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Hanania Soussan**CHANNELING OUR DESIRES**

It is written, "You shall spend the money for whatever your heart desires – for cattle, for flocks, for wine, or for strong drink, or anything that your soul wishes" (Devarim 14:26).

Once we have made an effort in our fields, and we have worked with our hands and can finally see the fruit of our labors, the Torah enjoins us: "You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year" (v.22). We must take the second tithe of our produce and bring it to Jerusalem, where we are to eat it in holiness and purity. If transporting the second tithe is too difficult, we can exchange it for money and spend that money in Jerusalem. The Torah even details how we are to use it: "You shall spend the money for whatever your heart desires – for cattle, for flocks, for wine, or for strong drink, or anything that your soul wishes." This means that we can consume the value of the second tithe with joy and derive tremendous benefit from it, as the verse tells us: "anything that your soul wishes." This is surprising, for it does not follow the normal pattern of the Torah. In general, the Torah asks us to refrain from the desires of this world and distance ourselves from them, lest we become enthralled by these desires and begin to pursue them. It is also said, "Before praying for words of Torah to enter our innards, better to pray for excessive food and drink not to enter them." Furthermore we read, "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2), which our Sages have explained as meaning: "You shall be separate." In other words, we must turn away from the pleasures of this world, diminish our desires, be satisfied with little, and not allow ourselves to be tempted by an abundance of food. Let us cite the words of the Mesilat Yesharim: "There are no pleasures on earth that do not lead to transgression" (chapter 13). For example, food and drink are allowed once we have fulfilled all the laws of kashrut. Nevertheless, a satiated person is tempted to cast off the yoke of Heaven. Drinking wine steers him toward debauchery and all other kinds of bad behavior. How much more, if someone is used to eating and drinking in excess, will he turn away from serving G-d, observing Torah, and prayer. This is the path that has been adopted by all the righteous throughout the generations. I remember that my father and teacher, Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, was always content with little and stayed far from all desires. He made sure not to eat meals that overly pleasing to the pallet, and was content with bread and water in small measure. Sometimes he would just eat the leftovers remaining on the table. This is the path that allows a person to grow in Torah and the fear of G-d. Despite all these things, in the verse found in this week's parsha, the Torah seems to be freeing us from this duty to restrain ourselves,

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

allowing us to eat and drink in abundance by asking us to consume the value of the second tithe to our satisfaction. Why? In general, is it not better to be satisfied with little?

The explanation is the following: Someone who has abundant harvests, and whom G-d has blessed the work of his hands, will have a sizeable amount once he redeems his second tithe for money. Of course he will have to use it entirely in Jerusalem to eat, rejoice, and benefit as he desires, and then he will share the rest with the poor of Jerusalem. However the flip side is that doing so constitutes a real danger to his spiritual life. In fact when faced with the tremendous wealth that G-d has given him, such a person is liable to grow proud and say, "My strength and the might of my hand have made me all this wealth" (Devarim 8:17), and he will forget G-d. Hence the Torah specifies, "You shall eat it there before Hashem your G-d, and you shall rejoice" (Devarim 14:26). The joy that surrounds the eating of the second tithe is specifically meant to increase G-d's glory, not our own glory or social status. All while eating, we must keep in mind the importance of the Shechinah, according to the verse: "I have set Hashem before me always" (Tehillim 16:8). This is the meaning of the phrase, "You shall eat it there before Hashem your G-d," namely that our meal takes place before Hashem and should be for His glory. We must always keep in mind that "it was [Hashem] Who gave you strength to make wealth" (Devarim 8:18), that this entire blessing comes from the open and generous hand of G-d, and that we have no reason to grow proud.

That being the case, an individual who has the merit of eating the second tithe in holiness and purity by keeping the Shechinah in mind – a person who savors his food with the proper and correct intentions, seeking only the glory of Hashem, not his own joy – not only will such a person's spiritual level not diminish, but his meal will become holy and be considered an offering. Such a meal will even allow him to grow in holiness and refine the purity of his soul. The more he eats, the more he will grow in the spiritual realm.

