

## MAN'S DUTY IS TO BECOME A VESSEL FILLED WITH BLESSINGS

**I**t is written, "I will command My blessing to you in the sixth year" (Leviticus 25:21). We need to look into the meaning of the words, "I will command My blessing," for this is not the regular way that a blessing is given! It should have been written, "I will bless you" or "I will give you a blessing." To speak of commanding a blessing, however, seems to make little sense in the context of this verse. Now there is a way to fully explain this expression, and it begins with the certainty that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not want a person to live with pain and suffering in this world. Thus before a person descends into the world, Hashem prepares "provisions for the trip," bundles of blessings that are ready to be bestowed upon him when he merits it. In fact when a person arrives in this world, he has the ability to choose if he will receive them or not. When he does G-d's will and prays as he should, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will command these blessings to come upon him according to his daily needs.

However if a person does not follow the right path – if he does not study, pray and perform mitzvot – then he alone is guilty. Even if he is inundated with pain and suffering, he is still responsible for not having received the blessings that were prepared for him. This is because he, and he alone, refused them.

I have already commented in various parts of my book concerning the verse, "If you walk in My statutes and you will keep My commandments... then I will give your rains in their time" (Leviticus 26: 3-4). This means that if we walk in Hashem's ways, if we diligently study Torah and observe mitzvot, we will receive what is destined for us, namely "your rains." The rain will fall as a blessing and give us the vitality that we so urgently need.

The meaning of the expression, "I will command My blessing" is thus: When you observe My mitzvot, I too will command the blessings, ones already prepared for you, to come upon you according to your needs. People therefore have no reason to complain about G-d, believing that they haven't received a way to make a living, or that they are overwhelmed with troubles and the like. The Holy

One, blessed be He, does not refuse a person his blessings. Rather it is the person himself, who by his very actions prevents blessings from coming to him.

Furthermore, we know that a person's sustenance is determined on Rosh Hashanah (Beitzah 16a), since on this day Hashem fixes his sustenance for the entire year. This is the blessing that Hashem prepares for him. The expression, "I will command My blessing" therefore refers to the blessing that Hashem, having already prepared it on Rosh Hashanah, will send to us.

If someone were to ask, "We see that some tzaddikim and bnei Torah are poor and suffer from hunger and want. Are we to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not command that they should receive the blessings reserved for them?"

The answer to this is very simple. Such situations stem from the fact that these tzaddikim have no desire for anything in the material realm. In order not to be detracted from their study of Torah, they only take what is strictly necessary for their service of G-d. For them, complete happiness means being able to continue studying Torah and perform mitzvot in poverty, as the Sages have said: "Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and toil in the Torah" (Perkei Avoth 6:4). Their sole desire is to discover new Torah insights and to understand its secrets.

These tzaddikim find Hashem's blessings (which He prepared for them in advance) in their Torah learning, which is the greatest of all blessings. We find the same situation with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. It is stated that "Jethro heard" (Exodus 18: 1), and the Sages ask what he actually heard. They answer by saying that he heard about Israel's passage through the Sea of Reeds and their war against Amalek (Mechilta, Zevachim 116a). This is surprising, for was Jethro the only one who heard of these things? After all, it is written, "Peoples heard, they trembled; terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were terrified" (Exodus 15:14-15).

This means that all the nations heard, as the Gemara states, and they even wondered if another

flood had come upon the earth. Despite everything they heard, however, they did not travel through the desert as Jethro had. Why was he the only one? It is because he abandoned all his concerns and futile pursuits in this world, ridding himself of all his material worries. Not only that, but Jethro also left his position as a priest of Midian in order to journey through the desert and become a Jew. He went to accept the Torah and thank Hashem for all His kindnesses, for he yearned for spiritual blessings and wanted to pursue the truth to the very end. Such was not the case with the nations of the world, for they had no desire for the truth, attaching no importance to it whatsoever. They even considered the truth as falsehood, and they remained attached to their concerns and futilities in this world.

