(Yirmeyahu 9:11)

When discussing the cause for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) states that Rabbi Yehudah asks, in the name of Rav, “What is meant by the statement: ‘Who is the wise man who will understand this?’ This question was asked of the Sages and prophets, but no one offered a response, until Hashem Himself explained, ‘Because they forsook My Torah.’” If Bnei Yisrael actually forsook the Torah, and did not fulfill the 613 mitzvot, why was it necessary for Hashem Himself to reveal the cause of the destruction to them? Wasn’t it self-understood that if they abandoned Torah and mitzvot, *churban* would be the direct result?

Torah study has two purposes. The first is that a person should become knowledgeable in all areas of halachah, so that he will observe the mitzvot correctly. Without knowing all the details of the mitzvot, he is liable to stumble.

The second, and main purpose, is that Torah study is man’s mission in this world. Learning Torah is an exalted and holy endeavor. Even if a person is 100% clear about all aspects of the mitzvot, he is still obligated to learn Torah and delve into their essence, even mitzvot that do not apply to him. The reason for this is that one must maintain strong ties with his Creator, knowing and understanding that all of his success comes from Him. Hashem is the One Who sustains him and his household, providing him with children, life, and financial support. The way to feel connected with Hashem is by studying His Torah. The more effort a person invests in understanding the depths of the Torah, the

greater will be his love of Hashem, and the more connected will he be with his Maker.

This was the mistake of Am Yisrael in the era leading up to the *churban*. They did not realize that Torah study is an end in and of itself. They believed that Torah study was necessary only in order to learn the details of the mitzvot. They learned Torah in order to know its laws, but saw no purpose in delving in it for its own sake. That was why they could not understand what caused the destruction. They were all righteous people, who fulfilled the mitzvot in all their details, easy and difficult alike. They observed Shabbat, wore tefillin, and kept all of the rest of the mitzvot. Why, then, they wondered, was the Beit Hamikdash destroyed?

However, they failed to consider the fact that they had a moral obligation to uphold their connection with Hashem in the most tangible way possible, by learning Torah. They were not aware of the reality that only consistent Torah study is the adhesive that bonds a person with his Heavenly Father. Thus only Hashem was able to provide the reason for the *churban*: “Because they forsook My Torah.” Certainly they kept the mitzvot, and most likely in the best way possible, but they did not apply themselves to learning Torah for its own sake. This frayed the ropes that bound them to Hashem.

The main purpose of the Beit Hamikdash was the connection that it formed between Bnei Yisrael and their Father in Heaven. When Bnei Yisrael severed their ties with Hashem through their laxity in Torah study, He punished them measure for measure by destroying the Beit Hamikdash, which was His connection to the nation. This was to hint to them that their rectification would come through Torah study.

This is one of the reasons that our *Chachamim* have forbidden Torah study on Tishah b’Av (*Shulchan Aruch* 554:1). Were we to learn Torah then, it would indict us, as if to say, “Where were you in the days of

the Beit Hamikdash? Why didn't you see fit to study Torah then, averting the destruction entirely?"

Parashat *Ha'azinu* is replete with rebuke. It would seem fitting to read this parashah during the three weeks of Bein Hametzarim, especially since it alludes to Megillat Eichah (איכה) in the pasuk (*Devarim* 32:30), "איכה ירדף אחד אלף ושנים ינוסו רבבה" – For how could one pursue a thousand, and two cause a myriad to flee?" Why, then, didn't Chazal establish the reading of this parashah during these weeks?

It is specifically because of all of the rebuke it contains that our Sages did not establish its reading then. These forms of rebuke evoke prosecution against us, for we have left Hashem, abandoning His Torah and freeing ourselves of His yoke. In order to seal the mouth of the Satan, we do not make mention of these rebukes.

Instead, parashat *Ha'azinu* is read during the Asseret Yemei Teshuvah, when a person is involved in introspection and doing teshuvah. The Satan and his associates are kept at bay during that time. The reading of parashat *Ha'azinu* provides an opportunity for reflection upon one's past misdeeds and a chance to change his ways.

We must keep in mind that the *churban* came for one reason – because they forsook the Torah. We must correct this, strengthening our bond with Hashem in continued Torah study. Then, Hashem will certainly hurry to redeem us and return His *Shechinah* among us, rebuilding His connection with His nation with the third Beit Hamikdash.

The Gemara relates the following incident (*Sanhedrin* 98a). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Mashiach and asked when he would come. He replied, "Today." The day passed with no sign of his arrival. Rabbi Yehoshua then approached Eliyahu Hanavi and told him that Mashiach had promised that he would come that day but did not. Eliyahu explained, "Mashiach was referring to the pasuk (*Tehillim* 95:7), 'Even

today, if we but heed His call.” He can come anytime, but it is on condition that we obey Hashem’s word. If we correct our ways and cling to the Torah, the light of Mashiach will shine upon us. It is completely in our hands.