It is for this reason that we can rejoice and benefit during Shabbat and the holidays by allowing ourselves to eat in abundance. Such eating is holy, similar to that of the offerings, and the more we eat the greater the mitzvah. Nevertheless, it must be done for the sake of Heaven and the glory of G-d. This clearly teaches us that during such sacred meals, we must be very careful not to succumb to frivolity or superficiality. If we let ourselves go by acting with self-importance, or after a good meal we go to sleep instead of reciting Birkat Hamazon, such a meal obviously loses the status of a mitzvah. In fact, how can such a meal be a pleasing odor to Hashem if it has not been properly completed with a blessing?

Concerning Bad Influences and the Media

It is written, “Do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams” (Devarim 13:4).

Generation after generation, Jewish communities have had to fight elusive ideologies that oppose the Torah and its followers. Profane books and the writings of rebels and “intellectuals,” young and old alike, who have followed them has led to a significant diffusion of cynical ideas. It is therefore not surprising that Torah giants in every generation have led the fight against such books and writings. In our days, they continue the fight against media publications that Torah scholars find offensive.

The gaon Rabbi David Bistrif, the Rosh Yeshiva of Milkdarf, once confided to his students that he was tempted to read profane books as a young man. However since he studied with the Chatam Sofer, who had completely banned the reading of such books, he managed to control himself and not read them. He invested body and soul into the study of Torah, and was one of the best students in the yeshiva. One night, he was awake in his room with none of his friends around. The evil inclination then enticed him, presenting him with an opportunity to immerse himself in forbidden books. He took one out of a secret hiding place and began to read it. At that very instant, he had a vision of a man standing with a spear (romach) in his hand. The vision terrified him to such an extent that he threw the book to the ground.

A few moments later, once he had composed himself, the evil inclination began to burn within him again: “Will an intelligent and refined boy such as yourself pay attention to absurd visions and illusions?” After hesitating somewhat, he took hold of the book and began to leaf through it...at which point he had the same vision! The threatening man with a spear in his hand was truly standing next to him. He was overcome by trembling and quaking. Terrified, he closed the book and hid it. Still trembling, he read the Shema and tried to fall asleep.

As the book Zichron LeMoshe recounts, Rabbi David was unable to concentrate during his studies on the following day, and he did not actively participate in class as he normally did.

At the end of his daily class, the Chatam Sofer spoke to hundreds of students in the yeshiva’s main hall. “Gentlemen, it has been a long time since we have mentioned the ban against the study of profane ideas. Let us discuss this a little.” He explained to his students the gravity of this prohibition, concluding by saying: “Know that the term cherem [banned] is composed of the same letters as romach [spear]. Whoever transgresses one is punished by the other,” and he continued with the Kaddish.

The hundreds of students gathered there were stunned, not understanding why the Chatam Sofer had felt it necessary to mention this subject on that day. The only one who understood the reason for it was Rabbi David, who knew what lesson to draw from this very clear message.

By the Merit of a Decision

A student of the mashgiach Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian recounted an incredible story (found in the book Lishcheno Tidreshu) about one yeshiva student who would regularly read newspapers and profane books. Hearing about this student, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian summoned him to his office. He then reprimanded him and asked that he firmly promise not to read such publications for a certain period of time. Unable to make such an important decision on the spot, the student asked for some time to reflect, to which the mashgiach agreed. However the student never responded by the time that he said he would. The Rav therefore summoned him again and gave him a stern lecture on the gravity of his behavior. Shaken, the

student firmly committed himself to not reading such publications for a certain period. At the end of that time, Rabbi Eliyahu asked the student to renew his commitment until Yom Kippur. He agreed and kept his word. On the eve of Yom Kippur, Rabbi Eliyahu again summoned the student and asked that he commit himself to not reading newspapers for another period of time. The young man replied that he wanted to think about it. Because he was having a busy day, however, he forgot to tell the mashgiach what his decision was.

