

Table of Contents



Shemot

<i>What's in a Name?</i>	1
<i>The Decree of Egyptian Slavery</i>	5
<i>Pharaoh's Command to the Midwives</i>	13
<i>The Schemes of Bilaam</i>	16
<i>The Power of Hashem's Names</i>	20
<i>The Power of Prayer</i>	24
<i>The Merciful Leader</i>	28
<i>Moshe, Servant of Hashem</i>	35
<i>Redemption in the Merit of Modesty</i>	40
<i>Fear of Hashem</i>	44

Gems on Parashat Shemot

<i>Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time</i>	49
<i>The Birth of Moshe</i>	51
<i>Three Positive Attributes of Am Yisrael</i>	52
<i>The Severity of the Sin of Lashon Hara</i>	53
<i>For Man Is a Tree of the Field</i>	54

Va'era

<i>There Is No Faith without Torah</i>	56
<i>Galut and Geulah – Based on the Hidden Torah</i>	59
<i>Personal Accounting</i>	76
<i>Pharaoh's Wickedness</i>	81
<i>Hashem Hardens Pharaoh's Heart</i>	85
<i>The Virtue of Gratitude</i>	89
<i>The Distinguished Plague</i>	93
<i>A Journey of Three Days</i>	97
<i>Pharaoh's Heart Is Hardened</i>	100
<i>Two Forces in Man</i>	108

Gems on Parashat Va'era

<i>The Plague of Blood</i>	110
<i>Pharaoh Hardens His Heart</i>	111

Haftarah of Parashat Va'era

<i>Yechezkel's Prophecy about Mitzrayim</i>	114
---	-----

Bo

<i>Sanctify Yourself through That Which is Permitted to You</i>	116
<i>The Youngsters with the Elders</i>	121
<i>Borrowing the Wealth of the Egyptians</i>	124
<i>The Wealth of Egypt and the Wealth of the Sea</i>	128
<i>Bnei Yisrael Were Protected by a Thread of Grace</i>	134
<i>One Mitzvah Leads to Another</i>	142

<i>The Mitzvah of Sanctifying the New Moon</i>	145
<i>The Essence of the Korban Pesach</i>	148
<i>The Mitzvah of Tefillin Arouses Faith</i>	151

Gems on Parashat Bo

<i>Tzaddikim Grow by Teaching Others</i>	157
<i>Taking the Spoils of Egypt</i>	159
<i>Hashem Passed over the Homes of Bnei Yisrael</i>	161

Beshalach

<i>The Splitting of the Sea</i>	163
<i>Comparisons to the Tsunami</i>	168
<i>The Wall of Water</i>	173
<i>The Unique Redemption</i>	176
<i>Why the Horses Drowned</i>	181
<i>The Torah Endures only Through Joy</i>	184
<i>Makkat Bechorot and Kriyat Yam Suf</i>	188
<i>He Is Standing Behind Our Wall</i>	191
<i>Man's Purpose in His World</i>	197
<i>Combating Routine</i>	202
<i>The Battle with Amalek</i>	206

Gems on Parashat Beshalach

<i>Torah Warfare</i>	209
<i>Waging War – Only through Torah</i>	211
<i>Moshe Rabbeinu's Portion in the Spoils of the Sea</i>	212

<i>One Who Goes in the Way of Torah Is Saved from the Yetzer</i>	
<i>Hara</i>	213
<i>Torah Protects and Saves</i>	215
<i>Fortifying One's Faith Averts the Attribute of Judgment</i>	216
<i>The Connection between Yosef's Bones and the Splitting of the Sea</i>	217
<i>Matrimony, Sustenance, and the Splitting of the Sea</i>	219
<i>The Wealth of the Egyptians at the Sea</i>	220
<i>The Wall of Waters</i>	222
<i>Lessons from the Angels</i>	223
<i>Hashem Fights for His Devout Ones</i>	225
<i>The Bitter Waters</i>	226
<i>The Month of Iyar – Preparation for Matan Torah</i>	227
<i>The Manna</i>	227
<i>Moshe's Raised Hands</i>	229
<i>At the Top of the Hill</i>	230

Yitro

<i>Why Yitro Came</i>	232
<i>The Virtues of Yitro</i>	240
<i>Yitro Heard</i>	245
<i>Coming Close to Hashem</i>	252
<i>You Shall Be Wholehearted with Hashem, Your G-d</i>	256
<i>Remembering One's Sins – Catalyst for Renewal</i>	259
<i>When We Are Unable to Hear</i>	263
<i>Yitro – The Righteous Convert</i>	269

<i>The Virtue of Unity</i>	273
<i>The Protective Power of Torah</i>	276
<i>Upholding the Torah with Enthusiasm</i>	285
<i>The Power of Influence</i>	289
<i>The Significance of Kabbalat HaTorah</i>	293
<i>Hashem and Bnei Yisrael Unite in Marriage</i>	298
<i>The Hatred of the Gentiles Descended From Har Sinai</i>	302
<i>Renewal in Avodat Hashem</i>	306
<i>The Wise Man Foresees the Outcome of His Deeds</i>	311
<i>Seeing the Sounds</i>	314

Gems on Parashat Yitro

<i>Yitro's Method of Fighting Amalek</i>	317
<i>Starting off on the Right Foot</i>	319
<i>Observing Mitzvot in order to Serve Hashem</i>	321
<i>Know Him in All Your Ways</i>	323
<i>The Purpose of Leaving Egypt</i>	324
<i>Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael Are One</i>	325
<i>The Ongoing Battle with the Yetzer Hara</i>	327
<i>The Connection between Parashat Yitro and Parashat Mishpatim</i>	328

Mishpatim

<i>Torah and Its Reward</i>	330
<i>The Servant of Hashem Rejoices in His Portion</i>	335
<i>The Mitzvot of the Torah</i>	345

<i>Kabbalat HaTorah – The Wedding of All Time</i>	348
<i>The Essence of the Shalosh Regalim</i>	351
<i>Who Will Climb the Mountain of Hashem?</i>	357
<i>The Merit of Torah</i>	361
<i>The Six Days</i>	363
<i>Burning Faith</i>	368
<i>Refuting the Angels</i>	373
<i>Torah's Residence on Earth</i>	377
<i>Torah – Lessons for Life</i>	383

Gems on Parashat Mishpatim

<i>The Connection between the Festivals and the Prohibition of Combining Milk and Meat</i>	387
--	-----

The Days of Shovavim

<i>Increasing Our Yirat Shamayim</i>	389
--	-----

Terumah

<i>Take for Me a Portion</i>	396
<i>So That I May Dwell among Them</i>	403
<i>Building the Mishkan in Unity</i>	410
<i>The Purpose of the Mishkan</i>	415
<i>The Limitless Dimensions of the Aron</i>	421
<i>Golden Inside and Outside</i>	424
<i>The Aron and Its Poles – Yissachar and Zevulun</i>	427
<i>Enlightening Lessons from the Mishkan</i>	429

Gems on Parashat Terumah

<i>Bnei Yisrael's Participation in the Mishkan</i>	436
<i>Torah – The Only Daughter of Hashem</i>	438
<i>Acquiring the Torah through Abandoning Wealth</i>	439
<i>The Prerequisite for the Presence of the Shechinah</i>	440
<i>A Practical Lesson from the Mishkan</i>	441
<i>The Vessels of the Mishkan</i>	443
<i>The Glory of Torah</i>	444

Tetzaveh

<i>Mutual Responsibility</i>	446
<i>Connecting to Tzaddikim</i>	449
<i>What's Mine Is Yours</i>	455
<i>The Exclusion of Moshe's Name from the Parashah</i>	464
<i>Garments of Torah</i>	477
<i>The Tamid Offering</i>	480

Gems on Parashat Tetzaveh

<i>The Precedence of the Oil</i>	484
<i>The Menorah – A Hint to the Beit Hamikdash</i>	486
<i>The Torah Is Not in Heaven</i>	487
<i>Everyone Must Sanctify Himself</i>	489

Ki Tisa

<i>The Half-Shekel</i>	491
<i>Maintaining Perfection</i>	495

<i>Bnei Yisrael Are Accountable for One Another</i>	499
<i>In the Shadow of Hashem</i>	503
<i>Setting Our Priorities Straight</i>	508
<i>Retaining the Luchot</i>	511
<i>In Explanation of the Chet Ha'egel</i>	517
<i>Torah Unites All Aspects of Man's Personality</i>	523
<i>Torah Protects and Shields</i>	526
<i>Moshe's Tefillah on Behalf of Bnei Yisrael</i>	529
<i>The Message of the Broken Luchot</i>	531
<i>Shattering Complacency</i>	535
<i>The Cause of the Chet Ha'egel</i>	538
<i>The Broken Luchot</i>	541
<i>Torah Is the Vessel That Holds Blessing</i>	544

Gems on Parashat Ki Tisa

<i>Hashem's Love for Am Yisrael</i>	552
<i>By Virtue, Not through Charity</i>	553
<i>Moshe Breaks the Luchot</i>	555
<i>Torah and Materialism Are Mutually Exclusive</i>	556
<i>Moshe's Second Ascent to Heaven</i>	557
<i>The Light of Torah</i>	559

Vayakheil

<i>Shabbat – A Taste of the World to Come</i>	560
<i>The Importance of Shabbat</i>	566
<i>Bringing down the Shechinah</i>	570

<i>Moshe Speaks to All of Bnei Yisrael</i>	572
<i>Bnei Yisrael Take Leave of Moshe</i>	575
<i>Walking in the Ways of Halachah</i>	582
<i>Shabbat Is the Source of All Blessing</i>	592
<i>Consecrating the Mundane</i>	598

Gems on Parashat Vayakheil

<i>The Connection between Parshiyot Ki Tisa and Vayakheil</i>	605
---	-----

Pekudei

<i>The Obligation to Make a Personal Accounting</i>	607
<i>Man Is a Miniature Mishkan</i>	612
<i>Lessons from the Mishkan</i>	618
<i>Protecting the Mind and the Heart</i>	626
<i>Building on the Foundations of Our Forefathers</i>	628
<i>The Correct Order</i>	632
<i>The Ark of Testimony</i>	636

Gems on Parashat Pekudei

<i>My Sin Is Before Me Always</i>	646
<i>The Effect of Sin</i>	647

Haftarah of Parashat Shekalim

<i>The Story of Yehoash Hamelech</i>	649
--	-----

Glossary	659
-----------------------	-----

Shemot

What's in a Name?

“And these are the names of the Children of Israel who are coming to Egypt; with Jacob, each man and his household came”

(*Shemot 1:1*)

Why does Hashem count Am Yisrael time and again, even though they were previously counted and their family names listed (*Bereishit* 35:22-26 and 46:8)? Rashi explains (*Shemot* 1:1) that the numerous countings give testimony to the love Hakadosh Baruch Hu has toward Am Yisrael. They are compared to the stars, which are counted each day, as the *Navi* declares (*Yeshayahu* 40:26), “He brings forth their legions by number; He calls to each of them by name.”

Perhaps we can also say that Hashem wanted to impress upon Bnei Yisrael that a person’s name is his essence, and is therefore priceless.

As long as a person is awake during the day or night, he has the ability to study Torah and perform mitzvot. This is the strongest type of protection from the *kelippah* and other forms of destructive forces. Torah shields a person from all harm (*Sotah* 21a). But, when a person is asleep, it seems as though he is left unguarded from all of the negative forces, for

sleep is a sample of death (*Berachot* 57b). During slumber, a person is powerless to fight his *Yetzer Hara*, who is always intent on causing him to sin.

Hashem, by counting His children time and again, demonstrates that their names are rooted in holiness, for these were the names which Yaakov called his offspring. A person's name is his best protection when he is asleep. Yaakov Avinu did not give names randomly, rather he sought names with spiritual sources, which denote Hashem's Kingship in this world. This would grant his children Hashem's protection. This is the lesson in the words, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who are coming to Egypt." They preserved their ancestors' traditions and continued calling their children by the sanctified, pure names, which Yaakov had called his sons (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:25). They had deep faith that their holy names would protect them from the *kelippah* and *tumah* in any situation, and especially when sleeping, when they were not involved in Torah study.

Although Bnei Yisrael sank to the forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*), they eventually merited salvation from the arduous labor in Mitzrayim. They distanced themselves from assimilating with the gentiles by preserving their Jewish identity. They did not change their names, their dress, or their language.

Bnei Yisrael held fast to their Jewish names, for they valued them greatly. Their names represented their essential sanctity. This sanctity was inherited from their father, Yaakov, the progenitor of the twelve Shevatim.

By way of *remez*, we might add the following. The word וְאֶלָּה (and these), is numerically equivalent to the word בָם (them), which refers to words of Torah (*Devarim* 6:7), "And you shall speak of them." Through the power of the holy names by which Bnei Yisrael are called, they have the potential to connect to the Torah Hakedoshah, which is comprised of Hashem's Names (*Zohar II*, 124a; *Ramban*, Introduction to the Torah). In this manner, they connect not only to the Torah, but to Hashem, Himself.

The Gemara recounts an episode concerning David Hamelech. As he stood at the entranceway of the bathhouse, he felt himself bare of mitzvot and became fearful. He thought of escaping to the House of Study, instead, in order to have the mitzvah of learning Torah. When he finally remembered his *brit milah*, he was mollified. He was comforted in the knowledge that the *zechut* of his *brit milah* would protect him at times when Torah study was not feasible (*Menachot* 43b).

Why wasn't David Hamelech afraid of entering the restroom? There, too, he was prevented from learning Torah, causing him to be bare of mitzvot. What is the difference between the restroom and the bathhouse?

When one is taking care of his needs in the restroom, he is still charged with the commandment to preserve a measure of modesty. He must not uncover more of his body than is absolutely necessary. This awareness of maintaining one's human dignity is a mitzvah (see *Michah* 6:8). Therefore, David felt confident that he was protected from any harmful forces there (*Berachot* 62a). He knew that the mitzvah of *tzeniut* would protect him. But the bathhouse did not afford him this level of protection.

However, according to our original train of thought, why didn't David rely on his holy name for protection? The name דָוִיד (David) is equal, after adding one for the word itself, to the Name of Hashem, הָאֵל. David seemingly should have had confidence that his name, an allusion to Hashem's Name, would guard him when in the bathhouse, when he was prevented from Torah study. We might suggest that David understood that as long as he did not contemplate his name, which alluded to the Name of Hashem, it had no power of protection. Since it signified Hashem's Name, he was careful not to think about it while in the bathhouse. He did not want to reduce the value of his name, desiring to preserve its pride. Therefore, he was assuaged after remembering the *brit kodesh*, knowing that the *zechut* of his *milah* would protect him from all harm.

An indication of the immeasurable meaning of a Jewish name can be learned from the fact that when a person is deathly sick, a name is added

to his original name. This provides additional protection (see *Rosh Hashanah* 16b) and prevents the forces of destruction from carrying out their evil intentions. The *sifrei Kabbalah* relate that after 120 years of a person's life, he will stand before the Heavenly Court. The first question he will be asked, will be what his name is (*Sha'ar Hagilgulim*, Introduction, 23). As we mentioned, a person's name indicates his essence and reflects upon his righteousness, or lack of it. In the days of the Talmud, in order to recognize the essence of a person, and whether or not he was of pure lineage, they would ask him his name. Rabbi Meir would know the core essence of a person, and whether he was a tzaddik or a rasha, according to his name (*Yoma* 83b).

The numerous countings in the Torah teach us the vast importance and the great depth inherent in Jewish names. Hashem always had Bnei Yisrael counted according to their families. Yaakov Avinu called his sons by holy names, which have their roots in the Upper Worlds. There is tremendous significance in Jewish names.

In Summary

- ◆ Rashi explains that Hashem counted Bnei Yisrael again at this point out of His tremendous love for them. Bnei Yisrael were listed by name to teach that a person's name reveals his essence, and has the capacity to influence him.
- ◆ Torah study protects a person during the daytime and during the night. But, when one is asleep at night, what will provide him protection? His name, which has its source in *kedushah*, is what safeguards him. Yaakov considered his sons' names carefully before giving them.
- ◆ When David Hamelech was in the bathhouse, he was greatly distressed, for he found himself bare of mitzvot. Then he remembered his *brit milah*. Why didn't he have this fear when he visited the restroom? When one is in the restroom, he still has the mitzvah of *tzeniut*, and he tries to cover himself as much as possible. Maintaining these halachot protect him. In the bathhouse, he is bereft of this mitzvah.

- ♦ David's name (תַּדְּוָעַת), adding one for the word itself, is numerically equal to the Name of Hashem (נָאָתָה). This being the case, his name certainly had the power to protect him from all harm. Why, then, was he afraid when at the bathhouse? It seems that the name of a person can protect him only if he contemplates its essence. David did not want to reflect on his holy name in a place of impurity and was therefore afraid of being without protection.

The Decree of Egyptian Slavery

“Egypt enslaved the Children of Israel with crushing harshness”

(Shemot 1:13)

Why were Bnei Yisrael fated to be enslaved under Egyptian tyranny, for the duration of four hundred years? Chazal explain (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 47) that this was decreed upon them as a consequence of Avraham Avinu's question (*Bereishit* 15:8) "Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it (the Land of Israel)?" His sons were destined to descend to Egyptian exile as punishment for his seeming lack of faith.

This is difficult to understand. Avraham Avinu was the paradigm of *emunah*, broadcasting to the entire world that there is none other than Hashem (*Rambam* 77:1; 3). Avraham certainly did not lack faith. Why, then, were Bnei Yisrael destined to suffer such a cruel fate?

This question is compounded by the fact that Hashem vowed to punish the Egyptians for enslaving Bnei Yisrael, as it says (*Bereishit* 15:14), "But also the nation that they will serve, I shall judge." Wouldn't it have been better to avoid enslaving the Jewish people, and thus avoid punishing the Egyptians?

The Egyptians were punished for scorning Bnei Yisrael and enslaving them with harsh labor, above and beyond what was predicted.

Chizkiyahu Hamelech was also criticized for lack of faith. Yeshayahu Hanavi told him that he would perish in both this world and the Next, for he did not marry and have children (see *Berachot* 10a). There is a mitzvah to have children. One who does not marry transgresses seriously (see *Yevamot* 63b; 64a). The Arizal writes (*Likutei Torah Mikeitz*), that Bnei Yisrael descended to Egypt in order to rectify the damage caused by Adam Harishon. He separated from his wife for 130 years. Although he had good intentions, and was even called a *chassid* for doing so (*Eiruvin* 18b), great damage was caused. Sparks of *kedushah* were held back from him because he did not first confer with Hashem.

When Chizkiyahu was informed of his imminent death, he told Yeshayahu, “Give me your daughter for a wife.”

To which Yeshayahu responded, “Do you think I want my daughter to become a widow? Hashem already said that you are slated to die.”

Then Chizkiyahu replied, “I have a tradition from my father’s house: ‘Even if a sharp sword is placed upon a person’s neck, he should not despair of Hashem’s mercy.’” Chizkiyahu then turned his face to the wall, and began weeping and praying (*Melachim II*, 20:2). Hashem immediately told Yeshayahu that He would add fifteen years to Chizkiyahu’s life.

Why did he turn toward the wall? Why didn’t he lift his eyes heavenward to pray?

Many people live in the lap of luxury, pursuing only money and material matters. One who lives like this cannot live a life of Torah. Baruch Hashem, we live in the world of Torah, and this is our occupation. The following story is told of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt”l. A wealthy magnate once visited him. When he observed the utter simplicity of Reb Moshe’s house, he decided to change the furniture. When the gaon, zt”l, arrived home, he took one look at the furnishings and refused to enter. He claimed it was not his house. He was not appeased until all of the old

furniture was returned. His entire world was Torah; he had no connection with physical pleasures.

The following analogy proves this point. A hungry man enters the Beit Hakeneset. There is some food on the table. When he is told to make a blessing for the merit of the recovery of a certain person, rather than having that in mind, he is consumed by his desire for food. This is a natural reaction. Materialism is like a wall, separating a person from Hashem.

Chizkiyahu Hamelech was surrounded by opulence. He feared that physicality would disturb his tefillah and the purity of his tears; therefore he turned to the wall. He wanted to face nothing at all. This is why many shut their eyes during prayer. When we look at something, we think of that item, and this detracts from our thoughts of Hashem (see *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah, Berachot 22b*).

In a similar vein, the Mishnah in *Avot* (3:7) denounces one who walks on the road, engrossed in his learning, and stops in order to admire the trees. When one is involved in Torah study, nothing else exists. He may not notice anything, even the wonders of Creation, which are mentioned in *Tehillim* (104:24). When we learn Torah, our wonder and awe should be focused solely on Torah. How can we compare the beauties of nature to Torah? Because Chizkiyahu did his utmost to ensure the purity of his prayers, with no partition between himself and Hashem, his prayers were accepted.

This sheds light on the purpose of our fathers going down to Egypt. Am Yisrael is the Chosen People. In order to be able to recognize Hashem, it was necessary that they detach themselves from earthly pursuits. When one is involved in physicality, his mind is on the frivolities of this world, and he cannot serve Hashem properly.

We find that our Avot gained in their Avodat Hashem by virtue of lowering themselves physically. Yitzchak allowed himself to be placed on the altar, covered with wood, like a sacrifice ready to be slaughtered.

Likewise, Yaakov suffered at the hands of Lavan and Eisav, who pursued him.

Bnei Yisrael needed to descend to Egypt. Through the harsh slavery that they suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, they lost their identity. They had no measure of physicality to call their own, and this enabled them to recognize Hashem. The Ibn Ezra describes the feeling of servitude (see *Shemot* 2:3; 14:13). There is no greater distress than that of being a slave. A slave loses all form of identity and individuality. He is compelled to execute tasks against his better judgment. At the end of the Egyptian exile, the pasuk (*Shemot* 2:23) states, “Their outcry went up to G-d.” Their prayer went directly to Hashem, without any obstacles.

Hashem praised Bnei Yisrael for their conduct as a nascent nation (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2): “I recall for you the kindness of your youth.” In the merit of four things, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt: they did not change their names, they did not change their dress, they made boundaries to avoid immorality, and they were careful not to speak *lashon hara*. These things brought them close to Hashem (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 226).

Had Chizkiyahu not turned toward the wall and been granted life in answer to his prayers, we would not merit the arrival of Mashiach, who will descend from him. Chizkiyahu had fifteen years added to his life, the *gematria* of the word פָּנָא (pride). By abolishing haughtiness from his heart, he was rewarded measure for measure by receiving an additional fifteen years of life.

Moreover, when Chizkiyahu passed away, a yeshiva was erected on his gravesite (*Bava Kama* 16b). This is because he nullified himself before the wall, an allusion to the grave. *Kohelet* (8:8) states, “Nor is there authority over the day of death.” Because Chizkiyahu subjected his authority to a Higher Being, he merited having a yeshiva on his gravesite, perpetuating his memory even in death.

Let us return to our original question of why Bnei Yisrael needed to be enslaved in Egypt. Avraham’s question of “Whereby shall I know?” did not

warrant them suffering such a long and bitter exile. Additionally, the sin of Adam Harishon could have been corrected in other ways. The slavery was necessary to teach the nation crucial points in Avodat Hashem. By being enslaved and removing the mantle of materialism from themselves, they became purified and capable of being Hashem's nation. Through the suffering that they endured, they attained the potential of feeling the pleasure of Torah, the tree of life. In order to learn Torah as is fitting, one must undergo suffering. In order to merit entering the Holy Land, they first needed to sojourn in Egypt, descending to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). This caused them to turn to Hashem and learn to appreciate the value of tefillah.

There is a custom that the children of the deceased do not accompany their parent to his burial. This is because when his *neshamah* ascends to Heaven, they ask the deceased what he has brought with him. If his sons are not worthy, *chas v'shalom*, he will be held accountable. "For this you came into the world?!" But, when his sons are not in the vicinity, they look at his Torah and mitzvah accomplishments. When a person dies, the people present close his eyes (*Rambam, Hilchot Aveilut* 4:1). Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 688) that the last thing a person sees in this life is Hashem Himself. We want this image to remain with him, and therefore, we close his eyes. How is it possible for eyes which look into the Torah to look at other things, which are removed from *kedushah*? When one works on conducting himself with increased *kedushah*, there will be no partition between himself and Hashem, and his tefillot will be accepted.

Let us learn a lesson from this. A person who perceived Hashem just before death has his eyes closed, in order to refrain from seeing that which is forbidden, even though the *Yetzer Hara* has no authority after death. How much more so, when a person is alive, performing mitzvot and learning Torah, is he forbidden from gazing at forbidden sights, *rachmana litzlan*.

Chazal teach us (*Rosh Hashanah* 4b), "If you have grabbed a small amount, you have gained; if you have grabbed a lot, you have not gained

anything.” “A small amount” refers to Torah. The Torah lies neglected in the corner, so to speak, with no takers. Whoever wishes to partake of it is invited to do so. But if a person is not satisfied with Torah alone, but pursues other interests as well, he loses his portion of Torah. Upon his deathbed, Rabbi Hakadosh lifted his ten fingers and proclaimed, “It is known to You, Hashem, that I didn’t take even a finger’s worth of pleasure from this world” (*Ketubot* 104a). So do we find with all great men, throughout the generations. My grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, was fabulously wealthy. But by the time night fell, he was a pauper, for he would distribute all his money to charity. He was once found wiping out his pockets to ensure that there was no money inside them. He explained that he wished to cleanse himself of the filth of physicality.

My father, zt”l, related another incident concerning my grandfather, zy”a. One night, he was unable to fall asleep. He asked his wife if she had shaken all leftover coins out of his pockets. She replied that she had taken some money in order to purchase household items. He told her to replace the money, since he would be unable to sleep, knowing that part of his money had not gone to *tzedakah*. Upon reflection, I realized how far removed we are from the level of such tzaddikim. We sleep good and well when we have money at our disposal. When we are lacking funds, we lose sleep, out of worry over our livelihood. Conversely, they were so full of faith in Hashem, that they slept well when they were relieved of their money.

My intention in relating this episode is not, *chas v’shalom*, to depress anyone. On the contrary, I wish to inspire my readers. Our generation has many more *nisyonot* than previous generations; yet, we sit and learn Torah. Our reward will be proportionately greater.

The world calls us *batlanim*, for we are engrossed in Torah, abandoning all earthly pursuits. A wealthy Jew once came to me in the Beit Hamidrash in Lyon, France. He wanted to receive a *berachah*. But he refused to contribute a cent to the Torah students, claiming that they are *batlanim* who don’t earn a decent living. I answered him, “You consider them

batlanim. Try to sit for a full day in front of the Gemara, and learn Torah. I'll give you whatever you want."

He answered that he would even spend a week at the yeshiva. He tried to do it, but he didn't even manage to learn for five minutes! When he understood just how much exertion is demanded to learn Torah, he donated a respectable sum to the yeshiva.

We must combine Avodat Hashem with Torah study. The Mishnah (*Mo'ed Katan* 28a) states, "Fortunate is the one who arrives here with his learning in his hand." "Here" refers to the World to Come, the world of pleasure, where one is free from the force of the *Yetzer Hara*. Only one whose Torah learning is evident by his actions is eligible to arrive there. Torah study without *yirat Shamayim* is worthless.

One should strive to learn Torah with no partitions between himself and Hashem. Rather, he should put up the dividers between himself and the world of materialism. This is the way Chizkiyah and our Avot conducted themselves. They eliminated materialism and only then "their outcry went up to G-d." The *Navi* proclaims (*Yechezkel* 16:6), "Then I passed you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, 'In your blood you shall live.'" Hashem promised our nation that He would cleanse them of their aveirot, alluded to by "blood." Then, they would merit "you shall live."

Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of four values that they preserved (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 226). The Chatam Sofer states that these are referred to in the first pasuk of our parashah: "And these are the names" – they maintained their Jewish names. "Of the Children of Israel" – they did not speak *lashon hara*. "Who are coming to Egypt; with Jacob" – they kept their style of dress. "Each man and his household" – they upheld the laws of family purity.

The *Chidushei HaRim* relates that the phrase "who are coming" is written in the present tense, in order to teach us the following lesson. In every generation, when Klal Yisrael finds itself in *galut*, and they turn to Hashem in prayer, He provides protection for them. Just as they were

redeemed from the Egyptian exile in the merit of these four acts, so too, if we strengthen ourselves in these areas, will we merit complete salvation.

In Summary

- ◆ Hakadosh Baruch Hu required Bnei Yisrael to descend to Mitzrayim. In order to build them up as His nation, they first needed to be enslaved. Only by becoming detached from all earthly matters and pleasures of the physical world could they attach themselves to Him. They benefitted greatly from their exile in Egypt, for when they were at last liberated, and witnessed all of the great miracles, they appreciated Hashem and His Torah all the more.
- ◆ We find that Chizkiyahu received an additional fifteen years of life in the merit of turning his head toward the wall in prayer. He thereby created a partition between himself and his splendid palace, which reminded him of his majesty and was liable to cause him to feel pride (**גָאֹל**), which has the *gematria* of fifteen. By facing the bare wall, his heart was open to supplicate Hashem.
- ◆ “If you have grabbed a small amount, you have gained; if you have grabbed a lot, you have not gained anything.” One who strives to attain material wealth, in addition to his Torah acquisitions, will be disappointed. He will not be able to hold on to his Torah studies. In order to succeed in Torah, one must detach himself completely from all mundane matters.
- ◆ “Fortunate is the one who arrives here with his learning in his hand.” “Here” refers to the World to Come, the world of *yirat Shamayim*. Torah without fear of Heaven is worthless and has no endurance in the World to Come.
- ◆ “Who are coming to Egypt” is written in the present tense in order to teach us the following lesson. In every generation, when Bnei Yisrael come close to Hashem, He redeems them from *galut*. Just as Bnei Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of four items which they preserved: their names, their language, separation from *lashon hara*, and steering clear of

immorality, so too, when we will be vigilant in these matters, we will also merit the *geulah*.

Pharaoh's Command to the Midwives

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah – and he said: When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birth stool; if it is a son, you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live”

(Shemot 1:15-16)

Pharaoh summoned the Jewish midwives, Shifrah and Puah, commanding them to check each baby as soon as it was born. If it was a boy, they were ordered to kill it. All girls were allowed to live. The midwives did not heed Pharaoh's orders and refused to comply with his decree. This aroused his ire, as the pasuk states, (*ibid. 1:18*), “The king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them: Why have you done this thing, that you have caused the boys to live!”

An obvious question arises. If Pharaoh was intent on killing all of the males, why did he appoint Jewish midwives for the mission? Wouldn't it have been more sensible to choose non-Jewish women for the job? They surely would have done it to perfection, preventing the Jewish savior from being born. Furthermore, how could Pharaoh imagine that just two women could manage to deliver all of the Jewish babies in Egypt? At that time, the Jewish women were giving birth to six babies at once (*Shemot Rabbah 1:8*). What was the rationale behind employing only two midwives

for such a large population?

Pharaoh was a wise man. He understood that Am Yisrael's survival was dependent on their unity. Without this sense of solidarity, they would no longer be considered a nation. They would be subject to the machinations of the Egyptians, who desired to destroy them completely. Pharaoh knew that before his death Yaakov had gathered his sons and told them (*Bereishit* 49:1-2), "Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov." Yaakov specifically used the terms of "assembly" and "gathering" in order to teach his children that they merit the status of nationhood only when they are united. But when they are scattered and dispersed, they are no longer a nation.

Throughout our history, we find that as soon as Bnei Yisrael became disunited, the forces of destruction were able to affect them. The Serpent caused a division between Adam and Chava. This brought about the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Similarly, Bnei Yisrael descended to Egypt due to the sale of Yosef. Had the brothers not hated him and thrown him into the pit, he would not have been sold as a slave, and Am Yisrael would have been spared the exile in Egypt. But because the unity of the Shevatim was flawed, it was decreed that Am Yisrael would go down to Egypt and be enslaved there for four hundred years.

The Torah likewise recounts the incident of the twelve stones, which Yaakov placed around his head. The Gemara (*Chulin* 91b) states that the stones fought among themselves. Each wanted Yaakov to place his head upon him. Hashem combined them into one large stone, and they provided protection for his head as a unified mass (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:11). When Yaakov observed this, he was joyous. The twelve stones corresponded to the Twelve Tribes. Yaakov took their merging into one mass as a sign that his twelve sons would eventually unite into one entity. This merit gave Am Yisrael the wherewithal to emerge from slavery and be redeemed from Egypt.

Pharaoh understood this and, in order to preclude their redemption, he attempted to prevent them from being unified. He did this by causing

divisiveness among them, by having specifically Jewish midwives check the babies on the birth stool. The word אָוְבָנִים (birth stool) is similar to אֲבָנִים (stones). This hints to Pharaoh's desire to damage the unity of Am Yisrael, portrayed by the stones which surrounded Yaakov's head, in which merit Bnei Yisrael were worthy of redemption. Two midwives were sufficient for this, since the fact that they were Jewish would arouse contention among the Jewish women.

He chose Yocheved and Miriam, who were also called Shifrah and Puah, since they were from the tribe of Levi, who were not included in the slavery (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:16). Their involvement in killing the babies would sow even greater discord and dissention among the masses because of the tribe that they were from. This would postpone the redemption. However, the midwives were loyal to their faith, preventing Pharaoh's diabolical plans from coming to fruition. Bnei Yisrael remained unified, and in this merit, they were worthy of the Exodus.

The Torah extols the virtues of the midwives, and they were rewarded for their loyalty, as it says (*Shemot* 1:21), "And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses." Rashi explains, "The houses of the priesthood, the tribe of Levi, and royalty, all of which are called 'houses.'" There is great symbolism in the fact that they received specifically these rewards. A house is a symbol of unity and harmony. The midwives saved the babies from death and were thus the catalysts for the building of many "houses" in Am Yisrael. This contributed to the unity among the nation. Therefore, they received houses of priesthood, the tribe of Levi, and houses of royalty. The king unites the nation. The name Levi (לֵוי) denotes accompaniment (לווי), the connotation of the name that Leah gave her son (*Bereishit* 29:34). Two people who accompany one another on the road demonstrate unity, for one protects the other.

In Summary

- ♦ Pharaoh appointed Jewish midwives to kill the Jewish babies. This is difficult to understand. Why didn't he just select non-Jewish midwives for this job? They certainly would have carried out his order. Furthermore,

why did he employ only two women for this task? Did he think that only two were enough to deliver all of the Jewish children? The Jewish women were giving birth to six babies at once!

- ◆ The trait of unity is tremendous. Yaakov summoned all of his sons before his death. He used the words “assemble” and “gather,” which are terms denoting unity. In this way, he indicated that the key to their survival is unity. Had the tribes been unified, they would never have sold Yosef. Consequently, the exile to Egypt would have been averted.
- ◆ Pharaoh was aware of the power of unity. Therefore, he specifically called the Jewish midwives to kill the male babies in order to plant dissention among Bnei Yisrael. Two women were sufficient for this.
- ◆ The midwives were rewarded for refusing to comply with Pharaoh’s orders by being given “houses.” A house is a symbol of unity. This was measure for measure for the unity which they promoted among Bnei Yisrael.

The Schemes of Bilaam

“Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying: Every son that will be born – into the River shall you throw him! And every daughter shall you keep alive”

(Shemot 1:22)

Pharaoh’s astrologers predicted that a Jewish son would be born who would redeem Bnei Yisrael (*Tanchuma, Vayakheil* 4). Therefore, Pharaoh gathered all his advisors, and asked what he should do about the “Jewish Problem.” He wished to prevent the birth of their savior. Pharaoh had three advisors: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yitro. Bilaam advised to kill the Jewish

infant boys and was later punished by death. Iyov remained silent and was punished with terrible suffering. Yitro fled and merited greatness (*Sotah* 11a).

My son, may he live, asked me the following question. Bilaam knew that Hashem hates immorality. This is why, later on, he advised Balak to draw Bnei Yisrael into sins of immorality. Hashem, who abhors all forms of lack of *tzeniut*, would be quick to avenge His Name and pour His wrath upon His people (see *Sanhedrin* 106a). Indeed, this was the case. After they sinned with the daughters of Moav, Hashem sent an epidemic upon Bnei Yisrael, and many perished. Finally, Pinchas acted zealously for Hashem, halting the epidemic. Since immorality causes such destruction to Bnei Yisrael, why didn't Bilaam advise Pharaoh to trap Bnei Yisrael with sins of debauchery? This would avert the birth of their savior and keep them enslaved for many years to come.

Perhaps we can answer in the following way. When Pharaoh sought the advice of his wise men, Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. Any iniquity on their part would be considered as though they were compelled. Hashem created the Torah as an antidote against the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b). Without this antidote, they could not be held responsible for being caught in the *Yetzer*'s trap. Thus, if they would sin in an immoral manner in Egypt, they could not be punished. However, when they sinned with the daughters of Moav, according to Bilaam's advice, this was after *Matan Torah*. They were now culpable for their actions and were severely punished. Many people perished because of this sin. Now that they possessed the Torah, Am Yisrael should have guarded themselves from this sin, for the Torah protects one from sin (*Sotah* 21a).

Moreover, Am Yisrael were worthy of salvation from Egyptian bondage in the merit of four values that they preserved – their Jewish names; their language; the secrets which they received from Yaakov their father. i.e., to guard themselves from immorality; and their caution not to speak *lashon hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 226). Maintaining these values provided Am Yisrael with special protection from being defiled in

Mitzrayim and preserved their Jewish identity. Am Yisrael was staunchly zealous to uphold their national purity. Even were Pharaoh to present them with the lure of lust, his plots would never have succeeded.

In fact, due to the harshness of the labor placed upon them, Am Yisrael lost all interest in these matters. Their own wives needed to adorn themselves and use the mirrors in order to be attractive to their husbands (see *Sotah* 11b). It would seem that a design of debauchery would fall flat. They were so utterly exhausted from their labor that they would not pay attention to this type of sin at all.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 168; *Eitz Chaim* 38:3) state that Bilaam was a reincarnation of Lavan Harasha, who wanted to annihilate Bnei Yisrael. How could he have advised Pharaoh to kill the males, the offspring of Yaakov and thus destroy his own progeny? Even the most wicked man in the world protects his own family.

The answer to this lies in the words of our Sages (*Avot* 2:5), “An unlearned person cannot be scrupulously pious.” One who is bereft of Torah and mitzvot can never be truly pious. His *Yetzer Hara* can surface at any time, causing him to fall into the worst crimes possible. He will even harm that which is most dear to him: the members of his family.

Lavan was called a rasha, since he did acts of wickedness throughout his life. He destroyed his *neshamah* and sank to the lowest level possible. He even decreed death upon his offspring. One who is lacking Torah is capable of losing all moral values and good sense, to the extent that he may even desire to harm his loved ones.

We can interpret Lavan/Bilaam’s behavior in another way. Jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of honor drive a person from this world (*Avot* 4:21). Lavan was extremely jealous of his son-in-law, Yaakov, who labored for him for fourteen years. In the end, Yaakov became the leader of a large family. He owned sheep, cattle, slaves and slave women, and many possessions. Lavan could not bear the thought that Yaakov had amassed all this wealth in his house. The very roots of Am Yisrael had been planted in his domain. Due to his tremendous jealousy, he descended to the

lowest level of depravity, and he did not hesitate to decree death upon his descendants in order to uproot this flourishing family tree.

How difficult is the lot of the person without Torah! Torah softens a person's character and bestows him with intelligence, wisdom, and good ethics. Those who have not merited drinking from the living waters of the Torah are capable of destroying their own lives, and do not hesitate to cut off the lives of their own offspring.

In Summary

- ◆ Pharaoh had three advisors: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yitro. Bilaam advised him to kill the newborn Jewish boys, Iyov remained silent, and Yitro fled. Why didn't Bilaam simply give the same advice to Pharaoh as he later gave to Balak: to cause Bnei Yisrael to sin in immorality, which would prevent the birth of their savior?
- ◆ In the times of Balak, Bnei Yisrael had already received the Torah, the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*. This was why they were punished so severely after sinning with the daughters of Moav. But, had they sinned while yet in Egypt, they would not have been punished in this way, for they had not yet received the Torah. They did not yet possess the tools to fight the *Yetzer Hara*, so they would not have been held responsible for this sin. Therefore, Bilaam did not present this idea to Pharaoh.
- ◆ Bilaam further knew that Bnei Yisrael in Egypt held fast to their names, their language, the secrets taught to them by Yaakov (i.e., to guard themselves against immorality), and desisted from *lashon hara*. Therefore, it would be futile to attempt to lure them to sin with the daughters of Egypt.
- ◆ Furthermore, due to the extreme physical labor placed upon them, it was not possible to attract them into sinful relationships. They didn't even pay attention to their own wives, as we find that the women needed to adorn themselves and bring along mirrors in order to be attractive in their husbands' eyes.

- ♦ Bilaam was Lavan reincarnated. His wickedness was far-reaching. He advised Pharaoh to destroy his own progeny, the sons of Yaakov Avinu! This was due to the tremendous envy he had toward Yaakov. See how great is the cruelty of the resha'im!

The Power of Hashem's Names

"He replied: Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Are you saying that you are going to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?"

(Shemot 2:14)

These words were said by Datan and Aviram to Moshe Rabbeinu, as he was rebuking them for striking one another (see *Nedarim* 64b). They asked him whether he wished to kill them, just as he had killed the Egyptian.

Rashi explains, "From here we learn that Moshe killed the Egyptian through uttering G-d's Ineffable Name." If Datan and Aviram witnessed Moshe killing the Egyptian with the Ineffable Name, how did they have the audacity to speak to him like that? They saw how mighty he was, able to kill someone just by the power of his speech.

Not only is the Ineffable Name one of Hashem's appellations, but each and every word of the Torah contains Hashem's Names within it (*Zohar* II, 124a; *Ramban*, Introduction to the Torah). This is the source of the obligation to gaze at the letters written in the Sefer Torah. All of it is Hashem's Name. For instance, the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 2a) stating, "Two who hold a tallit..." is certainly referring to a physical prayer shawl which two people are arguing over, but it is also essentially Names of Hashem.

A Jewish man once asked me if I know how to pronounce Hashem's Name, and I answered in the affirmative. He simply could not believe it. I continued, "Every *berachah* in which we say '*Baruch atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha'olam*' is a Name of Hashem. Practical Kabbalah does not refer only to the combination of Holy Names and deep intentions based on the secrets of Torah. Each and every mitzvah that a person does; every word of Torah that he exerts himself to understand; every tefillah that he imbues with pure intentions, according to his level of comprehension, for example, unifying Hashem's Name with the words, "*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*" (*Devarim* 6:4), are all examples of practical Kabbalah and contain Names of Hashem.

An amazing incident occurred in France, concerning my doctor. Aside from possessing vast medical expertise, he is also a *ba'al teshuvah*, who sets fixed times for Torah study with *mesirut nefesh*. He refuses to be involved in anything to do with medicine at those times.

Once, a fellow Jewish doctor fell ill with "the illness." This illness was discovered at an advanced stage, and it was clear to all that his days were numbered. My doctor went to pay him a visit and advised him of the following. Although, according to the natural order, people often die of this illness, maybe Hashem had sent it upon him in order to encourage him to strengthen himself in Torah and thereby merit longevity. The sick doctor accepted the advice and acted upon it. He began setting aside times for Torah and strengthened his mitzvah observance.

An incredible thing took place. After only a few short months, he was completely cured! It was an open miracle. The doctors said that they never witnessed someone who walked away from this particular illness before.

A miracle like this happens in the merit of the Torah. The Torah is full of practical Kabbalah and has the capacity to effect tremendous miracles. This is alluded to in *Tehillim* (145:19), "The will of those who fear Him He will do." Even without all forms of practical Kabbalah, Hashem fulfills the desire of those who fear Him and learn His Torah.

Why, then, aren't we influenced by the Names of Hashem while learning Torah and performing mitzvot? When a person is mired in materialism, his senses become dulled to matters of spirituality. This was the case with Datan and Aviram. Although they observed the miracle of Moshe killing the Egyptian through the Ineffable Name, they were not impacted by it. They were men of contention and slander, people who had no qualms about speaking *lashon hara*. Thus, they were unable to appreciate open miracles and were not affected by witnessing Moshe's killing the Egyptian with the Name of Hashem. They did not advance toward belief in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.

The *nisyonot* of this world are numerous and mighty. Many fall into their traps. Not long ago, I met a youth who had left the fold. He was dressed like a street kid. He was the son of a prominent Rav, but he could not withstand the temptations of the outside. I was greatly distressed to observe him in this state. We must sacrifice ourselves to remain distant from the frivolities of this world, so that our hearts are open to the Torah, to love and fear of Hashem. In that mindset, we can be influenced by Hashem's Names.

This lesson was brought home to me on a long flight from Eretz Yisrael via New York, to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was travelling in order to be *sandek* at a *brit* there. As we alighted from the plane in New York, we found a large mountain of snow, which prevented us from moving. We sat and waited for six long hours. I was thinking that the entire trip from Eretz Yisrael to New York would be in vain, if, *chalilah*, I would not manage to make it to the *brit* in time. I knew that they would wait for my arrival until the end of the day, but I feared that I wouldn't make it even by then. I would simply miss the mitzvah, and all my travelling would be for nothing. I prayed to Hashem that I should arrive at least before the close of the day. Indeed, I succeeded in arriving shortly before sunset, and we hurriedly performed the *brit*, in which I was the *sandek*. At the end of the ceremony, we prayed *tefillat Ma'ariv*. Then we made our way back to New York, and from there, to Eretz Yisrael. I contemplated just how much *mesirut nefesh* I had invested in merely one mitzvah. From here we learn

how much self-sacrifice a person is obligated to devote for every single mitzvah.

The *bachurim* study Torah and abandon all the trivialities of this world, which their counterparts take part in. They learn amidst tremendous suffering, through subservience and poverty. They come to learn Torah with *mesirut nefesh* and accept upon themselves the yoke of their Rabbanim. Hashem will surely repay them, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 31:20), “How abundant is Your goodness that You have stored away for those who fear You.”

On one of my trips, I took note of a *bachur* who sat near me. When the movie was showing, for the entire three hours of the film, he sat with head bent and eyes closed. He did not want to gaze at the filth on the screen. And even though, from time to time, his *Yetzer Hara* got the better of him, and he lifted his head, he immediately overcame his inclination and lowered it again. He surely has a large *zechut* for this behavior.

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian through the power of the Ineffable Name. Datan and Aviram witnessed this. Why, then, weren’t they fearful of Moshe Rabbeinu, and instead, mocked him?
- ♦ The entire Torah is replete with Ineffable Names of Hashem and forms of practical Kabbalah. A doctor recovered miraculously when he strengthened himself in Torah.
- ♦ We need to act with *mesirut nefesh* in order not to be affected by the street. Each mitzvah requires much effort and self-sacrifice. When one strives to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*, he will be rewarded.

The Power of Prayer

“During those many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d. G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Yaakov”

(Shemot 2:23-24)

Am Yisrael cried out to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, because of the terrible suffering they endured from the harsh labor that the Egyptians had placed upon them. Hashem heard their outcry, i.e., their prayers. Immediately afterwards, the Torah mentions the covenant which Hashem forged with the Avot Hakedoshim regarding their descendants' salvation.

The enslavement in Egypt was a decree from on High. Hashem promised the forefathers that after four hundred years of slavery, Am Yisrael would be redeemed with great power, and they would leave Egypt with great wealth (*Bereishit* 15:13-14). Part of the covenant with our Avot was a promise made by Hashem that Bnei Yisrael would be redeemed after suffering servitude there. This was unconditional, not dependent on the prayers of Bnei Yisrael.

However, the pasuk that we are discussing seems to indicate that Bnei Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of their prayers, as well. How can we resolve this contradiction?

The purpose of the Exodus was in order to forge a bond between Am Yisrael and their Creator. Without this connection, there is no meaning to the *geulah*. Tefillah connects a person with his Maker. By their moaning and groaning, Bnei Yisrael merited being redeemed, for they became connected to Hashem. Tefillah provided significance to the salvation. If

not for their bond with Hashem, they would not have merited receiving the Torah. Certainly, even without the power of their prayer, they would have been redeemed. Hashem would have kept the word He made in the covenant with the Avot. But their prayer effected a complete redemption, physical and spiritual, since they were imbued with the understanding that everything comes from Him. This is why the Torah goes to lengths to describe their outcry.

I know of cases in which, through the kindness of Heaven, we merited the release of prisoners through the power of our prayers. But they have no inkling of this. To this day, they are under the impression that the powers that be were instrumental in their release. Little do they realize that the Power That Be is the one truly responsible. They therefore do not have any gratitude toward Him.

Prayer serves the following purpose. When one supplicates Hashem, pouring out his heart before Him, he acknowledges that all comes from Him. When he is liberated of his suffering, he shows gratitude to Hashem, Who helped him in his distress. This was the case concerning Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim. Their prayers caused them to recognize Hashem's salvation and thank Him for accepting their tefillot and redeeming them.

The importance of prayer is illustrated by the incident concerning Chizkiyahu Hamelech and Yeshayahu Hanavi (*Berachot* 10a). Yeshayahu informed Chizkiyahu that he would soon die, and he would be deprived of his share in the World to Come, as well. This was because he had refrained from marrying, thereby disregarding one of the mitzvot. Upon hearing this, Chizkiyahu began weeping and asked Yeshayahu to give him his daughter as a wife. Yeshayahu replied that it was too late, for the decree had already been passed by Hashem.

Chizkiyahu did not accept this response. He asked Yeshayahu to finish his prophecy and be on his way. Then Chizkiyahu climbed into bed. Death begins in the legs, and he began to feel dullness in his legs. Then he cried a long, bitter cry to Hashem to give him another chance and lengthen his days, so that he might marry. Hashem acquiesced with his request and

agreed to give him another fifteen years, in order to rectify his actions. This was in the merit of Chizkiyahu's pure prayer, which emanated from the depths of his heart. He fully believed that "even if a sharp sword is resting on a person's throat, he may not despair of Heavenly mercy."

This account is difficult to understand. Yeshayahu Hanavi knew that "as long as the candle burns, one can still mend." As long as he was still living, Chizkiyahu had the opportunity to pray to Hashem to remove the decree. Even in the most difficult times, one may not despair of Hashem's mercy. This being the case, why did the *Navi* tell the king that it was already too late, and nothing could be done to correct the matter? We would have expected Yeshayahu Hanavi himself to supplicate Hashem on behalf of Chizkiyahu Hamelech, in the face of his great anguish. We certainly would not think that he would discourage him.

We might answer in the following manner. One cannot compare the prayer of a person for himself to the prayer of others on his behalf. The prayer of the person in need of salvation is the most effective prayer of all (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 53:14). Yeshayahu Hanavi knew that after this verdict was already decreed, only the power of Chizkiyahu's tefillah could rescind it. He tefillot would certainly burst forth from the depths of his heart and be proclaimed with full force and proper intention. Since Chizkiyahu's prayers would prove more effective than his, Yeshayahu did not see fit to supplicate on his behalf before Hashem. He wanted Chizkiyahu to cry out in his distress, and not rely on the prayers of the prophet to effect a reversal of the decree.

Chizkiyahu merited that through his actions Am Yisrael learned the lesson that one may never give up hope of Divine mercy. Yeshayahu Hanavi did not merit this. He had previously damaged his power of speech, when, at the beginning of his calling, he told Hashem (*Yeshayahu* 6:5), "I dwell among people with impure lips." Because he spoke ill of Am Yisrael and cast aspersion upon them, he did not merit being the innovator of this concept. Chizkiyahu Hamelech merited this, for, although he was in a desperate state, he did not despair of Hashem's mercy. He called out to Him with all his strength.

"Let not the prayer of the simple man be light in your eyes" (see *Berachot* 7a). At times, a person considers himself simple, reducing his value in his own eyes. He fails to turn to Hashem in tefillah, for he feels his prayers will be ineffective. This is absolutely untrue! As we previously stated, a person's own tefillah on his behalf is the most effective tefillah possible. This is because it comes from deep within one's heart. When a person prays, he connects himself with the rest of Am Yisrael; therefore, even if he himself is unworthy, the merit of the congregation stands by him and makes a great impression in *Shamayim*. Therefore, each and every person, even one who holds himself small, should turn to Hashem in tefillah. For even if he himself does not deserve to be answered, it could be that the collective merit of Klal Yisrael will push his tefillah upward.

I remember how my father, zt"kl, was always engrossed in tefillah, arousing Heavenly mercy upon Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, pleading for the final redemption. I am certain that if there was someone who did not deserve his prayers being accepted, the merit of my father's pure tefillah certainly stood by him and merited him being answered, as well. This is the reasoning behind approaching a tzaddik to pray on one's behalf. The tefillah of the tzaddik is effectual in and of itself, and the fact that one subjected himself to the tzaddik is a merit for him.

In Summary

- ♦ Bnei Yisrael called out to Hashem, and He heard their outcry and redeemed them from Egypt. This is puzzling. Hashem promised Avraham, in the *brit bein habetarim*, that Am Yisrael would be released from Egypt. Why does the Torah indicate that they were saved in the merit of their tefillot?
- ♦ Bnei Yisrael would certainly have been redeemed even without their supplications, for Hashem had vowed that He would redeem them. But being redeemed without being connected to Hashem is not true redemption. The Torah goes to lengths to specify their outcry, in order to emphasize that Bnei Yisrael were bound to Hashem through their tefillah. This made them worthy of subsequently receiving the Torah.

- ♦ Chizkiyahu was slated for death in this world, as well as in the World to Come, because he never married. In his last moments, he prayed to Hashem and beseeched Him to rescind the decree. His prayer was accepted. From Chizkiyahu, Chazal learn that even if a sharp sword is resting on a person's neck, he should not despair of Heavenly mercy.
- ♦ Yeshayahu Hanavi did not pray on behalf of Chizkiyahu, but left him to pray for himself. Yeshayahu knew that the most effectual prayer is that of the person himself, for it comes from the depths of the heart and is most sincere. Even if he does not deserve to be answered, when he prays, his tefillot are united with those of the rest of Am Yisrael, and the merit of the community stands by him.

The Merciful Leader

“An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw and behold! the bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed”

(Shemot 3:2)

Before Hashem sent Moshe on the mission of redeeming Bnei Yisrael, He revealed Himself to him at the burning bush. He turned to Moshe, telling him he was the only one who would rescue Am Yisrael from Mitzrayim. Moshe Rabbeinu attempted to evade the mission. Hashem knew that this would be his reaction and therefore preceded His instruction with the sight at the bush.

The bush which burned but was not consumed held special significance. The Torah states (*Devarim* 20:19), “Is the tree of the field a man?” Just as a tree cannot exist without water, so too, Am Yisrael cannot

endure without the waters of Torah. Moreover, one who does not uphold Torah and mitzvot is liable to become singed by the fire of lust. The fact that the burning bush remained intact pointed to Am Yisrael's miraculous survival of the hardships of exile. But the merits ensuring their existence were wearing thin, and they needed to be extricated from Egypt as soon as possible.

The Torah protects a person from sin. We are enjoined (*Vayikra* 26:3), "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them." One is charged to learn Torah and perform mitzvot. Without this, he has no means of survival. I remember, to my chagrin, that I once entertained the thought of transgressing in a certain area. But I immediately regretted it, stating, "You, David Pinto, who learn Torah, are capable of doing such a sin?!" In this manner, I refrained from doing the aveirah.

Chazal recount (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:3) that Hashem tested Moshe Rabbeinu before placing the reigns of leadership in his hands. He did this with the sheep. The story of the thirsty lamb, which ran to a body of water, is well-known. Moshe carried it in his arms and gave it to drink. Although all sheep look alike on the outside, Moshe noticed that one was missing. This attests to his lofty level. One who cares so much for a mere creature would care for his people even more. Therefore, Hashem chose him to redeem His flock from Mitzrayim, and lead them in the Wilderness.

The following incident is told of Rav Shach, zt"kl. He once entered the Beit Hamidrash of Yeshivat Ponevezh, which was full to capacity. He asked, "Where is so-and-so?" He had the ability to notice the absence of one specific *talmid*. This was due to his deep concern for each and every student. It was discovered that this *talmid* was absent due to illness. Moshe Rabbeinu likewise, displayed concern for everyone, even animals.

Even when Moshe noticed an Egyptian tormenting one of his fellow Jews, he acted in a merciful manner. It says (*Shemot* 2:11-12), "It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren, and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew

man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian with the power of uttering the Ineffable Name.

Let us try to understand this. Moshe was a mighty man; why didn’t he simply strike the Egyptian, thereby killing him? He did not do this, because he did not want to act in a violent manner. He proclaimed, “I will pronounce the Ineffable Name. If Hashem agrees to kill the Egyptian, the Egyptian will drop dead, and if not, he will remain alive.” From here we see a sample of Moshe’s mercy, for he was not prepared to smite even a gentile. For this reason, he was chosen to be the leader of Bnei Yisrael; only he was capable of redeeming the nation.

The next day, Moshe noticed Datan and Aviram fighting. When he tried to break up the quarrel, they demanded (*Shemot* 2:14), “Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us?” They were prepared to inform Pharaoh of his killing the Egyptian the day before. Since they were in the category of informers, Moshe had every right to put them to death. But, out of his great compassion for his fellow Jews, Moshe preferred to exile himself to the land of Midian, rather than harm his brethren.

In our day, the walls are plastered with placards for all sorts of *tikkunim*. There are suggestions for providing merit for life, for the *neshamah* of a deceased loved one, for the ill, and for the barren. But there is no *tikkun* suggested for increasing love and brotherhood among people, the most necessary attribute of our nation. The opportunity to demonstrate love of one’s fellow Jew presents itself very often in life. We must merely open our eyes and look around.

At the end of parashat *Shemot*, we find that Moshe accused Hashem, stating (*Shemot* 5:22), “My Lord, why have you done evil to this people, why have You sent me?” This seems to be in contradiction to Moshe’s usual approach, which was always one of humility. Why did he speak so brazenly before Hashem in this case?

When Moshe left Pharaoh’s palace, Datan and Aviram were waiting outside for him, demanding (*ibid. vs. 21*), “You have made our very scent

abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and the eyes of his servants.” Moshe did not chastise them for their scornful speech. Instead of becoming angry, he turned to Hashem in anguish, asking Him why He continued to cause His nation to suffer. He saw Datan and Aviram’s complaint in a positive light, believing that they were pained for the suffering of Am Yisrael. Therefore, he brought their words before Hashem.

We might explain this concept from another angle. The pasuk states (*ibid. 2:11*), “Moses...went out to his brethren...and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brethren.” Moshe felt that each Jewish person was his brother. Therefore, he felt it impossible to rule over them. We find numerous places where Moshe is referred to as a “servant.” For instance, in the Shabbat prayer, we proclaim, “Moshe will be glad with the portion bestowed upon him, for a loyal servant You called him.” In the sefer *Yehoshua* (1:1), we read, “It happened after the death of Moshe, servant of Hashem.”

Moreover, “Moshe descended from the mountain to the people” (*Shemot 19:14*). After receiving the Torah, Moshe went directly to the nation, leaving his personal matters for a later time. He considered himself a servant of the people. This was because of the tremendous *ahavat Yisrael* which burned within him. In this frame of mind, he turned to Hashem and asked in anguish, “Why have you done evil to this people?” He did not ask this in a defiant manner. On the contrary, he was commiserating and identifying with his people. Therefore, Hashem did not find his question objectionable.

A man once approached me after one of my many trips abroad. “How was the food? How was the flight?” From his many questions, it seemed as though he assumed that I go overseas on pleasure trips. All that is left for me to do upon my return is to share my experiences with him. I explained to him that although I am involved in holy work, it is not an easy job at all. It is slavery. But the benefit of *galut* is that it atones for one’s sins. The Gemara tells that Rabban Gamliel wished to appoint specific people for certain jobs. These candidates tried to shirk their appointment, claiming they were afraid of the honor it would afford them.

To which Rabban Gamliel retorted, “Do you think I’m granting you royalty and respect? I’m giving you nothing but slavery!” (*Horiyot* 10b).

The Torah commands every Jewish king to carry a Sefer Torah with him at all times, in order that he not become arrogant (*Devarim* 17:19-20). The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 104b) states that the Sages wanted to include Shlomo Hamelech among those who have no share in the World to Come, because he transgressed certain sins. Although he had been punished, even dethroned for some time, nevertheless, the *Chachamim* were steadfast in their decision to categorize Shlomo with Yeravam ben Nevat and Menashe, who lost their portion in the World to Come. This was all because Shlomo sat on the seat of Hashem. A person of his stature should have shunned this type of sin, for the eyes of the nation are upon him.

In his great distress, David turned to the *Chachamim* to ask them to release Shlomo from their verdict. But they refused to listen, until a Heavenly Voice ordered them to leave him. Although the Torah is in the hands of man, and no longer the purview of the Heavens (*Bava Metzia* 59b), only Hashem can decree punishment.

Similarly, every king and dignitary is enjoined to feel “as though a reptile is crawling up their back” (*Yoma* 22b). The Gemara explains that reptiles represent lowliness and embarrassment. The leaders of the nation are enjoined to feel this way, so that their hearts should not become proud. This shows us that royalty is, in reality, servitude.

The leaders of our nation are appointed to their position only after Hashem has discerned the quality of compassion deeply embedded in their hearts. When Avraham realized that the time had come for him to part from Lot, due to their opposing views, he did it without animosity. He prefaced his request with the words (*Bereishit* 13:8-9), “We are kinsmen.” Then he asked, “Please separate from me.” He used the word “please,” for he felt true love toward Lot. Further, the Torah states (*Bereishit* 18:7), “Then Avraham ran to the cattle.” The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit* 82) relates the following. The cattle fled, and Avraham, despite his advanced age, ran after them in order that they should not

lose their way, and also that they should not eat from pastures that belonged to someone else.

“Your righteous deed will precede you” (*Yeshayahu* 28:8). A person’s reputation goes before him. What was David Hamelech’s reputation? That he buried his enemies of war (*Rashi, Shmuel I*, 2:8, 13). David was full of virtue; why was specifically this behavior singled out? This is because when the nations of the world heard of this charitable act, it caused a great *kiddush Hashem*. This type of compassion is not found among the nations. On the contrary, they are accustomed to mocking and humiliating the dead of their enemies.

Similarly, David spent his days “involved with blood.” He spent much time ruling in cases of *niddah* in order to permit women to their husbands (*Berachot* 4a). Was there no Rabbinic authority who could have ruled in these cases? It hardly seems to be a respectable occupation for the king. Nevertheless, David Hamelech put himself at the service of the nation, and therefore saw no contradiction between being their king and being involved in these issues. When he was younger, and saw a lion and a bear attack the sheep, he arose and fought them, in order to protect the sheep (*Shmuel I*, 17:34-35). One who has compassion on animals will surely have compassion on people. Therefore, he was chosen to lead the Jewish nation.

From this *parashah*, we learn the *middah* of *ahavat Yisrael*. Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he was a servant of Bnei Yisrael. For that reason, after the sin of the Golden Calf, he turned to Hashem, and told Him that if He wished to destroy the nation, then (*Shemot* 32:32), “erase me now from Your book.” Without the Jewish nation, he saw no point in living. His mission in this world would come to an end as soon as he ceased serving his people.

The Chatam Sofer states that Bnei Yisrael were not redeemed from Egypt until they rectified the *middah* of *ahavat Yisrael* among themselves. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 1:1), “And these are the names of the Children of Israel who are coming to Egypt.” The words “who are coming” are

written in the present form to teach us that in every exile in which we find ourselves, we have the ability to be redeemed as long as we preserve the *middah* of *ahavat Yisrael*.

In Summary

- ◆ The burning bush alludes to a person, who is called a “tree of the field.” Without the protection of Torah, one is liable to become burnt in the fire of temptations. Just as the bush remained intact, so do those who are engrossed in Torah remain free of the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*.
- ◆ Hakadosh Baruch Hu tested Moshe’s ability to lead Bnei Yisrael with his flock of sheep. If Moshe behaved with compassion toward the sheep, how much more so would he deal compassionately with people.
- ◆ When Moshe witnessed an Egyptian tormenting a Jew, he killed the Egyptian through uttering the Ineffable Name, and not by striking him down. This was because he had mercy on him. He decided to use Hashem’s Name. If this person was not destined to die, the Ineffable Name would not kill him.
- ◆ When Moshe attempted to stop the fight between Datan and Aviram, they wanted to inform Pharaoh that he had killed the Egyptian. Instead of putting them to death, as they deserved for being informers, Moshe opted to flee the country and escape to Midian, out of his great mercy for others.
- ◆ “Moshe...went out to his brethren...and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brethren.” Moshe regarded each Jew as though he were his brother, and therefore worried about each of them, to the extent that he even accused Hashem of bringing evil upon His people. This was all out of his great love and concern for his fellow Jews.
- ◆ Jewish leadership is not only about grandeur and respect. One who leads the nation is a servant of the nation. When Rabban Gamliel wished to appoint one of the Sages to a position of prestige, he refused, for he feared the accompanying honor. To which Rabban Gamliel responded, “I am not granting power upon you, but servitude.”

- ◆ A Jewish king may not become haughty. He must realize that the people look toward him for guidance, and he must be perfect in his actions. The *Chachamim* wanted to remove Shlomo Hamelech's portion in the World to Come, because he was not careful enough in certain areas in which a king must be vigilant.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu acted with mercy, as well. He ran after the cattle, for he thought they might lose their way. Likewise, concerning Lot, he asked him in a pleasant manner to part ways with him.
- ◆ David Hamelech was most merciful. He sanctified the Name of Heaven by bringing the dead of his enemies to burial. Also, he acted as a servant of the people and involved himself in permitting women to their husbands. When a lion and a bear attacked the sheep, he fought them, out of mercy for his flocks.
- ◆ A Jewish leader must be merciful and consider himself a servant of the people.

Moshe, Servant of Hashem

“An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw and behold! the bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed”

(Shemot 3:2)

While Moshe Rabbeinu was watching the flock of his father-in-law, Yitro, in the Wilderness, he suddenly discovered a bush that was burning, but surprisingly remained intact. He was amazed at the spectacle, and drew closer, as it says (*Shemot 3:3*), “I will turn aside now and look at this great sight – why will the bush not be burned?” As he drew nearer, he

heard the voice of Hashem asking him to remove his shoes, for the place upon which he was standing was holy land. Hakadosh Baruch Hu then turned to Moshe and asked him to redeem Am Yisrael from Mitzrayim, from under the yoke of bondage. Hashem stated (*ibid. vs. 7*), “I have indeed seen the affliction of My people...and I have heard its outcry.”

Hashem used the sight of the bush to draw Moshe’s attention because of its symbolism. Man is compared to the tree, as the pasuk states (*Devarim 20:19*), “Is the tree of the field a man?” Just as a tree needs water to thrive and to grow, so too, do Am Yisrael need the Torah, which is compared to water, in order to survive. Hashem specifically chose a bush, for it is a short tree (*Shabbat 67a*). Hashem also indicated to Moshe that He was with them in their plight. The fact that the bush remained whole despite the flames indicated that Bnei Yisrael would survive in Egypt in spite of the tremendous suffering and torture which they experienced there.

How, indeed, did they manage to survive? It was in the merit of three things which they preserved: their names, their dress, and their language. These three values upheld the flame of Judaism in their hearts and prevented them from mingling and becoming defiled among the Egyptians (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:25*).

Hashem demonstrated to Moshe that just as the fact that the burning bush remained intact was above the confines of nature, so too, the continued survival of Am Yisrael in Egyptian bondage was also supernatural. However, one cannot be sustained by miracles forever. Therefore, Hashem asked Moshe to return to Egypt and redeem His children. He warned him that they had almost reached the fiftieth gate of impurity, and all of the pains they took to maintain their identity were insufficient to protect them.

We learn a tremendous lesson from Hashem’s words to Moshe. One may not rely on the merit of only one specific mitzvah, such as tefillin, Shabbat, etc., to sustain him. There is no way to measure the magnitude of just one mitzvah. However, in order to live life as a true Jew, with all

of its inherent privileges, one must study Torah and perform all of the mitzvot. There were many people in Morocco, Tunis, and Algiers of simple faith, but they did not involve themselves in Torah and fulfilling the mitzvot punctiliously. As a result, the next generation turned their backs on their Jewish traditions. They intermarried and brought gentile children into the world.

This is not to underrate the value of mitzvot such as tefillin, tzitzit, and *tzedakah*. But we must be aware of the fact that performing isolated mitzvot does not have the power to protect the Jew and guard him from spiritual descent. Only Torah study and performance of all mitzvot without exception can protect a person and bring him closer to Hashem.

How did Moshe dare to decline Hashem's request and refuse to go on his mission? He was well aware of Bnei Yisrael's low spiritual level and that they were on the brink of the fiftieth level of impurity, the point of no return. It is difficult to understand how Moshe refused to comply, saying instead (*Shemot* 3:11), "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" Hashem guaranteed him that He would accompany him and protect him, yet Moshe still refused. He even spoke negatively of Am Yisrael, claiming that they would not listen to him and believe his words.

The exchange does not end there. Hashem also gave Moshe signs and symbols, which would be used as evidence to Bnei Yisrael that he was an agent of Hashem. Even after receiving the signs, Moshe Rabbeinu still declined the task and stated (*Shemot* 4:13), "Send through whomever You will send." He meant, "Send through whomever You are accustomed to send, my older brother, Aharon" (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:16).

How did Moshe have the boldness to argue with Hashem, specifically after Hashem promised to be with him, and even gave him signs to prove his legitimacy? Moreover, after Moshe acceded to go to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh then increased the workload, he turned Heavenward, and charged (*Shemot* 5:22), "Why have you done evil to this people, why have You sent me?" This seems to be an act of defiance toward Hashem. This entire episode demands an explanation.

Moshe, in his great humility, never viewed himself as the leader of Bnei Yisrael, rather as their servant. Throughout all the years that he spent in the palace of Pharaoh, he sought ways of helping out his brothers and participated in their distress. Moshe could easily have felt superior to Am Yisrael, for he had the status of a prince who dwelled in the royal palace. But no; Moshe, in his extreme humbleness, considered himself equal to his fellow Jews. The word “brethren” is used time and again to describe his relationship toward them. This underscores his tremendous humility and feeling of kinsmanship with them.

On the first day that Moshe left the palace, he observed an Egyptian strike a Jew (*Shemot* 2). Out of concern for his fellow Jew, he killed the Egyptian with the Ineffable Name and hid him in the sand (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:29), after he had seen through *ruach hakodesh* that no one righteous was destined to be born from him. The next day, Moshe went out and found two Jews fighting. He turned to the one who had lifted his hand to strike his colleague and called him a rasha, demanding, “Why would you strike your fellow?” The commentators remark (*Rashi* 2:13) that these men were Datan and Aviram, who were mentioned other times in the Torah for their wicked actions. After they proved to him that they had witnessed his act of killing the Egyptian the day before, Moshe realized that the matter was known and fled Egypt.

Moshe could easily have punished these two men, preventing Pharaoh from finding out about the murdered Egyptian. Instead, he fled to Midian. He was willing to sacrifice his own personal comfort for the sake of his fellow Jews. He put their needs before his own. He judged Datan and Aviram in a positive light, by positing that they spoke so brazenly due to the terrible oppression which they underwent in Egypt. Although Moshe foresaw, in *ruach hakodesh*, their future wickedness, he did not punish them here for it.

In the Shabbat Shacharit prayer, we say, “Moshe will be glad with the portion bestowed upon him, for a loyal servant You called him.” We learn from this the nature of a Jewish leader. Moshe felt true happiness and completeness when he was serving Am Yisrael. Only when he considered

himself subservient and humbled to the nation, bent under the yoke of serving them, did he attain a feeling of relief and real joy. Similarly after *Kabbalat HaTorah*, we find (*Shemot* 19:14) that, “Moshe descended from the mountain to the people.” Chazal expound: Instead of resting somewhat, and taking care of his personal needs, he went directly to the people, to teach them all he had heard from Hashem. Rashi says, “This teaches us that Moshe did not attend to his own business, rather, he went directly from the mountain to the people.”

The Gemara (*Horiyot* 10a) relates the following incident. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel wished to appoint two of the great men of the generation to a position of dignitaries. They declined, stating they were afraid it would make them feel arrogant. He responded, “You think I am conferring honor upon you with this position. It has no honor connected with it, whatsoever. On the contrary, it is a form of servitude.” Yehoshua once told Moshe, “Place upon them public responsibility, and they will cease of their own” (*Sanhedrin* 17a).

Moshe Rabbeinu saw himself merely as a servant of his people. Therefore, when Hashem asked him to redeem the nation, he tried to avoid it. This was not because he did not care for their well-being. On the contrary, he did not feel that he was worthy of the mission. In his tremendous humility, he considered his brother, Aharon Hakohen, more fitting to redeem the nation.

When Moshe turned to Hashem and demanded (*Shemot* 5:22), “Why have you done evil to this people, why have You sent me?” he was not speaking defiantly against Hashem. Rather, he was asking an anguished question, which came from deep within him. He felt genuine pain over the fact that Pharaoh had increased the workload due to his interference. The *Middat Hadin* wished to bring retribution upon Moshe for his seemingly brazen remark, but Hashem realized he was merely speaking on behalf of Am Yisrael and did not allow him to be punished (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:22).

Hashem vindicated Moshe by adjuring the nation to “remember the Torah of Moshe My servant” (*Malachi* 3:22). Hashem agreed to Moshe

considering himself a servant of Am Yisrael and converted his status of servitude to a status of honor, calling him His servant.

In Summary

- ◆ Hakadosh Baruch Hu revealed Himself to Moshe in the burning bush. This demonstrated that despite all of their suffering, Am Yisrael would survive. Hashem asked Moshe to approach Pharaoh and demand Bnei Yisrael's release, for they would soon descend to the fiftieth level of *tumah*, the point of no return.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu refused Hashem's request, despite the signs He had given him. He asked Hashem to send his older brother, Aharon, in his stead. How could Moshe refuse Hashem's request? And how did he have the boldness to accuse Hashem, after he finally agreed to go, of bringing evil upon His nation, when Pharaoh increased the workload?
- ◆ "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant." Hashem approved of Moshe's subservience to the nation and converted it to an honorable status, conferring upon him the title of servant of Hashem.

Redemption in the Merit of Modesty

"And now, behold! the outcry of the Children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh and you shall take My people the children of Israel out of Egypt"

(Shemot 3:9-10)

"Under the apple tree I roused Your love" (*Shir Hashirim* 8:5). The *Midrash* in *Yalkut Shimoni* (8:993) states, in the name of Rava, that in the

merit of the righteous women of that generation, they were redeemed from Egypt. The *Midrash Rabbah* states that they were redeemed in the merit of preserving their Jewish names and language while in Egypt (*Shir Hashirim* 4:25). These two opinions seem to contradict each other. In what merit were they actually saved?

In addition, the tribe of Levi toiled in Torah the entire period that they were in Egypt (see *Midrash Rabbah* 3:6). Why wasn't the nation redeemed in their *zechut*, rather than that of the righteous women?

Chazal relate that Am Yisrael suffered in Egypt as soon as they began entering the places of entertainment of the gentiles. This affected them greatly and also contributed to *bitul Torah*. They were punished with the bitter exile. We can take a lesson from this. Whenever a person goes on a trip, he is liable to become influenced by his surroundings and must take proper precautions.

Am Yisrael's excursions in Egypt slowly but surely had an effect on them. Mitzrayim was called "the nakedness of the land" (see *Kohelet Rabbah* 1:9; *Eitz Chaim* 43:1). Even Dina, daughter of Yaakov Avinu, who went out to watch the girls of Canaan, was punished by being ravished by Shechem ben Chamor (*Bereishit Rabbah* 80:1-5). She was held accountable for desiring to watch the gentile daughters, who were not of her caliber. [Leah, on the other hand, went out to greet Yaakov for the sake of a mitzvah, and merited bearing Yissachar, who dwelt in the tents of Torah (*Eiruvin* 100b)]. When Bnei Yisrael went out to see the sights of Egypt, they were punished. In order to atone for this sin and to protect themselves from punishment, they upheld their Jewish language and mode of dress. This was in order to stay apart from the Egyptians, and it brought them atonement.

In the merit of the righteous women, who remained at home and did not go out to observe the Egyptians, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed. It is part of a woman's nature to desire to go out of the home. Nevertheless, they protected themselves and remained indoors. Therefore, Chazal tell us that it was in their merit that our nation was saved (*Sotah* 11b). The Torah

study of the tribe of Levi did not grant Bnei Yisrael sufficient merit for redemption. The *zechut* of the righteous women was effective, for it was imperative at that time to maintain their level of *tzeniut*, in order to avoid the defiled ways of the gentiles, which would lead to assimilation. It was in the merit of the *tzeniut* and purity of the righteous women that their children were raised in sanctity. They recognized the importance of maintaining their dress, their language, and their names.

In a similar vein, Chazal tell us that Kimchit merited seven sons who all served as Kohanim Gedolim (*Yoma* 47a). This was in the merit of her modesty. The beams of her house never saw the hairs of her head. In the merit of her extreme *kedushah*, she merited seven Kohanim Gedolim, who entered into the innermost chamber of the Beit Hamikdash.

The women in Egypt ensured the survival of the nation, using their copper mirrors in order to attract their husbands (*Shemot* 38:8; *Tanchuma, Pekudei* 9). In their merit, their husbands drew strength to deal with the difficult labor, and future generations were born. A Jewish home is characterized by *tzeniut*, and all blessing comes upon it in the merit of modesty. This is why Hashem calls Am Yisrael an *am kadosh* – a holy nation (*Devarim* 7:6). It is due to their *tzeniut*.

Gazing at forbidden sights is a severe transgression. There are three partners in the creation of a child: Hashem, the father, and the mother. Hashem does not wish to be included in a partnership in which a man is together with his wife, but has his mind on another woman. Therefore, it is crucial to beware of all forbidden sights during the daytime, for they might come back to him at night.

