

PARSHA

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HASHEM SEEKS ONLY SINCERITY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "And you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground" (Devarim 26:2).

There was great joy when the first fruit were brought to Jerusalem. The Mishnah provides us with the following description of this event: "How were the first fruit brought [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities that constituted the ma'amad assembled in the city of the ma'amad and spent the night in the open place thereof without entering any of the houses. Early in the morning the officer said, 'Arise, let us ascend to Zion, to Hashem our G-d' [Jeremiah 31:5]. . . . An ox with horns bedecked with gold and with an olive crown on its head led the way. The flute was played before them until they were close to Jerusalem" (Bikkurim 3:2-3). Then all the inhabitants of Jerusalem would welcome them and inquire about their welfare. Thus they ascended to the Temple mount with joy and cheer. The wealthy would bring their first fruit on platters of silver and gold, while the poor would bring them in wicker baskets. As each person offered his first fruit, he would read the section of the Torah corresponding to this subject: "An Aramean tried to destroy my father. . ." (Devarim 26:5), concluding with the blessing: "Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel" (v.15).

I wonder why the Torah commanded us to surround the mitzvah of the first fruit with such honor. What was the goal of all these preparations for this mitzvah? Why did each person not simply bring his first fruit to the kohen? Why was this mitzvah embellished and arrayed with all kinds of beautiful ornaments, such that the first fruit were brought with such glory and splendor? Furthermore, why did the owner of the first fruit have to read the section, "An Aramean tried to destroy my father"? This is how I interpret it: Clearly, a person's service of Hashem must come from the depths of the heart. Superficiality does not suffice. We sometimes fulfill G-d's mitzvot and even study Torah, but our actions are external, superficial – devoid of all feeling and enthusiasm. There seems to be, at least on the outside, an impetus to serve Hashem. However the main thing is missing, namely the heart. Yet we must serve G-d from the depths of our heart, with true feeling! We must experience a desire and yearning to draw closer to our Creator and fulfill mitzvot for G-d with true love and sincerity. But without an internal awakening to move us, all our actions will be mechanical, as mentioned in the verse: "With its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me" (Isaiah 29:13). It goes without saying that mitzvot performed in this way, as well as Torah studied in this frame of mind, will have no positive effect. Our Sages have also said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written: 'But Hashem sees into the

heart' [I Samuel 16:7]" (Sanhedrin 106b), and as it is written: "The intention of man is what matters to Hashem." Hence when we are serving G-d, we must not be satisfied with simply carrying out a mitzvah, for we should add intention and sincerity to it. We will then sense a fire for the mitzvah igniting within us, and we will draw closer to Hashem.

This is the idea contained in the mitzvah of the first fruit: Its goal is to help us realize that Hashem is the One Who gives us the strength to succeed. It must distance us from the thought that "my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth" (Devarim 8:17). Because of this mitzvah, we will praise and thank G-d for the beautiful land that He has given us, for all the good that He bestows upon us, and for enabling us to harvest the produce of our fields. Of course, gratitude that is simply superficial or artificial is not enough. We must fully realize the immense good that Hashem has done for us by giving us life, and by providing us with a heritage in the land that assures our sustenance and blessing. This is why the Torah orders us to honor and magnify the offering of the first fruit. In fact upon seeing all the beauty and glory surrounding this mitzvah, the owner of the first fruit will rejoice and be carried away by a love for G-d, and he will praise, glorify and thank Him. This won't be a simple thank you; it will be a true expression of gratitude stemming from the depths of his heart for the portion of land that G-d has given him, and for all the magnificent fruit that he has obtained from it. As a result, he will fully understand that it is G-d Who directs the world, Who provides him with everything, and Whose open and generous hand is the only source of blessing for his land. Such deep and sincere gratitude will strengthen the owner's faith in G-d and draw him even closer to Him.