On the night of Yom Kippur, after Arvit, as everyone was reciting Shir Hayichud, Rabbi Eliyahu went to the yeshiva to ask the student to accompany him outside. When he saw the fear of the judgment on his face, Rabbi Eliyahu spoke to him very sternly about the subject. On the spot, the student decided to renew his commitment until Shavuot.

In the meantime, Rabbi Eliyahu traveled to America. Then as Shavuot approached, the young man (who was living in the yeshiva) was filled with a sense of holiness and a burning desire to renew his decision even without the influence of the mashgiach. As soon as Rabbi Eliyahu returned to the yeshiva, he said to the student: “When I was in America and Shavuot arrived, I didn’t know what to do. I was there, and you were here. What would become of your commitment? I hope that you continued along the right path!” The person who recounted this story added that without any doubt, what Rabbi Eliyahu thought while he was in America helped the young man renew his commitment in Israel.

What follows is another story concerning the mashgiach Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian. A young man who often read newspapers suffered greatly from nosebleeds. He went from doctor to doctor and tried numerous treatments, all without success. He then went to see a renowned physician who decided that an operation was necessary. It was scheduled to take place at Jerusalem’s Hadassah Hospital.

On the day of the operation, the young man went to see Rabbi Eliyahu, who told him in no uncertain terms: “If you don’t firmly commit yourself to no longer reading newspapers, your trip to the hospital and the operation will be useless!”

Panic-stricken, the young man promised to never again read such publications. Rabbi Eliyahu then said to him, “Come, I will teach you something: In our prayers, how should we say: ‘Heal us, Hashem, and we will be healed’? We must stress the word ‘Hashem,’ as if to say: ‘It is G-d Who heals us. He is our only doctor.’ ‘Save us [Hoshienu]’ – when You are the One Who saves, then ‘we will be saved [venivashea]’ – there is salvation.” Rabbi Lopian then blessed him and left. The operation was a success, and the young man was restored to perfect health. A few years later, however, an incident took place that interested the young man, and he couldn’t resist opening up a newspaper to read about it. He picked one up, leafed through it, and then blood suddenly began flowing from his nose! He hurried to see Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, who would hear none of it. It was only after he committed himself to never reading newspapers regardless of the circumstance that the Rav blessed him. To this day, his problem has never recurred.

Guard Your Tongue

Force of Habit

The way we speak and our middot require habitual practice. Now in all things, the power of habit is considerable. If we reflect on this a little, we will realize that there is so much Lashon Harah for the simple reason that we have accustomed ourselves from our youth to saying whatever we want without people contradicting us. The result is that we don’t even realize that what we are saying may be forbidden.

– Chafetz Chaim

One Eye Open

It is written, “Like the deer and the hart are eaten” (Devarim 12:22).

The Chozeh of Lublin found an amazing allusion in the term deer (tzvi). This teaches us that even if the Torah has allowed us to eat meat simply because we crave it, we must still recall “the deer and the hart.” Concerning the deer we read, “A deer sleeps with one eye open and one eye closed” (Shir HaShirim Rabba 8:19), and precisely in the same way, when we eat meat out of sheer desire, we must keep one eye open to ensure that we are not carried away by our desires.

Zakef Katan

It is written, “You shall tithe [te’asser] the entire crop of your planting” (Devarim 14:22).

The ta’am above the term te’asser is a zakef katan.

According to the Vilna Gaon, this alludes to the teaching of our Sages: Tithe (asser), that you may become rich (tit’asher).

This is what the zakef katan hints at: It consists of mending (zakef) the situation, to transform the minor (katan) into abundance.

Honor

It is written, “You shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking” (Devarim 15:8).