Since we have reached this point, I would like to point out another allusion found in the Torah. Concerning the poles used to transport the holy Ark, it is stated: "The poles shall remain in the rings of the Ark. They may not be removed from it" (Exodus 25:15). In other words, the poles were not to slide out of the rings in which they were placed (Otzar HaMidrashim, p.298). This presents an apparent difficulty, for if the poles were not to leave their place (i.e., if they were to permanently remain in their rings), then why didn't Hashem command that the poles be physically connected to the Ark, or made from one part with it?

The answer is that these poles, which enabled the Levites to transport the holy Ark and the Tablets of the Law found within it, allude to man himself. Every person must resemble the poles used to transport the Torah and support it. This means that a person must be the hands of the Torah. He must ensure that the poles do not leave their rings, meaning that he does not distance himself from the Torah. If he does stray from it, the blessings and abundance of Heaven will not be sent to him. In order to receive the blessings that have been prepared for him, a person must constantly cleave to the Torah. He must not yield to the evil inclination when it tries to distance him from it and prevent blessings and abundance from coming to him. In this way he will become a vessel filled with blessings.

## MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

### *Faith and Confidence in Hashem Only by the Power of the Holy Torah*

Parshiot Behar and Bechukotai are connected to one another, and it is fitting to explain how and why they are linked. We know that man's goal in this world depends on his degree of faith in his Creator. When a person possesses simple faith and confidence in Hashem – knowing that his life and sustenance come from Him, as it is written, “Sustenance comes through the L-RD: ‘You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing’ [Psalms 145:15]” (Bereshith Rabba 20:9) – then he will never have to worry about his sustenance. He will place his confidence in Hashem and perform mitzvot even if he thinks that this may, at first glance, cost him his livelihood.

The mitzvah of Shmita is a perfect example of this. A person must let his land lie fallow for an entire year, thereby losing the means of obtaining sustenance. This is even worse when a Jubilee follows the Shmita year, for then a person has to stop working his land for two years. Whatever the case may be, a person who has faith and trusts in Hashem has nothing to fear. He will not work his land during that time, for it is a Sabbath to Hashem. That being said, how can a person who is steeped in materialism come to this realization, namely that everything comes from Hashem. How can he place all that he holds dear into Hashem's hand? To arrive at such a degree of faith, a person must recall the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and the fact that Hashem said, “I am the L-RD your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:1). If a person infuses this into his heart, he will merit cleaving completely to Hashem. It seems difficult, however, to understand what new information Hashem gave us at Sinai by stating that He brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt. How did this affect the people? As soon as the sea split, the Children of Israel came to this lofty realization, for they said: “This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him” (Exodus 15:2). Here the Sages have said, “By the sea a maidservant perceived what prophets did not perceive” (Mechilta ad loc.). Hashem revealed Himself to them in His glory, and they were clearly able to perceive Him. There was not a doubt in their hearts that the Holy One, blessed be He, was the One Who had brought them out of Egypt. Therefore what new information did Hashem give to the Children of Israel by telling them that He had delivered them from Egypt?

It was precisely at the giving of the Torah that Hashem reminded them of the exodus from Egypt. Why did He do this? It was in order to give the Children of Israel the following message: I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out from Egypt. It was I alone, no one else. I reward those who believe in Me and observe My mitzvot, and I punish those who transgress My will and My mitzvot. When you were slaves to Pharaoh, you trusted in Me to deliver you from there. In fact I brought you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, multiplying My signs and wonders in Egypt, where you had been enslaved and persecuted. I announced to the entire world that I am Hashem, and you came out with great wealth and as free men. The same applies even now. True, today your hearts harbor no doubts that I am Hashem your G-d, and you all believe in Me. Yet in order for this faith not to diminish, you have been brought to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah and its mitzvot, for it is by studying Torah and performing mitzvot that faith will remain in your hearts. In fact when faith awakens in man, nothing else but the Torah can keep it alive. Even if a person fulfills mitzvot, without Torah study his faith will fade and eventually disappear.