At that point he will say, "An Aramean tried to destroy my father" – the term Arami ("An Aramean") refers to the evil inclination, which is *ramai* ("crafty"), according to the explanation of the Ohr HaChaim. The expression *oved avi* ("destroy my father") means that "it was the evil inclination that pushed me to oved [destroy] the spiritual connection that I had with my holy ancestors, but now I want to draw closer to Hashem and fulfill His will with all my heart. Therefore please, Sovereign of the universe, 'Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel' [Devarim 26:15]." In other words: "Sovereign of the universe, we love You, we seek Your presence, and we want to take shelter in Your presence." We fully realize that without G-d's help, we would be unable to confront the evil inclination, which is why we pray: "Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel." How can we attain such a degree of love for G-d? By serving Him with deep sincerity and by offering the first fruit with joy and song. This idea

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also applies to Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness. In fact the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Lewinstein said, “It is true that during Elul, we are all motivated by an awakening that is greater than during the rest of the year. However we must be extremely careful to avoid a simple awakening that

is external and superficial. We must create an internal impetus stemming from the depths of the heart. This constitutes true service, which is called complete teshuvah. If we act in this way, we will sense the gravity of the day of judgment, and we will be filled with the fear of G-d.”

The Words of the Sages

Serving Hashem with Joy

It is written, “Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant” (Devarim 28:47).

Which are the happiest days of the year, days that we can mark off in our calendar? The mashgiach Rabbi Yechezkel Lewinstein Zatzal answered this for us in a letter he sent to one of his students: “The happiest days will soon be arriving,” by which he meant the awe-inspiring days of Elul and the ten days of teshuvah.

The happiness concealed within these days is based on what? The explanation is clear and simple: We are happy for having been given the possibility to cleanse our impurities, the sins into which we have fallen, and for the opportunity to draw closer to the Creator of the universe in so doing, an opportunity that we did not have during the rest of the year. Actually, this opportunity existed throughout the year, but on Elul we can draw closer to the King of kings much more easily, for He is among us at this time, as it is written: “Seek Hashem while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). The King goes to the trouble of drawing close to us, which should make us rejoice. We should sing for joy and derive great pleasure as a result, experiencing this incredible feeling, namely that the great King – the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who holds in His hands all the keys to our requests and desires, a King Who is also our Father – is now much closer to us. This means that we have the opportunity to ask Him for all we want, and He will respond more favorably to our requests because He is incredibly close to us during this time.

Can there be any greater joy? We have the opportunity to ask our Father for forgiveness, since He is now closer to us.

The Secret of Life

The book Pnei Meir (a biography of Rabbi Meir Feist of the United States) recounts that when Rabbi Meir was four years old, he became paralyzed in both legs, unable to take even a single step. Since that time, he spent his entire life in a wheelchair. In addition to his paralysis, he also suffered from other health problems and was a solitary man, without parents or family.

For decades, renowned doctors expressed their amazement at how he lived his life. In fact one doctor declared that, medically speaking, there was no way he could live beyond the age of 40. However Rabbi Meir lived 28 years longer than that, dying of a disease with no direct link to his condition.

Although a man in his situation was liable to feel dejected and extremely bitter – feelings that manifest themselves through depression and hopelessness, jealousy, a complete lack of a desire to live, and hoping for the end to come – Rabbi Meir reacted in the completely opposite way! He was joyful and happy, tolerant and calm, and filled with hope and encouragement. He was also happy for the good of others, as if it were his own, and he had an immense love of life!

His face was constantly radiating joy, and a feeling of happiness never left him. He was filled with joy in every circumstance and at all times, as well as with encouragement and satisfaction. How did he attain such heights?

It is written, “One day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand” (Te-hillim 84:11). Here Rashi explains: “[To live] one [day] in Your courtyards and die the next [is better than] living a thousand years somewhere else.”

Rabbi Meir lived his entire life with a sense of joy and blessing, each of his days being worth more than a thousand years in the life of someone who is not a ben Torah. That was the secret of his life: It was the joy and happiness of one who can study Torah and pray day and night, leaving behind all the

worries of this world. He finds himself living in a paradise on earth, and as Rabbi Meir himself once said, he could not imagine a paradise greater than studying at the Lakewood yeshiva.

Rejoicing Broken Spirits

In the book HaMeorot HaGedolim, it is said that Rabbi Nathan Tzvi Finkel would seek the advice of Rabbi Israel Salanter. During one of their conversations, he asked Rabbi Israel what approach to use in educating students. Rabbi Israel said to him, “We must rejoice broken spirits and revive troubled hearts.”

Rabbi Nathan Tzvi made an effort to instill a good and cheerful atmosphere among his yeshiva students, especially during the holidays. During such times, the walls of the yeshiva were constant witnesses to joyous singing and enthusiastic dancing. Many people came to see the enthusiasm of the yeshiva and participate in it. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi encouraged such joy. On Shabbat as well, people could hear singing arising from the student dormitories and from his own home.