Based on this, we can understand the pasuk (*Eichah* 1:15) “קרא עלי – מועד – He proclaimed a set time against me.” How can Tishah b’Av, a day of mourning and lamentation, be considered a *mo’ed*, which has the connotation of a festive day? Tens of thousands of our brethren fell in gruesome deaths, through hunger and thirst, bereft of everything. This pasuk teaches us that although Tishah b’Av is a day of distress, we should not despair. If we strengthen our connection with Hashem through Torah study, we have the potential to transform it into a holiday.

Each festival is celebrated on a specific date. Sukkot falls on the 15th of Tishrei, Pesach on the 15th of Nisan, and Shavuot on the 6th of Sivan. But there is no set date for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. It can happen at any time, even today, if we heed His call. Yirmeyahu’s words “He proclaimed a set time against me” are most appropriate. Each of us should feel that Hashem has proclaimed a set time against *me*, personally. Therefore, the responsibility of rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash rests upon my shoulders; it is solely dependent upon *me*. The future festival of redemption depends on our improving our character traits and reconnecting with Hashem through increased Torah study. Hashem eagerly anticipates the moment when He can finally redeem us forever.

This is alluded to in the words “קרא עלי מועד – He proclaimed a set time against me.” The *gematria* of the word קרא (proclaimed), adding one for the word itself, equals that of the word קרב (close), as well as קבר (burial plot). On the one hand, we have the ability to bring the holiday of the redemption closer, changing Tishah b’Av into a day of joy and festivity, an eternal salvation. On the other hand, we can “bury”

the day, postponing redemption indefinitely. Our deeds either bring us closer to the redemption, or distance us from it.

Tishah b'Av is the day designated for remembering the *churban* of European Jewry. Millions of our pure and holy brethren, men, women, and children, were murdered by the inhumanly cruel Nazis.

However, this raises a question. There were many mighty nations similar to the Nazis that rose to great power but were ultimately destroyed, e.g., Amon, Moav, and Rome. Many great world powers were extinguished without a trace. Why doesn't their destruction evoke the same emotive remembrance as the destruction of the Jewish people in the Holocaust?

Physical destruction comes upon Am Yisrael due to inner spiritual destruction. Only after Am Yisrael forsake Torah and mitzvot, *rachmana litzlan*, are they vulnerable to physical annihilation. Hashem specifically keeps the Holocaust of Europe at the forefront of world conscience, so that we should constantly remember its cause: that we abandoned His Torah, severing our bond with Him. Once we understand this, we are capable of correcting our iniquity and returning to our Source. This will certainly hasten the *geulah*.

We cry out to Hashem in anguish, "*Ribbono shel Olam*, how long will Your strength be in captivity and Your splendor in the oppressor's hand? Raise up the pride of Your nation, Yisrael, and redeem them from their exile and wretchedness." Hashem responds, "True, I suffer greatly, for My *Shechinah* is in exile. But it is up to you to mend your ways. You are enjoined to correct your actions and fortify yourselves with Torah. Then, I will immediately save you and return you to Me."

Chazal teach (*Avot* 4:18), "Exile yourself to a place of Torah." Maybe this means that in order to obviate the need for literal exile, we should willingly exile ourselves to a place of Torah learning. When there is *bitul* Torah, exile is decreed as punishment, and brings terrible suffering along with it.

Let us strengthen ourselves in Torah study and strive to delve in it both day and night. In this manner, we will strengthen the connection between ourselves and our Heavenly Father, meriting eternal redemption with the coming of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, speedily in our day.

————— In Summary —————

- The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because Bnei Yisrael “forsook the Torah.” Why was it necessary for Hashem Himself to reveal the cause of the destruction? Was it not self-understood that if they abandoned Torah and mitzvot, destruction would be the result?
- Learning Torah has two purposes. First, one should know halachah in order to keep the mitzvot properly. However, the main purpose is to learn in depth, in order to come close to Hashem.
- This was the mistake of the generation of the *churban*. Although they were stringent in regard to mitzvah performance, they failed to understand the importance of learning Torah in order to connect to Hashem. Thus, only Hashem could tell them the reason for the destruction.
- Since they did not appreciate that Torah connects a person with Hashem, the Beit Hamikdash, which is Hashem’s means to connect with the nation, was destroyed, measure for measure.
- Parashat *Ha’azinu* is replete with rebuke and is therefore not read during the Three Weeks, in order to prevent the Satan from prosecuting us.
- Mashiach can come any day, if we obey Hashem’s word. Unlike the festivals, which have a set date, the date of the future festival of redemption is dependent upon our actions.
- On Tishah B’Av, we remember the Holocaust, so that we should remember its cause: that we abandoned the Torah and severed our connection with Hashem. Then we can correct our faults and hasten the redemption. Once we return to Hashem, He will bring the Mashiach and the final redemption.

TIME TO REFLECT

“Remember, Hashem, what has befallen us; look and see our disgrace”

(Eichah 5:1)

Chazal recount five hardships that befell our ancestors on Tishah b'Av (*Ta'anit* 26b): The generation in the Wilderness was banned from entering Eretz Yisrael; the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed; the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed; Beitar was captured; and Yerushalayim was laid waste. It is a difficult, bitter day. There are still those among us, who, until today, feel the sorrow of our nation in *galut*. They mourn the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash as though they witnessed it. But, unfortunately, many have lost this sensitivity to our national loss. Their awareness has become so dulled that they ask in wonder what the weeping on this day is all about.