The purpose of Creation is for man to be fruitful and multiply, and this was the first mitzvah given to man. Before the sin, Adam and Chava were unclothed and were not ashamed. But after Adam sinned, the *Yetzer Hara* entered him. Then Hashem sewed for them tunics of leather. This teaches that *tzeniut* protects against the *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem rests His *Shechinah* upon a man and woman when they act within the confines of modesty (*Sotah* 17a). In our day, the temptations are tremendous. The *Yetzer Hara*

attempts to cause man to sin in this area, wasting his seed. We must staunchly withstand this *nisayon*, and in this merit, Mashiach will arrive. The first Mashiach will be Mashiach ben Yosef. Yosef represents *yesod* (foundation) (*Eitz Chaim* 32:9). The merit of Yosef HaTzaddik, who withstood the wiles of Potiphar's wife, will stand by us.

What is the meaning of a partnership? It is an investment made by more than one person, in which each party profits. So it is in the partnership with one's spouse. One must invest his thoughts only on his wife, and then Hakadosh Baruch Hu will shower him with all form of blessing.

A king may have up to eighteen wives (*Sanhedrin* 21a). This is not in order that he may satisfy his passion, rather, so that he should be able to take wives from each tribe, and thereby rule over each tribe effectively. One's mind must be only on his wife, and he must distance himself from forbidden sights.

In Summary

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt in the *zechut* of the righteous women. Why wasn't the Torah study of the tribe of Levi worthy of meriting the redemption? Also, we find elsewhere that they were redeemed in the merit of not changing their dress, etc. How do we resolve this seeming contradiction?
- ◆ Chazal tell us that Bnei Yisrael suffered in Egypt in retribution for meandering about the city and desiring to gaze at the sights. Similarly, Dina bat Yaakov was punished for going out to watch the girls of Canaan.
- ◆ In order to rectify the sin of gazing at the "nakedness of the land," Bnei Yisrael needed the *zechut* of the righteous women. Only in this merit were they redeemed.
- ◆ The righteous women in Egypt used their mirrors to beautify themselves, in order to arouse their husbands' interest. In this manner, they merited bringing forth righteous generations.

- ◆ One should beware of forbidden sights. Hashem is a partner in the creation of a child. He has no interest in being partners with one who thinks of another woman while together with his wife, *rachmana litzlan*.
- ◆ The first mitzvah which Adam Harishon was given was to be fruitful and multiply. Immediately after the sin, Hashem made them tunics of leather. *Tzeniut* is mandatory when the *Yetzer Hara* is in control.
- ◆ A king may have more wives than others, in order to ensure his leadership over all the tribes.

Fear of Hashem

“He replied: Please, my Lord, send through whomever You will send! The wrath of Hashem burned against Moshe and He said: Is there not Aharon your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak; moreover, behold, he is going out to meet you and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart”

(Shemot 4:13-14)

Hashem appeared to Moshe in the burning bush and commanded him to go to Bnei Yisrael to inform them about the *geulah*. Hashem would take them out of Egypt with many miracles and lead them in the Wilderness, in order to give them the Torah and bring them into the Promised Land. Hashem gave him signs to show Bnei Yisrael, in order that they would believe that he was an agent from Hashem, and not fabricating a story.

Moshe refused to go on the mission, explaining that he stuttered and could not do the task to perfection. Hashem promised he would be with him, as the pasuk states, “I shall be with your mouth.” But Moshe

continued to refuse the mission, with different excuses. When he felt that he had done his utmost and could no longer refuse, he made a proposition (*Shemot* 4:13): “Send through whomever You will send!” He was saying that Aharon was accustomed to being sent on missions of this sort; let him go on this one, as well, and rescue Am Yisrael from Egypt (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:16).

How did Moshe have the audacity to refuse Hashem’s order, time and again? Hashem gave him signs and performed miracles for him, promising to grant him personal protection. It would seem that Moshe should have accepted the job without questions. Hashem surely knows which person is most fitting for which task. If Moshe had been chosen to inform Bnei Yisrael about the forthcoming *geulah*, then obviously he was the person most appropriate for this.

Additionally, when Moshe said, “Send through whomever You will send,” he was asking Hashem to send the message through the one who usually takes messages, Aharon. Why did Moshe refer to Aharon only through a hint, rather than by directly stating that Hashem should send His message “through Aharon”?

Hashem observed how Moshe left the palace to commiserate with his fellow Jews. He even helped them in their labor, even though this damaged his royal rights. Likewise, after the incident in which he killed the Egyptian with the Ineffable Name and buried him in the sand, Datan and Aviram reported on him to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh wished to put him to death. Moshe could have denied the whole thing. The Egyptian was dead, and Datan and Aviram could not prove their words. They themselves might have been deserving of death for bearing false witness. But Moshe, in his greatness, preferred to simply leave the royal palace and flee for his life. He did this in order that Datan and Aviram should not suffer.

After taking note of Moshe’s great compassion on his people, that he always commiserated with their plight and sought ways to ease it, Hashem chose him to be their leader. He saw in Moshe the perfect

candidate for their savior, the one who would extract them from Egyptian bondage.

Moshe Rabbeinu, in his tremendous humility, feared that this appointment would cause him to become proud. He was afraid that he would feel superior to Bnei Yisrael, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, he attempted, time and again, to get out of this mission. Moshe's exchange with Hashem was not an argument. On the contrary, he tried to avoid being sent on this mission in order to avoid damaging his level of *yirat Shamayim* by becoming proud. This was the reason for his constant refusals.

Chazal state (*Berachot* 33b), "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven." In all areas of life, such as Torah study and mitzvah performance, a person receives *siyata di'Shemaya* in order to succeed and ascend. But there is one area in which the Upper realms have no control and a person's advancement in it is dependent solely upon himself and his own free will. This is the realm of *yirat Shamayim*. Each person develops his fear of Heaven according to his own efforts.

This being the case, we might suggest the following. Although Hashem promised Moshe that He would be with him and grant him special protection, Moshe feared executing the mission placed upon him. *Yirat Shamayim* is a trait which one masters of his own accord. Divine protection is not able to prevent one from feeling arrogance, which can damage his level of *yirat Shamayim*.

When Moshe realized that his arguments were not being accepted by Hashem, he stopped and said, "Send through whomever You will send." He did not mention Aharon's name explicitly because he knew that his brother was humble and modest. The Torah proves this in the proclamation which Moshe and Aharon made to the people (*Shemot* 16:7), "For what are we that you should incite complaints against us?" The word וּנָא (we) is written without the 'N to indicate that they held nothing of themselves at all. Moshe knew that Aharon would not want to do anything that might lead to him feeling arrogant. Thus, Moshe respected his wishes

by not mentioning his name outright, but referring to him in a concealed and modest manner.

Hashem took note of Moshe's strong desire to remain out of the limelight and continue living in subservience and humility. He told Moshe that when Aharon would see him "he will rejoice in his heart." Moshe was mollified by these words, and agreed to fulfill the command of Hashem. What was the secret in these words that effected a turnaround in Moshe's attitude toward the mission, after such a long discussion?

The fact that Aharon would rejoice at the mission of his brother indicated that Moshe would retain his humility and continue serving Hashem with *yirat Shamayim*. For, if Moshe would become arrogant due to his appointment as leader, Aharon would not be able to rejoice over it. By telling Moshe that Aharon would delight in his brother's joy, Moshe deduced that the mission would not damage his good character traits, and he would be able to continue serving Hashem through fear and submission.

The Torah states (*Devarim* 10:12), "What does Hashem ask of you? Only to fear Hashem." Fear of Hashem is a crucial tool in Avodat Hashem, enabling one to survive in this world. The Torah is acquired by one who humbles himself before it (*Derech Eretz Zuta* 8), one who possesses *yirat Shamayim*.

In Summary

- ◆ Hashem asked Moshe numerous times to redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt. Only after Hashem had told Moshe that Aharon would rejoice over Moshe's mission, did he agree to go. How did Moshe have the audacity to refuse time and again? Also, why did he refer to Aharon with a hint and not mention his name outright?
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu feared his appointment as leader would cause him to feel arrogant, which would lower his level of *yirat Shamayim*. Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven. Therefore, Moshe

declined the mission. It was not, *chas v'shalom*, because he did not want to do Hashem's bidding.

- ◆ Moshe alluded to Aharon without mentioning his name, because he was aware of Aharon's modest nature. He knew Aharon would want it this way, and the way to honor a person is to fulfill his desire.
- ◆ When Hashem told Moshe, "When he sees you he will rejoice in his heart," Moshe accepted the task. These words finalized the matter in his mind. Moshe realized that if Aharon would rejoice over his appointment as leader, it was proof that Moshe's level of *yirat Shamayim* would not be lowered because of it. For if his leadership would cause any type of descent in spirituality, Aharon would certainly not rejoice on hearing of his appointment.

Gems on Parashat Shemot

Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time

“A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Yosef. He said to his people: Behold! the people, the Children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and go up from the land”

(Shemot 1:8-10)

The Gemara states (*Sotah* 11a) that there were three people involved in this episode: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yitro. Bilaam, who gave the evil advice, was subsequently killed; Iyov, who remained silent, was decreed to undergo suffering; and Yitro, who fled, merited that his descendants sat in the *lishkat hagazit*.

Despite being a gentile, Yitro recognized that Hashem is the true leader of the world, and Am Yisrael is the Chosen Nation. Therefore, when he heard Bilaam's evil advice, he lifted his legs and fled. The author of the sefer *Be'er Yosef* asks why Yitro did not object upon learning of the decree, rather, choosing to flee without uttering a word in protest.

Yitro understood that were he to dispute the decree, he would be killed. Neither was silence an option, since this would be interpreted as agreement. Moreover, Iyov was stricken with suffering for remaining silent and not acting. Therefore, Yitro decided his best course of action would be to keep quiet and escape, in this manner demonstrating his disapproval.

Yitro knew that if he sided with Bnei Yisrael, the other advisors would rise against him, stating that the Jews are divided and contentious. There was basis to this claim, as Moshe declared, “Indeed, the matter has become known!” Rashi explains, “Moshe said, ‘The matter that I was puzzled about has been clarified for me. I used to ask, in what did Yisrael sin, more than all the seventy nations of the world, that they should be tyrannized with crushing labor? But now that I see that there are informers among them, I see that they are deserving of such punishment.’” Praising Am Yisrael would just fan the flame of accusation against them by the other advisors, as well as on High, and it would arouse the *Middat Hadin*. Therefore, Yitro decided not to react vocally, in order not to increase the accusation against Am Yisrael.

From Yitro, we learn the importance of doing the right thing at the right time. In the merit of fleeing from Mitzrayim, Yitro recognized the light of truth and joined the Jewish nation. His actions merited that his descendants sat in the *lishkat hagazit*.

The Birth of Moshe

“A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was good, and she hid him for three months”

(Shemot 2:1-2)

Yocheved gave birth to Moshe at the advanced age of 130. My son, may he live, asked me why the Torah does not express any wonder or excitement regarding this phenomenon. On the other hand, when Sarah gave birth to Yitzchak at the age of ninety, forty years younger than Yocheved's age at childbirth, the Torah describes the miracle at length. Sarah herself laughed at the prophecy that she would give birth at such an old age. Yitzchak's birth is described at length in the Torah and aroused a ruckus in the world, whereas Moshe's birth passed over relatively quietly, although Yocheved was much older than Sarah had been. What is the difference between the births of Yitzchak and Moshe that warrants this difference in reactions?

At the time of Yitzchak's birth, the Torah had not yet been given, and Hashem's Kingship was not recognized throughout the world. Therefore, his birth to Sarah at such an advanced age caused great excitement. The people of that generation could not conceive of a power that can change the natural order and grant an old woman a baby. On the other hand, at Moshe's birth, the tribe of Levi was sitting and learning Torah in the yeshiva in Goshen, even before the Torah was given. They understood that the power of Torah could change the laws of nature and effect great miracles. Since they recognized Hashem's intervention in the world, which goes beyond the laws of nature, the birth of Moshe did not cause such a stir. They believed that the Torah protects those who study it and grants them salvation in miraculous ways.

But how did the rest of Bnei Yisrael, who were not involved in Torah study, react to Moshe's miraculous birth? Why did they not become

excited over it? We might suggest that because they were mired in the hardships of slavery, they were unable to become excited at this miracle. Aside from their labor, they saw nothing around them. They simply had no time or strength for anything else.

Although the Egyptians were far from Torah and mitzvot, they felt the superiority of their slaves. When they observed the birth of a child to a mother of advanced age, they attributed it to another miracle in the chain of miracles that contribute to the survival of Am Yisrael.

Three Positive Attributes of Am Yisrael

“She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold! a youth was crying. She took pity on him and said: This is one of the Hebrew boys”

(Shemot 2:6)

Rashi explains the words “a youth was crying” to mean that Moshe’s voice was like that of a youth.

The Gemara relates (*Sotah* 12b) that Batya desired to abandon the abominations of Egypt and cling to the Jewish people. She went down to the river with her handmaidens, in order to cleanse herself from the idols of her father’s house. Suddenly, she noticed a box floating on the water. She sent her *amah* to take the box. Some commentators interpret *amah* to be her handmaiden, while others interpret it to be her arm, which became longer.

When Batya opened the box, she saw a baby crying with the voice of an older child. Why did Hashem cause Moshe’s voice to be like that of someone much older, and not like the voice of a regular baby? Batya

seemingly should have flinched from this anomaly – a baby with the voice of a youth – and desisted from taking the basket to the royal house. How would Bnei Yisrael have merited salvation?

Am Yisrael are defined by three character traits: They have shame, they are merciful, and they do acts of kindness (*Yevamot* 79a). Batya came to the Nile to cleanse herself from the idolatry of her father's house and become purified. She wished to join the nation of Hashem. Therefore, Hashem decided to test her. He wished to examine whether or not her character traits were in line with Am Yisrael, the nation she so wished to join. When Batya demonstrated her desire to save the baby in the basket in spite of his unusual voice, she proved that the trait of mercy was deeply embedded within her, and she was most fitting to join the Jewish nation.

The Severity of the Sin of Lashon Hara

“He replied: Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me, as you murdered the Egyptian? Moshe was frightened and he thought: Indeed, the matter has become known!”

(*Shemot* 2:14)

Rashi quotes the Midrash, “Moshe was worried because he had seen informers among Israel. He said, ‘Now that this is so, perhaps they are not fit to be redeemed.’”

Moshe Rabbeinu was afraid that Bnei Yisrael would not be redeemed, because of the sin of *lashon hara*. We find that the generation of Achav

did not fall in battle, even though they were idol worshippers. This was due to their brotherly love and the fact that they did not speak *lashon hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim I*, 213).

Shaul Hamelech, though, did not always emerge victorious in battle. This was because there were those who spoke *lashon hara* among his soldiers. The Torah leaders of our generation warn us constantly about this malady. Much of the suffering we experience results from the sin of evil speech. One must be most scrupulous never to speak ill of *bnei Torah*, for this goes straight up to Heaven and brings severe retribution, *chas v'shalom*.

For Man Is a Tree of the Field

“An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw and behold! the bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed”

(*Shemot 3:2*)

Hakadosh Baruch Hu appeared to Moshe specifically in a bush, and not a stone or the sheep which Moshe pastured. There is certainly depth in the spectacle of a burning bush. Why did Hashem choose to appear to him in this manner?

Hashem wished to indicate to Moshe that a person is likened to the tree of the field. Just as the tree needs water in order to grow, so too, do people need the Torah, which is compared to water, in order to endure. Chazal (*Bava Kama 17a*) tell us, “Water is Torah.” And just as water is plentiful, and has no boundary, so too, is the Torah boundless and deep. Whoever desires to plumb the depths of Torah is invited to do so, for

Torah is endless. In the blessings over the Torah, when it is read in the Beit Hakeneset, we state, “Eternal life He implanted within us.” Hakadosh Baruch Hu planted in the heart of each and every Jew the desire and the ability to toil in Torah, the tree of life for those who grasp it.

The fire which Moshe was shown alluded to the fire of lust, which may burn a person alive, removing him from the world. But if one exerts himself in Torah study, then “the bush is not consumed” – the Torah will protect him from all forms of danger.

There are many types of trees. Some are fruit-bearing; others are not. This is analogous to the different types of people in the world. The resha'im are compared to barren trees. They have no good deeds, yet their voices carry far. On the other hand, the tzaddikim are compared to fruit-bearing trees, containing within themselves Torah and good deeds.

There are trees which are green all year long, constantly covered with leaves. There are others which have leaves only during certain seasons and shed them at other times. The tzaddik is compared to the trees which are covered with flowers and foliage all year long. The change of seasons does not affect them at all, and they continue flourishing irrelevant of the time of year. The tzaddikim uphold the word of Hashem and withstand *nisyonot* admirably. They are unaffected by the changing winds of society.

The ordinary people of the nation are like the trees that are at times green and full, and at other times bare and brown. Sometimes, they observe mitzvot and go in the way of Hashem, but, at other times, their *Yetzer Hara* gets the best of them. Nevertheless, they quickly gather their wits about them and return to the ways of Hashem. The leaves then grow back, so to speak, and cover them as before. Hashem’s appearance to Moshe from a fire in the bush taught him about all of the different people included in Am Yisrael.

Va'era

There Is No Faith without Torah

“Moshe spoke before Hashem, saying: Behold, the Children of Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!”

(Shemot 6:12)

Rav Shach, zt”l, questions Moshe’s reasoning. Moshe claimed that since Bnei Yisrael did not listen to him, then surely neither would Pharaoh. But the reason that Bnei Yisrael did not listen to him was due to their shortness of breath owing to the tremendous labor they endured. This is stated explicitly in a previous pasuk (*Shemot* 6:9), “But they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work.” Yet Pharaoh was ensconced comfortably on his royal throne, detached from any form of bondage. What would prevent him from listening to Moshe’s words?

This question is sharpened by the following fact. When Moshe came to Bnei Yisrael previously, they did listen to him, as we are told (*ibid.* 4:30-31), “Aharon spoke all the words that Hashem had spoken to Moshe; and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed, etc.” What took place in the interim, precluding them from paying attention to Moshe the second time he came to them?

Moshe himself explained their change of attitude, saying it was because of their “shortness of breath” due to the harsh slavery. The acronym of the expression קוצר רוח (shortness of breath) is קר (cold). When Moshe approached them the second time, they had “cooled off” in their level of *emunah*. Previously, they became aroused because of the miracles that he performed, and bowed to Hashem as an expression of their *emunah*. But, in the meantime, their faith faltered. This teaches us an important lesson. When one feels an arousal in his faith or service of Hashem, he should immediately act upon it. In order to preserve this arousal, one should primarily toil in Torah. However, Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. This is why their *emunah* weakened.

This is alluded to in the first and last letters of the phrase קוצר רוח which spell חק (take). There is no “taking” except for Torah, as the pasuk in Mishlei (4:2) states, “For I have given you a good teaching (לחק), do not forsake My Torah.” The word לחק (teaching) refers to Torah. Because Bnei Yisrael were not involved in Torah study, they cooled off and weakened in their faith in Hashem.

Time not spent in Torah study causes boredom (see *Ketubot* 59b), and boredom induces indifference toward Avodat Hashem. This was the reason why they rejected Moshe the second time he approached them.

According to this, we can resolve the original difficulty of Rav Shach. Moshe was telling Hashem that if Bnei Yisrael, who possessed a Divine spark within them (*Shelah, Assarah Ma'amarot* 2:17), became deficient in their Avodat Hashem due to their lack of Torah study and refused to listen to him, all the more so would Pharaoh reject his proposal, since he did not even contain a Divine spark.

We find that this is exactly what transpired later in the parashah. Even after showing signs of regret for his actions, Pharaoh “cooled off” rapidly. During the plague of hailstones, for example, he called for Moshe and Aharon in a frenzy, asking them to pray for it to end. He even proclaimed (*Shemot* 9:27), “This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones.” He was aroused to do teshuvah.

But, just as soon as the danger passed, he cooled off again. He took back his words of regret and continued hardening his heart. This is attested to in the following words (*ibid.* vs. 34), “Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder ceased, and he continued to sin; and he made his heart stubborn, he and his servants.”

Based on this, we can explain the teaching of the Zohar (34a), at the beginning of parashat *Bo*. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 10:1), “Come to Pharaoh.” The Zohar explains that Hashem promised to help Moshe, by going with him. What changed here, warranting Hashem’s accompaniment of Moshe when he went to the palace of Pharaoh? When Moshe observed the depth of Pharaoh’s wickedness, who returned to hardening his heart shortly after becoming aroused to do teshuvah, he became very afraid. He was fearful lest Pharaoh’s evil ways would have an influence upon him. He did not want to be involved with him any longer. Even looking at a rasha is forbidden; all the more so, dealing with one. Hashem had to promise that He would accompany him there, and protect him.

There is no such thing as faith without Torah. The pasuk tells us (*ibid.* 14:31), “And they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” Their faith in Hashem testified to their *emunah*, and their faith in Moshe testified to their adherence to Torah.

I observed many people in Morocco and in France who had faith. But their lack of Torah knowledge precluded their observance of the halachot. They eventually, *rachmana litzlan*, lost their Divine image.

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe Rabbeinu asked if Bnei Yisrael did not listen to him, how would Pharaoh? Rav Shach, zt”l, states that Bnei Yisrael did not listen due to the intense slavery. On the other hand, Pharaoh was sitting in the lap of luxury. What was there to prevent him from listening to Moshe?
- ♦ We find that the first time Moshe approached Bnei Yisrael, they did heed his words. The pasuk attests to this by saying, “The nation had faith.” Why

did Bnei Yisrael disregard Moshe's words the second time he came to them?

- ♦ The word קָרְ (cold) is an acronym for the phrase קַוֵּץ רֹוחַ (shortness of breath). Bnei Yisrael “cooled off” from their original faith, because they were deficient in Torah knowledge. Boredom, induced by lack of Torah study, causes a person to cool off in his Avodat Hashem. Certainly Pharaoh, who had no Divine spark within him, would be cool to Moshe's proposition and would not pay heed to his words.
- ♦ The first and last letters of the phrase קַוֵּץ רֹוחַ spell the word קַרְ. This refers to the Torah. Without Torah one becomes “cooled off” in his *emunah*. During the plague of hailstones, Pharaoh admitted that Hashem was the righteous one. But when things calmed down, he cooled off and hardened his heart once again.
- ♦ The Zohar explains that Hashem promised to accompany Moshe to the palace and protect him. Why was this necessary? Moshe was afraid of becoming influenced by Pharaoh's wickedness, since after he repented, he immediately hardened his heart once again.

Galut and Geulah – Based on the Hidden Torah

“This was the Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem said: Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt according to their legions”

(*Shemot 6:26*)

Why were Bnei Yisrael redeemed by members of Shevet Levi, and why specifically by Moshe and Aharon?

The Connection between the Sefirot of Netzach and Hod

I would like to preface my explanation with the words of the Zohar (*Ra'aya Meheimana, Bamidbar* 236:a), regarding the *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod*: These two *sefirot* are inseparable.

The Arizal writes (*Eitz Chaim* 35:5) that the *chitzonim* have control of the *sefirah* of *hod*. On the other hand, the *sefirah* of *netzach*, which is eternal, can never fall under the control of negative forces. The *kelippah* is a form of falsehood (*Zohar Chadash, Ki Tisa, Ma'amar Asseret Hadibrot*). It is therefore termed *sitra achra*. [When we say that the *sefirah* of *hod* is under the control of the *chitzonim*, it refers only to the three lowermost points of *hod*. Therefore, it is only in regard to the aspect of royalty contained in *hod*.]

We find that Eisav's angel was a form of the Satan and the *sitra achra* (*Zohar, Bereishit* 170a). When he fought with Yaakov Avinu, and Yaakov asked for a blessing, he demanded, "Why then do you inquire of my name?" (*Bereishit* 32:30). Rashi explains that the angel said, "We have no fixed names." Why is it this so? Because a name reflects the essence of the item. A real item has an essence, and therefore qualifies for a name. But the Angel of Eisav is not real, and therefore has no essence, thus it does not qualify for a name.

This raises a difficulty regarding the words of the Zohar, which states that the *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod* are inseparable. If the *chitzonim* can gain control over the *sefirah* of *hod* and capture it, but cannot gain control over the *sefirah* of *netzach*, the two *sefirot* are separated. This seems to contradict the Zohar.

Although it is true that the *chitzonim* may have a hold on the *sefirah* of *hod*, it is still connected to *netzach* to a certain extent. This is why the Zohar states that they are inseparable. We find proof of this in the words of Chazal regarding Yaakov Avinu. The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 28:10), "And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva." Rashi, citing Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:6), states, "The departure of a righteous person from a place makes an impression.... After he departs from there, its splendor

departed, its glory departs, its grandeur departs.” This indicates that “after the splendor (*hod*) has departed from the city” with the tzaddik’s departure, it nevertheless still “leaves an impression” on it.

Let us explain this concept by means of a comparison. Hakadosh Baruch Hu minimized Himself, so to speak, after creating the world, so that He is not noticed in Creation. But through contemplating the Creation, we can recognize His imprint on the world. Similarly, even after the splendor (*hod*) of the city has departed from it with the tzaddik, through contemplation, we can discover the impression left behind by this splendor. This is the reality of the connection between *hod* and *netzach*. The impression of *hod* is always left upon the *sefirah* of *netzach*. This is the case even when *hod* is under the control of the *chitzonim*, until it will be rectified by Bnei Yisrael.

Galut – Hod Exiled by the Chitzonim

Galut means that the *Shechinah* is exiled and, so to speak, captured by the *chitzonim*. The *sefirah* of *hod* is entrapped and under the control of the wicked. The pasuk in Megillat Eichah states (1:13), “He made me desolate; sick throughout the day.” The word **דָּוַת** (sick) contains the same letters as the word **הָוֵד** (*hod*) (*Ra’aya Meheimana, Bamidbar* 243:a). All day long, we agonize over the fact that *sefirat hod* is in the hands of the *chitzonim* (see the writings of the Arizal).

The Avot were the *merkavah* for the *Shechinah* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 47:6). The twelve tribes are referred to (*Tehillim* 122:4) as “the tribes of G-d, a testimony for Yisrael.” David Hamelech termed them **שְׁבָطִי יְהֹוָה** (tribes of G-d), for they carried the *Shechinah* of Hashem with them, together with the attribute of *hod*. This is hinted to by the fact that the *gematria* of **הָוֵד** is equal to that of **שְׁבָטִי**. Thus, when they went down to Mitzrayim, the *Shechinah* descended with them (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 210), together with *hod*. When the Egyptians controlled the Jewish nation, they controlled the *sefirah* of *hod*, as well. When the *sefirah* of *hod* is under the control of the *chitzonim*, it becomes detached from the *sefirah* of *netzach*,

aside for the impression it leaves on *netzach*, which never departs from it.

Geulah – The Bond between Netzach and Hod

In the Shacharit prayers, we say, “How long will Your strength be in captivity, and Your grandeur in the hands of the enemy?” If we divide the word **בשֶׁבַי** (in captivity), we have the words **בשׁ-בֵּי**. The letters have the *gematria katan* of five, as does the word **קרב** (closeness). And the letters **בָּי** are numerically equivalent to twelve, corresponding to the Twelve Tribes. “Your strength” refers to the Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 31:5).

In this prayer, we ask Hashem how long His Torah will be desecrated in the enemies’ hands. Chazal refer to this in their declaration (*Avot* 6:2), “Every single day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Mount Chorev, proclaiming and saying, ‘Woe to them, to the people, because of the insult to the Torah!’” The Torah is included in the attribute of *netzach*, and is immune to the powers of the *chitzonim*. But since *netzach* is connected to *hod*, when *hod* is in the hands of the *chitzonim*, *netzach* stands alone and is also somewhat lacking. Therefore, *netzach* is also considered to be in captivity. This is the great insult to the Torah referred to in the Mishnah.

We pray to Hashem that He should bring close (**קרב**) the element of **בָּי** (the Twelve Tribes). We ask Him to bring Am Yisrael close to Him by attaching the *sefirah* of *hod* to that of *netzach*. Then, the Torah, which is *netzach*, will be freed. [We continue the liturgy with the words “and Your grandeur in the hands of the enemy.” This refers to Yaakov Avinu, whose attribute was grandeur (*tiferet*) (*Zohar* I, 157b), who sits in exile].

When Pharaoh pursued Bnei Yisrael until the Yam Suf, they came close to Hashem and did teshuvah. They thereby reconnected *hod* and *netzach*, and merited salvation. This is alluded to in the words (*Shemot* 14:10), “Pharaoh approached.” The word used for approached is **הקריב**, which has the same root as the word **קרב**, an allusion to Bnei Yisrael’s coming closer to Hashem (*Shemot Rabbah* 21:5).

We ask Hashem (*Eichah* 5:21), “Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old.”

Moshe and Aharon – Netzach and Hod

In order to redeem Bnei Yisrael, both elements of *hod* and *netzach* had to be united. Therefore, Hashem chose Aharon and Moshe, representatives of these attributes in this world. Moshe personified *netzach*, and Aharon, *hod* (*Zohar I, Hashmatot* 6a). Together, they had the ability to redeem Bnei Yisrael. Yosef had told his brothers (*Bereishit* 5:25), “G-d will indeed remember you.” The wording “will indeed remember” (פָּקֹד יְפָקֹד) is unusual. Yosef was hinting that the *geulah* would occur in a most unique manner, by both Moshe and Aharon.

Moshe Rabbeinu represented the *sefirah* of *netzach*, for he brought us the Torah. Scriptures refers to Torah as “bread – לְחֵם,” as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 9:5), “Come and partake of my food (לְחֵמִי).” Bread is derived from flour (קְמַח), which has the same *gematria* as נֶצֶח. How fitting is it for *netzach* to be the essence of Torah! *Netzach* means eternity, the unalterable truth. The Torah, too, is constant and will never change. This is what we affirm in the *Ani Ma’amin* prayer, “I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be exchanged.”

The Torah has the capacity to awaken the impression of *hod*, which is connected to *netzach*. This is done by the voice of Yaakov (*Bereishit* 27:22). The voice refers to Torah study (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). The pasuk in Tehillim states (68:35), “תנו עז לאלה-ים על ישראל גאותו” “Acknowledge invincible might to G-d, Whose grandeur is upon Yisrael...” “Invincible might” refers to Torah, as we pray, “עד מתי עז בשבי” “Until when will Your might be in captivity?” The *gematria* of גאות (grandeur) is equal to that of *hod*.

Hashem anticipates our rectification of the *sefirah* of *hod*, as it says, “Whose grandeur is upon Yisrael.” The correction of *sefirat hod*, from the hands of the *chitzonim*, can occur only through subjugation to the Torah. This is the way to rescue *hod* from the *kelippah*. Chazal state (*Zohar II*,

90b; III, 4b), “Yisrael, Hashem, and Torah are one.” All are truth, and truth is eternal. Therefore, all represent *netzach*.

Hashem expresses His eternity through His Kingship. But there can be no king without a nation. Therefore, He, so to speak, needs Am Yisrael. For that reason we say that His “grandeur is upon Yisrael.” Bnei Yisrael, the nation of Hashem, represent *hod*. Through the connection of Am Yisrael to the Torah, i.e. the bond of *hod* to *netzach*, they merit bonding with Hashem’s Kingdom, as His nation.

This is hinted to by the description (*Tehillim* 122:4) of the Shevatim as “the tribes of G-d, a testimony for Israel.” The numerical value of the word הָדָה (G-d) is equal to that of the word הַדָּת (hod). The Shevatim represent *hod*, for by their connection to Torah, they connect to Hashem. This is in line with the pasuk (*Tehillim* 19:8), “The testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise.”

Aharon Hakohen represented the *sefirah* of *hod*. He was the Kohen Gadol, who served Hashem in the Mishkan, the precursor of the Beit Hamikdash. The Beit Hamikdash is the source of the *sefirah* of *hod* (*Berachot* 58a). The pasuk in Eichah states (1:13), “He made me desolate; sick throughout the day.” The word חֲלֵד (sick) contains the same letters as הַדָּת. Hashem left us bereft of the Beit Hamikdash; consequently, the *sefirah* of *hod* is exiled.

The Beit Hamikdash corresponds to the heart of a person. If we study the arrangement of the tribes in the Wilderness, we find that the camp of Yisrael was in the outermost region, further in was the camp of the Levi’im, and inside that resided the *Shechinah*. The innermost camp contained the Mishkan and the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. This is just like the heart resides in the center of man’s body. Aharon also represents the heart. Therefore, Hashem told Moshe (*Shemot* 4:14), “When he sees you he will rejoice in his heart.”

“Moshe and Aharon were among His priests, and Shmuel among those who invoke His Name” (*Tehillim* 99:6). Chazal declare (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel* 89) that Shmuel was equivalent to Moshe and Aharon. Shmuel was

able to combine both *netzach* and *hod*. Shmuel testified about himself to Shaul (*Shmuel I*, 15:29), “The Eternal One (¶זע) of Israel does not lie and does not relent.” He used the term “Eternal One” to describe Hashem, for he embodied the *middah* of eternity (¶זע).

Moshe's Exchange with Hashem regarding His Mission to Mitzrayim

Why did Moshe refuse to go to the Jews in Egypt to rescue them? Hashem spent three days convincing him to go. Moshe declined, until Hashem promised that his brother, Aharon, would join him, as the pasuk states (*Shemot 7:1*), “And Aharon your brother shall be your spokesman.” What kept Moshe from taking the post of Am Yisrael’s savior? Didn’t he feel compassion for his people, whose cries rent the very heavens?

Moshe, as explained, embodied the properties of the *sefirah* of *netzach*, referring to Torah. Chazal state (*Derech Eretz Zuta 8*), “The Torah endures only in one who humbles himself before it.” Moshe, in his humility, was not even aware of his own greatness, never imagining that he represented the lofty level of *netzach*. He declined Hashem’s request that he redeem the nation, for he claimed that only the one who represented *netzach* was capable of it. By humbling himself, he actually became more fitting to fill the role of the representative of *netzach*, which demands true humility. Therefore, Hashem insisted he go, no matter what. But Moshe refused to go, until Hashem sent Aharon along with him. Even after Moshe understood that he himself portrayed the *middah* of *netzach*, he claimed that he must be connected with the representative of *sefirat hod*, in order to redeem Yisrael. Aharon was sent along to fill that position.

“He will be your mouth, and you will be his leader” (*Shemot 4:16*). The sum total of the numerical values of the words ¶זע and ¶הנ is 163, the *gematria* of one of Hashem’s Names. This teaches that Moshe and Aharon together are connected to the *midot* of Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu was termed (*Devarim 33:1*) “Moshe, the man of G-d,” because he represents eternity, and Hashem is eternal. The attribute of *netzach* is bonded with the *midot* of Hashem. Therefore, the *middah* of *hod*, which is intrinsically

connected with *netzach*, is also connected to the *middot* of Hashem. Thus, Aharon is also called a “man of G-d,” indicating his connection with *netzach*. This connection is also referred to in the pasuk mentioned above (*Tehillim* 68:35), “Acknowledge invincible might to G-d.” “Might” refers to Torah, for it is eternal. When it combines with *hod*, it gives strength to Hashem.

Torah Endures Only in One Who Humbles Himself before It

On the one hand, Chazal tell us (*Derech Eretz Zuta* 8) that Torah endures only in one who humbles himself before it, meaning that one must be humble in order to retain words of Torah. On the other hand, we find descriptions of Bnei Yisrael that seem quite the opposite of humble. The pasuk in *Tehillim* (68:35) says, “Whose grandeur is upon Yisrael.” Also, Bnei Yisrael are called (*Shemot* 19:6) “a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation.” It seems that Bnei Yisrael should take pride in their exalted position as Hashem’s nation. We even find (*Sotah* 5a) that there is an injunction that a *talmid chacham* must have an eighth of an eighth of pride. How can this seeming contradiction be resolved?

The Torah is comprised of the Names of Hashem (*Zohar* II, 124a; *Ramban*, Introduction to the Torah). The Torah preceded the Creation of the world by 974 generations. The Torah certainly cannot bond with one who is arrogant. The purpose of Torah is to raise the *sefirah* of *hod* from the *tumah* of the *kelippah* by means of combining with *sefirat netzach*, which is represented by the Torah, as previously explained. This is what Chazal meant by telling us that one must humble himself in order to acquire Torah. This is the way to extricate *sefirat hod* from the destructive forces. After accomplishing this, one has a right to be proud. This is positive, permitted pride. As mentioned above, the pasuk “Whose grandeur is upon Yisrael” refers to the unification of *netzach* and *hod*, through the actions of Bnei Yisrael. The pasuk speaks of the pride which is a direct result of this holy combination.

The Distinctiveness of the Tribe of Levi

Shevet Levi was exempt from bondage in Egypt (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:16). The Egyptians had control over the *sefirah* of *hod*. Shevet Levi was the tribe of Moshe and Aharon, representatives of *netzach* and *hod* (*Zohar III, Hashmatot* 256b). They were fitting to redeem Yisrael. Hashem had selected Moshe as their savior from his birth (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:4). Chazal explain that Levi (לוִי) was called by this name, because Hashem accompanied (לַיְוָה) him with gifts. He was chosen for his unique role already from before his birth, and he contained both *midot* of *netzach* and *hod* within him. Thus the ones to lead Bnei Yisrael to redemption came from Shevet Levi.

The tribe of Levi had two main occupations. The first was Torah study, including teaching it to others. And the second was the Avodah in the Mishkan, and later the Beit Hamikdash. The Torah is the representation of *sefirat netzach*, and the Beit Hamikdash is the representation of *hod*.

Yaakov Avinu had already designated Shevet Levi as a *merkavah* for Hashem's *Shechinah* in this world (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:8), preserving the *sefirah* of *hod*. When he asked to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, Bnei Yisrael were afraid that the *sefirah* of *hod* would disappear into the hands of the *chitzonim*, and they themselves would become so influenced by the Egyptians that they would be unworthy of ever being redeemed. Therefore, Shevet Levi was distinguished for Torah and Avodah (*Rambam* 77:1; 3) in order to preserve the *midot* of *hod* and *netzach*. When the time came, representatives of this tribe would redeem our nation. Yosef's use of the double language פֶּקֶד יִפְקֶד (will surely remember) refers to the two elements of *netzach* and *hod*, in whose merit the nation would become remembered and redeemed from Egypt.

The Secret of Galut Mitzrayim and the Struggle with Pharaoh

The Arizal explains that Bnei Yisrael descended to *galut* in Mitzrayim in order to extract the sparks of *kedushah* which had left Adam Harishon for the period of 130 years, when he lived alone and spent his time fasting.

These sparks were in Egypt. Bnei Yisrael had to descend there in order to collect and perfect them. At the Pesach Seder, we say, “הִא לְחַמָּא עֲנֵיהֶן – This is the bread of affliction.” We are referring to these specific sparks of *kedushah*, “which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt,” which they rectified in Egypt, and afterward merited the redemption.

To commemorate this, we eat matzah, poor man’s bread, to remind us of the sparks of *kedushah* that were “poor” because they were held captive by the *kelippah*. When Bnei Yisrael were rescued, they received the mitzvah of baking matzot, the bread of affliction. Through it, the sparks held captive in Mitzrayim were released and merited salvation.

The wicked Pharaoh, who was the embodiment of the *kelippah* and *sitra achra*, desired to prevent these holy sparks from receiving their salvation. The battle revolved around whether or not the *sefirah* of *hod* would fall under the influence of the *chitzonim*. Bnei Yisrael wished to connect *hod* and *netzach*, thereby reaching perfection and meriting the *geulah*. The holy sparks would thus also merit redemption. But Pharaoh attempted to separate them by capturing *hod*.

Furthermore, he had the audacity to deny the *sefirah* of *netzach*. He expressed this denial by telling Moshe (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?” Moshe, representative of *netzach*, could not tolerate Pharaoh’s presence and did not even want to see his face. This is why Hashem had to command him specifically (*ibid.* 10:1) to “come to Pharaoh.” The Zohar explains that the word נִכְן (come) begins with the letter ‘כ’, which has the *gematria* of two, hinting at the two who would approach Pharaoh, namely, Moshe and Aharon. And the letter ‘א’ (aleph) refers to *Alupho shel olam*, the General of the world, Hashem Himself. Thus Hashem indicated to Moshe that He Himself would also accompany him to Pharaoh, as the Zohar states, “I and you” will come.

The essence of the struggle between Moshe Rabbeinu and Pharaoh was who would commandeer the *sefirah* of *hod*. Would it, *chalilah*, be Pharaoh Harasha, the *sitra achra* personified, or Moshe Rabbeinu, who would capture *hod* and thereby rescue the sparks of *kedushah*? In this manner,

Bnei Yisrael, too, would be redeemed and receive the Torah, which is everlasting.

The Ongoing Battle with Amalek

Shortly after Bnei Yisrael entered the Wilderness, Amalek attacked. Amalek is the root of the *kelippah* (*Megaleh Amukot*, *Va'etchanan*, ofen 42). This is why they had a burning desire to harm Bnei Yisrael and defile them before they received the Torah. They knew that once Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, they would have the means by which to extricate *sefirat hod* from the hands of the *kelippah* forever, as the pasuk (*Shemot* 15:18) states, “Hashem shall reign for all eternity!” The *kelippah* would lose its last chance of ever gaining control of *hod*.

Hashem told Moshe (ibid. 17:16), “For the hand is on the throne of G-d (הָנֶסֶת): Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.” The *gematria* of Hashem’s Name הָנֶסֶת is equal to that of the word נְצֵחָה. Amalek wanted to damage the *middah* of *hod* and gain control over it, separating it from *netzach*. The battle with Amalek is ongoing. We are constantly attempting to return *hod* to its rightful place beside *netzach*. As long as Amalek exists, the *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod* cannot become unified. This will take place only after Amalek’s memory is completely obliterated from the world.

Once Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, the representation of *netzach*, they were meant to rectify the *sefirah* of *hod*, as explained above. The Torah was forced upon them, as Chazal tell us (*Shabbat* 88a), “Hashem placed the mountain above their heads, like a barrel.” This being the case, the connection of *netzach* to *hod* was incomplete. Amalek was not yet eliminated and continued in his war. Then Hashem sent Shaul Hamelech to fight Amalek. But he pitied the sheep, and did not wipe them out completely. Shmuel rebuked him for this misdemeanor (*Shmuel I*, 15:29), “The Eternal One of Israel does not lie and does not relent.” Shmuel alluded to Bnei Yisrael, comprised of twelve tribes, the numerical equivalent of the last letters of the phrase נְצֵחָה וְהָדָה (*netzach* and *hod*).

He was telling Shaul that Yisrael, too, do not lie or relent. Eventually, they will correct the *sefirah* of *hod*, connecting it to *netzach*.

The rectification regarding Amalek occurred in the days of Mordechai and Esther, descendants of Shaul Hamelech. Haman Harasha, of the seed of Amalek, rose against them, together with his ten sons, paralleling the ten *kelippot* of the ten impure *sefirot* (*Megillat Setarim L'Rabbeinu Yaakov MiLisa* 1:1). Just like there are ten *sefirot* of *kedushah*, so are there ten *sefirot* of *tumah* (*Zohar III*, 41b). But the *sefirot* of *tumah* have no basis in reality. They are merely like shadows, appearing in the absence of the light of the *sefirot* of *kedushah*. In order to nullify the power of the *sefirot* of *tumah*, all that is needed is to strengthen *kedushah*, for they are really nothing with nothing. The pasuk tells us (*Vayikra* 26:8), “Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand.” They have no intrinsic power of their own.

When Mordechai and Esther and all the Jews of their time accepted the Torah anew, the pasuk states (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook.” Chazal expound (*Shabbat* 88a), “They accepted it willingly.” The Torah which they had originally accepted under compulsion, they now accepted lovingly. This strengthened the bond between *netzach* and *hod*. In this manner, they overthrew Haman and his ten sons, together with the *kelippah* and the ten impure *sefirot*, thereby conquering Amalek. Moreover, Mordechai and Esther were called **הַיְהוּדִים** (the Jews), for it contains the word **הָעֵד**, hinting at their rectification of *hod*, and its attachment to *netzach*.

Zerubavel had begun rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash at the order of Koresh, but it was only completed after the days of Mordechai and Esther. The Beit Hamikdash, as mentioned, was the heart of the nation and corresponded to the *middah* of *hod*. As long as the *middah* of *hod* had not been corrected, the Beit Hamikdash could not stand. Only after Mordechai and Esther corrected this *middah*, was it appropriate to work on building the Beit Hamikdash anew.

Ten Sefirot of Kedushah to Connect Netzach and Hod

In the sefer *Chessed L'Avraham* (2:5), written by the ancestor of the Chida, zy”a, the following is written. There are ten *sefirot*, which bind a person with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We do not imagine how much strength we possess. Therefore, we must be very careful to elevate the ten *sefirot*, through Torah and mitzvot. These are the conduits by which our connection to Hashem, by means of the *sefirot*, is drawn down to us from Above. Aveirot, on the other hand, weaken the power of the *sefirot*.

The Avot were the *merkavah* for Hashem in this world (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 47:6). They were, so to speak, partners with Hashem in Creation. Likewise, the seven Shepherds. Each of the Avot, as well as each of the Shepherds, corresponds to one of the ten *sefirot*. We, their descendants, contain some of their strength. Therefore, the ten *sefirot* of Creation continue within us, through their power, as well as the power of Torah.

This is alluded to in the word **מֶרְכָּבָה** (*merkavah*). It can be divided into the words **מֵר** and **כָּה** (omitting the letter 'ב'). The word **מֵר** means bitter, but its letters can be switched around to spell **רֵם** (exalted or elevated). The letters **כָּה**, adding one for the unit itself, are numerically equivalent to Hashem's Name **ה-י-ה-ו-**. Bnei Yisrael have the ability to exalt Hashem, through their Torah and mitzvot. The letter 'ב', numerically equivalent to two, refers to the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, by means of which we elevate Hashem's Name **ה-י-ה-ו-** in the *merkavah*.

But, *chas v'shalom*, by doing aveirot, it is possible to degrade the ten *sefirot*, as well as Hashem's glory. In this case, *hod* and *netzach* become separated. Then the abundance of blessing is halted. In *Kriyat Shema*, we proclaim (*Devarim* 11:16-17), “Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others and prostrate yourselves to them. Then the wrath of Hashem will blaze against you; He will restrain the heaven so there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce.” The outcome will be bitter. This is referred to in *Eichah*, regarding the *galut* (*Eichah* 1:4), “She herself is embittered.” These, then, are the two interpretations of the word **מֶרְכָּבָה** (*merkavah*).

When Bnei Yisrael behave appropriately, they elevate (דָּבָר) Hashem's Name, alluded to in the letters כה. But when they demean Hashem's Name, they halt all blessing and the outcome is bitter, indeed.

The Sin of Rabbi Akiva's Disciples

Chazal tell us (*Yevamot* 62b) that during the period of Sefirat Haomer, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's disciples perished because they did not accord honor to one another. How are we to understand that disciples of the holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, did not accord honor to one another? Certainly, in their actions they respected each other; it was only in their hearts that they were lacking. This is borne out by the fact that the word כבוד (honor) is numerically equivalent to the word לב (heart). Avodat Hashem must come from the heart.

Every person is considered a miniature Beit Hamikdash, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them." Hashem dwells among each and every individual (see *Nefesh Hachaim*, in the *hagahah*). The world stands on Torah, *avodah* (prayer), and *gemilut chassadim* (*Avot* 1:2). The Torah is the representation of the *middah* of *netzach*, and the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash was parallel to *hod* (*Berachot* 58a). The world exists upon these attributes. When Torah is connected to Avodah, then *netzach* is connected with *hod*, and it produces *gemilut chassadim*. Kind deeds are the outcome of service of the heart, man's good character traits. Only through them can one acquire Torah.

In this vein, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, said that the forty-eight methods of acquiring Torah listed in the Mishnah are really forty-eight *midot*. He continues that the time period between Pesach and Shavuot, the forty-nine days of Sefirat Haomer, is the most auspicious time for attaining these forty-eight methods of Torah, as a preparation for receiving the Torah itself, on Shavuot. One should try to correct one *middah* each day. On the forty-ninth day, he should review and acquire all forty-eight *midot* again. The word ג"מ"ח is an acronym for גמilot חסדים (acts of kindness). The letters מ"ח refer to the forty-eight ways to

acquire Torah. Therefore, through kind deeds, we connect *netzach* to *hod*. And that is also why the Mishnah states (2:2), “Torah study is good together with an occupation (דָּרְךָ אֶרְצָ).” The words *דָּרְךָ אֶרְצָ* can also be interpreted as good character traits and kind deeds.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter further said that the forty-eight ways of *kedushah* parallel the forty-eight gates of *tumah*, meaning bad character traits. David Hamelech proclaimed (*Tehillim* 39:4), “My heart grew hot within me.” This refers to the service of the heart, which has the capacity to connect *netzach* to *hod*. Alternatively, it is referring to the mind, for all bad *middot* stem from the mind.

The Connection of Netzach and Hod through Service of the Heart

We quoted the statement of Chazal that words of Torah endure only in one who humbles himself before them (*Derech Eretz Zuta* 8). This means that one must lower himself in order to connect the *sefirot* of *hod* and *netzach*. Perhaps we can also say that the bond between *netzach* and *hod* is made by acquiring Torah through the forty-eight methods listed in the Mishnah, and through the *middot* of a person, which reflect what is in his heart. This is why one is commanded to humble oneself in order to acquire Torah. This is the way to connect *netzach* and *hod*.

Positive Pride and Negative Pride

The disciples of Rabbi Akiva did not respect each other in their hearts, and this indicated a measure of arrogance. This is a negative form of pride, the antithesis of humility, which is necessary to connect *netzach* to *hod*. Therefore, they died.

Previously, we explained the pasuk in our prayers, “How long will Your might be in captivity?” The word **בשבי** (in captivity) can be divided in two, **ב-ש-בִּי**. The numerical equivalent of the letters **ב ש** is the same as that of the word **קרב** (near). The letters of this word can be transposed to spell the word **רקב** (rotting). The pasuk in Mishlei (14:30) states, “Envy [brings]

rotting of the bones.” Envy is a direct result of arrogance. This is a most negative form of pride, the exact opposite of the pride which unites *netzach* and *hod*. This negative form of pride separates these two *middot*. This was the pride displayed by the disciples of Rabbi Akiva.

When Bnei Yisrael are disunited and feel pride, all types of negative character traits come to the fore. They deserve to be exiled, for *hod* has become separated from *netzach* and has fallen into the hands of the *chitzonim*. We are then “sick all day long” (*Eichah* 1:13), since *hod* has been captured by the *chitzonim* (*Ra’aya Meheimana Bamidbar* 243:a), as mentioned above.

————— In Summary ———

- ◆ Why were Moshe and Aharon chosen to redeem Bnei Yisrael, and why specifically members of Shevet Levi?
- ◆ The Zohar explains that *netzach* and *hod* are inseparable. How, then, can we understand the words of the Arizal, who states that the *kelippah* is able to capture *hod* but not *netzach*? The answer is that although *hod* is in captivity, its impression on *netzach* remains, just as the impression of a tzaddik always remains in the place where he previously resided.
- ◆ *Galut Mitzrayim* was the imprisonment of *hod* by Pharaoh. The *geulah* took place once *hod* and *netzach* were unified.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu was the embodiment of *netzach*, for he is our great Torah teacher, and Torah is eternity. Aharon Hakohen, who served Hashem in the Mishkan/Beit Hamikdash, which was the heart and splendor of the nation, represents *hod*.
- ◆ When Moshe and Aharon joined forces, the *geulah* was able to take place, for *hod* and *netzach* became one unit.
- ◆ Shevet Levi occupied themselves with Torah study, the symbol of *netzach*, and with the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash, the symbol of *hod*. In this manner, they preserved both *netzach* and *hod* in order to be able to redeem Bnei Yisrael. They were chosen for this mission specifically because they embodied these *middot*. Yaakov Avinu, when foretelling the redemption,

used the phrase “will indeed remember (**פִּקְדָּה יִפְקֹד**),” which is a double language. He was referring to the two aspects of the redemption, the *sefirah* of *netzach* and the *sefirah* of *hod*.

- ◆ At first, Moshe Rabbeinu was loath to redeem Bnei Yisrael. He did not consider himself the representative of *netzach*, out of his deep sense of humility. He agreed to go only after Aharon, the representative of *hod*, was chosen to accompany him.
- ◆ Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael in order to gain control over *hod*. They did this before Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, for afterward, *netzach* and *hod* would be eternally combined, preventing the *kelippah* from ever gaining control. This is the reason for Hashem’s pronouncement, “For the hand is on the throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation.” There will always be friction with Amalek, until *netzach* and *hod* are united, and the *kelippah* will become too weak to control *hod*.
- ◆ At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael were forced into accepting the Torah. Therefore, the connection between *netzach* and *hod* was fragile. In the days of Mordechai and Esther, they accepted the Torah willingly and connected *netzach* with *hod* in an everlasting bond. In this manner, they vanquished Haman Harasha, the descendant Amalek, and merited building the Beit Hamikdash, combining *netzach* and *hod*.
- ◆ Man is comprised of *ten sefirot* of *kedushah*. This is what enables him to be a *merkavah* for the *Shechinah*. Unfortunately, due to sin, man falls into the hands of the ten negative *sefirot*. This is hinted at in the word **מֶרְכָּבָה** (*merkavah*). Its first two letters are **מֵר**, which means elevated (**רָם**) when spelled backward. One must strive to elevate himself, in order to become a channel through which the *Shechinah* can come to this world. The word **מֵר** means bitter, a hint to the cessation of blessing in this world. The letter **'בָ'** of that word hints to the two sections of the Torah, the Written Law and the Oral Law. Through Torah, a person can become a *merkavah* for the *Shechinah*.

- ◆ The disciples of Rabbi Akiva respected each other externally. But the connection of *netzach* and *hod* require inner respect.
- ◆ *Hod* and *netzach* can become unified only through positive pride. Negative pride separates these two *sefirot*.
- ◆ “Torah endures only in one who humbles himself before it.” Yet, on the other hand, the Torah states, “Upon Yisrael is His grandeur,” seeming to indicate that pride is necessary in serving Hashem. Pride is indeed positive, when used in conjunction with humility, thus combining *netzach* and *hod*.

Personal Accounting

“But I shall harden Pharaoh’s heart and I shall multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt”

(*Shemot 7:3*)

At the beginning of Moshe’s mission to Pharaoh, Hashem informed him that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart and strike him with many plagues, until he would send Bnei Yisrael out from the land of Egypt. Why didn’t Hashem strike Pharaoh in one fell swoop in order to redeem Bnei Yisrael? What was the purpose of all the warnings and plagues which were given to Pharaoh?

This question is strengthened by the fact that a *chillul Hashem* resulted from this method. For after each plague, Pharaoh promised to send out Bnei Yisrael and then reneged on his word. He needed to be smitten again and again. Pharaoh desecrated Hashem’s Name by mocking Him and Moshe by his behavior. If Hashem would have smitten him with one tremendous plague, this would have been avoided.

Bnei Yisrael probably also wondered whether Hashem was able to rescue them, and why He did not strike down Pharaoh as he deserved. They surely pondered the necessity for so many plagues.

Shevet Levi was exempt from servitude in Egypt (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:16). This was because they were involved in Torah study in Goshen. On the other hand, the other tribes were somewhat lax in their Torah study, and therefore deserved being enslaved. Chazal teach us (*Berachot* 5a) that if suffering comes upon a person, he should examine his deeds. If he did so and came up with nothing, he should attribute his suffering to *bitul* Torah. The most common reason for tribulation is because of the sin of *bitul* Torah or lack of respect toward Torah scholars. This was the reason for the slavery in Egypt, and also why Shevet Levi was exempt from it.

The tribe of Levi, steeped as they were in Torah study, was not required to make a personal accounting. The rest of the nation, though, was obligated to do so. But they refrained, due to “shortness of breath and hard work” (*Shemot* 6:9). They were given the chance to observe Pharaoh, who had no opportunity to do a personal accounting. He had no connection with Torah, and one who has no Torah, has no merit for a personal accounting. Additionally, even were he to examine his deeds, he would not attribute his suffering to *bitul* Torah, so what would be the point of searching out his deeds at all? This served as a lesson to Bnei Yisrael.

When Pharaoh was struck by the plagues, he had no intention of surrendering whatsoever. He considered himself a god (*Shemot Rabbah* 8:2). He blindly pursued honor, constantly attempting to remove the plague from himself, so that he could continue his charade of divinity. He certainly had no interest in making a personal accounting upon being smitten by the plagues. Each time, he vowed to Moshe that he would send out the Jewish nation, but as soon as the plague was removed, he reverted back to his former obstinacy.

This taught Am Yisrael a tremendous lesson. When Hashem brings suffering upon a person, he must examine his actions immediately and do

teshuva. If he abstains from this course of action, a greater form of affliction will strike him. Finally, his hard heart will surrender. The first level of inquiry must be whether or not he exerted himself sufficiently in Torah study.

Pharaoh, in his pursuit of glory, lost his intellect completely. He became incapable of examining his actions and sending out Bnei Yisrael. This was because he was simply living one big lie. Nothing was more important to him than his own glory. He refused to seek truth and justice. He refused to question his belief that he might not in fact be divine. Therefore, he lost the ability to examine his actions and admit that he was wrong.

This taught Klal Yisrael the powerful lesson that Torah is paramount. Without it, a person is nothing and does not even have the ability to make a personal accounting. Pharaoh taught them this lesson. Hashem did not finish him off in one fell swoop in order to make an example of him. His pursuit of honor caused him to renege on his promise to set Bnei Yisrael free, time and again. Striking the Egyptians with numerous plagues clearly showed Bnei Yisrael how personal glory, coupled with a lack of Torah, brings a person to the depths of doom.

The glory of Torah is the only true glory. I once participated at a wedding in Chicago. A wealthy man entered the wedding hall. I stood off to the side, curious to observe how he would be honored. To my surprise, I noticed that no one paid him any attention at all. After a short while, a destitute Rosh Yeshiva entered the hall. He was so poor that he lived on the premises of the yeshiva. I noticed that all of the people honored him greatly. At those moments, I understood who is truly worthy of honor in this world. Only through exertion in Torah does one merit true glory. The rich man might feel respectable, and others may even show outward signs of respect toward him, but their respect is superficial. Conversely, honor which is bestowed on a person because of his toil in Torah is true honor, derived from an appreciation of what he has accomplished. The Torah elevates one's status so that he truly deserves respect.

Previously, we mentioned that Pharaoh enslaved Am Yisrael because they became lax in Torah. Similarly, Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness due to their laxity in Torah study. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:8), “Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Refidim.” Chazal expound (*Bechorot* 5b) that they weakened in Torah study. The word רְפָדִים (Refidim) is related to the word רְפֵאָה (weakened).

An ignoramus will not bother to make a personal accounting. He will experience suffering in order to arouse him to do teshuvah. However, he prefers to suffer rather than examine his deeds. He is complacent with his lot and feels no lack. But one who is steeped in Torah knows his Creator and knows his purpose in this world. As soon as suffering befalls him, he examines his actions, and corrects them.

I once went to visit a friend who was stricken with “the illness.” I was shocked at his appearance. Merely one month earlier, he had been at my home, and all was fine and well. Suddenly, he was very sick. This could, *chas v’shalom*, happen to anyone. This experience forced me to make an immediate personal accounting and examine my deeds.

Only one who values and respects the Torah will make a personal accounting at a time of need. But, unfortunately, one who is removed from Torah will never understand why he encounters suffering. Even if, deep down, he realizes why suffering comes, he ignores it. This can, *chas v’shalom*, cause the suffering to intensify.

We must learn from what happened to Pharaoh in Egypt. For, just as Hashem sent Moshe to strike Pharaoh in order to awaken him, so does He send us messages to awaken us. Let us not be like Pharaoh, who did not listen to his messages. When we receive a sign from on High, we should make a thorough personal accounting and change our ways. This will be beneficial to us all the days of our lives.

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem told Moshe that He would strike Pharaoh with numerous plagues before allowing Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt. Why didn’t Hashem just

strike down Pharaoh in one fell swoop, forcing him immediately to send the nation out? The method used seems to have caused a desecration of His Name, for Pharaoh mocked Moshe and did as he wished, promising to send Bnei Yisrael out and then reneging on his word.

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael probably asked themselves these questions in Egypt. Hashem wanted them to consider the necessity for so many plagues.
- ◆ The main objective of the multitude of plagues was to teach Bnei Yisrael the urgency of making a personal accounting. Pharaoh, blinded by his own honor, did not bother to consider that he was obligated to send out the Jewish nation. He did not realize that this was the cause of the plagues. This type of blindness is a result of a lack of Torah. By observing the punishments that plagued Pharaoh, Bnei Yisrael took this lesson to heart.
- ◆ The tribe of Levi was exonerated from bondage, because they were involved in Torah study. The other tribes, though, were lax in Torah study and were therefore subject to slavery. Chazal teach us that if suffering befalls a person, he should examine his deeds. If he did not find any fault in his actions, he should ascribe his suffering to *bitul Torah*.
- ◆ True glory in this world is the glory that comes hand-in-hand with Torah study. When a person exerts himself in Torah study, the Torah elevates him, and he becomes worthy of honor. Honor accorded to the wealthy is merely superficial.

Pharaoh's Wickedness

"But I shall harden Pharaoh's heart and I shall multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt"

(Shemot 7:3)

Hashem informed Moshe that he would harden Pharaoh's heart in order to punish him with many plagues. Why didn't Hashem strike Pharaoh with one fell swoop in order to redeem Bnei Yisrael? This question is strengthened by the fact that a chillul *Hashem* resulted, since Pharaoh continually reneged on his promise to send Bnei Yisrael out, mocking Hashem and His messenger, Moshe. Moreover, Bnei Yisrael must also have wondered why Hashem sent so many plagues (see *Personal Accounting*, above).

Let us offer an alternative explanation. Hashem treated Pharaoh in this way in order to teach Bnei Yisrael just how far-reaching is the wickedness of the resha'im.

Pharaoh considered himself a deity (*Shemot Rabbah* 8:2). He even managed to convince his nation that he never had to take care of his needs, like ordinary people. Thus, Hashem told Moshe (*Shemot* 7:15), "Go to Pharaoh in the morning – behold! he goes out to the water – and you shall stand opposite him at the River's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand." Hashem commanded Moshe to appear before Pharaoh specifically at the time when he would be shamed for his sham, just as he was taking care of his needs. He would be caught in the act, and his entire dogma of divinity would prove completely false. This was in order for Pharaoh to regret his obstinacy and send out Bnei Yisrael. But Pharaoh, despite all this, remained firm in his inflexibility and continued enslaving Bnei Yisrael. Likewise, he continued his "divine" acts.

Hashem strikes a person gradually, so that he can arouse himself to repent before greater suffering afflicts him. We find this to be the case

concerning *tzara'at*. At first, Hashem sends it upon one's house. Afterward, it comes upon his clothing. And only at the end, does it strike the person himself. This is because Hashem is patient. With Pharaoh, too, Hashem demonstrated patience, in order to give him a chance to repent. But Pharaoh remained stubborn throughout.

He was sunk in a deep craving for honor, to the extent that he considered himself a deity. Similarly, he was deeply mired in the passion for money. Therefore, Hashem struck him time and again. This was to indicate to him that if he would continue in his wicked ways, he would be left with nothing, neither honor nor wealth. Still, he did not heed the word of Hashem.

Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim witnessed miracles the likes of which were never duplicated in any generation. But maybe we can say that the most amazing miracle is the fact that a person can change a bad *middah*. This is what Hashem desired of Pharaoh. But Pharaoh refused to heed His messages.

I read a story regarding Rav Shach, zt"l. He was once officiating at a wedding ceremony. He already held the cup of wine in his hand, when suddenly the Admor of Vizhnitz, zy"a, entered. Rav Shach immediately passed the cup to him. The Admor at first refused to take it, but eventually yielded. This story should be a lesson for us. If we would pass up on such an honor, it would probably be in order to impress others with our humility, rather than to honor the other person. Nullifying oneself before another and feeling that one's fellow man is greater, thereby according him honor, is the biggest miracle possible.

Chazal tell us (*Nedarim* 38a) that Moshe Rabbeinu was fabulously wealthy. This is borne out in the pasuk (*Shemot* 34:1), "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Carve for yourself two Tablets of stone like the first ones.'" Rashi explains, "Hashem showed him a quarry of sapphire within his tent and said to him, 'The chips will be yours.' From there Moshe became very wealthy." The author of the sefer *Rachashei Lev* asks why Moshe

Rabbeinu needed all this wealth; he certainly did not desire it. Why did Hashem give it to him?

We might answer that Hashem wished to teach Bnei Yisrael how to relate to riches. Moshe Rabbeinu, in spite of his wealth, paid no attention to it at all. He went from the mountain to the nation and back, in order to receive the Torah and deliver it to them. He appreciated the value of the Torah. Despite his great wealth, Moshe Rabbeinu occupied himself only with Torah, his chosen profession. This was the message Hashem wished to instill in Am Yisrael.

The Avot Hakedoshim conducted themselves in a similar way. Money was merely a means, not an end in and of itself. We also find that Rebbi, who was tremendously wealthy, stretched out his fingers heavenward at the end of his life, proclaiming, “Let my fingers testify that I didn’t have any pleasure from this world at all” (*Ketubot* 104a). The Torah is the glory of the tzaddikim. Money means nothing to them. Were Hashem to take all of their money away from them, they would not be distressed at all.

Conversely, resha’im constantly pursue money. Pharaoh is an example of this. All his life, he sought wealth and glory. The only way to punish these wicked ones is to confiscate their money. Only then do they make an accounting of their actions. But even after his wealth was taken from him, Pharaoh failed to ponder what was happening. His servants cried out (*Shemot* 10:7), “Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?” But he stayed steadfast in his wicked ways. This illustrates just how far evil extends.

In Summary

- ♦ Even before bringing any of the plagues, Hashem told Moshe that He would strike Pharaoh time and again, until he would finally agree to set Bnei Yisrael free. Why didn’t Hashem just strike Pharaoh with one overwhelming plague, immediately granting Bnei Yisrael their freedom? It seems that a *chillul Hashem* was caused by the delay in the redemption, as Pharaoh mocked Moshe, by promising to let the Jews go and then taking back his word.

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael must themselves have asked these very questions, when they were in Mitzrayim. There was obviously a lesson that Hashem wished to impart to them by bringing numerous plagues upon the Egyptians.
- ◆ Pharaoh considered himself to be a deity, even stating that he did not have to take care of his bodily functions like regular humans. Hashem, therefore, had Moshe accost him at the river; maybe the shame would lead him to regret his former misdeeds.
- ◆ Hashem's method is to punish a person gradually. This is the case concerning *tzara'at*. First, it comes upon one's house, then on his clothing, and eventually, on the person himself. This was the case with Pharaoh, as well. Hashem struck him slowly but surely, in order to give him a chance to do teshuvah. But he refused to pay attention and repent.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael witnessed countless miracles in Mitzrayim. However, the greatest miracle of all is a person's success in correcting a bad *middah*. This is what Hashem wanted from Pharaoh, but he did not repent.
- ◆ Moshe became fabulously wealthy from the remnants of the *luchot*. The author of *Rachashei Lev* asks why it was necessary to grant Moshe this wealth. Perhaps we could say that it was for the sake of Bnei Yisrael. They would see that despite his great wealth, Moshe's occupation was Torah. Our forefathers and leaders related to their money merely as a means, and not as the goal itself.
- ◆ Conversely, the entire objective of the resha'im is to obtain more and more money and honor. Hashem punishes them by taking away their riches. But Pharaoh was so wicked that even that punishment did not cause him to change his ways. He remained steadfast in his wicked ways throughout the plagues.

Hashem Hardens Pharaoh's Heart

"Hashem said to Moshe: Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, he refuses to send the people. Go to Pharaoh in the morning – behold! he goes out to the water – and you shall stand opposite him at the River's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand"

(Shemot 7:14-15)

Rashi explains that Pharaoh would go out to the river every morning in order to relieve himself. He pronounced himself a god and claimed that he never had to take care of his bodily needs. He would arise early and take care of his functions at the Nile, while the rest of the country slept. Hashem commanded Moshe to approach Pharaoh specifically at the Nile, to demonstrate that he knew what was actually going on. He knew he was not a god, but a con artist. Pharaoh should seemingly have been ashamed at being discovered in this state by Moshe, and repent his evil ways. But no; Pharaoh hardened his heart and continued to shamelessly proclaim himself a deity.

Based on this, we might be able to explain the following question. An acquaintance asked why Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart after the first five plagues. We know that Hashem only punishes a person after he had the free choice to choose between good and bad, and he chose bad. But if Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, wasn't He taking away his free choice? How could Pharaoh be punished for choosing wrong when, in essence, he had no choice?

The Ramban explains that at first Pharaoh hardened his own heart, which is indicated by the description of him: "So Pharaoh's heart was strong" and: "Pharaoh kept making his heart stubborn." But, when it came to the plague of boils, the pasuk states (*Shemot* 9:12), "Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not heed them, as Hashem

had spoken to Moshe." Why do we find, that from this plague onward, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart?

The Ramban explains that in the beginning, Pharaoh was stubborn of his own accord. After the plague of pestilence, he desired to repent. But then it was already too late. Hashem hardened his heart at the end of each and every plague, until the death of the firstborn. This partly answers our question, but we are still left to wonder why Pharaoh was punished if Hashem was the one who enforced his obstinacy.

During the first *makkot*, Pharaoh hardened his heart time and again, and claimed to be a god. He displayed outright brazenness even before Moshe Rabbeinu, who caught him in his falsehood, as he was relieving himself at the river. After each of the first *makkot*, Hashem clearly saw that Pharaoh continued in his wickedness, not even bothering to try to choose good. He always chose evil. Therefore, Hashem punished him by removing his free choice. Pharaoh continued to behave wickedly, for he had made the initial decision to choose the path of iniquity. The way a person decides to take is the way he is subsequently led. His free choice is confiscated, and he remains on the path he originally selected (see *Makkot* 10b).

Yeravam ben Nevat is a case in point. He sinned and brought Bnei Yisrael to sin. Hashem appeared to him in a dream. He told him to repent, and he would merit strolling together with Hashem and David Hamelech in Gan Eden. But he remained obstinate till the end and refused to do teshuvah (*Sanhedrin* 102a). The reason he remained stubborn was because he was so accustomed to sinning and causing others to sin that he no longer possessed free choice. He was simply unable to choose good anymore. And although Achiyah Hashiloni predicted that his end would be bitter and he would inherit Gehinnom, he continued on his wicked path (*Melachim I*, 14:1-14).

Likewise, concerning Acher, a Heavenly Voice announced, "The teshuvah of everyone will be accepted, except for that of Acher"

(*Chagigah* 15a). Due to the magnitude of his sins, his power of free choice was removed. The gates of teshuvah were closed to him.

The Midrash states (*Shemot Rabbah* 13:3), in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “Here is an excuse for the heretics. They can claim that Hashem did not grant Pharaoh the opportunity to do teshuvah, for He hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” Upon this, Reish Lakish cites the pasuk, “With the scoffers, He will scoff.” Hashem warns a person once, twice, three times. But there comes a point where it is too late to do teshuvah, for his heart is closed to the opportunity. This is in order that he should receive retribution for his actions. This was the case concerning Pharaoh the rasha. Hashem gave him five occasions (the first five *makkot*) to do teshuvah, but Pharaoh remained unmoved. After that, Hashem told him, “You were stiff-necked and obstinate with me; I will add impurity to your already impure heart.”

Before the *makkah* of hail, Moshe warned Pharaoh and his servants that they could escape the plague by bringing their possessions indoors, as it says (*Shemot* 9:20-21), “Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants and livestock in the field.” Whoever believed in Hashem listened to the warning and was not harmed. Conversely, those who did not believe left their possessions outdoors and were harmed. But how could anyone not believe in Hashem at this point? This was the seventh plague; during the third plague of lice, the magicians of Pharaoh had proclaimed, (*Shemot* 8:15), “It is a finger of G-d.”

The gaon, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, in his sefer *Kesef Mezukak*, explains that while they were aroused to recognize Hashem by the earlier *makkot*, their repentance was merely lip-service and not internal. Therefore, they did not bother to bring their animals inside, despite Moshe’s warning. When one’s teshuvah is merely superficial, the sin remains with him. He may have deceived himself into believing that he has done genuine teshuvah, but it is a sham. This type of teshuvah is not desired at all.

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst'" (*ibid.* 10:1). Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto explains that when Hashem observed how Pharaoh did teshuvah only superficially, but not in his heart, He hardened Pharaoh's heart. This was in order that he would be smitten with the additional *makkot* of locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. Eventually, he would do heartfelt teshuvah.

But even after the last of the *makkot*, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart. This was in order that he would pursue Bnei Yisrael until the Yam Suf. This was because, at the last *makkah*, Pharaoh repented only out of fear of retribution, and not in submission to Hashem. This illustrates the depth of judgment.

Teshuvah which is mere lip-service is not sufficient. Teshuvah must come from the heart. A deep personal accounting is required to discern whether or not one's teshuvah is genuine. When one repents only externally, and not from a broken heart, he is left in his iniquity, and his teshuvah is not authentic. One who does not do complete teshuvah will never fear the word of Hashem.

In Summary

- ◆ Hashem commanded Moshe to appear before Pharaoh at the river, so that he would be there when Pharaoh relieved himself. This would shame Pharaoh into ceasing his proclamations that he was a deity. Yet Pharaoh continued in his wicked ways and did not feel any shame at all.
- ◆ Why was Pharaoh deprived of his free choice during the last five plagues?
- ◆ According to the Ramban, when Hashem observed how Pharaoh remained obstinate throughout the first five plagues, He punished him by removing his free choice. This opinion is cited in Midrash Rabbah.
- ◆ We find a similarity concerning Yeravam ben Nevat. His free choice was taken away from him after he had rejected all attempts to influence him to do teshuvah.
- ◆ How could some of the Egyptians not take heed of Moshe's warning, and

leave their livestock outdoors during the plague of hail – they had previously witnessed the “finger” of Hashem, during the plague of lice?

- ♦ Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto explains that all previous gestures of teshuvah were merely lip-service. This would also explain Pharaoh’s stubbornness. Pharaoh repented only superficially, not whole-heartedly. After the plague of the death of the firstborn, he repented inwardly, as well. But it was only out of fear of being killed. Therefore, Hashem hardened his heart once again, and he chased after Bnei Yisrael until the Yam Suf.

The Virtue of Gratitude

“Hashem said to Moshe: Say to Aharon: Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt; over their rivers, over their canals, over their reservoirs, and over all their gatherings of water, and they shall become blood; there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt”

(Shemot 7:19)

Rashi explains that Hashem told Moshe to say to Aharon to strike the water, because the river had protected Moshe when he had been cast into it as a baby. Therefore, it was not fitting that Moshe should hit it in order to cause either the plague of blood or the plague of frogs. Rather, Aharon should be the one to strike the water (see *Shemot Rabbah* 9:10).

Pharaoh had issued a decree that all male babies must be cast into the river (*Shemot* 1:22). Hashem miraculously caused Moshe to be born after six months of pregnancy. His mother, Yocheved, put him in a basket and

floated it on the river. In this manner, he escaped Pharaoh's evil decree. By Hashem commanding Moshe to avoid hitting the river, we learn a tremendous lesson. "Do not throw stones into the well from which you drank water" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:4). Showing gratitude is a wonderful virtue, which purifies one's heart and brings him to great heights.

Similarly, it was Aharon, and not Moshe, who struck the ground to initiate the plague of lice. This is because when Moshe killed the Egyptian, the earth was benevolent toward him and accepted the body for burial. Moshe Rabbeinu was grateful to the earth, which helped him in his time of need, and therefore did not strike it. He asked Aharon to do it instead of him (*Shemot Rabbah* 10:7).

"Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua; Yehoshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly" (*Avot* 1:1). This Mishnah traces the path of the tradition, from generation to generation. Every generation was responsible to pass it on to the next, in order that Torah should not be forgotten among Yisrael. As the years went by, and the generations became weaker, it was necessary to relegate the Oral Torah to writing. There simply were not enough people who could memorize it in its entirety in order to transmit it perfectly to the next generation.

Just as it is clear to us that we must appreciate the kindness of our forefathers, who transmitted the tradition to future generations, so must we show gratitude to our teachers and rabbis, who raised us in the path of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. Anyone who has merited gaining Torah knowledge from his teacher is obligated to him. Had his mentor not exerted himself to teach him Torah, who knows where he would be today?

Here is the place to point out that whoever has been given the ability to teach and develop Torah novellae and pass them on to others, but desists, is a thief and an ingrate to Hashem, Who granted him the wisdom to understand the Torah. In truth, every person is enjoined to transmit the tradition. Some are capable of passing it on only to their households, for they never received training as teachers. On the other hand, there are

those who were blessed with the skill of elucidation. If they keep their Torah to themselves, and do not bother passing it on to others, they are stealing it, for Torah is not their private property. Rather, it is the property of all of Klal Yisrael.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two. One half is comprised of mitzvot between man and Hashem, and the other half to mitzvot between man and his fellow man. However, the commandment to honor one's parents is written on the side dealing with mitzvot between man and Hashem. This is quite amazing; honoring one's parents would seem to be a mitzvah between man and his fellow man. Why is it written on the half dealing with mitzvot between man and Hashem?

Through honoring one's parents, a person shows them gratitude for all the hard work they invested in him. And because there are three partners in the creation of a person – his father, his mother, and Hashem (*Niddah* 31a) – by honoring one's parents, and expressing gratitude toward them, he will consequently honor the third partner in his creation, Hashem. He will show Him appreciation for everything he ever had in his life. Thus, we find that the mitzvah of honoring one's parents is interconnected with the mitzvot between man and Hashem. Gratitude toward one's parents causes one to feel gratitude toward Hashem.