All throughout the week, and for the entire year at the yeshiva, an atmosphere of cheerfulness and joy reigned. This was only natural, resulting from the fire and wisdom of Torah, which revives the soul and rejoices the heart, and which constantly filled the yeshiva. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi saw this as the true path of Torah as well, believing that it was part of education. Whenever he saw a student who was sad or dejected, he made an effort to change his mood.

In this spirit, he would admonish students who appeared somber. One day a student from another yeshiva was passing through Slabodka on his way from Lithuania to Poland, and he came to visit him at his home. On several occasions, Rabbi Nathan Tzvi pointed out to the student that he appeared too serious, and he tried to bring a smile to his face. However this student, who had been taught throughout his life to be serious and rigid, could not change his habits, and he did not smile.

Rabbi Nathan Tzvi saw a great failing in this, and he drew far-reaching conclusions from it. He had initially planned on sending his grandson along with this student to the Mir yeshiva, and together they would try to cross the border between Lithuanian and Poland. After this conversation, however, he cancelled his plan because he didn't want his grandson to be accompanied by this student, the merits of whom he questioned, to the point of fearing for their safety while on the road.

A young man once came to see Rabbi Nathan Tzvi in the city of Hebron to tell him that he had gotten engaged. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi noticed that he was too serious, and he reprimanded him for not having a smile on his face. He added that a smiling face is a great duty, especially when a man has a fiancée, with whom he should act appropriately.

Guard Your Tongue

They Will Certainly be Upset

Know as well that in regard to the prohibition against rechilut [talebearing], it makes no difference if we tell Reuven what So-and-so said about him, or if we tell Reuven's wife or relatives what So-and-so said about him. In either case, they will certainly be upset, and they will resent So-and-so as a result. Hence even if we have warned them not to tell anyone, it is still considered rechilut. – Chafetz Chaim

Establishing Peace

It is written, “Of whole stones shall you build the altar” (Devarim 27:6).

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai questions the meaning of the word sheleimot (translated here as “whole”). He says that these are stones that establish shalom (“peace”) between Israel and the Creator.

If in regard to the stones of the altar – which neither see, nor hear, nor speak – G-d has said, “You shall not raise iron upon them” (Devarim 27:5), how much more will a person who establishes peace between man and fellowman, between man and wife, between city and city, between country and country, and between family and family not experience any calamity!

– Mechilta D’Rabbi Yishmael

Complete Consolation

It is written, “All these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (Devarim 28:15).

The question is asked: Why are consolations not mentioned alongside the curses in Parsha Ki-Tavo, as they are in Parsha Bechukotai?

The Radbaz answers this question as follows: “According to me, consolations are not necessary in Parsha Ki-Tavo because they are alluded to at the same time. In fact each verse mentions the Name of G-d connected to mercy (Yud - Kei - Vav - Kei), as in ‘He strikes, and His hands heal.’ There is no greater consolation than this.

“Furthermore, we may add that Parsha Nitzavim, which mentions the covenant, immediately follows Parsha Ki-Tavo and mentions all the consolations. As such, it is complete consolation” (Responsa Radbaz 5769).

A Blessing in Reverse

It is written, “Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat from it. Your donkey will be robbed from before you, but it will not return to you. Your flocks will be given to your enemies, but you will have none to save you” (Devarim 28:31).

As our teachers have said in the holy Zohar, all the curses conceal blessings.

In his book Nachal Kedumim, the Chida writes that this verse, read in the reverse sense, becomes a blessing:

“You will be saved, and your enemies will have nothing. Your flocks will be returned, and your donkey will not be robbed from you. You will eat the meat of your ox, and it will not be slaughtered before your eyes.”

The Gate of Tears

It is written, “Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy and goodness of heart” (Devarim 28:47).