I clearly remember, with awe and trepidation, the atmosphere in Morocco during these days, when I was young. The people there knew very well the meaning of tragedy and destruction. Mourning was felt in every crack and crevice. From the beginning of the week in which Tishah b'Av fell, people would shelter themselves in their homes, afraid of walking the streets. This was in line with the exhortation of the *Navi* Yeshayahu (26:20), “Go, my people, enter your rooms and close your door behind you.” The righteous women would bewail the *churban* Beit Hamikdash. When Tishah b'Av arrived, everyone wore a woeful expression, as though their dead were lying before them, and grief gripped their hearts.

Regrettably, today, our hearts are like stone, and we do not comprehend the enormity of what we have lost with the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. We cannot fathom the suffering of the *Shechinah*,

crying out in agony from the bitterness of this *galut*, her dignity downgraded to the dust due to the weight of our sins, *rachmana litzlan*.

During the recitation of the *kinot*, people do become aroused to shed a tear or two, but after the day of Tishah b'Av, it's back to business as usual, as though nothing had happened. A person should feel the sorrow of the *churban* throughout the entire year. The sadness of Tishah b'Av should accompany us all the time, until Hashem sees our anguish and redeems us.

Why, indeed, do we not feel the lack of the Beit Hamikdash as we should? Why don't we feel the suffering of the *Shechinah* as they did in past generations? I would venture to say that this is due to a lack of contemplation. If we would consider what we are missing due to the *churban*, we would certainly be filled with sorrow and anguish. It is enough to just notice the lack of the *Shechinah*, which was once in our midst, and witness the degradation of the Torah, which was greatly honored during the days of the Beit Hamikdash. Contemplating the awful exile in which we are enslaved until this very day will surely melt our hearts.

The problem is that we are constantly on the run. We are caught up in the rat race of life, without a moment to think clearly. Day pursues day, with no break for introspection. How can we expect people nowadays to lament an era that they have no understanding of whatsoever? How can they bemoan a *galut* that they don't think is all that bad, after all?

One goes through many experiences in his life. If he were to just halt for a while and consider all that has occurred to him, he will see how Hashem has constantly stood at his side, rescuing him and coming to his aid, time after time. These incidents have the power to heighten his awareness of Hashem's Presence and strengthen his *emunah*, bringing him to greater levels of *yirat Shamayim*.

However, here too, we are faced with the same problem. A person does not take the time to reflect on his life. He brazenly attributes all of his successes to himself. If he would think about things a little, he would certainly clearly see Hashem's Divine intervention at play, showering him with kindness.

One should take the time to stop and do some soul-searching. He should scrutinize his actions and see whether they are appropriate or in need of correction. As it says in the sefer *Mesillat Yesharim* (Chapter 3), "The basic principle is that a person should examine all of his actions and not allow himself to cling to a negative habit, all the more so a sin or iniquity. The *Yetzer Hara* blinds a person's eyes. He walks in darkness and is completely unaware of the obstacles along the way. The only way to deal with this situation is, "Come to Cheshbon – come, let us make reckoning of our actions in this world."

An in-depth, honest personal accounting has the potential to transform a person from one extreme to the other. Even a gentile is capable of being positively affected by this principle. The Gemara gives an example (*Gittin* 57a) of Nevuzaradan the Chief Executioner, who found the blood of Zechariah boiling in the Beit Hamikdash. He asked Bnei Yisrael to explain this phenomenon, and when they saw that he was not satisfied with their explanations, they had no recourse but to tell the truth. They said that Zechariah used to chastise them in the Name of Heaven, in order to bring them back to the right path. Because they weren't interested in listening to his harsh words, they killed him.

Nevuzaradan saw that the blood had not stopped boiling for many years, so he decided to appease it. He had the members of the Upper and Lower Sanhedrin brought before him, and killed them. But the blood continued bubbling. He had young boys and girls brought before him, and killed them, as well. The blood continued to boil. He then killed the little children who learn Torah with their teachers, but to no avail. Then Nevuzaradan called out, "Zechariah, Zechariah. I killed out

the best of the nation. Do you want me to destroy them all?!” Zechariah’s blood immediately ceased boiling.

At that moment, thoughts of teshuvah entered Nevuzaradan’s mind. He thought, “If, for just one soul, so many were deserving of death, I, who murdered so many people, will surely receive retribution.” He contemplated his actions and made a personal accounting of his way of life. In a moment of clarity, he realized he was on the wrong road. The day would come when he would stand in justice and have to give an accounting for all his deeds. He realized that he must change his ways. He immediately fled his country and converted to Judaism. He was accepted under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

Nevuzaradan could have justified his actions. Bnei Yisrael were in a state of ruin and destruction. This killing was part of the Master plan; why was he to blame? Yet, he accepted upon himself the responsibility for the deaths that came about through him, for something negative is brought about by one who is liable. He therefore feared for his soul and did teshuvah. This is an example of what a moment of true introspection can accomplish. Through taking stock, one can make deep and meaningful changes and come ever closer to Hashem.