I saw the following question, quoted in a sefer: If Moshe felt it fitting to express gratitude toward inanimate objects, such as the water and the earth, why didn't he express gratitude toward Pharaoh, in whose house he was raised? One who is grateful to the inanimate will demonstrate gratitude toward human beings. However, not only did Moshe not express gratitude toward Pharaoh, but on the contrary, he was the one responsible for bringing the plagues upon him!

I would like to explain with an incident which happened to me. A man once approached me and said that we must show gratitude toward Hitler, *yemach shemo*. In his merit, the state of Israel was founded. For if not for his destruction of European Jewry, no one would have felt it necessary to create a Jewish state. I was extremely agitated at hearing these words. How is it possible, by any stretch of the imagination, to express gratitude

to someone who was responsible for the death of six million Jews?! It is comparable to saying that we should feel gratitude toward Haman, for in his merit we celebrate the holiday of Purim, with all its inherent mitzvot. This is certainly a most warped way of thinking.

Moshe did not express gratitude toward Pharaoh for all the years he spent in his palace, for Pharaoh was the icon of evil, the paradigm enemy of our people. Although he behaved kindly toward Moshe, when Moshe was a baby, it was merely the kindness of a gentile. The pasuk in Mishlei (14:34) states about such kindness, “But the kindness of regimes is a sin.” Pharaoh deserved no gratitude for raising Moshe. On the contrary, he deserved retribution for all the suffering he caused Bnei Yisrael by enslaving them.

Furthermore, when one expresses gratitude toward a wicked person, he is showing approval for his evil deeds and becomes a partner in his defilement. Had Moshe expressed gratitude toward Pharaoh for raising him, he would have been showing support toward evil incarnate.

I try my best not to use funds from Shabbat desecrators, for using their money would bolster them, granting them a measure of approval to continue desecrating the Shabbat. Oftentimes, a businessman who opens his business on Shabbat will mollify his conscience by donating to charitable causes. But we must know that using money obtained in a forbidden way will never yield blessing. Moreover, using it awards a stamp of approval to the offender, encouraging him to continue in his wayward ways.

This parashah teaches the importance of expressing gratitude. This *middah* purifies man’s heart and causes him to be elevated in Avodat Hashem. One who acknowledges the kindness of his fellow man will eventually acknowledge the kindness of Hashem.

In Summary

- ◆ Aharon struck the river to initiate the plague of blood, and the ground to initiate the plagues of frogs and lice. Moshe desisted, out of gratitude

toward the river and the earth, which both helped him in his times of need. Chazal teach us, “Do not throw stones into a well from which you drank.”

- ♦ The *middah* of gratitude purifies a person’s character and brings him to elevated heights.
- ♦ We are obligated to acknowledge the kindness of our forefathers, who transmitted the tradition of Torah in its entirety. Similarly, a person is required to show gratitude toward his teachers, who exerted themselves to teach him Torah. One who has the ability to teach must utilize his strengths to pass on his knowledge to others. One who desists from doing so shows ingratitude to Hashem, Who blessed him with his abilities.
- ♦ The mitzvah of honoring one’s parents is written on the side of the Tablets containing the mitzvot between man and Hashem. This does not seem appropriate. The reason for this is because honoring one’s parents causes a person to feel gratitude toward them for all they did for him. This, in turn, brings him to express gratitude toward his Creator, the third Partner in his creation.

The Distinguished Plague

“And on that day I shall distinguish the land of Goshen upon which My people stands, that there shall be no swarm there; so that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land. I shall make a distinction between My people and your people – tomorrow this sign will come about”

(Shemot 8:18-19)

Moshe was instructed to tell Pharaoh that if he would continue in his stubbornness and refuse to free Bnei Yisrael from his land, Hashem would

send upon him and his nation a plague of wild animals. The Torah continues its narrative, “I shall distinguish the land of Goshen.” Rashi explains this to mean, “I will set apart the land of Goshen.” Hashem would differentiate between the Egyptian homes and the Jewish ones. While the Egyptian houses would be swarming with wild animals, the Jewish houses would be completely clear of them. No wild animal whatsoever would approach a Jew. This is further borne out by the words, “I shall make a distinction between My people and your people.”

This raises the following question. Why only at the fourth *makkah*, that of wild animals, does the Torah specify the difference between the Egyptians and the Jews? The previous three *makkot*: blood, frogs, and lice also hit only the Egyptians and did not cause any damage to the Jews whatsoever. What was unique about the plague of wild animals that the difference between the Jews and Egyptians is stressed here?

Bnei Yisrael were indeed immune from the first three plagues, but they did not fully appreciate their uniqueness until they had experienced them. Only after witnessing the first three plagues did they come to a keen awareness of the vast difference between themselves and the Egyptians. Let us take the plague of blood as an example. When Am Yisrael discovered that they had pure drinking water, while the Egyptian waters were changed into blood, they felt privileged to be part of Hashem’s people. For even when the Egyptians drank the waters of the Jews, it switched to blood in their vessels, while the Jews had unlimited pure water.

Am Yisrael in Egypt preserved three items – their names, their dress, and their language (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:12). But this was not due to an appreciation of their intrinsic superiority as the Chosen Nation. Chazal tell us that they inherited these virtuous qualities from our Avot. The Avot bequeathed to them the *zechut* to maintain these traits, as well as the resilience not to mingle with the gentiles. Without the merit of the Avot, Am Yisrael would never have succeeded in their *nisayon*. Only after observing the first three *makkot*, wherein they perceived the difference

between themselves and the gentiles, did they attain a deep-seated pride in being the Chosen Nation.

The word “distinction” is mentioned only concerning the plague of wild animals, because it was with this plague that Am Yisrael first felt this distinction. Now they realized that it was not only in external matters, like preserving their names, that they were different, but also, and more importantly, they were essentially different from the Egyptians. They came to the recognition that Hashem “did not place our lot together with theirs” (*Aleinu* prayer).

On the words “tomorrow this sign will come about,” the Ben Ish Chai states the following (*Shana Rishona, Va’era*). The letters of the word **מחר** (tomorrow) can be transposed to spell **ר”מ**, the number of organs in the human body. The *zechut* of guarding their bodies, keeping themselves totally apart from the Egyptian nation, gave them the merit to be completely protected from the plague of wild animals. Not only did the beasts not harm them; they did not even enter their places of residence.

Chazal emphasize that the Torah does not state that wild beasts would attack the Egyptians, but called it simply a “swarm.” This is because although the animals arrived in a conglomeration, none attacked the other. This is in spite of the fact that larger animals naturally prey on smaller ones. This provided a lesson for Am Yisrael. In the days of Mashiach, when Hashem’s glory will be revealed, the animals will all get along with each other. They will live side by side, without attacking each other for survival, as it says (*Yeshayahu 11:6*), “The wolf will live with the sheep.” Am Yisrael, compared to a sheep among seventy wolves (*Tanchuma, Toldot 5*) will no longer be afraid of the surrounding nations, for their glory will be upheld by the gentiles. The gentiles will be afraid to attack them ever again.

In all the plagues, the order of nature was changed in order to carry out Hashem’s desire. We find that the frogs sacrificed their lives, even entering the ovens of the Egyptians in order to fulfill Hashem’s will (*Pesachim 53b*). And here, at the plague of wild animals, the beasts lived

harmoniously with each other. In the plague of hail, fire and water co-existed, in order to uphold the word of Hashem. The plagues were meant to serve as lessons for Am Yisrael, in preparation for *Matan Torah*. In order to be truly worthy of receiving the Torah, they had to exist with each other in love and brotherliness and be willing to sacrifice their lives to uphold the Torah.

In Summary

- ◆ “And on that day I shall distinguish the land of Goshen.” Rashi explains that this means, “I will set apart.” Why only here, during the plague of wild animals, did Hashem state that He would differentiate between the Egyptians and the Jews? In the previous three plagues, Hashem also set the Jews apart from the Egyptians. What is unique about this plague?
- ◆ Hashem set Bnei Yisrael apart from the Egyptians in the first three plagues because of the three traits which they preserved: their dress, language, and names. Chazal stress that they maintained these qualities not because they appreciated their special status as the Chosen Nation, but because they inherited these traits from the Avot. Only after witnessing the first three plagues, did Am Yisrael gain an appreciation of their exalted level. It was then that they preserved these qualities from a deep-seated recognition of their greatness. This is why the phrase, “I will set apart” is used only here.
- ◆ The plague of wild animals was introduced with the statement: “Tomorrow this sign will come about.” The Ben Ish Chai explains that the word **מחר** (tomorrow) contains the same letters as **ר"מ** (248). This alludes to the fact that Bnei Yisrael guarded the 248 limbs of their bodies, and their 365 sinews. This is what provided them with the merit to be protected from the plague of wild animals.
- ◆ The Torah refers to this plague as a “swarm,” without mention of wild beasts. This is a reference to the miracle of the animals co-existing, without harming one another. Also in the future, all of the nations will live peacefully with Bnei Yisrael, and will not seek to harm them.

- ♦ Every plague contained a reversal of the natural order. Opposing forces made peace in order to do the will of Hashem. This should be a lesson for Bnei Yisrael. In order to merit receiving the Torah, they must live in unity with each other.

A Journey of Three Days

We will go on a three-day journey in the Wilderness, and bring offerings to Hashem, our G-d, as He will tell us

(Shemot 8:23)

Moshe Rabbeinu told Pharaoh that Bnei Yisrael wished to leave Egypt for a three-day journey, in order to bring offerings to Hashem. But he knew that they actually wanted to go for a longer amount of time. How can we understand that he veered from the truth?

Pharaoh knew that his end was near. His only redeeming feature was the fact that Am Yisrael was enslaved to him in Egypt. He knew, in his heart of hearts, that as soon as Bnei Yisrael would leave his land, he would lose his empire and pay up for his misdeeds. Therefore, Pharaoh, in his prudence, hardened his heart and categorically refused to send them out.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that the merit of Am Yisrael residing in his midst was Pharaoh's best protection. This was why he held onto them fiercely, staunchly preventing them from escaping. When a person wishes to request something big, he knows there is little chance of obtaining it. Therefore, he turns to the owner and tries to minimize the value of the item. For example, in order that we should not be daunted by the magnitude of doing teshuvah, Hashem enjoins us (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah*

5:2), “Open for Me an opening the size of a needle hole, and I will open for you an opening the size of a banquet hall.”

Moshe knew who he was dealing with. Pharaoh, with his begrudging manners and stubborn ways, would surely have opposed that Bnei Yisrael should leave for a longer amount of time. They would have been forced to remain in Egypt.

Moshe asked specifically for a three-day trip, for this was a reasonable amount of time for their needs. This gave him the opportunity to enter into a discussion with Pharaoh. Had Moshe asked for only one or two days, Pharaoh would have regarded his request as mockery and would never have agreed.

We might add that Moshe was telling Pharaoh the following. In order for the Egyptians not to smell the offerings which Bnei Yisrael intended to sacrifice, Bnei Yisrael had to travel a distance of at least three days. That would ensure that the offensive odor of the burning sheep, which were worshipped as gods in Egypt, would not waft into the noses of the Egyptians.

Am Yisrael were steeped in the forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Yitro*). They were not yet ready to accept the Torah and to merit the numerous miracles which they would experience during the forty years in the Wilderness. Moshe, recognizing their difficult situation, at first thought it would be good for them to leave Egypt gradually, as opposed to a sudden exodus. Slowly but surely, they would remove the *kelippah* of impurity from themselves, until they would merit Hashem’s salvation and the performance of His miracles in the Wilderness. On the other hand, Hashem was aware of their dire predicament. The hour glass was running low. Were they to stay in Egypt for just a while longer, they would be likely to fall into the fiftieth level of impurity, the point of no return. They would never merit redemption from Egypt.

When Moshe asked Pharaoh for a three-day journey, he was speaking from his point of view. He specified three days, for he believed that Bnei

Yisrael would, indeed, return after that. We know that Bnei Yisrael did, actually, leave Egypt before the allotted time. Hashem had shortened the exile, due to the harsh labor placed upon them. Only after Moshe finished speaking with Pharaoh, did Hashem inform him that He wished to redeem Am Yisrael at that time, in one act.

In Summary

- ♦ Why did Moshe tell Pharaoh that the Jews wished to leave Egypt for a three-day journey in order to bring sacrifices to Hashem? He knew it would take much longer. The answer is that Moshe recognized Pharaoh's stubbornness. Therefore, he minimized the request. Had he asked that they should be able to leave for a long journey, Pharaoh would never have agreed. A request of three days seemed reasonable and was open for discussion.
- ♦ Moshe specified three days, in order that the Egyptians would not smell the offensive odor of the offerings. A distance of at least three days would guarantee this.
- ♦ Furthermore, Moshe originally assumed that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt gradually, and not in one exodus. This would help them to prepare for a life of miracles in the Wilderness. This is why he specified three days. He truly believed they would return. But this was not what Hashem wanted. He wanted a one-time, eternal Exodus, with no looking back.

Pharaoh's Heart Is Hardened

"Pharaoh sent and behold; of the livestock of Israel not even one had died – yet Pharaoh's heart became stubborn, and he did not send out the people"

(*Shemot* 9:7)

Even after the plague of pestilence, which clearly demonstrated Divine Providence, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart. Only the animals of the Egyptians died; the animals of Bnei Yisrael remained alive and well. Pharaoh should have been overcome with faith in Hashem at this open display of His supervision, but he refused to humble himself to Hashem.

The pasuk emphasizes that “not even one” of the Jews’ animals died. The Malbim expounds that we find this term applied in two other places. One is at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, in parashat *Beshalach*. There, we read (*Shemot* 14:28), “The water came back and covered the chariots and the horsemen of the entire army of Pharaoh, who were coming behind them in the sea – there remained **not even one** of them.” The other is in *Navi* (*Shoftim* 4:16), “The entire camp of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; **not even one** was left.” At the Splitting of the Sea, all of the Egyptians were drowned except for Pharaoh, and at the war with Sisera, all of the army fell, except for Sisera.

The Malbim continues that it is similar here, with regard to the plague of pestilence. All of Bnei Yisrael’s animals were saved, except for one. This was the animal of the son of the Israelite woman and the Egyptian man. He is mentioned in the pasuk in parashat *Emor* (*Vayikra* 24:10). When Pharaoh noticed that this one animal perished, he understood it to mean that Moshe’s prophecy was not completely accurate. Then, he hardened his heart, refusing to send out Bnei Yisrael.

The Malbim’s words demand clarification. The reason why this man’s animal was killed was because he was considered an Egyptian, since his

father was Egyptian. Therefore, his animal died just like those of the rest of the Egyptians. Even though Pharaoh might claim that he was Jewish, because of his mother, and thus assert that Moshe's prediction did not materialize in its entirety, how could the death of one animal blind Pharaoh to the tremendous miracle that took place, causing him to further harden his heart?

Certainly Pharaoh's obstinacy did not result from a lack of faith in Hashem. The very fact that he was punished with the plagues attested to their power to induce him to believe in Hashem. Pharaoh's failing was that he did not believe that Moshe Rabbeinu was the true agent of Hashem. Because of this, he examined the details of each of the Ten Plagues. He sought and searched, to discover if Moshe's words did, indeed, materialize fully and in every detail. When he found that they had not been fully actualized, he hardened his heart. He lost faith in Moshe, for the words of Hashem's messenger must come true in the most complete way possible.

Moshe Rabbeinu was aware of Pharaoh's suspicion and was therefore most careful with the words he employed. An example of this is in *makkat bechorot*. There, the pasuk states (11:4), "At about midnight, I shall go out in the midst of Egypt." Chazal explain (*Berachot* 4a) that Moshe purposely used the words, "At **about** midnight," instead of saying, "At midnight," for the following reason. He thought, *Maybe Pharaohs' astrologers will miscalculate, and then call me a swindler.* Had he given an exact hour, Pharaoh's astrologers, who were likely to err in their calculations of the midnight hour, would ascribe the mistake to Moshe. Therefore, he gave an approximate time.

In his sefer *Kesef Mishneh*, my ancestor, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zt"l, writes the following. After the plague of hail, Pharaoh proclaimed (*Shemot* 9:27), "Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones." Yet, he continued hardening his heart. Why was this so? At the end of the plague, Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray for the noises and the hail to dissipate. Moshe prayed on his behalf, and the noises and hail abated. But he did not ask for the rains to stop, and Moshe therefore, did not pray for

that. Pharaoh claimed that since Moshe's words were not completely fulfilled, Moshe was not the agent of Hashem.

We learn from here how meticulous one must be in serving Hashem according to the letter of the law. If he swerves even a small amount from the halachah, others are liable to learn from him and follow in his ways, until they spiral downward. Our *Chachamim* enjoin us (*Avot* 1:11): "Scholars, be cautious with your words...The disciples who follow you there may drink and die, and consequently the Name of Heaven will be desecrated."

After the plague of pestilence, when Pharaoh witnessed how the animals of Bnei Yisrael remained safe, he certainly believed in Hashem. As mentioned earlier, he believed in Hashem from the first plague. But the fact that one animal of the Jews died, even though the owner's status as a Jew was dubious, was enough to cast qualms in his heart. He doubted Moshe's position as an emissary of Hashem. Therefore, he hardened his heart. Once he disbelieved Moshe, there was no reason to send forth the nation.

Rabbi Yosef Hakohen Shwartz, zt"l, in his sefer *Ginzei Yosef*, explains the matter differently. When Pharaoh noticed that the animals of the Jews remained alive, it did not really bother him that the Egyptians' animals died, because he figured he would help himself to theirs. This would offset his losses, thus he did not take the plague to heart.

According to this line of reasoning, Rabbi Shwartz settles another intriguing matter. The Torah tells us that Pharaoh contributed animals of his own for Bnei Yisrael to offer as sacrifices. This was in fulfillment of the pasuk (*Shemot* 10:25), "Even you will place in our hands feast-offerings and burnt-offerings." How was it possible for Bnei Yisrael to sacrifice these animals – it is a clear halachah that an animal used for idol worship may not be brought as a *korban* (*Temurah* 28a and b). Pharaoh and his nation used their animals for idol worship; they worshipped the sheep, as it says (*Shemot* 8:22), "If we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt in their

sight, will they not stone us?" How was it possible that they used the Egyptian animals as offerings?

Rav Yosef Shwartz explains this, based on his previous idea. After the plague of pestilence, Pharaoh stole animals belonging to Bnei Yisrael. It was these animals which he offered to them to use as sacrifices. Therefore, they were kosher for the *korbanot*. For even had the Egyptians worshipped them in the interim, they were not forbidden for the Jews, for they did not truly belong to the Egyptians (*Chulin* 40b). Only the owner of an item can make it prohibited. (This insight is also brought down in the sefer *Talelei Orot* in parashat *Bo*, in the name of the elder Admor of Gur).

However, we could counter that even the animals owned by the Jewish people were forbidden to be used as sacrifices, since "whatever a slave owns, belongs to his master" (*Pesachim* 88b). The animals which were in the possession of Bnei Yisrael, who were enslaved to Pharaoh, really belonged directly to him, as well as to the Egyptians who worshipped the sheep. Thus, we are still left with our original question: How could Bnei Yisrael use these animals for sacrifices?

As we stated above, throughout the course of the *makkot*, Pharaoh certainly came to a measure of belief in Hashem. The multitude of *makkot* was in order to instill in Bnei Yisrael faith in Hashem. The *makkot* taught them that Hashem runs nature. "His kingship rules upon everything." Hashem rules even over the gods of Egypt. The forces of evil and *avodah zarah* were very well-developed in Egypt. Egypt was the hotbed of witchcraft, producing the greatest sorcerers. Hashem struck them and their gods time and again, to prove that they were totally ineffective. Already at the outset of the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians pronounced that only Hashem could perform such a feat (*Shemot* 8:15). During the plague of pestilence, the miracle of the distinction between the cattle of the Egyptians and that of Bnei Yisrael further proved this point.

What caused Pharaoh to harden his heart and not send out Bnei Yisrael was his mistrust of Moshe Rabbeinu as Hashem's agent, as mentioned above. As soon as he saw a deficiency in Moshe, he assumed Moshe

would be demoted from his position. Then there would be no emissary to take the Jews out of his land, and they would remain his slaves. This would also explain, according to the explanation of Rav Shwartz, why Pharaoh was not afraid of stealing Bnei Yisrael's animals after witnessing the tremendous miracles that had occurred. He saw a deficiency in Moshe, and that allayed all his fears.

In any event, from the beginning of the *makkot*, Pharaoh understood that Bnei Yisrael were slipping out of his grasp. Already at the plague of blood, they became free of his bondage. This is indicated in the Midrash describing the *makkah* (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10). All of the waters of Egypt converted to blood. The Egyptians found themselves without drinking water. They therefore bought water from the Jews. Had Bnei Yisrael still been enslaved to Pharaoh at that point, the Egyptians would have been able to seize all their water without having to pay them. The fact that they were forced to pay proves that the Jews were already on the road to freedom.

Four days prior to the fourteenth of Nisan, the time of *korban Pesach*, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to prepare the sheep and tie it to their bedposts. The Egyptians worshipped the sheep. How did Bnei Yisrael possess the boldness to tie the sheep to their bedposts in full view, without being afraid of incurring the wrath of the Egyptians?

It would seem appropriate to say that since the beginning of the plague of blood, the first of the *makkot*, the Egyptians had not served the sheep. This being the case, there was no problem regarding the status of the sheep. They were most fitting for the Pesach offering. Originally, all of the possessions of Bnei Yisrael actually belonged to the Egyptians, for "whatever a slave owns, belongs to his master," rendering the sheep unfit for a sacrifice. But, as explained before, from the start of the *makkot*, Bnei Yisrael were liberated from bondage to the Egyptians, causing that their sheep belonged completely to themselves.

We can also answer our question with the following two explanations. Firstly, although Pharaoh considered stealing the animals of the Jews

during the plague of pestilence, when all of the Egyptian animals were dying, he did not end up succeeding. Secondly, the reason why Hashem told Bnei Yisrael to tie the sheep to their bedposts in front of the Egyptians was in order to prove to them that their gods were powerless. They observed the Jews tying up their sheep, preparing them for slaughter, and did not react. They would finally come to the realization that their gods are helpless.

The Egyptians understood that their forms of *avodah zarah*, at least the animals which they worshipped, were worthless. Therefore, they decided to steal the animals of the Jews after the plague of pestilence. This was in contradiction to their belief that the sheep was holy and forbidden to touch, all the more so, to steal or purchase. Once they were shown that the sheep possessed no powers, they had no qualms about stealing them. Once the Egyptians ceased believing the sheep to be deities, and worshipping them, the sheep were not suspected of having been used for idol worship.

We might explain Pharaoh's hardened heart in the following manner. He attempted to scorn Moshe to the point that Moshe would give up and desist being Hashem's envoy. Then, Pharaoh would maintain control over Am Yisrael. Therefore, at the conclusion of the plague of hail, he proclaimed (*Shemot* 9:27), "Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones." Immediately afterward, he returned to his evilness, and hardened his heart once again. His admission to Hashem's righteousness in opposition to his own wickedness gave Moshe cause to believe that he would finally let Bnei Yisrael go. But just as soon as the *makkah* ended, Pharaoh made a mockery of Moshe, hardening his heart and refusing to let them leave. By this, he desired to break Moshe's spirit and cause him to despair.

The sefer *Kesef Nivchar*, written by my grandfather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy"a, states that Pharaoh indeed succeeded in shaming Moshe Rabbeinu. At the *makkah* of hail, Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray for the thunder and lightning to stop, which he did. In the end, the rains also ceased, although that had not even been mentioned. Moshe was ashamed

to approach Pharaoh afterward, to warn him of the upcoming plague of locusts. Hashem had to convince him to go.

Pharaoh preferred to harden his heart, knowing he would suffer more *makkot*. He believed that in the end, Moshe's spirit would break, and he would despair of his position as an agent of Hashem. Without an emissary, Bnei Yisrael would remain incarcerated in Egypt, slaves to him forever. This gave him the boldness to steal their animals during the plague of pestilence, as explained by Rabbi Schwartz, zt"l. He already imagined Moshe abandoning his position, leaving the Jews in Egypt as his slaves. What belongs to the servant belongs to the master (*Pesachim* 88b), and he therefore was permitted to take their possessions as he saw fit. In Hashem's kindness, Pharaoh's plans were thwarted. Moshe redeemed the Jews from Egypt against Pharaoh's wishes.

In Summary

- ◆ Pharaoh hardened his heart at the plague of pestilence, even after noting that all of the Jewish animals survived. How could this be?
- ◆ The Malbim explains the words “of the livestock of Israel not even one had died” to mean that one did actually perish. This was the animal of the man who was born from an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father.
- ◆ Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, explains that Pharaoh wavered in his faith in Moshe as an emissary of Hashem. Therefore, he hardened his heart at the plague of hail. He noticed that even the rain had ceased, although he had not requested that. Likewise, he saw that one of the Jews’ animals perished during the plague of pestilence. Therefore, when forewarning of the upcoming plague of the death of the firstborn, Moshe stated, “At about midnight,” instead of, “At midnight.”
- ◆ The sefer *Ginzei Yosef* states that Pharaoh considered stealing the animals of Bnei Yisrael which remained alive. Based on this, he explains how it was possible for the Jews to use the Egyptian animals for the *korban* Pesach. They were considered as having been used for *avodah zarah*. But

since they had originally been stolen from Bnei Yisrael, this did not pose a problem.

- ◆ We might explain this difficulty in another way. Already at the beginning of the *makkot*, Bnei Yisrael were liberated from bondage. The Egyptians saw Hashem's miracles and believed in Him. Therefore, they did not dare to take water from the Jews without payment during the plague of blood. For this reason, Bnei Yisrael did not fear tying the sheep to their bedposts in order to prepare them for use as *korbanot*. The Egyptians just doubted the veracity of Moshe Rabbeinu as Hashem's emissary. Therefore, they did not hesitate to steal the Jewish animals. Since these animals originally belonged to Bnei Yisrael, and Bnei Yisrael were liberated from slavery from the beginning of the *makkot*, they were not considered having been used for *avodah zarah*. Either Pharaoh did not succeed in actually stealing their animals, or after believing in Hashem, his nation abandoned idol worship. Proof of this is the fact that they had the boldness to contemplate stealing the sheep of Bnei Yisrael, an act deemed most abominable had they still been worshipping them.
- ◆ Another explanation of Pharaoh's hardening of his heart was that he wished to make a mockery of Moshe and bring him to despair. This would cause him to desist being Hashem's agent. According to Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, Moshe was shamed by the fact that the rain ceased during the plague of hail. Without an agent, Bnei Yisrael would remain under Pharaoh's rule.

Two Forces in Man

“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants and livestock in the field”

(*Shemot 9:20-21*)

The Steipler Gaon, zt”l, in his sefer *Kehillat Yaakov*, expresses surprise at this. How is it possible that there were Egyptians who still did not fear Hashem? They surely knew by now that all of Moshe’s words were fulfilled, since he was the emissary of Hashem. How could there have been people who dared to leave their livestock outdoors?

Rav Shach, zt”l, presents an explanation. Every person contains two opposing forces. One force encourages him to do good, whereas the other one draws him to evil. Pharaoh considered himself to be a deity, claiming that he did not need to relieve himself like other human beings. Although he was discovered by Moshe at the river, he returned to his palace and continued his charade. The power of evil within him overpowered his common sense, which told him that his secret was known to all. Instead of paying attention to his common sense, he foolishly maintained this falsehood.

Every person must be conscious of the two opposing forces within him and choose to cling only to good. The Egyptians who feared Hashem brought in their animals. They ceased believing in Pharaoh, for their good side overcame their evil. But those who left their livestock outdoors, although subconsciously believing in Hashem and in Moshe, continued wavering on the see-saw of good and evil, and were therefore not considered *yerei Hashem*.

I once caught a yeshiva student red-handed. He told me that although he was aware of the severity of the sin, he continued sinning, since he is

pulled in opposite directions, and he is completely mixed up. How, indeed, are we to deal with these conflicting forces within us? Setting times for learning *mussar* is effective in helping the power of good gain the upper hand. One who truly fears Hashem does not seek leniencies for himself.

In Summary

- ♦ The Steipler Gaon, zt”l, asks how there were Egyptians, who, after experiencing so many plagues, still did not fear Hashem during the plague of pestilence.
- ♦ Rav Shach, zt”l, explains that every person has two opposing forces within him. One pulls him to good, and one pulls him to bad. The Egyptians, who followed their good inclinations, brought their animals indoors. But the others, who felt the pull of both inclinations, did not bring in their animals.
- ♦ By means of learning *mussar*, a person gains the tools to overcome the pull toward evil and allow goodness to prevail.

Gems on Parashat Va'era

The Plague of Blood

“So says Hashem: Through this shall you know that I am Hashem; behold, with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood”

(Shemot 7:17)

Why did Hashem begin the punishment of the Egyptians with the plague of blood? There are various answers given, among them the following (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:9). When Hashem wishes to bring retribution upon a nation, He strikes their gods first. The Nile was the god of Egypt, and was therefore struck first, having its waters turn to blood.

It seems appropriate to add the following. Hashem wanted Moshe to ask Aharon to bring this plague instead of him. This is in accordance with the teaching of Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:4), “Do not throw stones into a well from which you drank.” Since the Nile had protected Moshe when he had been placed on it as an infant, it would show a lack of gratitude were he to strike it, turning its waters to blood (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10).

Hashem knew that Moshe was most scrupulous in maintaining the honor of his fellow man. Proof of this is his response when Hashem sent

him on the mission of redeeming the nation. He answered, “Send through whomever You will send,” asking that Hashem should choose his older brother, Aharon, as His emissary. Hashem wanted to teach Moshe to be just as vigilant in preserving the honor of the inanimate. Moshe learned this lesson and consequently refrained from striking the Nile in order to turn it to blood, as it had previously protected him. Hashem brought this plague first, specifically in order to transmit this message to Moshe.

We might add that the *gematria* of the word 血 (blood), adding one for the word itself, is equal to that of the word 人 (man). The plague of blood was a *tikkun* for the sin of Adam Harishon. When he sinned, the sparks of *kedushah* were dispersed throughout the world, reaching Egypt. By beginning the series of plagues, Hashem hinted that the sparks of Adam had received their *tikkun*. Since his sparks had a connection to blood, the very first plague was blood. The Arizal (see *Likutei Torah, Mikeitz*) explains that the words, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Mitzrayim,” refer to these sparks. Whoever partakes of the matzot brings a *tikkun* upon himself, for it contains sparks of *kedushah* from the time of Adam Harishon.

Pharaoh Hardens His Heart

“And Pharaoh hardened his heart even this time, and he did not send out the people”

(*Shemot 8:28*)

Pharaoh consistently hardened his heart throughout the *makkot*, which Hashem brought upon him and his nation. This is incredible. Pharaoh had already received a number of plagues, and he knew that the plague of pestilence was scheduled to come next, yet he still hardened his heart and remained stubborn. How was this possible?

When Torah and *emunah* are lacking, a person remains obstinate. The truth can be staring him in the face, and he can see the Hand of Hashem most clearly, but only the power of Torah counterbalances the force within a person which declares, “My might and the power of my hand have given me greatness.” Let us learn from the episode with Pharaoh that a person without Torah is groping in the dark. He will be blind even to matters in which the Hand of Hashem is blatant.

At *Kabbalat HaTorah*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu forced Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah (*Shabbat* 88a). After tasting of the pleasantness of Torah, they wished to accept it willingly, without any form of compulsion. When one has Torah, he sees the pure, undeniable truth.

Parashat *Beshalach* begins with the pasuk (*Shemot* 13:17), “It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people.” The Midrash cites a difficulty among the commentaries (*Shemot Rabbah* 20:3). We find that even Bilaam stated (*Bamidbar* 24:8), “It is G-d Who brought him out of Egypt.” Even Bilaam the Wicked realized that it was Hashem who took out Bnei Yisrael from Egypt. How can the Torah state, “When **Pharaoh** sent out the people”?

Chazal expound (*Shemot Rabbah* 20:3): Whose words were actualized? The words of Pharaoh, who said, “Nor will I send out Israel!” or the words of Hashem, Who commanded, “Send out My nation!”? The pasuk in Tehillim (147:15) states, “He Who dispatches His utterance earthward; His word runs swiftly.” Woe to the wicked, who attempt to nullify the word of Hashem. They are nothing but worms, and will disappear from the world. Hashem told Pharaoh, “You stated that you would not send out Yisrael. But I ordered you to send out the nation. Let’s see whose words will materialize.” Ultimately, Pharaoh himself came running to Moshe, falling at his feet and begging him to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt (*Shemot* 12:31). When did Hashem dispatch His utterance earthward? When Pharaoh dispatched Am Yisrael from Egypt.

Certainly the words of Hashem are what prevail. Why did Hashem see fit to enter into this exchange with Pharaoh in the first place? This should provide a lesson for all generations. One who is lacking Torah is capable

of ignoring and even denying the words of Hashem, to the point of expecting his own word to come to fruition. This is liable to happen when Torah, and its pleasant taste, is missing. Therefore, Pharaoh was under the delusion that his words would be realized. But Bilaam Harasha, who witnessed *Matan Torah*, knew that the entire matter was according to the word of Hashem. He understood that Hashem had taken the Jews out of Egypt in order to give them the Torah. When asked by his people if Hashem would destroy the world, He explained that Hashem was giving the Torah, which is called “might” (*Tehillim* 29:11) to His people, and therefore performing the wonders of *Matan Torah* (*Zevachim* 116a).

Haftarah of Parashat Va'era

Yechezkel's Prophecy about Mitzrayim

“In the tenth year, in the tenth [month], on the twelfth of the month, the word of Hashem came to me, saying: Son of Man, direct your face toward Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and prophesy concerning him and concerning all of Egypt”

(Yechezkel 29:1-2)

The *Navi* prophesied about Mitzrayim, and continued his words, “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great serpent that crouches within its rivers, who has said, ‘Mine is my river, and I have made myself.’ The land of Egypt will become desolate and a ruin; then they will know that I am Hashem – because he said, ‘The River is mine and I have made it.’ Therefore, behold I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt into destroyed and deserted ruins, from Migdal to Aswan to the border of Cush. The foot of a man will not traverse it, neither will the foot of an animal traverse it; and it will not be inhabited for forty years.”

Nevuchadnezzar was the emissary of Hashem in striking Egypt. But he had squandered all of his funds on the fortress he had erected for Tyre. The *Navi* continues his narrative, “Son of Man: Nevuchadnezzar, king of

Bavel, has pressed his army to perform a difficult labor against Tyre...and he and his army had no reward from Tyre for the labor that they had performed." Nevuchadnezzar refused to attack Egypt, for he had no resources from which to pay his soldiers. Hashem told Yechezkel Hanavi to tell Nevuchadnezzar that he could keep all of the booty of Egypt, as the pasuk states, "Behold, I am giving the land of Egypt to Nevuchadnezzar, king of Bavel; he will carry off its multitude and seize its booty and take its plunder, and that will be the recompense for his army. In return for the labor that he did there, I have given him the land of Egypt."

What are we meant to glean from the prophecy of Yechezkel, a Jewish prophet, regarding Nevuchadnezzar's sequestering of Egypt?

It seems that Hashem was teaching Bnei Yisrael not to place their trust in other nations. They had placed their trust in Egypt. Therefore, Hashem sent the king of Bavel to conquer them, devastating Egypt for the next forty years. This taught the Jews that Egypt was a very insecure place in which to place their security.

All of the Words of the Prophets are True

Yechezkel Hanavi prophesied that Egypt would lie in ruin for forty years. Even animals would not set foot there. Had the smallest of animals stepped into the country during that time, Yechezkel's prophecy would have been proven false. Since Yechezkel completely believed in his prophecy, he had no apprehensions regarding this statement. And, indeed, for the next forty years, not any living creature set foot in Egypt. This teaches us that all the words of our prophets are true.

Bo

Sanctify Yourself through That Which is Permitted to You

“Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh and said to him: So said Hashem, G-d of the Hebrews: Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me? Send out My people that they may serve Me!”

(*Shemot 10:3*)

The Admor of Alexander, in his sefer *Yismach Yisrael*, finds a difficulty with this pasuk. Hashem was the one who hardened Pharaoh's heart. How could Moshe and Aharon accuse Pharaoh of refusing to listen to Hashem's word? Was it Pharaoh's fault that he remained stubborn? Why was he punished with ten plagues if he was forced into that position?

Our Sages teach (*Yevamot* 20a), “Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you.” There are many aspects of life which do not fall under the category of the forbidden. But one who truly fears Hashem will erect fences around himself and refrain from these forms of conduct, in order to keep distant from actual sin. He will merit ascending in levels of *kedushah* and *yirat Shamayim*. There is no comparison between one who serves his Maker out of fear and one who serves Him out of love (see

Yoma 86a). One who sanctifies himself by refraining from that which is inherently permitted to him does so out of love for his Creator. Therefore, he merits becoming sanctified and exalted before Hashem (*Vayikra* 19:1; *Ramban, Parashat Kedoshim*).

One who desists from doing acts which are not intrinsically forbidden will certainly refrain from transgressing those which are. If he had the moral courage to resist the temptation to do something essentially permitted, all the more so will he find within himself the strength to withdraw from doing something which is forbidden. However, one who never accustomed himself to being vigilant in those areas which are intrinsically permitted will find it extremely difficult to stand up to the *Yetzer Hara* when he presents him with a blatant transgression.

This can be compared to one who attends a wedding feast and gorges on whatever food is available. When he is quite full and satisfied, he is liable to wander into forbidden turf. He may gaze at forbidden sights, for he has not trained himself to erect barriers between the outside world and himself. The basis of *kedushah* is overcoming one's desires. One who accustoms himself to abstain from physical desires, even those which are permissible, will eventually rise in *kedushah* and *taharah*.

Pharaoh was the *kelippah* incarnate (see *Sha'ar Hapesukim, Vayeishev*). He did not subdue his lusts at all. We certainly would not have expected Pharaoh to suppress his passions completely, all the more so to sanctify himself in permitted areas. Nevertheless, he should have recognized the Creator, owing to the numerous opportunities which had been presented to him.

Hashem tested Pharaoh to see if he would recognize His illuminating rulership, in light of all the miracles he had witnessed, or would he just continue in his decadent demeanor, ignoring Hashem's Presence? When Hashem observed how Pharaoh closed his ears and his heart to His message, He hardened his heart, in punishment for his wayward ways. The *makkot* were justly sent upon him for refusing to acknowledge

Hashem's Presence. Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart only after this was proven. Even after all of the miracles he had witnessed, he remained stubborn.

Pharaoh should have displayed some degree of remorse at the hardening of his heart. He should have at least mitigated the level of the labor of Bnei Yisrael. But he refused to do so. He did not demonstrate even a measure of regret or sorrow in regard to his situation, refusing to subject himself to Moshe in the least. Therefore, Moshe appeared before him with a grievance, rebuking him for his refusal to accept the word of Hashem.

Conversely, we read of the case of Elisha ben Avuyah, also called Acher. He was once riding a horse on Shabbat, with Rabbi Meir, his disciple, walking beside him. Suddenly, he stopped Rabbi Meir in his tracks, stating that he may walk no further, for they had reached the *techum Shabbat*. To which Rabbi Meir countered, "You are so proficient in all aspects of Torah; why don't you do teshuvah and mend your evil ways?"

Elisha ben Avuyah responded that he was interested in correcting his ways, but he had heard a Heavenly Voice declare the following: Everyone has the opportunity to do teshuvah, except for Elisha ben Avuyah (*Chagigah* 15a). With these words, Acher expressed his remorse over his condition and his desire to do teshuvah, although he was prevented from it. Pharaoh, on the other hand, followed the dictates of his heart, displaying no regret whatsoever. This was the accusation against him, and this is what warranted the Ten Plagues.

We might add the following. The last letters of the words **מתי מאנת** (when will you refuse) are numerically equivalent to the word **קדוש** (holy). And the last letters of the phrase **לענוות מפני** (to be humbled before Me) are also. Pharaoh was obligated to sanctify himself, ascending above his passions and lusts. He arrogantly refused to be humbled before Hashem. This arrogance was the cause of his downfall. After recognizing

Hashem, he should have submitted himself to Him and not continued in his denial.

A liberal “Rabbi” once approached me, asking for my blessing in a specific matter. I was quite surprised at his humbleness, that he approached an Orthodox Rabbi and subjected himself before someone who seemingly contradicted his entire world outlook. He informed me that for a long time, he had been involved in discussions with his friend. This friend convinced him to approach me and discuss various aspects of Judaism. I couldn’t spend a lot of time with this man, for there were long lines of people waiting outside my door, for advice or a blessing. But what I did manage to tell him was most effective, sent to my lips from Heaven. I quoted to him the first pasuk of Chumash *Shemot*, “And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household came.” I emphasized the words “with Yaakov,” yelling them into his ear numerous times. I noticed that his face turned green, and he looked like he was about to faint.

He asked me, “How did you know that the man who sent me to you is my friend, Yaakov?”

I responded that I really hadn’t known, but Hashem had put the words into my mouth. Since he arose from his low level and brought himself to approach a religious Rabbi, one who contradicted his entire world outlook, I was given the right words, which would shake him of his lethargy and cause him to do teshuvah.

Had Pharaoh taken advantage of the various opportunities which presented themselves to recognize Hashem’s Presence, Hashem surely would not have hardened his heart. But since he increased his wickedness, demanding that Moshe and Aharon be removed from his presence, he was held accountable. He and his nation were punished with the Ten Plagues, as they deserved.

In Summary

- ♦ If Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, why did Moshe accuse him of refusing to send out Bnei Yisrael? Where was his free choice? Why did he get punished for something which was seemingly beyond his control?
- ♦ "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." By abstaining from those things which are permitted to a person, it will be easier to resist doing that which is prohibited. This was Pharaoh's failing. Not only did he fulfill all of his lusts and passions, he closed his eyes to seeing the Presence of Hashem, in spite of all the opportunities presented to him.
- ♦ Hashem indeed hardened Pharaoh's heart. But this was only because this was the path Pharaoh had charted for himself. Hashem gave him the chance to express remorse over his attitudes, but he showed no signs of remorse whatsoever. Conversely, despite hearing that his teshuvah would never be accepted, Acher felt regret over his actions.
- ♦ The last letters of the words **מתי מאנת** (when will you refuse), as well as those of **לענות מפני** (to be humbled before Me) are numerically equivalent to the word **קדוש**. Pharaoh arrogantly refused to humble himself before Hashem and thus lacked *kedushah*. This was the beginning of his downfall, according him the notoriety as the paragon of impurity.

The Youngsters with the Elders

“So Moshe and Aharon were returned to Pharaoh, and he said to them: Go and serve Hashem, your G-d; which ones are going? Moshe said: With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go, because it is a festival of Hashem for us”

(Shemot 10:8-9)

The gaon, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, clarifies the argument between Pharaoh and Moshe. By asking, “Which ones are going?” Pharaoh meant that they should take only those who were capable of going of their own accord. But they should leave behind the youngsters, who had no understanding of sacrifices, as well as the elders, who could not make the arduous journey in the Wilderness.

Moshe answered that the youngsters and the elders would join “because it is a festival of Hashem for us.” All members of a Jewish household are encouraged to rejoice on the festivals (*Devarim* 16:14), even though they are not all obligated to do so. So too, all members of the nation should participate in the journey through the Wilderness to join the festival of Hashem.

I would like to expound on these words. The youth were most certainly influenced by the physicality and *tumah* which were rampant in Mitzrayim, which was even called “the land’s nakedness” (*Bereishit* 42:9). “Nakedness” alludes to their defilement. They therefore had no interest in joining the nation into the Wilderness. This was true especially after the plague of blood, when Bnei Yisrael became wealthy due to the sale of pure drinking water (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10). This wealth surely held the

youth captive in Egypt. But Moshe was convinced that as soon as they would leave the confines of Egypt and enter a place of spirituality, they would accept the Torah willingly. The pasuk in Tehillim states (34:9), “Contemplate and see that Hashem is good.” Once they would taste the beauty of Torah, they would not be able to part with it. The event would be considered “a festival of Hashem for us.” Moshe wished to educate them with this understanding. Then they would automatically merit receiving the Torah.

Pharaoh responded (*Shemot* 10:10), “So be Hashem with you as I will send you forth with your children! Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces.” According to Rabbi Yoshiyah Pinto, who claims that Pharaoh argued with Moshe in regard to the youth, we must clarify what Pharaoh gained by saying this. Also, what did Moshe accomplish by declaring that the youth would taste the Torah and then come to love it themselves?

We can suggest that Pharaoh doubted the children’s desire to learn Torah and rejoice in it. “The evil intent is opposite your faces” meant that perhaps the children would regard the Torah as evil, *chas v’shalom*. Moshe refused to accept Pharaoh’s words. Although the Torah seems difficult at first, once one has immersed himself in it, he never wants to leave it.

Moshe said that he would take the sheep, as well. He wanted to impress upon the youth that the sheep are not *avodah zarah*, as was believed by the Egyptians, who worshipped it. Pharaoh stated, “Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces.” Chazal state (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 392) that he was referring to the sin of the Golden Calf. Pharaoh wished to demonstrate just what was destined to result from taking along the sheep: the *Chet Ha’egel*.

Pharaoh added (*Shemot* 10:11), “Not so; let the men go now. Serve Hashem, for that is what you seek!” And he drove them out from Pharaoh’s presence.” Pharaoh’s men pressured him into calling for Moshe and Aharon and discussing the matter, for the land of Egypt was quickly deteriorating. He was convinced, and led a debate, limiting the number of

people leaving the country. When he saw that Moshe had no interest in compromise, Pharaoh chased him away.

We can learn something about the ways of the *Yetzer Hara* from this exchange. The *Yetzer Hara* seeks ways to cause people to stumble in sin. He will leave a person only when the person is steadfastly opposed to him. When Pharaoh saw how Moshe and Aharon stood staunchly against him, not heeding his claims at all, he gave up and chased them away.

“And he drove them away.” Let us take note of Rashi’s words on this pasuk: “This is an abbreviated verse, which does not specify who is the one who chased.” According to what we just said, Pharaoh the haughty was the embodiment of the *Yetzer Hara*. He simply could not subject himself to Moshe. The pasuk does not specify who chased away whom, because it wishes to teach us the following: The *Yetzer Hara* is chased away from a person who holds onto his principles. When one stands firm in the face of his *Yetzer Hara*, not veering one iota from them, his *Yetzer Hara* simply disappears.

One has the ability to flee from his *Yetzer Hara* and not draw him into face-to-face combat. A Jewish man told me that he entered a store in order to take care of some business. There he encountered a woman who posed a spiritual threat to him. He decided to forgo the transaction. Instead, he picked up his feet and fled from the place, without a backward glance.

We might say that Moshe chased himself away from Pharaoh. He understood that the discussion was purposeless, and so he fled from the place, not wishing to remain in the domain of evil for one extra moment.

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe and Pharaoh had a debate regarding the importance of bringing the youth along with the nation into the Wilderness. The Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, explains the following. Pharaoh declared that only those who went of their own accord should be allowed to leave. But Moshe responded that the elders and the youth would join them, as they, too,

participate in the festivals, and Bnei Yisrael were now going to celebrate a festival before Hashem.

- ♦ It would seem fitting to add the following. Pharaoh felt that the youth would not be interested in spiritual pursuits, but would rather remain in Egypt, with its glitter and glitz. But Moshe countered that after they would taste spiritual pleasure, they would never wish to return to Egypt.
- ♦ “Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces.” The Rif comments that Pharaoh was indicating that spirituality will be considered “evil” in the eyes of the youth. Better they should stay behind, he claimed.
- ♦ Another explanation of these words is that they refer to the sin of the Golden Calf, which Pharaoh said would be the outcome of bringing along the sheep. Bnei Yisrael would use them to serve *avodah zarah*.
- ♦ “And he drove them away.” Rashi states that it does not specify who chased whom. The one who did the actual chasing is irrelevant; the purpose is to teach us how the *Yetzer Hara* persuades a person to sin.

Borrowing the Wealth of the Egyptians

“Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels. Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and in the eyes of the people”

(Shemot 11:2-3)

Hakadosh Baruch Hu enjoined Bnei Yisrael to borrow gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians. The Torah emphasizes that Hashem granted

the Jews favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. The Egyptians respected them for, despite the fact that they had entered their homes during the plague of darkness and had seen their great wealth with their own eyes, they had not touched a thing. They waited until after the plague passed, and only then did they ask permission to borrow the items, with the approval of the Egyptians (*Shemot Rabbah* 14:3).

Why did Hashem maneuver matters so that Bnei Yisrael had to request the items? Why didn't He contrive that the Egyptians would hand over the vessels to Bnei Yisrael out of their own good will? Much embarrassment would have been prevented this way. Furthermore, why were the Jews told to ask permission to receive the items? They could have demanded them as compensation for all the years of backbreaking labor.

The slavery in Egypt was unbearable. Thousands of Jews, among them infants, perished due to the hard work. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:34) relates that Pharaoh suffered from leprosy. To relieve his ailment, he would soak in the blood of three hundred Jewish children daily! For this alone, they had every right to demand the Egyptians' gold and silver. What was the point of asking their permission to take it?

"You departed from Egypt, from the house of bondage" (*Shemot* 13:3). Egypt was one big house of bondage. While there, Bnei Yisrael feared the Egyptians as a slave fears his master. As long as they were there, in spite of the onset of the plagues, they considered themselves slaves. They simply could not demand the Egyptian treasures as compensation for their hard work. They were prevented by their slave mentality.

In order for Hashem's promise to Avraham (*Bereishit* 15:13) "And they will serve them, and they will oppress them for four hundred years...and afterwards they will leave with great wealth" to be fulfilled in completion, Hashem commanded that they ask for the vessels of Egypt. The Jews would not feel afraid to merely ask for the vessels, as opposed to demanding them as payment. Rashi expounds (*Shemot* 11:2), "So that that righteous man Avraham should not say: He fulfilled in them the decree,

They will enslave them and they will afflict them, but He did not fulfill in them, And afterwards they will depart with great possessions.”

Chazal add (see *Shemot Rabbah* 24:2) that only after Am Yisrael saw the Egyptian horsemen sinking into the depths of the sea, did they finally feel completely severed from Egyptian bondage. When they perceived their tormentors drowning before their eyes, they finally believed they were liberated. This feeling of freedom was lacking when they were in Egypt. They did not have the boldness to demand the vessels of the Egyptians as compensation for all their years of toil.

We are still left with the question as to why Hashem did not orchestrate things in a different way. Why didn't He have the Egyptians turn to the Jews, of their own accord, and offer them their precious vessels? Perhaps we can say that had Am Yisrael received the vessels of the Egyptians without toil and effort, it would have brought them to the level of “Yeshurun became fat and kicked” (*Devarim* 32:15). They would have attributed their great wealth to their own power (*ibid.* 8:17). Now that Hashem was commanding them to request the vessels of the Egyptians, Bnei Yisrael recognized that everything comes from Him. They had nothing to be proud of whatsoever, for everything was given gratis, not in reward for their labor.

Chazal explain (see *Meshech Chochmah*, *Devarim* 29:16, in the name of the *Mechilta*, *Bo* 84), that when Bnei Yisrael were searching in the Egyptian homes during the plague of darkness, they saw that their homes were full of idolatry. They understood that their Egyptian taskmasters were, in actuality, slaves to vanity and futility, far from true freedom. Hashem wanted to impress upon them the fact that one who serves idols is a slave. There is no true free man except for one who is involved in Torah. Hashem enjoined Bnei Yisrael to borrow the Egyptian vessels to drive home this point. One who pursues materialism is a slave to the vanities of this world.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu reminded Bnei Yisrael that although they may feel completely free of Egyptian bondage, they must bear in mind the

following: As long as they have not yet received the holy Torah and its mitzvot, they are still enslaved to their *Yetzer Hara* and the vanities of this world. Only after they would stand at the foot of Har Sinai and proclaim, as one, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” would they merit true freedom, as it says (*Avot* 6:2), “You can have no freer man than one who engages in the study of the Torah.”

In Summary

- ◆ Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to borrow the gold and silver vessels of the Egyptians. Why didn’t Hashem cause the Egyptians to offer their vessels to Bnei Yisrael? Furthermore, why didn’t they ask for these items as gifts, as compensation for all of their years of slavery?
- ◆ It would seem appropriate to say the following. Bnei Yisrael were not psychologically fit to demand the vessels as payment for their years of bondage. In spite of all the miracles and plagues which they had observed, they were still afraid of their Egyptian taskmasters. They were still in slave mode. However, Hashem wished to fulfill His promise to Avraham Avinu, that his children would depart from Egypt with great wealth. Therefore, He had them ask to borrow the items.
- ◆ Why didn’t Hashem cause the Egyptians to offer their vessels to the Jews, rather than commanding the Jews to hearken to His command to search for these items? It is because this would have given Bnei Yisrael the feeling that it was their prowess which gained this wealth for them, and He wished to prevent this. Bnei Yisrael needed to recognize that everything comes from Him.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael were freed of their slave mentality only after witnessing the Egyptians drowning in the sea. But even then, Hashem told them they were not completely free men. True freedom is achieved only after one has received the Torah, for there is no freer man than one who engages in the study of Torah.

The Wealth of Egypt and the Wealth of the Sea

“Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels. Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and in the eyes of the people”

(Shemot 11:2-3)

Rashi explains that the word **אֶלְךָ** (please) is always used as an expression of request. Hashem requested that Moshe tell Bnei Yisrael to ask the Egyptians for their wealth in order that the righteous man, Avraham Avinu, should not say, “He fulfilled in them the decree *They will enslave them and they will afflict them*, but He did not fulfill for them *And afterwards they will depart with great wealth*.

This raises several questions. In His decree to Avraham, Hashem promised Bnei Yisrael treasures of gold and silver.

Included in this promise was that Bnei Yisrael would find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. This being the case, what was the purpose of asking the people to borrow the vessels? Wouldn’t Bnei Yisrael jump at the opportunity to get rich quick? Did they need to be cajoled into borrowing the items from the Egyptians? When a rich man grants his friend access to his treasury, to take whatever he wishes, he does not need to plead with him!

Furthermore, wouldn’t it have been more respectable for the Egyptians to offer the Jews their precious items, of their own accord? It is much more honorable to offer a gift to the poor man before he asks for it.

The last question, which many commentaries have raised, is the following. Why was Hashem so concerned that Avraham might have a grievance upon discovering that He had not taken Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt with great wealth, as He had promised? Avraham was the greatest believer; how could he be suspected of lacking faith in this area, *rachmana litzlan*?

Am Yisrael was divided in two. The first group consisted of the tzaddikim, who viewed money not only as unnecessary, but as a burden. There were many great men in our history who resisted wealth, in order not to be mired in the world of business. This would detract considerably from their Torah study. Even when one is involved with the needs of the community, this may negatively affect his learning.

We find this to be the case regarding Mordechai Hatzaddik. At the end of Megillat Esther, the pasuk states (*Esther* 10:3), “Mordechai...found favor with the multitude of his brothers.” But not with all of them. Chazal explain (*Megillah* 16b) that some of his brethren – the members of Sanhedrin – separated from him, for he decreased his Torah study. He was forced to spend more of his time involved with the needs of Am Yisrael. All the more so, one who decreases his Torah study for reasons that are not connected to public service, but just to increase his bank account, is held accountable. Therefore, the tzaddikim in Egypt did not desire to partake of the country’s wealth at all.

Conversely, the second group had an innate desire for money. They were extremely enthusiastic regarding the treasures of the Egyptians. They did not need to be asked twice to borrow vessels. They did not even need to be asked once.

Hashem’s command, then, was directed at the tzaddikim, who loathed materialism, which detracts from Torah study and mitzvah performance. Hashem had to beseech them to take of the spoils of Egypt. This was to avert a scenario in which Avraham would notice that some of the Jews left with riches, and some without. He would not have been aware that there were those who despised money, due to their righteousness.

Hashem begged these people to borrow the vessels; their taking them would thus be a mitzvah.

The group of money-lovers also needed this command. They were suspected of not using their newfound gains appropriately. They may even have squandered them for sinful purposes. Therefore, Hashem arranged it so that they received the spoils at His request, in the form of a mitzvah. This would impress upon them that it all came from Him, and they would remember to use it only for the purpose of a mitzvah.

On a deeper level, Hashem was afraid that hidden in the gold and silver of Egypt was *kelippah* and *tumah*. We find that at the end of his days, Avraham Avinu gave gifts to the children of Keturah and sent them away (*Bereishit* 25:6). Chazal relate (*Sanhedrin* 91a) that he gave them names of impurity, so that they should not adhere to his possessions, thereby defiling them. Thus, Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the wealth of Egypt in the form of a mitzvah. The sanctity of the mitzvah would peel away the *kelippah* and all other forms of impurity, which had been surrounding the spoils.

According to this, the spoils of Egypt were consecrated only for mitzvot. How, then, could Bnei Yisrael have fashioned the Golden Calf, which was formed of this silver and gold? This is explained by the fact that it was the *Erev Rav*, the admixture of Egyptians who clung to the Jewish nation at their departure from Egypt, who took the spoils with ulterior motives, eventually fashioning the Golden Calf and causing Bnei Yisrael to participate in this sin. Bnei Yisrael themselves used the wealth for the construction of the Mishkan.

We might further explain that the gold used to form the Golden Calf came from the spoils of the sea. The spoils of Egypt and the spoils of the sea were intrinsically different. Whereas in Egypt, the nation was enjoined to borrow the vessels, fulfilling a mitzvah amidst *kedushah*, the wealth of the sea was an entirely different matter.

"Moshe caused Israel to journey from the Yam Suf" (*Shemot* 15:22). Rashi explains that Moshe had to "move them against their will" from the

sea shore, for the Egyptians had adorned their horses with ornaments of gold and silver and precious stones. Bnei Yisrael were so involved in amassing this wealth that they did not want to journey onward. The spoils taken from the Egyptians at the sea were greater than the spoils they took from Egypt, as it says (*Shir Hashirim* 1:11), “Necklaces of gold we will make for you, along with spangles of silver.” They needed to be literally pulled away from the plunder at the sea.

This posed a great accusation against Bnei Yisrael. How could it be that, after witnessing such tremendous miracles at the Yam Suf, they still had such a passion for gold and silver, to the degree that Moshe had to force them away? How could it be that, after seeing the revelations of the *Shechinah* and exclaiming “This is my G-d and I will beautify Him” (*Shemot* 15:2), they fell upon the spoils of the Egyptians as one who finds a magnificent treasure? The maid servant saw at the Yam Suf revelations that even Yechezkel ben Buzi did not see in his prophecy (*Mechilta, Beshalach, Parashat Hashirah* 3). They should have refrained from taking this plunder, or at least displayed less enthusiasm in doing so.

Why did Hashem grant them spoils as they left Egypt? Why didn’t He simply wait until after *Kriyat Yam Suf*, when they obtained the spoils there? It seemed certain that after witnessing the great miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf*, they would not pay any attention to the wealth of the sea. Therefore, Hashem ensured they would attain their wealth from the spoils of Egypt. As it turned out, they not only showed great interest in the spoils of the sea, they fell upon them voraciously, to the point that they needed to be literally forced to move on.

Instead of Bnei Yisrael warranting praise for being moved by the great miracles that took place, they were condemned for being drawn after riches. This censure added to the force of the *kelippah*, which had adhered to the wealth at the sea. This is hinted at in the words of the pasuk describing the spoils of the sea (*Shir Hashirim* 1:11), **נקודות הכסף** (spangles of silver), whose last letters are numerically equivalent to the word **לילית** (one of the impure forces). This impure force adhered to the silver they plundered at the sea.

The spangles of silver refer to the fickleness of money. On the one hand, it can attach itself to the *kelippah*, pulling its master into the snare of sin, as was the case in the sin of the Golden Calf. Shlomo Hamelech referred to this aspect of wealth in his statement (*Kohelet* 5:9), “A lover of money will never be satisfied with money.” On the other hand, money can be a catalyst for great things. Supporting Torah scholars and building the Mishkan, as they did with the spoils of Mitzrayim, the “spangles of silver,” are examples of mitzvot which can be accomplished by means of riches.

The word נקְדָה (spangle) means a dot. This teaches us that money is merely a single dot. It has no intrinsic value. It can be used either for good or for bad. This is borne out by the juxtaposition of the spoils of Egypt and the spoils of the sea.

Hashem commanded that Bnei Yisrael take riches from their Egyptian neighbors, instead of having the Egyptians offer their wealth of their own accord. He was afraid the Egyptians would inject impurities of the *kelippah* into their wealth. Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). Who knows where the *kelippah* might have led them? Only by performing the mitzvah in its purest form would they succeed in peeling away the layers of *kelippah* and *tumah*.

The word which Hashem uses in telling Moshe to speak to Bnei Yisrael is דֹבֶר (speak), which is a harsh term. Hashem was like a loving father, who commands his son to eat well, or to take his medicine. He speaks firmly, but with love. Likewise, Hashem spoke to Am Yisrael in a harsh tone, which stemmed from his great love toward them. He desired that they take the wealth of Egypt in fulfillment of His command. They would thus remove the danger of the *kelippah*, which was hidden in the money and has the power to take a person out of this world.

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zt”l, was once approached by a Jew who had found a pure silver tray that had originally been used for *avodah zarah*. He guarded this tray fiercely, for it brought him great wealth. Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto saw, through *ruach hakodesh*, that the source of this

man's wealth was *avodah zarah*. He approached the man and ordered him to burn all of his possessions, for the *kelippah* of *avodah zarah* was attached to them, *rachmana litzlan*.

One who invests his heart's desires in money, feeling it is paramount in his life, should suspect that the force of the *kelippah* has adhered to it. Who knows if his money will not bring him harm? But one who cherishes his money as a means for mitzvot, such as supporting Torah and giving *tzedakah* to Torah scholars and poor people, is protected from harm in the *zechut* of the mitzvah.

This may be one reason why Hashem commanded us to give one-tenth of our earnings to *tzedakah* and to increase our acts of charity. This ensures that our money remains free from the force of *kelippah*. One who spends all his time amassing wealth, never sharing any of it with the less fortunate, will become harmed by his riches.

In Summary

- ♦ Why was it necessary for Hashem to beseech Bnei Yisrael to borrow vessels from the Egyptians, since it was for their own benefit? Why didn't Hashem arrange it so that the Egyptians would offer their wealth to Bnei Yisrael of their own accord?
- ♦ There were two types of people in Am Yisrael – the tzaddikim, who despised money, and the masses, who enjoyed it.
- ♦ Hashem requested of both these types to borrow vessels from the Egyptians. The tzaddikim needed to be asked, due to their aversion to money, and the public were asked, in order that they should consecrate this money for a mitzvah. Hashem was afraid that when Avraham would see the tzaddikim leave Egypt empty-handed, he would suspect Him of breaking His promise that Bnei Yisrael would leave with great wealth.
- ♦ Hashem arranged for the spoils of Egypt to be obtained by way of a mitzvah for two reasons. The first was that Bnei Yisrael would use it for good things, in the knowledge that it was Hashem Who had bestowed it

upon them. And the second was in order to remove the *kelippah* and *tumah* which may have adhered to it.

- ♦ The Golden Calf was formed either by the wealth of the *Eirev Rav*, or by the spoils of the sea, which Bnei Yisrael were held accountable for, due to their over-exuberance in gathering them. Moshe had to literally remove them from the sea's shore against their will.
- ♦ “Necklaces of gold we will make for you, along with spangles of silver” refers to the tremendous wealth Bnei Yisrael gained at the sea and in Egypt. The last letters of the phrase נקודות הכסף (spangles of silver) have the same *gematria* as the word לילית, one of the impure forces.
- ♦ Hashem told Moshe to “speak” to Pharaoh, using the strong term דבר. But He said it out of love. This is like a father, who commands his son to eat healthfully and take his medicine.
- ♦ Wealth that has connections to *avodah zarah* is tainted by the *kelippah*. Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zt”l, ordered a wealthy man to destroy all of his possessions, which were affected in this way.

Bnei Yisrael Were Protected by a Thread of Grace

“Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels”

(*Shemot 11:2*)

Why does Hashem refer to the Egyptians as “fellows?” Were they friends of the Jews? Moreover, why did the Jews need the wealth of the Egyptians? Throughout the entire year of the plagues, Bnei Yisrael gained

wealth. For instance, Chazal explain (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10) that during the plague of blood, the Egyptians were forced to purchase water from the Jews, for theirs had been changed into blood. Furthermore, Hashem knew that at the sea, the plunder would be fantastic, for the Egyptians would bring along all their treasures. Why, then, was it necessary to borrow vessels from the Egyptians on their way out?

Rashi explains that Hashem requested Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael to ask the Egyptians for their wealth, in order to fulfill His promise to Avraham Avinu that after suffering slavery in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael would leave with great wealth.

How are we to perceive Avraham's complaint against Hashem (*Berachot* 9a)? There were many incidents in his life in which he could have voiced complaint, but kept his peace. For example, he could have complained regarding *Akeidat Yitzchak*, for Hashem had promised him (*Bereishit* 21:12) that he would have descendants from Yitzchak. He remained silent then. Why would he voice a complaint now, regarding the wealth that Hashem had promised his descendants?

On Shabbat Hagadol, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to take sheep and prepare them for the *korban Pesach*. A great miracle occurred. Although the Egyptians observed the Jews taking their idols, the sheep, and sacrificing them, they merely gritted their teeth and remained silent (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana* 5:17; *Shemot Rabbah* 16:3). The Egyptians finally understood that Pharaoh had deceived them all along. They instinctively realized that they had no choice in the matter. A massive *makkah* was on the horizon.

Similarly, Hashem gave the Jews favor in the eyes of the Egyptians before they left Egypt. The Egyptians loaded them down with treasures. Even though the Jews had gained wealth during the plague of blood, and they were destined to receive even more at the sea, Hashem did not want them to feel that they just discovered some plunder. He wanted them to view their wealth as an acquisition bestowed upon them. This is why He had them request it from the Egyptians.

Avraham certainly would not hold a grievance against Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. He would have preferred no contact whatsoever between his progeny and the gentiles. He felt that once the Jews would find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, they would mingle with them. Avraham therefore preferred that Bnei Yisrael take no wealth along with them. This is the meaning of Rashi's words, "So that the righteous man, Avraham, should not say: He fulfilled in them the decree *They will enslave them and they will afflict them*, but He did not fulfill in them *And afterwards they will depart with great wealth*." They would leave loaded down with physical wealth, but fall short in spirituality. The close contact with the Egyptians would influence them negatively.

Avraham himself was vigilant in this area. We find that he separated from Lot, because he did not want his disciples to become influenced by his negative traits. Likewise, Sarah requested of him to chase out Yishmael, for he was liable to have a negative effect on Yitzchak. She feared for Yitzchak's future, and Avraham obeyed her. Similarly, the halachot regarding the prohibition of eating food cooked by a gentile and wine produced by gentiles are in order to prevent us from mingling with them and being adversely influenced (see *Avodah Zarah* 35b; *Rashi*, ibid.).

We indeed find that the minimal amount of mingling with the *Eirev Rav* had devastating results. They were the ones who convinced Bnei Yisrael to fashion the Golden Calf. This is what Avraham feared. It is likely that Bnei Yisrael themselves were afraid to get too close to the Egyptians. Therefore, Hashem asked Moshe to speak to them, in order to alleviate their qualms. They were guaranteed not to be negatively influenced by this contact, for Hashem promised to protect them.

Avraham rejoiced from his place on High when he observed that Bnei Yisrael were not detrimentally affected in Egypt. This was in fulfillment of the pasuk (*Chavakuk* 3:2), "In wrath, remember to be merciful." Although Bnei Yisrael were at the forty-ninth level of defilement, Hashem had mercy upon them and did not allow the Egyptians to approach them. The fact that Hashem upheld His promise was proof that He would surely uphold His promise to bring them into Eretz Yisrael and fulfill all He had said.

Now we can understand why the word “fellow” was used to describe the Egyptians. Even if the Egyptians were to show affability toward the Jews, the Jews had nothing to fear from this form of friendliness. Hashem promised to protect them with a thread of grace.

A Thread of Grace Was Drawn upon Bnei Yisrael, Preventing the Egyptians from Cleaving to Them

“Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt” (*Shemot* 11:3). With these words, the Torah continues explaining why Bnei Yisrael had nothing to fear. A special thread of grace was drawn upon them by Hashem, to prevent their mingling with the Egyptians. The Egyptians perceived this holy protection and were therefore cautious in their dealings with Bnei Yisrael. This is the protection mentioned in the pasuk (*Devarim* 28:10), “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you.”

Chazal tell us that many Egyptians converted before the Exodus (*Shemot Rabbah* 18:10). The pasuk describes Moshe (*Shemot* 11:3) in the following way: “The man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of the people.” Moshe, who was equivalent to all of Bnei Yisrael, was favored with a special grace. It was a grace of *kedushah*, which was apparent to all. We find that when Esther entered the king’s chamber, she too was granted a thread of grace by Hashem, and immediately found favor in Achashveirosh’s eyes (*Megillah* 13a). The Gemara states that one who studies Torah at night has a thread of favor drawn upon him in the daytime (*Chagigah* 12b). It was this thread of grace which prevented the Egyptians from having an adverse effect on the Jews.

“But against all the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue” (*Shemot* 11:7). The “dog” is a reference to the *kelippah*. The Egyptians were extremely impure. Chazal state (*Kiddushin* 49b) that ten measures of witchcraft descended to this world; Egypt received nine of them. Egypt was the “nakedness of the land,” an allusion to their depraved mentality. A man would have improper thoughts regarding a strange woman whom

he had never met before, due to the impurity in the atmosphere. Naturally, Bnei Yisrael would have been affected by the rampant corruption. Egypt was the hotbed of the *sitra achra*. But the *kelippah* had no control over Bnei Yisrael, and this frightened the Egyptians, preventing them from causing them harm.

We can take a lesson from this. Only one who has Torah and *yirat Shamayim* is helped by Hashem to maintain his spiritual level. A person often rides a bus or goes on trips. He is liable to fall in spirituality, but Hashem protects him. The grace which Bnei Yisrael were granted in Egypt was a complete gift from Hashem. They had not yet received the Torah, and they were enslaved by the Egyptians. Hashem granted them this thread of grace as a free gift. Once they accepted the Torah, through its powers, they merited entering Eretz Yisrael, for the Torah shields and protects (*Sotah* 21a). This thread of grace is what guarded them from the influence of the Canaanite nations.

The Name Pesach Teaches a Lesson in Serving Hashem

“You shall say: It is a Pesach feast-offering to Hashem, Who skipped over the houses of the Children of Israel” (*Shemot* 12:27). The holiday of Pesach is also known as *Chag Hamatzot*. It would seem more appropriate to call the holiday by this name. The name *Pesach* is a reference to the *korban* which they brought the day before the actual holiday. But we eat matzot throughout the festival. Why, then, is the holiday not referred to as *Chag Hamatzot*?

The name *Pesach* teaches us a wonderful lesson. Hashem *pasach* (passed over) the Jewish homes. This means that He protected His people from the *kelippah*, which passed over their homes, as well. The Egyptians passed over the Jewish homes and did not react to their taking of the sheep. A person, too, must learn to “pass over” his aveirot, i.e., avoid doing them, just as Hashem passed over the sins of Bnei Yisrael and bonded with them. One must ignore the temptations of sin that come his way and focus on doing mitzvot. The name of the holiday *Chag Hamatzot* shares a root with *hamitzvot* (the mitzvot). The two mitzvot required in

Egypt, on that first Pesach, were *brit milah* and *korban Pesach*. In the merit of these mitzvot, Hashem passed over their homes.

Our Rabbinical authorities (*Shulchan Aruch* 429:1) mention the idea of **קמַח אֶת פְּסָחָה** (Passover provisions for the needy). The word **קמַח** is derived from the word **קְמַח** (flour), whose letters can be rearranged to spell **מַקְרָב** (merchandise). This is borne out in the pasuk (*Mishlei* 4:2), “For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” The word **מִקְדָּשׁ** (teaching) shares a root with the word **מַקְרָב**. One who truly desires to learn Torah and fulfill mitzvot, must overlook the temptation to sin and should perform mitzvot. The *tzedakah* given before Pesach alludes to flour, the physical support we afford the poor, as well as to Pesach, the Torah which we desire to acquire. In order to acquire it, we must overcome the trials presented by sin. By becoming unified, giving aid to the poor, and learning Torah, we merit coming closer to Hashem.

Aveirot Hinder Prayers and Good Deeds from Ascending

The sefer *Noam Elimelech* (*Likutei Shoshanah*), written by the holy Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a, states the following. Before a person begins praying, he should do teshuvah for his misdeeds, so that they will not hinder his prayers from reaching *Shamayim*. Without doing so, one might learn a *dvar Torah* thousands of times, but not understand it completely. This is mind-boggling.

I once came to the realization of how deep this matter is. I was standing in line at the airport. At first, the line was relatively short, but within a few minutes, it grew very long. I asked my travelling companion why we couldn’t cut the line, as we had business class tickets. He looked at me for a moment, and then explained why the line was moving so slowly. There was a woman who was looking frantically for her ticket, but couldn’t find it. Then I responded, “Any small aveirah, or word of *lashon hara*, has the potential of blocking our good deeds. All the more so will the prayers of others on our behalf be prevented from having an effect. A person must always make sure to be pure from sin, immersed completely in teshuvah. He must be careful not to sully his mind with improper

thoughts and deeds. When there is dispute, also, mitzvot and tefillot are obstructed from ascending.”

A Rabbi was involved in a quarrel with his wife for three months. The entire time, he refused to receive people and speak in public. The reason for this was mentioned above. The moment there is negativity, it impedes the path of goodness. How then could he bless people? But teshuvah and good deeds take down the partitions erected by our aveirot. When one passes over the temptation to do wrong, he causes the *kelippah* to pass over him and neglect badgering him to transgress. When a person demonstrates this desire, the Torah protects him. The name *Chag HaPesach* reminds us to “pass over” the opportunity to sin, and keep our distance from aveirot.

In Summary

- ◆ “Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow.” Were the Egyptians the friends of Bnei Yisrael, that they were called their “fellows”? Also, why were Bnei Yisrael enjoined to request the gold and silver of the Egyptians? Hashem knew that they would soon receive the plunder at the sea, which was much greater than the wealth they were acquiring in Egypt. Moreover, Rashi’s words that Hashem granted them physical wealth at their departure from Egypt in order to mollify Avraham, who would bear a grievance had they not gone out with great wealth, needs explanation. At the *Akeidah*, Avraham had the opportunity to complain, for he had been promised that Yitzchak would be his successor. He did not complain then; why should he be suspected of complaining now?
- ◆ At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the wheel came full circle. Now the Egyptians feared Bnei Yisrael. They realized the game was over; they were being punished for their acts. Therefore, they attempted to come close to Am Yisrael. Avraham was afraid that they would influence his children negatively. We find countless examples of how Chazal distance us from the effects of the gentiles, in order that we should not learn from their ways. Hashem assured Moshe that they had nothing to fear, as He

would protect them by providing them with a thread of grace. This is similar to the case of Esther. A *talmid chacham*, too, who learns Torah by night, is granted the protection of this thread of grace during the daytime. This injects fear into those who wish to cause Bnei Yisrael to sin, and they immediately leave them.

- ♦ The pasuk states that when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, no dog whetted its tongue. This is a reference to the *kelippah*, compared to the brazen dog.
- ♦ The lesson we can learn here is that one who has true *yirat Shamayim* is guided by Hashem constantly, so that he will not falter in spirituality.
- ♦ *Chag HaPesach* is also called *Chag Hamatzot*. It would seem more appropriate to call the holiday by this name, for we eat matzot all seven days of the festival, whereas the *korban Pesach* was eaten only on the first day. The *korban* was offered even before the holiday – after midday on the fourteenth of Nisan. The name *Pesach* provides a lesson for generations. Just as the *kelippah*, as well as Pharaoh and his people, passed over us, and Hashem “passed over” our aveirot and came close to us, so too, must we “pass over” the temptation to sin and cleave to Hashem. The name *Chag Hamatzot* has the same root as *mitzvot*, for in the merit of the *mitzvot* of *brit milah* and *korban Pesach*, they were redeemed.
- ♦ The term קמח א דפסחא alludes to these matters. The word קמח (flour) has the same letters as the word מkap (merchandise), which hints to Torah. We must pass over our aveirot and cling to Torah and *mitzvot*. קמח also refers to giving *tzedakah* to the poor, and providing help for our fellow man, one of the ways of acquiring Torah.
- ♦ Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a, instructed that before praying, one should have thoughts of teshuvah. The aveirot are like a partition, blocking our good deeds and tefillot from ascending on High, *chas v’shalom*. Teshuvah and good deeds open the door to tefillah and *mitzvot*.

One Mitzvah Leads to Another

***“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel, saying:
On the tenth of this month they shall take for
themselves – each man – a lamb or a kid for
each father’s house, a lamb or a kid for the
household”***

(Shemot 12:3)

Bnei Yisrael were commanded to sacrifice the sheep, the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians. With its slaughter, Bnei Yisrael were demonstrating that they had no part whatsoever in their idol worship (*Shemot Rabbah* 16:2; *Tur, Orach Chaim* 430). Bnei Yisrael displayed tremendous self-sacrifice in fulfilling all aspects of the *korban* Pesach. Four days prior to its offering, they had to tie the sheep to their bedposts, checking them for blemishes. When the Egyptians noticed the Jews taking their deity, their anger boiled within them. But Am Yisrael paid no attention to their wrath. They clung to Hashem’s mitzvah and fulfilled it at all costs (*Shemot Rabbah* 16:3).

In the second year after their departure from Egypt, Am Yisrael gathered to sacrifice the *korban* Pesach. A group of people approached Moshe Rabbeinu. They had become impure by coming into contact with the dead and were upset that they were thereby deprived of performing this mitzvah. They asked Moshe to find out whether there would be another chance to offer the *korban* Pesach, just as everyone else did. Upon seeing their great desire for this mitzvah, Moshe Rabbeinu conferred with Hashem. Hashem answered that they could, indeed, bring the *korban* Pesach at a later date, one month after Pesach, on the 14th of Iyar, as it says (*Bamidbar* 9:11), “In the second month, on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon, shall they make it; with matzot and bitter herbs shall they eat it.”