We can now say that we fully understand the mitzvah of Shmita, the only mitzvah that the Torah describes as having been given on Mount Sinai. The performance of this mitzvah entails a certain loss, for a person loses the means by which he can obtain his sustenance for the year, to the point that only one whose faith is solid can perform it without fear or worry. This is why the Torah qualifies the mitzvah of Shmita with the expression “on Mount Sinai,” for it is when a person recalls the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai – the fact that the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt was solely meant to bring them to Sinai in order to receive the Torah and fulfill it – that his faith will be strengthened. A person can then study Torah and his faith will increase. He will then be able to fulfill the mitzvah of Shmita with joy, without fear or worry regarding his sustenance.

Since we have reached this point, let us explain why Parshiot Behar and Bechukotai are found next to one another in the Torah. Rashi cites the Sages in stating, “‘If you walk in My statutes’ [Leviticus 26:3]. This means that you must toil in the study of Torah [Torat Kohanim ad loc.].” In order for a person's faith to be strengthened, and for him to perform all the mitzvot (even those that apparently entail a financial loss), it is simply not enough to recall the giving of the Torah on Sinai. A person must also put an effort into studying Torah in poverty and hardship, in pain and suffering. It is also not enough just to study the Torah, for one must put all his effort into it. He must “walk in My statutes,” meaning that he must devote himself to this Torah, which was given on Mount Sinai, and then he will be deemed worthy of approaching Hashem and witnessing miracles and wonders. Thus in order for a person to forgo his livelihood and experience financial loss without reacting, it is not enough for him to simply recall Mount Sinai and augment his faith. He must also study the Torah diligently, for the body demands it. This is because there is no pleasure for body or soul outside of one's efforts in studying Torah. It is in this way that a person achieves faith and confidence in Hashem.

If we are correct in this regard, we will be able to better understand the subject of the Sanctuary's inauguration. During the seven days of its inauguration, the Shechinah did not rest upon the Sanctuary. It was only on the eighth day that the Shechinah descended upon it (Tanhuma, Pekudei 11), which is why Moses disassembled it on each of those seven days. Why did the Shechinah descend only on the eighth day, since Hashem elevated the Sanctuary on each of those days? From here we learn that it is only when there is faith and confidence that there is a Torah – when the Children of Israel truly realize that only Hashem can elevate the Sanctuary – that He will make His Shechinah reside there. This is because the Torah's power can only infuse a person and support him when he has faith and confidence in Hashem.

### *Everything is Taken Into Account*

***It is written, “I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember, and I will remember the land” (Leviticus 26:42).***

The commentators ask what this verse is doing in the middle of a passage containing rebukes. In his book *Darhei Mussar*, Rabbi Yaakov Neiman Zatzal explains: “This verse teaches us a great principle in how Hashem deals with His creatures. When hardships and great trials come upon an individual or community, people have the impression that the Holy One, blessed be He, has neglected or abandoned them. Because such beliefs lead people to lose hope, the Torah tells us: When rebukes are administered to an individual or community through hardship and suffering, I will demonstrate that I am also showing you good. In this way you will know that I have not removed My guiding hand from you, and that I still love you. Even misfortunes come from My guiding hand, and “Everything that the Merciful One does is for the good.”

We find this same approach being taken with Joseph, for it is written: “They raised their eyes and looked, and, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites...their camels were bearing spices, balm, and lotus” (Genesis 37:25). Rashi states, “Why did Scripture publicize their burden? To let you know the reward of the righteous, for it is customary for Arabs to carry only naphtha and tar, whose odor is foul. Yet for this one [Joseph], it was arranged [that they should be carrying] spices, so that he should not be afflicted by a foul odor.” The Alter of Kelm, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Zatzal, said that from here we see just how hardships are sent in a precisely calculated way. Although Joseph was suffering from his trials and humiliations, he nevertheless did not deserve to suffer on account of a foul odor. Since he did not deserve this, the Holy One, blessed be He, arranged for some Arabs to be transporting goods that had a fragrant smell. Thus Joseph would not be bothered by a foul odor. If a person is not meant to suffer, then he will not suffer in the least.