Rashi points out: “Even a horse to ride on and a servant to run before him.” In his book *Ayelet HaShachar*, the gaon Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman Shlita notes that this passage deals with honor, not financial need.

This means that the mitzvah also consists of demonstrating honor to someone if honor is what he lacks.

A person once paid a visit to the home of the Chazon Ish. Upon leaving, the Chazon Ish accompanied him all the way outside, despite the fact that the person in question did not merit such honor. The Chazon Ish explained that it was precisely honor that he was lacking.

Established on Lovingkindness

It is written, “You shall rejoice on your festival” (Devarim 16:14).

Rabbi Shimon continued his discourse as follows: “He who rejoices on the festivals but does not give to the Holy One, blessed be He, His due share is selfish. The Satan tries to injure him, accuses him before Heaven, devises his downfall, and causes him endless trouble.”

To give the portion of the Holy One, blessed be He, means to gladden the poor according to one’s ability. For on these days the Holy One, blessed be He, goes to look at these broken vessels of His. He comes to them and, seeing that they have nothing with which to rejoice on the festival, He weeps over them and ascends on high with the intention of destroying the world. The members of the Heavenly academy then present themselves before Him and plead: “Sovereign of the universe, You are called gracious and merciful. Let Your compassion spread upon Your children.”

G-d answers them, “Truly I have established the world only on the foundation of lovingkindness, as it is written: ‘For I said: Forever will it be built with lovingkindness’ [Tehillim 89:3], and the world is established on it.”

The angels of Heaven then say, “Sovereign of the universe, behold So-and-so, who eats and drinks and is in a position to give charity, but fails to do so.” The accuser then comes and, having claimed and obtained permission, sets out in pursuit of that man.

– Zohar I:10b

Don’t Forget the Bnei Torah

By Rabbi David Pinto

It is written, “Beware for yourself, lest you forsake the Levite all the days of your life” (Devarim 12:19).

It is fitting to explain why the mitzvah of supporting the Levite is juxtaposed to the mitzvah of ma’aser sheni (the second tithe). As we know, the tribe of Levi symbolizes bnei Torah, meaning the talmidei chachamim who bear the standard of the Torah, as the Rambam explains: “Why did the Levites not receive a portion in the inheritance of the land of Israel and in the spoils of war like their brothers? Because they were set aside to serve G-d, to minister to Him, and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments, as it is written: ‘They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel’ [Devarim 33:10]” (Hilchot Shmita 13:12).

The Torah commands that when we rejoice in His great benefits – when we eat, drink, and benefit from eating the second tithe – we must not grow proud by forgetting Hashem and foolishly thinking that everything belongs to us. We are obligated to support the Levite, who carries the standard of the Torah, as well as to support the talmidei chachamim. In fact that is how Hashem’s Name is magnified and sanctified in the world, for we are helping a talmid chacham continue to reside in the tents of Torah without worrying about money. Supporting the Levite is the most important way that we can thank Hashem for all the kindnesses He gives us. As we read, “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and happy are those who support it” (Mishlei 3:18). Happy are the ones who support those who study, helping them and providing them with an opportunity to continue along this path without having to worry about money. Yeshivat Ben Hazemanim in Ashdod supports hundreds of avrechim and young men, all because of the generous contribution of one businessman with an extraordinary devotion to Torah.

Although this businessman’s financial situation was beset by difficulties, and things were not going well for him, he never wavered in supporting the study of Torah through his significant donations. What follows is a glimpse into how Hashem helped him, as well as the individual providence that he experienced. When he first committed himself to supporting Yeshivat Ben Hazemanim in the summer of 2011, he sadly told me how certain financial reports on the value of his various businesses had been issued. He was afraid that these reports would leak out to the press, which would naturally result in a huge loss in the value of his stocks, threatening all his wealth. He didn’t know where to turn in his despair, and so he asked me for a blessing. I said to him, “You are supporting those who study Torah, and the great merit of this mitzvah will protect you. You have no reason to worry. Have faith in Hashem and you’ll soon emerge from this terrible situation.”