The same is true regarding the condition of our nation during the time of the Beit Hamikdash. They were on a high spiritual level, with the *Shechinah* residing in their midst. They received physical blessing from Above. Suddenly, everything was lost, with no memory of the days of plenty. When one reflects on this, he will come to an awareness of the enormity of the tragedy of the *churban*, and he will cry out with every fiber of his being: “Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old.”

We have an example of this in our daily lives. Every morning, we recite the blessing thanking Hashem “for not having made me a gentile.” Did a person ever sit down and consider the meaning of this blessing? This is an important *berachah*, which must be made with

proper intention. Does a person reflect on the difference between himself and his gentile neighbor, apart from the fact that he is circumcised? This blessing is laden with significance.

Once I was on a transatlantic flight for fourteen hours. I was sitting near some gentiles. This experience deepened my understanding of the essence of the *berachah* “Who has not made me a gentile.” It was enough just to observe a small fraction of their lifestyle to recognize the fundamental differences between us. The life of a non-Jew is similar to that of the animal, except that the latter walks on all fours...

In our Yamim Noraim prayers, we state, “The advantage of man over animal is futility, for everything is futility.” I observed these people on the plane. I watched how they fell upon their meals just as soon as they awoke, without washing their hands or rinsing out their mouths. They were interested in nothing other than physical pleasures. Throughout the long hours of the flight, they were constantly watching the abominable movies, completely entrenched in pursuits of lust.

L’havdil, the Jew awakens in the morning and immediately recites *Modeh Ani*. He is full of thanksgiving to his Creator for returning his *neshamah* to him. Before eating, he washes his hands and makes the proper blessing. He sits at the table with manners. If, *chalilah*, an inappropriate picture or piece of literature happens his way, he has the inner strength to overcome temptation and immediately turns away from it. He is not prepared to sell his soul to the *Yetzer Hara*.

Of course, after witnessing their shameful behavior, I felt true appreciation for the difference between the Jew and the gentile. That morning, I made the blessing “Who has not made me a gentile” from the depths of my heart, with complete concentration. This incident demonstrates that with real introspection and deep analysis, tefillah and all blessings take on new meaning. Praiseworthy is the person who is mindful of his deeds and considers them at all times.

The essential difference between a Jew and a gentile is that we have the Torah. The Torah refines a person and straightens out his ways. It affords him a certain dignity, polishing his *middot* and enabling him to live with *derech erez*. Through learning Torah, a person comes close to Hashem and acquires perfect *emunah* and pure *yirat Shamayim*.

I would like to recount here a wonderful story that depicts the power of *emunah*, inherent in the heart of every Jew. Each of us is replete with faith, as the pasuk in Shir Hashirim states (4:3), “As many as a pomegranate’s seeds are the merits of your unworthiest within your modest veil.” Approximately three years ago, a woman in France brought her wheel-chair bound son before me. She told me, most bitterly, that he had been in a terrible car accident and was now paralyzed from the waist down. The doctors despaired of his ever recovering, *rachmana litzlan*. She came to ask me for a *berachah* that he recover quickly and completely.

The following Gemara went through my mind (*Berachot* 5a). Rabbi Yochanan had become sick and Rabbi Chanina came to visit him. Rabbi Chanina asked him, “Do you enjoy the suffering?” To which he responded, “Not the suffering, and not its reward.” Rabbi Chanina then told Rabbi Yochanan to give him his hand. Through this act, Rabbi Yochanan recovered.

I told this boy, as well, to give me his hand. With herculean effort, he attempted to rise from his chair and give me his hand. But he immediately fell back into his wheel-chair. I told his mother to do this little exercise with him every day, stating the words of Rabbi Chanina, “Give me your hand.” She should thereby force him to get up, and with Hashem’s help, he would be healed.

After three years, the woman returned with her son. But this time, he walked in, like an ordinary man! She relayed to me that every single day, for three years, she turned to her son and said, “Give me your hand.” At times, he would become frustrated, crying out, “Don’t you

see that it isn't helping at all? It's so hard for me to stand. Why do you torture me so?"

"But I had faith in the blessing of the tzaddik," she told me, "and would not surrender. I knew that the day of his salvation would come. Suddenly, one day, when I asked for his hand, he surprised me by rising easily and standing on his feet like a regular person. He began to jump and scream from joy at this tremendous miracle."

Certainly, the pure faith in this woman's heart rewarded her with the merit of seeing her son's salvation. His recovery did not come immediately. Nonetheless, she persisted in her faith that the day would come that he would be healed, with Hashem's help. She indeed merited witnessing a miracle. Such is the power of faith.

A man by the name of Jackie Edri once approached me. He had been married for many years, yet did not have any children. The doctors told him he was infertile and could not have children. He came to me and demanded, "If Sara Imeinu and all of our Matriarchs were barren but were eventually redeemed, why shouldn't I also merit having children?!"

I answered, "Are you as righteous as they?"

He replied, "I am their descendant."

I didn't know what to say.

Then he continued, crying, "Would that I merit having children."