Rabbi Yossi said, “It is written: ‘Serve Hashem with joy, come before Him with joyous song’ [Tehillim 100:2], for in His service there is no room for sadness. It may be asked: What if a man is deep in sorrow and tribulation, and has no heart to rejoice, and yet his trouble forces him to seek compassion from the Heavenly King? Should he refrain from praying on account of his sorrow? What can he do? He cannot help being heavy-hearted! The answer is, ‘All gates have been closed since the destruction of the Temple, but the gate of tears has not been closed’ – and tears are an expression of sadness and sorrow. The celestial beings appointed over the gate of tears break down all the iron locks and bars, and let these tears pass through. The prayers of the afflicted penetrate and reach the holy King.... Thus the prayers of the afflicted person do not return to him empty, and the Holy One takes pity on him. Blessed is the man who in his prayers sheds tears before the Holy One.”

– Zohar II:165ab

The Soul and First Fruit, the Land and Mitzvot

It is written, “And you shall take of the first [reshith] of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you” (Devarim 26:2).

The term reshith refers to the Torah (Bereshith Rabba 1:1), meaning that we must fulfill the Torah and perform mitzvot in order for Hashem to grant us a reward in the World to Come. Now fruits represent this reward, as it is written: “These are the precepts, the fruits of which man receives in this world” (Pe’ah 1:1). Because we fulfill the Torah, we will receive a reward.

The term velakachta (“and you shall take”) is used here, a term that is also related to marriage, since it is written: “When a man yikach [marries] a woman” (Devarim 24:1). The only true acquisition is marriage (Kiddushin 4b). Thus by sacrificing ourselves for Torah, which is called a “wife,” we will merit fruits. Now the soul can only fulfill Torah and mitzvot when it is clothed in the physical body, and mitzvot can only be performed in this world. Furthermore, most of the commandments concern the material realm, such as shmita, the Jubilee, birth, circumcision, etc., whereas only a few concern the spiritual realm, such as prayer for example.

Likewise when a person dies, he becomes exempt from fulfilling mitzvot. Thus G-d rewards the soul for the body that fulfilled His commandments in this world. Hence He ordered us, “And you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land” – these fruits coming only from the land, from this material world. Yet when we pass away, we do not bring money or possessions with us, only the Torah that we studied and the mitzvot that we performed in life.

The soul is like collateral that is placed in our hands, and we must safeguard it so as to prevent the evil inclination from tarnishing it with sin, as it is written: “Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out [Devarim 28:6] – your departure from this world should be like your entry into it: Just as you entered it without sin, so should you leave it without [sin]” (Bava Metzia 107a). The soul is destined to be reclaimed by G-d, but we do not know when He will want His collateral back. Hence we must ensure that it is fitting to return at any time, and that the Owner is not angered by finding His collateral damaged.

Thus it is written “that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance” (Devarim 26:1) – just as the land of Israel in an inheritance and collateral for the Jewish people, given to them on condition (as stated in Sifrei Devarim 38b: “If you submit to G-d’s will, the land of Canaan will be yours. If not, you will be exiled from it”), likewise the soul was entrusted to us and we must protect it from all harm.

How are we to protect it from the harmful influences of the evil inclination? By spending time in a yeshiva and by studying Torah, for we can only truly study Torah in a yeshiva!

The Gemara tells us, “Our ancestors were never without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the desert they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was old, but stayed in a yeshiva.... Our father Isaac was old, but stayed in a yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was old, but stayed in a yeshiva” (Yoma 28b).

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

Accounts from the Life of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol in Honor of his Hilloula on Elul 26 (Part II)

“Great are the deeds of the tzaddikim.” Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, a man accustomed to miracles by the merit of his forefathers, never stops reminding his followers that we are all capable of developing faith in our Sages. Anyone who has faith in the power of the holy Torah and its Sages will quickly merit deliverance precisely because of this faith in those who study Torah.

Many are those who come to pray for deliverance during a Hilloula for the tzaddikim of the Pinto family. It is then that we concretely see how the power of the tzaddikim is even greater after their death than during their lifetime.

In connection to the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, one amazing story perfectly illustrates this:

In the year 5763, the situation in Morocco was very tense and dangerous. Numerous suicide bombers tried to destroy densely populated Jewish areas, attracting even terrorists from the Al-Qaeda network.

One Friday night in the month of Sivan 5763, ten suicide bombers planned on detonating themselves in ten separate Jewish locations. These accursed terrorists had planned on executing their plan on Friday night after the Shabbat meal. The moment they chose was itself a miracle, since they didn't plan on attacking Jews during the meal itself.