In fact Hashem in His kindness helped him, and incredibly no journalist looked into these financial reports, which were eventually forgotten by everyone. This illustrates the tremendous merit of supporting the tribe of Levi, meaning those who study the holy Torah.

The Memory of the Tzaddik is a Blessing

Remember the Torah of Moshe

Special Joy at the Hilloula of the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto

With the approaching Hilloula of our teacher Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, the father of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, we shall reveal a few gems from the amazing life of the tzaddik. This time, we shall take our accounts from the treasure chest of lessons given by our teacher, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita, who in his classes has shared the Torah and incredible mitzvot of his father.

From his earliest years, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, the beloved son of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, adopted ways of holiness and distinction, as he himself witnessed in his father's home. Humility and discretion constituted the jewels of his immense virtues, not to mention the noble lineage that adorns the Pinto family like a precious stone. Child after child, generation after generation, these were men of faith, pious men, holy and pure individuals accustomed to miracles and wonders, men who illuminated their generation with Torah and holiness. Our teacher Rabbi David Pinto described his father as follows: "I looked at the ketubah of Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, and I realized how well he could hide his greatness. Even the title of 'Rav' is not mentioned in it. The only thing we find is 'the upright scholar.' In it we read that Rabbeinu Haim Pinto was only called a 'scholar who conferred merit to the community.' These men were so humble that even their relatives weren't aware of their greatness, for they hid their virtues and never grew proud of them. This is the path that leads to unity among men." Another important trait that characterized Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto was silence, a trait praised by works of Mussar, which affirm that it "befits the wise." Rabbi David Pinto continues: "Such was the greatness of my father, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, who was considered by all to be a tzaddik, a humble and pious man as well as a great kabbalist. Although he never wrote any book, neither on direct nor mystical [Torah] interpretations, he was respected and valued by all, and people would travel from great distances to ask him for a blessing, advice, or to explain their problems to him. And all for the simple reason that my father spoke little and measured everything that he said. Even with us, his own children, he spoke little, and how much less with strangers. When we asked him, 'Why don't you go out a little?' he would reply: 'If I go out, people will come to me with all kinds of issues, and yet it is written: "In a multitude of words, transgression will not be lacking" [Mishlei 10:19]. That's why I prefer to remain at home.'

"Sometimes a single word allows us to build or destroy. One day, the director of a respected yeshiva asked me to extol the merits of his yeshiva to a certain wealthy individual. He wanted me to tell this man that his yeshiva was a high caliber institution, which is what I did. Not long afterwards, the director of this yeshiva warmly thanked me, for the man in question had given a much larger donation than usual."

The Goal: The Sanctification of the Divine Name

Many people ask our teacher how his father was able to acquire such precious middot. The answer is that he knew that everything that fills this world is but futility. Thus praise and honor did not tempt him, and



he did not pursue them. Throughout his life, his aim was solely the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot, his goal being to sanctify the Divine Name in the world. Thus he was able to overcome his evil inclination and be incredibly considerate to everyone.

Rabbi David continues: "Many were those who met him and recounted that a powerful light emanated from his face, so much so that they were afraid to look at him. My mother also mentioned that they often saw a fire emanating from my father's room, and because they feared that a fire might have broken out, they rushed into his room...only to find nothing!"

"This was most likely a great spiritual fire stemming from the power of the Torah of our saintly ancestors, who were completely attached to G-d and merited the light of the Shechinah among them, a light that illuminated their faces. It was this level that the Children of Israel had reached when they encamped around the Sanctuary, which is why they were not afraid of the fire that dwelled in the Mishkan, which was in their midst."