Not only did these people merit celebrating the Pesach holiday fittingly, but the entire concept of *Pesach Sheini* was introduced to the nation

because of them. They yearned to fulfill Hashem's command, so Hashem allowed the mitzvah of *Pesach Sheini* to be brought to light through them. This teaches us how a person should long to keep Hashem's mitzvot. Chazal teach (*Avot* 4:2), "One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin." A person who performs a mitzvah enthusiastically is granted the opportunity to do another mitzvah, increasing his merit. Commensurate with a person's desire to uphold Hashem's word and perform mitzvot, Hashem protects him from sin and gives him more opportunities to do mitzvot.

Conversely, one who brazenly transgresses Hashem's word, and displays no regrets whatsoever for neglecting the mitzvot, receives no Heavenly protection. The more he sins, the more occasions present themselves for sin. He will eventually find himself mired in sin throughout the day.

Hashem regards the thought to do a good deed as part of the deed itself (*Kiddushin* 40a). Therefore, if a person truly desires to fulfill a specific mitzvah, but for some reason is prevented from doing so, Hashem considers it a done deed. Moreover, He provides the opportunity for him to do another mitzvah, as though he had actually done the original one. This is in accordance with the dictum "One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah." Almost everyone can attest that they wish to do the will of Hashem. They are merely prevented by different life situations. Such a person should examine whether or not this desire is at the forefront of his mind, spurring him on to make every effort to fulfill Hashem's will, and not just a fleeting fancy with no sound basis.

For illustration, let us bring the following example. A man brought home a lottery ticket and filled it out. When he returned to the ticket office in order to present his ticket, he found the place closed. He returned home slightly disappointed. But when he discovered on the following morning that the winning numbers were the very ones which he had entered, there was no limit to his anguish and disappointment at being deprived of the big prize.

A person must make a personal reckoning. How does he view a lost opportunity to do a mitzvah? Is he slightly disappointed, like the man when he discovered that the ticket office was closed? Or is he filled with deep distress, like the man when he discovered that he had the winning numbers but had been withheld from presenting his ticket?

It is only natural for a person to be drawn after the physical. Only very unique individuals will feel deep anguish upon being prevented from doing a mitzvah which he had set his heart on performing. The more one concentrates on the value of mitzvot, and their unimaginable reward, the stronger the desire will be within him to perform them, even at great cost and self-sacrifice. Hashem guarantees a person who is constantly involved in mitzvot that He will give him further opportunities to perform mitzvot. His entire life will revolve around goodness and kindness.

The saying “One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah” can be likened to a necklace. As long as the links are connected, the necklace remains whole. But as soon as one link falls off, the necklace is intrinsically damaged. Each mitzvah is like a link in a chain. Just like a necklace has no beginning and no end, there is no starting point and no finishing point in the performance of mitzvot. Mitzvot are constantly leading to further mitzvot. If, *chas v’shalom*, one mitzvah becomes severed, the entire chain is damaged.

In Summary

- ♦ Bringing the *korban* Pesach demonstrated Bnei Yisrael’s self-sacrifice in Avodat Hashem. The second year after their departure, a group of people, who had become impure due to contact with the dead, approached Moshe and asked why they should be deprived of sacrificing the Pesach offering. Because they showed such love for Hashem’s mitzvah, they not only were allowed to bring the *korban* on the 14th of Iyar, but the entire mitzvah of *Pesach Sheini* came to light in their merit.
- ♦ Corresponding to a person’s desire to do Hashem’s will is he granted the opportunity to do more and more mitzvot. On the other hand, when a

person shows his pleasure to sin, Hashem gives him more chances to sin. This is in line with the dictum in Avot, “One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah and one aveirah leads to another aveirah.”

- ◆ Hashem regards the thought to fulfill a good deed as part of the good deed. Whoever has a strong desire to fulfill mitzvot, but does not manage to do them, is considered to have performed them. He will even have the opportunity to fulfill more mitzvot, as if he actually had done the good deed. A person must examine whether he truly desires to do Hashem’s mitzvot, or it is just a fleeting fancy.
- ◆ “One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.” One’s mitzvot can be compared to a necklace made of links. There is no beginning and no end; mitzvot continue ad infinitum.

The Mitzvah of Sanctifying the New Moon

“This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year”

(*Shemot 12:2*)

While yet in Egypt, Am Yisrael was given the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon (**שְׁמַרְתָּ יְהוָה כָּל־יְמֹנֶה**). They did not perform it in Egypt, so why was it necessary to be given it while they were still there? What is so significant about sanctifying the new moon that it was one of the first mitzvot commanded to Bnei Yisrael?

The only element of Creation which we can actually see renewing itself, month after month, is the moon. When Hashem created the world in six days, everything was fresh and pure of sin. When Adam sinned, this newness became tainted. This stain accompanies us throughout the

generations. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, wishes to forgive Am Yisrael for this sin. He therefore commanded us to bless and sanctify the moon, every month anew. By sanctifying the new moon, we renew our *neshamot* as well, purifying them from the stain of Adam's sin.

Therefore, this was one of the first mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael received, while they were still in Egypt. Since they were steeped in the forty-nine levels of impurity (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*), they were commanded to sanctify the new moon. Their *neshamot*, too, would become sanctified, becoming free of the abominations of Egypt. Furthermore, since they were on such a low spiritual level, they had to look to the heavens and contemplate (*Yeshayahu* 40:26) "Who created these?" This is one of the reasons for sanctifying the new moon.

The day of Rosh Chodesh is auspicious for forgiveness and atonement. Hashem considers this day as the six days of Creation, when the world was clean and new, pure of sin. On Rosh Chodesh, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to sacrifice a he-goat (*שעיר*) for a sin-offering. A he-goat is also an *עז*. It is appropriate that the he-goat atones for our sins. The Mishnah in Avot states (5:20), **עז פנים לגהנום** (the brazen-faced one is headed to Gehinnom). The word *שעיר* (he-goat) shares letters with the word *רעה* (wickedness). Thus, the *korban* of Rosh Chodesh atones for the resha'im, so that they are spared Gehinnom.

Teshuvah was created before the Creation of the world (*Pesachim* 54a). The world cannot endure without teshuvah. Why did Hashem allow Am Yisrael to sin with the Golden Calf? How could He allow them to sin so severely, in a transgression whose punishment is meted out through the generations? The fact that they could fall so far, from the level of "*Na'aseh v'nishma*" to the level of the *Chet Ha'egel*, could only be due to the fact that Hashem allowed it to happen.

The purpose of this is to teach that even for such a severe sin as the Golden Calf, teshuvah is possible (see *Avodah Zarah* 4b). One should never despair of Heavenly intervention. Even if a person has grave sins, Hashem is always prepared to accept his teshuvah. Rosh Chodesh is the

perfect opportunity for a person to do complete teshuvah. Just as the moon renews itself, a person can renew his *neshamah*, by repenting for his sins and returning to his Creator.

We sanctify the new moon frequently, each month, thereby receiving atonement for our transgressions on a constant basis. This drives home the point that Hashem is ready and waiting for our prayers, and longs for our repentance.

Just as the he-goat sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash on Yom Kippur atoned for the nation, so too, does the he-goat offered on Rosh Chodesh atone for our sins. Chazal relate (*Shavuot* 9a) that Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, “Bring a sin-offering on My behalf, for I decreased the moon.” If we can say that Hashem, so to speak, needs an offering brought on His behalf, how much more so does the sin-offering atone for us.

————— In Summary ————

- ♦ Am Yisrael were instructed to sanctify the new moon while yet in Egypt. What is so significant about this mitzvah that it was given to them before the main body of the mitzvot?
- ♦ The moon is the only element in Creation that renews itself each month. It is a symbol for man that he too, should “renew” himself, by correcting his actions.
- ♦ Hashem created teshuvah before the world. The world cannot exist without teshuvah.
- ♦ The message of the *Chet Ha'egel* is that even for such a severe sin, teshuvah is possible.

The Essence of the Korban Pesach

“Moshe called to all the elders of Israel and said to them: Draw forth or buy for yourselves one of the flock for your families, and slaughter the Pesach-offering”

(Shemot 12:21)

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to take sheep, tie them to their bedposts for four days, and then slaughter them. They should roast the meat and eat it in groups. Nothing may be left over for the morning. Hashem added that they may not break any bones (*ibid.* 46)

The commentaries explain that Bnei Yisrael were told to “draw forth” the sheep, which hinted to them to “withdraw their hands from *avodah zarah* and become involved in the mitzvah of *korban* Pesach.” The *zechut* of the blood of the *korban* Pesach would stand by them so that they would be spared the plague of the firstborn. Apart from divine powers with which the Egyptians accredited it, the sheep symbolized the vanity of this world of physicality. Before departing from Egypt, Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to sever themselves from anything which hinted to materialism, as alluded to by the sheep.

However, we are faced with a contradiction. Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Bnei Yisrael to roast the *korban*. Roasting is a most delectable way of preparing meat. But if the entire point of taking the sheep was to nullify anything which smacked of materialism, why were they told to roast the meat before eating it? It wasn’t enough to merely taste the *korban*. They had to finish the entire animal, not leaving over anything. Why was there so much emphasis on consuming the *korban*?

On a trip to New York, I happened to visit the home of an elderly widow whose husband had recently passed away. She looked like she had forgotten about him completely. She was made up and outfitted in style,

not at all giving the impression of one mourning her late husband. Suddenly, her son burst into the room. She turned to him, and asked, in English, “What is the weather forecast for the weekend?” Her son answered that it would be overcast.

She then replied, most dejectedly, “So we won’t be able to go to the beach.”

To which her son responded that she didn’t have to worry; he had the vacation home all prepared, the pool was cleaned out, and videos were rented. He also had meat ready to be roasted. She could rest assured that they had a packed weekend waiting for them. The woman, though, was still distraught – what would be with the beach?

When the mother and son finished their dialogue, I turned to the woman and told her, “I apologize for eavesdropping, but, because I also speak English, I understood the entire exchange. Permit me to ask you something. Why are you concerned only with the physical aspect of your weekend? You packed your schedule in a most organized fashion, but did you leave any space for the *neshamah*? Doesn’t Hashem, too, deserve an honorary place in your weekend?” The woman looked at me abashedly, not knowing how to respond.

Something of this sort took place when Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, amid all the filth and frivolity. Hashem wanted that they should taste all the flavors of the physical world before they would follow him into the desolate desert. Afterward, when they would be surrounded by the Clouds of Glory and eat the manna of heaven, they would be able to make an honest assessment. When did they feel fulfillment – when they were in Egypt, filling themselves on roasted meat, or now, trudging in the Wilderness, preparing themselves for *Kabbalat HaTorah*?

However, the command to eat the *korban* Pesach was mitigated by the injunction that “You shall not break a bone in it” (*Shemot* 12:46). When a person is involved in physicality, even if he is in the midst of doing a mitzvah, he must ensure that he maintains his innate purity and good *middot*. He may never forget that he is a member of the Chosen Nation.

We do not subscribe to the mindset of the great philosopher, who, when caught eating a limb of a living animal, proclaimed, “While I am eating, I am not Aristotle.”

Indeed, all of Bnei Yisrael, aside from the *Eirev Rav*, who clung to them, preferred the *korban* of Hashem over the physicality which depicted the immorality of Egypt. Bnei Yisrael, in the Wilderness, merited ascending from the forty-nine levels of impurity, to the forty-nine levels of purity. They were eventually ready to accept the Torah at Har Sinai, from the mouth of Hashem.

In Summary

- ♦ “Draw forth and take for yourselves” was Hashem’s command to Bnei Yisrael to take the sheep for the *korban* Pesach. The commentaries explain, “Withdraw your hand from *avodah zarah*, and sever yourselves from the frivolities of this world.” Why, then, were they commanded to roast the *korban*, making it physically tantalizing? This would seem to contradict the objective of the sacrifice, which was to sever themselves from materialism.
- ♦ Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to taste roasted meat, as an example of physical pleasures, before their sojourn in the Wilderness. Once there, they would experience the spiritual joy of closeness to Hashem. Then they could honestly judge which pleasure is preferable. Barring the small numbers of the *Eirev Rav*, all of the nation ascended the ladder of *kedushah* and felt the indisputable superiority of spiritual delight.

The Mitzvah of Tefillin Arouses Faith

“And it shall be for you a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes – so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth – for with a strong hand Hashem took you out of Egypt”

(Shemot 13:9)

Moshe was told to command Bnei Yisrael to constantly remember the miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. They were to write the pesukim pertaining to *Yetziat Mitzrayim* in the tefillin on their forearms and their heads. Rashi explains, “The Exodus from Egypt will be for you a sign. You should write these passages (which refer to the Exodus) and bind them on the head and on the arm.”

Binding the tefillin, which contains the passages mentioning *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, upon their arms and heads would bind them with the steady reminder of the great miracles done at their departure from Egypt. Tefillin was one of the first mitzvot they received after leaving Egypt, for it strengthens a person’s level of faith. The first thing Hashem requested, after they left, was that they believe in Him and in Moshe, His servant. Faith is the key to our people’s superior status as the Chosen Nation. Without faith, they have no tools with which to connect to words of Torah and delve into them. Only through firm faith in the Creator are they capable of accepting the Torah with enthusiasm and merit being the Chosen Nation from among all of the nations.

Unfortunately, there are many Jews who live on autopilot. They perform mitzvot by rote, without any feeling. Pure faith is lacking from their hearts. They continue the habits they grew up with. They do not believe that by learning Torah and observing the mitzvot, they are strengthening the bond between Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael (*Zohar* II, 90b; III, 4b). These people can be compared to the wealthy

tycoon who is constantly pursuing riches. He doesn't even have time to enjoy his wealth. I have met rich people who are so involved in their businesses, that they don't even have a chance to eat, to the extent that an offensive smell emits from their mouths, as though they were the homeless indigents of the street.

Faith is the basis of a person's existence and gives meaning to life. Without vibrant faith, the mitzvot of the Torah lose their inner substance and depth. One who performs mitzvot without basic, deep-seated *emunah* loses the source of his existence, as well as the existence of the Jewish nation.

"Man is obligated to consider himself as though he himself left Egypt" (*Pesachim* 116b). We mention the miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* not less than six times a day. Why is it so important that we should remember the Exodus so frequently, to the extent that Chazal state that it is an obligation?

Pesach, which deals with the miracles in *Mitzrayim*, is the festival of *emunah*. The miracles Bnei Yisrael experienced at their departure from Egypt strengthened their faith in Hashem. Since faith is the cornerstone of our existence, we mention it several times throughout the day, among them when we don tefillin, which contain the passages of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* invests a person with faith in Hashem, which provides him with the power to withstand the trials that arise in his life.

The pesukim mentioning the mitzvah of tefillin are found in the Torah immediately after the injunction (*Shemot* 13:8), "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.'" It would seem more fitting to discuss the various mitzvot connected to Pesach at this point, since one usually speaks about topics pertaining to the matter at hand. For instance, a bridegroom will not discuss with his bride what their future children will wear. At a funeral, one does not discuss a *brit milah*. Why, then, is the

mitzvah of tefillin placed immediately after the mitzvah to tell one's son about the miracles of Egypt?

This can be explained according to what was stated above. Pesach is the holiday of faith. In order to strengthen one's faith, he must mention the miracles of Egypt, which bind him to his Creator. Tefillin, which contain passages that speak about *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the symbol of our faith, is the perfect catalyst to bring us to pure faith.

Immediately upon arising in the morning, a person affirms his faith: "Modeh ani – I thank You, living and enduring King, Who returned to me my soul with compassion; how great is Your faith!" Since Bnei Yisrael believe in Hashem, He displays confidence in them. He returns their *neshamot*, even though they may not have utilized them appropriately the day before. Hashem anticipates our teshuvah on the coming day and trusts us to keep our *neshamot* pure of sin.

Tefillin are laid on the forearm of the weaker hand, and on the head, between the eyes (see *Rashi, Devarim* 6:8). The Ben Ish Chai (*Shanah Rishonah, Vayeira*) states that the tefillin worn on the left arm are parallel to the heart, which is on a person's left side. The tefillin worn on the head are parallel to the mind. The heart and the mind must always be guarded from sin. The believing Jew must subject his heart and his mind to Hashem. All his thoughts and all his desires must be sanctified to His will alone. The mind and the heart of a person are naturally pulled to the physical, but when faith burns within one's heart, it has the power to steer his wishes to elevated, sanctified heights.

We are commanded (*Devarim* 11:18): "You shall bind them." Some have the custom to wrap the tefillin seven times around the arm, and some wrap it eight times. Whatever the custom, all wrap their tefillin around their arms and tie them around their heads, between the eyes. A person thereby becomes bound to Hashem and His Torah, through the *emunah* which has been strengthened within him.

David Hamelech enjoins us (*Tehillim* 55:23), "Cast upon Hashem your burden and He will sustain you." When a person lives with pure faith that

only Hashem can resolve his problems, and he therefore casts them upon Him, he merits the end of the pasuk “and He will sustain you.” Hakadosh Baruch Hu will extricate him from his plight and support him. Conversely, one who lives by the credo “I and none other,” demonstrates, regardless of his official title, that he has no measure of faith whatsoever. Had he been a man of simple faith in Hashem, he would never feel he had the answer to all his problems.

Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years. There were 400 years between the birth of Yitzchak and *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Subtracting the years of his life, and the lives of the Shevatim (for the slavery began only after their demise), will bring us to 210 years of bondage. The initials of the words **שָׁאַר** **תְּ** (arm and head, upon which one lays tefillin), are numerically equal to 210. Hashem wants us to always remember the miracles that occurred to Am Yisrael during their days of slavery in Mitzrayim. We do this through the tefillin which we place on our arms and heads. The last letters of the words **שָׁאַר** **תְּ** spell the word **דָּשָׁ** (demon). One who desists from donning tefillin loses his faith in Hashem and invites the demons to rule him, *rachmana litzlan*, for the negative forces gain control in the absence of tefillin.

We mentioned the custom of some to wrap the tefillin around their arm seven times, and the custom of others, to wrap it eight times. The sum of seven plus eight is equal to fifteen, the *gematria* of Hashem’s Name, ה-י. This Name of Hashem alludes to this world and the World to Come, which were created with these letters (*Menachot* 29b). The binding of tefillin unifies both worlds.

The purpose of donning tefillin is to weaken the *Yetzer Hara*, who resides in the mind and the heart of man. A direct outcome of this is that one’s *emunah* is strengthened. One places tefillin upon his arm first, and then wraps tefillin upon his head. Hashem wants us to understand that the *Yetzer Hara* is old and feeble, and does not need to be battled head on. Furthermore, it is sufficient to strike him with the left arm, which is the weaker one. The right arm corresponds to the Torah, about which it is said (*Devarim* 33:2), “From His right hand, He presented the fiery Torah

to them." When the *Yetzer Hara* observes a person holding the Torah in his right hand, he becomes weakened. But if a person lacks Torah and *emunah*, he himself loses the strength of both his right and his left hands.

The initials of the words **מוח לב** (mind and heart) spell the word **מל**, a reference to **מילה** (*brit milah*). And the last letters are **ב-ה**, which are numerically equal to ten, an allusion to the letter 'ה' of Hashem's Name. One who believes in Hashem, and devotes his mind and heart solely to Him, will merit that Hashem will remove the foreskin of his heart. It will no longer hamper his Avodat Hashem. The Gemara states (*Makkot* 10b) that a person is led and assisted in the way in which he wishes to go. Sanctifying one's mind and heart for Hakadosh Baruch Hu aids a person in fortifying the faith found in his heart, so that he can adhere to the Ten Commandments, the purpose of life for the believing Jew.

On Shabbat and holidays, one is exempt from putting on tefillin (*Rambam, Tefillin* 4:10). If the symbolism of tefillin is so significant, why don't we wear them on these exalted days? The reason is as follows. Tefillin depict faith and connection to Hashem. Shabbat attests to Hashem's creation of the world in six days, and the fact that He rested on the seventh. Likewise, one who sits in his sukkah for seven days proclaims his belief in the seven Clouds of Glory. There is no need to repeat these messages with the tefillin. Shabbat and the holidays are sufficient to awaken *emunah*, and therefore do not need to be accompanied by the mitzvah of tefillin.

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem told Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael the mitzvah of tefillin, which contains the passages of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. This strengthens our faith, for the Exodus from Egypt is the basis of our *emunah*. Chazal state that one is obligated to consider himself as though he left Egypt.
- ♦ The tefillin are placed upon the arm and the head. The arm is opposite the heart, and the head is the residence of the mind. Both the heart and the mind need protection against the *Yetzer Hara*. The right hand symbolizes

the strength of Torah. One places tefillin on his left, weaker arm, symbolizing the weak *Yetzer Hara*. The tefillin of the arm are donned first, and afterward, those of the head. The battle with the *Yetzer Hara* is not unconquerable; one does not have to fight him head on.

- ◆ On Shabbat and the festivals, one does not wear tefillin. The entire purpose of tefillin is to strengthen one's *emunah*. Observing Shabbat and the Jewish festivals, in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt, testifies to a person's faith. Thus, tefillin are superfluous at these times.

Gems on Parashat Bo

Tzaddikim Grow by Teaching Others

“Hashem said to Moshe: Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst”

(Shemot 10:1)

The Zohar (see II, 34a) explains that with the words “come to Pharaoh,” Hashem was saying that He would go along with Moshe. This indicates Hashem’s love for His agents. Hashem accompanied Moshe Rabbeinu on his mission to Pharaoh. Moshe was already involved in a Divine mission: bringing the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. Chazal tell us that Hashem is sold together with the Torah (*Shemot Rabbah* 33:1). Hashem is together with the one who is involved in Torah. Furthermore, the messenger of a person is considered as the person himself. The *Shechinah* actually spoke from the throat of Moshe Rabbeinu, for he was Hashem’s eminent emissary.

The Rosh Yeshiva of *Yeshivat Kol Torah*, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Yehudah Schlesinger, shlita, asked the following question. The Gemara recounts that previous tzaddikim would isolate themselves in preparation to serve Hashem. They would spend one hour before tefillah and one hour after tefillah in this type of service (*Berachot* 32b). This provided

them with quality time for their personal growth. But now we are involved in the communal matter of disseminating Torah and ensuring the growth of our students. Where will we find the time to ascend in our own personal service?

I answered him that by the mere fact that he was taking time off from his own matters in order to serve his pupils, preparing them for Avodat Hashem, he was improving and elevating himself. The Midrash states (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Zuta* 17), “*Talmidei Chachamim* increase peace in the world, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 54:13), ‘All your children will be students of Hashem.’ Do not read, ‘בָּנִים’ – ‘your children’ but ‘בְּנוֹנִים’ – ‘your builders.’” By building and improving their disciples, the *talmidei chachamim* build up themselves. We also read (*ibid.* 42:21), “Hashem desired for the sake of [Israel’s] righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious.”

“Moshe descended from the mountain to the people” (*Shemot* 19:14). Rashi explains that this teaches us that Moshe did not attend to his own business, rather, he went directly from the mountain to the people. Moshe’s “business” was certainly not that of a businessman. He was so far removed from the materialism of this world that he even separated from his wife. The pasuk is telling us that he desisted from his own spiritual pursuits for the sake of Am Yisrael’s Avodat Hashem, in order to improve them and teach them Torah.

The Rav who worries on behalf of his students can be likened to a mother who cooks and cleans for her family. Even as they eat, she hovers over them, at their service. She herself hardly tastes anything, but she is not hungry. Feeding her family fills her with fulfillment. Similarly, the Rav who sees to the needs of his pupils feels satisfaction in what he does.

The *zechut* of serving their pupils stands by them forever. Each country accepts its unique currency. Even the richest man must present the currency accepted in that place, in order to be able to make a purchase. We must prepare the currency that is acceptable in *Olam Haba*. This is the *zechut* of Torah study and dissemination of Torah. My grandfather,

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, wrote that just as one cannot live without money, one cannot live without Torah.

Taking the Spoils of Egypt

“Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels”

(Shemot 11:2)

Chazal tell us in the name of Rabbi Yannai (*Berachot* 9a), “The word נא (please) is a language of request. Bnei Yisrael were requested to ask for the riches of Egypt, in order that that tzaddik (Avraham) should not say that Hashem fulfilled the promise to enslave and afflict them, but not the promise to take them out with great wealth.”

The author of the sefer *Ohr Meir* quotes a famous question. Moshe was told to “please speak – דבר נא.” The word דבר is an expression of speaking harshly. How does it fit together with the word נא, which is a term of appeal?

Furthermore, why was it necessary to hurry them up to fulfill this request? Money is essential; the people would surely run to obtain it.

Previously, I raised another point. Would Avraham Avinu really be pained, were Bnei Yisrael to be deprived of physical wealth? Wouldn’t he be satisfied that they merited the Clouds of Glory and the rest of the spiritual treasures awaiting them?

Bnei Yisrael were so exultant to finally depart from Egypt that they did not feel a need to request the riches of the Egyptians. Certainly the tzaddikim, such as Moshe himself, Aharon, and Yehoshua, felt no

inclination toward gaining money. Regarding Moshe, the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 10:8), “The wise of heart will seize good deeds.” At the time that everyone was busy with collecting the wealth of Egypt, Moshe was involved with the casket of Yosef (*Sotah* 13a). These people had to be addressed in stern tones, and forced to go and borrow gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians.

The word “please,” on the other hand, was used to address the ordinary members of the nation, who hungered for riches. They needed to be made aware that they were taking the money for a higher purpose: the observance of Torah and mitzvot. They were not allowed to believe it was coming to them, in order to prevent them from feeling (*Devarim* 8:17) “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” Hashem wanted to ensure that the wealth would not go to their head. He did not want Avraham to think that their gaining this money was a disadvantage for them. Money can bring a person into a downward spiral, *chas v’shalom*. This would be a deficiency in the fulfillment of the promise (*Bereishit* 15:14) “and afterward they will leave with great wealth.”

The great wealth referred to here is actually the Torah. Nevertheless, Avraham Avinu would be pained at seeing the tzaddikim leaving Egypt empty-handed. Money has great significance when used as a catalyst for Torah and mitzvot. Avraham would also be pained over the fact that they had slaved in Egypt and had not received payment. The tzaddikim were not interested in taking anything for themselves, but Hashem ordered them to take the Egyptians’ wealth for these reasons. They later contributed this wealth toward building the Mishkan.

Hashem Passed over the Homes of Bnei Yisrael

“The blood shall be a sign for you upon the houses where you are; when I shall see the blood and I shall pass over you; there shall not be a plague of destruction upon you when I strike in the land of Egypt”

(*Shemot 12:13*)

Chazal teach (*Pesachim* 116b), “A person is obligated to consider himself as though he left Egypt.” One who does not see himself in this light, shirks his duty. The Gra proclaims (*Ma’aseh Rav*) that wherever the word “obligated” is used, it refers to a positive commandment which one must uphold. It is not mere allegory.

Therefore, every Seder Night, we commemorate *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Unfortunately, nowadays, we sit together, but feel nothing at all. We may go through the whole Seder mechanically, by rote. Many do not really know what is expected of them. But we are meant to feel as if we literally left Egypt on this night, and we are now liberated men.

In the Haggadah of Pesach, we mention the following episode. “An incident (השען) took place with Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon. They were seated around the Seder table in Bnei Brak and retold the account of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* the entire night.” I always wondered why this incident is described as a “story – הילען.” Was the holy *Tanna’ims*’ fulfillment of the mitzvah of retelling the episode of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* so unique? This is the obligation of every single Jew; certainly the *Tanna’im* would fulfill it.

What was unique to them was that through telling the story of the Exodus, they actually felt as though they had just departed from Egypt.

Thus, they fulfilled the dictum (*Kiddushin* 40b) “Great is study which brings to action.” Their story (השען) was realized in action (העשהן).

We learn from this incident that whoever studies the stories of the Torah, and accords them due honor as the tales of our Avot, has the ability to reach the level of our Avot.

Beshalach

The Splitting of the Sea

“And you – lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it; and the Children of Israel shall come into the midst of the sea on dry land”

(*Shemot 14:16*)

Hashem had stipulated, during the six days of Creation, that when the time would come, the waters of the sea would split. This would take place after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt and the Egyptians were in hot pursuit. The water would split for the Jews and wash over the Egyptians (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 5:5) But when Moshe lifted his hand over the water in order to split it, it refused to obey and continued flowing (*Shemot Rabbah* 21:6).

The Ohr Hachaim has difficulty understanding this (*Shemot* 14:27). We find several instances in the Gemara regarding *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im* who split rivers and lakes. The case with Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair is a famous example (*Chulin* 7a). However, the sea required a Divine revelation in order to split, as it says (*Tehillim* 114:3), “The sea saw and fled.” The sea saw the figure of Hashem (figuratively), and fled from before Him (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 234). Why didn’t the sea uphold the condition made with Hakadosh Baruch Hu at its creation, to split in half?

How can we understand that the sea refused to split for Moshe Rabbeinu, defying Hashem's command?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that there was an inherent difference between Moshe Rabbeinu's times and the times of the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im*. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. Therefore, they were lacking the *zechut* afforded by the Torah in order for the water to split. The waters were not prepared to go against the tide and veer from the course of nature. In the times of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, the river split, because the power of his Torah stood by him, granting him the privilege that the waters should change their course and halt their flow.

This teaches us the tremendous power of the Torah. It grants protection for those who study it, and even has the power to change the natural order of things for the benefit of its adherents. The waters of the sea did, eventually, split for Bnei Yisrael. Hashem turned to them and explained that although Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah, they were headed toward Har Sinai for that very purpose. Their positive intentions were enough to grant them the *zechut* which Torah affords its supporters.

Once the sea had split, and Bnei Yisrael had passed through on dry land, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand over the Sea, and the water will go back upon Egypt, upon its chariots and upon its horsemen'" (*Shemot* 14:26). The entire purpose of *Kriyat Yam Suf* was for Bnei Yisrael to walk through, and the Egyptians to be left behind. If the waters would remain split, the Egyptians would take advantage of the opportunity and follow Bnei Yisrael until the other side, and there would be no benefit gained from the miracle. Thus, the Ohr Hachaim asks why it was necessary for Hashem to command Moshe to raise his hand over the waters of the sea to return them to their original state. The waters should have returned to their former state of their own accord.

Chazal explain that the sea wavered in its commitment to split for Bnei Yisrael when it heard an accusation taking place on High (see end of

Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 234). The angels were prosecuting against Bnei Yisrael, stating, “The Egyptians are idol worshippers, and the Jews are idol worshippers. In what way are Bnei Yisrael superior, warranting a change of nature, whereas the Egyptians do not?” The words of our Sages are perplexing. Was it possible at all to compare Bnei Yisrael to the Egyptians? Bnei Yisrael were in the purification process in Egypt. They had long ceased worshipping idols (see *Shemot Rabbah* 16:2). How could the two be equated?

We might answer based on what is said about the generation of King Chizkiyahu. There was not even a child, in all the land, who was not proficient in the halachot of *tumah* and *taharah*, in all their minutiae. Chizkiyahu stabbed a sword at the entrance to the Beit Hamidrash and declared, “Whoever does not sit in the Beit Hamidrash and learn Torah will be pierced by the sword!” (*Sanhedrin* 94b).

Chizkiyahu’s actions require a deeper understanding. We believe that Torah enlightens us and makes us wiser. Torah provides protection from the *Yetzer Hara*, as Hashem told us (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created the Torah as its antidote.” We are commanded to fulfill the mitzvot, and one who desists will receive his just desserts. Aveirot carry a heavy penalty, as the Torah itself avers. But we never see a clear statement that one who abstains from learning Torah receives a punishment, or deserves death. Torah study is a merit, and provides reward for those who plumb its depths. But one who observes the mitzvot of the Torah punctiliously, without actually learning Torah, is not punishable by death. From where did Chizkiyahu have the boldness to proclaim that whoever refuses to learn will be pierced by the sword?

The word **חרב** (sword) shares letters with the word **רחוב** (street). Chizkiyahu did not mean to physically put to death those who desist from Torah study. He meant to hint to the nation that whoever does not ensure that he enters the Beit Hamidrash to learn will naturally be drawn toward the street and all it has to offer. His mind, unoccupied by Torah, will be a vessel available for the filth of frivolity to enter. Allowing the street to enter one’s mind and body is comparable to suicide by the sword. It is a

combination of both physical and spiritual death. Throughout the generations, Am Yisrael underwent gruesome pogroms and suffered the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. We shudder anew each time we hear descriptions of those dark days. Spiritual devastation, though, is many times worse. An example of this is the *galut* of Greece, who did not want to annihilate the Jews, but distance them from Hashem.

A major difference between spiritual death and physical death is the following. Physical death ends one's life in this world, but he continues living in *Olam Haba*. However, spiritual death kills a person both in this world as well as the Next. Chizkiyah was teaching that one who desists from Torah study invites all forms of temptations and worldly passions into his life, murdering his soul. The **חרב** (*street*), alluded to by the **חרב** (*sword*), literally kills him.

Based on this, we can explain the reasoning of the sea in refusing to go back to its former status in order to drown the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael were steeped in *avodah zarah*, just like the Egyptians, for they had not yet received the Torah. They did not yet have the tools with which to combat *nisyonot* that would arise in this world. Physical temptations are considered *avodah zarah*, which bring destruction upon Am Yisrael. The waters noted the vast abundance of wealth the Jews had gleaned from the Egyptians and considered that these were mundane possessions, the equivalent of *avodah zarah*. Only after Hashem clarified that this was part of the promise made with Avraham, that Bnei Yisrael would depart from Egypt with great wealth, did the waters become consoled and agree to split.

The following pasuk supports this idea. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to take a sheep for the *korban Pesach* with the words, "Draw forth or buy for yourselves..." (*Shemot* 12:21). Rashi explains that they were told to withdraw their hands from *avodah zarah* and take for themselves sheep, the deity of Egypt and sacrifice it. By slaughtering the deity of the Egyptians, they would slaughter the *Yetzer Hara*, which is also compared to *avodah zarah*. This act would remove the Egyptian culture from them, and the temptation for physicality, which was so prevalent among the

Egyptian nation. Hashem made it clear to the sea that Bnei Yisrael had severed all ties with idolatry. Thus, the sea did indeed part its waters for them.

In Summary

- ◆ The Ohr Hachaim asks why the sea refused to split for Moshe Rabbeinu; Hashem had already made a condition, during the six days of Creation, that it would split at that point. We find that rivers and lakes split for the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im* on a regular basis. The explanation is that at the Splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael had not received the Torah, which has the power to change the laws of nature. The Torah is what provided the *zechut* for the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im* to effect changes in the natural order. After Hashem convinced the sea that Bnei Yisrael intended to accept the Torah, it was mollified and agreed to split.
- ◆ Similarly, it is hard to understand why Moshe was commanded to stretch his hand over the sea after Bnei Yisrael walked through, in order to return it to its former state. This should have happened automatically. Chazal add that the sea refused to show partiality toward the Jews in splitting for them and returning to drown the Egyptians, for the angels declared that they both worshipped *avodah zarah*. Is it possible to compare Bnei Yisrael to the Egyptians? Especially in light of the fact that Bnei Yisrael were ascending the ladder of spirituality and had long since abandoned idol worship.
- ◆ We can explain the matter based on an incident with Chizkiyahu Hamelech. He stabbed a sword at the entrance to the Beit Hamidrash and proclaimed that whoever desisted from learning Torah would be pierced by the sword. The word **חרב** contains the same letters as the word **רחוב**. His underlying meaning was that one who refrains from learning Torah is liable to be enticed by the temptations of the street and meet his spiritual demise.
- ◆ Physical temptations are compared to *avodah zarah*. Upon seeing all of the wealth that Bnei Yisrael had amassed in Egypt, the waters believed

that Bnei Yisrael were mired in materialism, which is compared to idolatry. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael were no better than the Egyptians. When it was clarified that Bnei Yisrael had withdrawn their hands from idol worship, and this was the wealth they were ordered to take in order to fulfill Hashem's promise to Avraham, the sea was mollified and agreed to split.

Comparisons to the Tsunami

“Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all the night, and He turned the sea to damp land, and the water split. The Children of Israel came within the sea on dry land; and the water was a wall from them, on their right and on their left”

(*Shemot 14:21-22*)

Shortly after their departure from Egypt, Am Yisrael found themselves in an unbearable situation. The Egyptians were in hot pursuit; the sea was before them, and the Wilderness all around. They tried their best to escape the Egyptians, but found themselves trapped on all sides. In desperation, they cried out to Moshe, who turned to Hashem, asking Him to rescue His nation. He stated that if Hashem did not save His people, a great *chillul Hashem* would be caused among the nations of the world. They would claim that Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt to kill them in the Wilderness, for He obviously did not have the power to bring them into Eretz Yisrael, *rachmana litzlan*.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu paid attention to their cries and commanded Moshe to stretch his hand over the waters of the Yam Suf. The waters would split, allowing Bnei Yisrael to pass through. Moshe did as he was commanded, and lo and behold! The angry waters calmed down, and stood as a wall to the right and to the left of the nation. Some commentaries explain that the waters split into twelve pathways, and each Shevet passed through in the pathway designated for it (*Tanchuma, Beshalach 10; Peirush Hamishnah L'HaRambam, Avot 5:4*).

One who studies this event on a deeper level will come to a great revelation. Where did all of the waters disappear to? We know that in the year 5765, the entire world was shocked at the tsunami, which inundated several Asian countries. Soaring waves flooded everything in their path. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the waters also stood high, but they did not harm the Jews in any way. Upon noting the tremendous devastation in the wake of the tsunami, we can appreciate the miracle involved in the Splitting of the Sea. Without a special miracle, water can wreak havoc and destruction, demolishing entire worlds.

The tsunami drove home the lesson that it is Hashem Who rules over nature. As soon as He removes His supervision from the bounds of the sea, tragedy overflows.

At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the waters reached fantastic heights, but they hardened and remained erect. This is an additional miracle in the chain of miracles performed on behalf of Am Yisrael. The Torah says (*Shemot 18:1*), "Yitro heard." Rashi expounds, "What report did he hear that he came? The Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek." The entire world witnessed the tremendous miracles done for Am Yisrael at the sea; why was Yitro the only one who was awakened to come to join Bnei Yisrael, from all the nations of the world?

Yitro possessed the inner consciousness and the depth of understanding to realize how great this miracle actually was. Not only did the waters split, but they stood sentry at the sides of Am Yisrael, rather than washing over the nation. Similarly, after Bnei Yisrael passed through

on dry land, they returned to their former state and drowned the Egyptians. This paradox in which the waters, on the one hand, protected Am Yisrael, and on the other hand, mercilessly washed over the Egyptians, inspired Yitro to probe the matter. He realized there was a Higher power managing the world with wisdom.

Many stories revolve around the natural disaster which happened in Asia. One, in particular, brought me to the recognition that Hashem wanted to arouse our attention. In the zoo in Sri Lanka, there are numerous lions, elephants, and small animals. Fifteen minutes prior to the tsunami washing over the zoo, it was clear of all its animals. They had all fled beforehand. No one could explain this phenomenon. The animals sensed the danger before it was too late. They escaped and were saved. We cannot read a story like this and remain indifferent.

Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 38a) that when Hashem created Adam Harishon, He told him, "Although the animals preceded you by one day, it does not mean they are more important than you." This is true as long as mankind clings to Hashem and His Torah. But when people forsake the Torah and mitzvot, the animals are considered more important, and they have the added advantage of having been created a day earlier. This was the case in the tsunami, as we mentioned above. Hashem granted the animals the sense to smell danger and the ability to escape. But the people were deprived of this sense. The world needed to learn a lesson, in order to rectify their actions and return to Him.

After the Great Flood in the days of Noach, Hashem swore never to bring a flood again from the skies. But, unfortunately, we have no reassurance that a flood will not come from the ground. The tragedy of the tsunami drove home the point that the world is not in our hands. There is a Conductor, Who orchestrates everything from on High. In opposition to this belief are those who look for natural causes to world catastrophes. They develop strategies for the purpose of warning people before any imminent calamity. As believing Jews, we understand that man's intelligence is limited, and he is powerless in the face of Hashem's will. Physical prowess will not prevent catastrophe. The only way to

prevent such perils is by doing complete teshuvah and connecting to Hashem.

There are scientists who spend their days and nights developing radar systems to check the vibrations of the sea. When these vibrations vary from the norm, the systems transmit messages to investigate the matter. In this manner, the scientists hope to warn people in advance regarding any upcoming tragedy. This is all fine and good, as long as people realize that modern technology is useless if Hashem so wills it. One school of fish can wreak havoc on the entire system, teaching the public incorrect information.

A scientist was once asked to explain the events of the Splitting of the Sea from a natural point of view. He countered that it was not the great miracle that the Jewish nation had made it out to be. There was merely a breaker, which caused all of the water to withdraw from the sea bed. This allowed Am Yisrael to pass through. This scientist did not bother considering Hashem's powers. We know that this rationale does not hold any water. Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself was the One Who rescued Am Yisrael and drowned their enemies.

People think they remember, understand, and know everything, but this is not so. I personally experienced the frail nature of man in the following way. A short time ago, my grandfather's, zt"l, walking stick was missing. This stick is most precious to me. I wouldn't exchange it for the entire city of Paris. It is invaluable in my eyes. For a whole month, I searched for it, trying to remember where I had placed it, but to no avail. Then, one night, my grandfather came to me in a dream and told me that the next day, I would find the stick. Upon awakening in the morning, I didn't give credence to my dream. I figured that I had been thinking about the cane so much that I dreamed about it at night. To my utter surprise, a woman approached me that day, holding the stick in her hand. She thanked me very much for lending it to her.

I was speechless. I didn't remember loaning it to her at all. This incident showed me that Hashem wants to let us know, from time to time, that He

is the One in control. If a person thinks he runs the show, Hashem hastens to remind him Who the real Director is.

The Flood came upon the world, because all of Creation corrupted its ways. Not only did the people behave immorally; the animals, too, cohabited out of their kind (*Bereishit Rabbah* 28:8). It is well-known that in the section of town where the tsunami took place, there is tremendous decadence. People flock to there from across the globe, in order to be involved in iniquity, *rachmana litzlan*. People sell their own daughters for the sake of money. This debauchery cries to the Heavens. Hashem proved to the world that when there is a lack of chastity, He removes His supervision. The results are not long in coming.

It pains the heart to observe how people try to rationalize the catastrophe in natural terms. They thereby distance themselves from the reality that everything comes from Above, as a reaction and a punishment to the numerous breaches prevalent there. The Torah tells us (*Devarim* 23:15), “For Hashem, your G-d, walks in the midst of your camp to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you; so your camp shall be holy, so that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you.”

In Summary

- ♦ At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the waters split into twelve paths, and none of the Jews were harmed by them. Yet, at the tragic tsunami, in which some waves came upon the shores, tens of thousands of people met their deaths. This teaches us that it is Hashem Who runs the world.
- ♦ The animals of the zoo in Sri Lanka were not affected by the tsunami, for they sensed danger and managed to escape. But when mankind sins, they have no power to escape the wrath of Hashem and are caught in punishment.
- ♦ The tsunami hit the place which is the hotbed of immorality and depraved behavior. Immorality warrants Hashem’s fury. He had promised never to

bring a Flood from the heavens again, but this flood from the sea was in retribution for the decadent lifestyle of the people living in these places.

The Wall of Water

“The Children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea; the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left”

(*Shemot 14:29*)

The *Kli Yakar* (14:29) notes that the word **הַמִּזְבֵּחַ** (wall) appears in the Torah without the letter 't. Spelled this way, it can also mean **הַמִּזְבֵּחַ** (anger). The waters were angry at Bnei Yisrael for floundering in their faith at the sea and not entering immediately, thereby displaying a lack of faith that Hashem would split it for them.

Previously (*ibid. vs. 22*), we find the word **הַמִּזְבֵּחַ** written in the full version, “And the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left.” Why is there a discrepancy in the spelling of this word? Perhaps we can explain in the following way. When Bnei Yisrael traversed the sea, the word **הַמִּזְבֵּחַ** is spelled out in full, in order that the *Middat Hadin* would not be aroused against them.

The prosecuting angels could well have claimed the following. The entire miracle of the Splitting of the Sea was in the *zechut* of their accepting the Torah in the future. Torah demands self-sacrifice in order to endure. If Bnei Yisrael were not prepared to dedicate their lives to Hashem now, who is to say that they would be prepared to accept the Torah, which requires *mesirut nefesh*, in the future, meriting the Splitting of the Sea on their behalf? Hashem wanted to avoid this accusation, which contained an element of truth. He therefore switched the order of the

pesukim in the Torah, writing the word הַיְמָה in its full version at this point, where it seemingly should have been written missing the letter 'l.

"Hashem said to Moshe: Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey" (*Shemot* 14:15). When a person finds himself in a difficult situation, it is natural for him to cry out to Hashem. Why did Hashem ask Moshe why he was crying out to Him? We might answer that just before, we find that Hashem had told Moshe to tell the nation (*ibid.* 14:14), "Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent." This seems to indicate that Am Yisrael were supposed to strive to reach the level of such intense faith in Hashem's salvation that they would see no need to cry out to Him. Hashem told Moshe that as their leader, he had to serve as a personal example. If he commanded Bnei Yisrael to be silent and completely depend on Hashem, why did he himself cry out to Him? His crying out contradicted his own words.

The miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf* did not come effortlessly. It teaches that the entire world is in need of Torah with *mesirut nefesh* in order to exist. In their absence, miracles are hard to come by. When Nachshon ben Aminadav sacrificed his life by entering the sea, the waters immediately subsided and split in two (*Sotah* 37a). He demonstrated *mesirut nefesh*, which goes hand-in-hand with accepting the Torah. Since *Kabbalat HaTorah* was the *zechut* for the Splitting of the Sea, as soon as a measure of self-sacrifice was shown, the raging waters calmed down.

The commentaries (*Ohr Hachaim, Shemot* 14:27) ask, "How could the waters have ignored the condition made during the six days of Creation, that it should split for Am Yisrael, and continue to flow?" Perhaps we can say that as long as Am Yisrael did not enter, they showed a deficiency in their level of *mesirut nefesh*. The waters' refusal to split awakened them in this area, and brought them to teshuvah. Nachshon ben Aminadav was the first to take this message to heart, and all of Bnei Yisrael followed suit.

No miracle comes for free. In order for a person to merit a miracle, he has to have merits which advocate his cause. Then he will merit Hashem

changing the course of nature on his behalf, transforming his fate into goodness.

In Summary

- ♦ The *Kli Yakar* points out that the word חָמֵם (wall) is written in its shortened version, alluding to חָמָר (anger). The waters, so to speak, were angry at Am Yisrael for their lack of faith, which they displayed by not entering the sea before the waters split.
- ♦ Why does the Torah first write the word חָוֹמָה in its full version, and afterward, write it in its shortened version? Originally, the sea displayed anger (*חָמָה*) toward Bnei Yisrael, and afterward, it subsided. Thus, it seems that first the word should be written without the 'l. Hashem did not want to arouse the *Middat Hadin* by emphasizing the fact that Am Yisrael were deficient in *mesirut nefesh*, and therefore it is first written as *חוֹמָה* in full.
- ♦ Usually, when one encounters a difficulty, he cries out to Hashem. Why did Hashem ask Moshe, “Why do you cry out to Me?” Moshe had just told the people, “Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent.” He was contradicting his own command by crying out to Hashem.
- ♦ The miracle of the Splitting of the Sea did not come easily. In order to merit a transformation of the natural order, one needs the merit of Torah with *mesirut nefesh*. Since Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah, they needed an added measure of self-sacrifice. Nachshon ben Aminadav took this message to heart and was the first to jump into the waters. The nation followed behind, and the waters subsided.
- ♦ The reason why the waters did not split immediately when commanded was to teach the nation to do teshuvah and act with *mesirut nefesh*.

The Unique Redemption

“On that day, Hashem saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore”

(*Shemot 14:30*)

The Chida asks why we constantly mention, at every opportunity, in our blessings and our tefillot “in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt?” Throughout the generations, Hashem has delivered our nation from our enemies, but we barely mention this. We do not discuss the redemption effected by the Judges, who constantly rescued us from the enemy of the time. Neither do we mention the exodus from Bavel, or the *geulah* which took place in the times of Mordechai and Esther, when they were saved from the plot of Haman. The salvation of the Chashmonaim from the hands of the Greeks, in the days of Chanukah, is also not given place of prominence. How was the redemption from Egypt unique, warranting constant mention and remembrance?

The Exodus from Egypt was intrinsically different from all other redemptions. The miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was a collective miracle, affecting all of Am Yisrael. Without it, we would not be a nation. Everyone would simply have sunk in the quagmire of Egypt. They would have begun to bond with the Egyptians, through the years of bondage, and fallen to the fiftieth level of *tumah*, the point of no return.

But regarding the other redemptions, it was only a segment of the population which was saved. Our nation would not have vanished, had there been no redemption. Even if only one Jewish woman remained alive, and even were she to have married a gentile, her son would have been a Jew (*Yevamot 45b*). The entire nation would not have been vanquished, for a remnant would have remained. This was the case with Chanukah, as well as all the world wars, even regarding the terrible years of the Holocaust that swept over European Jewry. Only when Mashiach will

arrive, will we again experience a collective *geulah* (*Berachot* 12b), similar to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, as it says (*Michah* 7:15), “As in the days when you left the land of Egypt I will show it wonders.”

Yetziat Mitzrayim was the greatest liberation, encompassing all other liberations, and this is why we mention it so many times each day. This is illustrated by the following parable. When a person receives a donation from a poor man and a wealthy man, the generous donation of the rich man negates the modest one of the pauper. However, remembering the donation of the wealthy person brings to mind that of the poor man. Likewise, *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is equal to all the other redemptions. The other liberations pale in comparison to it, and are included in its commemoration. Therefore, when we remember the Exodus from Egypt, we remember all our other salutations. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was the most powerful redemption that our nation ever experienced.

Furthermore, other redemptions were not permanent like the one from Egypt. At the liberation from Bavel, there were still Jews who remained in exile, even after the redemption and the building of the second Beit Hamikdash. Likewise, after Chanukah, Greek culture still prevails in the world. And although Haman’s plot was thwarted, evil decrees constantly occur.

We might also answer based on the following question. We are taught (*Sanhedrin* 90a), “All of Israel have a share in the World to Come.” The question is asked, What portion awaits the *resha’im*, who have no merits? How could the *Tanna* include all of *Bnei Yisrael* in this sweeping statement?

Perhaps we can answer as follows. When *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt, they had not yet received the Torah, and they were mired in forty-nine levels of impurity (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). Nevertheless, the *Navi* praises them (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), “I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land.” Until this very day, Hashem remembers the perfect faith that our fathers demonstrated by following Him into the

Wilderness, without provisions (*Shemot* 12:39). The Wilderness is an arid, desolate, empty land, dry and without water. Nonetheless, they followed Him there, without worrying about the fate of their wives and children. The women were busy with large households, for in Egypt, they had given birth to six children at once (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:8). Our fathers bequeathed to us this faith, to the degree that, “Even if a sharp sword is resting on your neck, do not despair of Heavenly mercy” (*Berachot* 10a).

This level of perfect faith is a guiding light for our nation in every generation. One who gives *ma’aser* of his money to *tzedakah*, and then loses all of his money, should not question Hashem’s acts by saying, “The Torah promised (*Devarim* 14:22), ‘You shall tithe.’ The commentaries explain (*Ta’anit* 9a), ‘Tithe in order that you become rich.’ How could it be that I lost my entire fortune due to giving charity?” Rather, one should believe unequivocally, just like our fathers who left Mitzrayim with blind faith. Their faith certainly was strengthened when they witnessed the great miracles that took place in Egypt. But we have the Torah, the easiest method of acquiring *emunah*. How much more so must we demonstrate simple faith in Hashem.

Even a person who is sunk in the forty-ninth level of *tumah* has the ability to demonstrate faith in Hashem, which will bring him merit. Chazal teach (*Avodah Zarah* 10b), “There is one who acquires his world in one moment.” Even a rasha, through a simple act, can acquire a portion in *Olam Haba*. This is how everyone, righteous and wicked alike, has the capability to gain a portion in the World to Come.

On a deeper level, we can add that each and every Jewish person has the potential to be a great tzaddik. Even a notorious rasha can make a turnaround and become virtuous. Chazal compare the Jew to the pomegranate (*Eiruvin* 19a). Even the wicked ones have great potential, just like a pomegranate has a great number of seeds. Bnei Yisrael were emancipated from Egypt in order to accept the Torah. Hashem considered it as though they were anticipating it at any moment. So is it with each and every Jew. Hashem believes that at any given moment, through a small act, he will do teshuvah and embrace the Torah way of

life. Embedded in the heart of every individual Jew, even the wicked, is a Divine image, literally a portion of Hashem Himself. The Torah sits, so to speak, in an obscure corner (*Yoma* 72b; *Kiddushin* 66a), awaiting the return of her sons.

This situation can be compared to the following scenario. A wealthy man has not touched food or drink for some days. However, he has the means, either cash, or a credit card, with which to purchase provisions, to sate his hunger and quench his thirst. This knowledge keeps him going. He knows that whenever he desires, he can break his fast. Conversely, the poor man, who has no means to purchase his basic necessities, is in dire straits.

The Jew is like the rich man, for he has the potential in his pocket to return to Hashem at any moment. This is the meaning of the words of the *Tanna*, “All of Israel have a share in the World to Come.” Every Jew has the potential to gain admission into the World to Come.

Now let us return to the original question of the Chida. Why is the redemption from Egypt singled out from among all of the redemptions? The true redemption of the Jew is Torah and teshuvah, the only means by which to attain physical redemption. *Galut* is distancing oneself from Torah. The words גלות (exile) and גאולה (redemption) share letters and thus are similar. What is lacking from גלות is the Torah, and this is what causes exile.

The *geulah* from Egypt was in order that Bnei Yisrael should receive the Torah and mitzvot. This is what awarded them the merit to be redeemed. And although they had not yet received the Torah, Hashem saved them in a supernatural manner, removing them from the forty-nine levels of *tumah*, to which they had sunk (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). At every opportunity, we mention Hashem’s kindness in extricating us from Egypt in an unnatural way.

The other redemptions took place after Bnei Yisrael had already received the Torah and mitzvot. The exiles came in the wake of *bitul* Torah. As soon as Bnei Yisrael returned to Torah study, the difficulties

ceased and the *geulah* arrived. Therefore, we do not commemorate the other redemptions in the same way as the redemption from Egypt. We can release ourselves from these exiles, if we desire it sufficiently. The Torah sits in an obscure corner, waiting for someone to claim her (*Yoma* 72b; *Kiddushin* 66a).

In Summary

- ◆ The Chida asks why the redemption from Egypt is singled out from among all other redemptions from exile, by us constantly commemorating it with the words, “In memory of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.”
- ◆ One explanation is that the *geulah* from Mitzrayim applied to the entire nation. If not for this redemption, our nation would not have endured. Whereas, with all the other redemptions, our nation would have survived even had they not been rescued at that specific time.
- ◆ The future redemption will be for the entire nation, just as *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was.
- ◆ Another explanation is that it is the Torah that provides salvation for the nation. At *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bnei Yisrael were rescued from *galut* in order to accept the Torah. This is a lesson for future generations. Redemption is granted in order to accept the Torah.
- ◆ In Pirkei Avot, we read the statement, “All of Israel have a share in the World to Come.” Chazal ask how we understand that even the wicked are included in this statement.
- ◆ One explanation is that even a rasha has the potential to acquire a portion in the World to Come. This is like Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. Even though they were submerged in the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, they followed Hashem into the Wilderness, an uncultivated land, with simple faith. They were called holy, even before receiving the Torah.
- ◆ Another explanation is that every Jew has the potential, through the Divine image within him, to return in complete teshuvah. He can take the

Torah, which is sitting and waiting. This will earn him admission into the World to Come.

Why the Horses Drowned

“Then Moshe and the Children of Israel chose to sing this song to Hashem, and they said the following: I shall sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea”

(Shemot 15:1)

At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, not only were the Egyptian riders drowned as punishment, but the horses which carried them were, as well. Why were the horses deserving of such a strange, painful death, when it was the Egyptians who carried out the evil plan to chase after Bnei Yisrael?

The *ba’alei mussar* explain that the horses helped the Egyptians fulfill their wicked plans by carrying them to Bnei Yisrael. One who assists another in sinning is punished as well. A bad deed is done by a wicked person. This is why the horses, too, sank at the sea.

Partners in crime both suffer. One who supports sin, even if he does not actually perform the sin himself, is considered to have a hand in the deed, and is held responsible for it. The horses, measly beasts of burden, certainly had no intention to do harm, yet they were nonetheless punished by being drowned with their riders. All the more so will a thinking person, who has understanding, be taken to task if he is an accomplice to sin. Even in the gentile courts, *l'havdil*, abettors in crime are severely punished, even if they themselves did not transgress. The

mere fact that one helped another to violate the law, or provided him with shelter, warrants that he should be punished.

This is difficult to comprehend. Did the horses transport their riders willingly, in pursuit of Bnei Yisrael? It was the Egyptians who enthusiastically harnessed their horses in the great chase after the Jewish nation. Pharaoh, in his zeal to chase the Jews, forewent travelling in his chariot. Instead, he saddled his steed. It is difficult to understand why the horses received retribution for helping the Egyptians to sin. Would we say that a car that was driven by a criminal must be penalized for being a partner in crime? That would be ridiculous; it has no sense to understand the part it is playing in the offense. Likewise, the horses had no inkling of where they were headed. Why were they punished like their riders, dying an unusual death?

The power of influence cannot be underestimated. For instance, we find that Hashem did not suffice with delivering the main aspects of the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu on earth. Rather, He commanded him to ascend to Heaven in order to receive the Torah. This was even at the risk of his personal safety. Hashem felt it paramount that Moshe should transmit the Torah to Am Yisrael with maximum emotion and intensity. In order to accomplish this, Moshe had to ascend to Heaven and experience the special spiritual atmosphere there. He had to observe the Avot engrossed in Torah. Only by these means would he be able to transmit the Torah to Bnei Yisrael with full flavor and enthusiasm. Had Moshe received the Torah while yet on earth, he would have been lacking the spiritual passion that was prevalent on High. This type of Torah would have been deficient.

It is man's nature to be influenced by his surroundings and follow the societal norms. This is why the Torah admonishes us to distance ourselves from a bad neighbor (*Avot* 1:7). By living among righteous people, who spend their time doing acts of kindness, one will be persuaded to emulate them and follow in their ways. This is using peer pressure in a positive way (*Rambam, Hilchot De'ot* 6a).

From the moment that the Egyptians harnessed their horses for the dishonorable deed of pursuing Bnei Yisrael, their negative influence clung to the horses, who naturally became their accomplices in crime. The power of influence is so strong that even the animal, acting on natural instinct, becomes affected, eager to help in the aveirah. We find a similarity in the case of the Generation of the Flood. The animals then were negatively influenced by the actions of man, to the extent that they themselves corrupted their ways. The pervasive atmosphere of immorality was so tangible that the animals, naturally needing their own kind, cohabited with animals of other species. This completely opposed the natural order of the world. (*Bereishit Rabbah* 28:8).

Conversely, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey was influenced to change its nature for the good (*Yerushalmi, Demai* 1:3). It was stolen by highwaymen. When they wished to feed it, it refused to partake of the food. It was accustomed to eating the kosher food of the house of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. When they discovered that the donkey refused to touch their food, they understood that this was a unique donkey. They hurried to return it to its master. As soon as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair received it back, he immediately fed it kosher food. He understood that it had not touched non-kosher food. See how great is the power of influence! Even animals absorb the atmosphere of their surroundings, and behave accordingly.

This, then, is why the horses deserved to drown in the Yam Suf. It is to teach us the tremendous power of influence, both for good and for bad. Even the horses, who lacked free choice, were influenced by the enthusiasm of the Egyptians and hurried to chase after Bnei Yisrael. How much more so are people, who have intelligence and free choice, answerable for their actions.

In Summary

- ♦ Why were the Egyptian horses punished together with their riders at *Kriyat Yam Suf*? It was the Egyptians who pursued Bnei Yisrael. *Ba'alei mussar* explain that the horses assisted them in sinning and were therefore

held accountable. One who acts wickedly is liable. We must take a lesson from this. If the horses, brute animals who lacked intelligence, were punished, all the more so are people, who possess intelligence and feeling, held accountable for helping others to sin.

- ♦ This is still difficult to understand. The horses had no level of understanding; the Egyptians coerced them into helping them by harnessing them for the pursuit of Bnei Yisrael. Why, then, were they punished so severely? The power of influence for good or for bad is so strong that it can literally change the nature of those in its surroundings. This includes even the nature of animals. We find that the animals corrupted their ways in the Generation of the Flood and were therefore punished. At the Yam Suf, the horses were swept up by the influence of the Egyptians, eagerly chasing after Bnei Yisrael. This is why they deserved such a grisly death.

The Torah Endures only Through Joy

“Then Moshe and the Children of Israel chose to sing this song to Hashem, and they said the following: I shall sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea”

(*Shemot 15:1*)

The angels requested to say *shirah* at the Splitting of the Sea (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 233). Hashem said, “My handiwork is drowning in the sea; how can you desire to sing songs of praise?”

Why were Bnei Yisrael granted permission to sing to Hashem, when the angels were forbidden? What is the essential difference between them?

Hashem did not grant permission to the angels to sing songs of praise, for He is pained when He is required to punish His creatures. But with Bnei Yisrael, it was a different story. They had suffered backbreaking labor for hundreds of years under Egyptian tyranny. They were permitted to sing at the downfall of their enemies, who drowned at the sea. Without this song, which joyfully emanated from the recesses of their hearts, they would not have felt truly liberated from the Egyptians and ready to serve Hashem.

Another compelling explanation is the following. Am Yisrael was on the way to receiving the Torah. The Torah endures only through joy, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), “Serve Hashem with gladness.” Therefore, Hashem allowed them to sing and rejoice. Through this joy, they would properly prepare for *Matan Torah*. Without feeling joy, they would not merit seeing the *Shechinah*.

Rabbeinu Tam of the *Ba’alei Tosafot* would place money in front of him when he would learn Torah. This would gladden his heart, filling him with joy, which enabled him to learn better. Certainly the Torah was more precious to him than money. Proof of this is that he chose to learn Torah, and not amass riches. But, the bottom line is that money gladdens a person. Rabbeinu Tam used this as a means to further his level of Torah study. Based on this, we can suggest that after Bnei Yisrael rejoiced at the downfall of the Egyptians, Hashem allowed them to discover the spoils of the Sea, in order to gladden their hearts so that they would be open to receive the Torah.

Rabbeinu Hakadosh was fantastically wealthy. But he had no personal pleasure from his wealth. Chazal relate (*Avodah Zarah* 11a) that he was a close friend of Antoninus, the Roman Caesar. They both had tremendous wealth, never lacking even foods which were not in season. Before his death, Rabbeinu Hakadosh pointed his fingers heavenward and proclaimed that he did not even have a finger’s worth of physical pleasure from this world (*Ketubot* 104a). Why, then, did he bother amassing such wealth? The mere fact that he was wealthy gave him happiness, and afforded him the luxury of basking in the Torah through joy.

In Tehillim, David Hamelech declares (84:3), “My soul yearns, indeed it pines, for the courtyards of Hashem.” My great-grandfather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, would explain this pasuk in the following manner. The word **נכספה** (yearns) describes David’s desire to come to the house of Hashem. It shares letters with the word **כסף** (silver/money). Money is a means to attain joy, opening a person’s heart to yearn for the courtyards of Hashem.

In light of this, we can explain why Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael the spoils of the sea, after giving them the wealth of Egypt before they left. Hashem originally granted them the riches of Egypt in order to cause them joy, which would bring them to the appropriate level for accepting the Torah. But then Pharaoh and his men chased after them. Bnei Yisrael were so frightened that any previous joy simply left them. Therefore, Hashem gave them another opportunity to acquire wealth – the spoils of the sea. This would broaden their hearts to accept the Torah joyfully.

Moreover, it was imperative that they obtain the wealth of the Egyptians by borrowing them, rather than through a miracle. The Midrash states (*Midrash Tehillim* 92) that the disciples of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai were envious of a colleague who had become wealthy. Rabbi Shimon took them to a valley and commanded it to release money, which it did.

Hashem could have performed the same miracle for Bnei Yisrael. The objective of having Bnei Yisrael take out riches from Egypt was to bring them joy after all the years of arduous labor under the heavy hand of Egypt. Their anguish was compounded by the fact that the Egyptians exploited them for so many years, enslaving them without any intention of payment. When they were finally commanded to ask the Egyptians for their vessels, they felt as though they were being compensated for all their years of difficult labor. Had the wealth appeared miraculously, as in the case of the students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, they would not have had the good feeling of earning their remuneration.

Similarly, Yaakov Avinu happily worked for Rachel and Leah, the daughters of Lavan. He desired to earn his wages, and not receive them

gratis. In *Bircat Hamazon*, we allude to this concept, as we beseech Hashem that we should receive our livelihood “not by the hand of flesh and blood.”

Additionally, when Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to contribute toward the Mishkan, they felt as though they were donating from their own possessions. Had they received the wealth of Egypt as a gift, they would have simply felt that they were returning the money to its original Owner. Since they felt that these riches were owed to them, this allowed them to feel that they were giving their own possessions. Thus, their whole-hearted giving fulfilled the words (*Shemot* 25:2), “...from every man whose heart motivated him you shall take My portion.”

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem did not allow the angels to say *shirah*, but He did allow Bnei Yisrael to sing in celebration of the death of the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael had suffered under the hand of the Egyptians, thus it was fitting for them to rejoice. Moreover, Hashem wanted them to be in a state of joy in preparation for accepting the Torah.
- ♦ Why did Hashem grant Bnei Yisrael the spoils of the sea after they had already received the wealth of Egypt upon their departure? The purpose of the spoils of the sea was to bring them to a state of joy in preparation for *Matan Torah*. Their original joy at receiving the wealth while in Egypt had been spoiled when Pharaoh pursued them. The spoils of the sea returned to them the level of joy they had experienced at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.
- ♦ Bnei Yisrael were told to ask for the vessels of the Egyptians, and were not given this wealth miraculously. This way, they felt they were being compensated for their years of labor. When they would contribute their riches to the building of the Mishkan, they would feel the joy of giving from their own possessions.

Makkat Bechorot and Kriyat Yam Suf

“The might and vengeance of G-d was salvation for me. This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary; the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him”

(*Shemot 15:2*)

Upon comparing the two great miracles of *makkat bechorot* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*, we find that they are intrinsically different and complement each other. At *makkat bechorot*, Hashem demonstrated His complete knowledge of, and control over, His creatures. At the precise moment of midnight, Hashem killed the firstborn of the people and the animals. He was able to differentiate between those who were the firstborn and those who were not. There were some wise guys among the Egyptian *bechorot*, who pretended they were not the firstborn at all. They wanted to show everyone that they were able to escape the plague. But of course, Hashem struck them. The Egyptian women would cohabit with strange, unmarried men. But Hashem knew exactly who were the firstborn to their fathers and struck them (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 208). The plague of the firstborn proved to the entire world that Hashem is omniscient.

At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, Hashem split all the waters of the world, contrary to the laws of nature (*Shemot Rabbah* 21:6). This revealed His complete control over the entire world. Everyone acknowledged that Hashem is the only G-d, and there is none other. At the Splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael saw Hashem with their very own eyes, proclaiming, “This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary.” Even nursing babies saw Hashem’s Presence (*Sotah* 30b). Even Pharaoh, who had previously declared (*Shemot* 5:2), “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice,” conceded to Hashem’s Kingship, and the command to be subservient to Him. All of the nations trembled in fear of Hashem’s grandeur, which was revealed at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. This is mentioned in the Song of the Sea (*Shemot* 15:15-16), “Then the

chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved. May fear and terror befall them."

The basic difference between *Kriyat Yam Suf* and *makkat bechorot* was the following. While *makkat bechorot* revealed to the entire world Hashem's all-encompassing knowledge of man and beast, at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, everyone saw, with their own eyes, Hashem's Divinity and how He controls the world. The plague of the firstborn was evidence of Hashem's sovereignty; at the Splitting of the Sea, they actually saw the *Shechinah* and Hashem's mastery over everything.

Now we can understand why Hashem differentiated between *makkat bechorot* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*, and why they were separated by seven days. *Makkat bechorot* occurred on the first day of Pesach, whereas *Kriyat Yam Suf* was only on the seventh day.

Bnei Yisrael required a seven-day preparation period in order to merit perceiving Hashem's Divinity at the sea. Although they had observed His supervision over each and every creature at *makkat bechorot*, they needed this preparation time in order to perceive His *Shechinah*.

This can be compared to a person who spent a long time in a dark, gloomy room. In order to be able to bear the brightness outside, he must accustom himself, little by little, to the light. If he is suddenly exposed to sunlight, he is liable to be harmed by it. Similarly, when they wished to inform Yaakov that Yosef was found, they did not tell it to him suddenly. This might very well have shocked him to death. Rather, Serach bat Asher played music and sang the words, "Yosef is still alive" (*Ba'alei Tosaftot, Bereishit* 45:26). Bnei Yisrael had spent 210 years in Egyptian bondage, sunk in the forty-nine levels of *tumah*. They had lost their self-identity in their slave mentality. In order to perceive Hashem's *Shechinah*, they needed to attain this perception gradually, step-by-step, with preparation between each step.

We might suggest an additional explanation for the seven day division between *makkat bechorot* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, Bnei

Yisrael merited seeing the *Shechinah*. This is similar to the *kedushah* of Shabbat, for on Shabbat, too, we perceive the *Shechinah*. Just as Shabbat is on the seventh day, so too, was it necessary to have *Kriyat Yam Suf* take place on the seventh day. Shabbat has six preceding days of preparation; the revelation of the *Shechinah* at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, was also preceded by six days of preparation.

Moreover, perceiving the *Shechinah* at *Kriyat Yam Suf* was a “taste of the World to Come,” which is how we describe Shabbat. At the Song of the Sea, Bnei Yisrael proclaimed, “Hashem will rule forever!” If not for the sin of the Golden Calf, they would have received the Torah, and the world would have attained eternal perfection. When a person makes appropriate preparations throughout the week in honor of Shabbat, he surely will merit the fulfillment of our Sages (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), “He who toils on Erev Shabbat, will eat on Shabbat.” He will merit experiencing the “taste of the World to Come.” The more he invests in Shabbat, the greater the dividends. Maybe he will even merit sensing the *Shechinah* with his additional *neshamah*, which arrives on Erev Shabbat.

In Summary

- ◆ *Makkat bechorot* proved Hashem’s control over His creatures. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, Bnei Yisrael literally saw the *Shechinah*.
- ◆ Hashem differentiated between these two miracles. He wanted Bnei Yisrael to prepare themselves step-by-step, before reaching the top of the ladder: *Kriyat Yam Suf*. A sudden transformation would very likely affect them detrimentally, after all the years of being influenced by the mire of Mitzrayim.
- ◆ Alternatively, there were seven days between *makkat bechorot* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Perceiving the *Shechinah* at *Kriyat Yam Suf* was a taste of the World to Come, just as we experience this taste on Shabbat, which comes after six days of preparation.

He Is Standing Behind Our Wall

“The might and vengeance of G-d was salvation for me”

(*Shemot 15:2*)

“He is standing behind our wall, observing through the windows, peering through the lattices”

(*Shir Hashirim 2:9*)

After Bnei Yisrael departed from Egypt and witnessed the Splitting of the Sea, they burst into song, and sang, “This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a Sanctuary.” They were on an elevated level at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, because they had become influenced by the night of protection, the night of Pesach. Hashem had revealed Himself to them in great luminosity, for He had smitten Egypt on that night by killing their firstborn sons.

The experiences of that night will remain forever etched in our collective memory. Pharaoh himself arose from his bed, seeking to send out Bnei Yisrael. Pharaoh symbolized the night and the *kelippah*. He submitted himself to *kedushah* by awakening and going to look for Moshe and Aharon at night. Bnei Yisrael will never forget his ultimate submission to Hashem. They reached the epitome of recognition of Hashem, when they all sang together, “This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a Sanctuary.”

Similarly, at the End of Days, we will cry out (*Yeshayahu 25:9*), “Behold, this is our G-d; we hoped to Him that He would save us; this is Hashem to Whom we hoped, let us exult and be glad in His salvation.”

Chazal teach (*Shemot Rabbah 2:2*) that from the time of the *churban Beit Hamikdash*, the *Shechinah* has never left the *Kotel Hama’aravi*. This is the last remnant we have of the *Beit Hamikdash*. What is the meaning of the word מערבי (Western)? It shares a root with the word ערב (evening), a

time of darkness. The destruction of the Beit Hamikdash brought darkness upon the world. However, Hashem is with us in *galut*. He stands, as it were, behind our walls and watches over us.

Am Yisrael inherited the title עֲבָרִים (Hebrews), from their forefather, Avraham, known as אֶבְרָהָם הַעֲבָרִי (Avraham of the other side). The entire world was on one side, worshipping idols, and Avraham stood staunchly on the other, serving Hashem. The word העבר is also linked to the word ערָב, alluding to the lesson above: Hashem is with us in all our troubles. Hashem Himself affirms (*Tehillim* 91:15), “I am with him in distress.” In our darkest hour, Hashem stands beside us.

With Hashem’s help, at the future redemption, we will proclaim loud and clear, “This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary,” just as they said at *Kriyat Yam Suf*.

Why did the Sanhedrin sit specifically in Yerushalayim, during the time of the Beit Hamikdash? David Hamelech says (*ibid.* 122:2), “Our feet stood firm within your gates, O Jerusalem.” Chazal explain (see *Makkot* 10a) that they would plumb the depths of Torah while standing at the gates of Yerushalayim. This is borne out by the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 2:3), “For from Zion will the Torah come forth, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.” The most auspicious place for Torah study is Yerushalayim. We know that the entire Eretz Yisrael has Hashem’s special supervision, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 11:12), “A Land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it.” What is unique about Yerushalayim, that it is singled out as the ideal place for Torah?

The Zohar (II, 161a) explains that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. From where did He begin creating the world? From Yerushalayim. For there is the *Kodesh Hakodashim* and the *Even Hashetiyah* (see *Yoma* 54b). Everything was created by the power of looking into the Torah. Thus, the Torah is most potent in the place from which the world came into being. Therefore, Yerushalayim is the place most prominent for Torah, and this is why the Sanhedrin made it their location.

Yerushalayim is the starting point of the world, created by the blueprint of Torah. This is why Yerushalayim has the honor of being the place propitious for Torah study, and the very air of Yerushalayim confers wisdom upon one who breathes it. This is also the reason why the *Shechinah* never leaves the *Kotel Hama'aravi*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu guaranteed that Torah will never be forgotten by our progeny. All of the Torah that we possess is in merit of the Kotel, which is left to us, the remnant of the Beit Hamikdash, at the place of the *Even Hashetiyah*.

Many of our tzaddikim yearned and pined for the Holy Land. They suffered and sacrificed their very lives in order to come to Eretz Yisrael, because they valued the land immensely. Avraham Avinu traversed the Land, in order to merit inheriting all of it.

The central station for Torah is Yerushalayim. Just as the entire world came into being from the *Even Hashetiyah*, Torah, too, came forth to the entire world from there. And although our world became dark due to the *churban*, the Torah continues shining its light upon the world. In Shir Hashirim (2:9), the pasuk states, “He is standing behind our wall.” The Torah exists in Yerushalayim and in the entire world.

“When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem” (*Vayikra* 1:2). Chazal expound (see *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 21 63a): The pasuk does not state, “When a man offers a sacrifice,” but, “When a man among you brings an offering.” From here we learn that a person must offer himself. How can a person offer himself? This seems impossible to demand.

The explanation is the following. Every person who studies Torah is considered a miniature Beit Hamikdash. In the Beit Hamikdash, sacrifices were offered. One who is considered a Beit Hamikdash also offers sacrifices. What are they? They are the offerings he makes of his physical lusts and animalistic desires, which raise him to the level of a miniature sanctuary. He has actually transformed himself into the Holy of Holies.

The Beit Hamikdash is located at the spot of the *Even Hashetiyah*, created by the power of the Torah, upon which the entire world was founded. Now we can understand why the Torah was written upon stones,

and why the Mizbeach was made of stone. Just as stone is a hard substance, so too, is man's heart. And just as water is capable of penetrating stone, so too, is the Torah, which is compared to water, able to penetrate a person's heart and transform him into a miniature Beit Hamikdash. Rabbi Akiva, upon observing stones that had been penetrated by water, said that if water can penetrate tough stone, drop by drop, the Torah could surely penetrate his hard heart (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 6:2). By the strength of Torah, one lesson after another, he reached his exalted level.

One is instructed to transform himself into a miniature Beit Hamikdash through toiling in Torah and nullifying his personal desires. These are his sacrifices for Hashem that he makes during his life.

Rav Shach, zt"l, would say that a person may speak all day long as though he is dependent upon Hashem, saying, "Baruch Hashem," "Be'ezrat Hashem," etc., but he does not honestly believe that he is totally reliant on Hashem. The only way one can really feel this way is through learning Torah and nullifying his personal desires. Chazal state (see *Zohar* III, *Ra'aya Meheimana* 232a) that the *Shechinah* spoke from the throat of Moshe Rabbeinu. I read that Hashem speaks to every person through the study of Torah. By delving into the Torah, a person converts himself into a miniature Beit Hamikdash. He has the ability to feel Hashem's Presence this way. Just as the Torah and the *Shechinah* still reside within the remaining wall of the Beit Hamikdash, the Kotel, so too, do the Torah and *Shechinah* rest within a person, who is a miniature sanctuary.