I answered, "Amen."

After about a year and a half, he came to me with the good news that his wife was expecting a child. He asked that I bless her.

I asked him, "To which specialists did you turn?"

He responded, with utter simplicity, "We did not go to any specialists or professors. From the time that I received the Rav's blessing, I had

full faith in Hashem that in the merit of your forefathers, I would be redeemed. The blessing of the Rav has been fulfilled, for I have been granted a child.”

I told him that he had taught me a lesson in perfect, simple faith. It has the power to transform harsh decrees to compassionate ones. Fortunate is the one who merits cleaving to this good *middah*.

These two stories demonstrate the awesome power of pure faith in Hashem. Whatever the man of perfect faith requests from Hashem, he is granted. In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, the power of pure faith was imbedded in the hearts of the people. Studying the ten miracles that took place in the Beit Hamikdash will fill one’s heart with faith in Hashem and *yirat Shamayim*. Unfortunately, we are lacking all of this.

May it be Hashem’s will that He restore His *Shechinah* to Tzion and rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, the house of our splendor. This day of mourning will then be transformed into a day of joy.

————— **In Summary** —————

- Five tragedies took place on Tishah B’Av, including the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Unfortunately, few people today truly mourn the *churban*, let alone shed a tear over it. Why do we fail to mourn over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the suffering of the *Shechinah* like our ancestors did?
- It is because we fail to reflect upon what we are missing. We live hectic lives and do not take the time to contemplate either the blessings that Hashem showers upon us daily, or our actions, which need correction.
- The *Mesillat Yesharim* teaches us to “come to Cheshbon” and make an accounting of our deeds.
- One moment of introspection can have tremendous results. We see this from Nevuzaradan, who converted to Judaism, after committing the most heinous crimes, because he paused to reflect on his actions.

- By considering the import of the *berachah* “Who has not made me a gentile” we should renew our appreciation of the gift of Torah and mitzvot every day.
- Likewise, appreciating Hashem’s kindnesses and the miracles He has wrought for us in former times, in the Beit Hamikdash and in our personal lives, should help us reconnect to Him.

TU B'AV



TU B'AV AND YOM KIPPUR – DAYS OF UNITY AND REJOICING

“There were no days more joyous among Bnei Yisrael than Tu b’Av (15th Av) and Yom Kippur” (*Ta’anit* 26b). What is the similarity between these days, to the extent that Chazal equate them as the most joyous days of the Jewish calendar?

Furthermore, the Jewish year is replete with holidays, each containing elements of joy. What is the unique quality of the joy of these two days, which is so much more exalted? (*Ta’anit* 30b; *Bava Batra* 121a; *Eichah Rabbah*, Introduction 33.)

We can understand the joy felt on Yom Kippur, for that is the day Hashem forgives all our sins (*Vayikra* 16:30). We feel a spiritual happiness, because our souls have become purified. We once again have the ability to climb the ladder of Avodat Hashem without the encumbrance of sin. But what is the great joy of Tu b’Av?

Chazal provide explanations. But we are still left with our question: Bnei Yisrael experienced miracles on other holidays; why was this day chosen as the happiest of them all?

The Gemara (*Yoma* 85b; *Pesikta Rabbah* 39) teaches us that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and Hashem. For sins between man and his fellow man, one must first obtain forgiveness from his fellow man in order to obtain forgiveness from Hashem.

Thus the most important part of one's preparations for Yom Kippur is in the area between himself and his fellow man. One must mollify his friend before he can hope to achieve the atonement that Yom Kippur offers.

It is the element of unity and appeasement that permeates the air on Yom Kippur that renders it a joyous day. Everyone understands that this brotherliness is a prerequisite to Hashem's forgiving all of their sins. Once people have reconciled their differences and become conciliated, their joy is compounded by the atonement that they receive on Yom Kippur. This is the main reason for the joy felt at the conclusion of the day.

Similarly, if we examine the joy of Tu b'Av, we will find that it was caused by the unity felt among Bnei Yisrael on that day and because their sins were forgiven then.

The Gemara (*Ta'anit* 30b) explains that on Tu b'Av, the Shevatim allowed intermarriage between the tribes. They did not differentiate between the rich and the poor. All were reunited. The Gemara (*ibid.* 26b) describes how the daughters of Israel would go out dressed in white. They would all wear borrowed clothing, in order not to shame those who did not have their own. On that day, as well, the Jews in the desert ceased to die. They then realized that the sin of the spies had been forgiven. [This is another similarity to Yom Kippur, when they received atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf].

Chazal (*Uktzin* 3:12) state that Hashem did not find a vessel to contain blessing other than peace, as it says (*Tehillim* 29:11), "Hashem will give might to His nation, Hashem will bless His nation with peace."

When Am Yisrael is united, Hashem blesses them with *chessed* and compassion. He silences all prosecution against them.

Tu b'Av is a joyous day for the same reason as Yom Kippur. Tu b'Av was joyous due to the unity that prevailed between the people, which

silenced all prosecution against them. Likewise, on Yom Kippur our joy is boundless due to the knowledge that all our sins have been forgiven, including those between man and his fellow. Our unity is an integral part of the process of gaining atonement. Thus we are able to “go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds” (*Kohelet* 9:7).