He Fulfills the Will of Those Who Fear Him

"Let us look into how G-d is prepared to fulfill the will of the tzaddik who walks in His ways and seeks to please Him. Some time ago, I attended the birthday celebration of a woman who was very old. This celebration had been organized by her relatives, and it took place in the Paris apartment of Pinhas Abitan. The woman's daughter, Lea, told me that when her mother was 16 years old, her parents wanted to marry her off to a much older man. She tried to convince them otherwise, but without success – all her arguments fell on deaf ears. In her distress, she turned to my father, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, and explained her situation to him. My father said to her, 'Before you are lamps that are filled with oil, lamps that I normally light in honor of the tzaddikim. If you can point to the oil lamp of my father, the saintly Rabbeinu Haim Pinto, I am sure your deliverance will be close.' The young woman, who possessed great faith in the Sages, pointed to one of the lamps, which turned out to be that of Rabbeinu Haim Pinto. My father then immediately assured her, 'Go in peace. Everything will be well. As soon as today, you will experience deliverance and will soon meet the right man to marry, a good and suitable husband.'

"The woman's daughter told me that she had barely made it through her front door when she discovered her parents waiting for her. They said to her, 'We've decided that the man in question is too old for you, and therefore it's best to annul the match. Gather the rings and earrings that he gave you so we can return them to him.'

"The words of my father were fulfilled in their entirety. Not long afterwards, she was married at the right time with a young man from Paris and became pregnant. During the delivery, however, her life and that of her unborn child were in danger. Understanding the gravity of the situation, her husband went to see my father to inform him. My father covered his face and said, 'I can promise you that your wife will be in perfect health and that G-d willing nothing bad will happen to her. As for the child, however, I cannot promise anything, for I sense that it is not alive.' That is precisely what happened, for the child had died. The mother survived,

however, and lived a long time. This is what I was told by her daughter, Mrs. Lea Bensimon.

“Now at first glance, how is it that the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills the desires of these tzaddikim, as the verse tells us: ‘He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him’ [Tehillim 145:19]? The answer is because they enthusiastically serve G-d and have completely devoted themselves to the holy Torah by sacrificing their body, soul, and all their possessions for the honor of Hashem, without considering any financial loss resulting from the fulfillment of mitzvot.

“In fact enthusiasm in the performance of mitzvot proves that a person is happy to fulfill G-d’s will. It demonstrates that he yearns to serve Him at all times and as best he can. The Holy One, blessed be He, pays back such a person a hundred times over, and furthermore He watches his steps and fulfills his desires and wishes.

“What follows is a story that was told to me by one avrechim about his own father, who once approached my father to receive a blessing. Contrary to my father’s usual practice, he said to him: ‘Give me some tzeddakah

and I will bless you.’

“‘I don’t have any money on me,’ the man said. My father immediately replied, ‘I know, my son. I know that you don’t have any money. So go outside, and on the way you will find an envelope containing a sizable amount of money. It’s for you.’ With great faith in the tzaddik, the man simply left without asking any questions, and while outside he came upon an envelope filled with money. He returned it to my father, who then blessed him.

“This man demonstrated tangible and complete faith in G-d, for if he had been surprised and asked my father whom to go see to find this envelope, the question itself would have demonstrated a lack of faith. Yet as soon as he heard these words emerge from my father’s mouth, he believed them to such a degree that he could already see, so to speak, the envelope before his eyes. Hence he didn’t ask any questions and immediately went to find it. There are several levels of human virtues, and we must continuously elevate ourselves until we achieve complete perfection in all our deeds.”