In the Passover Haggadah, we say, "Each person is obligated to view himself as though he himself left Egypt." The Vilna Gaon states that this is an actual obligation. How is it possible for a person to feel as though he left Egypt if he does not know the meaning of slavery? According to what was said above, this is understandable. Whoever is connected to the Torah, will certainly remember the statement "This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a Sanctuary." These words were etched into the soul of man. All the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai. Whoever left Egypt said this statement at the sea. Furthermore, there is a

commandment to believe that Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 20:2), “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.” Torah study strengthens a person’s faith.

Chizkiyahu Hamelech stabbed a sword at the entranceway to the Beit Hamidrash, and proclaimed that whoever did not learn Torah would be pierced by the sword (*Sanhedrin* 94b). This is perplexing. Of course, it is a mitzvah to learn Torah. But nowhere do we find that one who desists from Torah study is deserving of death. We can clarify this in the following way. The Torah is “behind our walls,” i.e., the walls of the Beit Hamidrash. Whoever passes by the Beit Hamidrash and does not enter is liable to fall into the hands of the *Yetzer Hara*. A hint to this is that the letters of כָּרֶב (sword) are included in the word רְחַמָּב (street). One who ignores the call of the Torah becomes prey to the sounds of the street. One is obligated to enter the Beit Hamidrash to study Torah, in order to make himself into a miniature Beit Hamikdash.

Rav Shach, zt”l, states that Hashem put into the nature of the animals exactly what they need in order to exist. They have a memory, which enables them to know what they need, where to live, etc. Animals cannot add or subtract from their predetermined tasks. But human beings are different. Hashem invested man with natural instincts and the choice to change his tendencies. He instilled within him the nature to sacrifice himself for the sake of the Torah. Therefore, the pasuk states, “When a man among you brings an offering.” A person has the potential to transform himself into an offering before Hashem.

A hint to this can be found in the fact that the word מִנְדָּא (man) is numerically equivalent to forty-five, just like the name of Hashem, הָיָה-יְהָיָה, with each letter spelled out. Hashem, so to speak, carved His Name into man, in order that he would have the capacity to sacrifice himself for the sake of Hashem. But a person also has the power of free choice. He can choose whether or not to sacrifice himself. If he goes in the ways of the Torah and dedicates his life to Hashem, he will merit being a miniature Beit Hamikdash.

Hashem placed in the animals only their natural instincts, in order that they may survive. They have no evil inclination. But into mankind Hashem etched His Name, so that he has the ability to sacrifice himself for His sake. But He also placed within him a *Yetzer Hara*. The experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is also engraved into our *neshamot*. Furthermore, we ourselves (our *neshamot*) stood and proclaimed, "This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a Sanctuary." It is an undeniable fact. Therefore, a person is obligated to consider himself as though he left Egypt. A person is capable of this, for he has free choice to do as he wishes.

What gives a person the wherewithal to be so punctilious with various mitzvot? For example, there are people who are very stringent with every crumb of chametz, being scrupulous not to transgress sighting or finding chametz on their property. He has the spiritual strength to do this because *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is etched into his subconscious and he heard Hashem Himself proclaim, "I am Hashem, your G-d."

This is also what encourages a person to refrain from touching his wife when she is a *niddah*. Who besides for Hashem sees what he does in the inner chambers of his home? Some rule that the prohibitions of touching and passing objects from husband to wife during this time are only Rabbinic prohibitions. Yet a person has the power to be careful. This is all due to the fact that everyone was present at *Kriyat Yam Suf* and proclaimed, "This is my G-d and I shall build for Him a Sanctuary." Likewise, we were all present at *Matan Torah*. We all heard and saw what took place. This is what gives a person the power to keep mitzvot. One who observes the Rabbinic ordinances with *mesirut nefesh* receives the ability to keep the more difficult mitzvot.

In Summary

- ♦ At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bnei Yisrael said, "This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a Sanctuary." At the future redemption, we will say the same thing. But until that time, Hashem hides His face from us for "He is standing behind our walls."

- ◆ What makes Yerushalayim unique, that the Sanhedrin sat specifically there? And why does Torah come forth from Tzion?
- ◆ The advantage of Yerushalayim is that it is the place of the *Even Hashetiyah*, the Foundation Stone upon which the world was created by the power of the Torah. Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.
- ◆ What gives a person the ability to transform himself into a miniature Beit Hamikdash, and how can he sacrifice himself as an offering to Hashem?
- ◆ Man's superiority over the beast is his power of free choice. A person can elevate himself to the loftiest levels. In the *zechut* that all of the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael were present at *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and at *Kabbalat HaTorah*, all future generations were affected.

Man's Purpose in His World

“Moshe caused Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur; they went for a three-day period in the Wilderness, but they did not find water”

(Shemot 15:22)

Moshe had to move Bnei Yisrael away from the sea against their will, for the Egyptians had adorned their horses with ornaments of gold and silver and precious stones, and they were so involved with finding them at the sea that they did not want to journey onward. The spoils taken from the Egyptians at the sea were greater than the spoils they took from Egypt (*Rashi*, ibid.).

This raises the following question. Why did Bnei Yisrael receive the spoils of the sea as a gift, yet had to borrow the vessels of the Egyptians before they left?

To answer this, we must explain the purpose of their sojourn in Egypt.

Many people wander about, wondering what their purpose is in the world. The scientists are sure that people come into the world in order to live and enjoy as much as possible, similar to the animals. However, any thinking person will realize that it does not make sense for someone to have been born a human being in order to die as an animal.

Heretics will opine that since mankind evolved from the animal, there is nothing wrong with cremating a body after death. They therefore live their lives pointlessly. Many nations across the globe live this way. They want the good life, and they want to be in control. One animal will prey on another, for sustenance or safety, always involved in its survival. Likewise, the nations of the world, who live like animals, are constantly occupied with the battle of survival and control. Sometimes, one is on top, and at other times, another is in control, exactly like the animals.

This was the lifestyle in ancient Egypt. They would worship the animals, giving them preference over people. Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael down to Egypt so that they should observe this corrupt way of life and learn to keep away from it. They would steer away completely from this “beastly” lifestyle, and understand that they were put here to serve Hashem, meriting eternal life in *Olam Haba*.

This is why they were told to borrow the vessels from the Egyptians, instead of Hashem having the Egyptians give the vessels as gifts. This would make them realize that money comes only from Hashem. Accumulating wealth is not the purpose of our existence. A person’s wealth is predetermined by Hashem. If He wants a person to have money, he will get it even without working. And if He sees fit to withhold money from someone, no matter how hard he works, he will not see any blessing in his labor. By desisting from thinking (*Devarim* 8:17) “my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth,” Bnei Yisrael would come

to the recognition that the true purpose of life in this world is preparation for the Afterlife. They received the vessels from the Egyptians only on loan, for had they received them as free gifts, they would have assumed it was payment for their years of labor. This would inject the feeling of pride and self-assurance into their hearts.

Conversely, the spoils of the sea were given to them as gifts. They did not have to ask for them. This taught them the following message, which was vital to internalize before they received the Torah. Man is master over his money, and not the other way around. A person may not allow himself to pursue materialism and worry over wealth. All of his concerns must revolve solely around Torah and mitzvot. Proof is that they received the spoils of the sea free of charge, directly from Hashem.

Once, a Jew approached me, weeping bitterly, as though a terrible calamity had befallen him. When I asked what was bothering him, he answered that he had a debt of ten thousand shekel, which had weighed on him for the last year. I was surprised to observe how he was so eaten up over this money. I gave him the amount, and he calmed down. I was obviously the messenger of Hashem, sent to give this man the money. Everything is from Hashem, and there is no need to worry. David Hamelech put it succinctly (*Tehillim* 121:1-2), “**מֵאֵין יְבוֹא עָזֶר** – From where will my help come? My help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.” When a person realizes that his salvation will come (which can also mean “from nothing”), i.e., he does not place his trust in people, his salvation will immediately arrive from Hashem.

The Alter of Novardok, zy”a, was involved in business in order to support his family. Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, zt”l, met him, and asked why he dedicated part of his time for business, rather than spending all his time involved in learning Torah and Avodat Hashem. The Alter asked, “If I don’t engage in business, with what will I live?”

To which Rabbi Yitzchak responded, “And with what will you die?” Meaning, “What will you bring with you to *Olam Haba*? Why do you enslave yourself to money and not completely to Torah?”

Bnei Yisrael tied the sheep to their bedposts, indicating that animals are subordinate to mankind, and not the other way around. But if a person does not live to fulfill his true purpose, he is on a lower level than even the animal.

In the year 2006, the natural disaster of the tsunami took place. An underwater earthquake shook the waters, and they gained tremendous strength, overflowing onto a sizeable portion of land. They swept away people and property. Over one-quarter of a million people met their deaths in this catastrophe. But all of the animals, from the big to the small, followed their finely-honed senses, which signaled to them that trouble was brewing. They fled for their lives. In their singular objective of finding shelter, no animals preyed upon another. The leopard ran side-by-side with the deer. A short time later, two airplanes nearly collided. They were saved a mere few meters away from each other, by one of the pilots executing a last-minute act. Upon examination, it was discovered that the radar of one of the planes had been damaged. This was radar invented by humans. See the difference between the radar that Hashem placed in the animals' brain and the radar created by man.

In Mexico, a man approached me and asked that I bless him that he should succeed in his endeavors. I asked what exactly those endeavors were, but he refused to share that information with me. I answered that I do not bless something which I know nothing about. He said he desired to commit suicide. I was shocked at this revelation. Here was a Jew, surrounded by a loving family, which gave him only *nachat*. He was also blessed with wealth. Yet he found no purpose in his life, and wished to end it. This is the end of one who does not believe in Hashem and His Torah. The author of *Mesilat Yesharim* writes (chapter 2) that there is one who is blind from birth, and there is one who just does not want to see. The second one can even pass by a Beit Hakeneset, and see the sign directing him toward spiritual gains, but turn his heart and eye away.

Researchers have discovered that there are also animals that have suicidal leanings. One can watch a procession of mice, rats, or frogs, which jump into the water to their deaths. A person who lives like an

animal is liable to find a similar end. This is all due to his closing his eyes to the Torah. He is walking in darkness, similar to the animal, which lives merely to exist, and ends its life when it has had enough.

In Summary

- ◆ Why was it necessary for Bnei Yisrael to descend to Egypt, and why did they obtain the riches of Egypt by borrowing them, as opposed to receiving them as a gift? How were the spoils of the sea different, warranting that Bnei Yisrael received them as a gift?
- ◆ There are those who believe that the purpose of a person in this world is to live like an animal, fighting for his survival. This was how the Egyptians lived, and this is why they worshipped the animals. Hashem sent His nation there to observe the Egyptian lifestyle and learn to keep away from it.
- ◆ Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to ask for the wealth from the Egyptians, so that they would realize that it came from Him and was not in any way compensation for their years of labor.
- ◆ The spoils of the sea were given as a gift, so that Bnei Yisrael would realize that man is master over his money. They found it for free without even exerting themselves.
- ◆ In the tsunami, it was evident that the animals' senses were more developed than those of the people. The people perished, whereas the animals sensed the imminent danger and took cover in time. When a person lives like an animal, the animals are preferable to him.

Combating Routine

The people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moshe, and they said: Why is this that you have brought us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock through thirst?"

(Shemot 17:3)

Am Yisrael arrived at the Wilderness and were suddenly overcome with terrible thirst. Their state was unbearable, and they came with complaints and cries against Moshe. "Why did Hashem take us out of Egypt?" they demanded. "Was it in order to kill us in the Wilderness? He could just as well have wiped us out in Egypt." Moshe perceived their bitterness, and was afraid that in a short time, they would simply stone him. He therefore turned to Hashem and cried out to Him to rescue Am Yisrael and give them water before they physically attacked him.

It is difficult to understand how Am Yisrael descended to such a level of complaint against Hashem and Moshe His servant. We know that when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, their faith in Hashem was firm. They trusted that He would sustain them in the Wilderness. For that reason, they had not made provisions for themselves (*Shemot* 12:39). They followed Hashem in the uncultivated desert (*Yirmeyahu* 2:1). How was it possible that from such a high level of faith and belief in Hashem, they would come to scorn Him and defame His Name, by saying, "Is Hashem among us?" (*Shemot* 17:7).

Hashem tested them with the *nisayon* of a lack of water in order to examine the level of their loyalty to Him. He wanted them to continue being impressed by the amazing miracles that they experienced on a daily basis in the Wilderness. Rashi (ibid. vs. 8) explains this with the following analogy. This is compared to a man who put his son on his shoulder and went out on a journey. The son saw an object and said, "Father, take that

object and give it to me.” The father gave it to him. This happened a second and third time. They met a man. The son said to the man, “Have you seen my father?” His father said to him, “Do you not know where I am?” He cast him down from upon his shoulders, and a dog came and bit him.

Hashem performed wondrous miracles for Bnei Yisrael and filled their every need in the desert. But just as soon as they felt a lack, they came to Moshe with grievances. When Hashem observed how they rejected his reign, He ceased raining down all of His goodness. He brought Amalek to attack. This was their wake-up call to return to their compassionate Father.

It seems that what drew them to such a depraved state to speak out against Hashem was the force of habit. Bnei Yisrael had grown accustomed being supplied with all their needs by miracles. They eventually took these wonders for granted, expecting them to continue unconditionally. They ceased being inspired by the miracles to thank Hashem for all the good and blessing He showered upon them. They were so accustomed to Hashem providing their needs that they were not even ashamed to speak with chutzpah against Moshe, demanding water to quench their thirst. It was completely natural to them that Hashem would provide all their requirements, whether or not they were worthy.

There are people who awaken in the morning without the slightest incentive to thank Hashem for His great mercy in returning their *neshamot*. They think it is most natural that every morning they open their eyes, get up on their feet, and go about their daily tasks. Unfortunately, it isn’t until something goes wrong in one’s routine, or he doesn’t feel as well as previously, that he begins to ponder all the goodness that Hashem bestowed upon him until now. He finally understands that nothing in life can be taken for granted.

A couple once came to me for a blessing. The wife had gone into deep depression as a result of the sudden death of her father, who was only fifty-two years old. He was rich and strong, without any medical problems.

He died suddenly, while talking to his daughter. This daughter couldn't internalize his demise. Just as her father had lived up until this point, without any specific problems, she felt he would continue living. However, every day of a person's life is a wonderful gift from Hashem. It is a gift that must be recognized and thanked for openly. Nothing should be taken for granted.

What is the best ammunition against the force of habit? How can a person discipline himself in order not to fall into the rut of routine, assuming that everything is coming to him? When one exerts himself in Torah study, the force of habit loosens its grip on him. Through learning Torah, he realizes that everything comes to him from Hashem. Conversely, one who is not anchored to Torah will be adrift on the sea of habit and routine.

When Am Yisrael encamped in **רֶפִידִים** (Refidim), they became lax in toiling in Torah. This brought them to complain at Mei Merivah. Chazal (ibid. vs. 1) state that there really did not exist a place called Refidim, but it was called thus, for **רָפַא יָדֵיכֶם בְּתוֹרָה** (their hands grew weak in Torah). When there is no toil in Torah, routine and habit take their toll. Hashem has to then strike a person in order to arouse him from his spiritual slumber, just as He brought the nation of Amalek upon Bnei Yisrael in order that they should return to Him and recognize His miracles once again.

A man once approached me and said that instead of toiling in Gemara, he preferred to study Chumash. Studying Gemara demanded too much exertion, he contended. This was above his level. I told him that this manner of thinking was a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*. I explained to him that all of the holy sefarim which line our walls were not written of their own accord. Much sweat and hard work went into producing them. Just as Torah demands labor, so do all areas of life demand great exertion. We have yet to discover a baby whose mother did not have to carry him for nine months. Neither does a good, healthful meal appear on its own, rather through long hours of physical effort.

A person's *Yetzer Hara* causes him to become lax in Torah study. Yet it motivates and energizes him to continue pursuing the frivolities of this world. I know people who always complain that they don't have enough time to sit and study Torah. On the other hand, they don't cease in their pursuit of physical gains. They spend all their time amassing more and more money.

Chazal state (*Rashi, Shemot* 19:1; see *Tanchuma, Eikev* 7), "The words of Torah should be new to you." If one lacks pleasure in his Torah study, it is liable to wear him down, to the extent that he may, *chalilah*, lose all interest in learning altogether. But when a person constantly views Torah with freshness, as though it were just given to him on Har Sinai, he will be invigorated to study it with vigor and zeal.

This is illustrated by the following parable. A person buys a new suit. The first time he wears it, he struts about with his head held high. He hurries to remove any stain or dust so that it remains fresh and new. The second time he wears it, he still feels pride and pleasure in it, but not quite as much. On the third day, he throws the jacket over his shoulder in a haphazard way. The original excitement has completely left him, and none of the novelty remains.

If one does not look for ways to toil and maintain his excitement over words of Torah, routine will all too quickly strike him. The day will not be long in coming when he loses all interest in Torah. Only when a person seeks insights and new ideas and plumbs the depths of every *sugya*, without letup, will the sweet taste of Torah accompany him all the days of his life.

In a similar vein, a man once told me that as long as his Rebbi was alive, he never sat close up to him and did not look into his eyes, out of fear of accustoming himself to his Rebbi's exalted level. He had a strong desire to constantly feel the fear of his Rebbi upon him. To this end, he took upon himself various exercises, which would encourage the feeling of constant novelty when he was with his Rebbe. May we, as well, merit always feeling the novelty of Torah.

In Summary

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael had strong complaints against Hashem and Moshe when there was a lack of drinking water. How can we understand that the generation that witnessed the miracles of Egypt could fall to the level of asking, “Is Hashem in our midst?”
- ◆ The force of habit is what caused them to behave this way. They became accustomed to the amazing miracles performed by Hashem and took them for granted.
- ◆ The only weapon that has the power to prevent habit is exertion in Torah. When a person toils in Torah, he constantly discovers novelty, and is as excited over it as though it were just given on Har Sinai.
- ◆ David Hamelech asked Hashem (*Tehillim* 27:4), “Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life.” This is done through “visiting in His Sanctuary.” A visit has a special meaning, for it is always accompanied by excitement and anticipation. David was asking that every time he entered the Beit Hamidrash, he would have the same enthusiasm as previously, just like a visitor or guest.

The Battle with Amalek

“Amalek came and battled Israel in Refidim”

(*Shemot* 17:8)

After their departure from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael travelled in the Wilderness and rested in Refidim. Chazal (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 25) ask, “Why was their place of resting called רְפִידִים (Refidim)? Because בָּתָוָה (their hands grew weak in Torah). Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah, and they were commanded to keep only a few

mitzvot. Still, they were lax in these few areas. This aroused Hashem's anger, and Amalek came to attack.

A servant of the king who is commissioned to execute many tasks will be easily forgiven for being negligent in one of his duties, because he succeeded in carrying out the rest of his jobs to perfection. But if this servant had been assigned only a few duties, but did not discharge them due to laziness and disrespect, the king's anger will be evoked against him. The servant will be held culpable, because disregard in this case demonstrates a lack of concern and a nonchalant attitude toward his responsibilities in general.

When Bnei Yisrael encamped in Refidim, they were compared to the servant who had only a minimal amount of duties, yet avoided even these. Hashem had performed numerous miracles on their behalf. They were commanded to keep only a few mitzvot, yet they failed to observe them. Hashem's anger against Am Yisrael was very great. This is what brought Amalek to attack them.

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, Haman, who descended from Amalek, cast lots to decide on which day to destroy the Jewish nation, men, women, and children. This decree hung over their heads, for they displayed coolness toward Avodat Hashem, partaking of the feast of the wicked Achashveirosh, in spite of Mordechai's warnings to keep away (*Megillah* 12a). They acted in the same way as their ancestors, who were cooled off to Avodat Hashem, becoming weak in Torah before Amalek's attack.

The battle with Amalek in the Wilderness can be compared to the following scenario. A person enters a boiling tub. Although he gets scalded, he has cooled off the water for others who wish to enter (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ki Teitzei* 938). After the battle with Amalek, although Amalek themselves were defeated, they had cooled off the fear and anxiety which the nations had formerly felt toward Am Yisrael.

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, after the entire nation fasted for three days and did complete teshuvah for their prior coolness toward

Torah, they merited a turnaround, as the Megillah states (*Esther* 8:16), “The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.” They basked in the light of Torah and warmed themselves by its fire, atoning for their previous coolness toward it. Chazal expound that the word וַיִּקְרֹב (and honor) refers to tefillin of the head. The tefillin has the power to warm up a person’s mind and heart, binding him to his Father in Heaven. At that point, the fear of the nations toward Am Yisrael returned to the level it was on after *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Megillat Esther shows clearly that when the voice of Yaakov is strong, the hands of Eisav are powerless. After Bnei Yisrael repented, Haman had no power to fight them any longer.

In Summary

- ♦ Amalek had the power to fight Bnei Yisrael in Refidim because Bnei Yisrael grew lax in Torah. They had been commanded to keep only a few mitzvot, but were remiss. They were compared to a servant who has only a few responsibilities, but fails to execute them. This is a most severe offense.
- ♦ In the days of Mordechai and Esther, Haman, the descendant of Amalek, wished to wipe out the Jewish nation. This was in retribution for their coolness toward *yirat Shamayim*. They had displayed coolness toward Avodat Hashem; Amalek came and cooled off the fear of all the nations toward Bnei Yisrael.
- ♦ After the Jews repented for this coolness, their fate turned around, and they merited joy and gladness. Some commentaries explain that the word וַיִּקְרֹב (and honor) refers to the tefillin of the head, which warm the mind and the heart of every Jew, binding him to Hashem.

Gems on Parashat Beshalach

Torah Warfare

“So God turned the people toward the way of the Wilderness to the Sea of Reeds”

(*Shemot 13:18*)

The Torah relates that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt armed, bearing weapons for any eventuality. We don't find that Moshe reprimanded them at all for this. On the contrary, he agreed to their decision to carry out arms. However, this seems like a lack of faith in Hashem's protection. Moshe guarantees them further in this parashah (*ibid. 14:14*), “Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent.” Hashem fought their battles. Why did they need weapons?

Moshe wished to impart the following lesson to the nation. All the weapons in the world are powerless if a person lacks the protection of Torah. Indeed, when Bnei Yisrael were faced with danger on all sides, they ignored their artillery and cried out to Hashem. Moshe asked them then, “Why do you cry out?” He was stressing the fact that although they were bearing arms, they were faced with the bare truth: “Not with an army and not with strength, but through My spirit, said Hashem” (*Zechariah 4:6*). Without the shield of Torah, all the weaponry in the world is worthless. As they had not yet received the Torah, they feared the Egyptians

tremendously, in spite of their artillery, and cried out to Hashem for His salvation.

The Gemara recounts (*Chulin* 7a) that when Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair had to cross the river, it immediately split in two. Yet, when Bnei Yisrael stood at the shore of the Yam Suf, with the Egyptians on their heels, the waters refused to split. The Ohr Hachaim finds this difficult to understand (*Ohr Hachaim, Shemot* 14:27). Was the disciple, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, greater than the teacher, Moshe? Furthermore, Hashem had stipulated, during the six days of Creation that the sea would be prepared to split before Bnei Yisrael after the Exodus from Egypt (*Bereishit Rabbah* 5:5).

The Ohr Hachaim explains as follows. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair merited the water splitting before him in the *zechut* of Torah. No force is greater than the power of Torah. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. Consequently, the water was not ready to change its course and split for Bnei Yisrael. Moshe recognized the truth in this assertion and was therefore very worried. He cried out to Hashem to rescue them.

Ideally, a person should fear nothing other than Hashem. Fearing a human being or an animal is an indication of sin. If not for one's sins, he would have complete faith in Hashem's salvation. Hashem created people so that all the beasts are afraid of him, for he is the crown of Creation. But once a person has perverted his ways, and spoiled the Divine image within him, the animals do not sense the superiority of man. This emboldens them to approach man and harm him. But if a person had perfect faith, he would have nothing to fear. His heart would be filled with tranquility in the knowledge that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is watching his every step and protecting him from all harm.

Waging War – Only through Torah

“So God turned the people toward the way of the Wilderness to the Sea of Reeds”

(Shemot 13:18)

Bnei Yisrael left Egypt armed with weapons (see *Shemot Rabbah* 20:19). Why did they feel the need for this? They witnessed how Hashem had waged their battles in Egypt. They understood that He would likewise fight their battles in Canaan. And, indeed, in their battle with Amalek, Hashem fought for them.

We might suggest that Hashem wanted to put them to the test. They would have all the artillery at their disposal, yet they would have no use for it. They had not yet received the Torah, and without Torah they were powerless.

“When you will go out to war against your enemies” (*Ki Teitzei* 21:10). We have the capacity to fight our enemies only through the power of Torah. We find that David did not go out to war until the branches swayed (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel* 142). One goes to war only as the Torah dictates. Yehoshafat and Chizkiyah are examples of kings who waged war only by the strength of Torah. Shlomo Hamelech, who clung to the Torah, did not even need to go out to war, for connection to Torah precludes outside battles. The Chashmonaim overcame their enemies as few against the many. This was in the merit of their belief that Hashem is the Only G-d.

Moshe Rabbeinu promised the people, “Hashem will fight for you, and you will remain silent.” When Torah and *emunah* are prevalent, Hashem fights our battles, and we can sit back, assured in our confidence in Him.

“Amalek came and battled Israel in Refidim” (*Beshalach* 17:8). Chazal explain that Bnei Yisrael grew lax in Torah (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 25). Bnei Yisrael fought against Amalek in spite of their weakness in Torah at that time. This was not an ideal battle, for it lacked the merit of Torah,

and thus did not fully demonstrate Hashem's Kingship. Had Bnei Yisrael been strong in their Torah study, they would have succeeded in repairing the entire world, bringing it to the realization of Hashem's Kingship. The war would have indicated that Torah is paramount. But, alas, they were lacking in Torah, and this was not to be. For this reason, "Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation" (*Shemot* 17:16).

After Bnei Yisrael entered the Land and had a king, it would be their task to repair the deficiency they had during the battle with Amalek. The king would lead them in wars with the power of Torah. This is referred to in the pasuk in Tehillim (20:8), "Some with chariots, and some with horses; but we, in the Name of Hashem, our G-d, call out." The pasuk states (*Shemot* 15:3), "Hashem is Master of war – His name is Hashem."

Moshe Rabbeinu's Portion in the Spoils of the Sea

"Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, for he had firmly adjured the Children of Israel, saying: G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you"

(*Shemot* 13:19)

"The wise of heart will seize good deeds" (*Mishlei* 10:8). Chazal state (*Sotah* 13a) that this pasuk refers to Moshe Rabbeinu. While the rest of Bnei Yisrael were busy asking their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver, Moshe was occupied with finding Yosef's remains. This was in order to fulfill the promise that the Shevatim had made with Yosef, that they would take his coffin with them when they were released from Egypt. This poses

a difficulty. Bnei Yisrael asked for the wealth of Egypt by Hashem's command (*Shemot* 11:2). Why didn't Moshe obey this command, as the rest of the nation did?

It seems that either Hashem commanded him to take care of Yosef's coffin, thereby exempting him from the command to ask for the wealth of the Egyptians, or others asked for wealth on his behalf. Maybe he took a small item in order to fulfill this injunction, and after that he attended to Yosef's remains.

One Who Goes in the Way of Torah Is Saved from the Yetzer Hara

"Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel day and night"

(*Shemot* 13:21)

"Hashem went before them" means that He went together with them. The pasuk in Devarim (1:31) states that Hashem went with them "as a man carries his son." Hashem took Bnei Yisrael through the Wilderness like a father with his son, protecting him from snakes and scorpions, holding his hand to protect him from all danger. Similarly, Hashem surrounded them with the Clouds of Glory (*Sukkah* 11b). The letters of the word אִתָּם (with them), can be transposed to spell the word אֶתְמָה (truth). Torah is the only truth. When Bnei Yisrael walk in the path of Torah, Hashem is with them.

"Pharaoh approached; the Children of Israel raised their eyes and behold! – Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened;

the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.” Pharaoh symbolized the *Yetzer Hara* (in the name of the *Rambam*). “Pharaoh approached” tells us that when the *Yetzer Hara* approaches a person, he must fortify himself with Torah and mitzvot, crying out to Hashem in supplication. He must maintain his identification with Torah, the epitome of truth. Torah is the catalyst to bring Hashem into our midst.

Similarly, the *Yetzer Hara* approached Yosef Hatzaddik, when he was faced by the wife of Potiphar. The pasuk states (*Bereishit* 39:11), “He entered the house to do his work.” Rashi quotes Chazal (*Sotah* 36b), who explain this pasuk in two ways. One is that he entered in order to take care of his needs, and the other is that he entered in order to sin with Potiphar’s wife. The *Yetzer Hara* placed him into a difficult *nisayon*, to the extent that he went of his own accord to sin. “Pharaoh approached” implies that the *Yetzer Hara* approaches a person with tremendous strength, in order to cause him to sin.

The Gemara relates (*ibid.*) that Yosef was saved from sin because his father’s image appeared before him. Also, he received a Divine message that were he to sin, his name would be omitted from the *eifod*. “Yisrael lifted their eyes.” Yisrael is Yaakov, Yosef’s father, who appeared to Yosef, saving him from sin. Yisrael is also a hint to the *Shivtei Yisrael*, among whom he would not be remembered, were he to sin with Potiphar’s wife.

Yosef was protected by the power of Torah and mitzvot. Similarly, Bnei Yisrael “cried out to Hashem.” They reinforced themselves with Torah and tefillah. One who is connected to Torah, the emblem of truth, merits Hashem’s protection. Yosef was one with the Torah. The following episode attests to this. When Yosef wished to reveal himself to his father, he sent wagons to him, with his brothers. Chazal explain that these wagons hinted to the subject of *eglah arufah*, as the word for wagon and the word for calf are spelled alike (**עגלת**) (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3). He was thereby indicating that through all the years of his residing among the decadent society of Egypt, he still maintained his ties with Torah. This

saved him from sinning with the wife of Potiphar, and prevented him from being influenced by the temptations of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The pesukim regarding Yosef refer to what would happen to his descendants in the future. When they observed how Pharaoh, the *Yetzer Hara* incarnate, was approaching them, in order to frighten them into the *nisayon* of despair in their service of Hashem, they immediately lifted their eyes heavenward, turning to Hashem for assistance. This strengthened them, and encouraged them to pray for His salvation from the hands of Pharaoh the wicked. This should serve as a lesson for all generations.

Torah Protects and Saves

***“Pharaoh will say of the Children of Israel:
They are imprisoned in the land, the Wilderness
has locked them in”***

(Shemot 14:3)

When Bnei Yisrael were facing the Yam Suf, they were locked in by the Egyptians from behind and wild animals and the desert at the sides. The last letters of the word נִבּוּכִים (imprisoned) spell the word מ' (sea), which is numerically equivalent to fifty. Bnei Yisrael were at the brink of the fiftieth level of *tumah* (Zohar Chadash, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). Therefore, they were imprisoned in the Wilderness. The word סגָר (has locked) is related to the word גִּירְסָא (study). When Bnei Yisrael are not involved in Torah study, they become “locked” in the Wilderness. Without Torah, a person is liable to lose faith, and may even descend to the fiftieth level of *tumah*.

Fortifying One's Faith Averts the Attribute of Judgment

“Hashem said to Moshe: Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!”

(Shemot 14:15)

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Bnei Yisrael were being judged at that time. They had to convert the Divine Attribute of Justice to Mercy. Moshe advised them to focus single-mindedly on pure faith in Hashem. They journeyed into the sea, trusting fully that they would be granted a miracle, for faith changes justice to mercy.

It is difficult to comprehend why Hashem needed to instruct Bnei Yisrael to fortify themselves with faith at the shores of the Yam Suf. After leaving Egypt, they loyally followed Him into the uncultivated Wilderness, without even taking provisions for the journey. They had pure faith that He would tend to their needs. Certainly after witnessing the awesome miracles that Hashem performed at the time of the plagues in Egypt, their faith was steadfast and firm. Why, then, did they require that their faith should be strengthened?

Miracles are not performed gratis. In general, miracles are performed in the merit of Torah and mitzvot. But Bnei Yisrael at the Yam Suf had not yet received the Torah. Which *zechut*, then, could deliver them from the trap of the Egyptians? Their original release from Egypt was in fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 15:14), "Afterwards they will leave with great wealth." What merit would stand by them to have the sea split? The only way they would merit this was through the power of their faith. This is why Hashem used the word "דֹבַר" – Speak," which is a strong term (*Makkot* 11a). They had to increase their level of faith in order to merit *Kriyat Yam Suf*.

We learn from here that strengthening our faith in Hashem and increasing our Torah study transforms the Attribute of Divine Justice to Mercy. Chavakuk Hanavi encapsulated the Torah in one mitzvah (*Chavakuk 2:4*), “The righteous person shall live through his faith.” The merit of one’s stalwart faith grants him life.

The Connection between Yosef’s Bones and the Splitting of the Sea

“Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all the night, and He turned the sea to damp land and the water split”

(*Shemot 14:21*)

“The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned backward”

(*Tehillim 114:3*)

The Midrash asks, “What sight caused the sea to flee? It was the bones of Yosef” (*Shochar Tov*). What is the connection between Yosef’s bones and the Splitting of the Sea?

When Bnei Yisrael plundered Egypt of its gold and silver, Moshe was involved in searching for the remains of Yosef. This was in order to fulfill the vow which Yosef had made with Bnei Yisrael, that when they would be released from Egypt, they would take his bones with them. Moshe was completely attached to Torah and mitzvot. When this mitzvah came his way, he ignored the lure of wealth and occupied himself in finding Yosef’s bones.

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 35:10) says, “All my limbs will say, ‘Hashem, Who is like You?’” A person’s essence is to praise Hashem. The name יוסף comes from the word *להוסיף* (to add). Moshe, who served Hashem with every fiber of his being, constantly sought to add mitzvot to his credit. He therefore became occupied with Yosef’s coffin, instead of amassing wealth (*Sotah* 13a). “Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him” (*Shemot* 13:19). The word “took” hints to marriage, as a woman can become sanctified to a man through “taking,” as in the pasuk (*Devarim* 24:1), “If a man takes a woman” (referring to marrying her). We learn from here that Moshe Rabbeinu was married to the Torah, i.e., he was one with it.

Thus, when the sea saw Moshe subjecting himself to the Torah, it understood that it, too, must subject itself and split for the glory of the Torah, which Bnei Yisrael would later receive on Har Sinai. Bnei Yisrael, upon perceiving how Moshe nullified himself before the Torah, would certainly follow his ways. Even the Egyptians respected him; certainly Am Yisrael did. When they would emulate him, they too, would be connected to the Torah. The fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was single-mindedly involved with finding Yosef’s remains signified Yosef Hatzaddik’s great powers. This is what brought the sea to split before his coffin.

Matrimony, Sustenance, and the Splitting of the Sea

Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all the night, and He turned the sea to damp land and the water split

(*Shemot 14:21*)

Chazal teach that finding one's marriage partner and livelihood are as difficult as Splitting the Sea (*Pesachim* 118a). What is the correlation between earning a living and finding one's marriage partner, equating them both with *Kriyat Yam Suf*? And how are they each similar in difficulty to the hardship involved in splitting the Sea?

When Bnei Yisrael stood at the shore of Yam Suf, with the Egyptians in hot pursuit, they did not imagine that their salvation would come by the sea splitting for them. They cried out to Hashem to rescue them. They understood that Hashem had redeemed them from Egypt with mighty miracles, and they had full faith that He would protect them now, as well. But they had no idea where their deliverance would come from. This is borne out in the pasuk in *Tehillim* (121:1-2), "I raise my eyes to the mountains; whence will come my help? My help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth." When the believer is placed in distress, he lifts his eyes heavenward for salvation. He has intrinsic faith that his help will come from the Creator, but he has no idea how it will arrive. He is confident that Hashem will help him in the most efficient manner.

When Bnei Yisrael stood at the Yam Suf, they were sure that Hashem would save them in a supernatural manner; they were simply unaware of what it might be. Herein lies the connection of marriage and sustenance with the Splitting of the Sea. Although a person has perfect faith that he will find sustenance and his life's partner, he has no idea from where they will come. He might invest all his energies into a specific business

venture, believing that this will reap dividends. But Hashem, the Ultimate Provider, causes his sustenance to arrive from a completely different direction, which he never thought of previously. This is like Am Yisrael at the Yam Suf, who never fathomed that their salvation would come from the sea.

Finding one's soul mate is similar. A person oftentimes thinks that he is running the show, and he will decide whom to marry. But the truth is, that Hashem, the Ultimate Director, Who understands the depths of man's heart, brings him the one who is most suitable for him. This is the one who will help him accomplish his life's task of building a blessed home and perfecting his character. And even if at first glance, it seems that this woman is not compatible with him, and he therefore finds it difficult to live with her, he must internalize the following. Just as Am Yisrael did not believe that their salvation would arrive from the sea, yet that is what happened, so too, did Hashem choose this woman to be his life's partner, for she is the only one who is fitting for him.

One will merit salvation only if he believes it is Hashem Who brings salvation. But if someone is stubborn, trusting that his deliverance can come only in a specific way, this proves that he believes only in himself. He will thereby never attain his aspirations.

The Wealth of the Egyptians at the Sea

“Egypt pursued and came after them – every horse of Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen – into the midst of the sea”

(*Shemot 14:23*)

Chazal relate that the Egyptians decorated their horses with gold, silver, and precious jewels when they chased Bnei Yisrael (*Rashi*, ibid. 15;

Mechilta D'Rashbi 12:36). This later became the spoils of the sea, which Bnei Yisrael plundered.

The following question begs an explanation. The reason why the Egyptians' pursued Bnei Yisrael in the first place was in order to restore their wealth, which Am Yisrael had taken from them when they left Egypt. Rashi, at the beginning of parashat *Beshalach*, explains that Pharaoh succeeded in convincing the Egyptians to join him in chasing after the Jews by stating that they were going in order to reinstate their former wealth. Why, then, did they bring along more jewels when chasing after the Jews?

The Egyptians infused their gold and silver with the forces of the *kelippah* and *tumah*, in order to defile Bnei Yisrael with all kinds of impurity. This was why they brought along their wealth, and why Hashem struck it, as well. The pasuk states that the horse and rider were thrown into the waters. When Hashem brings retribution, He first smites the gods. At *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Hashem struck down the firstborn, for the Egyptians paid homage to their firstborn.

Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to encamp near *Ba'al Tzafon*, for this was the idol of the Egyptians, and this would demonstrate its futility. Their wealth, together with the forces of impurity connected to them, were drowned at sea, proving that they were completely ineffective.

The Wall of Waters

“The Children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea; the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left”

(*Shemot 14:29*)

Why were the waters split in such a way that they became firm walls, instead of just falling by the side, rendering the middle section a dry path?

There are a few ways of explaining this concept. Had the waters flowed on the sides of the pathway, they might have flooded the world. Hashem wished to demonstrate that even when He is punishing evildoers, He still maintains His mercy and does not destroy the entire earth. The walls were erected in order to keep the waters in check. Similarly, He forbade the angels from singing *shirah* at the downfall of the Egyptians, for even when retribution is meted out, He has compassion on His creatures (*Megillah 10b*).

Water, in its natural state, is constantly flowing. Here, Hashem changed the course of nature, and had the waters stand up against their natural inclination, and remain erect as a wall. Chazal relate that Hashem made twelve pathways, with partitions in between, one for each Shevet. He glorified His Name by these miracles at the Sea.

As Bnei Yisrael traversed their individual pathways, they had no recourse but to look heavenward and unite their hearts toward Hashem, Who performed such marvelous kindness with them. They indeed merited observing the *Shechinah*, calling out, “This is my G-d and I shall make for Him a sanctuary!” (see *Sotah 30b*). They accepted the yoke of Heaven upon themselves and proclaimed, “Hashem will reign forever!”

As we study the miracles of *Kriyat Yam Suf*, we too, can merit the revelation of the *Shechinah*. When a person learns Torah, the *Shechinah* is beside him. Chazal tell us that the *Shechinah* spoke from the throat of

Moshe Rabbeinu (*Zohar III, Ra'aya Meheimana* 232a). The pasuk states (*Shemot* 33:11) that Moshe spoke with Hashem face-to-face, so to speak. Immediately afterward, we read that Yehoshua never left the tent. He merited leading the nation after Moshe, because he hid himself in the tent of Torah and was influenced by the abundance of blessing which Moshe received by his Divine exchanges. His Torah study, in its own right, contributed to the *Shechinah* bonding with him.

Whoever analyzes the stories of the Torah merits an abundance of Heavenly blessing, which rain down at the time of the account. One who learns the details of *Kriyat Yam Suf*, merits the inspiration received at that time.

Lessons from the Angels

“Then Moshe and the Children of Israel chose to sing this song to Hashem, and they said the following: I shall sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea”

(*Shemot* 15:1)

When the Egyptians were drowning in the Yam Suf, the angels wished to say *shirah*. Hashem said to them, “My handiwork is drowning in the sea; how can you wish to say *shirah*!?” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 233). We must analyze this desire of the angels to praise Hashem. We, humans of flesh and blood, have a burning *Yetzer Hara* within us. We constantly battle our desires. We likewise have pleasure from praising Hashem. But the angels are completely good. They have no inner battle or *Yetzer Hara*.

to contend with. What pleasure do they get from singing Hashem's praises?

The Vilna Gaon explains in the following way. A person is called one who goes, whereas the angels are called those who stand. One is constantly moving, either upward or downward. He has the ability to continually collect mitzvot, ascending in spirituality. Even after death, a person accrues merit through the good deeds of his children. But angels stay put, from the time of their creation. What kind of enjoyment, then, do they get from calling out, "*Kadosh, kadosh,*" before Hashem?

In the Word to Come, the tzaddikim sit with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah* (*Berachot* 17a). The source of this pleasure derives from their *avodah* in this world, and their exertion in the fulfillment of Hashem's will. Acquiring joy from doing mitzvot in this world guarantees a person the pleasure of the glory of the *Shechinah* in the World to Come. And although he experiences transient pleasure by doing mitzvot in this world, the spiritual pleasure he will experience in the World to Come, which results from the mitzvah, is eternal.

The angels on High sacrifice themselves for the pleasure of observing Hashem's glory. Chazal relate (*Eichah Rabbah* 3:8) that after saying, "*Kadosh, kadosh,*" they fall into the Dinar River, and become burnt. They literally sacrifice themselves for a moment of praising Hashem, for this transitory pleasure is eternal. It is this pleasure that motivates the angels to sing *shirah*.

We are enjoined to learn a few lessons from the angels. If the angels sacrifice themselves for a momentary pleasure, how much more so must we dedicate ourselves to gaining everlasting pleasure. Moreover, doing mitzvot grants a person enjoyment even in this world.

Furthermore, the angels thank Hashem, in their recitation of "*Kadosh, kadosh,*" for the *zechut* of standing before Him, even though it is for but a fleeting moment. All the more so, must a person thank Hashem for the opportunity to stand before Him forever in the World to Come. David Hamelech refers to this pleasure in *Tehillim* (61:5) with the request, "May

I dwell in Your tent in worlds.” Chazal expound (*Yevamot* 96b) that the word “worlds” alludes to two worlds; this world as well as the World to Come. We are enjoined to live in this world properly, in order to truly live in the World to Come. Enjoying the taste of Torah and mitzvot in this world is actually sampling the pleasure of the World to Come. This is in line with the statement of our Sages (*Avot* 4:17), “Better one moment of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life of this world.”

Hashem Fights for His Devout Ones

“Hashem is Master of war – His name is Hashem”

(*Shemot* 15:3)

This pasuk is hard to understand. Is Hashem a warrior? And what is the meaning of, “His name is Hashem”? What is Hashem’s actual essence – is He a warrior, or is His name Hashem?

When Hashem sees that a person cleaves to Him and walks in His ways, He connects to that person, helping him fight his battles. When Hashem’s Name is apparent in a person’s life, for he lives his days for His sake, Hashem becomes his warrior. The prophet Shmuel (I, 2:9) says, “He guards the steps of His devout ones.”

A soldier who fought in the Yom Kippur war told me the following story. During the course of the battle, he once found himself alone in the face of forty enemy tanks. He was overcome with weakness and felt his end was near. He tried to utilize his last moments on earth by concentrating on dying for the sake of the Holy Land. While still engrossed in these thoughts, he suddenly discovered that all of the tanks had retreated and disappeared. There is no miracle greater or more tangible than one in

which a person sees that Hashem fights his battle for him. Hashem actually becomes a warrior, Who vanquishes the enemy before him.

The Bitter Waters

“They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter; therefore they named it Marah”

(*Shemot 15:23*)

The commentaries ask why the place was called “Bitter” rather than “Sweet,” since the bitter waters turned sweet. I would like to suggest the following. Although the waters miraculously turned sweet, Bnei Yisrael were unable to appreciate this miracle since they had not yet received the Torah, which is sweeter than honey and nectar. Nothing can be compared to the sweetness of the Torah. Therefore, Marah was named for the original bitterness of the waters.

The Month of Iyar – Preparation for Matan Torah

“He said: If you hearken diligently to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and do what is just in His eyes, give ear to His commandments and observe all His decrees, then any of the diseases that I placed in Egypt, I will not bring upon you, For I am Hashem, your Healer”

(*Shemot 15:26*)

The initials of the words “**אָנָי י-ה-ו-ה רְוִפַּאַךְ**” – I am Hashem, your Healer,” spell the word **אֵיֶר** (Iyar). When does Hashem bring us healing? When we observe His decrees. Iyar is the most auspicious time for this, since we prepare ourselves for receiving the Torah on Shavuot during this month.

The Manna

“The House of Israel called it manna. It was like coriander seed, it was white, and it tasted like a cake fried in honey”

(*Shemot 16:31*)

The pasuk in Devarim (8:2) states that Bnei Yisrael were given the manna in order to afflict them. This is most surprising. We know that the manna was pure pleasure, in its form and in its taste. How was the manna a form of affliction?

There were two properties to the manna. One is that it was completely absorbed by the body, without the need for digestion, and thus without forming any waste materials. Second, the people had no free choice whether or not to gather it. Had they desisted from gathering it, they would have died of hunger. Gathering too much resulted in it turning moldy, for it could not be preserved. They had to gather the precise amount, as specified by Hashem. Their free choice played no role here.

These two characteristics of the manna elevated the nation to the level of angels. On the one hand, it was physical in its form and taste. On the other hand, it was spiritual, as it demanded that they behave on the level of angels.

This was the point of affliction for them. Am Yisrael were enjoined to straddle two worlds. They were not quite angels, but they were above the level of the average human. This is a great hardship for a person, for he does not know exactly where he stands. The reason Bnei Yisrael were put into this situation was so that they would taste a sample of Gan Eden, and constantly strive to reach it, through keeping Torah and mitzvot.

Moshe's Raised Hands

"Moshe said to Yehoshua: Choose people for us and go do battle with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand. Yehoshua did as Moshe said to him, to do battle with Amalek; and Moshe, Aharon, and Chur ascended to the top of the hill. It happened that when Moshe raised his hand Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger"

(Shemot 17:9-11)

Moshe Rabbeinu commanded Yehoshua to choose people for war, and then he stated that he would ascend the hill with his staff. We have two difficulties with this statement. If Moshe's staff possessed special powers, as we find it brought about the plagues in Egypt and split the sea, what was the purpose of choosing warriors to do battle for the nation? The staff itself was capable of bringing them victory. Second, what was the significance in the raising and lowering of Moshe's hand; as Rashi asks, "Was it the hand of Moshe that won the war?"

We can answer both questions together. The staff of Hashem was a symbol of Torah and man's adherence to Hashem's word. Moshe was, in essence, telling Bnei Yisrael that he would ascend the hill with the *zechut* of Torah. If they would fortify themselves with Torah study and adherence to Hashem's word, these merits would protect them. But if, *chalilah*, they would become lax in these areas, the staff would have no power of protection. They would be forced to do battle with Amalek in a natural manner, through warriors.

However, Bnei Yisrael would never succeed in surmounting Amalek this way, for Amalek were trained fighters and would easily triumph over Bnei

Yisrael. This was the reason why Moshe commanded Yehoshua to choose men, apart from bringing his staff along with him. Bnei Yisrael were given two options: either natural warfare with warriors, or a supernatural war beyond the laws of nature, by means of the staff, which depicted adherence to the Torah and mitzvot of Hashem, the Ultimate warrior Who fights our wars.

Moshe's arms acted like a barometer, testing whether or not Bnei Yisrael were sufficiently devoted to Torah, or, *chas v'shalom*, far from it. When his arms were raised, they understood that they were close to Hashem and the Torah, and this is what grants them victory against Amalek. But when Moshe's arms were lowered, it indicated that the nation had become weakened in their Torah study, and Amalek was given the upper hand. Moshe's hands did not make or break the war; they were merely an indication to Am Yisrael regarding their status.

At the Top of the Hill

“Yehoshua did as Moshe said to him, to do battle with Amalek; and Moshe, Aharon, and Chur ascended to the top of the hill”

(*Shemot 17:10*)

Why were Moshe, Aharon, and Chur specifically chosen to ascend to the top of the hill in the battle against Amalek?

The *gematria* of the initials of their names, מ-א-נ, is equal to forty-nine. During the forty-nine days that Bnei Yisrael spent in the Wilderness between Pesach and Shavuot, they were involved in acquiring the forty-nine levels of *kedushah*, and ridding themselves of the forty-nine levels of *tumah*. Amalek came to attack them specifically at this time, in

order to infuse them with impurity, to drag them down once again to the nadir of defilement. In this manner, they would gain victory over Am Yisrael.

Therefore, Moshe fought the battle by means of his hands. When he lifted his hands heavenward, Bnei Yisrael gained victory. When he lowered his hands, Amalek triumphed. Hands held heavenward hint to the forty-nine levels of purity, an indication that Bnei Yisrael were on the rise. But when he lowered his hands, it alluded to the forty-nine levels of defilement, and Amalek prevailed.

Chur, who joined Moshe and Aharon, was a tremendous tzaddik. We can learn this from the following. Betzalel, who was young at the erection of the Mishkan, was nonetheless a great man, for he was given the power to use special combinations of Hashem's Names, through which the world had been created, to build the Tabernacle (see *Sanhedrin* 69b; *Berachot* 55a). The verse introducing Betzalel states, "Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur." Obviously, his ancestor Chur was certainly a great man.

Yitro

Why Yitro Came

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

Rashi asks, “What report did he hear that had such a great effect on him that he came? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.”

In the Song of the Sea, the pasuk states (*Shemot* 15:14-15), “Peoples heard – they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved.” Chazal relate (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua* 9) that for forty years, everyone spoke about *Kriyat Yam Suf*. They had all witnessed it, for all the waters in the world split at that time (*Shemot Rabbah* 21:6). Even later, after Yehoshua began leading Am Yisrael, the nations of the world were still abuzz over the Splitting of the Sea. We find that Rachav, who hid Pinchas and Calev when they

scouted out the Land, discussed it with them. Not all of the nations heard about the Ten Plagues, but the Splitting of the Sea made waves.

The Ohr Hachaim (*Shemot* 14:27) recounts that there were many tzaddikim who performed miracles. One example is Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, who split a river that he needed to cross. But when Moshe ordered the sea to split, he was faced with defiance. Although he hit the waters, as Hashem had commanded, they refused to part. How can we understand this in light of the fact that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair split the waters so easily?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair lived after *Matan Torah*. The power of Torah enabled him to perform miracles. But Bnei Yisrael at *Kriyat Yam Suf* had not yet received the Torah. Even though they rose to the level of witnessing Divine revelation (*Mechilta Beshalach, Parashat Hashirah* 3), they lacked the *zechut* of Torah for this miracle to occur.

The waters eventually did part, taking into account the *zechut* of the Torah which Bnei Yisrael were on their way to accepting. Hashem considers a good thought as a good deed. Therefore, they could be considered as having already received the Torah. The waters could hinder them no longer, and they split before them.

“Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Refidim – רְפִידִים” (*Shemot* 17:8). The *Ba’al Haturim* explains that they became lax in mitzvot רְפֹעַת יָדֵיהֶם מִן (the *mitzvot* of their hands). This brought about Amalek’s attack. Chazal state (*Bechorot* 5b) that there is really no such place as Refidim, but it was called this name to indicate that they displayed a weakness in Torah there.

What was the essence of the accusation against Bnei Yisrael? They must surely have been exhausted after the exertion of coming out of Egypt and crossing the sea. Weren’t they entitled to rest a bit? Why were they held so accountable for slackening in their Torah study? They had not even received the Torah at this point; what was their great offense?

I once asked a woman why she doesn't visit different countries. She replied that once, on an airplane, there was some sort of failure. Since then, she doesn't have the nerve to fly. I tried proving to her that travel by car is by far more dangerous, but she would have none of it. Someone who was burnt once doesn't take any chances. He is still paralyzed by the original fear.

This explains the accusation against Bnei Yisrael at Refidim. They had not long ago experienced being locked in by the sea on all sides, with the waters refusing to part before them. This was because they did not have the merit of Torah to protect them. They were in tremendous peril, as the Egyptians were advancing toward them. They understood, first hand, that one cannot exist without Torah. This is why they were charged now for their weakening in Torah study. They had experienced the danger of living without Torah. They should have taken this lesson to heart, but because they did not, Amalek attacked.

Chazal relate (*Yerushalmi, Ta'anit* 4:5; see *Shabbat* 116a) that when Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai, they were like a child running out of school. They felt no compunctions regarding leaving the place where they had received the Torah, and the location where Hashem had forgiven them for the sin of the Golden Calf. Bnei Yisrael were blamed for not feeling any sense of regret at leaving the *Shechinah*. Their desire to remain at the sea, collecting the spoils of the Egyptians after the waters split, exacerbated this flaw. Perfect faith in Hashem should have been etched in their minds. Since they did not display enough *emunah* at that time, as soon as they loosened their connection with Torah, Amalek pounced upon them.

This teaches the great importance of constantly fortifying oneself in Torah. For even the Generation of Wisdom, who left Mitzrayim and received the Torah, failed in this area and, as they left Har Sinai, were akin to a young child who can't wait to flee from the schoolhouse.

We mentioned above that Yitro was influenced to join the Jewish nation when he heard about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. But there were countless other miracles which occurred at the time, such as the

manna, the well, etc. What was unique about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek that drew Yitro to join the Jewish nation?

Something that a person sees with his own eyes has a great effect upon him. Everyone saw the Splitting of the Sea, for all the waters in the entire world split at that time. One cannot compare hearing with seeing, for “seeing is believing.” Similarly, we find (*Shemot* 14:31), “Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.”

But the entire world heard and saw, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 15:14), “Peoples heard – they were agitated.” Why was Yitro the only individual who opted to join the Jewish nation? We can answer this based on the words of the *Mesilat Yesharim* (chapter 2). There are two types of blind people. One is blind from birth. He is physically handicapped and cannot see. The other can in fact see, but he sees only that which he is interested in seeing. He, too, is considered blind.

This was the status of the world at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Everyone on the face of the earth witnessed the Splitting of the Sea, but blinded themselves to its message. They failed to learn any lesson from what they experienced, not bothering to ponder or analyze the matter. Conversely, Am Yisrael took the experience very much to heart, and believed in Hashem as a result. Yitro, too, saw the message in the sea and decided to become a part of the Jewish nation.

The tribe of Levi was not enslaved in Egypt. They were involved in Torah study when the others were working. They reviewed all they had learned from their forefathers. What was the accusation against the rest of the nation – they had not yet received the Torah; how could they be held accountable for not studying it? It seems fitting to say that they were culpable for not going to learn from the tribe of Levi, the Torah scholars of the nation.

When there is a laxity in Torah, one’s faith becomes shaky. This was what took place in the Wilderness, as Bnei Yisrael proclaimed (*Shemot* 17:7), “Is Hashem among us or not?” They were held severely accountable

for this attitude, and it is what brought upon them the battle with Amalek. I remember many people in Morocco who had strong faith in Hashem. Unfortunately, they were lacking Torah. When a time of *nisayon* arrived, they fell. Without Torah, faith falters.

Now we can understand the uniqueness of Yitro, the only one who came to join the Jewish nation. He had been the minister of Midian, serving all the forms of idolatry in the world (*Mechilta Yitro* 1). He heard about the great miracles that Bnei Yisrael experienced, and began believing in Hashem. He immediately set out to join Am Yisrael in order to learn Torah. He realized that if he did not pursue Torah study right away, his *emunah* would waver, and he would gain nothing from what he had seen and heard.

He also observed how Am Yisrael had been attacked by Amalek as soon as they weakened in their Torah study. He therefore began swimming in the sea of Torah, before his faith could flounder.

Yitro faced unbelievable tests. Here he was, the minister of Midian, great and important in the eyes of his nation. He left everything behind and joined the Jewish people. He knew that without Torah, his *emunah* would corrode, just as Bnei Yisrael's had, when Amalek arrived.

Kabbalat HaTorah

The episode with Yitro is an introduction to *Matan Torah*. The connection between the two is a lesson for us. If Yitro, a gentile, heard of the miracles and arrived at the right conclusions, that a person should accept upon himself the yoke of Torah, all the more so must Bnei Yisrael contemplate the many miracles Hashem did for them, and accept the Torah willingly.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter explains that during each of the fifty days beginning with *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bnei Yisrael were occupied with repairing one level of spirituality, until they reached the summit of the fiftieth level of *kedushah*, in time for accepting the Torah. But they had been remiss in Torah for a period of time at Refidim; this detracted from

the days spent in self-improvement. How, then, were they able to merit receiving the Torah after fifty days?

Bnei Yisrael certainly did not completely desist from Torah study. Their fault was that they learned with a sense of complacency, instead of a feeling of longing. This was their offense when they were blamed for weakening their hands from Torah study. They should have exerted themselves in learning Torah more diligently. This can be compared to a person who is granted access to the king's treasury and is told to take as much as his heart desires. He surely will not be lazy in this matter, but will execute this mission with great enthusiasm. This was how Bnei Yisrael were intended to toil in Torah. Because they were negligent, Amalek attacked. After the battle with Amalek, they most likely applied themselves in Torah and perfecting their *middot*, in order to correct their previous mistakes.

Lessons from the Tsunami

In the month of December, 2006, a great tsunami overflowed the Asian continent, claiming over three hundred thousand lives. How did this happen? Mighty waves came from under the waterbed. They went unnoticed until they had wreaked tremendous devastation. Entire locales were totally destroyed. I heard that in Sri Lanka, over one hundred elephants escaped a mere few moments prior to this catastrophe. Yet the people had no clue of what was about to occur.

Let us contemplate this incident. Are the animals on a higher level than the people that they possess a sense of impending danger which impels them to flee, whereas mankind is left in the dark?

Chazal teach (*Berachot* 6b) that when a person walks in the ways of Hashem, the entire world is at his service. But if he does not go on the proper path, the animals and insects, which were created before him, are more significant than he is (*Sanhedrin* 38a). Animals have no Torah to protect them. Therefore, they are granted special instincts to save them from danger. But mankind has the gift of Torah. Every Jew who studies

Torah has a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu within him. He has no need for this sixth sense, for Torah protects him from all harm. Conversely, harsh decrees befall those who are empty of Torah. When we are lax in our Torah study, we invite tragedy, *chas v'shalom*. But the animals, which do not deserve this punishment, are given the sense to flee.

The calamity in Asia should arouse us to realize just how limited is the power of man. Without the *zechut* of Torah, man has nothing to maintain his existence. Whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu does in the world is in order for Am Yisrael to become strengthened. By imagining such a great tragedy happening to us, *chas v'shalom*, we will be inspired to fortify ourselves spiritually in order to avert a similar fate.

In Summary

- ◆ “Yitro heard.” Yitro heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek and came to join the Jewish nation. Not only did Yitro hear, but the entire world heard. For the next forty years, the whole world spoke about *Kriyat Yam Suf*. We find that even in the time of Yehoshua, Rachav discussed this matter with Pinchas and Calev.
- ◆ The Ohr Hachaim asks why the river split for Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, whereas the sea refused to split before Moshe Rabbeinu and the entire Jewish nation. He explains that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair had the merit of Torah, but Kriyat Yam Suf was before Matan Torah, so the nation lacked this *zechut*. However, since Bnei Yisrael were on the way to accepting the Torah, Hashem considered it as though they had already received it, earning them the merit of Torah. Thus the sea did eventually split.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael became weak in Torah, and therefore Amalek attacked. Why did they deserve such severe retribution? They had recently left Egypt and experienced Kriyat Yam Suf. Weren’t they entitled to rest up a bit? The answer is that Bnei Yisrael saw the ramifications of living without Torah, by the waters refusing to split before them. They should have understood that they needed to strengthen themselves to their maximum in Torah, and not suffice with a watered down version of Torah study.

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah; what was the grievance against them, claiming that they weakened in Torah study? Shevet Levi apparently studied Torah during the years of bondage in Egypt. Am Yisrael, then, should have turned to them to learn Torah.
- ◆ Something that a person sees with his own eyes has a tremendous effect upon him. This is reflected in the pasuk, “Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.”
- ◆ Why was Yitro the only one whose heart moved him to convert? The Mesilat Yesharim explains that there is a person who has eyes, but is nonetheless blind, because he does not reflect upon what he sees.
- ◆ Yitro noticed that as soon as Bnei Yisrael grew lax in Torah, Amalek attacked. He therefore urged himself to convert, for he realized that his emunah would waver if he did not immediately act upon his inspiration. Without the power of Torah, emunah is shaky. This is borne out by the fact that Bnei Yisrael descended to the level of asking, “Is Hashem in our midst or not?”
- ◆ The incident with Yitro is described before Matan Torah, in order to teach Bnei Yisrael to follow in his ways.
- ◆ Multitudes of people perished in the tsunami, whereas many animals perceived the impending danger, and escaped in time. Why do animals possess a sixth sense, helping them to escape before disaster strikes, whereas people lack this sense? People do not need such a sense, for they are endowed with the Torah, which is their protection. But without Torah they are, indeed, in great danger.

The Virtues of Yitro

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

Thus opens the parashah that describes the Giving of the Torah to Am Yisrael. Why is this parashah named *Yitro*? Wouldn't the name *Parashat Matan Torah* or *Parashat Moshe*, after Moshe Rabbeinu, be more appropriate? After all, Moshe was Hashem's emissary in giving us the Torah from Heaven, through great self-sacrifice. Why was Yitro deserving of such great honor? Only a short while beforehand, he was the priest of Midian, practicing all of the forms of idolatry available at the time (*Mechilta, Yitro 1*).

Hashem chose specifically the name of *Yitro* for this parashah in order to teach us his tremendous virtues. Rashi explains that Yitro heard about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. These drew him to the Jewish nation. Yet, in the Song of the Sea (*Shemot 15:14*), we state, “Peoples heard – they were agitated.” Yitro was not the only one who heard about the tremendous miracles that occurred to Am Yisrael. But Yitro was the only one who internalized the message contained in the miracles. He did not listen with his ears; he listened with his heart. The rest of the nations heard about the wonders, but did not internalize their message. After a short while, they forgot about the whole thing, and went back to daily life.

Yitro was different. He had the humility to admit that he was living a life of error and fraud. At the first opportunity to recognize Hashem's Presence and the eternity of Am Yisrael, he confessed his mistake and came to live under the protection of the *Shechinah*. There are those who prepare a *seudat Yitro*. This is in commemoration of the feast that Yitro made when he became aware of the greatness of Hashem and joined the

Jewish nation. This special meal demonstrated his exalted spiritual stature, he was able to recognize the truth and publicize it openly, without shame. The parashah of *Matan Torah* is called parashat *Yitro* for precisely this reason. We are enjoined to learn from Yitro the following powerful lesson. In order to serve Hashem correctly and walk in His ways, we must cling to the truth without fearing those who ridicule the service of Hashem. When a person is not ashamed to admit his mistakes, and has the courage to change his ways and embrace the truth, he has tremendous merit, just as Yitro, who acknowledged the truth and merited that the parashah concerning *Matan Torah* was called by his name.

Furthermore, we can learn the following lesson. If Yitro, who was the minister of Midian, far from a Torah lifestyle, was inspired to seek the truth and clung to it without paying attention to the scoffers, all the more so, must we adhere to the truth. We must behave with Jewish pride. Only when one ignores the scoffers and prosecutors is he capable of going in Hashem's ways and holding fast to Torah and mitzvot.

It is natural that if a person's house is damaged, he tries to renovate as soon as possible. He takes advantage of the earliest opportunity to rebuild his house anew. Everyone can identify with this approach. Why, then, didn't Hashem see fit to rebuild His world after it was destroyed by the sin of Adam Harishon? Hashem created a perfect world in six days. But after Adam sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, this world was spoiled and never returned to its former glory. The world will return to its former pristine state only after Mashiach arrives.

This is most astounding. When Hashem brought the Torah down to the world, all of the nations feared Him. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 15:15), "Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved. May fear and terror befall them." When Hashem proclaimed, "I am Hashem," His voice was heard from one end of the world to the other. All of Creation, without exception, heard this pronouncement (based on *Zevachim* 116a).

Chazal relate that after the Torah was given, the nations of the world approached Bilaam Harasha, their prophet, and asked if the world was about to be destroyed. He replied that the world would continue existing for thousands of years to come. The tumult was caused by Hashem giving the Torah to His nation. From this reply, they understood that the Torah is the purpose of the world's existence. It is in the merit of the Torah that the world continues. Why didn't Hashem take advantage of the opportunity when the nations were in a state of fearing Him, recognizing His Divinity, in order to bring Mashiach and the entire world to its completion?

Regarding the days of Mashiach, the *Navi* states (*Zechariah* 14:9), "Hashem will be the King over all the land; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One." Hashem's Kingship will reign over the entire world, and all will recognize His rule. This will bring the world to perfection, and it will return to the days of Creation, before the sin of Adam Harishon, days of perfect wholeness.

Why does Hashem seek to perfect His world, returning it to its original state, only after Mashiach arrives? Why didn't Hashem restore it to its former glory at *Matan Torah*, when all feared Him? Why must the coming of Mashiach involve hardship and suffering, when this could all be avoided by the gentiles believing in Hashem and His Torah and accepting His authority over themselves? This would have saved us so much agony and anguish. We would have been spared Amalek's attack, and his subsequent "cooling off" of our nation with regard to the rest of the gentiles. We would have been saved all of the misery and grief which we have suffered in the long years of exile. Hashem could have anointed Moshe as Mashiach and we would have evaded all of the distress of *galut*.

We can clarify this issue by quoting the following pasuk (*Shemot* 19:6), "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation." The words "You shall be to Me" signify our uniqueness as Hashem's nation, preferred as a kingdom of ministers, exalted among the nation, and chosen above all of mankind. The word 'ל' (to me) is numerically equivalent to forty, an allusion to the forty days which Moshe spent in Heaven, preparing to

receive the Torah. The ability to be exalted in the eyes of Hashem comes through the Torah. Hashem wanted Am Yisrael to be unique among the nations in the merit of their Torah study. Had all of the nations accepted the dictates of the Torah immediately, Bnei Yisrael would have missed the opportunity to be special by receiving the Torah.

Bnei Yisrael forestalled Hashem's perfection of the world by the damage they caused with the sin of the Golden Calf. They therefore need to be purified through *galut* in order to receive atonement. Only afterward, can the world return to its former glory. "For Mine is the entire world" (*ibid.* 19:5); we should all recognize Who is the Owner of the world. But because Am Yisrael became corrupted and did not wait for Moshe's descent, instead fashioning the calf, the entire world became spoiled. When Am Yisrael, the Chosen Nation, introduce doubt in their Avodat Hashem and hurry to fashion a Calf, lowering the bar of their service, certainly the gentiles are barred from believing in Hashem and dedicating themselves to His service.

The Zohar teaches (II, 161b) that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. Why was this necessary? Hashem wrote the Torah; He knows it by heart! Hashem was informing us that the world exists only for the sake of the Torah. As soon as Am Yisrael forsake the Torah, the world loses its merit for continued existence.

In addition to the damage caused by the sin of Adam Harishon, Am Yisrael harmed the world through committing the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, Hashem did not want to use the opportunity of *Matan Torah* to rectify the world, because the Giving of the Torah itself presented an opportunity for sin (when Moshe was delayed in bringing down the *luchot*). Only in the days of Mashiach, when Am Yisrael return from their exile, achieving complete atonement, will the world return to its former state, and Hashem's existence will be unanimously recognized.

In Summary

- ♦ Why is such an important parashah as that of the Ten Commandments called by the name of Yitro, who had only recently abandoned idol

worship? Yitro merited this honor by virtue of listening with his heart. He was not like the rest of the gentiles, who heard about the miracles and then forgot about them. Yitro likewise paid no heed to the scoffers. As soon as he recognized the truth, he came to dwell under the wings of the *Shechinah*. The fact that this parashah is named after him teaches us the value of listening with one's heart, against all detractors.

- ♦ Why didn't Hashem use the opportunity of *Matan Torah* to repair His damaged world after the sin of Adam Harishon? The entire world was in awe of Hashem and feared His kingdom at that time. Why did He wait, instead, for the coming of Mashiach, when all will recognize His rulership? Much suffering could have been averted, had the world been brought to perfection earlier.
- ♦ Hashem wanted Am Yisrael to be a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation. This occurs when they are "to Me." The word 'ל' (to me), numerically equivalent to forty, alludes to the Torah, which was given after forty days. Am Yisrael's uniqueness derives from the Torah. Had the gentiles also hurried to accept it, Am Yisrael would have lost its superiority among Creation.
- ♦ Am Yisrael corrupted their ways and damaged the world by committing the sin of the Golden Calf, in addition to the sin of Adam Harishon. The only way to refine them from their impurities is through the refinery of *galut*. Only then will the entire world believe that it belongs to Hashem. This concept was spoiled by the sin of the Golden Calf. If Bnei Yisrael do not reveal loyalty to their Master, what can be expected of the gentiles?

Yitro Heard

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

“Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, came to Moshe with his sons and his wife, to the Wilderness where he was encamped, by the Mountain of G-d”

(ibid. vs. 5)

This parashah, which deals with *Kabbalat HaTorah*, is not called *Parashat Moshe*, after Moshe Rabbeinu, who brought the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. It is not called *Parashat HaTorah*, or even *Parashat Bnei Yisrael*, after the nation who accepted the Torah from the Mouth of the Holy One. How did Yitro merit that this most important parashah should be named after him?

Yitro certainly had special virtues, which granted him the tremendous *zechut* to have this parashah named after him. Yitro was the minister of Midian, an idol worshipper (*Mechilta, Yitro 1*), but when he heard about the amazing wonders of Hashem, he left behind all his wealth and prestige and came under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

Everyone who forsakes worldly pleasures to come close to Hashem has his own reasons for doing so. The *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu 1:3*), “An ox knows his owner, and a donkey his master’s trough.” Even dumb animals recognize their owners, and who it is that feeds them. There are Jews who become inspired to return to their Maker, Who grants them every moment of life in this world.

Just as a piece of furniture testifies that it was made by a carpenter, and a garment testifies that it was made by a tailor, so too, does the world bear witness to its Creator. When Yitro acknowledged all the miracles that Hashem had performed, he did not remain inactive. Instead, he sought ways of drawing near to Him. The words “Yitro heard” indicate that he opened his ears and his heart to hear Hashem’s word. It was in merit of this hearing that the parashah is named after him.

Yitro had an advantage over Bnei Yisrael. Whereas they left Egypt in a hurry, not even having time to bake their bread, Yitro came of his own free choice. No one forced him to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*. When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, they were released from bondage to freedom, from the depths of depravity to the summit of sanctity (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). They followed Hashem merely out of disgust for their former lifestyle. This was why they agreed to follow Moshe Rabbeinu in the Wilderness. But Yitro left the comfortable and honorable life of the minister of Midian, abandoning all his wealth, in order to follow Hashem in the uncultivated desert.

Yitro came to Hashem from his own goodwill. He was a gentile who had no obligation to observe the 613 mitzvot. Yet he did not remain indifferent when hearing about the great miracles of Hashem at *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and in the Wilderness. His virtue was that he came under the wings of the *Shechinah* of his own volition. This awarded him the honor of having this parashah named after him.

Yitro also possessed the following virtue. Bnei Yisrael saw Hashem’s wonders throughout their odyssey. Yitro, conversely, only heard about them. The only miracle he witnessed firsthand was the Splitting of the Sea. He nevertheless made the decision to follow Hashem. Although “seeing is believing,” Yitro internalized what he heard. He utilized his power of imagination to picture the scenes which took place, as though he himself had participated in them. The miracles of the Exodus from Egypt and of the Wilderness were tangible facts to him. Merely hearing about these wonders motivated him to forsake his former position in Midian and cling to Hashem and His Torah.

We are told that Menashe, son of Chizkiyahu Hamelech, practiced every form of idolatry in the world. He even had the brazenness to place a statue in the Beit Hamikdash. He desecrated this holy site, to the extent that the fire went out from above the Mizbeach. Additionally, he killed Yeshayahu Hanavi (*Sanhedrin* 103b). When Menashe was being burnt to death, although he was in terrible agony, he suddenly remembered Hashem. He cried out to Him and did complete teshuvah (*ibid.* 101b). The angels, aware of his tremendous wickedness, wished to lock the Heavenly gates, keeping his tefillot from reaching Hashem's Throne. But Hashem prevented them from doing this (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim* II 246).

What prompted Menashe to call out to Hashem and repent after all of the great sins he had committed? The answer is that he recalled the words of Chizkiyahu, his father. Chizkiyahu, too, had faced punishment of death. This was because he had refused to marry. At the last moment, he was able to rescind the decree, and fifteen years were added to his life. Upon this, Chizkiyahu stated, "Even if a sharp sword is resting on a person's neck, he should not despair of Heavenly mercy" (*Berachot* 10a). Menashe learned from his father to turn to Hashem when in difficult straits.

In the heat of the moment, when his feet were being singed from the fire, he suddenly remembered his father's teaching. When all else failed, Menashe turned to Hashem, as a last resort, and returned to Him completely. I read an opinion in the sefarim, that Menashe was the one appointed to escort *ba'alei teshuvah* through the portals of Gan Eden. How great is the power of listening. It can stimulate a person, in his very last moments, and change his fate through the power of teshuvah.

Everyone who does teshuvah is considered as a newborn. His thoughts are pure and he is free of sin. Chazal declare (*Shabbat* 119b), "The world stands on the breath of the young children." This would imply that the merit of the youth is greater even than that of the tzaddikim. They literally uphold the entire world. I remember, when I was a young boy, how my family would mention the names of specific tzaddikim. Their memory is forever etched in my mind. Their exalted deeds escort me through life. A

child's mind is clear and unsullied from improper thoughts. He is therefore capable of absorbing lofty matters, which will remain with him always.

Menashe defiled himself with idolatry throughout his life. Nevertheless, he succeeded in doing perfect teshuvah and confessing his sins. This was in merit of the maxim he had heard from his father. In his difficult moments, Menashe was able to conjure up his father's words. One may never lose hope of Hashem's salvation. He utilized this saying in his last moments and merited his cries reaching Hashem.

I remember that when I was a child, my father would constantly use the phrase, "Be'ezrat Hashem," in the Arab language spoken then. The lilt in his voice, at the recitation of those words, still rings in my ears. The power of hearing is tremendous. This phrase influences me till today. Likewise, I recall my father often sighing and crying out painfully, "There are no tzaddikim left in the world." But immediately afterward, he would gather strength and nullify his words, stating, "Not true. The tzaddikim have not left. They endure and continue upholding the world." He would jump up and strengthen himself like a lion to do Avodat Hashem, proving that there are, indeed, righteous men, who have the power to protect the generation.

Just as every book has an introduction, describing the contents of the book, the first pasuk of parashat *Yitro*, describing what he heard, is an introduction to *Matan Torah*. Yitro's experience proves the power of Torah and endears it in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael. Yitro was the minister of Midian, lacking no aspect of materialism. Yet he left behind all of his former wealth and glory and came to take shelter under the wings of the *Shechinah*. This was all based on the reports that he had heard regarding Hashem's miracles. If only hearing about Hashem's wonders brought Yitro to join Bnei Yisrael, without even having seen the miracles personally, this is the ultimate proof to Hashem's supremacy. This is the perfect introduction to receiving the Torah, because it makes it cherished in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael.

Many people, like Yitro, heard about Hashem's wonders and miracles. Yet, unlike him, they did not make any changes in their lifestyles as a result. What was unique about Yitro's approach, which brought him to come close to Hashem and do teshuvah for his previous iniquities?

As we mentioned earlier, Yitro employed his power of imagination to make the miracles of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* real to him. He was so successful that he actually felt as though he had participated in those miracles. Therefore, although he merely heard about these miracles, he was able to identify with the excitement of the people who had actually experienced them.

Chazal relate the following account concerning Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness. At Minchah time, one Shabbat, he noticed that his sons were absent. He asked Beruriah, his wife, about this. She replied that they were involved in their studies in the Beit Hamidrash. After three stars emerged at the end of Shabbat, she brought him to the farthest room of the house and revealed to him their dead bodies, lying on the bed. She then told him, "The Depositor has arrived and taken back His deposit." To which Rabbi Meir responded, "Hashem has given and Hashem has taken; may His Name be blessed" (*Iyov* 1:21). Only then did he understand the cause of their absence (*Midrash, Mishlei* 31).

When I read this incident, I was overcome with trembling. From where did Beruriah get the inner strength to remain silent throughout Shabbat and not cry over the deaths of her beloved sons, to the degree that she managed to hide it from her husband, in order not to spoil his joy on Shabbat? Also, from where did Rabbi Meir acquire such blind trust in his wife that he did not further question her about his sons, or fear for their fate? Upon realizing the truth, where did he obtain the fortitude to proclaim, "Hashem has given and Hashem has taken; may His Name be blessed"?

When the Torah is implanted within a person's heart, it fills it completely, enlarging it to the degree that there is room for nothing else. The Torah bestows upon a person the ability to cope with all forms of

anguish and agony. Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness was completely immersed in the sea of Torah and halachah. Beruriah, likewise, was exceedingly righteous. The great ones of the generation would come to hear her words of Torah. The Torah which encompassed this pious couple granted them the potential to absorb the pain of their loss. They possessed complete self-control and accepted the Heavenly decree with love.