They also wanted to commit murder in the Jewish cemetery at Casablanca. This was unbelievable, for what were they looking for in a cemetery? Everyone there is already dead! We were therefore able to witness great miracles, for they detonated themselves in Jewish areas that weren't populated! Thus about 50 people were killed, but not a single Jew was among them, thanks to our G-d, the protector of Israel.

Because of the dangerous situation, the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol was almost cancelled. Many people were afraid to participate, and I myself didn't know whether to organize the Hilloula or not. I finally decided to go, come what may.

I therefore took a huge risk, especially since many people had asked for the Hilloula to be cancelled, for on that week two Jews had been killed in Morocco. We nevertheless decided to celebrate the Hilloula.

In fact the Hilloula took place in 5763, and there were very few like it, so much so that it's difficult to describe. Thousands, even tens of thousands of Jews came to pray by the grave of the tzaddik, and for security reasons there were even more soldiers and policemen at the cemetery than ordinary people, about three security officers to protect every Jew.

The day of the Hilloula in Mogador was an extraordinary sanctification of G-d's Name. What's truly interesting is that as Selichot were being recited at the end of Shabbat by the grave of the tzaddik, and as Morocco was filled with suicide bombers, we could only hear the sound of prayer. Who could have thought that such a

thing would happen in Morocco, where this Islamic movement has recently reared its head?

We should mention the great merit of the tzaddik at this point. All Moroccan state and municipal officials (including the Mayor of Mogador) who helped Jews in this circumstance received a tremendous reward. With Hashem's help, and by the merit of the tzaddik, the King of Morocco promoted them to high positions along with a corresponding salary.

Furthermore, they themselves acknowledged that they had never before been promoted or received a raise, and it was only now – when they helped Jews who had come to pray by the grave of the tzaddik – that G-d helped them by raising them to higher positions, and all by the merit of the tzaddik. Everyone saw this and rejoiced.

There's more. The airport at Mogador had been closed to all air traffic, and it was only reopened for this event so that three airplanes from around the world – airplanes filled with hundreds of Jews – could come and participate in the great Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us. This cost the Moroccan government tens of millions of dollars.

We must also thank the Moroccan government for having lodged every Jew who came to participate in the Hilloula. May it continue all its kind deeds for the Jewish people, wherever they may be.

In this regard, we must point out what the residents of Morocco themselves have confirmed without shame, namely that since Jews have left Mogador, prosperity has left the city. When they saw Jews returning for the Hilloula, they said that prosperity is returning.

May the Name of Heaven be sanctified in public because the Jewish people follow the paths of Hashem. May the nations of the world respect us, and may Mashiach reveal himself and deliver us, speedily and in our days. Amen.

I Won't be Needing You

Mrs. Elkaïm traveled to Morocco seven years ago in order to pray by the graves of the tzaddikim. The taxi driver who was driving her asked, “Why are you going to visit the dead? Don't you have anything else to do? Go visit the living instead!”

Mrs. Elkaïm replied, “In that case, tomorrow I won't be needing you.”

“Why not?” asked the driver.

“Because tomorrow I plan on going to Mogador, where I'll be visiting the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. And since I see that visiting such places bothers you, I prefer to use another driver, someone who appreciates and respects these tzaddikim, who even in death are called alive.”

The driver continued to ridicule Mrs. Elkaïm, saying that she was wasting her time and money visiting the graves of people who were dead. Suddenly, as he was speaking, his face became paralysed. It became contorted and he was unable to utter a word from his mouth.

At that point he realized that this happened as a direct result of his words against the great men of Israel, and because he had scorned the tzaddikim, who in death are called alive. Regretting his behavior, he immediately brought Mrs. Elkaïm some candles

so she could light them by the grave of the tzaddik and ask for forgiveness on his part. Thus she quickly made her way to the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol to publicly sanctify Hashem's Name, and she was successful: While she was praying from the bottom of her heart by the grave of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, she called the driver's cell phone and told him that she was now praying by the tzaddik's grave.

It was then that a great miracle occurred. As Mrs. Elkaïm was speaking to the driver, he suddenly regained the ability to speak! In fact it was as if he had never been mute, for he began to speak just as before. Naturally he thanked Mrs. Elkaïm for her prayers, and he also thanked the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto and the Creator of the world. At that point he took it upon himself to honor the tzaddikim, who in death are even greater than in life.