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Rosh Chodesh Elul

We will be celebrating Rosh Chodesh Elul this Shabbat. In the past, this day was characterized by fear and trembling on account of the approaching day of judgement [Rosh Hashanah]. Each individual and the entire community would search their souls and ask themselves if they were truly prepared for the day of judgment. The Rishon L’Zion, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Amar Shlita, said that the gaon Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Brodie Zatzal (the Av Beit Din of Petah Tikva) once told him that his father, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Zatzal, said that he still remembered the Rosh Chodesh Elul of his childhood. People knew in advance that they had to prepare a first-aid kit for Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal, who would faint upon hearing that Rosh Chodesh Elul had arrived. In several communities, the custom was that on the Shabbat when Rosh Chodesh Elul was announced, the chazan proclaimed it using the melodies employed on the Days of Awe, melodies that ushered in a solemn atmosphere that awakened repentance.

Such was the reaction of men of truth, those who acknowledged their deeds and knew that G-d would judge every hidden thing. When the chazan began reciting the words “Rosh Chodesh Elul will be...” it is said that the Chafetz Chaim’s entire body would tremble and that he would burst into tears, the result being that a great fear descended upon all the faithful. The gaon Rabbi Yosef Salant Zatzal also recounts that in his youth, he prayed in the same Jerusalem synagogue as Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer Zatzal. Since Rabbi Yitzchak was known to stay at home on Elul, he was asked to serve as the chazan for the blessing of the month. When he recited the words “Rosh Chodesh Elul,” he burst into prolonged sobbing, to the point that the entire congregation began to weep along with him. Rabbi Yosef Salant said that the memory of this “Shabbat Mevarchim” left him with a fear of Elul for the rest of his life. Here is the description given by the famous traveler Yaakov Sapir Zatzal in his book *Even Sapir*: “On the Shabbat when Rosh Chodesh Elul was announced, the custom in Sanaa was for the Rav and his Beit Din to go to every synagogue during the morning prayer with a letter of admonishment that contained warnings and calls for repentance for the Days of Awe. This letter was read in every synagogue to arouse people to teshuvah. I also went with them, for this custom was precious in my eyes. However in the morning we were unable to go to all 20 synagogues, even if Shabbat prayers had been prolonged, the result being that we began before dawn and finished at Mincha.

“When we arrived for Musaf at the synagogue of the kabbalist Maari Yehia HaCohen, the congregation asked me to serve as the chazan, to which I agreed. I also prayed with a broken heart when I arrived at the recitation of the prayer: ‘May it be Your will to bring us up in joy to our land and plant us within our borders,’ at which point the walls of my heart opened. I was unable not to weep, and I implored [Hashem] with all my might, until I could no longer speak. With a contrite and broken heart, the entire congregation shed torrents of tears, and that Shabbat was transformed into Yom Kippur.”

Only Horses Don’t Care

The maggid of Jerusalem, Rav Schwadron Zatzal, would usually recount the following parable in the name of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk Zatzal: There was once a merchant who purchased a large amount of goods, which he wanted to bring across the border illegally. Although he hired a wagon driver who knew all the roads and byways, he still began to tremble, for who knew what could happen? Who knew if he would succeed in crossing the border successfully, or if all his merchandise would be confiscated, meaning that the money he had invested would be completely lost and he himself would be imprisoned! Needless to say, he was stressed and anxious. However the wagon driver was completely relaxed, for he was used to transporting merchandise across the border illegally, and he knew all the roads like the back of his hand. However on the day that they set out, the wagon driver was also stressed and filled with apprehension, nervously looking every which way. His nerves were on edge, constantly on the alert for the slightest disturbance and trembling at the smallest suspicious movement. If he were to be caught, his horses and wagon would be confiscated, and he would be brought to justice! Only the horses remained indifferent and calm, even when they crossed the border. Rabbi Chaim of Brisk explained that some people begin to tremble as soon as Rosh Chodesh Elul arrives, getting up early to recite selichot and beseech Hashem for mercy, knowing exactly what lies in the balance – life, peace, health, and sustenance – absolutely everything. Even people who are usually indifferent are overcome by fear and trembling on the day of judgement, when they have to cross the border, meaning on Rosh Hashanah itself. It is only horses that remain indifferent, thinking only about food, meaning the holiday meals.