Likewise, when Yitro accepted the yoke of Heaven upon his shoulders, the Torah broadened his heart and filled it completely. He had no need whatsoever for his previous wealth. He was entirely absorbed with love of Hashem. He followed Him into the Wilderness, placing his trust in Him. He believed that Hashem would guard him and sustain him appropriately. The Torah tells us that Yitro proclaimed, "Baruch Hashem!" He was the first one in our history who blessed Hashem's Name, and bequeathed this blessing for generations to come.

How great is the sense of hearing! It has the power to overturn worlds, bringing a person from darkness to light and from slavery to freedom.

Yitro's advice to appoint ministers over every thousand people, and ministers over every hundred people was accepted warmly. We might have expected Bnei Yisrael to spurn his suggestion, as they seemingly scorned Moshe's position. But when they observed how Yitro had made the arduous journey to join them, through his own efforts, they understood that his counsel, too, came from the depths of his pure heart. He had only their best interest in mind. He wanted to spare the nation long hours of waiting in line, hours which could be used to pursue Torah knowledge. They therefore took his advice.

In Summary

- ◆ Why was this special parashah containing *Matan Torah* named after Yitro? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to call it by the name of Moshe Rabbeinu who gave the Torah, or Bnei Yisrael, who accepted it?
- ◆ Yitro had an advantage over Bnei Yisrael. He had not experienced the great miracles; he had merely heard about them. He imagined their impact

and joined the nation of his own accord. But Bnei Yisrael left Egypt under pressure. They left in order to escape bondage, not necessarily to receive the Torah. Yitro, on the other hand, came of his own accord, to do teshuvah.

- ◆ Additionally, the parashah is named after Yitro, because even though, as a gentile, he did not have to keep all the mitzvot, he chose to do so, and sacrificed himself to follow the nation in the uncultivated Wilderness.
- ◆ Also, Yitro did not experience all of the miracles, as the Jewish nation had. He merely heard about them. But this was enough to motivate him to join Bnei Yisrael.
- ◆ Yitro utilized the power of hearing to its utmost. Through this power, he came to teshuvah. We find the power of hearing to be significant regarding Menashe. Although he was extremely wicked throughout his life, he repented at the last moment, just as he was being placed in a boiling cauldron. This was due to the strength implanted in him by Chizkiyahu, his father, who would say, “Even if a sharp sword is resting on a person’s neck, he should not despair of Heavenly mercy.”
- ◆ The parashah begins with the words “Yitro heard.” The fact that he abandoned all honor and esteem, in order to accept the Torah in the Wilderness demonstrates the tremendous worth of the Torah, and endears it in our eyes.
- ◆ Rabbi Meir’s two sons passed away on Shabbat. His wife, Beruriah, hid the matter from him, in order not to cause him anguish on Shabbat. From where did she get the strength to behave this way, and from where did Rabbi Meir have the strength to remain tranquil throughout Shabbat? Their strength derived from the Torah, which pervaded their hearts and fortified them against this great calamity.

Coming Close to Hashem

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

Yitro heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek and came to join the Jewish nation (*Rashi*, *ibid.*).

Amalek came and attacked Bnei Yisrael in Refidim. Chazal explain that this was a direct result of their laxity in Torah (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana* 3:1). But Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. How could they be held accountable for *bitul Torah*?

After *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the entire world feared Hashem. Amalek came and “cooled off” this fear. Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimonii, Ki Teitzei* 938) that this can be compared to a boiling bathtub. All are afraid to enter. Until finally, one fool comes along and steps in. True, he gets burnt, but he has cooled it off for everyone else. Amalek, by attacking Bnei Yisrael, cooled off their level of faith in Hashem.

How could Hashem allow such a thing to take place? How could He let Amalek damage the pure *emunah* demonstrated at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, simply because they were negligent in their Torah study?

A son is obligated to honor his father. This is because his father has given him life. Additionally, he raised him and supported him and gave him whatever he needed to live a productive life. When the child is young, he does not realize just how much his father does for him. Only when he becomes older, does he appreciate how much gratitude he must have toward his father.

The Gemara relates the following incident (*Yerushalmi, Kiddushin* 1:7) regarding Rabbi Tarfon, the great *Tanna*. When he grew ill, his mother

came to state his merits, so that those present could pray for his recovery. She recounted just how diligent he was in the mitzvah of honoring her. One time, they were walking together, when her shoe suddenly tore. Rabbi Tarfon bent down and placed his hands under her feet, so that she might walk upon them and not feel the sharp stones strewn about the streets. The Sages told her that the kindness which she had done for him – giving birth to him and raising him – was far greater than that which he did for her.

A young child who does not understand the level of kindness which his parents bestow upon him is not held culpable when he ridicules them. But the Sages rule (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 343) that a smart child is held accountable. In his wisdom, he should realize how great is the mitzvah of honoring one's parents. The same holds true with all mitzvot, even though one is not officially obligated to observe mitzvot before the age of thirteen.

Bnei Yisrael observed the great miracles which Hashem had performed at *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Both Jew and gentile entered the sea. The Egyptians sank to the bottom, whereas the Jews walked through on dry land. Chazal tell us (*Mechilta Beshalach, Parashat Shirah* 3) that a handmaiden at the sea perceived Hashem to a greater degree than even Yechezkel in his prophecy. Bnei Yisrael should have, through their wisdom, understood the magnitude of gratitude that they were supposed to display toward Hashem. They should have felt close to Him at all times, without letup. The whole purpose of Torah study is to come close to Hashem. Although, at this point, Bnei Yisrael were not yet commanded to study Torah, they should have understood that it was incumbent upon them to maintain their close ties with Hashem.

The Gemara lauds using one's environment to learn proper conduct (*Eiruvin* 100b), "Had the Torah not been given, we could have learned modesty from the cat, honesty from the ant, etc." Bnei Yisrael's remark (*Shemot* 17:7), "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" indicated doubt in their belief in Hashem. This was considered terrible *bitul Torah*; they weakened their connection to Hashem. Hashem judges His pious ones to a

hairsbreadth. Amalek came in through this breach in their faith, and completely cooled off their faith and fear of Hashem.

When Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael, the nation was aroused to teshuvah. This is the *tikkun* for Amalek's attack. Strengthening our Torah study and faith in Hashem are the means of combating Amalek. This is the way to repair the stain on Bnei Yisrael's *emunah* that had been caused by the battle with Amalek. This is our holy obligation in every generation, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 17:16), "Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation."

כִּי יָד עַל כֵּס־יְהָ מִלְחָמָה "The battle against Amalek is eternal, as it says, "For the hand is on the throne of G-d; Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation." The numerical value of the word **יד** (hand) is equal to that of **זהב** (gold). Silence is golden, as the saying goes. This refers to abstaining from *lashon hara*. When Bnei Yisrael complained "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" it was a form of *lashon hara*, the opposite of golden silence, which has the *gematria* of fourteen. Had they desisted from speaking *lashon hara*, maintaining "golden" silence, the Name of Hashem **ה-**, which is numerically equivalent to fifteen (i.e., the same as **זהב** – golden (silence), when adding one for the word itself) would have remained complete. But by speaking slanderously, they defaced this Holy Name.

Yitro took note how at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, everyone saw the *Shechinah* clearly. He noticed that Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to maintain their level of closeness with Hashem, yet they became lax in their faith, asking whether or not Hashem was in their midst. This brought about Amalek's attack. Yitro realized that one who perceives Hashem's glory is obligated to preserve his level of closeness with Hashem. He therefore abandoned his successful lifestyle in Midian and chose to learn Torah, coming close to Hashem in the Wilderness under the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu, his son-in-law.

Yitro, although yet a gentile, was acutely perceptive. The Torah lauds him and even designated an entire parashah to be named after him. This

is not an ordinary parashah, but the parashah of *Matan Torah*. When he arrived to join the nation, Moshe and all the elders went out to greet him and accord him honor (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 268). An entire section of this parashah is devoted to Yitro's advice to Moshe regarding appointing judges. The merit that Yitro gained by his keen understanding of Hashem's greatness and the importance of clinging to Him awarded him this tribute.

In Summary

- ◆ Yitro heard about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. This brought him to join the Jewish nation.
- ◆ The battle with Amalek was a direct consequence of *bitul Torah*, which was apparent in Refidim. Although Bnei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah, and were not commanded to study it, they were held responsible for weakening their connection with Hashem, which is the direct opposite of the purpose of the Torah. From all of the miracles they witnessed at Yam Suf, they should have understood the importance of closeness to Hashem and faith in Him. Their indifference opened the doors to Amalek to cool off the fire of *emunah*, which had been prevalent in the entire world after *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Yitro attained this understanding himself. He followed Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness and merited all of the glory ascribed to him in this parashah.

You Shall Be Wholehearted with Hashem, Your G-d

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

Yitro joined Bnei Yisrael after hearing about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek (*Rashi*). Why didn't he come on account of the miracles of the battle with Egypt? Why was it specifically the battle with Amalek that spurred him to connect with the Jewish nation? The Egyptians were bent on physically destroying the Jewish nation. To this end, they enslaved them in the hope that little by little, they would die out, until nothing would be left of them whatsoever. Amalek had a different agenda. They wished to annihilate the Jewish nation spiritually, by introducing doubt in their minds. This would result in a lackadaisical attitude toward Avodat Hashem. It would diminish their *yirat Shamayim* and cool off their faith in Hashem. They were not interested in physically annihilating Bnei Yisrael as much as in severing their spiritual ties with Hashem.

When the Egyptians were pursuing Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness, they hurried to supplicate Hashem and cry out for His deliverance, as the pasuk says (*Shemot 14:10*), “Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened; the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.” On the other hand, when Amalek broke out in spiritual warfare against Bnei Yisrael, we don't find Bnei Yisrael turning to Hashem for salvation and crying out to Him.

Perhaps we can explain the difference in their reactions to these two enemies in the following way. When they perceived the Egyptians, with their spears poised, they realized the imminent danger, and called out to

Hashem to spare them. But the nation of Amalek had a different tactic. They bore no arms. Theirs was silent warfare. It was the deadly poison of tainting their faith and implanting doubt in their minds. Am Yisrael could not identify this type of peril as readily, and hardly realized that they were in a state of battle with them. This was why they desisted from turning to Hashem for rescue.

The battle with Amalek was much more perilous than that with Egypt. Hashem fought their battle against Egypt, but Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to fight their own battle with Amalek. The Amalekites succeeded in damaging the perfection of Hashem's Name and His Throne. This is borne out by the pasuk, “**כִּי יָד עַל כְּסֵד הָה**” — For the hand is on the throne of G-d.” The word used for “throne” is abbreviated to **כְּסֵד**, as opposed to the usual word **כְּסָא**. Likewise, Hashem's Name is written in its abbreviated form (**נָא**). Only in the future, will His Name and His Throne be complete, when Amalek are eradicated once and for all.

Yitro was able to identify the peril that Bnei Yisrael faced in the battle with Amalek. He understood all too well the repercussions of decreasing one's *yirat Shamayim* and having doubts implanted in one's mind. This drew him to recognize Hashem and join Am Yisrael.

I was once visiting a large city, and I discovered a magnificent building. It was truly beautiful, built in ultra-modern style, with emphasis placed on the most updated technology available. After a short time, I again passed through this city. I found that the building was still under construction, not yet completed. This brought the following thought to mind. In the olden days, the structures were simple and were built in relatively short amounts of time, allowing for people to enjoy them quickly. Whereas, nowadays, the contractors try to update the structures as much as possible, causing delays in the process, and often resulting in unfinished jobs.

This is analogous to Am Yisrael and its existence in the world. The Torah says (*Devarim* 18:13), “You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d.” We are instructed to serve Hashem with simplicity and loyalty,

without questioning His ways or trying to outsmart them. We are enjoined to do His will because it is His will. The Amalekite nation understood that Bnei Yisrael can serve Hashem correctly only through simple faith. Therefore, they sought ways to cool off their faith, implanting doubts and questions in their hearts. They artfully caused Bnei Yisrael to question and doubt their faith. These questions eventually led them to fashion the Golden Calf, to their eternal shame.

Frequently, when I arrange an open house for the public, people far from Torah and mitzvot approach me. They ask for a *berachah* in a specific area in which they need help. I generally request that they take a resolution upon themselves first, so that the blessing can rest upon it and be effective. There are those who immediately acquiesce and accept upon themselves *chizuk* in any one of a number of areas. They may decide to set aside time for Torah study, wear tzitzit, don tefillin, cover their hair, dress modestly, or observe the laws of family purity.

On the other hand, there are those who attempt to get out of this by stubbornly asking what is the connection between taking upon oneself a seemingly small resolution to improve in something and receiving a blessing. Similarly, there are people who do not respond with “Amen” after I bless them. Instead, they look at me questioningly, as if to say, “Is that all you have to offer?” Their gaze tells me they would prefer I would do some hocus-pocus and instantly change their fate. I would like these people to understand the following. When one truly believes in the power of a *berachah*, it has the ability to be effective. But when one shows a lack of simple faith, by asking all sorts of “whys,” he is emulating the ways of Amalek. It should be made clear that *berachah* cannot come upon such a person.

Yitro appreciated the virtue of simple faith and realized that trying to outsmart Hashem is perilous. He hurried to attach himself to the Jewish nation. By connecting himself with them, he removed doubt and questions from their hearts, restoring their perfect faith in Hashem.

In Summary

- ◆ Rashi explains that Yitro joined Am Yisrael after hearing about the miracles of *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. Why weren't the miracles with Egypt sufficient motivation to bring him to join the Jewish nation?
- ◆ The battle with Egypt was physical, whereas the battle with Amalek was of a spiritual nature. Amalek introduced doubts in the faith of the Jewish nation. While Bnei Yisrael recognized the physical danger that faced them from the Egyptians and therefore cried out to Hashem for rescue, they did not identify the danger of Amalek and therefore did not ask for salvation.
- ◆ Yitro, in his wisdom, realized that Am Yisrael was in greater jeopardy from Amalek than they had been when facing Egypt. He joined the Jewish nation and corrected their mistake, fortifying them in the command of being wholehearted with Hashem.

Remembering One's Sins – Catalyst for Renewal

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

One is forbidden to remind a *ba'al teshuvah* of his former iniquities (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 58:2). Why, then, does the Torah mention Yitro's former status as the minister of Midian? Moreover, the pasuk states, in his praise, that he was the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu. Is it not

somewhat of a disgrace for Moshe to have the name of his father-in-law, a former idol worshipper, connected to his?

David Hamelech proclaims (*Tehillim* 51:5), “For my sin is before me always.” What is the purpose of the sinner constantly remembering his sin? By doing so, he is encouraged to acquire more Torah and mitzvot, detaching himself from his former sin and correcting it. The power of renewal helps the *ba’al teshuvah*, day by day, to put more distance between himself and his previous iniquities.

Yitro remembered all too well the *avodah zarah* he had served while in Midian, for there was no form of idolatry that he did not pursue (*Mechilta, Yitro* 1). Calling him the minister of Midian was a constant reminder of who he was, and who he became. It prodded him to improve his level of Torah and mitzvot. Referring to him as the minister of Midian was an accolade, for he ascended the spiritual ladder, rung by rung. The Torah calls him the father-in-law of Moshe in praise of the level he reached. Moshe felt no shame at all in being associated with such a person.

The following incident proves this point. I once met a *ba’al teshuvah*. He told me that as long as he tries to erase his sinful past, he falls into the snare of sin. But when he remembers his sinful past, he reaches greater heights. Remembering the sins of one’s past helps one to ascend spiritually.

Anguish over One’s Sins Rectifies Them

Another advantage to remembering one’s prior sins is based on the following analogy of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zy”a. One who missed a meal can never make it up. For instance, if someone did not eat supper, he will not eat two breakfasts the next day, because after one, he is sated. This is the case with the sinner. He will never be able to correct the span of time he spent sinning. If he wasted time from his morning learning *seder*, and did not spend it learning, he can never completely make up for it. Learning in the evening carries its own obligation and does not make up

for what he missed in the morning. The only way to rectify a sin completely is by feeling remorse over it.

Another Reason for Calling Yitro the Minister of Midian

On the one hand Yitro was called “the minister of Midian,” which seems to be a most humiliating appellation, for it denotes *avodah zarah*. On the other hand, he was called “the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu,” an honorable title.

When Yitro recognized Hashem, stating (*Shemot* 18:11), “Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods,” he was pained at not having known this sooner. He was awakened to this knowledge only after *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. Only then did he understand that Hashem is mightier than all other gods. He regretted that he had not realized this sooner.

Let us explain this idea with the following example. We say that Columbus discovered America. He was the one who brought knowledge of this continent to the rest of the civilized world. But the truth is that he didn’t discover it at all. Didn’t the Indians live there already? Likewise, Yitro was aggrieved that although Hashem existed from time immemorial, he had not merited recognizing Him beforehand. This regret stopped him from further sinning. He reckoned that if he had not yet corrected his past, it was best not to add to his iniquities by sinning in the future, which would demand further correction.

This is a winning method to employ against the *Yetzer Hara*. He convinces a person to sin, telling him that he can do teshuvah afterward. This is a perverted way of thinking. Why should a person burden himself with more sin, if he has not yet repaired the damage of the past? One should live according to the maxim (*Tehillim* 16:8), “I have set Hashem before me always.” This will prevent him from sinning. One who has sinned should invoke the pasuk (*ibid.* 51:5), “My sin is before me always.” He should avoid further sinning, which will require further fixing. The

appellation “minister of Midian” was most honorable, for this is what encouraged Yitro to serve Hashem, and precluded further sin.

The title “minister of Midian – כהן מדין” also confers another tribute on Yitro. The word כהן (Kohen, minister) can be divided into כה and נ. The numerical equivalent of כה, adding one for the word itself, is equivalent to that of the Name ה-נ-ה-נ. And the numerical equivalent of the letter נ is fifty. The Kohanim are sanctified, for they serve Hashem in the fifty gates of *kedushah* and nullify the fifty levels of *tumah*. Yitro originally officiated as a priest for idolatry, sunk in the fiftieth level of impurity. When he converted, he transformed himself into a priest for Hashem, ascending to the fiftieth level of purity. This is alluded to in the title the “minister of Midian.” He abandoned his former status as a Kohen for *avodah zarah* and dedicated himself to serving Hashem wholeheartedly.

In Summary

- ◆ Why was Yitro called “the minister of Midian,” recalling his past as the priest for *avodah zarah*? It was because he constantly remembered his previous sins. This encouraged him to elevate himself. Calling him the “minister of Midian,” which alluded to his sins, was actually an honorable title.
- ◆ Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zy”a, postulates that only regret over one’s past sins can actually rectify them, for it is impossible to make amends for the time spent sinning. This is akin to a missed meal, which can never be replaced.
- ◆ Whenever Yitro remembered his former sins as the minister of Midian, he resisted the temptation to further sin, because he did not want to be responsible for repairing more iniquities.
- ◆ The word כהן (Kohen, minister) can be divided into כה and נ. The numerical equivalent of כה, adding one for the word itself, is equivalent to that of Hashem’s Name ה-נ-ה-נ. And the numerical equivalent of the letter נ is fifty, alluding to the fifty gates of *kedushah* or, *chalilah*, *tumah*. The Kohen of Hashem is sanctified, and the priest of *avodah zarah* is

defiled. Yitro transformed himself from a minister of idolatry, sunk in the depths of impurity, to a Kohen of Hashem, raised to the fiftieth level of purity. This is why his former status was mentioned.

When We Are Unable to Hear

“Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, came to Moshe with his sons and his wife, to the Wilderness where he was encamped, by the Mountain of G-d”

(*Shemot 18:5*)

How did Yitro succeed in opening his heart to the voice of the Torah, casting his previous wealth and prestige behind him?

Precisely this act of abandoning the materialism of this world was what gave him the ability to hear Hashem's word. Even the slightest connection with foreign concepts dulls the heart and stuffs up the ears from hearing the voice of Hashem.

In parashat *Shemot*, the Torah relates how Moshe had difficulty understanding the reason for the terrible exile his people faced. They were enslaved to Pharaoh and suffered at the hands of his nation. One time, he found two Jewish men fighting. He chastised them, crying, “Wicked man, why would you strike your fellow?” The two people, who were Datan and Aviram (*Tanchuma, Shemot 10*), retorted, “Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me, as you murdered the Egyptian?” Then Moshe said, “Indeed, the matter is known.”

Rashi explains that Moshe now understood why Bnei Yisrael were tyrannized with crushing labor. Previously, he knew that their slavery was

the result of sin, but he had not been able to understand which specific sin warranted the crushing servitude. When he saw that there were informers among the people, he understood that they deserved this punishment (see *Rashi, Shemot* 2:13-14).

The last letters of Moshe's words “**אַכְן נוֹדָע הַדָּבָר**” – Now the matter is known” spell the word **נָגֵר**, a derivative of the word for “shaking off” (**לִנְגַּר**). Bnei Yisrael were shaken off of mitzvot, as a garment is shaken off of dust. What caused them to be this way?

Rashi explains, in the name of Chazal, that Moshe became extremely afraid, for he saw that Am Yisrael had informers among them. How would they ever merit salvation (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:30)? Datan and Aviram were slanderers, who informed Pharaoh that Moshe had killed the Egyptian (ibid. 31). This trait of speaking *lashon hara* caused them to be divested of mitzvot. As we mentioned above, any form of association with worldly matters, all the more so, involvement in sin, distances a person from mitzvot. This is especially true of those who speak slanderously. Chazal (see *Tosefta D'Peah* 1:2) teach that such a person loses his portion in *Olam Haba*.

When I was once in Paris, a man told me *lashon hara* about a fellow Jew. He asked me to rebuke this person for his wrongdoing. I asked how he knew that what he claimed was true. He refused to answer. I told him this was proof that he was lying, and I therefore had no reason to rebuke the person. He went on his way. After a time, this man called me up. He asked for forgiveness. He said that after I refused to believe his story, he himself began to doubt its veracity. He investigated the matter and found it to be completely fabricated. I thanked Hashem for not believing him. I would have rebuked the man for nothing, had I believed the story. One who accepts *lashon hara* is held accountable, as well as the one who tells it. Chazal teach (*Arachin* 15b) that *lashon hara* kills three people: the one who says it, the one who listens to it, and the subject who is spoken about.

The incident with Datan and Aviram demonstrates how the sin of *lashon hara* blinds a person from witnessing miracles and thereby gaining a greater level of *emunah*. They saw with their own eyes how Moshe killed the Egyptian with the Ineffable Name (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:29). This should have aroused them to realize the tremendous power inherent in the Names of Hashem; they effect miracles. However, instead of becoming greater believers when Moshe chastised them for striking one another, they responded most brazenly. This reaction was due to their mindset of speaking slander. Their chutzpah toward Moshe indicated their chutzpah toward Hashem. We find, throughout the Torah, that Datan and Aviram maintained this mindset of boldly contesting the word of Hashem. Any form of sin, or overindulgence in worldly matters, prevents a person from receiving influence from the Torah.

On one of my flights, I noticed a young man learning from a Gemara. He had earphones on and was listening to a cassette. At first, I gave him the benefit of the doubt, assuming he was listening to Torah tapes. But when I happened to pass by, the strains of music were noticeable. I was truly surprised; how could someone be impressed by words of Torah, while immersed in music?!

One cannot look at the sun directly, but only through sunglasses or a screen. So too, must one have a filter for his ears. He should ensure that his ears hear only appropriate things. His eyes, too, should never be used to gaze at things that defile the heart. These types of sights deafen the ears and block the heart from words of Torah.

I once visited the office of an ENT doctor. He had illustrations of the body's audio system. It looks like a whole city, with streets in all directions. Hashem made all this in order that we should be able to serve Him maximally. Certainly the heart, and all the other complex organs of which man is comprised, were created in order to do His will. We are enjoined to be most scrupulous regarding indecent language (*nivul peh*). This type of speech is worse than *lashon hara*. *Lashon hara* causes a person to lose his portion in *Olam Haba*, whereas indecent language destroys the speaker's lot in this world, as well (see *Shabbat* 33a).

Separation from This World and the Sin of Pharaoh

Let us try to understand why Hashem brought additional plagues upon Pharaoh even after He Himself hardened Pharaoh's heart. The first plagues were sent as punishment for Pharaoh's self-induced stubbornness. But after the plague of hail, when Pharaoh admitted that Hashem is righteous (*Shemot* 9:27), he ceased hardening his own heart. From this point on, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, as it says (*Shemot* 10:1), "For I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn." Why, then, did Hashem continue bringing plagues upon him? Surely, Pharaoh was not to blame for denying Hashem; his free will had been taken from him.

It would seem fitting to say that although Pharaoh believed in Hashem, which he indicated by saying that Hashem is righteous, he did not allow his heart to serve Him completely. He was still mired in the frivolities of this world, which preclude perfect faith in Hashem, as explained above. *Emunah* is not merely intellectual; it must be felt in the heart. Without constantly renewing one's level of faith, he is liable to continue falling into sin.

"Hashem said to Moshe: Arise early in the morning and station yourself before Pharaoh" (*ibid.* 8:16). Moshe was instructed to meet with Pharaoh specifically in the morning, for that was when Pharaoh visited the River. Rashi explains (*ibid.* 7:15) that Pharaoh considered himself a deity, therefore, he arose early, when no one else was about, in order to relieve himself at the Nile. Even after Pharaoh stated that he believed in Hashem, he continued his charade. As long as a person does not remove the nonsense of this world from within him, *emunah* cannot penetrate his heart, and he is vulnerable to attacks of the *Yetzer Hara*.

This is borne out by the pasuk in Tehillim (115:6) that describes the idols of the gentiles: "They have ears, but cannot hear." This seems contradictory; if they have ears, how can they not hear? But it is like we said above. They certainly have the ability to hear words of Torah and faith, in an intellectual way, like Pharaoh believed in Hashem

intellectually, but they do not hear with their heart. They do not translate their knowledge into action.

Man's actions are paramount. Chazal tell us (*Eiduyot* 5:7), "Your deeds will bring you close, and your deeds will distance you." One who is immersed in the nonsense of the media, such as newspapers and radio, and afterward opens his Gemara, is straddling two worlds. He cannot be correctly influenced by the Gemara to behave appropriately. Ideally, Torah study is tremendous. Ideally, it brings a person to proper action (*Kiddushin* 40b).

When the Sefer Torah is removed from the Aron Kodesh, we recite the prayer of *Brich Shmei*. There, we proclaim, "We are the servants of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and we bow down to Him and to the honor of the Torah." It is one's appreciation of the glory of Torah that prompts a person to serve Hashem and bow down before Him. This is impossible when one is involved in other matters. The Torah must remain pure and unsullied, through guarding oneself from sins in general, and sins between man and his fellow man in particular.

In order to merit the effect of Torah upon us, we must prepare a fitting place for the *Shechinah*, free of sin and worldly frivolities. The Torah bears this out in the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them." Only after one prepares himself to be a receptacle for Hashem's Presence, can He actually reside within him.

David Hamelech perceived Hashem's handiwork in every aspect of Creation, as he says (*Tehillim* 8:4), "When I behold the heavens, the work of Your fingers." His *emunah* was strengthened thereby. Why are we not influenced similarly?

We are occupied with other matters, which preclude us from opening our minds to be influenced by the works of Hashem. Conversely, Yitro abandoned the vanities of this world and was thus able to be inspired toward greater faith by observing Hashem's miracles at the Yam Suf and the battle with Amalek. His ears were open to truly hearing what was

going on around him, to the extent that he was able to declare: “Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the other gods.”

In Summary

- ♦ “Yitro came.” How could he leave all of his former wealth and follow Bnei Yisrael into the Wilderness?
- ♦ It would seem fitting to say that Yitro’s heart was open to hear the word of Hashem because he left all of the frivolities of this world behind.
- ♦ Moshe Rabbeinu realized that slavery was decreed upon Bnei Yisrael because they were divested of mitzvot. This is hinted at in the words, “Indeed, the matter is known,” whose last letters spell נער, akin to the word for “shaking off.”
- ♦ Datan and Aviram were stripped of mitzvot and spoke most brazenly against Hashem and Moshe, even after witnessing the miracle of Moshe killing the Egyptian through the Divine Name. This was due to their *lashon hara*.
- ♦ Why did Hashem harden Pharaoh’s heart and then punish him with plagues for his stubbornness? Even after believing in Hashem, he continued acting craftily, proclaiming himself a deity and taking care of his needs in the early morning hours, when no one was watching. For this, he was punished.

Yitro – The Righteous Convert

“He said to Moshe: I, your father-in-law, Yitro, have come to you, with your wife and her two sons with her”

(Shemot 18:6)

When Yitro heard about the miracles of *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek, he abandoned all of his wealth and prestige as the minister of Midian. He came to Moshe and asked to join the Jewish nation, coming under the wings of the *Shechinah*. At first, Moshe was loath to accept his father-in-law, because he did not know if his intentions were pure. When Yitro noticed Moshe's reticence to do so, he said, “If you do not wish to accept me through my own merit, accept me through the merit of your wife, who is my daughter. And if you do not wish to accept me through her merit, accept me through the merit of your sons, who are my grandchildren.” Moshe still declined to accept him as a member of the Jewish nation. In order to convince Moshe, Yitro described himself as, “**אֹנֶן חֲוֹתֵןךְ – I, your father-in-law.**” The word **אֹנֶן** refers to Hashem. By including Himself in Yitro's request, Hashem was commanding Moshe to accept Yitro with open arms, even though he did not want to (see *Mechilta, Yitro 1*).

The sefer *Histakel BeOreitah* clarifies why Moshe refused to accept his father-in-law, in spite of his supplications and subjugations. At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, many of the gentiles were impressed by the mighty miracles performed for the Jewish nation and requested to be converted to the Chosen Nation. This element of people, called the *Eirev Rav*, was inspired to join the Jewish people in the excitement of the moment. But in actuality, they were not prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Hashem's will.

The pasuk states (*Shemot 17:1*), “They encamped in Refidim.” Chazal tell us (see *Bechorot 5b*) that nowhere in the Wilderness was there a place

called Refidim. The Torah uses this word to indicate that Bnei Yisrael became lax in Torah study. How is it possible that the Generation of Wisdom, who saw the miracles of Hashem with their own eyes, became lax in Torah study? It is because they were negatively affected by the *Erev Rav*, who left Egypt with them. The *Erev Rav* damaged the purity of our nation and decreased their level of *yirat Shamayim*, which had been gleaned through the miracles that accompanied them.

This laxity in Torah, the direct influence of their contact with the *Erev Rav*, is what led Bnei Yisrael to fashion the Golden Calf. It is also what brought the Amalekite nation to attack them. Moshe, who realized the ruinous results of accepting gentiles into their ranks, was rankled at the thought of another proselyte.

Yitro had previously been the minister of Midian and had served every form of *avodah zarah* in the world. He had also been Pharaoh's advisor. Moshe therefore did not know if it was the enthusiasm of the moment, as a result of the miracles at *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek, which were inducing him to convert. This type of fiery excitement could be extinguished in a very short time.

Conversely, it might have been a very deep enthusiasm, which would grow as Yitro fortified his Jewish identity and strengthened his bond with Bnei Yisrael. Moshe was wary of the influence of *geirim*, for he knew that they can damage the nation. He was ready to forgo the closeness of his wife and children, as long as Am Yisrael would not suffer from any negative influences from Yitro, who had served all forms of idols.

Hashem guaranteed Moshe that, on the contrary, Yitro would prove an asset to the community. He desired to join the nation with all his heart, and he would be a most beneficial member of Bnei Yisrael, of inestimable value to the nation. Moshe finally agreed to accept him.

Yitro lived up to all the expectations Moshe had of him. He benefitted our nation by introducing the idea of appointing judges over every thousand people and judges over every hundred people, etc., in order to

improve the present situation by alleviating the burden placed upon Moshe.

When Hashem testified to Yitro's pure motives, Moshe hurried to greet him warmly. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 18:7), "Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law, and he prostrated himself and kissed him, and each inquired about the other's well-being."

Yitro brought Moshe's family with him, when he came to meet Moshe in the Wilderness. The pasuk says (*ibid.* vs. 4), "Yitro...took Tzipporah...and her two sons: of whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a sojourner in a strange land,' and the name of the other was Eliezer, for 'the G-d of my father came to my aid.'" The names of Moshe's sons are stated previously, in parashat *Shemot*, as well as the reasons behind them. Why does Yitro repeat this information here? He was indicating to Moshe that he had been scrupulous in raising his sons with pure education and had not attempted to influence them negatively. Proof was that they maintained their Jewish names. Had he tried to cause them to serve idols, they would never have been able to keep their names. Yitro was also alluding to the following. Just as he never harmed Moshe's sons spiritually when he was a gentile, all the more so he had no destructive motives regarding their education, in his desire to join the Jewish nation.

The commentaries explain that Yitro keenly felt the implications of his grandsons' names, just as Moshe had, upon naming them. The name *Gershom* (*ger*, sojourner) indicated his feelings of alienation from the pagan culture. The name *Eliezer* hints to how Hashem helped him by opening his eyes to the truth, and directing him to the ultimate purpose, Torah.

Yitro's words testified like a thousand witnesses that he was speaking the truth. Therefore, Hashem took up his cause, and told Moshe to accept him. He was a righteous convert with pure intentions, unlike the *Eirev Rav*, who sullied the nation by joining them. The halachah states that one who wishes to convert is rejected three times. Only if he is persistent and

expresses his desire to join our nation, do we grant him the opportunity to do so (*Yevamot* 47b). This stringent manner of dealing with would-be converts is a result of our painful past. The *Erev Rav* joined the Jewish nation on the spur of the moment, and not through a deep-seated desire to be a part of them. They caused Bnei Yisrael untold damage, by influencing them to sin most gravely, specifically in the sin of the Golden Calf.

In Summary

- ♦ After hearing of the wondrous miracles performed on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, Yitro desired to join the nation. But Moshe Rabbeinu refused to allow him to join, even after he asked to be accepted in the merit of his daughter and grandchildren. Why was Moshe so firm in his refusal?
- ♦ We might suggest that Moshe Rabbeinu was afraid it was just a passing whim which would soon dissipate. He knew that Bnei Yisrael are damaged by insincere converts. The *Erev Rav*, who left Egypt together with them, caused them untold damage by influencing them to serve the Golden Calf.
- ♦ The Torah repeats the names of Moshe's sons and the reasons given for them. This is evidence that Yitro, while yet a gentile, did not affect them adversely. This allowed him to join the Jewish nation.
- ♦ By repeating their names and the explanations for them, Yitro indicated that he identified with them. *Gershon* meant that he felt that the heathen culture was foreign to him, and *Eliezer* indicated that he knew that Hashem helped him.

The Virtue of Unity

“They journeyed from Refidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain”

(Shemot 19:2)

Rashi expounds that the words “and Israel encamped there” are written in the singular form to indicate the unity of Bnei Yisrael, who camped at Har Sinai “as one man, with one heart.”

Unity is a precondition for receiving the Torah. This can be explained, based on the words of the Zohar (see II, 90b; III, 4b), “Yisrael, Hashem, and the Torah are one.” Only when one is united with his fellow man, can he be connected with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Torah. He thus merits the guarantee (*Kohelet* 4:12) that “a three-ply cord is not easily severed.” A lack of harmony between the members of the nation unravels this cord.

Success in Torah study is dependent on unity. If, for instance, students do not honor their teacher who labored to prepare the lesson, he will not gain satisfaction from transmitting it, and this will preclude him from investing effort in preparing a good lesson in the future. In the end, no one will gain from the relationship.

A man once heard a disparaging comment about a certain *talmid chacham*. Afterward, this Torah scholar came to his yeshiva to deliver a Talmudic lecture. But this man could not succeed in following the train of thought, due to the negative comments he had previously heard about this teacher. Later, it was discovered that the *lashon hara* had been aimed at another person, not this Rabbi at all. I told the man that it was forbidden for him to accept *lashon hara* about anyone, regardless who it was. Because he had accepted words of slander, he damaged the Divine image within him. He missed the opportunity to learn Torah, and lost out

on gaining from this most dynamic speaker. This was all a result of his sin of accepting *lashon hara*.

The following incident demonstrates the value of respecting another's learning. I once met a simple Jew, who joyously announced that he had a Torah insight. He related it to me, and although it was quite simple, I nevertheless praised him highly. The man was ecstatic. Today, he devotes two hours of his day to Torah study. This is due to the value that was accorded to his Torah novellae. How important it is to be in harmony with others and praise them whenever possible!

The *Beit Halevi* once raised a question during his *shiur*. His son, Rabbi Chaim, jumped up and answered. The *Beit Halevi* slapped him and rebuked him, stating that he had not toiled in Torah sufficiently before responding. Rabbi Chaim did not justify himself, saying that he was afraid someone else would precede him with the answer. He would not have minded if another pupil would have answered correctly and reaped praise. He felt so unified with his peers that there was no room for jealousy. It is this unity that fortifies Torah scholars in their mastery of the Torah.

A beautiful example of harmonious interchange among those who disagree is the relationship between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. They had differing opinions in many subjects. The Gemara (*Eiruvin* 13b) states that we rule according to Beit Hillel. They would understand their own reasoning, yet, at the same time, that of Beit Shammai. They respected the Torah teachings of their colleagues, even though they were in opposition to them. Therefore, regarding their disputes, we are told, "These and those are the words of the living G-d." As Beit Hillel reviewed and polished the words of Beit Shammai, they brought out their brilliance, bestowing on them the honor of being part of the Torah. Whoever listens to the words of Beit Hillel also hears the opinion of Beit Shammai, and respects it.

Conversely, Rabbi Akiva's students died out because they lacked this type of unity. They were remiss in respecting their colleagues' words of

Torah (*Yevamot* 62b). They did not, *chalilah*, sin intentionally. They were radiant orbs in the firmament of Torah. When they perished, the entire world turned dark and desolate, just as it was darkened during the Greek Exile by the primeval darkness (*Bereishit* 1:2; *Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit* 4). This was because the voice of Torah was stilled. Their only sin was a lack of sufficient honor toward their friends' Torah insights.

Unity is the most significant form of preparation for accepting the Torah. We should strengthen ourselves in this area when we prepare for *Kabbalat HaTorah* between Pesach and Shavuot. In the Wilderness, Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael fifty days to prepare for receiving the Torah. They could have been brought on eagles' wings to the foot of Har Sinai. Targum Yonatan explains the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:4), "I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me," to mean that Hashem carried Bnei Yisrael to the site of the Beit Hamikdash, on the back of eagles, in order that they offer their Pesach sacrifice there. Yet, before *Matan Torah*, they had to journey in the Wilderness for forty-nine days before receiving the Torah. This was in order that they should acquire the trait of unity.

In Summary

- ◆ "Yisrael encamped there" at Har Sinai before *Matan Torah*. This is written in the singular form to teach us that they camped in unity. When there is unity among the nation, then, "Yisrael, Hashem, and Torah are one."
- ◆ Unity is a precondition for Torah study. It injects joy in the hearts of colleagues and energizes them to continue in their spiritual ascent.
- ◆ Even though Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai disagreed on many matters, the halachah is ruled according to Beit Hillel, for they respected the words of their peers, Beit Shammai. Conversely, the disciples of Rabbi Akiva displayed a lack of respect toward each other's Torah teachings, and this is what caused them to perish in an epidemic.

- ♦ Unity is the best preparation for accepting the Torah. The Torah was given only on the fiftieth day after *Yetziat Mitzrayim* to give the nation time to become truly unified in order to receive it.

The Protective Power of Torah

“You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel”

(*Shemot 19:6*)

The words – **וְאַתֶּם תָּהִיו לִי מֶמְלָכָת כֹהֲנִים וְגֹוי קָדוֹשׁ** “You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation” contains various allusions.

The word **אתם** (you) can be transposed to spell **אמת** (truth). The word **לי** (to Me) is numerically equivalent to forty, referring to the forty days that Moshe spent in Heaven, receiving the Torah. The word **ממלכת** (a kingdom) refers to the rule of our Rabbis (*Gittin 62a*). When truth prevails, through the power of Torah, our Rabbis reign.

The word **כהנים** is translated by Rashi to mean “noblemen,” based on the pasuk in *Shmuel* (II, 8:18).

The word **גוי**, adding one for the word itself, is numerically equivalent to twenty-six, the *gematria* of Hashem’s Name, **י-ה-ו-ה**. This refers to the fact that Hashem and Yisrael are one (*Zohar III*, 4b). This is through the power of Torah, which is called truth (**אמת**, indicated by the word **אתם**).

The Torah enables a person to attain perfection. Through connecting to the Torah, he is connected to Hashem as a member of the holy nation (**גוי**), which has the same *gematria* as Hashem’s Name. Moreover, one who is intimately bound with Torah will never err. Hashem will simply not

allow a falsehood to pass his lips, for he is one with the Torah, whose motif is truth.

Chazal explain that all of Creation is subservient to man, as long as he goes in the ways of Torah. All of Creation is made in order to serve him. But if he does not follow in Hashem's ways, the animals are preferable to him. Not long ago (December 2006), the natural disaster of the tsunami on the Asian continent killed hundreds of thousands of people. I heard from Rabbi Yehudah Rakow, shlita, that numerous animals were saved from this catastrophe. Their internal radar sensed that something was amiss, and they succeeded in fleeing to safety.

Animals are granted this sense of danger, which we humans do not possess, in order to survive. But mankind has a more effective survival technique. That is Torah study. The Torah protects man from all form of harm. We find many tzaddikim who controlled nature by the power of their words. One who needs radar systems to save him, just as the animals are saved by their internal instincts, is lacking a measure in his level as a human being. This is because he is deficient in his Torah involvement.

There is a family in Mogador, Morocco, named Ben-Shabbat. Rav Mordechai Ben-Shabbat was my Torah teacher when I was a child. The family received this name from his grandfather, Rav Yaakov Ben-Shabbat, who sacrificed his life to observe Shabbat. He was once travelling with a group. When Shabbat descended, they continued on, but he remained behind. Although he was surrounded by dangerous beasts, he did not continue his journey. After Shabbat ended, he found out that the entire group had been killed. When he was asked how he had escaped this fate, Rav Yaakov responded, "The Torah protects its adherents" (*Sotah* 21a). One who sacrifices his life for Shabbat, without fear of the repercussions, is guaranteed protection by the Torah.

A similar story is told about the Ohr Hachaim. A lion approached him. The Ohr Hachaim showed him that he was circumcised. The lion not only refrained from attack, but it stood guard over him. The *kedushah* of his

brit milah, coupled with his tremendous Torah study, stood sentry over him, precluding all harm. A person has no need for animal reflexes during a time of danger. The Torah protects him and grants him control over nature and the very animals themselves.

It is interesting to note that at the plague of wild animals, Moshe had to intensify his tefillah in order to remove the *makkah*, as Rashi explains (*Shemot* 8:26). There are those who ask what was unique about this plague, that it required an increase in tefillah in order to eliminate it. It would seem fitting to say the following. The name of the plague was ערב (a mixture of animals). This word has the same root as the word עבר (responsible). It was as if the animals were responsible for “taking care of” the other beasts in Egypt; the Egyptians themselves. The animals felt at home in Egypt, for the Egyptians acted in a most beastly fashion. The animals simply could not tear themselves away from tearing away at the Egyptians. Therefore, in order to be rid of them, Moshe had to increase his supplications. But a member of the holy nation, whose *gematria* is numerically equivalent to Hashem’s Name, need never fear any animal.

The Names of Moshe’s Sons

After Yitro heard about the battle with Amalek and the Splitting of the Sea, he left Midian and joined Moshe. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 18:2-4), “Yitro...took Tzipporah...and her two sons: of whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, ‘I was a sojourner in a strange land,’ and the name of the other was Eliezer, for ‘the G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.’” Why does the Torah repeat the names of Moshe’s sons and their explanations? This had been mentioned previously (*ibid.* 2:22).

Let us precede our explanation with a question regarding the Splitting of the Sea. The Ohr Hachaim asks (*ibid.* 14:27) why didn’t Moshe succeed in splitting the sea immediately? Conversely, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair succeeded in splitting the river as soon as he arrived there (*Chulin* 7a). The Ohr Hachaim explains that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, who came many generations later, was armed with the power of the Torah. But *Kriyat Yam*

Suf occurred before *Matan Torah*. The nation did not yet have the power of the Torah to merit them this miracle.

How can we understand that the waters knew exactly who had already received the Torah, and who had not? To strengthen this question, we find the Nile in Egypt did as it was ordered and turned to blood on command. It did not argue over this. Likewise, every *makkah* effected a change in the course of nature; yet nature did not object. Why, then, do we find that the waters of the Yam Suf did oppose Moshe's command?

The Mishnah cites (*Avot* 5:6) ten items that were created on Erev Shabbat, at twilight. Among them is the staff. This was the staff of Aharon, which had the acronym בָּעֵחֶב עַדְשׁ בָּעֵחֶב written on it. These were the initials of the ten *makkot*. Now we can understand the willingness of nature to yield to the plagues. Already at the time of Creation, the plagues were destined to take place in Egypt. But *Kriyat Yam Suf* was different. It did not hold this place of prestige in Creation. For that reason, the sea did not want to change its course. It knew its purpose was to constantly flow and would not deviate from its natural tendency until Hashem Himself commanded it.

However, Chazal tell us (*Bereishit Rabbah* 5:5) that at the time of Creation, Hashem did make a stipulation with the sea, in order that it would split for Bnei Yisrael after the Exodus. But it most probably assumed that Bnei Yisrael would be great in Torah and mitzvot at that time, rendering them worthy of this great miracle. When it noticed that Bnei Yisrael were at their nadir, after leaving Egypt, sunk in the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, it refused to split.

Nature knows its purpose. In Morocco, there was a dog that was called Eliyahu. This is because it would show up at every *brit milah*. It eventually died at one of the *britot*. This dog did not come invited; it is clear that it was some sort of reincarnation with a purpose to fulfill in this world. Chazal inform us (*Bava Kama* 60b) that dogs are the only creatures that recognize the Angel of Death. This is why they whimper when there is death in the town. People are then relegated to walking around them, on

the sides of the streets. A rabbi once found a dog at the side of the street and pushed it into the middle of the street. The dog immediately died. Every single creature knows its job in this world.

We, who possess the Torah, have no need for animalistic instincts. Torah protects us from all harm. Had the Torah not been given, we could have learnt ethics from the animal kingdom (*Eiruvin* 100b). The dog sings its specific praise to Hashem: “Come, let us bow and prostrate ourselves.” It speaks in the plural form, for it teaches people to praise Hashem (end of *Perek Shirah*). A person has the ability to praise Hashem only when he adheres to the Torah. This makes him a perfect person, a part of the holy nation (‘יִשְׂרָאֵל), numerically equivalent to Hashem’s Name.

Let us return to the Yam Suf. The sea refused to split because Am Yisrael did not yet possess the power of the Torah. It finally acceded after Hashem Himself commanded it. Did Hashem, *chas v’shalom*, wish to insult Moshe, telling him (*Shemot* 14:15), “Lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it,” knowing full well that the waters wouldn’t listen? Certainly not! Hashem decreed that it should happen in this way in order to teach us that Torah is the necessary ingredient for changing the natural order.

And now we return to Yitro. Moshe became famous throughout the world, through the miracles of *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the plagues of Egypt, and the battle with Amalek, as we read in the Song of the Sea (*Shemot* 15:14). Yitro ostensibly received great honor for being the father-in-law of this most honorable person. But how could he leave behind all his fame and prestige as the minister of Midian? Furthermore, the parashah states, “Yitro heard,” which refers to *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. There are those who posit that he heard about *Matan Torah*, as well. They state that he joined our nation after the Torah was given (*Zevachim* 116a). This raises an obvious question: The entire world heard about these great occurrences; how is it that Yitro was the only one who came?

I would like to suggest that what kept Yitro going, all along, were the names that Moshe gave his sons. They were an inspiration to Yitro. The

name of Moshe's older son, *Gershom*, taught him that we are all strangers (*geirim*) in this world. David Hamelech says in Tehillim (144:4), "His days are like a passing shadow." A person's life is but a shadow. And not the shadow of a wall, which remains standing, but fleeting as the shadow of a bird, here one moment and gone the next (*Bereishit Rabbah* 96:2).

The name of the younger son, *Eliezer*, encapsulated Moshe's realization that "the G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." The Hebrew word for sword is חרב, which is similar to the word for street, רחוב. Yitro was constantly reminded that the street is the hotbed of the *Yetzer Hara*, where it is nearly impossible to overcome him. One should not believe in himself until his dying day (*Avot* 2:4). Yitro surely did not feel spiritually secure in Midian. Additionally, he noted how Bnei Yisrael, who had experienced the great miracles, became weak in their Torah study. He realized that were he to remain in Midian, he would die spiritually. He therefore abandoned it all, and came to Moshe.

The Torah repeats the names of Moshe's sons to emphasize that the messages contained in them energized Yitro and taught him the path to take. This is what granted Yitro the merit to do teshuvah through the power of the miracles he had noticed.

The inspiration that Yitro acquired by dint of hearing of the amazing miracles is what prompted him to join our people. Before retiring at night, I have a habit of imagining earthquakes, wars, and the like. This brings me to the understanding that without Torah, this is what happens. This is similar to the lesson Yitro took from *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek.

Even today, we find people who demonstrate *mesirut nefesh* for the Torah. Rabbi Yehudah Rakow, shlita, related the following incident to me. Rabbi Yerucham's, zt"l, mother missed him tremendously after he went to learn Torah in a far-off yeshiva. She came one evening to visit him. The entire building was shrouded in darkness, save for a small corner that was

lit up. She peeked in, and found her son learning Torah with great self-sacrifice. She left him, undisturbed.

Even today, we find cases of those who sacrifice their lives for the sake of Torah. When I was a mere ten-year old, my father sent me off to yeshiva, and I did not see him for six years. I spent four days travelling there by train. At the time, I could not fathom the point in doing this. Now I understand that it was to inculcate within me *mesirut nefesh* for Torah.

This parashah is named after Yitro, because his deeds are an introduction to *Matan Torah*. Yitro's method of approaching the Wilderness, leaving all the wealth of Midian behind, serves as an example to all of us. Weakening in Torah is so significant as to cause Amalek to attack. Furthermore, the Torah endures only in one who humbles himself before it, just as Yitro left behind everything for the sake of Torah.

"They encamped in Refidim" (*Shemot* 17:1). Because Bnei Yisrael became lax in Torah study, Amalek pounced on them (*Bechorot* 5b). What was the great charge against Bnei Yisrael? Is there any mortal who does not need to rest at times?

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter poses a different question. Every day between *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah* was spent improving a different *middah*. But if Bnei Yisrael were deficient in Torah study, why was *Matan Torah* not postponed in order to correct the *midot* that they neglected?

Perhaps we can explain along the following lines. Everyone is entitled to rest; there is nothing wrong with relaxing. But one can only rest after he has accepted the Torah. To rest beforehand is dangerous. This is why Amalek was able to attack them. This can be compared to a person who purchases a lottery ticket. Before even finding out whether he won, he struts about like a lord. This is ridiculous! So too, when Am Yisrael demand to relax before receiving the Torah, they invite disaster.

The Splitting of the Sea

Kriyat Yam Suf is a most difficult concept to imagine. How could water stand erect and an entire nation pass through on dry land? We all surely believe in it, but it is hard to visualize. A man once approached a tzaddik with this difficulty. The tzaddik instructed him to return that evening. When the man returned, the tzaddik had a bowl of soup before him. He took the spoon and divided the contents of the bowl in two with it. “You see for yourself how it can be. This is what Hashem did for Am Yisrael when they left Egypt.”

I, too, had difficulty understanding *Kriyat Yam Suf*. How could I make it tangible in my mind? After the natural disaster of the tsunami in Asia (December 2006), I was able to imagine what took place then. In the tsunami, a tremendous underwater earthquake created strong currents, which flooded over large portions of the Asian continent. Hundreds of thousands of casualties resulted. The full impact of this catastrophe has yet to be assessed. This gives us an idea of what took place at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. If an earthquake can bring waves that overflow the shores by some kilometers, certainly the easterly wind that Hashem brought upon the Yam Suf had the power to split the sea, as it says (*Shemot* 14:22), “The water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left.”

“You set a boundary they cannot overstep, they cannot return to cover the earth” (*Tehillim* 104:9). How could it be that the floodwaters in Asia overflowed the natural boundaries of the shoreline? In the natural order, the waves come from the upper levels of the water, in clear sight. The shores hold these waters in check by sending them back where they came from. But in this supernatural incident, the waves came from the lower levels of the water, hidden from the eye. These waters are not held at bay by the coastline and are free to overflow the shores.

Multitudes of animals were spared death, due to their finely-honed instincts of danger, which led them to escape in time. We explained (see *Why Yitro Came* and *Comparisons to the Tsunami*) that animals are in need of this sense, but we humans have no need for it. We have the Torah

which empowers us to control nature. One who depends on animalistic instincts for survival is lacking in his Torah lifestyle.

In Summary

- ◆ “You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation.” This pasuk contains many hints to the tremendous power of the Torah.
- ◆ Animals depend on their instincts to survive. But people do not need this, for they have the Torah which preserves and protects.
- ◆ Rabbi Yaakov Ben-Shabbat was called by this name, because he literally sacrificed his life to observe Shabbat. A similar story is told of the Ohr Hachaim who was protected by a lion in the merit of his *brit milah*.
- ◆ Moshe had to increase his tefillot in order to remove the plague of wild animals. This was because the animals found the Egyptians to be so similar to themselves that they had difficulty parting from them.
- ◆ Why were Gershom’s and Eliezer’s names specified once again, along with the reasons for them? This was what strengthened Yitro in his odyssey and inspired him to leave everything behind. The entire world heard about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek, yet only Yitro arrived to join the nation. The names of his grandsons drew him to Am Yisrael. *Gershom* alludes to the fact that he felt himself alienated from his homeland, and that everyone is essentially a foreigner in this world, for his life is but a fleeting shadow. The name *Eliezer* hinted to him that Hashem saved Moshe from the sword (**חרב**) of Pharaoh. This also refers to the street (**רחוב**). He was enjoined to leave the influence of the streets of Midian and join Am Yisrael.
- ◆ During all of the *makkot*, nature yielded to the will of Hashem, by the command of Moshe or Aharon. Why, then, did the waters refuse to split at *Kriyat Yam Suf*? The initials of the *makkot* were inscribed on the staff used to bring them. This staff was created on Erev Shabbat at twilight. It is part of the Creation, and as such, can control Creation when the time is right. But *Kriyat Yam Suf* was different, it was not an inherent part of Creation, but had to be commanded by Hashem. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair

succeeded in splitting the river due to the power of the Torah that he embodied.

- ♦ Rabbi Yerucham's mother came to visit him in the yeshiva. When she observed his diligence, she simply left without even speaking to him. When I was a young boy of ten, my father sent me off to yeshiva. I did not see him for the next six years. This is *mesirut nefesh* for Torah.
- ♦ Why were Am Yisrael held accountable for lowering their standard of toil in Torah in Refidim – isn't everyone entitled to relax a little? Before receiving the Torah, they were forbidden from reducing their level of learning.
- ♦ Studying the tsunami will give us an understanding of *Kriyat Yam Suf*. How could the tsunami have taken place, after Hashem assured us that the shores would keep the waters in check? This was a totally unnatural event. These were not ordinary currents, but waves which came from under the water and were therefore not stopped by the coastline.

Upholding the Torah with Enthusiasm

“You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel”

(Shemot 19:6)

Hakadosh Baruch Hu approached all of the nations individually, offering them the Torah. They asked what is written in it. Hashem explained the details of the *Asseret Hadibrot*. When they realized how much is involved in observing the mitzvot, they declined. Finally, Hashem approached Bnei Yisrael. Despite all of the prohibitions and restrictions it contained, they

desired the Torah and called out, as one man with one heart, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”

This is quite puzzling. At the time of *Matan Torah*, Hashem’s Kingdom was recognized by all. The entire world acknowledged Hashem’s glory. They still maintained the memory of the Ten Plagues, the miracles of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, and *Kriyat Yam Suf*. The pasuk attests to this (*Shemot* 15:14), “Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved.” How did the nations have the audacity to refuse the Torah?

Hashem’s rulership was indisputable. It was clear to all, just as the existence of a house proves the existence of its builder, and a garment proves the existence of its tailor. Intellectually, the nations knew that Hashem exists and He alone rules this world. The problem was that it remained a piece of knowledge in their minds, but never entered their hearts. They did not allow themselves to become enthusiastic over it. Their initial excitement was quickly diminished and eventually dissolved completely. This was because they did not come to observe Am Yisrael in their miraculous state in the Wilderness.

The following account illustrates this concept. After the fall of the Twin Towers, I read a lot about the incident. I saw many photographs which eternalized those awful moments. Yet I could not come to grips with it until I actually stood at the place where the mighty towers had once stood and saw with my own two eyes the sight of destruction.

Similarly, the nations of that generation should not have made do with the reports they received regarding Am Yisrael. They should have felt compelled to get up and journey out to the Wilderness. They should have felt an urge to observe this unique people, who were miraculously guided and protected by Hashem. Had they taken this approach, they certainly would have been affected. Their abstract knowledge would have entered their hearts and been transformed into zest and zeal. They never would have rejected the Torah.

I once went to the hospital to visit a victim of a terrible road accident. He told me that if there is anyone out there who needs proof of a Creator, he should be referred to him. He faced death, and was saved only by Heavenly mercy. After a while, I again met this man. I asked him if he dons tefillin, as a result of the miracle he experienced. He answered that he did not. I could not believe what I was hearing, and probed further.

"Only a few days ago, you yourself told me that you can prove there is a Creator, Who manages the world. How can you say this and at the same time transgress His commands, especially after being saved most miraculously?"

The man had no answer. He knew I was right.

I have experienced similar cases in which a person might tell me that he dons tefillin only on Rosh Chodesh, or a specific day of the week when the rabbi arrives to help him. This never fails to shock me. Do they also eat only on Rosh Chodesh? Are they, *chas v'shalom*, so handicapped that they cannot lay tefillin on their own? I honestly believe that this attitude stems from a lack of enthusiasm to fulfill Hashem's commands. If a mitzvah comes their way, and it's convenient, they'll perform it, but as soon as it becomes complicated or inconvenient, they immediately decide to pass up on it.

Whoever merited experiencing a miracle or a special type of Divine Providence is obligated to translate the enthusiasm engendered into action. It is human nature to accustom oneself to any situation in which he finds himself. Even the tremendous enthusiasm that grips a person in the wake of a fantastic event that happened to him is liable to dissipate. Therefore, after the experience, it is imperative to immediately take upon oneself a resolution and stick to it. Then, even if the excitement of the moment will wear off, the resolution will remain, constantly reminding him of his former fervor. The power of this resolution can affect him positively, and actually effect observance of the entire Torah.

After *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, all the nations of the world heard about the greatness of Hashem and the miracles He performed for Am Yisrael in the

Wilderness. But because they lacked enthusiasm, the nations failed to exert themselves to learn more about Hashem. The knowledge that they had did not suffice to bring them close to Him. They soon forgot everything, and even had the brazenness to reject the Torah offered to them by Hashem.

Perhaps we can add the following point. When the nations were offered the Torah, they asked, "What does it say in it?" The word מה (what) is numerically equivalent to the word מִנְאָה (man), as well as to Hashem's Name נָאָתָּה, when its letters are spelled out. The nations meant to say, "If the Torah symbolizes Your Name, and the person who is detached from worldly pleasures, then, no thank You." They lived animalistic lives, and were not interested in giving up the creature comforts of this world.

Conversely, when Am Yisrael rested at Pi Hachirot, they recognized the Torah as Hashem's handiwork, as the pasuk states (*Bereishit* 45:12), "For My mouth is speaking to you." They therefore did not ask questions or raise doubts, but immediately cried, "*Na'aseh v'nishma!*" They expressed their desire to cling to Hashem and the Torah which emanated from His mouth.

Some of the commentaries ask why Hashem chose to inform the gentiles specifically of the mitzvot which were part of the Seven Noachide laws. They were already commanded to keep these mitzvot; what was the point of mentioning them again? Hashem wanted to quiet them in the future. He wished to avert their accusation against Him for not granting them the Torah. Hashem was in essence telling them that they were rejecting even the mitzvot that they had previously received as part of the Noachide laws. How dare they now have the audacity to complain that they were not given the Torah?!

The gentiles maintained their stance of merely hearing about the miracles and not coming to learn more. They thereby indicated that they were not interested in serving Hashem. Their hearts were cold to the truth.

Now we can understand why we are enjoined to remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day. It has the potential to remind us of all of Hashem's constant kindnesses with us. Then we will accept the Torah with ebullience and excitement.

In Summary

- ◆ How could the nations reject the Torah after witnessing Hashem's mastery over the entire world?
- ◆ A person may understand something intellectually, but if he does not internalize it in his heart, its impact will decrease until it is completely forgotten. This is what happened with the gentiles, after they witnessed the miracles of the Exodus.
- ◆ The nations refused to accept the Torah's restrictions upon themselves. By doing so, they rejected Hashem's Kingship over the world.

The Power of Influence

“On the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered”

(*Shemot 19:16*)

Rashi explains that the words “when it was morning” teach us that Hashem came to Har Sinai before Bnei Yisrael. They were criticized for this, since it is not fitting that the teacher should wait for the student.

In describing the preparations that took place prior to *Matan Torah*, and the exalted moments when Hashem Himself would appear on the mountain, the Torah adds a point. Bnei Yisrael went to sleep the night before *Matan Torah*, and did not awaken. They each went to bed peacefully, as if nothing tremendous was going to take place the next day. Additionally, instead of Bnei Yisrael standing at the foot of the mountain, eagerly anticipating Hashem's arrival, He was the one who came there first. Moshe had to literally wake them up, pulling them out of bed. Why was this so? Is it proper for a teacher to wait for his students? How much more so was it improper for Hashem to wait for His nation to arrive.

Whoever peruses the pesukim describing *Matan Torah* and the miracles in the Wilderness cannot help but be overwhelmed with enthusiasm regarding *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. The sounds and sights of the Giving of the Torah, the thunder and lightning and the shofar shook up everyone. These things arouse the hearts of those who read about them. Also, the tremendous *kedushah* which permeated the air then, when Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness together with the *Shechinah*, was most tangible.

How could it be that Yitro was the only one who converted to the Jewish nation on the heels of these miraculous events, whereas everyone else remained static and unchanged?

This question is strengthened in light of what took place in the days of Mordechai and Esther. After Hashem effected a turnabout in their fate, changing the days of mourning to days of festivity, many gentiles recognized the Creator and joined the Jewish nation. The Megillah states (8:17), "Many from among the people of the land professed themselves Jews." How can we understand that in the days of Purim, gentiles arrived in droves to join Bnei Yisrael, whereas at *Matan Torah*, Yitro was the only one who abandoned his idolatry to embrace the Torah? What is the core difference between the generation of the Wilderness and that of Mordechai and Esther?

At *Matan Torah*, although Bnei Yisrael proclaimed, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” as one man with one heart, Hashem forced them to accept the Torah, holding the mountain over them like a barrel (*Shabbat* 88a). Their reticence in accepting the Torah was expressed by the fact that, on the night before *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael slept peacefully, not eagerly anticipating the revelation of Hashem the next day. Hashem had to wait for them to arrive at Har Sinai, and compel them to accept the Torah.

Conversely, in the generation of Mordechai and Esther, the Megillah states (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves.” Chazal explain (see *Shabbat* 88a; *Rashi*, ibid.) that they accepted the yoke of Heaven upon themselves. They did complete teshuvah, joyfully and willingly. This was in contrast to the way they had originally accepted the Torah at Har Sinai.

This explains why only one gentile, Yitro, saw fit to join the Jews, while during the days of Purim, many gentiles joined them. When the nations noted that Bnei Yisrael slept well the night before *Matan Torah*, they did not feel any enthusiasm, for they saw that the Jews themselves were indifferent toward this great event. Obviously, they felt, the event is not as pivotal as it had seemed. Had these nations observed joy and exuberance on the part of Bnei Yisrael, to the extent that they couldn’t even sleep the night before, it would have caused a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* in the world, and many would have joined them under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

I remember that when I was a young boy, the king of Morocco was scheduled to visit our city. Out of excitement, I couldn’t sleep the entire night before. Instead, I grabbed a good seat, where I could see everything. I stood at my post the rest of the night, until the sun came up, and the king arrived. If this is the honor accorded to a king of flesh and blood, all the more so is the honor due to the King of the world.

It would seem that all of the Divine revelations which they had previously experienced somewhat dulled their senses. They were not as enthusiastic as they should have been, and therefore went about their

business as usual, retiring for the night without proper preparations for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. The Zohar (I, 8a) states that nowadays there is a custom to remain awake the entire night of Shavuot, to atone for their attitude on the eve of *Matan Torah*.

Conversely, in the times of Mordechai and Esther, the nation accepted the Torah upon themselves and their progeny, joyfully and in unity. When the gentiles observed their tremendous joy at accepting upon themselves the Heavenly yoke, coupled with their self-sacrifice to perform the mitzvot, they could not remain unmoved. They, too, came close to Hashem.

How remarkable is the power of influence! One can be influenced for the good, returning to his Father in Heaven, as in the days of Mordechai and Esther. Or one can be influenced negatively, *chalilah*, by the scorn and derision directed toward Torah and mitzvot by others, which diminishes his own *yirat Shamayim*.

In Summary

- ♦ How could Bnei Yisrael retire as usual on the night before receiving the Torah, without enthusiastically preparing for this major event? Hashem Himself had to await them at the mountain.
- ♦ Why was Yitro the only one among all of the nations who saw fit to join the Jewish nation? Conversely, we find that in the days of Mordechai and Esther, many gentiles converted to Judaism. How was their acceptance of the Torah at this time different from *Matan Torah*?
- ♦ At Har Sinai, Hashem placed the mountain above the nation like a barrel. They were forced to accept the Torah, rather than accepting it willingly. This was why they did not prepare properly for the event and arrive early at Har Sinai. This is what kept the nations, too, from coming under the wings of the *Shechinah*. But in the days of Mordechai and Esther, all of

the Jews accepted the Torah willingly. This influenced the gentiles to embrace Judaism, as well.

The Significance of Kabbalat HaTorah

“Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain”

(Shemot 19:17)

Bnei Yisrael stood at the foot of the mountain in order to receive the Torah. According to the Midrash, the mountain was plucked from its place and was held over them like a barrel (*Rashi*).

The Gemara (*Shabbat* 88a) states, in the name of Rabbi Abdimi bar Chama bar Chasa, that Hashem held the mountain above them like a barrel, saying that if they would accept the Torah, fine. But if not, they would be buried under the mountain. Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov states that this shows the importance of the Torah. Rashi explains that by placing the mountain above their heads, Hashem actually provided a defense for Bnei Yisrael. When, in the future, they would be remiss in their Torah studies, they would have the excuse that they were originally forced into accepting the Torah.

Only after the miraculous deliverance of Purim took place, in the days of Mordechai and Esther, did Bnei Yisrael accept the Torah upon themselves willingly.

How could Chazal say that they were compelled to accept the Torah at Har Sinai (or under it)? They had beheld Hashem's *Shechinah*, along with the miracles of the plagues and the Splitting of the Sea. The entire nature

of their sojourn in the Wilderness was miraculous. This all proved the existence of the Creator.

Tosafot (*Shabbat* 89a) relates the following. When the Satan discovered that Hashem wished to bestow the Torah upon Bnei Yisrael, he claimed, “Does this nation, which will worship a Golden Calf in another forty days, deserve to receive the Torah? It’s an insult to the Torah to give it to such a people!” Hashem removed the Satan from before Him.

The Gemara (ibid.) relates that after Moshe descended with the two *luchot*, the Satan again approached Hashem, asking where the Torah was located. Hashem answered that it was on earth. The Satan then went and sought the Torah in every conceivable place – on the earth, in the sea, in Gehinnom, but he did not find it anywhere. Then Hashem told him that it was in the possession of ben Amram. The Satan came to Moshe and asked for the Torah’s whereabouts. Moshe denied having the Torah with him, “Who am I that I deserve the Torah?” he queried. Hashem turned to him and told him that he was saying falsehood, for he had been granted the Torah when in Heaven. To which Moshe countered, “You had a treasure hidden in Your treasure house, which You delight in every day; should I deserve to have it?” Hashem responded, “Because you are so humble, the Torah will be called by your name, as it is said, ‘Remember the Torah of My servant, Moshe.’”

What business was it of the Satan where the Torah was located? Those who sit on High have no *Yetzer Hara*, and therefore have no need for the Torah, its antidote (*Bava Batra* 16a). The Satan had no use for the Torah; why was he so insistent on finding it?

This episode is mentioned to prove just how wonderful the Torah is. For, although the Satan had no need for it, he felt the lack of the light of Torah when Moshe descended to earth with the *luchot*. All of the angels, among them the Satan, sensed the absence of the Torah’s radiance when it was taken from Heaven. This is what compelled him to seek it out.

This idea is illustrated by the following metaphor. A chandelier is magnificent and glows with the light of numerous bulbs. If one bulb were

to burn out, the chandelier would remain beautiful, but it would become somewhat damaged. The Torah was in Heaven, where the lights never go out. Nevertheless, the Torah's removal caused a dimming of sorts to be felt by the angels.

Am Yisrael received an invaluable gift at *Matan Torah*. Why, then, were they forced into accepting it? Wouldn't we have expected them to take it with open arms? If the angels so desired the Torah, despite the fact that they had no need for it, all the more so should Am Yisrael have rejoiced with the Torah, which is so necessary for their physical and spiritual survival.

The fact that Hashem forced them to accept the Torah indicates His great mercy for His people. He knew that they would sin with the Golden Calf after forty days. They would be deserving of destruction. This is why Hashem taught Moshe the secret of the *ketoret*, which would provide atonement for the nation (*Shabbat* 89a). When Hashem saw that His sons would sin, He left them an escape route, the opportunity to excuse themselves by claiming that they never accepted the Torah willingly, for it was foisted upon them. They could assert that this was the reason for their sins.

According to the natural order, Am Yisrael should have accepted the Torah willingly and with love, in light of the miracles which were done for them on a daily basis, and their faith in Hashem. But Hashem, in His mercy, switched their way of thinking, in order that they would be coerced into taking the Torah. This would give them the chance to explain themselves on the Day of Justice. They would be able to justify the sins on their hands. How great is Hashem's compassion! He precedes the remedy before the malady.

When Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, ready to receive the Torah, the angels placed two crowns of glory upon their heads. These corresponded to the two Batei Mikdash. But when they sinned with the Golden Calf, these crowns were removed from them. The two Temples, too, were captured by the *chitzonim*, as Yirmeyahu Hanavi laments that Bnei Yisrael

were “sick all day long.” The Arizal (*Eitz Chaim* 18:5) explains that the letters of the word נִזְרָא (sick) are the same as that of נִזְרָא (glory). The Beit Hamikdash, under the *sefirah* of *hod*, is now under the jurisdiction of the *kelippah*.

When the Chashmonaim reclaimed the Beit Hamikdash, they lit the Menorah. They thereby detached the *sefirah* of *hod* from the constraints of the *kelippah* and returned it to Am Yisrael. It was as if they returned to Bnei Yisrael the two crowns of glory, which had been placed upon their heads by the angels at *Matan Torah*.

Although Bnei Yisrael lost their crowns due to the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe retained his crowns, for he did not participate in this sin (*Shabbat* 88a). This is the reason why his face glowed. When these crowns were taken from Bnei Yisrael, the Torah was endangered, for the *sefirah* of *hod* was in the captivity of the *kelippah*.

Hashem was concerned for the future of the Torah, and therefore, allowed Moshe to keep his crowns. This is what Chazal refer to by stating (see Zohar I, 25a; *Likutei Torah, Tehillim* 90) that in every generation, there is one *neshamah* which contains sparks of Moshe Rabbeinu. If not for this *neshamah*, the entire generation would be unable to understand the Torah. Only in the merit of the crowns of glory contained in Moshe Rabbeinu’s *neshamah*, which appears in each generation, does Am Yisrael have the ability to learn Torah, to uphold it, and to be upheld by it. It was only in the merit of receiving the Torah in the Wilderness that they merited these crowns.

Now we can understand the exchange between Hashem and the Satan. Hashem informed him that the Torah was located on earth. Why didn’t He just refer him to Moshe? Hashem wished to impart the lesson to the world that the Torah endures only in one who nullifies “earthiness” and physicality from within himself. It prevails only in one who humbles himself before it. At first, the Satan did not understand Hashem’s intentions. He assumed the Torah was found on the earth itself. The Satan could not grasp that the Torah could be found with someone who was

mere flesh and blood. The Torah is so vast and measureless; how could it possibly find residence within a person of limited strength?

After unsuccessfully searching for the Torah, the Satan was told that it was to be found with Moshe Rabbeinu. According to the laws of nature, a small vessel cannot contain a large object. But because Moshe Rabbeinu worked on himself, eradicating every last vestige of physicality, the Torah found a welcome residence within him. Hashem told the Satan to seek for the Torah with *ben Amram*. He did not refer to his name *Moshe*. The name מֹשֶׁה contains the same letters as that of מֹשָׁה. Moshe felt this name was too exalted for him. He therefore asked to be called *ben Amram*. From here we learn the sublime level of righteousness and humility that he possessed. His subservience to Hashem and His Torah was what caused the Torah to remain with him and be attributed to him. Unlike human kings, who name their estates after themselves, Hashem chose to call the Torah by Moshe's name. This is borne out by the pasuk (*Malachi* 3:22), "Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant."

In Summary

- ◆ Bnei Yisrael had witnessed the plagues in Egypt and the miracles at the sea. They recognized Hashem's hand throughout. Why, then, did they refuse to accept the Torah willingly, to the extent that Hashem had to hold the mountain above their heads to force them? Furthermore, by the angels' refusal to allow the Torah to be brought down to earth, they should have understood its greatness. How could they pass up on such a gift?
- ◆ According to the natural order, Bnei Yisrael would most certainly have accepted the Torah willingly. But Hashem knew that they would subsequently sin with the Golden Calf. Since they were forced into accepting the Torah, they had the excuse that they had accepted the Torah under duress and were therefore prone to sin. This would prevent them from being blamed for their misdeeds.
- ◆ The Satan approached Hashem, asking where the Torah was to be found. Hashem told him it was on earth. The Satan then went and searched all

over for it, but could not find it. He returned to Heaven, asking Hashem for further details. Hashem told him that ben Amram had it. Why didn't Hashem tell him initially that the Torah had been given to Moshe? It seems that Hashem originally wanted to allude to the fact that Torah exists only in one who humbles himself as the earth. This was why He stated that it was on earth. When the Satan did not understand the message, Hashem specified that it was with *ben Amram*, using this name to refer to Moshe, since it denotes his humility.

- ♦ At the time that Bnei Yisrael cried out “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” they were awarded two crowns, which were subsequently removed after the sin of the Golden Calf. The two Batei Mikdash, alluding to the *sefirah* of *hod*, were also captured by the *chitzonim*. Only Moshe Rabbeinu maintained his crowns, and his face glowed from their radiance. All of our success in Torah study is attributed to the fact that every generation contains a *neshamah* whose source is Moshe Rabbeinu, bringing *hod* into the world.

Hashem and Bnei Yisrael Unite in Marriage

“Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain”

(Shemot 19:17)

The Midrash explains that Har Sinai was held over the heads of the people like a barrel. What was the point of this?

From the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Am Yisrael and Hashem were in the process of marriage. The nation left Egypt with no provisions. They were a tremendous camp of people, containing millions, a large portion of which were women and small children. They relied on Hashem for sustenance. They were like the wife who trusts that her husband will provide for all of her needs. The *Navi* describes their loyalty in the following words (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), “Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into

the Wilderness, into an unsown land." This was the beginning of the marriage between Am Yisrael and Hashem. At Har Sinai, they entered the chuppah (*Ta'anit* 26b), which was the mountain placed above their heads.

Under the chuppah, the *chatan* presents the *kallah* with a gift, such as a wedding ring. Hashem presented Am Yisrael with the greatest gift imaginable – the holy Torah. It is more precious than anything in the world.

A *kallah* will treasure her ring most dearly, and protect it from all harm. She will not relinquish it to anyone else, no matter how much they would pay. This ring represents the love and desire of her husband toward her at the time of their marriage. The ring is so personal and close to her heart that she will never agree to part with it. This is our perception of the Torah. It is our wedding band, and even more. It bands us together with Hashem and we would never exchange it for all the riches of the world.

A woman can never really leave her husband against his will. Even if she were to escape to the ends of the earth, she would be bound to him by her marriage. The only way for her to sever her bond with him is through divorce. Am Yisrael are similarly eternally united with Hashem, from the time of their marriage to Him at Har Sinai. Even if we hide from Him, there is no escaping. The knot that we tied with Hashem can never be severed. We will always be joined with Him. And just as a man must provide for his wife, so has Hashem guaranteed to sustain us. How fortunate we are to be sustained by Hashem Himself!

Women are accustomed to gaze at their wedding band on the day of their anniversary. This reminds them of their wedding day and strengthens their union. Likewise, the unification of Am Yisrael with Hashem is renewed year after year, on the anniversary of their wedding, Shavuot. Each person feels this, on his level.

The Bond of Marriage between Husband and Wife - To Fortify Torah

As we have explained, the Torah is the wedding band uniting Am Yisrael with Hashem. Chazal state (*Yevamot* 62b), “One who is without a wife, is without Torah and joy.” The Jewish wife brings her husband joy in his Torah study. Without her, he is considered devoid of Torah. This can be explained simply. She is the one who encourages him to learn, and she supports his spiritual growth.