We might go so far as to say that it is in the merit of the preparations we began on Tu b’Av, appeasing our fellow man, that we earn atonement for our sins on Yom Kippur.

The sefarim suggest that the day of Tu b’Av is the beginning of the days of judgment that start in Elul and culminate with Hoshana Rabbah. It is appropriate on this day to begin making an accounting of one’s actions during the previous year.

This is alluded to in Moshe’s words to the nation (*Devarim* 29:10), “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d... from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water.” Tu b’Av is alluded to by “the hewer of your wood,” since it was the last day assigned for the preparation of wood for the sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash. The “drawer of water” refers to Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of the water-pouring ceremony (*Simchat Beit Hasho’eivah*), which took place throughout Sukkot (*Sukkah* 4:1). The white clothing worn by the young maidens on Tu b’Av indicates the purity attained through the atonement of sin (*Yeshayahu* 1:18).

The joy in being granted atonement for our sins is a spiritual joy. The *neshamah* is wary of descending to this world, lest it become sullied with sin. The *sifrei Chassidut* explain Hashem’s words to Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 12:1) “Go for yourself from your land” in the following manner. The *neshamah* is loath to descend to this world, because of the *Yetzer Hara* and the many temptations awaiting it at every opportunity. The *neshamah* prefers to remain under the Heavenly Throne and enjoy the glory of Hashem’s *Shechinah*. It would rather stay

stationary and not ascend to loftier levels, just as the angels do. It would prefer being a servant who serves his master perfectly, without the hope of rising, but also without the fear of falling.

But Hashem's plan is otherwise. He tells the *neshamah* (*Avot* 4:22), "Against your will you were created; against your will you were born..." Hashem commissions it to enter this perilous world with the words "Go for yourself."

He conveys the message that if the *neshamah* will observe the mitzvot, it will be "for yourself" – for its own benefit. The *Yetzer Hara* will then be under its jurisdiction. This is hinted to by the pasuk in *Devarim* (21:10), "When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture his captives."

If a person wages war with his *Yetzer Hara*, he will gain control over him and vanquish him. Then he will have the ability to serve Hashem with both of his inclinations, the *Yetzer Hara* as well as the *Yetzer Hatov* (*Berachot* 54a). He will ascend to great heights, even above the angels, who always remain at the same level.

This might be what Rashi is referring to by explaining the words "Go for yourself" as "For your pleasure and for your benefit." By the *neshamah* making this treacherous journey in this world, it stands to gain tremendous benefits, which would be unattainable had it remained on High. Its sojourn in this world contains potential for unlimited greatness.

The double expression of "Go for yourself" alludes to the two choices that a person has in this world. He can either choose the path of truth, or, *chas v'shalom*, the path of falsehood. This choice is implanted in every person even before he is born (*Niddah* 30b).

This is the choice that the *neshamah* faces as soon as it enters this world. Hashem advises it to choose life. This is by "going from your

homeland and your father's house." These refer to the mundane pleasures of this world. Then the *neshamah* will merit seeing "the land which I will show you." This alludes to the unimaginable reward awaiting those who fear Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim* 31:20), "How abundant (מה רב) is Your goodness that You have stored away for those who fear You." Once the *neshamah* has accomplished its mission, it is promised "and I will make of you a great nation."

The initials of the words מה רב (how great) spell the word מר (bitter). The last letter of מה and the first letter of רב spell הר (mountain). The *neshamah* suffers bitterly in this world from the *Yetzer Hara*, who is described as a mountain. The Gemara (*Sukkah* 52a) relates that in the future, Hashem will display the *Yetzer Hara* before all. The tzaddikim will weep, asking, "How did we succeed in scaling this high mountain?!"

Hashem placates the *neshamah*, "How great is the good awaiting you. After all of the trials and tribulations, you deserve the reward reserved for My tzaddikim."

Woe to the person who succumbs to his *Yetzer Hara*. Instead of the daily bitterness of battle with his *Yetzer Hara*, he will receive his measure of bitterness in the World to Come. This is according to the words of the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 16:8), "The *Yetzer Hara* is initially sweet, and bitter at the end." One must constantly aspire to earn the reward awaiting those who do battle with their *Yetzer Hara* in this world.

————— In Summary —————

- Our Sages designated the days of Tu b'Av and Yom Kippur as the most joyous days on the Jewish calendar. How are they alike? We rejoice on Yom Kippur for the atonement that we gain for our sins from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Likewise, Tu b'Av is a day for rejoicing in the unity which reigns among Bnei Yisrael on that day, when each person mollifies his fellow. This unity

is part of the preparation for Yom Kippur. Unity among all members of the nation is a prerequisite for forgiveness from Hashem.

- The main aspect of joy is spiritual. The *neshamah* is wary of descending into this world of mundane pleasures and sin. Hashem appeases it, by stating, “Go for yourself. If you go in My ways, the *Yetzer Hara* will be under your control. He will be your captive.” Rashi explains the words “Go for yourself” as: “For your pleasure and for your benefit.” By its descent to this world, the soul merits the reward hidden for the tzaddikim in the World to Come. By constantly battling his *Yetzer Hara*, despite all of the anguish this causes him, one earns the privileges reserved for the tzaddikim.