In Parsha Beha'alotcha it is stated that the Children of Israel asked for meat. The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow” (Numbers 11:18). Rashi interprets this to mean: “Prepare yourselves for punishment.” In the end the Torah states, “The anger of the L-RD was kindled against the people, and the L-RD struck the people with a very great plague” (v.33). Now while meat was

being prepared for the people, we are told that the quail “were two cubits above the ground” (v.31). Rashi explains the significance of this statement: “They flew at a height that they reached a person’s heart, so that it would not be difficult for them to gather them, so that they need neither rise up nor bend down.” In other words, even though Hashem had issued a severe decree against the people, He ensured that they were not to suffer more than had been decreed, to the point that they would not even have to make an effort to gather the quail. From here it follows that even when a person is assailed by trials, Hashem does not remove His guiding hand from him. Even then He cares for a person in the tiniest detail, ensuring that he shouldn’t, for example, have to be exposed to a foul odor or bend down to pick up his food.

### *A Pearl From the Rav*

***It is written, “Do not take from him interest or increase.... I am the L-RD your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 25:36-38).***

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita explains the connection between the prohibition against taking interest and the exodus from Egypt. He states that when someone lends money with interest, he acts in a way that is contrary to having faith in Hashem, for by charging interest he is saying that Hashem is powerless to send him blessings. By doing so, he also damages the unity of the Jewish people, for he is ignoring the fact that Jews are responsible for one another, and that a person must help his fellow Jew. Thus by taking interest, he makes his fellow’s life harder, not easier. Furthermore, such a person also damages the brit (covenant) of circumcision, for the word ribit (“interest”) is formed by the same letters as the word brit. Now the merit of circumcision was one of the reasons for which the Children of Israel were rescued from Egypt. Thus a person who lends money with interest harms the Jewish faith, the unity of the Jewish people, the covenant of circumcision, and by extension the exodus from Egypt. Therein lies the connection between the prohibition against taking interest and the exodus from Egypt.

## **IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH**

### *Faithful and Devoted*

***It is written, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the L-RD; the L-RD will be his security” (Jeremiah 17:7).***

If a person puts his faith in Hashem, even when doing so is very difficult for him, Heaven will help him achieve complete faith. This is why he must begin by doing what is incumbent on him alone. When he does that, in the end he will acquire faith. He will also merit that Hashem will truly be “his security” (Mayana Shel Torah citing the Shir Maon).

Before coming to light in the city of Constantinople, the tzaddik Rabbi Aharon of Titov (the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov) would spend his time in the Beit Midrash. There, seated behind a furnace, he devoted himself to the service of Hashem day and night, though he suffered from terrible hunger and want. Nobody paid attention to this avrech seated alone in a corner, and the condition of Rabbi Aharon’s home went from bad to worse.

One day while in the Beit Midrash, Rabbi Aharon could not take it any more. He cried out, “I’ve been here among the faithful for a long time, devoting myself exclusively to the study of Torah and the service of Hashem. Have any of you ever asked yourselves what I live on?”

The people were shocked to hear this, and some even turned pale. Several individuals then promised to take care of Rabbi Aharon’s needs from that day on. When the Beit Midrash emptied, however, Rabbi Aharon burst into tears. “How could I have done such a foolish thing – asking for help from created beings?” He regretted what he had done, and he thought, “I’ve always had faith in Hashem!” In his sadness, he remained next to the mezuzah day and night. He implored Hashem to make people forget what he had said to them, as well as their promises to him, and his prayers were answered.

– Torat HaParasha

## **REASONS FOR THE MTZVOT**

### *The More of One, the More of the Other*

***It is written, “If your brother becomes impoverished and his means fail with you, you shall strengthen him” (Leviticus 25:35).***

One of the Chafetz Chaim’s disciples, a man who was great in Torah and the fear of Heaven, was experiencing financial difficulties. Each time he went to see the Chafetz Chaim, he would complain: “If the Holy One, blessed be He, had given me the blessing of wealth, I would have generously helped everyone and become the greatest giver of tzeddakah.” The Chafetz Chaim would listen to him and shake his head with discontent.