But there is a deeper meaning to this statement. The wife gives birth to children, whom the man is commanded to teach Torah. She provides him with the opportunity to share his Torah knowledge with others. If not for her, he would still learn Torah, but not in order to teach to others. The sefarim teach us that one who merits learning Torah and passing it on to others is guaranteed a portion in the World to Come. An intrinsic aspect of learning Torah is to impart it to others. Moshe Rabbeinu himself learned Torah in order to transmit it to the nation, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 33:4), “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” One who does not marry is deprived of the opportunity of passing on this heritage. His own Torah study is deficient, and he is said to be “without Torah.”

Chazal tell us (*Gittin* 90b), “The Mizbeach sheds tears over a man who divorces his wife.” The commentaries ask what is the connection between the Mizbeach and divorce. Perhaps we can explain in light of the above. The Mizbeach is where sacrifices were offered as atonement for sins. The woman keeps her husband connected to Torah and mitzvot. A mitzvah observer who has fallen will not secede from Hashem’s nation. Rather, he will seek ways and means of doing teshuvah. He will wish to bring a *korban* as atonement. The fact that the man has a wife keeps him in line with the desire of Hashem, and the offering of sacrifices when necessary. But if he separates from her, he will be less inclined to bring sacrifices. For this, the Mizbeach sheds tears.

Additionally, on the *Shalosh Regalim*, husband and wife would band together and ascend to Yerushalayim. There, they would visit the Beit Hamikdash and bring sacrifices. The stronger their connection with the Beit Hamikdash, the greater their connection with Hashem, Whose Presence resides there.

This sheds light on the episode with Chizkiyahu Hamelech. Yeshayahu Hanavi appeared to him and ordered him to write his will, for he was on the brink of death. He would die as punishment for not marrying and having children. Chizkiyahu excused himself by saying that he abstained from marrying for he saw in a Divine vision that he would beget a rasha, Menashe, who would anger Hashem. To which Yeshayahu countered, "Why do you meddle into the affairs of Heaven? Hashem commanded us to be fruitful and multiply, and you are therefore commanded to get married. What business is it of yours if your son will be a rasha? Because you refrained from this mitzvah, you will die and lose your portion in both worlds" (*Berachot* 10a). Did Chizkiyahu deserve to die for neglecting this one mitzvah of having children, especially in light of the fact that he had righteous motives?

By refraining from marrying, Chizkiyahu denied himself the opportunity of passing on his Torah knowledge to his children. This should have been more important to him than the consideration that he would father a rasha. It demonstrated that he did not value Torah properly. For this, he was slated to die. He prayed and repented and was spared from death. He had sons, and although Menashe was indeed a rasha, he eventually did teshuvah. Hashem can do what no human can, turning the hearts of the wicked back to Him.

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem placed Har Sinai above the heads of Am Yisrael, as a barrel. This was the chuppah of Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. The bonds of their marriage began in the Wilderness, where they followed Him loyally. The Torah is the wedding band which they received at Har Sinai.

- ◆ We must treasure the Torah, just as a *kallah* cherishes her wedding band. And just as a husband is obligated to provide for his wife, so has Hashem obligated Himself to sustain us.
- ◆ We can never sever our ties with Hashem, just like a woman is bound to her husband.
- ◆ A woman propels her husband to grow in Torah. She bears him children to whom he will impart his Torah knowledge.
- ◆ One who divorces his wife causes the Mizbeach to shed tears. A man without a wife becomes deficient in offering sacrifices, thus rendering the Mizbeach deficient.
- ◆ Chizkiyah was destined to die for not marrying, because he was denying himself the opportunity to teach Torah to his future sons.

The Hatred of the Gentiles Descended From Har Sinai

“All of Har Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the furnace, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly”

(Shemot 19:18)

When Hashem's *Shechinah* rested upon Har Sinai, the entire mountain was engulfed in smoke. Our Sages relate (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9) that two contradictory things happened at the time of *Matan Torah*. One was that the mountain trembled and moved from its place, due to the sanctity of the event. This is illustrated in the pasuk in *Tehillim* (104:32), “He looks toward the earth and it trembles; He touches the mountains and they

smoke." At the same time, the rest of the world became paralyzed, as Chazal tell us that when the *Asseret Hadibrot* were announced, the birds did not chirp and the cows did not low.

On the one hand, Har Sinai shook and moved from its place, and on the other hand, the entire world was frozen. What is the secret behind this paradox?

Hashem wanted to teach the world the lesson that without the Torah, everything is petrified and nothing can exist. Therefore, all those who did not accept the Torah were silent and unmoving. But on the other hand, Torah provides vitality to whoever accepts it. Even the inanimate mountain was energized and had the ability to move, due to the *kedushah* of the Torah upon it.

Chazal explain (*Shabbat* 9a) the reason for the name Har Sinai. The word סִינַי (Sinai) is similar to the word שָׁנָא (hatred). From the moment the Torah was given on Sinai, hatred came down to the world. The gentiles were also aware that Torah is the purpose for the existence of the world. If not for the Torah, everything would be still. According to common sense, the nations should have rejoiced over Am Yisrael's accepting the Torah, after they themselves declined it. They were granted a right to exist in the merit of this acceptance. They should have felt great gratitude toward Bnei Yisrael for this benefit.

But Hashem had other plans. He specifically drew hatred into the world, together with the Torah. This hatred is what keeps our nation in line. When Am Yisrael distance themselves from Torah and mitzvot, breaking the vow they made at Har Sinai, they essentially lose all rights to exist. The nations perceive the danger involved and hate them for this. Because Hashem is long-suffering and merciful, He does not hasten to punish Bnei Yisrael. He first sends them reminders to repent. These come in the form of the gentiles' hatred toward our nation. The moment the Jew feels the gentiles' hatred upon him, he is awakened to repent, for he understands that this hatred is a direct result of his distancing himself from the path of Torah and mitzvot.

In this vein, we can translate the pasuk “He looks toward the earth and it trembles” to mean the following. Hashem brings natural disasters in the world in order to arouse us to do teshuvah. Even when an earthquake occurs in a far-flung place, where there are no Jews, this does not exempt us from the responsibility to take a lesson from it. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, spares us. He therefore sends us messages by harming those who deny Him. If we would realize that we were meant to undergo this suffering, this would bring us to complete teshuvah.

I was once delivering a *shiur* in Lyon, France. One of the listeners, who suffered from a brain tumor, was not feeling well. He stepped outside in order to get some fresh air. Just then, a gentile passed by, and called out, “Dirty Jew!”

This man didn’t know what hit him. He turned to the gentile and asked, “What did I do to you to make you talk like that to me?”

The gentile merely shrugged his shoulders, “I just can’t stand you because you’re Jewish.”

At the end of the lecture, this man approached me, confused and shaken. He asked me, “Why did he speak to me like that? Did I do him any harm?”

I answered with a question of my own, “Do you wear tefillin? Are you strict with kashrut?”

He answered in the negative.

I continued, “Are you sure you’re a Jew?”

He said he was.

“How are you a Jew? How can you be a Jew without fulfilling anything?!”

Even without provocation, the gentiles hate us. This animosity is actually a gift from Hashem. Instead of punishing us immediately when we sin, He postpones punishment. He sends the gentiles to intimidate us, in order to bring us to teshuvah. In the future, Hashem will hold a

world-wide court case, and all of the righteous Jews who walked in His way will merit seeing His true Kingship.

“Hashem will be the King over all the land; on that day Hashem will be One, and His Name will be One” (*Zechariah* 14:9). With Mashiach’s arrival, only Hashem’s Kingdom will prevail. There will no longer be any need for the animosity of the nations, for Am Yisrael will go in His ways. On the contrary, the nations will fear us and seek ways to serve us and honor us.

In Summary

- ◆ Two opposing events happened at *Matan Torah*. The mountain itself trembled and moved from its place. On the other hand, the rest of the world was frozen into silence. How can we reconcile this?
- ◆ Hashem wished to impart to Bnei Yisrael the message that a world without Torah is lacking vitality. Even the animals do not make a sound. But the Torah has the potency to grant life into even inanimate objects, such as Har Sinai, which moved from its place at the Giving of the Torah.
- ◆ The word סִינַי (Sinai) is similar in sound to the word שׂנְאָה (hatred), for together with the Torah, hatred came into this world. The gentiles hate us with a very specific purpose. It is in order to bring us back to Hashem and do teshuvah. Likewise, all of the world tragedies have one objective: to arouse us to do teshuvah. In the future, only Hashem’s Kingdom will reign, and the animosity of the gentiles will disappear. This will happen because Bnei Yisrael will come close to Hashem and will have no need for the terror and taunts of the nations, in order to bring them to teshuvah.

Renewal in Avodat Hashem

“G-d spoke all of these statements, saying: I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery”

(Shemot 20:1-2)

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu appeared on Har Sinai in His full glory, the fear and awe were so great that there was utter silence; no cow lowed, and no bird chirped (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9). Hashem's voice was heard from one end of the world to the other. All of the nations realized that Hashem was giving the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

The first Commandment that Hashem gave to the nation is “I am Hashem, your G-d.” Didn’t Am Yisrael know that Hashem is their G-d? What is this statement revealing to them? We would not imagine a king standing before his nation, exclaiming that he is their ruler, or a Rosh Yeshiva proclaiming that he is his students’ mentor. Why did Hashem inform Bnei Yisrael Who He is?

The Midrash states (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 937) that the words of Torah should constantly be new in our eyes. This means that we should never feel like we know everything already, doing mitzvot by rote. Rather, we should feel a novelty and newness in Avodat Hashem, continuously perceiving fresh insights. This is the reason behind the injunction of Chazal to make one hundred *berachot* daily, with concentration. By nature, one who is accustomed to make one hundred *berachot* on a daily basis, will fall into habit and do it by rote. He will hardly pay attention to the words coming out of his mouth. But when a person focuses on his words, counting each one like a pearl, he will constantly renew his enthusiasm in his Avodat Hashem with each *berachah* that he says.

Until now, Hashem had appeared to Bnei Yisrael through an intermediary: His servant, Moshe. Their entire connection to Hashem was through Moshe. Am Yisrael knew that it was Hashem Who had released

them from Egypt with a mighty hand. But now, as they stood at the foot of Har Sinai, becoming His chosen nation by receiving the Torah, He wished to awaken within them feelings of freshness in their service of Him. This would affect them and their offspring all their lives. This is why Hashem changed from His usual custom and addressed the nation directly, with His own voice. This caused great excitement among them, and aroused their hearts to feel constant enthusiasm in Avodat Hashem.

The most appropriate time for teaching this lesson was the day that Am Yisrael received the Torah. Therefore, Hashem chose this day to reveal Himself before Bnei Yisrael, proclaiming that He is Hashem, their G-d, in His own voice. In this manner, Am Yisrael would best internalize the message that one should always feel novelty in Avodat Hashem.

Similarly, the essence of Shavuot is receiving the Torah anew. For this reason, we are commanded (*Vayikra* 23:16) to bring “a new meal-offering to Hashem.” Avodat Hashem demands constant renewal. Likewise, there is a dispute among the *Tanna'im* regarding the date of *Matan Torah*. Some claim it took place on the 6th of Sivan, whereas others claim the 7th of Sivan (*Shabbat* 86b). This is because the Torah does not cite a specific date. Perhaps we can suggest that the Torah specifically did not mention a date for *Kabbalat HaTorah* in order to teach us the following. Every day should be for us the day of the Giving of the Torah, for the Torah should always be new in our eyes. It should not be relegated to one specific day of the year.

Shmuel Hanavi recounts (*Shmuel II*, 6:3-7) that Uzah and his brothers, the sons of Avinadav, were responsible for the Aron Hakodesh. When they had to transfer it to the City of David, they loaded it onto a wagon drawn by oxen. All Bnei Yisrael came out in song and music before the Aron. Suddenly, Uzah noticed that the animals pulling the wagon began moving. He therefore stretched out his hand to steady the Aron, so it should not fall from the wagon. In punishment for touching the Aron, he was instantly killed. He should have realized that the Aron does not need support. On the contrary, the Aron carries its carriers (*Sotah* 35a). There should not have been any fear of the Aron falling out of the wagon. Stretching out his

hand indicated a lack of faith in Hashem. This warranted the punishment of death. When David observed Hashem's wrath, he decided to let the Aron remain where it was, and not bring it to his city.

This raises a question. The fact that Uzah was chosen to take care of the Aron Hakodesh demonstrates his righteousness. How could it be that he did not control his instincts and stuck out his hand to steady the Aron?

At that time, Am Yisrael was in a state of jubilation, for the Aron was finally returned, and was about to be placed in its appropriate residence. The pasuk tells us (*ibid. 6:5*), "David and the entire House of Israel were rejoicing before Hashem with all kinds of cypress-wood instruments – with harps, lyres, etc." We might say that since they were so joyful that Uzah was not so scrupulous with his actions. Sometimes one's joy is so great that he becomes less vigilant with his actions. Uzah's elation led him to a feeling of complacency, which resulted in him not being mindful enough of what he was doing.

His deed was magnified by the fact that the Aron contained the very *luchot* which state "I am Hashem." This is the Commandment that enjoins us to exhibit freshness in our Avodat Hashem. The charge against him was all the greater, for he sinned with the Aron that teaches us to feel novelty in serving Hashem.

But another question arises here. Uzah was a tzaddik, as his mission testified. How can we say that he did not feel newness in his service of Hashem, and that his joy effected a feeling of rote and routine?

We might say that Uzah was on such a lofty level that every moment of his life was spent seeking ways and means of ascending ever higher. This eventually led to his downfall, for he came to a standstill in his Avodat Hashem, degrading the Aron Hakodesh.

In a similar manner, we might explain the sin of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, who mistakenly brought an alien fire. Their act stemmed from the desire to gain novelty and insight in Avodat Hashem, to the extent that they wished to bring additional offerings that they had not

been commanded. However, a fire which is not mandated is deemed alien. They were burnt by their desire, for this fire led to their deaths.

Uzah also desired to become sanctified and superior in his Avodat Hashem. But as much as this desire burned in his heart, he did not pay due attention to ensuring the elevation of his actions. This is why he stumbled by placing his hand on the Aron.

With their deaths, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, as well as Uzah, bequeathed to us the following important lesson. One must renew himself and climb the ladder of Torah and *yirat Shamayim* only according to his own spiritual level. Furthermore, a person is not capable of acquiring many levels of *kedushah* at once. He must take small steps and progress slowly but surely. This will ensure that he does not descend in his Avodat Hashem. Chazal teach us (*Sukkah* 5a), "If you have grabbed too much, you have grabbed nothing at all." Only at the age of forty, after one has filled himself with knowledge of Shas and Poskim, may he delve into the secrets of Kabbalah (*Shach, Yoreh De'ah* 246:6). Conversely, a young man who has no knowledge of Mishnah or Gemara is strictly forbidden from entering the secrets of Torah. His spiritual level precludes involvement in these lofty areas of Kabbalah.

When a person finally acquires a spiritual asset, or reveals an insight in Avodat Hashem, he should make every effort to maintain what he has. There is a universal custom to remain awake the entire night of Shavuot learning Torah, in order to rectify the fact that Bnei Yisrael remained asleep in their tents the night before *Matan Torah* and did not arise to greet the *Shechinah*. Moshe had to literally pull them out of bed (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah*). We might suggest that Am Yisrael had grown accustomed to Hashem's Presence during the days of preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. This detracted from their anticipation of receiving the Torah.

A person must constantly feel newness in Torah and Avodat Hashem. This will prevent him from performing mitzvot by rote. Yet one must be careful to be aware of his true level in his service of Hashem. We should

not seek to attain something that is beyond our realm, for that may have disastrous results.

In Summary

- ♦ Why did Hashem start the Ten Commandments with the words “I am Hashem?” Bnei Yisrael were already aware of Him.
- ♦ Habit weakens a person. Although they recognized Hashem, He was now coming to reveal Himself to them. This teaches us that Avodat Hashem needs constant renewal.
- ♦ Uzah stumbled by stretching out his hand to steady the Aron. How could such a righteous individual slip in this way? We must say that he was so joyous at the return of the Aron that he was not in complete control of his actions. Nevertheless, how could such a thing have occurred? The answer is that Uzah wished to acquire levels beyond his capability. We find a similar occurrence regarding Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. Their high jump brought them to fall low.
- ♦ One must always look for freshness in serving Hashem. But at the same time, he must be aware of his level. Even though the desire to come closer to Hashem gnaws away at him, he should not bite off more than he can chew.

The Wise Man Foresees the Outcome of His Deeds

“All the people saw the sounds and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain; the people saw and trembled and stood from afar”

(*Shemot 20:15*)

How could the nation “see the sounds”? The words וירא העם (the people saw) can also mean that the nation feared. They heard the sounds of the shofar, which generally signify war or the Day of Judgment, and feared their implication. But let us try to understand the simple meaning of the pasuk, which seems to imply that they actually saw the sounds.

“The wise man sees the outcome of his deeds” (*Tamid* 32a). Bnei Yisrael were in this category at *Matan Torah*; they had the foresight to see the implications of the shofar’s sounds. However, the word “seeing” does not seem accurate. A person can attempt to predict what will happen to him, but he does not have any power to perceive what exactly will take place in the future. Maybe the way to explain this statement is as follows. A person’s wisdom depends on his ability to see the far-reaching effects of his mitzvot. He can determine whether or not they are done perfectly, *l’shem Shamayim*. They may, *chas v’shalom*, contain an element of personal interest and be tainted by ulterior motives. This type of mitzvah comes through aveirah, and it is preferable not to do it at all.

One’s power of imagination can help him picture exactly what will result from his mitzvot. It can help him understand whether or not he is fulfilling the mitzvot from a desire to fulfill Hashem’s will and sanctify His Name. When this is the case, he earns a special level of *siyata di’Shemaya*, which saves him from all harm.

“The wise of heart will seize good deeds” (*Mishlei* 10:8). Chazal say that this pasuk refers to Moshe Rabbeinu (*Sotah* 13a). At the time when the

entire nation was involved in acquiring the riches of Egypt, Moshe took it upon himself to locate the remains of Yosef. But weren't all of Am Yisrael occupied with Hashem's command, when they were taking the wealth of Egypt? Hashem had promised Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 15:14), "And afterwards they will leave with great wealth." Taking the wealth of the Egyptians was in fulfillment of this promise. Why was only Moshe's action considered a mitzvah?

True, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to take the spoils of Egypt. But when they were busy with that, they were not concentrating on fulfilling Hashem's word. They were completely consumed by the desire to acquire more and more riches. Therefore, it was considered a mitzvah done without considering the outcome. Moshe, on the other hand, was considered "the wise man who sees the outcome of his deeds." With his power of vision, he saw the lasting effect of taking the Egyptians' money, and opted, instead, to focus on finding Yosef's coffin, for one who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from performing another mitzvah (*Sukkah* 25a). Moshe probably took a small item from the spoils of Egypt, in order to fulfill Hashem's command. Alternatively, Batya, daughter of Pharaoh, left Egypt with the rest of the Jewish nation and most likely took objects from her father's house. Since Moshe was considered her son, this was deemed Moshe's wealth, as well.

Because Bnei Yisrael did not use their power of imagination to picture the outcome of the urgent plundering of Egypt, it was detrimental to them. Mixed together with the wealth was the greedy temptation for money and possessions. This ultimately led them to fashion the Golden Calf.

Hashem blesses a person with wealth in order to allow him to support the weak and needy. But unfortunately, people perceive their possessions with distorted vision. They consider their money as the ultimate goal, instead of a means. This is similar to a mitzvah done through an aveirah, which results from the inability to see the future.

Bnei Yisrael spiritually scrubbed themselves for fifty days. They said "We will do" even before "We will hear." They had reached the level of

the angels, who accept Hashem's mission upon themselves even before hearing what it is (*Shabbat* 88a). Making the declaration of "Na'aseh v'nishma!" demonstrated their ability to see the long-term effect of their actions. Since they were on the elevated level of the angels, they were able to see the future result of *Kabbalat HaTorah*. This, then, is the meaning of the words, "The entire people saw the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar."

The statement "The wise man sees the outcome of his deeds" can be explained according to Kabbalah in the following way. The word נולד (outcome) has the same root as the word ولד (newborn). The wise man sees himself before he was born. He imagines what it was like to learn Torah with the angel, while yet in his mother's womb (see *Niddah* 30b). With the development of each organ, the angel announced, "This organ parallels this mitzvah." This obligates us to be most scrupulous in fulfilling the mitzvot after arriving in this world, the world of deeds. At *Kabbalat HaTorah*, Am Yisrael saw the voices of the angels who had originally taught each one Torah before he was born. They were able to cry out "We will do" even before, "We will hear," for they could see the wonderful results of keeping the Torah and observing the mitzvot.

In Summary

- ◆ "The entire nation saw the sounds." How is it possible to "see sounds"? The word "saw" can be read as "feared." Bnei Yisrael feared the implication of the sounds. This explanation veers from the simple meaning of the pasuk.
- ◆ Maybe the pasuk refers to a different type of seeing, alluding to the wise man, who "sees the outcome of his deeds." Bnei Yisrael said "Na'aseh v'nishma," just like the angels, who accept their mission without knowing what is involved. They reached this great level through their wisdom. They were able to imagine the results of their choices and therefore desired the Torah and mitzvot.
- ◆ "The wise of heart will seize good deeds." This refers to Moshe who was occupied with finding Yosef's coffin, while Bnei Yisrael were involved

in emptying Mitzrayim of its wealth. Taking the wealth of the Egyptians was also considered a mitzvah, for it was fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham. Why, then, weren't all of Am Yisrael considered "wise of heart"? They did not take the wealth in order to fulfill the commandment, but with ulterior motives, whereas Moshe took pains to bring respect to Yosef's remains, knowing that no one else would bother themselves with this mitzvah.

- ♦ “The wise man sees the outcome.” He imagines himself in his mother’s womb, learning Torah with the angel. With the development of each limb, the angel explains which mitzvah it corresponds to. He will now behave according to that which he was taught previously.

Seeing the Sounds

***“All the people saw the sounds and the flames,
the sound of the shofar and the smoking
mountain; the people saw and trembled and
stood from afar”***

(*Shemot 20:15*)

Sounds are limited to the sense of hearing, they cannot be seen. What is the pasuk telling us?

The parashah regarding the *sotah* (*Bamidbar 5:11-31*) sheds light on this. When a man would suspect his wife of infidelity, he brought her to the Kohen in the Beit Hamikdash. There, she would be given the bitter waters to drink, in which Hashem's Name had been erased. If she had indeed sinned with another man, her stomach would become inflated, and she would die on the spot.

This woman is commanded to swear that she did not consort with a strange man. What is the reason for this? If she had the temerity to sin

with a stranger, surely she would not be concerned about making a false oath.

We might say that the voice contains a certain force. That which was said can never be retrieved. Even the *sotah*, who may have sinned with a stranger, is not suspected of swearing falsely in the Name of Hashem. The impression made by speech is not easily erased.

“The entire people saw the sounds.” Hashem illustrated to them the significance of the spoken word. How far-reaching are its consequences! And just as there is unsuitable speech, such as swearing falsely in Hashem’s Name, which has devastating consequences, conversely the wonderful sound of Torah leaves an everlasting impact on the world.

I remember how my teacher, Hagaon Rav Shammai Zohn, zt”l, would tremble when he delivered a shiur. The words of Torah emanating from his mouth seemed to emanate from his hands and feet, his heart and innards, as well. His entire being was encompassed in the give-and-take of Torah. His words, which came from the heart, entered the heart. During his lectures, his students saw the sounds, comprehending the meaning of the sound of Torah.

In the days of preparing for *Matan Torah*, one must internalize the virtues of the sound of Torah. The phrase **מתן תורה** is related to the word **מתנה** (gift). The Torah is a gift more precious than gold and pearls. A person can actually assess the value of the gift he will receive on Shavuot. If he ascended in Torah, exerting himself in its study during the course of the previous year, he will receive a great gift on Shavuot. He merited gaining greater insights and understandings in the words of Torah. But if a person wasted time from learning, not bothering to apply himself to “see the sounds,” his gift will be smaller than that of the previous year. There is no such thing as standing still in Avodat Hashem. If you have not gone forward, you have gone backward. One must make the effort to preserve the level he has reached. If he is not constantly vigilant, he is liable to slide downward. This is expressed in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 24:3), “Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity?”

I have seen donors who previously made modest contributions to Torah institutions. But commensurate with their advancement in Avodat Hashem was their increase in charity. Their higher level of understanding brought them to the appreciation of Torah, motivating them to enlarge their donations.

Chazal tell us, in the name of Rabbi Yosef (*Pesachim* 68b), “If not for that day [of *Matan Torah*], I would be just one of many named ‘Yosef’ in the marketplace.” What distinguished him from the others was the sound of the Torah which he acquired. This gave him the distinction of being called “Rav.” The word **רָב** (Rav) also means “much.” Because he applied himself to Torah study, he merited expanding his gift of Torah, from year to year. This was due to his understanding the deep significance of the “sound of Torah.”

In Summary

- ◆ “The entire nation saw the sounds.” How is it possible to see sounds? The *sotah* was sworn to state that she was faithful to her husband. What was the purpose of this? If she had the temerity to sin with a stranger, surely she would not be concerned about making a false oath.
- ◆ The voice has certain potency, and therefore there was no fear that she would swear falsely.
- ◆ Just as swearing falsely has great ramifications, conversely, there is tremendous significance to the sound of Torah study. Hashem wished to demonstrate this concept to the nation. Therefore, He had them see the sounds and thus understand their meaning.
- ◆ A person merits acquiring levels in Torah according to the effort he has invested. On Shavuot, a person receives *berachah* in Torah commensurate with what he prepared for himself. One should prepare himself properly for the festival of *Matan Torah*.

Gems on Parashat Yitro

Yitro's Method of Fighting Amalek

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(*Shemot 18:1*)

Rashi expounds, “What report did Yitro hear that had such a great effect on him that he came? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.” We might explain, by way of *remez*, that the battle with Amalek is actually the battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. This is as difficult as splitting the sea. At the Yam Suf, Bnei Yisrael had no escape route, for the Egyptians were coming up from behind, wild animals surrounded them at their side, and the sea was in front. In the same way, the *Yetzer Hara* closes in on a person from all sides. Even when a person is involved in a mitzvah, the *Yetzer Hara* injects improper thoughts into his mind.

The only way to combat the *Yetzer Hara* is through Torah. The word עמלק (Amalek) has the same *gematria* as the word ספק (doubt). The way of the *Yetzer Hara* is to instill doubt into a person’s heart. Only through toil in Torah are these doubts resolved. Torah keeps the *Yetzer Hara* at

bay. Yitro heard that the battle against the *Yetzer Hara* is as complex as splitting the sea. This aroused him to accept the Torah, the only antidote for the *Yetzer Hara*.

We find that the nation of the Keini, the descendants of Yitro, resided among the Amalekites. When Shaul Hamelech went to do battle with Amalek, he asked them to leave, in order to be spared. This was because their forefather, Yitro, had done an act of kindness with Am Yisrael by giving Moshe good advice regarding the appointment of judges. An entire parashah is named after him.

This arouses our curiosity. What brought Yitro's descendants to sit precisely among the nation of Amalek, after their father left his former life on account of Amalek, the symbol of the *Yetzer Hara*?

The Keini nation lived among Amalek in order to constantly remember that it was they who caused their father to convert and accept the Torah. This was an expression of the pasuk in Tehillim (51:5), "My sin is before me always." Chazal (*Berachot* 5a) state, "A person should always ensure that his *Yetzer Hatov* silences his *Yetzer Hara*." Shaul was admonishing them that close proximity to the *Yetzer Hara* carries the risk of provoking him and, *chalilah*, falling into his trap. Shaul warned the Keinites (*Shmuel I*, 15:6), "Lest I destroy you with them." They, too, were liable to become swept up with the dirt of the *Yetzer Hara*. They would then be considered Amalekites, and deserve to be destroyed.

Starting off on the Right Foot

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(Shemot 18:1)

Rashi asks, “What report did he hear that had such a great effect on him that he came? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.”

Why did Yitro merit an entire parashah being named after him? And why was it specifically these two incidents that brought him to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*?

The beginning of any mitzvah is the most significant aspect of that mitzvah. Many Sages mention the value of going to do a mitzvah. Just the mere act of walking to do the mitzvah is great, for it is the first step involved in doing the mitzvah. Hashem considers even thoughts of doing a mitzvah part of the mitzvah itself (*Kiddushin* 40a).

We find an example in the following case. Eglon, the king of Moav, stood up in order to hear the word of Hashem from Ehud the Prophet (*Shoftim* 3:20). He merited that Mashiach will come from him (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim* 42). Likewise, Nevuchadnezzar, who was the scribe of Evil Merodach, king of Bavel, ran toward the messenger to correct a line in the letter sent to Chizkiyahu.

This event happened after the sun had set a few hours later than usual, in order to heal Chizkiyahu. The letter originally stated, “Peace unto Chizkiyahu king of Yehudah, and his G-d.” After it was sent out, Nevuchadnezzar, who had not been present when it was written, heard about it. When he learned that Chizkiyahu’s name had been inserted before the Name of Hashem, he rushed to change it to read, “Peace to the

G-d of Chizkiyahu, and peace unto Chizkiyahu," in order to precede Hashem's glory to that of flesh and blood. In this merit, he ruled over the entire world (*Sanhedrin* 96a).

The nascent nation of Am Yisrael followed Hashem into the Wilderness with firm faith. They took no provisions along, trusting completely in His benevolence. The *Navi* praises them (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2-3), "Thus said, Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land. Israel is holy to Hashem, the first of His crop; all who devour it will be held guilty; evil shall come upon him." This was all in merit of the first time they followed Him, to Har Sinai. Although they did not yet have the Torah, they received tremendous reward for going toward it. They also warranted receiving the Clouds of Glory and the manna in merit of their faithfulness.

How significant is the alacrity demonstrated at the beginning of doing a mitzvah! Special angels are created simply from the act of going to do a mitzvah. [Conversely, going to sin carries with it retribution...] The beginning of a mitzvah indicates how the mitzvah will look. Without acting with alacrity, the mitzvah is liable to become lost to us forever. This is how Pinchas merited the great reward he received. When he saw Zimri sin, before the entire nation, he immediately took a spear in hand and struck him, without sparing a moment.

On Shabbat, we are above the laws of nature, living under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Therefore, the Satan sees it as his holy mission to disrupt our preparations for this exalted day. For this reason, Chazal enjoin us (see *Gittin* 6b) to be most careful to avoid arguments and quarrels on Erev Shabbat. Preparing for Shabbat is the beginning of observing Shabbat. Due to its great significance, the Satan, sensing something is afoot, desires to gain a foothold and cause people to sin.

Hence, Amalek felt the need to weaken Bnei Yisrael specifically at the start of their journey to *Kabbalat HaTorah*. The first steps taken toward a

mitzvah are the most significant. This is where the Satan and Amalek step in to cool us off and do damage.

As soon as Yitro heard of Hashem's miracles at the sea and with Amalek, he came to join Am Yisrael in the Wilderness. He merited a warm welcome, and a parashah called by his name. His descendants were judges in the *lishkat hagazit* (*Sanhedrin* 106a). Yitro understood that Bnei Yisrael merited the Splitting of the Sea due to the fact that they had originally followed Hashem into the Wilderness. This taught him the tremendous importance of acting with alacrity when beginning to do a mitzvah. Conversely, he noted the great damage done by Amalek, when Bnei Yisrael weakened their Torah study, when they had just become a nation. These two incidents spurred him on to come under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

Observing Mitzvot in order to Serve Hashem

“Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”

(*Shemot* 18:1)

What is the connection between parashat *Yitro* and parashat *Mishpatim*?

Parashat *Yitro* is the parashah describing *Matan Torah*, and parashat *Mishpatim* is the parashah detailing the mitzvot. This teaches that immediately after receiving the Torah, one must begin fulfilling the

mitzvot. This is what makes us servants of Hashem, both in this world as well as in the World to Come. Hashem referred to this in the opening of the *Asseret Hadibrot* (*Shemot* 20:2), “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.” The whole reason for releasing us from Egyptian bondage is that we become bonded with Hashem, through the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot.

Performing mitzvot through a feeling of servitude to Hashem is completely different from doing them without this feeling. One who performs mitzvot in order to become closer to Hashem is like a person who works hard in order to earn money. Every penny he makes earns him a wonderful sensation, encouraging him to labor further for more. Likewise, every mitzvah a person does in order to be a true servant of Hashem earns him a fantastic feeling. With each additional mitzvah, he is binding himself closer and closer with Hashem, until he deserves to be called a servant of Hashem.

I knew a Jew in Mexico who kept the mitzvot, but without any feeling or enthusiasm. As much as I tried to arouse him to improve, nothing helped. One day, I found him praying with concentration. I asked him what had brought about this change. He explained that it was the death of his father that brought him closer to his Heavenly Father.

It's such a shame that people build their relationship with Hashem only in the wake of tragedy, like the death of a loved one. It is most fitting to think about this and acquire the feeling of closeness with Hashem before tragedy strikes.

Know Him in All Your Ways

“Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took a burnt-offering and feast-offerings for G-d; and Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe before G-d”

(Shemot 18:12)

When Yitro joined the Jewish nation, he wished to do something for them. Therefore, he prepared a royal feast for the important people. Scriptures state that Hashem Himself participated in this feast. The reason that this is recounted in the Torah is in order to teach us that even when a person does the mundane act of eating, he should remember that Hashem is with him, watching his every deed. He should ensure that he eats with table manners, for Hashem is with him in all that he does.

I was once approached by a man who looked ravenously hungry. I asked a family member to buy this man something to eat, in order for him to regain his strength. After a short time, the family member returned with a substantial portion of shwarma in his hand. I invited my guest to wash and eat. We would continue talking after he was finished.

I told him that I would leave the room, in order that he would feel comfortable, without being ashamed to eat in front of me. We would resume our discussion in ten minutes. Not two minutes passed, when I remembered that I had forgotten to offer him something to drink with his meal. I entered the room where he was in order to put a drink before him. Imagine my surprise at witnessing this honorable, wealthy businessman, bent over his food, attacking it as though he had not seen food for days. I felt terrible that I had caught him in such a humiliating position.

Yitro prepared a feast for the elders of the generation, with the participation of Hashem. He wanted to teach the world that even during

mealtime, a person must remember that he is the son of the King, and act accordingly. Hashem participated in the meal, for He observed Yitro's genuine desire to join the Jewish nation and share his wealth with the Torah Sages.

Moshe, Aharon, and even the *Shechinah* partook of this meal. The pasuk uses the Name of Hashem, Elokim, referring to the Attribute of Justice. Yitro offered sacrifices to Hashem, abandoning all of the pagan gods and becoming His servant. However, this aroused the Attribute of Justice against Bnei Yisrael. Yitro had joined Bnei Yisrael after only hearing about the miracles they had experienced. But had Bnei Yisrael not witnessed the miracles first-hand, they might not have come to accept Hashem's Torah at all.

The Purpose of Leaving Egypt

“I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery”

(Shemot 20:2)

The commentaries ask why Hashem describes Himself as the G-d Who took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, rather than the G-d Who created the world. Many reasons are given for this (*Ibn Ezra*, ibid. 20:1).

When Hashem appeared to Moshe, telling him about the future redemption from Egypt, He stated (*Shemot* 3:12), “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on the mountain.” The entire purpose of leaving Egypt was in order that Bnei Yisrael would come to Har Sinai and accept the Torah. “I am Hashem... Who has taken you out of...Egypt” underscores this message. By seeing how Hashem changed

the laws of nature, in order to release them from bondage to freedom, they became aware of the fact that He rules nature, and He is the Creator of the world.

The main objective of their salvation was that they perceive Hashem and draw near to him. This took place at Har Sinai, when He opened all of the seven heavens and appeared before them in His full glory (*Pesikta Rabbati* 20).

Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael Are One

“All the people saw the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain; the people saw and trembled and stood from afar”

(*Shemot* 20:15)

Rav Shach, zt”l, writes that the Torah and Hashem are eternal. Conversely, our perceptions are limited by time and place. Our understanding of this world is therefore bound by numbers. Hashem, Who is everlasting, is not limited. We have no tools by which to measure Him. So, too, is His Torah eternal and unlimited. One can study Torah all his life and never deplete it.

Likewise, each member of Am Yisrael contains a *neshamah* hewn from on High. Its supernal source is what grants it eternity, even after the body has died. Am Yisrael are unique from among all of the nations by virtue of the *neshamah* which they have received from on High. In spite all of the suffering and hardship which they have endured in this world, they live on eternally. This is the meaning of the statement in the Zohar (see II, 90b; III, 4b), “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one.” What is the

common factor uniting all three? Their eternity. Hashem has no boundaries and therefore His Torah is everlasting, without measure, as the Mishnah states (*Avot* 5:22), “Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it [the Torah] for everything is in it.” Am Yisrael, who occupy themselves with the Torah, satiating their eternal *neshamot*, merit existing forever.

When Bnei Yisrael heard Hashem’s voice emanating from the mountain, their souls left them and ascended heavenward. The angels had to return their *neshamot* to their bodies (*Shabbat* 88b). The entire purpose of receiving the Torah was in order that the *neshamah* should accept the yoke of Torah and mitzvot. Why did their *neshamot* depart specifically at this time?

When Am Yisrael stood at the foot of Har Sinai, they still had a vestige of the Egyptian abominations clinging to them. There was a need for their souls to leave their bodies, being returned to them anew. They would be considered as having died and been reborn. They would be like a newborn, who never tasted the taste of sin. The body without the soul could not accept the Torah, for it is temporary. The eternal *neshamah* ascended to Heaven, became completely purified, and were returned to their bodies pure and sanctified, ready to accept the eternal Torah and mitzvot.

The Ongoing Battle with the Yetzer Hara

“Hashem said to Moshe: So shall you say to the Children of Israel: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. You shall not make [images of what is] with Me; gods of silver and gods of gold shall you not make for yourselves”

(Shemot 20:19-21)

This parashah depicts the Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. Bnei Yisrael saw the *Shechinah*. Hashem told them (*ibid.* 20:3), “You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence.” The command not to make gods of silver and gold seems superfluous. Many of the commentaries find this difficult to understand.

We can learn a *mussar* lesson from this, regarding the strength of the *Yetzer Hara*. When Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, they had reached such an exalted level that the *Yetzer Hara* left them. But this great level obligated them. They had reached a level they had never before attained. If they would weaken in Torah and become involved in the frivolities of this world, the danger would be tremendous. The emptiness of this world is akin to idol worship. Therefore, Hashem commanded them, once again, “Gods of silver and ...gold shall you not make.”

The Admor of Satmar, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, zy”a, called the television *avodah zarah*, for it epitomizes all of the nonsense of this world. Specifically at the time of the Giving the Torah, when the nation was most exalted, were they told to be mindful of the *Yetzer Hara*. In the sanctified place, where the *Shechinah* resides, the *Yetzer Hara* finds lodging. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 20:18), “Moshe approached the thick cloud.” Moshe entered into battle with the *Yetzer Hara*, which is compared to a thick cloud. This alludes to the fact that each and every Jew must know that the closer he desires to come to Hashem, the stronger the *Yetzer Hara* fights within him. He is enjoined to confront him.

Rabbeinu Bachya, zt”l, (*Shemot* 20:20) states that when one stands before Hashem in prayer, he is forbidden from thinking about gold and silver. This is considered as serving gods of gold and silver. Even in the Beit Hakeneset, in the midst of tefillah, a person may think of gold and silver. Therefore, Hashem warned Bnei Yisrael, “Gods of silver and ...gold shall you not make.” Even though they were on such a high level, after receiving the Torah, the *Yetzer Hara* was able to inject improper thoughts into their hearts, even in the midst of tefillah, and even in holy places.

The Connection between Parashat Yitro and Parashat Mishpatim

“And when you make for Me an Altar of stones, do not build them hewn, for you will have raised your sword over it and desecrated it”

(*Shemot* 20:22)

“If you buy a Jewish bondsman, he shall work for six years; and in the seventh he shall go free, for no charge”

(*ibid.* 21:2)

The Torah always has a reason for connecting the end of one parashah to the beginning of the next, providing us with a practical insight. What is the connection between the commandment to build an altar of stone at the end of parashat *Yitro* and the *eved Ivri* at the beginning of parashat *Mishpatim*?

Maybe we can say that a prerequisite for the building of the altar of our Avodat Hashem is making oneself humble like the earth for Hashem’s

sake. The Sages state (*Derech Eretz Zuta 8*), “Torah is acquired only in one who humbles himself before it.” The altar made of earth hints to a person that he was created from earth, and will ultimately return to earth. Just as the earth is silent, so too, should a person seek silence in serving Hashem. Even when His commandments are not understandable, he should do them without demanding explanations.

Only after one has mastered the attribute of silence, will he merit becoming a true servant of Hashem. Only he is a free man. When a person remains silent, and subjects his desires to those of Hashem, he arrives at the elevated level of being called a servant of Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu epitomized this, as we say, “Let Moshe rejoice in the portion granted to him, for You called him a faithful servant.”

Mishpatim

Torah and Its Reward

“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them”

(*Shemot 21:1*)

“They journeyed from Refidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain”

(*ibid. 19:2*)

When Bnei Yisrael were awaiting the Giving of the Torah at the foot of Har Sinai, they are described as having “encamped” in the singular voice (כָּפֹר). Rashi explains that this denotes that they encamped “as one man with one heart.” Hashem did not give the Torah to Am Yisrael until they were unified. This is because He wished to return the world to its former state before the sin of Adam Harishon. At that time, Hashem, the Torah, and man were one (see Zohar II, 90b III, 4b). Everything else is secondary. Adam Harishon did not want to get free gifts. Therefore, Hashem gave him mitzvot, in order that he should be able to earn his portion in *Olam Haba*.

Adam Harishon encompassed the entire Creation. All of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael were contained within him. When he was chased out of Gan Eden, the *Yetzer Hara* began to act. It began its debut by introducing the temptations of *avodah zarah* and immorality. Then the Generation of the Dispersion arose. They were unified, but lacked Torah. Afterward, the Avot began teaching Torah to the world. They attempted to bind the world to Hashem and His Torah, but were unsuccessful. Then Am Yisrael descended to Egypt. After their release, they wished to receive the Torah. But Torah demands unity among the nation, and with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Torah itself. After they proclaimed, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” they proved themselves worthy of this great gift.

Tzaddikim epitomize love for their fellow Jews. They are one with them, and also with Hashem and the Torah. Their love for Hashem’s nation stems from their love of Hashem and His mitzvot. They merit the fulfillment of the pasuk (*Tehillim* 145:19), “The will of those who fear Him He will do.” Hashem acts according to their wishes, for they act as one with Him.

Before the Giving of the Torah, Bnei Yisrael were as one man with one heart. This enabled them to bond with the Torah and accept it. This, too, afforded them the privilege of connecting with Hashem. Hashem told them at Har Sinai (*Shemot* 20:2), “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.” Initially, Hashem released them from Egypt due to the promise He had made with the Avot. But now that they demonstrated unity, He became their Hashem, one with them.

“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them” (*Shemot* 21:1). What is the connection between parashat *Yitro* and parashat *Mishpatim*? When a country has elections, each candidate proposes his political platform. This gives the public an idea of what he intends to do once in office, to help them make an educated decision of whether or not to vote for him. Similarly, *l’havdil*, do we find this to be the case here. Am Yisrael, so to speak, elected Hashem as their Governor, and here, in parashat *Mishpatim*, He delineates His decrees. Am Yisrael agreed with everything and called out, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”

Hashem made a precondition with Bnei Yisrael before consenting to give them the Torah. This was that they adhere to the mitzvot. And here the likeness to a political election ends. We never find a president who, before coming into office, promises to levy taxes on the people. On the contrary, a prospective president guarantees all sorts of services for the sake of his countrymen. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu imposed 613 mitzvot upon our nation, a heavy tax, indeed (*Bereishit* 49:15). They must be scrupulous in the laws of Shabbat, family purity, etc. Nevertheless, they chose to follow Hashem, stating, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” After hearing this response, Hashem began teaching them His ordinances.

A president of flesh and blood would never succeed in gathering supporters, were he to place such severe constraints upon them. How do we understand Bnei Yisrael’s willingness to accept Hashem’s rule with all of its inherent restrictions?

“If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time” (*Vayikra* 26:3). Hashem tells us that although it is difficult to observe the Torah, if Bnei Yisrael does His will, then He, the Torah, and Bnei Yisrael will be one, and they will acquire all that they wish. They are promised all manner of blessings, as long as they keep the mitzvot. They will also merit life in *Olam Haba*. The sefer *Chessed L’Avraham* (4:3) states that all bounty comes to the world in the merit of mankind. It is the power of our mitzvah performance that unleashes Heavenly blessing upon the world. Granted, mitzvot are not always easy to perform, but Hashem grants us bounty and blessing in return. He also assures us of fulfilling our wishes.

I heard a frightening story from Rabbi Orpelli, shlita. He heard it from an eye witness. My father, zy”a, was once invited to a festive meal in Morocco. Slices of bread were distributed among those present, but there was not enough to feed everyone. The man sitting near my father was ravenously hungry. Turning to my father, he said scornfully, “Is one measly slice of bread enough to satiate one’s hunger? They should distribute a few slices to each person!”

My father responded, “You will receive your portion and become full from it, and even leave some over.”

The man began to laugh derisively, and drew everyone else into fits of laughter also. In the end, everyone ate the slice he received, was sated, and even had left over, just as we find in the case of Elisha Hanavi. This is in fulfillment of the verse (*Tehillim* 145:19), “The will of those who fear Him He will do.” When a person goes in Hashem’s ways, and all his faculties are attuned to Torah, he merits having his words fulfilled. This is borne out by the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 30:3), “He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.” One who ensures to always keep his word, is guaranteed that Hashem will uphold what he says. The purpose of man in this world is to attain this level – knowing what Hashem wants from him, and feeling His closeness.

Hashem desires to confer great reward upon Am Yisrael for upholding the Torah. But the *Yetzer Hara* conceals this from him. He allows him to see only the difficulties involved in performing mitzvot. Man must employ his intellect to realize that mitzvot contain inestimable good. Blessing comes upon that which is hidden from the eye (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 42:1). Important and valuable objects are concealed; one will not lay all his money on the table for all to behold. We find that, *l'havdil*, the Sefer Torah is wrapped and stored in the Aron Hakodesh. In order to reveal its beauty, one must exert himself, through his own efforts. No one will do the job for him.

At Har Sinai, which is described in parashat *Yitro*, Bnei Yisrael heard the *Asseret Hadibrot*. Now, in parashat *Mishpatim*, the mitzvot of the Torah are specified. Bnei Yisrael are also enjoined to obey the tzaddikim of every generation.

The pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:20), “Hashem descended upon Har Sinai.” Har Sinai was transformed into the state the world was in before the sin of Adam, when Hashem would descend with the angels. At *Matan Torah*, Hashem brought upon Har Sinai the fragrance of Gan Eden (see *Shabbat* 88b). This was all in merit of the unity of Am Yisrael at Har Sinai. They

were like Adam Harishon before his sin, who contained all of the *neshamot* within him. Hashem descended for the sake of raising the level of Bnei Yisrael.

Now we can understand why the Torah begins parashat *Mishpatim* with the mitzvah of the *eved Ivri*. This teaches that we must be loyal servants of Hashem. Conversely, if a person does not make himself into a servant of Hashem, by fulfilling the mitzvot, he will become enslaved to the desires of the *Yetzer Hara*. He will eventually be sold as a slave, due to his iniquitous behavior. One should not sell himself short.

The entire purpose of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was that Bnei Yisrael would be bound with their fellow men with ropes of love. They would feel complete responsibility for each other. This would ensure that the Torah they were about to receive would be upheld. The 613 mitzvot correlate the 613 organs of a person. By maintaining love and responsibility for each other, they will be at one with the Torah. Hashem will consequently be bound to them, as well. In this manner, Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are one.

In Summary

- ♦ Rashi explains that Bnei Yisrael encamped (יָמַן) in the singular tense to denote that they were “as one man with one heart.” Hashem did not want to give the Torah until Am Yisrael were united as one. He wanted to return the world to the perfection it had enjoyed before the sin of Adam Harishon. At that time, there was complete unity between Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and man.
- ♦ What is the connection between parashat *Yitro* and parashat *Mishpatim*? When a king wishes to be elected into office, he offers the people all types of services. So, too, after we responded affirmatively to the offer of the Torah, does Hashem inform us of the commandments, in order to bestow goodness on us.
- ♦ Observing the Torah and mitzvot is difficult, but we are promised great reward for doing so. We are even promised reward in this world for the performance of mitzvot: “I will give you rain in its time.”

- ♦ The first mitzvah of parashat *Mishpatim* is the halachah of the *eved Ivri*. This is to teach us that we must be subservient to Hashem. If we refuse, we will find ourselves serving the *Yetzer Hara* instead.

The Servant of Hashem Rejoices in His Portion

“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them: If you buy a Jewish bondsman, he shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free”

(*Shemot 21:1-2*)

The Torah mentions the subject of the *eved Ivri* first in the list of the laws of *Choshen Mishpat*. Why is this so? Aren't these laws delegated to judges? Furthermore, why do these laws begin with the subject of the *eved Ivri*?

In the *haftarah* of parashat *Mishpatim* (*Yirmeyahu* 34), it is recorded that in the time of King Tzidkiyahu, Yirmeyahu Hanavi warned Bnei Yisrael that Nevuchadnezzar King of Bavel would do battle with Yerushalayim. The nation immediately repented and set free their slaves, fulfilling the command to set free one's slaves after six years. Immediately after, they received the report that the enemies retreated to Bavel.

This is quite surprising. Bnei Yisrael did not undertake to be more stringent with Shabbat observance or with any other mitzvah. They merely set their slaves free. What was so great about this act that warranted liberation from their enemies?

The *Navi* relates (ibid. vs. 11) that after Nevuchadnezzar and his battalions left Yerushalayim, everyone retrieved his slave, as it says, "But

they reneged after that and brought back the bondsmen and bondswomen whom they had sent forth as freemen and subjugated them as bondsmen and bondswomen." When a person is in distress, he does complete teshuvah, but after he is released from this situation, he returns to his wrongdoings. This is how Bnei Yisrael acted. At first, they set their slaves free, but after Nevuchadnezzar retreated, they took back their slaves. He immediately returned and captured Yerushalayim.

After some years of labor, a person acquires a slave mentality. He fears his master and will always live in his shadow, even after being set free. He has no individual identity, for all that he attains belongs to his master. This is why the Torah commands a master to provide his slave with gifts when he frees him, as it says (*Devarim* 15:14), "Adorn him generously from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar; as Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you, so shall you give him." This is all in order for the former slave to feel free of his master, so that he can begin life as a truly free man.

The Ibn Ezra asks (see *Shemot* 2:3; 14:13) why the Torah constantly mentions that we were slaves in Egypt. Today we are free men. He explains that bondage is a status, etched into one's very being. It is very difficult to release oneself from this condition. The Torah reminds us, time and again, that although we were originally slaves in Egypt, we were set completely free, in order that we should understand that we are slaves no longer.

When Bnei Yisrael retrieved the slaves that they had formerly set free, Yirmeyahu Hanavi (34:16) lamented that they reneged and desecrated Hashem's Name by doing so. We could understand why negligence in laying tefillin or performing a *brit milah* would carry with it a desecration of His Name. But why does the reclaiming of slaves warrant being called a *chillul Hashem*?

In Tefillat Shacharit of Shabbat morning, we say, "Moshe shall rejoice with the portion granted to him, for a faithful servant You have called him." Moshe's greatness lay in the fact that he was loyal to Hashem. In

the king's palace, the servant who dedicates himself to the king's wellbeing is considered faithful.

In the year 1974, an assassination was attempted on the king of Morocco. He was travelling by plane, and a missile was shot toward it. The plane was flying over the city Ouezanne, on its way to Kenitra. The king was saved at the last moment. [He attributed his salvation to the merit of the tzaddik, Rabbi Amram Diwan, zy”a, an emissary from Eretz Yisrael who passed away in Morocco and was buried in Kenitra.]

This is how he was saved. The missile struck the plane, which began swaying. The quick-thinking pilot contacted the rebels who had shot the missile, and told them that the king was dead. He claimed that only he and his men remained alive and would they please stop shooting, so that at least they could survive. In this manner, the pilot succeeded in landing safely. The king returned to his throne and immediately put every last one of the rebels to death. The pilot was honored, for he demonstrated loyalty and determination in saving the king's life. This is a loyal subject. This, *l'havdil*, is how Hashem describes Moshe – a faithful servant.

We are all servants of Hashem. But only He knows who is a truly loyal servant. Hashem testified that Moshe was a loyal subject. We cite, "Moshe shall rejoice with the portion granted to him." What is this portion granted to him? It is the Divine image within him. Every person contains a part of Hashem within him, for He blew life into us. When a person blows, he blows his own breath into the other object (see *Ramban, Bereishit* 2:7). For example, a blown up balloon is full of the air of the one who inflated it. One who feels that Hashem blew of Himself into him, will feel loyal to Him and certainly serve him to full capacity.

A person who was sold as a slave undergoes an upheaval. Until now, he was a free man, enslaved only to Hashem. Now that he became enslaved to another person, his Divine image became distorted and desecrated. He is no longer only at the service of Hashem. The only way to rectify this situation is by setting him free. Then he becomes enslaved to Hashem alone.

A servant in his master's home is exempt from mitzvot, for he must be available to serve his master. Aside from this, something of his Divine image becomes desecrated, as mentioned. Therefore, the Torah commands the master to honor his slave even though he is enslaved to him. Through the respect that the master displays toward his slave, he feels how much he lacks by not being a free man. His sins are atoned for through this sorrow.

A slave who declares that he is quite comfortable with his master; he loves his wife and his children, and declines the offer to go free, is in a woeful position. Here he has the opportunity to return to complete service of Hashem and chooses instead to remain the slave of a human being. As retribution, he becomes a slave forever, losing his Divine image.

This slave is brought to the doorpost, and his ear is pierced with an awl. Why is this procedure done specifically at the doorpost? The Name of Hashem שְׁדַי is inscribed on the mezuzah, which is on the doorpost. The Ben Ish Chai, explains (*Shanah Sheniyah, Ki Tavo*), based on Kabbalistic writings, that the Name שְׁדַי is bestowed upon a baby at his *brit milah*. Until his *brit*, he is called שְׁדָה (under the negative forces). As soon as the foreskin is removed, the letter ו enters him and completes the Name of Hashem.

I would like to add the following thought. The letter ו symbolizes *Olam Haba*. The world was created with Hashem's Name ה-ו (Menachot 29b), as it says (*Yeshayahu* 26:4), “**כִּי בֵּה ה' צוֹר עֲולָמִים**” – For in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds.” This world was created with the power of the letter ה, and the World to Come was created with the letter ו. One who desires to draw *kedushah* upon himself must guard the *oht brit kodesh*. In this manner, the *kedushah* of the letter ו completes Hashem's Name שְׁדַי, and he is protected by it. By being brought to the doorpost, the slave is being told that since he refuses to be enslaved only to Hashem, he is removing the Name שְׁדַי from upon himself.

Now it is understood why the *Navi* places such significance on the fact that Bnei Yisrael took back their slaves, even stating that they desecrated

Hashem's Name by doing so. By retrieving their slaves, they denied them the possibility of having Hashem's Name connected to them, and with it the opportunity to serve Hashem properly. The Torah is replete with Names of Hashem. One who is deprived of the chance to learn Torah loses out in this connection with Hashem, resulting in the desecration of His Name.

I was once approached by a woman in Mexico, who related the following. Her brother passed away, years ago, on the 4th of February. Her sister also passed away on that same date. That year (2005), a few days before February 4th, she came to me, deathly afraid. I told her we would give the names of her deceased siblings to the members of the kollel, in order that they should learn Torah in their merit. She should also submit her own name, so that they should study on her behalf. I gave in this list to one of the young *avrechim*.

This woman later approached Rabbi Tawil, shlita, the Rav of the Mexican *kehilla*, who had referred her to me. This is what she said: One evening during the week of February 4th, she felt a hand touch her. Upon opening her eyes, she found a woman standing by her. Alarmed, she quickly awoke her husband.

I attributed the entire episode to the emptiness of dreams. I also entertained the possibility that she might have had emotional disturbances. On the other hand, her words may have had weight. The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that the dead sometimes come back to life. [The Zohar says that after a person's death, he is brought back to the place where he had sinned. There, he is punished. We believe this, even though we cannot prove it. It is similar to believing in the existence of angels whom we cannot see; or believing in the existence of Eliyahu, who comes to a *brit*, or on the eve of Pesach, when we recite, "Pour Your wrath upon the gentiles."]

I suspected there was truth to her words. I asked if there was a fruit tree on their property that they had cut down. She answered in the affirmative. This is a serious offense (see *Bava Batra* 26a). In our yeshiva

in Lyon, for instance, when we needed to cut down a tree in order to build a *sukkah* there, we ruled according to our rabbi's orders. We uprooted the tree and replanted it somewhere else. We also conducted a *tikkun*. Uprooting a fruit-bearing tree is a grave offense. I told her to take a fruit and place it in the spot where the tree had been. I figured that if she had, indeed, seen an apparition, she would see it again. If not, she would see nothing.

The next morning, she heard a woman's voice coming from her young son's room. She and her husband rushed into the room. Their son told them that a woman had appeared there. They immediately came to see me. I instructed them to go to her father's house for the week of February 4th, and not leave the house for that entire day. But they did not obey me and left the house. Her father, who was handicapped and paralyzed, was smoking a cigarette in bed. The cigarette fell from his hand onto the bed, causing a tremendous fire. He choked on the smoke and was burned to death.

This story calls out: "There is justice and there is a judge!" Sometimes, we forget that it is our job to serve Hashem. We must remember that we contain an element of the Divine. We should rejoice with this gift, and remain loyal followers of Hashem. Learning Torah is the surest method of staying connected with Hashem.

On that fateful date of the February 4th, three members of that family perished. This woman was the only survivor. A few days before his demise, her father was brought to see me. On his way out, he tripped on the stairs, and was hurt. This fulfilled the death penalty of stoning. It was also a form of *hereg*, for it was a strong fall. The last forms of choking and burning completed the four types of death inflicted upon a sinner by Beit Din.

What saved the daughter from death? It was the merit of the *tzedakah* that she gave for the study of Torah. *Tzedakah* saves from death. Not only *tzedakah*, but the Torah studied on her behalf brought her merit. How

great is the power of Torah study! This family was decreed destruction, *rachmana litzlan*. In the *zechut* of Torah study, she was spared.

The three family members who passed away died on the same English date, but not on the same Jewish date. This was not an observant family, and they did not follow the Jewish calendar. Hashem wanted to demonstrate that the deaths were not random. He therefore struck them, year after year, on the same date. This was in order to bring it to their attention, so that they would understand that His hand was behind it.

[This story is being retold after rabbinic consultation. It is in order to awaken the public. I asked my teacher, Rabbi Kaufman, shlita, if I should relate incidents that I hear from people. He responded with the pasuk in Mishlei (3:27), “Do not withhold good from its rightful recipients.” It is imperative to tell over these stories, for some listeners will receive inspiration from them.]

There is a well known story regarding Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, zt”l. A disciple of his passed away. Rabbi Chaim asked to be called before the funeral. He arrived and found the disciple alive, lying upon the coffin instead of inside it. When he asked about this, the disciple responded that the wall of his house is really in his neighbor’s property. For this reason, he was denied entry into Gan Eden. Certainly it was in the merit of his Torah that he was allowed to return to life, in order to rectify this matter. We do find instances in which the dead come back to life.]

Chazal tell us that any Jew who is involved in Torah study has a spark of Moshe within him. He should also feel the utter joy that Moshe Rabbeinu felt toward his Avodat Hashem, as we recite on Shabbat, “Moshe shall rejoice with the portion granted to him” (*Tikkunei Zohar* 114a; *Ohr Hachaim*, *Shemot* 27:20).

Every man who purchases a slave has actually acquired a master (*Kiddushin* 22a). He must take care of his slave’s needs and treat him as an equal regarding food, etc. This is quite perplexing. The slave was sold as a punishment for stealing. Why should he be treated as an equal? This is a form of retribution for the master, since he denied this slave the

privilege of having a Divine image and becoming close to Hashem. As a result, he is impelled to treat the slave as an equal and must grant him gifts when he is freed, so that he may begin life anew as a servant of Hashem.

From all the above, we can understand why the Torah begins its list of mitzvot in this parashah with the subject of the Jewish slave. Hashem's intention is that a person should serve Him and be connected to Him. One who purchases a slave requisitions this service of Hashem for himself. One who sells himself to another person causes a *chillul Hashem*. Due to the severity of this matter, the Torah begins the parashah with this subject.

The term *eved Ivri* is borrowed from the first person to be called *Ivri*. This was Avraham Avinu. This hints to us that we should continue on his path in Avodat Hashem, constantly connecting ourselves to Him.

In the Shacharit tefillah, we say, "Let us all know Your Name and study Your Torah *lishmah*." Learning Torah for its own sake binds us with Hashem and His Names. This is how we "know Hashem's Name." We and all our descendants must strive to merit being called servants of Hashem. Spiritual success is only in the merit of the Torah.

As an example, the woman in Mexico was saved from the decree of death against her family in the merit of the *tzedakah* that she donated for Torah study.

In a similar vein, there are many countries today that are economically stable. This is due to the tremendous Torah study taking place there. I read in the compilation of Rav Shach's, zt"l, discourses that he was once asked whether it is preferable to build a synagogue or a yeshiva. He replied that there is no shortage of synagogues, Baruch Hashem. But there is a dearth of yeshivot. It is therefore preferable to concentrate one's efforts in establishing a yeshiva.

I myself noticed this phenomenon in Morocco. When Torah prevailed, there was wealth and happiness. But when Torah decreased, the

economy suffered. The same holds true in the United States. Forty years ago, the country was not as rich as it is today. With the influx of Jews and the proliferation of Torah study, the country has attained tremendous wealth. Similarly, in France. Twenty years ago, you could count wealthy people on your fingers. Nowadays, with the increase of Batei Midrash, there are numerous affluent individuals. This is specifically noticeable in Lyon. There used to be isolated stores here and there. Today, there is a burgeoning of shops, all in the merit of the Torah that finds a home there.

In Manchester, where I served many years ago as *mashgiach*, there were only two *kollelim*. One was that of my mentor, Rabbi Kaufman, and the other of the organization, *Machzikei Hadat*. Today, Torah is, Baruch Hashem, flourishing there. Manchester has even earned the appellation of “mini-Yerushalayim.” The economy has improved there. If the heads of state here in Eretz Hakodesh would realize that survival and success depends on Torah study, the situation would be much improved. Unfortunately, the *Yetzer Hara* is in control.

There are two main chambers of the heart, the right ventricle and the left ventricle. The right ventricle is the chamber of the Torah, while the left one houses the *Yetzer Hara*. The right side is *kadosh*, yet so weak that its voice is hardly heard. Conversely, the left side is so influential and powerful. This is why we see the Torah scorned and insulted. If we would realize how crucial Torah is to our existence, we would benefit tremendously.

————— In Summary ———

- ♦ Why does parashat *Mishpatim* begin specifically with the laws regarding the *eved Ivri*?
- ♦ In the *haftarah* of parashat *Mishpatim*, we read that Nevuchadnezzar came to do battle with Yerushalayim. Am Yisrael, in response, did teshuvah by setting free their slaves. As a result, they were spared his attack. Afterward, they took back their slaves. Then Nevuchadnezzar returned and captured Yerushalayim.

- ◆ Yirmeyahu Hanavi rebuked the nation for desecrating Hashem's Name when they retrieved their slaves. What was so terrible with what they did?
- ◆ A slave loses his identity in the service of his master. This is why, when freeing one's slave, there is a command to grant him gifts.
- ◆ The Torah constantly reminds us that we were once slaves in Egypt. What is the reason for this? The *Ibn Ezra* explains that it is very hard to rid oneself of the slave mentality he acquired in bondage. The Torah constantly reminds us that we are free men, in order to set us free of this mindset.
- ◆ "Moshe shall rejoice with the portion granted to him." Moshe's outstanding virtue was that he was a faithful servant of Hashem.
- ◆ Each of us is a servant of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, for each of us contains a Divine spark. Hashem blew of Himself into us, like a balloon which is full of the breath of the one who inflated it.
- ◆ One who was sold as a slave loses a degree of the Divine image within him, for he has become enslaved to a different master. He can no longer serve Hashem to his utmost. Thus, selling a slave contains an element of *chillul Hashem*. For this reason, the master is punished. He must ensure that his slave's needs precede his own. This is because by purchasing the slave, he decreased the element of the Divine image within him.
- ◆ A slave who wishes to remain in bondage has his ear pierced by the doorpost, beneath the mezuzah. The mezuzah is inscribed with the Name 'נ-תשׁוּ. Before a baby's *brit*, he is under the forces of **טשׁוּ** (impurity). The *brit* makes him complete, adding the letter **נ**. He thereby acquires the entire Name, 'נ-תשׁוּ. A slave who damages his essence is considered to be damaging Hashem's Name, as well.
- ◆ Every Jew who involves himself in Torah contains an element of Moshe Rabbeinu within him. This should give us cause to rejoice in the wonderful portion which is ours.

- ◆ Material success in this world comes from the fabric of Torah. This has proven true in countless places across the world.

The Mitzvot of the Torah

“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them: If you buy a Jewish bondsman, he shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free”

(Shemot 21:1-2)

When Hashem instructed Moshe to teach Bnei Yisrael all of the mitzvot of the Torah, He stressed that he should “place the commandments before them” just like food is placed on a table already prepared and ready to be eaten (see *Rashi*, *ibid.*). A person who approaches the table does not have to search for what to eat; the food needs no further preparation. Hashem commanded Moshe to explain all of the mitzvot to Bnei Yisrael in this clear manner. They should not feel a need to re-learn the subject or interpret it according to their own understanding.

However, why was Moshe told to explain the mitzvot to Bnei Yisrael, rather than explaining the importance of Torah study? It is not possible to observe mitzvot without knowledge of the Torah. Torah study is what propels a person to perform mitzvot. Those who do the mitzvot without learning Torah are bound to perform only the easy ones. Those which entail difficulty, and are difficult to understand, will either be neglected or certainly not done with enthusiasm and desire. Torah enables a person to gain *yirat Shamayim*. It instills within him the message that we must perform mitzvot without exception, for that is Hashem’s will. How can a person reach this understanding without learning Torah?

Likewise, it is difficult to understand why the Torah chose to explain the laws of the *eved Ivri* first and foremost, at the beginning of parashat *Mishpatim*. This mitzvah is not relevant for all generations. Why didn't the Torah choose, instead, a more general mitzvah, which is always pertinent, such as the laws of milk and meat, tzitzit, tefillin, etc.?

Let us explain with the following analogy. A person comes to the Beit Hakeneset in order to pray. He knows that this is the purpose of going there. However, a needy person might go to the Beit Hakeneset on a Friday night with the specific purpose of receiving an invitation for a meal. Nevertheless, it is self understood that the primary purpose of the Beit Hakeneset is not to serve as a meeting place, but as a sanctuary for prayer.

Similarly, Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai had a clear understanding that their entire purpose in this world is in order to accept the Torah. When Hashem turned to them, asking if they desired the Torah, they immediately answered, “*Na'aseh v'nishma!*” They responded that they would do before they would even hear what was involved, against human nature, for they understood, deep in their hearts, that this was their purpose. Indeed, before a *neshamah* arrives in this world, it takes an oath that it will use its time in this world to learn Torah. Without Torah study, a person simply has no *zechut* to exist in the world. The entire raison d'être for a person's creation is in order that he learn Torah and fulfill the mitzvot. When the mitzvot are listed in this parashah, it is therefore unnecessary to precede them with the injunction to learn Torah.

Something which is obvious does not need proof. Hashem saw no need to command Bnei Yisrael once again to study Torah, for it was self-understood and known to all. The Midrash states (*Mechilta, Beshalach*), “The Torah was given only to those who ate the manna.” Bnei Yisrael's elevated level granted them the privilege of receiving heavenly bread. It is what carved in their hearts the obligation to accept the Torah, to study it and observe its mitzvot.

In this same vein, we can understand the words of the Ibn Ezra (*Shemot* 20:2), who asks, “Why do the *luchot* begin with the words, ‘I am Hashem...Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt,’ and not, ‘I am Hashem...Who has created heaven and earth?’” Seemingly, Creation arouses greater faith in Hashem than the Exodus. Everyone in the world, in every generation, can experience the wonders of Creation, whereas *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was witnessed only by that generation.

The Ibn Ezra explains that Hashem chose specifically *Yetziat Mitzrayim* upon which to hinge our faith. Everyone was already aware that Hashem had created the world. It did not need further elucidation. But the episode of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was novel. All of the inherent miracles were exciting. Hashem therefore chose the miracles of Egypt as the catalyst for Bnei Yisrael’s belief in Him.

Similarly, the parashah begins with the mitzvot, without mentioning Torah study first, since the people had already accepted upon themselves to learn Torah, without questions. The subject of the *eved Ivri* is taught first because of the special message it imparts. It sharpens the understanding that we are slaves of Hashem. The whole point of being in this world is to serve Him. When a person submits himself to Hashem’s desires, he is free of the manacles of materialism and the ties of temptations, as Chazal teach (*Avot* 6:2), “You can have no freer man than one who engages in the study of the Torah.”

When one realizes that he is Hashem’s employee, he becomes free of the ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*. He eventually becomes master over his thoughts and desires.

Based on this, we might explain the words “that you shall place before them” in the following way. The word **תַּשְׁלִיכָה** (you shall place) is similar to the word **נְשִׁיאָה** (uplifting). When a person observes all of the mitzvot which were placed before him, he merits ascending in spirituality, shaking off the shackles of the frivolities of this world.

In Summary

- ◆ The Torah begins this parashah with a list of mitzvot. Why doesn't it start with the injunction to learn Torah before delineating the mitzvot? Furthermore, why does it begin with the laws of the *eved Ivri*, laws which are not even applicable in all generations?
- ◆ It is self-understood that Bnei Yisrael must study the Torah; there is no need to put it in writing here. Before a *neshamah* descends to this world, it promises to learn Torah and observe the mitzvot. Therefore, the mitzvot are explained without stating that one must first learn Torah.
- ◆ Similarly, the Ibn Ezra explains that Hashem founded our faith on *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, rather than on the Creation of the world. We need not look for faith in the Creation; it is a given, known to all. Whereas *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was a new phenomenon, demanding belief. This is why Hashem began the *Asseret Hadibrot* with the words, "I am Hashem...Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt."
- ◆ The mitzvot in *Mishpatim* begin with the laws of the *eved Ivri* to teach us that we are slaves to Hashem. However, this enslavement frees us, since the truly free person is one who learns Torah. He is liberated from the bonds of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Kabbalat HaTorah – The Wedding of All Time

"And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them"

(*Shemot 21:1*)

Hashem commanded Moshe to arrange the mitzvot of the Torah before Bnei Yisrael, as a set table, prepared and ready for man to partake of. Hashem specified that Moshe should "place the mitzvot before them," so

that he would not think it sufficient to teach them the mitzvot and review them until they are clear, but realize that he must also make the words of Torah palatable and appetizing, exactly as the food on a beautifully set table (see *Rashi*, *ibid.*).

The Torah brings tremendous joy to the hearts of those who learn it. This is why a mourner is prohibited from learning Torah (*Mo'ed Katan* 15a), and why on Tishah B'Av, we are forbidden to learn Torah (*Ta'anit* 30a). Hashem commanded Moshe to arrange the mitzvot in a pleasing manner in order to add to the joy of learning Torah. For just as a colorful, aesthetically pleasing table, loaded down with culinary delights, brings pleasure to a person, so too would the Torah, set before the people in an attractive manner, bring them elation and happiness.

However, this seems to contradict the way in which the Torah was given. There was tremendous fear and trembling at Har Sinai, as it states in parashat *Yitro* (*Shemot* 19:16), "There was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered." Furthermore, Chazal tell us that as soon as Hashem revealed Himself to Bnei Yisrael on the mountain, proclaiming, "I am Hashem," their souls departed. The angels had to return their souls to their bodies, as Chazal teach (*Shabbat* 88b), "My soul departed as He spoke."

Why didn't Hashem bestow the Torah upon Bnei Yisrael in a pleasant and joyful manner, in the same way as Moshe was now enjoined to set the mitzvot before them? Giving the Torah amidst thunder and lightning, in trembling and fear, makes the Torah seem most threatening and gloomy. Instead of fulfilling it through love, this would cause them to fulfill it through fear, which is a lower level of service.

In order to answer this, we must examine another seemingly strange event. In all circles of Jewry, the *chatan* breaks a glass under the chuppah. This is in memory of the *churban*. Why, on the happiest day of his life, is he reminded of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, which surely evokes sorrow? The Torah does not want us to mingle joy with grief.

It is specifically on the most joyous day of a person's life that he is reminded of the *churban* Beit Hamikdash. It is in order to warn him to be vigilant in his new life. He must preserve the love he now feels toward his new wife, so that his future home will not crumble due to baseless hatred, as did the Beit Hamikdash. Especially at the highest moment of his life, his heart is aroused to the necessity of maintaining peace and unity. This is caused by an increase in *ahavat Yisrael*. When one makes sure to maintain unconditional love in his household, he is guaranteed that his household will endure. This message is impressed upon him when he breaks the glass.

The Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai was like a wedding (*Ta'anit* 26b). The *chatan*, Hashem, bestowed the Torah upon his *kallah*, Am Yisrael. At those lofty moments, fright and trembling took hold of everyone. This was in order to demonstrate the significance of the event. They were meant to realize just how much they needed to exert themselves in order to uphold the Torah and go in Hashem's ways. In moments of fear, a person is aroused to think of what awaits him if he forsakes the path of our fathers and abandons the Torah.

After the Giving of the Torah, when Bnei Yisrael had internalized this message, Hashem commanded Moshe to present the mitzvot to them in a pleasant manner. This would induce them to uphold the Torah through feelings of love. In this way, their reward would multiply manifold.

In Summary

- ◆ Hashem commanded Moshe to present the Torah to Bnei Yisrael in a most pleasing manner. This would instill joy in their hearts. But the Torah itself was given through fear and trembling; why did Hashem afterward ask Moshe to arrange the mitzvot in an appealing manner?
- ◆ Additionally, why on the happiest day of a person's life, is he reminded of the *churban*, by breaking a glass? This is to teach the new couple that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed on account of baseless hatred. If they

want their new sanctuary to last, they must build it on the foundation of unconditional love.

- ♦ The Giving of the Torah was the wedding between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. From its outset, we were taught that if we do not observe the 613 mitzvot, *chas v'shalom*, this marriage will be destroyed. Therefore, the Torah was given amidst fear and awe. After Bnei Yisrael understood the significance of the matter, Hashem had Moshe arrange the mitzvot in a pleasing way, in order that they should feel joy in keeping them.

The Essence of the Shalosh Regalim

"And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them"

(*Shemot 21:1*)

The majority of parashat *Mishpatim* deals with matters between man and his fellow man. The Torah emphasizes the importance of being vigilant with the honor of one's friend and to avoid causing him anguish. This is borne out by the mitzvot of the *eved Ivri*, one who kidnaps a person and sells him, one who strikes his friend, etc. As the parashah continues, we find the commandment of ascending three times a year to Yerushalayim, on the holidays of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, in the following verse (*Shemot 23:17*), "Three times during the year shall all your menfolk appear."

What is the connection between the mitzvot between man and his fellow man and the mitzvah of ascending to Yerushalayim for the holiday? The entire purpose of the mitzvot between man and his fellow man, which are recorded in this parashah, is to increase unity among Bnei Yisrael. Similarly, the mitzvah of ascending on the *regel* effected unity and

connection among Am Yisrael, as they all gathered in the House of Hashem. Also on the way up to Yerushalayim, many acts of kindness were performed for those who had traveled a long distance. Altogether, ascending to Yerushalayim in honor of the festival brought about peace and unity among the people.

We are enjoined to ascend to Yerushalayim specifically three times, not four or five. The number three alludes to the pasuk (*Kohelet* 4:12), “A three-ply cord is not easily severed.” The three-ply cord described in the Zohar (see II, 90b; III, 4b) are Am Yisrael, Hashem, and the Torah. By going up to Yerushalayim three times a year, this connection became strengthened. This is the connection upon which the entire world stands.

Pesach is the symbol of unity. Although Bnei Yisrael were sunk in the forty-nine levels of impurity, they merited leaving the depravity of Egypt. This was in the *zechut* of the Torah, which Hashem intended to bestow upon them. They would receive the Torah through unity and mutual responsibility for one another. Am Yisrael met His expectations, as one man with one heart, proclaiming, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”

Am Yisrael personified the essence of Pesach, for they merited deliverance due to their unity. This unity gained expression at *Kabbalat HaTorah*. The Pesach Haggadah describes the level of *achdut* represented by Pesach in the words, “Whoever is needy shall come and partake.” On the second night of Pesach, we begin counting the Omer, preparing for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. How fitting it is to prepare for receiving the Torah in a state of unity!

Shavuot is a reenactment of *Matan Torah*. Every year, we feel as though we are receiving the Torah anew.

Sukkot represents the Clouds of Glory, with which Hashem enveloped us in the Wilderness (*Sukkah* 11b). The *gematria* of the word סוכָה is equivalent to the sum of that of Hashem’s two Names, ה-וּ-ה-יְ and אֵל-יְ.

What we see from here is that these festivals are parallel to the three-ply cord of Hashem, Am Yisrael, and Torah, which are intertwined.

Ascending on the festivals to the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim strengthens this cord, connecting us with Hashem and the Torah.