GLOSSARY



Afikoman – the smaller half of the broken matzah that is hidden and then eaten before *chatzot*

Ahavat Hashem – love of Hashem

Ahavat Yisrael – love of one's fellow Jew

Akeidah – the Binding on the Altar of Yitzchak

Aliyah, aliyot (pl) – the honor of being called up to the Torah on Shabbat and holidays

Anshei Kneset Hagedolah – the Men of the Great Assembly

Aron – Ark of the Covenant

Aron Hakodesh – the Holy Ark in the Beit Hakeneset

Asseret Yemei Teshuvah – the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Aveirah, aveirot (pl) – transgression

Avodah – Service in the Temple, or specifically referring to prayer

Avodat Hashem – service of Hashem

Avot – Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Bal tashchit – the prohibition against wastefulness

Ba'al teshuvah, ba'alei teshuvah (pl) – (lit. master of return) one who has returned to Jewish observance

Ba'al tokea – person who blows the shofar

Ba'alei Mussar – Masters of Ethics

Baruch Hashem – Thank G-d

Bein Hametzarim – (lit. “Between the Straits”) the three weeks between the seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah b’Av

Beinonim – average people

Beit Din – rabbinical court

Beit Hakeneset, Batei Kenesiot (pl) – house of prayer, synagogue

Beit Hamidrash, Batei Midrashot (pl) – house of study

Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple

Beit Hillel – lit. The House of Hillel, i.e., his disciples

Beit Shammai – lit. The House of Shammai, i.e., his disciples

Ben sorer u’morer – the wayward son

Ben, bnei (pl) – son

Berachah, berachot (pl) – blessing

Bikurim – gifts of the first fruits given to the Kohen in the Beit Hamikdash

Bitul Torah – time wasted from Torah study

Bnei Yisrael – the Children of Israel

Brit milah – circumcision

Chachamim – (lit. wise people) Sages, teachers

Chag – festival

Chametz – leavened bread, which is forbidden to be eaten on Pesach

Charoset – a mixture of nuts and wine, which is reminiscent of the bricks that the Jews were forced to make in Egypt

Chas v’shalom – May G-d have mercy

Chashmonaim – Hasmoneans

Chassid – righteous person

Chatan – groom

Chatzot – the midnight hour according to halachah

Chazal – our Sages, may their memory be for blessing

Chessed – act of kindness

Chillul Hashem – desecration of Hashem’s Name

Chillul Shabbat – desecration of Shabbat

Chinuch – education

Chitzonim – forces of impurity

Chuppah – wedding canopy

Churban – destruction, referring to the Beit Hamikdash

Chutz La'aretz – Diaspora

Derech erez – proper behavior, character refinement

Eglah arufah – a calf whose neck was broken as atonement for the death of a person found between two cities

Eemunah – belief, faith

Eminat Chachamim – faith in our Sages

Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel

Erev – the eve of

Etrog – citrus fruit used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Galut – exile

Gan Eden – Garden of Eden, Paradise

Gematria – numerical value

Gematria katan – (lit. “small gematria”) the numerical value of the sum obtained by dropping the zeroes from the numerical values of all the letters and then adding them up

Geulah – redemption

Geulah sheleimah – complete, final redemption

Gevurah – strength

Gid hanasheh – sciatic nerve

Gilgul – reincarnation

Haggadah, Haggadot (pl) – the sefer relating the story of the Exodus

Hakadosh Baruch Hu – The Holy One, blessed be He (Hashem)
 Halachah, halachot (pl) – Jewish law, edicts
 Halachic – according to Jewish law
 Hallel – prayer of thanksgiving said on Rosh Chodesh and the festivals
 Hilchot – the laws of...
 Hilula, hilulot (pl) – celebration conducted on the anniversary of a tzaddik’s death
 Hod – beauty (one of the *sefirot*)

 Imahot – the four Mothers of our nation

 Kabbalah – hidden facets of the Torah
 Kabbalat HaTorah – the Receiving of the Torah
 Kabbalists – those who learn Kabbalah
 Kallah – bride
 Karet – punishment of being cut off from Hashem
 Karpas – vegetable such as potato or parsley eaten at the Passover Seder
 Kav, Kav Hayashar – Kabbalistic term, lit. “Line,” “Straight Line”
 Kedushah – holiness
 Kehunah – priesthood
 Kelippah, kelippot (pl) – force of impurity
 Ketoret – incense
 Kezayit – halachic unit of measurement
 Kiddush Hashem – sanctification of Hashem’s Name
 Kiddush levanah – the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon
 Kilayim – the prohibition of planting two separate species together
 Kimcha d’Pischa – food parcels given to the poor before Pesach
 Kinot – lamentations, read on Tishah b’Av
 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

Korban, korbanot (pl) – offering, sacrifice

Kotel Hama'aravi – the Western Wall

Kriyat Shema – the recital of the Shema

Kriyat Yam Suf – the Splitting of the Sea

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'havdil – “To separate” (figure of speech)