This disciple eventually moved to St. Petersburg, and there he started a business. In fact he greatly prospered and soon became very wealthy. With his increased wealth, however, came increased stinginess. One day the Chafetz Chaim arrived in St. Petersburg, and his longtime disciple went to meet him. When the tzaddik asked how he was and what he was doing, he answered with great satisfaction: “Thank G-d, I don’t lack a thing, and I’m in good health!” The tzaddik then asked, “And tzeddakah?” He replied, “Rabbeinu, I honestly thought that if I were rich, I would be very generous and support Torah institutions and talmidei chachamim. However now I feel that I avoid giving tzeddakah.” The Chafetz Chaim said to him, “Let me tell you a story. A peasant went into town to buy some much needed food. He entered a grocery store and wanted to purchase some flour. The grocer said to him, ‘Here’s a bag and there’s the scale. Fill the bag with as much flour as you need.’ The peasant, who was a little slow on the uptake, though not a fool, poured a great deal of flour into the bag. However the more he poured, the more the grocer added weights to the opposite side of the scale. In the end, the grocer presented him with a bill of five rubles. The peasant was surprised: ‘What’s this bill for? I didn’t want to spend more than a ruble on flour.’ The grocer protested, ‘Don’t be foolish! If you didn’t want more than a ruble’s worth of flour, then why did you put so much flour in your bag? Didn’t you realize that the more flour you put on one side of the scale, the more weight I’d put on the other side?’” The Chafetz Chaim ended his story by saying, “When a person runs after money, he fails to realize that as his wealth increases on one hand, the power of the evil inclination increases on the other. A poor person thinks that if he were rich, he would be in control of his wealth. What really happens, however, is that his wealth controls him.”

– Adapted from Chafetz Chaim: The Life and Works of Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan of Radin

## **GUARD YOUR TONGUE**

### *Prevention is Easier Than Cure*

While talking with Shimon, Reuven spoke Lashon Harah about Levi. Since Shimon knows Reuven quite well, he realizes that he won’t stop there. Instead, Reuven will tell other people the same thing about Levi. That being the case, Shimon should take the initiative and warn potential listeners that Reuven is speaking against Levi for no good reason. As we know, most people commit the error of believing the Lashon Harah they hear, and it is difficult for them to rid themselves of the impression that it makes. Thus when Shimon takes the initiative by telling other people that Reuven is speaking against Levi, he is helping to ensure that Reuven’s portrayal of Levi will be greeted with suspicion.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### *The Fiancée's Gift and the Tailor's Wages*

The wife of Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, a great talmid chacham, gave a tailor some fine fabric so he could make her a dress. When the tailor completed the dress and brought it to the Rebbetzin, he let out a deep sigh as he presented it to her. When she asked him why he was so sad, he explained his problem to her: "My daughter became engaged not long ago, and her fiancé recently visited me and thought that the dress I was making was really for her. Now that he's learned that the dress is for someone else, he's become extremely upset. In fact I'm afraid that the engagement will fall through and that my daughter won't marry!" The Rebbetzin was moved by the tailor's plight, and therefore she took the dress and gave it to him. "Give this to your daughter as a gift," she said. When the Rebbetzin recounted this story to Rabbi Zusha, he immediately asked: "Have you paid the tailor for his work yet?" His wife was taken aback by the question. "What?" she asked. "I gave him the dress as a gift. What is there to pay for?" Rabbi Zusha replied, "This poor tailor worked an entire week for you, not for his daughter. He impatiently wanted the job to be finished so he could bring you the dress and get paid. Now what will he buy his food with?" Upon hearing this, the Rebbetzin immediately followed her husband's instructions and paid the tailor for all his work.

– Tiferet Nashim

## A TRUE STORY

### *The Reasoning of Reb Shraga*

*It is written, "As for your brethren, the Children of Israel, a man shall not work his brother with rigor" (Leviticus 25:46).*

The gaon Rabbi Nathan Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slobodka, said that he was once in the home of the wealthy Reb Shraga Feivel Frank, who was hosting a number of great talmidei chachamim and important figures from the city. On the table was a bell, which Reb Shraga Feivel would use to call his maid. Upon hearing the bell, the maid was to enter the room and ask if anything was needed.