A Lottery Drawing

Each year our teacher, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, organizes a Hilloula in honor of the tzaddikim from the Pinto family. During this time he recounts the greatness of the tzaddikim and the miracles they perform, and he strengthens people's faith in the Creator of the universe. One year he experienced something incredible, something that we heard directly from his mouth:

"While I was in France about 30 years ago, my father – who was in Israel at the time – telephoned me and told me to go and organize the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto in Morocco. I did what he wanted and left for Morocco. As the day of the Hilloula approached, I realized that I didn't have enough money for the expenses of the Hilloula. I therefore addressed myself to Rabbi Yossef Knafo and told him that I was lacking funds.

"He asked me, 'How much money do you need for the Hilloula?'"

"I said that I estimated all expenses to be around \$5,000."

"He then made a suggestion that I wasn't happy with at first, and which I hesitated to agree to. In the end, however, I asked that through the merit of my holy grandfather, we would find all the necessary funds.

" 'Tonight,' Rabbi Yossef said to me, 'there's going to be a lottery drawing for \$10,000. Let's buy a ticket together and share the winnings. We'll each receive \$5,000, and in this way you'll have the funds for the expenses of the Hilloula.'"

"I wrote down 5 numbers for Rabbi Yossef, and he went to a lottery outlet to fill out a ticket with these same numbers. When he returned, I realized that the numbers on the ticket he purchased were not in the same order that I had written them. I therefore asked him to purchase another ticket, but this time to select the numbers in the correct order.

"He went and purchased another ticket, this time with the numbers in the correct order, and at night we found out that the ticket we had purchased together had won. We had won \$10,000! Thus with the help of Heaven, we were able to organize the Hilloula with all the proper splendour, as befits the honor of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us."

We should point out that our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Shlita told us that despite winning the lottery, it didn't make him lose his head. Since that time, he has never purchased another lottery ticket. "As soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, wants to make a man wealthy, He has numerous ways of enriching him."

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

The Heart of the War

In the same verses where the 98 curses are mentioned, we find guidance on proper behavior and ethics that everyone should respect in order not to suffer these curses. For example, it is written: "If you will not be careful to perform all the words of this Torah that are written in this book, to fear the honored and awesome Name" (Devarim 28:58), meaning that in this war – the war of Torah observance and Torah study – the evil inclination sends its best fighters to the front. The Rebbe of Belz, Rabbi Issachar Dov, said, "The evil inclination spends less energy in discouraging us from acting with restraint and piety than it does in using tricks to distance us from the study of Torah" (Responsa Chavatzelet HaSharon, Introduction).

The gaon Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman stated, "I heard the saintly Chafetz Chaim say: 'It matters little to the evil inclination if a Jew mortifies himself, weeps, and prays all day long. The main thing is to prevent him from studying Torah'" (Kovetz Ma'amarim, p.88).

Furthermore the Vilna Gaon used to say, "Not a single day passes that the evil inclination is not more lethal than on the day before" (Toldot Rabbi Yossef Zundel of Salant, p.113).

The Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, the gaon Rabbi Shemuel Rozovski, used to say: "It is impossible to merit the Torah without going to war. In fact to accumulate Torah knowledge, we must – in

addition to making an effort to acquire it – fight against laziness and desires that run counter to it. Each word of Torah that we acquire is compared to the 'spoils' of war, as written in Eishet Chayil and interpreted as a metaphor for Torah: 'The heart of her husband trusts in her; spoils shall not be lacking' [Mishlei 31:11]."

Along the same lines, the mashgiach Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe wrote the following in Alei Shur: "It is well-known, and mentioned in all the books, that the main objective of the evil inclination is to prevent us from studying Torah. Its sole purpose is to disrupt our learning, for that is why it was created to be the Satan."

The Chazon Ish said that he himself fought a tendency for laziness throughout his life! What can we say in light of such an assertion!

A Meal of Embers

One day, as Rabbi Baruch Halberstam of Gorlitz was studying a sugia, one of his students entered the room and interrupted his learning. At that point Rabbi Baruch exclaimed, "I'm inviting you to eat!" The student didn't understand his teacher's words, and so Rabbi Baruch explained: "The Gemara says that whoever forsakes his study of Torah for a mundane discussion must eat embers. I therefore invite you to eat them!" (MiGedolei HaTorah VeHaChasidut, Vol II, p.115).