Leviyah – the position of being a Levi

Levi'im – Levites

Lishmah – for the sake of Heaven, with no ulterior motives

Lulav – palm branch used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Maftir – the last person called up to the Torah on Shabbat and the festivals

Makkat bechorot – the plague of the firstborn

Malchut – majesty, kingship

Maror – bitter herbs, eaten at the Pesach Seder

Mashiach – the Messiah

Matanot la'evyonim – monetary gifts given to the poor on Purim

Matan Torah – the Giving of the Torah

Mazal – luck, good fortune

Melachah – thirty-nine categories of “work” that are forbidden on Shabbat and the festivals

Menorah – the Candelabra in the Beit Hamikdash

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 – Divine Attribute of Justice

Midrash – homiletical teachings of the Sages

Mikveh, mikvaot (pl) – body of water for ritual immersion and purification

Minchah – the Afternoon Prayer

Mishkan – the Tabernacle

Mishlo'ach manot – gifts of food sent on Purim

Mitzrayim – Egypt

Mitzvah, mitzvot (pl) – good deed, commandment

Mizbeach – the Altar

Muktzeh – objects which are forbidden to be moved on Shabbat

Musaf – additional prayer on Shabbat morning

Mussar – ethical teachings

Nachat – joy or pleasure from another's accomplishments

Navi – prophet

Nazir – person who accepts certain restrictions in order to attain a high level of purity

Nefesh – soul

Neshamah yeteirah – the additional soul granted to a person on Shabbat

Neshamah, neshamot (pl) – soul

Netilat yadayim – ritual washing of the hands

Netzach – eternity (one of the sefirot)

Nisayon, nisyonot (pl) – test, challenging situation

Nisuch hamayim – the ceremony of pouring the water on the Altar at Sukkot

Nitzotz, nitzotzot (pl) – spark

Ohr Ein Sof – kabbalistic term, lit. The Infinite Light, referring to Hashem

Ohr Hamakif – kabbalistic term, lit. The All-encompassing Light

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

Parah adumah – the red heifer
 Parashah, parshiyot (pl) – chapter, Torah portion
 Parashat hashevuah – weekly Torah portion
 Parnasah – livelihood
 Pasuk, pesukim (pl) – verse
 Payot – side-locks
 Pirkei Avot (or Avot) – Ethics of the Fathers

Rabbanim – rabbis
 Rachmana litzlan – May G-d's mercy be upon them
 Rasha, reshaim (pl) – evil person
 Remez – hint
 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
 Se'ah – halachic unit of measurement
 Sefarim hakedoshim – holy books of Torah thought
 Sefer, sefarim (pl), sifrei kodesh (pl) – book, holy books
 Sefirah – kabbalistic term, behavior by which we perceive Hashem
 Sefirat Haomer – the mitzvah to count the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot
 Segulah – a specific act done in order to gain merit
 Shacharit – the Morning Prayer

- Shaliach tzibbur – cantor, leader of the prayers
Shamash – sexton
Shamayim – Heaven
Shechinah – Divine Presence
Shemirat halashon – guarding one’s speech
Shemittah – the commandment to leave the land fallow for seven years, only applicable in Eretz Yisrael
Shemoneh Esrei – prayer containing eighteen blessings, recited three times a day
Shevarim teruah – short, broken blasts on the shofar
Shevatim – the Twelve Tribes of Israel
Shiur – Torah lecture
Shlita – may he live many good years, Amen
Simanim – signs, referring to the fifteen signs of the Seder
Sinat chinam – baseless hatred
Sitra Achra – the Satan, negative forces
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. a fast from speaking) a specified amount of time when one refrains from speaking
Tallit – prayer shawl
Talmid – disciple, student
Talmid chacham – Torah scholar
Tanna, Tannai’im (pl) – Sages of the Mishnah
Tefillah, tefillot (pl) – prayer
Tefillin – phylacteries
Tekiah gedolah – long blast on the shofar
Tekiah ketanah – short blast on the shofar
Teshuvah – repentance

Tikkun – rectification

Tumah – impurity

Tzaddik, tzaddikim (pl) – righteous person

Tzara'at – a disease (often translated as leprosy) that is a manifestation of a spiritual impurity, often caused by speaking *lashon hara*

Tzedakah – charity

Tzeniut – modesty

Tzitzit – four-cornered garment with fringes, worn by men and boys

Ushpizin – seven shepherds of Israel

Viduy – confession

Ya'aleh v'Yavo – a short supplication said on Rosh Chodesh and the festivals

Yam Suf – the Sea of Reeds

Yerei Shamayim – those who fear Heaven

Yerushalayim – Jerusalem

Yeshiva – rabbinical college

Yetzer Hara – evil inclination

Yetzer Hatov – good inclination

Yetziat Mitzrayim – Exodus from Egypt

Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven

Yom Tov, Yamim Tovim (pl) – festival

Zechut – merit

Zechut Avot – merit of the forefathers

Zman – time, semester

Zt'l – May the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing

Zy" a – May his memory protect us