Reb Shraga Feivel wanted to honor his guests, and therefore he rang the bell. However the maid failed to appear. A few minutes later he tried again, yet she still failed to appear. This repeated itself several times.

Reb Shraga Feivel's guests were surprised, asking why he did not demand more discipline from his staff.

The kind-hearted tzaddik smiled and said, "This brings me the greatest joy, for I'm constantly afraid that I've wronged my servants by transgressing the Torah prohibition, 'As for your brethren, the Children of Israel, a man shall not work his brother with rigor.' However when I see that my servants aren't afraid of me, I'm comforted."

– Torat HaParasha

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREATS

### *For the Sake of the Cattle and Herds*

Alexander the Great came to the King of Katzya and was shown a great deal of silver and gold. He said, "I did not come to see your silver and gold. I came to see your laws and customs." As they were sitting, two men came before the king for litigation. One of them said, "My master the king, I purchased a ruin from my friend. I demolished it and found a hidden treasure inside. I therefore said to him, 'Take your treasure. I purchased a ruin, not a treasure.'" The other litigant said, "I fear the punishment of theft just as much as you do. I sold you the ruin and everything in it – from the depths of the earth to the heights of heaven!" The king summoned one of them and asked, "Do you have a son?" He replied that he did. He then summoned the other and asked, "Do you have a daughter?" He too said yes. The king therefore said: "Let them marry each other, and the treasure shall belong to the two of them." Alexander was amazed. The king to him, "Did I not rule properly?" He replied, "No, you did not." He retorted, "If such a case came before you in your country, what would you do?" Alexander replied, "I'd cut off both their heads and send the treasure to the royal palace." The King of Katzya asked Alexander, "Does the sun shine in your country?" Alexander replied that it did. "And do rains fall upon you?" asked the king. "Yes," said Alexander. "Perhaps there are cattle and herds in your land?" the king asked. "Indeed there are," said Alexander. "By my life!" exclaimed the King of Katzya. "It is for the sake of the cattle and herds that the sun shines for you and that the rains fall upon you."

– Jerusalem Talmud, Bava Metzia 2:5

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### *Rabbi Meir ben Gedaliah – The Av Beit Din of Lublin*

Rabbi Meir of Lublin, known as the Maharam ("Our Teacher Rabbi Meir"), was among the greatest Poskim of his generation. Born to Rabbi Gedaliah of Lublin in the year 5318, the Maharam studied Torah in his youth with the Rosh Yeshiva of Krakow, Rabbi Yitzchak Hacohen Shapira Zatzal, who later became his father-in-law. The Maharam greatly elevated himself in Torah and Halachah, and as early as 5342, being just 24 years old, he was named as the Rosh Yeshiva of Lublin. In 5347 he was named as the Rav of Krakow, and around 5355 he traveled to Lemberg and headed its large yeshivot. In fact hundreds of young men learned their Torah from him. Finally in 5373 he returned to Lublin, where he served as its Rav and Av Beit Din until his dying day. The name of the city has since become attached to his own ("the Maharam of Lublin"). People sent him questions from all corners of the country, and he graciously answered them all. He made many disciples, including individuals who became great Torah figures in their own right, men such as the Shelah and the Megale Amukot. The Maharam wrote many books, some of which were printed while others were not. Among his works are Maor HaGadol, Maor HaKatan, Ner Mitzvah on the Smag, Torah Ohr, and Ohr Shivat HaYamim. His greatest work, entitled Meir Einai Chachamim, consists of his explanations and commentaries on the entire Talmud. It is printed after the gemarot themselves, right next to the Maharsha's commentary. Today many scholars still use his commentary, a work that is truly faithful to its name, for it enlightens the eyes of scholars in its explanation of the Gemara.

On Iyar 16, 5376, the Maharam's soul departed for the celestial academy, and his body was laid to rest in the old cemetery of Lublin. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.