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 3b) relates instances in which Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira debated with a gentile, who would constantly find weak points in Am Yisrael that he ridiculed. In one of these confrontations, the gentile demanded to know why the Torah forbids a gentile from partaking of the *korban Pesach*; he himself was accustomed to ascending to Yerushalayim every year and participated in eating it. Rabbi Yehudah knew that his intention was to find fault with Am Yisrael. Therefore, he told him that on the upcoming Pesach holiday, he should ascend to Yerushalayim and request the portion of *alyah*, a most delectable cut. In fact, this is the animal's tail, which is forbidden to be eaten because it is offered on the Mizbeach.

This gentile took his advice, and when he went up to Yerushalayim on Pesach, he asked to receive this portion. When the people heard this, they began suspecting his origin, for this part of the animal is forbidden to a Jew. After investigating the matter, they discovered that he was a gentile and sentenced him to death. When they found out that he had arrived by the order of Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira, they sent Rabbi Yehudah a letter to his hometown, Netzivin. In it, they wrote, "Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira lives in Netzivin, but his net is spread across Yerushalayim." They meant that his influence was felt as far as Yerushalayim, as was proven by this incident with the gentile.

Many commentaries ask how Rabbi Yehudah could remain at home, and not go up to Yerushalayim, despite the mitzvah to do so. The Vilna Gaon clarifies, as follows. Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira was a descendant of the members of the tribe of Ephraim, who left Egypt before Hashem had commanded and were therefore deserving of death (*Sanhedrin* 92b). These people were later resurrected by Yechezkel ben Buzi. Since the *korban Pesach* was an obligation for one who had left Egypt and received a portion in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yehudah was exempt from it, for his ancestors did not leave Egypt together with the rest of the nation. The Vilna Gaon proves his words by the following fact. When there was an

altercation whether or not Yechezkel ben Buzi actually resurrected the dead, Rabbi Yehudah himself testified that he was a descendant of one of those who were resurrected.

However, this leaves us with a question. True, maybe Rabbi Yehudah was not obligated to ascend on the festival together with the rest of the nation, for his tribe was not included among those who left Egypt, but why didn't he feel aroused to ascend to Yerushalayim and partake of the *korban* Pesach in order to fortify the bond between Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael. How could he forgo this?

We might answer that even though he did not physically go up to Yerushalayim, he was able to influence the nation to bind with Hashem even from his home in Nitzivin. He knew the ropes and was able to bind Hashem, Torah, and Am Yisrael, into a three-ply cord wherever he was. This is evidenced by the letter sent to him by the people of Yerushalayim. He therefore saw no benefit in physically going there.

While in the Wilderness, Bnei Yisrael did not circumcise themselves. They were concerned about the travails of their travels, for they never knew when the cloud would pick up and indicate that they were to continue on (see *Yevamot* 91b). Since partaking of the *korban* Pesach is permitted only to circumcised Jews (*Shemot* 12:48), Am Yisrael was prevented from sacrificing this offering during their sojourn in the desert. During all of the years in the desert, they celebrated only the first Pesach of their nationhood.

This raises a difficulty. Why didn't Hashem wait for all of those newly-circumcised to recover from their ordeal and only then command the pillar of cloud to move on and continue travelling? He purposely did not wait for them, for they had the sin of *lashon hara* in their midst. By speaking ill of Eretz Yisrael, they damaged their level of unity. Since Pesach is a holiday fostering unity, when groups of people sit together to share the *korban*, He preferred that those who had transgressed should not partake of the *korban*, which is intrinsically a symbol of unity.

This idea also explains the connection between the mitzvah of “You shall not cook a kid in the milk of its mother” (*Shemot* 23:19) and the mitzvah of *korban* Pesach (*Shemot* 23:18), which precedes it. Although the prohibition of mixing milk and meat is a statute, we might find a taste in the mitzvah. The kid is the offspring, whereas the milk represents the mother. Cooking the two together is deemed an act of cruelty. The mere act of cooking the kid in its mother’s milk is sufficient to damage a person’s soul.

If we were commanded to refrain from cooking these two items together in order to distance ourselves from cruelty, how much more so must we be careful regarding the feelings of our fellow man! Since the purpose of ascending to Yerushalayim and offering the *korban* Pesach is unity and brotherly love, the Torah saw fit to place it near the mitzvah of milk and meat. (For further clarification of the transgression of eating milk and meat together, one can study the commentaries of the *Ibn Ezra*, the *Kli Yakar*, and the *Ramban* on the Torah.)

It is forbidden to partake of the *korban* Pesach when one has chametz in his possession, as it says (*Shemot* 23:18), “You shall not offer the blood of My feast-offering upon leavened bread.” Chametz is symbolic of arrogance and haughtiness of heart. Leavening agents puff up the dough, just like arrogance puffs up a person. Conversely, the *korban* Pesach depicts humbleness, for when a person takes note of what is happening to the sacrificed animal, he understands that it is being killed in place of it, for his iniquities. Haughtiness and humility cannot co-exist. Therefore, all chametz must be removed before the *korban* Pesach is sacrificed.

The essence of Pesach is to unify people and help them attain a feeling of mutual responsibility. Arrogance precludes connection with one’s fellow man and love for one another. Therefore, the Torah commands us to eat the *korban* Pesach only after removing all *chametz* from our domain.

In Summary

- ♦ Parashat *Mishpatim* contains various mitzvot, which pertain to relationships between man and his fellow man. This parashah also records the commandment to ascend to Yerushalayim for the *Shalosh Regalim*. Just as vigilance in the mitzvot between man and his fellow man strengthens the bond of peace and unity among Am Yisrael, so too, did ascending for the festivals unite Am Yisrael. The road to Yerushalayim itself was paved with acts of kindness.
- ♦ We are enjoined to ascend to Yerushalayim three times a year. This corresponds to the three-ply cord: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Am Yisrael, and the Torah. The festival of Pesach alludes to Am Yisrael, who merited salvation due to their unity. On this holiday, we invite all the needy to come and partake of the *korban* Pesach. Shavuot parallels the Torah, which was given then. And Sukkot corresponds to Hashem, depicted by the Clouds of Glory which surrounded our nation in the Wilderness. Whoever went up to Yerushalayim at these times strengthened the bond between these three pillars of the world.
- ♦ Why didn't Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira ascend to Yerushalayim, together with the rest of the nation, opting instead to remain home in Netzivin? He was a descendant of the dead of Shevet Ephraim, who were resurrected by Yechezkel ben Buzi. Since they had not left Egypt with the rest of the nation, they did not receive a portion in the Land, and were not commanded to ascend to Yerushalayim on the festivals. He did not feel that he was missing out on this opportunity, for he was notified that although he had remained at home, his influence was felt in Yerushalayim.
- ♦ Bnei Yisrael did not perform the mitzvah of *korban* Pesach all of the years that they traveled in the desert, for they were uncircumcised, due to the difficulties of their travels. Why didn't Hashem simply perform a miracle, which would preclude them being harmed by fulfilling the mitzvah of circumcision? It would seem that because they spoke *lashon hara* about Eretz Yisrael, they were forbidden from partaking of the *korban* Pesach, the symbol of unity.

- ♦ The prohibition of mixing milk and meat is connected to the mitzvah of ascending for the festivals for the following reason. Eating a kid in its mother's milk is an act of cruelty. If the Torah is scrupulous with the feelings of the goat, which is a mere beast, all the more so must we be vigilant with the feelings of our fellow man.
- ♦ One is forbidden from partaking of the *korban* Pesach as long as there is chametz in his domain. Chametz symbolizes arrogance, whereas a *korban* represents humility. These are in direct opposition to each other. The essence of *korban* Pesach is to foster unity and feelings of mutual responsibility. A person reaches this level only by means of humbling himself. Thus, he must first rid himself of all chametz.

Who Will Climb the Mountain of Hashem?

“Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended. They saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, and it was like the essence of the heaven in purity. Against the great men of the Children of Israel, He did not stretch out His hand – they gazed at G-d, yet they ate and drank”

(Shemot 24:9-10)

At the time of *Matan Torah*, Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders were so spiritually elevated that they were able to actually see Hashem. But when Nadav and Avihu gazed at the *Shechinah*, they continued eating and drinking, not displaying awe at the sight of Hashem's Glory. Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma, "They looked at Him with undue familiarity, while

eating and drinking.” How can we possibly understand that Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders of the generation continued eating and drinking when Hashem appeared before them? Anyone with common sense is paralyzed with fear when confronted by a human king, how much more so should one fear the King of kings.

We must say that this was no ordinary meal. It was more like a sacrificial offering. This is similar to the way the Kohanim partook of the offerings in the Beit Hamikdash, about which the *Navi* states (*Yechezkel* 41:22), “This is the Table that is before Hashem.”

The accusation against Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders was that they gazed at Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu, too, merited speaking face-to-face with Hashem, but he never dared fix his gaze upon Him. He would, instead, lower his eyes. He knew that (*Shemot* 33:20) “no human can see Me and live.” Similarly, the prophets would fall to the ground whenever they received a prophecy from Hashem, in order to avoid seeing the *Shechinah*. Even when Moshe did merit perceiving Hashem’s *Shechinah*, he saw only His “back,” wrapped in a tallit, due to the tremendous level of holiness and awesomeness of Hashem Yitbarach.

The charge against Nadav and Avihu was not the fact that they ate, for this was surely a holy type of eating. Rather, it was due to their gazing at the *Shechinah*. Although they had reached the elevated level of seeing the Glory of Hashem, they should have respected it. They were expected not to exploit this tremendous virtue, rather, to turn away from the *Shechinah*.

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone Tablets and the teaching’” (*Shemot* 24:12). This pasuk appears immediately after the incident with Nadav and Avihu. It indicates the tremendous esteem in which Hashem held Moshe. For, although he earned the eminent status of seeing Hashem, he resisted the urge to do so. He did not want to become damaged by gazing at Hashem inappropriately. Therefore, Hashem invited him to ascend to Him on High, as a token of His approval of his scrupulousness regarding His

honor. Indeed, after Moshe ascended, and was surrounded by all different types of angels, he still did not dare to gaze at Hakadosh Baruch Hu directly. He merely held on to the Heavenly Throne.

The following story is relevant to this topic. The daughter of Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hagadol, zy”a, once heard her father learning. She perceived a second voice, combined with his. She thought he was learning with another man and therefore entered the room, bearing two cups of coffee. When Rabbi Chaim ended his learning session, he asked his daughter if she had discerned the guest. She answered in the affirmative and asked why he had not drunk his cup of coffee. To which her father responded, “This was no human visitor, but Eliyahu Hanavi, who came to learn together with me *b’chavruta*.” He added that because she dared to gaze at his visage, it was decreed that she would die on her wedding day.

For this reason, the holy Rabbi Chaim refused to hear marriage proposals for his daughter. He did not wish to hasten her death, so he kept her single. One evening, Rabbi Kalifa, zy”a, appeared to him in a dream. He wished to marry off his grandson to Rabbi Chaim’s daughter. Rabbi Chaim told him that he was afraid to marry off his daughter, because he feared for her life. Rabbi Kalifa responded that they should match the two, and pray for the life of the *kallah*. The two were married, and all prayed for the success of the couple, and that the curse should leave the *kallah*. Their prayers were answered, and she merited living a long life.

When I heard this story, I was puzzled. If the daughter of the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto merited seeing Eliyahu Hanavi and remained alive, it must mean that she was virtuous. If so, why did her father predict her death? After thinking over the matter, I came to the following conclusion. Rabbi Chaim Pinto felt that his daughter should not have entered the room to see who her father was learning with. She knew he was learning alone, and no one else had entered the house. She should have stayed out of the room. But because she did not overcome the temptation to take a look where she should not have looked, even though essentially she was

entitled to look, she was held accountable. One must be wary of gazing at lofty sights, in order not to become damaged.

Nadav and Avihu were eligible to look at Hashem, but, for the sake of His honor, they should have turned away from the *Shechinah*. They should certainly not have continued their meal. The pasuk in Tehillim (24:3) bears this out: “Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity?” By all laws of nature, it is impossible for a person to ascend the mountain of Hashem and settle there, for it is the place of the *Shechinah*, designated for Him alone. Yet specifically the person who is meticulous with Hashem’s honor and ensures not to gaze at the *Shechinah* merits to ascend and become great through this meticulousness. This was the case regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, who was punctilious with the honor of Hashem, and thereby merited Hashem inviting him to ascend His mountain.

In Summary

- ♦ How are we to understand that Nadav and Avihu and the seventy elders saw the *Shechinah* and still sat and ate?
- ♦ We must say that they ate in holiness. Their meal was considered a *korban* on the altar. This was not the accusation against them. Rather, it was that they had the brazenness to gaze at the *Shechinah*.
- ♦ Conversely, Moshe Rabbeinu, who guarded himself from looking directly at Hashem, merited greatness. Hashem invited him to ascend the mountain, in order to receive the *luchot*.

The Merit of Torah

“Moshe ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain”

(Shemot 24:15)

When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, the angels wanted to burn him alive, stating, “What is a person doing among us?” (*Shabbat* 88b). They meant, “What is a physical body of flesh and blood doing in the place of the *Shechinah*, where there are angels who have no body or form?” When Hashem saw how the angels were discomfited at Moshe’s arrival on High, He told them that he came to receive the Torah. This was not really a satisfactory response, for their question was why a human being was allowed in Heaven. If Hashem wished to bequeath the Torah to a nation, He could very well have brought it down to earth without bringing the nation’s messenger up to Heaven.

It seems that Hashem intentionally did not give the angels a satisfactory response because He wanted Moshe to respond to them. This type of approach is surprising. Isn’t it the way of a king to protect his guests? We cannot imagine that a guest should feel threatened by the king’s guards. Why, then, did Hashem place Moshe in the position of responding to the angels, knowing that he would be burnt by them if his answer was not satisfactory?

Hashem wanted to impress upon Moshe the truth that after 120 years of life in this world it will be impossible for a person to reside in the proximity of the *Shechinah*, in a world that is completely good, without having first filled himself with Torah. Even Moshe, on his most exalted level, would not be able to co-exist with the angels without Torah. Physicality and materialism do not co-exist with holiness and purity, the elements of the World of Truth. Moshe was commissioned to transmit this message to Bnei Yisrael.

The Gemara relates the following account regarding Acher (*Chagigah* 15a and b). Elisha ben Avuyah was his name, but he defected from our nation, earning him the epithet *Acher* (Other). Upon his death, his *neshamah* arrived at the Heavenly Court. When they saw how wicked he had been, the angels wished to send him to Gehinnom. But all of his Torah study stood by him, preventing him from entering Gehinnom. For, although Elisha ben Avuyah was an avowed rasha and sinner, he was full of Torah knowledge. Rabbi Meir would come to learn Torah from him. When the Heavenly Court noticed that his Torah protected him from Gehinnom, they wished to have him enter into Gan Eden. Here, too, he was denied entry. His many transgressions blocked the gates of Gan Eden. In this manner, his *neshamah* hovered between Gan Eden and Gehinnom, being barred entry from both.

The greatest punishment is being caught in this position, without the ability to correct one's actions and eventually merit life in *Olam Haba*. When a person's *neshamah* sees all of the great tzaddikim sitting in Hashem's Presence, learning Torah from Him, it yearns to join them in order to enjoy the splendor of the *Shechinah*. How terrible is its pain at not being able to fulfill its desire, when it is denied entry. It can be compared to a young child who sees various colorful candies displayed before him, but is forbidden from tasting them.

Moshe Rabbeinu's ascent to Heaven teaches that at the end of the day, it is only Torah that enables a person to enter the World of Truth. Even Moshe, on his great level, faced the danger of the angels, before he received the Torah. The *Navi* proclaims (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), "Your righteous deed will precede you." When the time comes for a person to leave this world, his Torah study, termed "righteous deed," will open the gates of Gan Eden for him.

In Summary

- ◆ The angels wanted to burn Moshe Rabbeinu when he ascended to Heaven, saying, "What is a person doing among us?" Hashem did not give them a satisfactory answer, but let Moshe contend with them on his own. Why

did Hashem put him through this ordeal? Isn't it the way of the king to protect his guests?

- ♦ Hashem did this purposely. He could have given Moshe the Torah while he was yet on earth. But He wanted Moshe to ascend to Heaven, so that he would have to reply to the accusation of the angels. This battle with the angels conveyed a message to him, as well as to the entire nation. In order to merit entering the gates of *Olam Haba*, one must possess Torah. When the angels realized that Moshe's objective was to learn Torah, and that he had sanctified himself for this purpose, they left him alone.
- ♦ Elisha ben Avuyah (Acher) studied much Torah, but then he defected. He remained hovering between two worlds. He did not merit a portion in Gan Eden, because of his great sins, but he did not deserve entering Gehinnom, for his Torah knowledge stood by him. This is, indeed, the worst punishment possible.

The Six Days

“Moshe ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of Hashem rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. He called to Moshe on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud”

(*Shemot 24:15-16*)

Moshe Rabbeinu waited on Har Sinai for six days. Only on the seventh day, Hashem instructed him to ascend to the heavens, for the duration of forty days and nights. “The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain-top before the eyes of the Children of Israel” (*ibid. 24:17*).

We have difficulty understanding why Moshe had to wait for six days at the top of the mountain. Let us surmount this difficulty in the following way.

Man, who was created on the sixth day, is comprised of 248 organs and 365 limbs. These body parts can be used for virtue, or *chas v'shalom*, iniquity. When Hashem created man, He instilled within him the feeling of responsibility for his body parts, so that he should use them for good, and not for sin, *chalilah*.

On contemplation, we see that a person has two eyes to help him navigate his way in this world. He can use his power of sight in a positive way, as the pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 15:39), “That you may see it (the *tzitzit*) and remember.” Seeing the *tzitzit* is an aid to remembering the mitzvot in general, and fulfilling them. Conversely, one might use his eyesight for the wrong reasons. A person might feel “narrow-eyed” at his friend’s success. He may even place upon him an *ayin hara*. A woman once approached me with a broken cup in her hand. She related that when they were celebrating a *chanukat habayit* for their new home, her husband lifted this cup in order to make a *l'chaim* with his guests. Suddenly, a hole appeared in the cup, in the shape of an eye. I couldn’t help but come to the conclusion that an evil eye ruled that householder and his new house. This was the cause of the unusual break in the cup.

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to wait on the mountain for six days. This paralleled the six days of Creation, during which Hashem prepared the Creation for the sake of mankind. Only after the word was ready and waiting, did Hashem fashion Adam Harishon. He told him, “See all that I have created in My world. I created everything in your honor. Make sure to uphold the worlds and not destroy them” (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:1; 13). How would man uphold the worlds? By using his body parts wisely, by performing mitzvot. He would desist from committing sin, which has the power to destroy the world.

By waiting on the mountain for six days, Moshe imparted the lesson that Am Yisrael must sanctify their bodies, which were created on the

sixth day. Only by doing this will they merit ascending on the seventh day, the day of Shabbat, holy to Hashem. Shabbat is equal to the Torah, as Chazal teach us that the Torah one learns on Shabbat is superior to the Torah learned during the rest of the week. Shabbat injects a special taste into Torah study. One who wishes to reach great levels on the seventh day through Torah study must first internalize the message that he should sanctify the parts of his body. He must employ them for doing mitzvot, and not the opposite, *chalilah*.

At *Matan Torah*, Hashem specified that no animal should come near the mountain. What was the reason for this? At that time, Bnei Yisrael were loaded down with sheep and cattle, for they had left Egypt with great wealth. Chazal tell us that each Jew had at least ninety donkeys (*Bechorot* 5b). It was surely a difficult command for the people to keep their animals away from the mountain.

Hashem was showing them that although the animals were created before them, they are inferior to mankind. Man is the crown of Creation and its purpose. Hashem created the entire world for man.

This taught them that as long as people are at the level of *Kabbalat HaTorah*, i.e., they are involved in the study and the fulfillment of Torah, they surpass the level of the animals, who were created before man. But as soon as they neglect the Torah and mitzvot, forgetting why they came into the world, they lose their exalted level, allowing the animals to bypass them.

We might explain this point in another way. The animals symbolized the idolatry of Egypt and the frivolities of this world. Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to keep the animals away from the mountain in order to teach them the following. In order for the Torah to enter their hearts, and endure within them, they must first excise all of the Egyptian idolatry, which represented materialism and physicality.

How could Bnei Yisrael control such a tremendous amount of sheep and cattle, preventing them from approaching the mountain? Hashem did not command them to keep the animals away. He merely stated that the

animals should keep their distance from the mountain. This teaches us that it was not Bnei Yisrael who kept their animals away, but Hashem Himself. The message to Am Yisrael is clear. The animals steered clear of the mountain not because they had self-restraint, but because they do not have a *Yetzer Hara*. Even without a clear command, they listen to the word of Hashem, for they have no evil inclination tempting them to transgress His word.

On the other hand, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to maintain a distance from the mountain. Their *Yetzer Hara*, though, tempted them to come close and transgress Hashem's will. However, the fact that they were commanded indicates that they would receive great reward for overcoming the *Yetzer Hara* by keeping distant from the mountain. The animals, which have no evil inclination, were not deserving of reward.

This contains a powerful message for Bnei Yisrael. When they received the Torah, they were also receiving the *Yetzer Hara*. The *Yetzer Hara* particularly attacks Torah study. Just as they would receive reward for listening to the word of Hashem and not coming close to the mountain, so would they receive reward for learning Torah and observing the mitzvot, in spite of their evil inclination. Commensurate with their *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to prevent them from keeping Torah, will be their reward for overcoming his ploys and immersing themselves in the sea of Torah.

When a person yields to the idol of his *Yetzer Hara*, remaining idle from Torah study, he is reminded that the animals were created before him. A glaring example of this is Bilaam Harasha. He was on his way to curse Bnei Yisrael, when his donkey suddenly opened its mouth, rebuking him (*Bamidbar* 22:28), "What have I done to you that you struck me these three times?" Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 765) that the donkey was rebuking him for going to curse the nation that ascends to Yerushalayim three times a year (for the pilgrimage to the Beit Hamikdash). They also have three exalted and holy fathers. From this account, we see the following. When a person transgresses the word of Hashem, he falls lower than the animal. The entire advantage of mankind over animals is the power of Torah study. When a person wastes his time

from Torah, the animal is superior to him, by virtue of the fact that it was created first.

Unfortunately, we find people who are far from Torah and mitzvot. Their beastly behavior leads them to do the most despicable acts. Fueled by animalistic drives, they stop at nothing. They are prepared to steal, fight, and even murder in order to advance their personal cause. They prey on their fellow men like the creatures of the jungle. When man will finally realize that his entire purpose in this world is in order to grow in Torah and mitzvot, he will merit being the chosen of Creation, the one for whom everything came into being.

In Summary

- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu waited at the foot of Har Sinai for six days. Only on the seventh day did Hashem call him up to Heaven. This teaches us the following lesson. It is incumbent upon man, who was created on the sixth day, to sanctify his body. Only afterward, can he ascend to Heaven. He sanctifies himself by performing the mitzvot, which correspond to the organs and limbs of his body.
- ◆ Hashem commanded that the animals should not come close to the mountain. Why was this? In order to teach the people that although the animals were created before mankind, they are inferior to man. However, man maintains his superiority only when he observes the Torah and mitzvot.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael were not commanded to keep the animals away from the mountain. Hashem merely stated that the animals should maintain a distance. They conformed to His wish, for they have no *Yetzer Hara*. But man, who is influenced by the *Yetzer Hara*, needs a direct command in order not to stumble.

Burning Faith

The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain-top before the eyes of the Children of Israel. Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights

(Shemot 24:17-18)

When Hashem wanted to give Bnei Yisrael the Torah, He commanded Moshe to climb up the mountain, which was enveloped in a cloud. Hashem's Presence appeared to him in a fire. But we do not find that the people were impressed by the fact that Moshe was capable of entering a fire and remaining alive. Moshe Rabbeinu, a man of flesh and blood, existed for forty days and nights inside a fire, without becoming harmed in the least. Conversely, when Avraham Avinu was thrown into the furnace in Ur Kasdim and came out unharmed, the entire world was in an uproar. Why were they so enthusiastic over his miraculous salvation, whereas Moshe's emergence from the fire after so long, did not raise an eyebrow?

There is a fundamental difference between spiritual fire and physical fire. The latter consumes and destroys, whereas spiritual fire not only does not scorch man, but grants him life-giving heat. [See the words of Chazal (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2a*) in which the *Chachamim* came to the *brit milah* of Elisha ben Avuyah and began learning Torah. Immediately, a fire descended, engulfing them in its flames. Avuyah feared they would burn down his house. See their response].

Avraham was cast into a physical fire. When he emerged alive, it was considered a fantastic miracle. This open miracle raised a ruckus throughout the world. Moshe, on the other hand, was engulfed in the flames of Torah. This was no cause for alarm. Not only does the Torah

not destroy, it is the potion of life for those who are fired up to live by its dictates (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Chazal state (*Berachot* 63b) that the Torah endures only in one who kills himself over it. This means that a person subjects himself to the Torah, making it paramount in his life. In this merit, the fire of Torah burns within him and gives him life. Conversely, the fire of physicality is a physical fire, which burns. It has the potential to snuff out the life of a person both in this world, as well as in the World to Come.

Hashem's *Shechinah* was overtly clear to all at the Splitting of the Sea, as it says (*Mechilta Beshalach, parashat Shirah* 3), "A maidservant saw at the sea what Yechezkel ben Buzi did not merit seeing." The Zohar says (II, 38a) that at the Exodus from Egypt, there was a tremendous revelation of Hashem's glory, to the extent that the night turned to day. If so, why weren't the miracles of the Exodus quoted as the amazing miracle witnessed even by the maidservant, which Yechezkel Hanavi did not merit seeing? What was the difference between the Exodus from Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea?

We can base our answer on the first of the *Asseret Hadibrot* (*Shemot* 20:2), "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." The pasuk does not state, "I am Hashem, Who has created heaven and earth." After Bnei Yisrael witnessed all of the miracles of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Kriyat Yam Suf*, they had not the shadow of a doubt that Hashem is the Creator of heaven and earth. There was no need to mention, at *Matan Torah*, that He is the Creator. After arriving at such a clear awareness of Hashem's Kingship in the world, they followed Him into the desert with pure faith that He would provide for all their needs, as the *Navi* proclaims (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), "Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land."

Bnei Yisrael were "taken out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, they were still chained by the shackles of impurity. They did not have the tools to perceive the

Shechinah. Therefore, the miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is not held as a banner of the revelation of Hashem's glory. But at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, when Bnei Yisrael were completely severed from the servitude of Egypt and all its associated *tumah*, they were finally capable of perceiving Hashem's *Shechinah*. At the time of the Giving of the Torah, their spiritual level was so great that it was superfluous to mention that Hashem created heaven and earth. All of the miracles performed for them at the Exodus, as well as those done during the years in the Wilderness, brought them to a clear and absolute recognition of Hashem.

While yet in Egypt, great miracles took place. But the mask of *tumah* blocked the eyesight of many of our nation. At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, they all merited reaching high spiritual levels, proclaiming (*Shemot* 15:2), "This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary!" This, then, is the essential difference between *Kriyat Yam Suf* and *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

There are three levels of faith in Hashem. The first is that of Noach at the time of the Flood. He believed, but he did not believe that a flood would come. This type of *emunah* wavers at times, so that the person slackens in his faith, forgetting Who is the Manager of the world. This was the level of Bnei Yisrael at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

The second level of faith was demonstrated by Am Yisrael at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Then, they all merited seeing the *Shechinah* of Hashem, face-to-face, as it were.

The third level of faith is the loftiest of all. This was the level Bnei Yisrael reached at the Giving of the Torah. There, it states that they "saw the sounds." They attained a level of faith even greater than that of the angels. This level grants a person complete control over all of his instincts and inclinations. This is the level that causes Hashem to ask (*Shabbat* 88a), "Who revealed this secret to My children?"

A Torah Jew should constantly strive to attain the third and most elevated level of faith. The path toward this goal is bumpy and strewn with stones and stumbling blocks. This is because the greater a person, the greater is his *Yetzer Hara*. But one who reveals a desire to advance

and climb higher on the ladder of Torah and *yirat Shamayim* receives Heavenly assistance.

Parashat *Yitro* (*Shemot* 18:1) opens with the words, “Yitro heard.” Rashi asks, “What report did he hear that had such a great effect on him that he came? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.” Didn’t Yitro hear about the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt? The entire world heard about how Hashem released an entire nation from bondage to freedom at midnight, smiting the entire Egyptian nation. Why wasn’t this report sufficient to bring Yitro out of Midian to join the Jewish nation? What was unique about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek that awakened him to change his lifestyle?

At the time of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the *kelippah* still clung to Bnei Yisrael, for they were at the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*). Yitro could not appreciate the greatness of the miracle. But at *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek, after Am Yisrael had removed the shell of impurity from themselves and accepted the yoke of Heaven, Hashem’s miracles were manifested before all, arousing *emunah* in the heart of Yitro.

Unfortunately, we find the following scenario to be most prevalent nowadays. There are yeshiva students who are very knowledgeable in Torah. They are familiar with the writings of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, zt”l, but they are sorely deficient in their *emunah*. They allow this defect to grow and intensify, without trying to figure out how to repair it. A yeshiva student who is great in Torah but lacking in *emunah* does not have Torah at all. He can be compared to one who immerses in the *mikveh* while holding an impure insect in his hands. He will remain as impure as he was when he entered.

Hashem gave me the merit to grow up in Morocco, where the people are infused with simple faith. They blindly follow the words of their rabbis, fulfilling the commandment (*Devarim* 17:11), “You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.” Even if your teacher tells you that right is left, listen to his voice (*Sifri, Shoftim* 11).

On one of my visits to Mexico, a woman entered the home where I was staying. She began yelling and crying. Her cries were heard from afar and drew people to see what had happened. She told me that she was denied children for many years, and her husband decided to divorce her. When she realized that there was no hope, she decided to take upon herself the mitzvah of *taharat hamishpachah*. This resolution awarded her the scorn and derision of her family and friends. When her husband heard about her decision, he was even more convinced that he wanted to divorce her. She asked him to help her observe the laws of family purity, just until the date of the divorce. Wonder of wonders! In the *zechut* of that simple faith, shortly afterward, she merited to have a child.

This story is truly astounding. How tremendous was the simple faith of this simple woman. We can all learn a lesson from this tale. If she could muster such staunch spirit and faith in her Creator, how much more must we, Torah Jews, exhibit such belief.

————— In Summary ———

- ♦ Moshe spent forty days and nights engulfed in the fire at the top of Har Sinai, in order to receive the Torah. Why wasn't the world impressed by his safe emergence? When Avraham was saved from the burning furnace in Ur Kasdim, the entire world was in an uproar. Avraham Avinu was rescued from a physical fire, which devours all within its path. His rescue was, indeed, cause for amazement. Moshe was enveloped in a spiritual flame, the fire of Torah. This fire not only does not destroy; it warms the hearts of people toward their Father in Heaven. It is no wonder, then, that Moshe was not damaged at all.
- ♦ At *Kriyat Yam Suf*, a maid servant perceived what later prophets did not merit seeing. According to the Zohar, the night of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was full of wonders, to the extent that the night turned to day. Why, then, didn't everyone perceive Hashem's glory at the Exodus? At the time of the Exodus, a measure of impurity still clung to Bnei Yisrael. This prevented them from perceiving the *Shechinah*. But at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the

kelippah was washed away, enabling the entire nation to see the *Shechinah*.

- ♦ For this reason, Yitro came and joined the Jewish people on account of *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* did not provide him with ample reason to come, for Bnei Yisrael did not perceive the *Shechinah* then, due to the *kelippah* which still adhered to them.
- ♦ There are three levels of faith. The lowest level is that of Noach, who believed in Hashem, but did not believe that the Flood would come. This was the level of Bnei Yisrael at *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The second level is *emunah* which enables a person to observe the *Shechinah*. This was the level they reached at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. The third is a level so great that it enables a person to “see sounds.” A person physically feels Hashem throughout his entire being. This was the level they attained at *Matan Torah*. For this reason Hashem did not need to introduce Himself as the G-d “Who created heaven and earth.” Hashem stated, “I am Hashem...Who brought you out of Egypt.” There was no shadow of a doubt that Hashem created the world. There was therefore no need to mention it.

Refuting the Angels

“Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights”

(*Shemot 24:18*)

When Moshe arrived in Heaven, the administering angels wanted to burn him, crying out, “What is a man doing among us?” Hashem instructed Moshe to respond to them and refute their words. Moshe told

Hashem, "I am afraid that they will burn me with the vapor of their mouths." Hashem then said, "Grab hold of My Throne of Glory, and answer them." Holding on to the Heavenly Throne granted Moshe the wherewithal to silence the accusations of the angels (*Shabbat* 88b).

This Midrash arouses numerous difficulties. First of all, why was Moshe afraid of the angels? He had ascended to Heaven at the behest of Hashem. He sanctified himself and ascended gradually, until he reached the level of the angels. Why was he so fearful of them? Furthermore, why didn't Hashem Himself respond to the angels, when He saw Moshe's fears? Instead, He ordered Moshe to grab hold of His Throne, and in this manner, he would find the strength with which to respond fittingly. Hashem could easily have brought down the Torah to him on earth. This would have avoided the confrontation with the angels altogether. The Torah itself testifies (*Devarim* 30:12), "It is not in Heaven." Why, then, was the Torah given to Moshe in Heaven?

One answer will settle all of the questions. Hashem purposely instructed Moshe to ascend to Heaven in order to receive the Torah. He wished to impress upon Moshe the understanding that man is the chosen among Creation, and he therefore has nothing to fear from the angels. When a person carries within him Torah and mitzvot, he is elevated to the level of the administering angels. Angels were originally created in order to serve man (see *Sanhedrin* 59b). But when Adam Harishon sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he was chased out of Gan Eden. He descended in stature, no longer being considered the crown of Creation.

Moshe Rabbeinu sanctified himself by separating from his wife and abstaining from food and drink during his stay in *Shamayim*. He climbed higher and higher, until he reached the level of angels. He had nothing at all to fear from them. On the contrary, the fact that the Torah was given to him in Heaven underscored the fact that one who sacrifices his life for the sake of Torah is compared to the administering angels. Moshe, not yet aware of his superior status, feared the angels. He thought they were superior to him. This is why he was afraid that he did not have a fitting response for them.

Hashem instructed Moshe to respond to the angels, rather than replying on his behalf, in order to teach a lesson for generations. A person should know what to answer to the accusations of the prosecuting angels, and thus invalidate their claims. After 120 years, a person will come on High. If he is found worthy, he will be among the angels. But he will have to be able to answer their questions. Therefore, while yet in this world, it is advisable for a person to prepare his answer. By Moshe responding appropriately to the charges of the angels, he bequeathed all future generations with the ability to respond correctly.

The Torah was given specifically in Heaven to teach us various lessons. One must realize that in order to accept the Torah upon himself, he must detach himself completely from materialism. He must raise himself above the ground. Earthiness and physicality cannot co-exist with words of Torah. A person must dissociate from the frivolities of this world in order for Torah to enter his heart. Moshe ascended to Heaven and abstained from food and drink for the duration of forty days and nights in order to teach us the lesson that receiving the Torah requires detachment from physicality.

Even the *Ohel Mo'ed* was not sufficiently spiritual in order that Moshe could receive the Torah there. This is because it was constructed of physical materials, such as curtains, etc. The Torah was given on a mountain, which is detached from the earth, as it is raised above the ground. This is a message for all generations.

I read an insight of the Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik, zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Yosef. We find that the mitzvah of observing Shabbat was transmitted differently from the rest of the mitzvot. The other mitzvot were delivered by Moshe to Aharon, who told them over to his sons. They, in turn, passed them on to the Elders, and finally they were taught to all of Bnei Yisrael (*Eiruvin* 54b). But we find that with the mitzvah of Shabbat, Moshe was told to gather all members of the nation together and transmit the word of Hashem directly to all of them.

The reason for this is the following. When Moshe ascended to *Shamayim*, he sampled the magnificence of the Upper Worlds. Shabbat is a taste of *Olam Haba*. Thus, who could be more fitting than Moshe to teach Bnei Yisrael about its laws? He was most capable of conveying the tangible taste of Gan Eden, together with the mitzvah of Shabbat. This can be likened to a person who smells a wonderful perfume. His account of its marvelous fragrance is much more credible than that of someone who merely heard that this perfume has a good scent. In order that Bnei Yisrael should acquire the full flavor of the wonderful life of *Olam Haba*, Moshe Rabbeinu was chosen to pass the mitzvah of Shabbat on to them, in its full fragrance.

Whoever observes Shabbat is considered as having observed the entire Torah (*Zohar Chadash, Bereishit; Midrash Hane'elam* 29b). Shabbat and Torah are one and the same. For that reason, Moshe was instructed to gather Bnei Yisrael and teach them the laws of Shabbat, for in doing so, he was also commanding them to observe all of the mitzvot of the Torah.

“I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies. I hastened and I did not delay to keep Your commandments” (*Tehillim* 119:59-60). David wished to prove to us, that after thorough investigation, he came to the conclusion that there is nothing in this world which can compare to Torah. Therefore, he “hastened and did not delay to keep Your commandments.” Let us take a lesson from his words. The Torah given to Moshe on High has not become antiquated and obsolete. In order to savor its flavor, all we need is to disengage from all of the engaging qualities of this world. This will give us the ability to enjoy Torah in its complete sense.

In Summary

- ♦ The angels wished to harm Moshe, claiming, “What is a person of flesh and blood doing among us!?” Why was Moshe afraid of responding to them? Also, why didn’t Hashem Himself provide a fitting response? Why was Moshe ordered to ascend to Heaven in the first place, instead of receiving the Torah while on earth?

- ◆ Moshe's ascent to *Shamayim* proved to all that man is the epitome of Creation when he is involved in Torah and mitzvot. However, Moshe was not aware of his eminent status at the time. This is why he feared responding to the angels.
- ◆ Hashem did not respond to the angels' accusation, because He wants man to become accustomed to answering objections appropriately, on his own. This is a necessary tool to acquire before entering *Olam Haba*, where one will find himself in the company of the angels.
- ◆ The Torah was given in Heaven in order to teach us the following. For one to be worthy of Torah, he must detach himself completely from the physical and the frivolous. Har Sinai itself demonstrates this, by being raised above ground level.
- ◆ The mitzvah of Shabbat, a sample of the World to Come, was given by Moshe directly to the entire nation, in contrast to the other mitzvot, which were transmitted indirectly. Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come, and only Moshe, who actually spent time on High, was capable of transmitting the wonderful taste of Shabbat most appropriately to the nation.

Torah's Residence on Earth

“Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights”

(Shemot 24:18)

When Moshe ascended to *Shamayim* in order to receive the Torah, the angels were in an uproar. “What is a human being doing here?” they demanded. They nearly killed him. He responded that he came to bring

down the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, for the world cannot exist without the Torah (*Shabbat* 88b).

This Midrash is quite astounding. Just beforehand, when Bnei Yisrael proclaimed, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” these very angels came down and placed two crowns on the head of each person. One corresponded to “*na’aseh*,” while the other corresponded to “*nishma*.” If the angels objected to the idea of Am Yisrael receiving the Torah, why did they rejoice with them by placing the crowns on their heads? And if they were happy about this, what did they have against Moshe when he ascended Heaven to receive the Torah?

The insurgence of the angels at Moshe’s arrival teaches us an important lesson. Torah is not meant for the heavens. Its place is here on earth. Therefore, when Am Yisrael cried out “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” the angels placed crowns on their heads, indicating their pleasure at the Torah’s arrival at its true destination. It belongs on earth, where it is studied and upheld. When Moshe ascended to Heaven, they thought he wished to learn Torah there. This is why they intended to kill him. When Moshe explained to them that his purpose in ascending to Heaven was to learn Torah from Hashem in order to transmit it accurately to the nation, they were appeased.

The *Yetzer Hara* has wily ways to cause a person to stumble, time and again. This is all in order to take him away from his Torah studies. In proportion to the *nisayon* involved in studying Torah with the requisite effort and exertion, so will be the reward. We cannot compare learning which comes easily to that which is acquired through sweat and toil.

I once read a story about a humble householder who approached Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, zy”a. He wished to donate all of his money to Rabbi Chaim’s yeshiva, on condition that Rabbi Chaim would learn every day for the elevation of his soul. He was childless and had no one who would say Kaddish after he departed from this world. Rabbi Chaim agreed to the arrangement, and indeed learned in the merit of the man’s *neshamah* every day of the year after his death.

One day, Rabbi Chaim had difficulty understanding a certain Mishnah, and he retired with the puzzle unsolved. That night, the householder appeared to him in a dream, asking whether Rabbi Chaim was upholding the arrangement. Rabbi Chaim answered in the affirmative, mentioning that he was dealing with a complexity that he could not decipher.

To Rabbi Chaim's utter surprise, this simple Jew explained the entire Mishnah, settling all his doubts and questions. Rabbi Chaim was astounded that this simple man, who had no understanding of the subject whatsoever in his lifetime, could answer his questions. He immediately gathered together his disciples, to demonstrate to them the reward for Torah. Because this man donated funds for Torah study, and Torah was being learned for his soul, he merited receiving a portion among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden and being immersed in Torah.

This man was able to resolve a difficulty of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin only after seeing what the future held. He donated his wealth on condition that Torah would be studied on his behalf. If not for his foresight, he would never have merited attaining this tremendous spiritual level.

When the angels saw Moshe in *Shamayim*, they asked if he intended to receive the Torah gratis. Torah demands toil. It is only after one literally sacrifices himself for it that he merits acquiring it. When the angels understood that Moshe did not come with the intention of receiving free gifts, even surrendering physical pleasures by separating from his wife and fasting for forty days and nights in order to ascend to Heaven, they accepted him among themselves. Even the Angel of Death revealed to him the secret of the *ketoret* (*Shabbat* 89a).

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu wished to confer merit upon Yisrael; therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance" (*Makkot* 23b). The Rambam states that a person may fulfill mitzvot all his life, but not do them all willingly and with the requisite joy. For this reason, Hashem increased the amount of mitzvot He gave Am Yisrael. This way, a person should do at least one mitzvah perfectly. This mitzvah will stand up for him on the Day of Judgment and warrant him a portion in *Olam Haba*.

The *Yetzer Hara* causes a person's downfall. He thwarts all of his efforts to observe the Torah properly. Possibly, the most virulent *Yetzer Hara* is the temptation for money. It prevents him from fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot accurately.

I would like to relate a story to which I was witness. It demonstrated to me, in a most unusual way, just how far the lust for money has spread in our generation.

When I was in Paris, I went to pray at the Beit Hakeneset on Shabbat. I found women with uncovered hair, sitting among the men, waiting for the prayers to begin. I realized that I would not be able to pray if this continued, for a married woman's uncovered hair is considered nakedness (*Berachot* 24a). I turned to the rabbi and requested that he ask the women to go upstairs to the ladies' gallery. But the rabbi declined, with the excuse that this is the way they pray here, and he cannot chastise the women.

Upon hearing this, I brought a proof to my words from the following fact. During the Beit Hamikdash, Am Yisrael would go up to Yerushalayim for the festivals. On Sukkot, they would have the *Simchat Beit Hasho'evah* in the Beit Hamikdash. Chazal emphasize the fact that a great *tikkun* was enacted at that time. Originally, the women would be indoors, in the *azarah*, while the men were outdoors, dancing and rejoicing and drawing *ruach hakodesh* upon themselves. Although they were separated from each other, it was decided that the women go upstairs, to a separate section.

This was a holy celebration, where they were drawing the Divine spirit upon themselves, and the *kelippah* of lust was nullified. The *Shechinah* rested upon them and protected them from improper temptations. Nevertheless, the Sages felt it necessary to keep the genders completely apart, as much as possible (*Sukkah* 51b).

I asked the rabbi if the spiritual level of his congregants was higher than that of the men of yesteryear, who participated in the *Simchat Beit Hasho'evah* and drew down measures of *ruach hakodesh*. If they needed

the added separation of being on different floors in those days, all the more so nowadays, when there is so much mingling, must we be vigilant in these matters. When I finished speaking with him, I asked the women to kindly go upstairs, so that we could begin the tefillah, and they readily complied.

I came to the realization that people are amenable to listening. The Rabbi of the congregation refused to rebuke his congregants, due to the fear of losing his position and thus his livelihood.

We need the zealots who fight for Hashem's honor and truly wish to mend the breaches in *tzeniut*. We find that people are so careful regarding *kashrut*, seeking the most reliable supervision. But *tzeniut* does not receive such attention. Maybe the difference lies in the fact that behind the *kashrut* scene are people with personal interests. They profit from their *kashrut* symbol. But one who hoots his horn in favor of *tzeniut* does not accomplish anything. Therefore, no one gives a hoot, not bothering to be involved in this important matter.

"Be strong and become a man" (*Melachim* I, 2b). David Hamelech instructed his son, Shlomo, to nullify his wills and desires for the Torah. This would earn him the epitaph "man," with which Moshe Rabbeinu was described (*Bamidbar* 12:3): "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble." His tremendous humility, coupled with his detachment from the frivolities of this world, warranted him the title "man." Likewise, Tehillim praises the "man" who walks the right road (1:1), "Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful." Complete detachment from the physical and mundane earns a person this accolade.

Perhaps we could add the following. If we remove the letter 'ה', which has the *gematria* of ten, alluding to the Ten Commandments, from the word **וְאָנָה** (man), we are left with the word **וְאָנָה** (fire). This is the fire of passion which burns in a person until he is consumed and destroyed from both worlds. Before his death, Rebbi lifted his ten fingers heavenward. He used them to testify that he did not have even one finger's worth of

pleasure from this world (*Ketubot* 104a). His ten fingers paralleled the *Asseret Hadibrot*, as well as the ten sayings with which the world was created. One who subdues his desires for physical pleasures in honor of the Torah, will certainly earn fantastic, immeasurable reward.

In Summary

- ♦ The angels had placed crowns upon the heads of Bnei Yisrael at the time that they cried, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*.” Why, then, did they object when Moshe ascended to *Shamayim* to receive the Torah? The residence of Torah is here on earth. The angels were elated at the Torah reaching its destination at the proclamation of “*Na’aseh v’nishma*.”
- ♦ The *Yetzer Hara* employs all types of tactics to preclude Torah study. Perhaps the major temptation of our generation is that of money.
- ♦ David Hamelech instructed Shlomo, “Be strong and become a man.” By means of nullifying his evil inclination, he would merit being called a “man,” just like Moshe Rabbeinu was described: “The man Moshe was exceedingly humble.” The word **וְיַעֲשֶׂה**, minus the letter **ו** (symbolic of the Ten Commandments), spells the word **וְאַתָּה**. This is the fire of passion, which is given free rein in a person’s heart, if he does not immerse himself in the healing waters of Torah.
- ♦ On his deathbed, Rabbi Hakadosh lifted his ten fingers heavenward. He said that they can testify that he did not derive any physical pleasure from this world. Maybe he was also alluding to the fact that he fulfilled everything contained in the Ten Commandments.

Torah – Lessons for Life

“Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights”

(Shemot 24:18)

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on High in order to receive the Torah. He remained there forty days and nights. The angels wished to prevent him from bringing the Torah down to earth for Bnei Yisrael, for they knew that it would eventually become desecrated. Chazal state that every day, the Torah bewails its lost dignity (*Avot* 6:2).

Hashem instructed Moshe to give the angels a fitting response to their objection. Moshe explained to them that they have no *Yetzer Hara* and therefore do not need the Torah to guard them from the constant battle with the *Yetzer Hara*, helping them to improve their character traits and guiding their way on the proper path. Conversely, Bnei Yisrael do have a *Yetzer Hara*, intent on tripping them up at every opportunity. It is only the Torah that has the power to show people of flesh and blood the proper way to behave and the proper path to take in order to subdue the *Yetzer Hara*. The fact that Bnei Yisrael would desecrate the Torah in the future only underscores their tremendous need for it in combating their *Yetzer Hara*.

The Zohar states (see II, 82b) that the Torah is a manual of good advice against the *Yetzer Hara*. The mitzvot are actually instructions for proper behavior, which are effective in preventing people from being doomed through sin. The Torah is made up of the Names of Hashem (*Zohar* II, 90b). Therefore, whoever engages in Torah study receives Heavenly assistance in battling his *Yetzer Hara*. Chazal (*Sukkah* 52b) tell us that without Hashem's help, one would never overcome the *Yetzer Hara*.

A man once came over to me, crying that whenever he stood up for the Shemoneh Esrei tefillah, his mind wandered to all sorts of places, filling

up with thoughts that prevented him from having proper concentration. I advised him to begin learning the halachot of tefillah. The halachot have the power to cause a person to recognize the greatness of tefillah. This would help him refrain from thinking improper thoughts at the time he is standing before the King of kings.

The Saba MiNavhardok, zt”l, states that the Torah is a living *mussar* work, which arouses the person who toils in it to fulfill Hashem’s mitzvot. It also enables one to refrain from straying after his heart and transgressing. Merely reading the deeds of the forefathers can awaken a person to act charitably.

Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world (*Zohar* II, 161a). Torah is the blueprint of the world. The entire world is founded on Torah, and without it, the world would simply dissolve. This is analogous to a building which is built with utmost precision. It stands tall and majestic, and no wind or storm can move it. But if anyone parks a car filled with explosives nearby, the building will fall like a deck of cards. All of the planning and hard work will crumble into nothingness.

The world was created according to the Torah. Hashem placed the stamp of Torah onto every location on earth. This is what grants it the power to exist. Unfortunately, our sins have the capacity to destroy the world. This was borne out by the events of 9/11, when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers, crushing them to a fine powder, leaving no memory of their former prestige.

Moshe asked the angels to agree to give him the Torah, for it is the only thing that can help Bnei Yisrael improve their *midot* and guide them on the proper path, as it says (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created the Torah as its antidote.”

The parshiyot of *Shovavim* (the acronym of: *Shemot*, *Va’era*, *Bo*, *Beshalach*, *Yitro*, and *Mishpatim*) deal with improving one’s *midot*, the correction of *yesod*, the virtue of teshuvah, and preparation for *Kabbalat HaTorah*. There was a great man who prepared a suitcase by the door when he read parashat *Bo*. When asked about this, he responded that

he was going on a self-imposed exile in order to atone for his sins. See how great is the power of the Torah, energizing a person, to the degree that he feels as though he himself lived in those days.

Even though Bnei Yisrael lived in Egypt, the land of slavery to all forms of abomination, they did not desecrate their *brit kodesh*. They likewise preserved their Jewish names, language, and the secrets that were handed down from Yaakov Avinu. They also refrained from *lashon hara* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 226). This is a great lesson for us, to wear our heritage with pride, in spite of alien winds which blow at us from all sides.

On the other hand, Pharaoh was a self-acclaimed deity. Despite the fact that Moshe caught him in the act when he was relieving himself at the Nile (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:8), he continued in his charade and did not relent. He continued hardening his heart throughout the Ten Plagues, and did not do teshuvah.

The narratives of the Torah are really works of ethics. They can bring a person to soar to great heights, just as Bnei Yisrael enjoyed at *Matan Torah*. If we take the lessons from these parshiyot, and sanctify ourselves before Hashem, we would then be considered as having risen from the forty-ninth level of impurity, together with all of Bnei Yisrael, to the forty-ninth level of purity.

In Summary

- ◆ The angels objected to Moshe taking the Torah to Bnei Yisrael on earth. He explained that in addition to their *Yetzer Hatov*, Am Yisrael received a *Yetzer Hara*, which attempts to cause them to stumble at every opportunity. The Torah is the only tool which is able to protect them from the *Yetzer Hara*. This is in conjunction with Hashem's proclamation, "I created a *Yetzer Hara*; I created the Torah as its antidote." The angels accepted this response.
- ◆ The Zohar states that the Torah is a manual of advice for living. The Saba MiNovardok states that the Torah is a living *mussar* sefer, which protects a person from sinning and awakens him to perform mitzvot.

- ♦ The parshiyot of Shovavim deal with *middot* improvement and the virtue of teshuvah. We see how staunchly Am Yisrael stood in the face of the abominable acts of Egypt. And we see the low level of Pharaoh, who held himself so high, claiming to be a deity even when his charade was revealed.

Gems on Parashat Mishpatim

The Connection between the Festivals and the Prohibition of Combining Milk and Meat

“Three pilgrimage festivals shall you celebrate for Me during the year”

(*Shemot 23:14*)

“The choicest first fruit of your land shall you bring to the House of Hashem, your G-d; you shall not cook a kid in the milk of its mother”

(*ibid. vs. 19*)

These pesukim, read on the festivals, mention the three pilgrimage festivals, as well as the prohibition of mixing milk and meat. What is the connection between the festivals and this prohibition? They seem to be completely separate mitzvot. The sefer *Rav Peninim* discusses their connection.

Perhaps we can suggest the following. Sukkot alludes to the future redemption. That will be the time that Hashem will spread His reign of peace upon us, with the coming of Mashiach ben David. We will then finally be emancipated from all of our suffering. The entire face of the

world will be transformed at that time. The animals of prey will live in tranquility with the domesticated cattle, as the pasuk states (*Yeshayahu* 11:6), “The wolf will live with the sheep.” All of the sacrifices (except for the *korban todah*), will be nullified (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:7). The *Yetzer Hara* will be slaughtered, and sin will be gone, obviating the need for the *korban chatat*. The only festivals celebrated will be Purim and Yom Kippur (*Midrash, Mishlei* 9). Many of the prohibitions of the Torah will be eliminated. Chazal tell us, for instance, that the swine will become a pure animal, permissible for consumption (see *Ritva, Kiddushin* 49b).

The Torah juxtaposes the subject of the festivals with the prohibition of milk and meat to teach us the following. As long as we are in *galut*, celebrating the festivals, the prohibition of milk and meat is in effect. But in the future, when the holidays will be nullified, the prohibition of milk and meat will be nullified, as well (see *Niddah* 61b; *Maharitz Chayot*, ibid.).

The Days of Shovavim

Increasing Our Yirat Shamayim

The six weeks when we read the parshiyot of *Shemot*, *Va'era*, *Bo*, *Beshalach*, *Yitro*, and *Mishpatim* are called the days of *Shovavim*, which is an acronym for their names. These days are auspicious for teshuvah (see introduction to *Ma'amarei Razal Shabbat*). These days were designated as days of atonement, similar to the days of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance, when Hashem is close to those who call to him sincerely (*Yevamot* 49b). In Morocco, even women would fast on the days of *Shovavim*, breaking their fast with the onset of Shabbat. What is so unique about these days that they were designated as days of atonement?

In parashat *Shemot*, we read how Bnei Yisrael descended to Egypt and were enslaved by the Egyptians under cruel decrees. As the parashah continues, we see that Hashem appeared to Moshe and asked him to be His agent to save Am Yisrael. Moshe acceded only after much imploring. Parashat *Va'era* describes the severe plagues which Hashem inflicted on the Egyptians. In parashat *Bo*, we find the last three *makkot*, and how Hashem prepared Bnei Yisrael for the Exodus, eliminating all those who did not want to leave, in the plague of darkness.

Parashat *Beshalach* records Bnei Yisrael's Exodus from Egypt. Although Pharaoh initially wished to release our nation in order to halt *makkat bechorot*, Hashem had other plans in mind. When Bnei Yisrael finally left

his land, liberated from bondage, Pharaoh began chasing after them with his entire army. This parashah describes the miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Bnei Yisrael traversed on dry land, whereas the Egyptian pursuers were plunged into the depths of the sea. When Bnei Yisrael witnessed this amazing miracle, they burst forth in song for their Creator.

After this wondrous event, Bnei Yisrael continued in the Wilderness, constantly seeing open acts of Divine Providence. Parashat *Yitro* describes *Kabbalat HaTorah* on Har Sinai, where Am Yisrael united as one man with one heart, proclaiming, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”

The weeks of Shovavim culminate with parashat Mishpatim, which lists several of the 613 mitzvot, whose observance unites our nation as the chosen one of Hashem.

The succession of these parshiyot points to the fact that Bnei Yisrael’s descent to Egypt was in order to prepare them for accepting the Torah, ensuring their success as Hashem’s nation. The entire purpose of man in this world is that he maintains the *mishpatim* (statutes) of Hashem. Bnei Yisrael wished to become Hashem’s nation. This was their redeeming feature. If not for this, they would not have been redeemed from Egypt. Reading these parshiyot gives one a perception of the purpose of man in this world. Therefore, these days are most auspicious for teshuvah.

The six parshiyot read during these weeks correspond to the six days of the week. The Zohar (see *Zohar Chadash* II, 89b) explains that Hashem created the world in six days, parallel to the six thousand years of its existence. At the end of this time, Mashiach will arrive to redeem Am Yisrael, just as Shabbat redeems one from his weekday cares, bringing balm to his soul. These parshiyot teach us that one must labor and toil in order to be deserving of the seventh day, the day of Mashiach’s arrival.

Moreover, just as only one who toils and prepares on Erev Shabbat will merit eating on Shabbat (*Avodah Zara* 3a), so too, must one toil and prepare himself during these days in order to atone for the entire year. In this manner, we will warrant the coming of Mashiach.

– וְאֶלָּה הַמְשֻׁפְטִים “*וְאֶלָּה הַמְשֻׁפְטִים*

The last of these parshiyot begins with the words “*וְאֶלָּה הַמְשֻׁפְטִים*” – *and these are the ordinances*, starting with the letter ‘l, which is numerically equivalent to six, in order to teach the following. When a person merits correcting his deeds, throughout the six Shabbatot of *Shovavim*, he will surely merit observing all of Hashem’s mitzvot, coming closer to Him.

Hashem commands us to recall the miracles of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day (*Berachot* 12b). Why isn’t it enough to remember these miracles on Pesach, the holiday of our liberation? The Exodus from Egypt is the basis for *Kabbalat HaTorah*, the precondition for the existence of the Jew in this world. Just as a person needs food for his daily survival, and cannot claim that he ate previously for the next day, so too, the Torah and mitzvot are our spiritual sustenance, which the *neshamah* demands on a daily basis. Recalling the miracles of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* brings one to the ultimate purpose, *Kabbalat HaTorah*. He must remember this event all the days of his life.

When Moshe Rabbeinu came before Pharaoh, warning him of the plague of locusts, Pharaoh’s servants turned to him, stating (*Shemot* 10:7), “How long will this be a snare for us? Send out the men that they may serve Hashem, their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?” Pharaoh’s men realized that the nation dwelling in their midst was managed in a supernatural way. Pharaoh’s only recourse was to release them from his land, in order that Egypt would not suffer more plagues.

At first, Pharaoh accepted these words and sent a message to Moshe and Aharon, stating that he would allow the nation to leave Egypt in order to bring offerings to Hashem. But he stipulated that only the men be allowed to go; the women and children would remain behind as guarantors of their return. Pharaoh added (*Shemot* 10:10), “Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces.” He saw a star of evil, which would harm the Jewish nation (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 392). Moshe and Aharon did not respond, for they knew there was truth to his words. How can we understand the fact that Pharaoh was able to prophesy this evil, which alluded to the sin of the Golden Calf?

When Bnei Yisrael are not true to Hashem, their enemies receive Divine revelation concerning the retribution that Hashem will take upon His people. The nations of the world have antennae, which sense when Am Yisrael are weak in Torah and abandon Hashem. They then rush to fight us, like a warrior discovering priceless plunder.

During the plague of blood, when only Bnei Yisrael had drinking water, the Jews transacted business deals with the Egyptians. The Egyptians would purchase water from the Jews at exorbitant prices. Only in this manner, would they have water fit for drinking. Am Yisrael understandably became quite wealthy during this plague (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10). There were those among our people who began to develop a love for money. They formed friendships with the Egyptians, their benefactors. These people did not want to leave the land. The Torah says about them (*Devarim* 32:15), “Yeshurun became fat and kicked.” In spite of all the miracles that Hashem had performed for them, they preferred the money and wished to remain in Egypt.

This brought a heavy indictment against Am Yisrael, which even Pharaoh was able to discern with the help of his stargazers. This is alluded to in his statement (*Shemot* 10:10), “Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces.” The letters of the word רָאֹה (look) can be transposed to spell רָאַי (light). He was indicating, “When Hashem will cast Egypt into darkness, Bnei Yisrael will have light. But this will prove the undoing of those who desire to remain in Egypt, because they will perish in the plague of darkness, due to their lust for money.”

We have seen most tangibly that when Am Yisrael is disconnected from Hashem and His Torah, the Angel of Destruction is given authorization to destroy. Moreover, the gentiles have special sensors which discern when Bnei Yisrael is remiss in Torah and mitzvot. They know that it is a tremendous opportunity for them when Hashem hides His face, when He is angry at His people. They hurry to manipulate this opportunity in order to intensify His wrath upon us and bring about our downfall in their own notorious ways.

Love of materialism and love of Torah are diametrically opposed. Whoever wants to be truly connected to the Torah must set his priorities straight. Torah must be his sole objective, and money merely an object to bring him to his goal. Each person must make a personal accounting, in order to figure out exactly how much energy he should invest in the pursuit of a livelihood. More than this basic level is considered luxurious living, and is superfluous to a life of Torah.

I once heard of a man who dedicated the two hours between nine o'clock and eleven o'clock a.m. every day, solely for Torah study. A man approached him one day, during these hours, wishing to interest him in a specific business deal. He would be able to profit tremendously, living off the profits for a long time to come. But the man refused to listen. He continued learning as before.

When this fellow saw he had no one to talk to, he decided to approach the man's wife. He expressed his surprise at her husband's reaction, stating that only a madman would miss an opportunity like this. The wife rushed to the Beit Hamidrash in order to convince her husband, but her pleas fell on deaf ears. At eleven o'clock, he lifted his eyes from his sefarim, and told his wife the following: You should know that the businessman who approached me is none other than the *Yetzer Hara* in the guise of a man. He was sent in order to test me, to see whether or not I would keep my resolution. If it was, indeed, a recommendation for a good business deal, Hashem will send the man back in the afternoon or evening hours, when I am available.

Chazal state (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 248) that when Pharaoh pursued Bnei Yisrael, he intended to take back all of the possessions that they had seen during the plague of darkness and removed with them from Egypt. He and his men set out, laden down with riches. This is what would become the spoils of the Sea, which Bnei Yisrael enjoyed after *Kriyat Yam Suf* (*Tanchuma, Shoftim* 13). This is very perplexing. If Pharaoh meant to recoup all of the riches that had been previously taken, what was the point of travelling with so much wealth? If a rabbi would travel abroad to raise funds for his yeshiva, he surely would not approach a potential

donor with his pockets bursting with cash. His objective is to receive donations, not to give them.

Hashem purposely put this foolish idea into Pharaoh's mind in order that Bnei Yisrael would eventually receive the riches at the sea. Pharaoh also had ulterior motives in chasing Bnei Yisrael while loaded down. He understood the human fallibility for riches. He set out with fortunes, in order to draw Bnei Yisrael after him.

In this manner, he hoped to have the good fortune of returning them to Egypt. But there was one thing he neglected to take into account. All those who truly loved materialism more than spirituality had perished in the plague of darkness. He took all of his wealth along with him, placing all his eggs in one basket. But his devious plot did not hatch, for Bnei Yisrael were not attracted to his money. On the contrary, they fled into the Sea, with him at their heels.

This teaches a powerful message. When Am Yisrael are united with Hashem, not paying attention to materialism, Hashem repays them for their loyalty by protecting them in times of peril. He rescues them from their enemies in the most miraculous ways. This drives home the point that it is not worldly acquisitions which provide succor. It is only Hashem, Who guards His children when He observes their steadfast attachment to His Torah. In these days, as we read the account of bondage and liberation from Egypt, our faith becomes fortified and we become closer to Hashem.

In Summary

- ♦ The weeks of *Shovavim* are auspicious for teshuvah. What is so unique about them to warrant this?
- ♦ In these days, we read the parshiyot describing our nation's descent to Egypt and the slavery that was their lot. Then we read of the plagues and the amazing miracles performed for Bnei Yisrael. After that we learn about *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, *Kriyat Yam Suf*, and *Matan Torah*. These

parshiyot are the foundation of our faith. Studying them brings a person to contemplate his purpose in this world. This causes him to do teshuvah.

- ◆ These six parshiyot parallel the six days of Creation, which are followed by Shabbat.
- ◆ The gentiles are able to sense when Bnei Yisrael are disconnected from the Torah. They then arrive to antagonize them. Pharaoh told Moshe that it was not advisable for them to leave Egypt, for there was evil before them. He was able to foresee the sin of the Golden Calf, which would take place in the Wilderness.
- ◆ Hashem caused Pharaoh and his army to leave Egypt loaded down with wealth, against the natural order. This was in order that Bnei Yisrael would receive it all as the spoils of the sea after the Egyptians drowned.
- ◆ Pharaoh's intention was that these riches would entice Bnei Yisrael to come back to Egypt. But he did not realize that those who placed monetary value above spiritual quests had already perished in the plague of darkness.

Terumah

Take for Me a Portion

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion”

(Shemot 25:1-2)

Hashem asks Bnei Yisrael to “take for Him a portion,” in order to make a donation, which would be considered their part in constructing the Mishkan. The *Ba'al Haturim* explains that the words “Speak to the Children of Israel” refer to words of appeasement, as we find the *Navi* Yeshayahu says (40:2), “Speak consolingly of Yerushalayim.” In order to convince Am Yisrael to contribute, they must be spoken to gently.

Why did Hashem need the contributions of Am Yisrael? Doesn’t the entire world belong to Him, as the *Navi* states (*Chagai* 2:8), “Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold – the word of Hashem, Master of Legions.” Likewise, the pasuk in *Divrei Hayamim* (I, 29:14) reads, “From Your hand have we given to You.” Hashem certainly could have revealed a treasure trove or a gold mine to Moshe Rabbeinu, thus obviating the gifts of Bnei Yisrael.

This brings to mind the account of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Some of his disciples left the yeshiva and sought their livelihood elsewhere. After some time, they returned, laden down with wealth. Rabbi Shimon noticed the pupils who had remained behind casting furtive glances at the riches of their colleagues. He decided to teach them a valuable lesson. He brought them all outside to a valley. He told the valley to fill up with riches. It suddenly became full of precious gems. His students immediately began collecting all within their reach, filling up their pockets and bags. He told them that they were permitted to keep the money, but it would come at the expense of all their reward in the World to Come. When they heard this, they left everything behind, taking nothing with them (*Shemot Rabbah* 52:3).

If a man of flesh and blood, such as Rabbi Shimon, could order an entire valley to fill with riches, all the more so could Hashem, King of the entire universe, create precious jewels out of nothing. This could have been used for the Mishkan. Why did Moshe need to speak to the nation in a persuasive manner, in order to convince them to part with their wealth?

This can be explained with the following analogy. A man once approached me, crying and bewailing his lot. He related that his son-in-law abuses his daughter. He told me that this son-in-law had been a miserable pauper when he first married his daughter. He gave his son-in-law money to start a business and provided him with a fine dowry and everything he could want. Now, in spite of all this, at a time of anger, the son-in-law disregarded all these benefits, behaving shamefully toward his wife.

I asked the man why he had invested so much in his son-in-law. He replied that he wanted his son-in-law to appreciate his benevolence and behave properly with his daughter. But all of his dreams went down the drain. I contemplated why this partnership did not last, and I came to the conclusion that the son-in-law considered himself the one in charge, and thus did not feel the need to put in any effort in the business. Had the young groom been an actual partner with his father-in-law, he would have split the profits with him, and business would have boomed. I advised the

man as to how to continue, and blessed him with renewed peace in his daughter's home.

A partner feels much more of an obligation toward his business than a mere recipient. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to feel like active partners in the construction of the Mishkan. He therefore urged and beseeched them to contribute toward it from their own funds. This would give them a feeling of being a partner from its inception. Am Yisrael would be considered as having brought down the *Shechinah* to dwell in their midst.

Chazal relate (*Berachot* 55a) that Betzalel combined Hashem's Names, by which the world was fashioned, thereby constructing the Mishkan. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the world according to the Torah (*Zohar* II, 161b), which is a combination of Hashem's Names (*ibid.* 90b). Before the world was created, the Torah was not as we know it today, a compilation of mitzvot; rather, it was a combination of Hashem's Names. When Hashem decided to create the world, He separated the words of the Torah, and arranged each according to the future command which would be written (*Ramban*, Introduction to the Torah). For instance, Hashem wrote the mitzvah (*Devarim* 22:10), "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together" in His Torah. What did He do? He created oxen and donkeys in order that people could fulfill this command.

When Betzalel constructed the Mishkan based on Hashem's Names, he was actually constricting the whole world into the confines of the Mishkan. Thus, the Mishkan became a miniature world. Through contributing toward the Mishkan, Am Yisrael became partners in the creation of this miniature world. This was the purpose of their contributions.

Chazal teach us (*Shabbat* 119b) that whoever says, "Thus the heaven and earth were finished" (*Shabbat Kiddush*), is a partner with Hashem in the Creation of the world. Furthermore, whoever labors in Torah supports the world and prevents it from destruction, as the *Navi Yirmeyahu* (33:25) states, "If My covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth."

The most important lesson for us to learn from Bnei Yisrael's partnership with Hashem in building the Mishkan, the model of the world, is the following. If we act virtuously, we benefit ourselves and the entire world. If we act with iniquity, we harm ourselves and the entire world. This is borne out in the pasuk in Kohelet (7:13), "Observe G-d's doing! For who can straighten what he has twisted?"

Chazal state (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13) that after Adam's creation, Hashem walked with him among all of the trees of Gan Eden. He told him, "See how beautiful and pleasant are My creations. I created everything for you. Make sure not to spoil and destroy My world." Every single action, good or bad, has the ability to change the world. Adam understood the tremendous power invested in him. He realized that a partner does not betray his associate by neglecting his job. He knew that he had to exert himself to the maximum in order for the partnership to succeed. He would be the one to profit.

The purpose of the Mishkan was "so that I may dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8). Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to build a Mishkan so that He would rest within each and every Jew (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4, in the *hagahah*). But we know that Hashem is described as a consuming fire. We can try to emulate Him at best. How is it possible to come near Him? A person is merely flesh and blood. If he is put near a fire, his body burns into nothingness. How could Hashem, Whose glory fills the world, compress Himself, so to speak, to enter the body of man?

Hashem collected dust from all the corners of the world in order to create man (*Sanhedrin* 38a). He Himself fashioned him. Every organ is parallel to a positive commandment, and every sinew is parallel to a negative commandment. Man is comprised of 248 organs, corresponding to the 248 positive mitzvot, and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 365 negative mitzvot (*Makkot* 23b). When this being was completely formed, Hashem blew into it the breath of life from Above. A person, then, is just like a Sefer Torah, ready and prepared for the *Shechinah*'s Presence. He has the potential to be a Mishkan for Hashem, where He "may dwell among them." One who sanctifies himself by observing the mitzvot, and

is careful to avoid transgressions, transforms his body into a chariot upon which the *Shechinah* can ride. His entire being is holiness and purity; certainly Hashem is not ashamed to reside within him. On the contrary, the *Shechinah* feels comfortable to be found in this exalted being, full of Torah, the combination of His Names.

Hashem wishes to elevate our nation. Therefore, He asked the people to contribute toward the Mishkan, the miniature world, created by His Names, i.e., the Torah. It is therefore fitting for a person to exert himself in observing the Torah with all his might. He will thereby transform his being into a residence for the *Shechinah*. Utmost care should be taken not to be dragged into sin, for this will cause him to lose his closeness with Hashem. One mitzvah generates another, and one aveirah generates another.

Chazal teach (*Sanhedrin* 37a; *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 31:3) that every person is a world unto himself. By contributing of his possessions to the Mishkan, he indicates that materialism means nothing to him. His sole aspiration is to elevate his soul, to be partners with the *Shechinah*. By donating his gold and silver toward the Mishkan, he sanctifies them, transforming them into spiritual assets that bring down the *Shechinah*. Just as Bnei Yisrael eagerly donated toward the Mishkan, so too, must we use our finances to help support yeshivot and Torah institutions. This will bring Hashem to dwell in our midst.

After a person gives *tzedakah*, he immediately feels a lack. However, he is really gaining, as it says (*Ta'anit* 9a), “Give one tenth – so that you may become rich!” The word **תעשר** (you shall tithe) is similar in spelling to the word **תתעשר** (you shall become rich). When a partner invests in a business, he does not feel shortchanged, for he understands that his investment will reap dividends. He will receive his share of the profits, owing to his share of the business.

Hashem wished to convey to Bnei Yisrael the message that by contributing to the Mishkan, they were literally becoming His partner in the Creation of the world and the Torah. The revenues engendered are

tremendous. Nowadays, when the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash no longer exist, man may fulfill his part in the partnership of upholding the world through the dissemination of Torah by contributing to Torah institutions. Let him rejoice in this union as though he invested in the best type of stocks, for the remuneration awaiting him in the future is unimaginable.

Hashem said, “Let them take for Me a portion.” “For Me” means to say, “From Mine” (*Temurah* 31b). Whatever Am Yisrael give to Hashem is ultimately His. They should not feel the lack whatsoever, just like a slave does not feel he is missing anything by giving to the king, for whatever he owns belongs to the king. The word **תְּרוּמָה** (portion) has the same root as the word **הַתְּרוּמָות** (elevation). By a person overcoming his natural inclination in favor of offering a portion to Hashem, even though he would prefer to keep everything to himself, he is elevating himself to a higher level of Avodat Hashem.

We might answer our original question in another way. Why did Hashem request the donations of Am Yisrael for the construction of the Mishkan? Money is referred to as “dough,” and the supporter of the family as the “breadwinner.” Hashem wanted Am Yisrael to invest the staple of life – their money – into the Mishkan. In order to be a genuine servant of Hashem, one must dedicate his life-force. A person should be ready to sacrifice all of his wealth rather than transgress the will of Hashem.

In our generation, the plight of poverty in which our yeshivot find themselves cries up to the heavens. It is every person’s moral obligation to devote himself to the upkeep of these institutions. Each one is considered a miniature Mishkan, demanding *mesirut nefesh* for its construction.

In Summary

- ♦ Everything in this world belongs to Hashem. Why, then, did He humble Himself and ask Am Yisrael to donate toward the Mishkan? Even Rabbi

Shimon bar Yochai was able to fill a valley with riches. Hashem certainly does not need the donations of people.

- ◆ Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to be partners with Him in the construction of the Mishkan. This would obligate them to feel responsible for it. Additionally, by Betzalel building the Mishkan through the Names of Hashem, by which the very world itself was created, when Am Yisrael would contribute toward it, they would likewise become partners in Creation itself. This strengthened the bond between Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael.
- ◆ The main objective of our part in the partnership with Hashem in the building of the Mishkan and in Creation itself, is the following. We must ensure not to spoil this beautiful world. Rather, we must guarantee its upkeep, by means of our good deeds.
- ◆ How is it possible for Hashem, Who is depicted as an all-consuming fire, to reside inside of man, who is but dust and ashes? Man is comprised of organs and limbs which parallel the 613 mitzvot. He is therefore similar to a Sefer Torah itself. From his inception, man was designated to house the *Shechinah* within him. Hashem is happy to reside in a body which adheres to mitzvot.
- ◆ Nowadays, when the Beit Hamikdash no longer exists, one becomes a partner with Hashem in Creation by means of generously supporting Torah institutions. One should realize that he suffers no lack by doing so. This type of support should be viewed as investing one's assets in a lucrative business deal.
- ◆ The word **תרומה** (portion) has the same root as the word (elevation). Donating toward the Mishkan has the power to elevate a person spiritually. Money is called “bread” or “dough.” When Bnei Yisrael donate their money, which is their very life-force, toward the Mishkan, or any Torah cause, they demonstrate their readiness to sacrifice their very lives for Hashem’s sake.

So That I May Dwell among Them

“Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion”

(*Shemot 25:2*)

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them”

(*ibid. 25:8*)

The parashah of *Terumah* deals with the Mishkan and its vessels. This was the place where Hashem's *Shechinah* dwelt. The parashah begins with the command to raise funds for the construction of the Mishkan. Only afterward, do we find the command to actually build the Mishkan. Generally, one displays his wares; when there is interest, he states his price. Wouldn't it be more sensible to first order the building of the Mishkan, and afterward, to ask for donations?

We might answer based on the wording of the first pasuk. Why does the Torah say, “Let them **take** for Me a portion,” instead of, “Let them **give** Me a portion”? Everything in the world belongs to Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim 103:19*), “His kingdom reigns over all,” and (*Yeshayahu 6:3*), “The whole world is filled with His glory.” It is impossible to give anything to Hashem. By the commandment “Let them take for Me a portion,” Am Yisrael were instructed to take of their inner beings, their character traits and tendencies, and dedicate them to Hashem.

How do they accomplish this? By devoting their pure hearts completely to Hashem's service, to attain *yirat Shamayim* and *ahavat Hashem*. It is not possible to give to Hashem in a tangible way. But it is within our power to bestow upon Him the spiritual gift of elevating ourselves in Avodat Hashem. This gives Him tremendous pleasure. This, then, is the reason for the Torah's use of the word “take,” for there is a type of giving which

is feasible for us. It is the taking of our inner selves and sanctifying them unto Him.

With this understanding, we might explain why the Torah first states the command to collect donations, and only afterward, the command to build the Mishkan. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to first donate their pure unsullied hearts to Avodat Hashem. Only in this state, would they succeed in building the Mishkan, the home for the *Shechinah*.

The pasuk uses the words “so that I may dwell among **them**,” instead of saying, “so that I may dwell inside of **it**” (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4, in the *hagahah*). Each and every individual Jew has the potential to be a residence for the *Shechinah*. How can he achieve this? By taking his entire being and sanctifying it to Hashem.

After Atalyah Hamalkah killed out the entire House of David, Yoash Hamelech remained alive (*Melachim II*, 11). His aunt, Yehoshava, daughter of Yehoram, hid him in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. This is how he was saved (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim II*, 233). He was brought there as a baby and lived there for six years. He was finally rescued by his uncle, Yehoyada, when he became king.

The *Navi* relates (*ibid. vs. 12*) that once, when Yoash visited the Beit Hamikdash, he noticed that the walls were peeling and in need of renovation. He felt that it was a disgrace to Hashem’s honor to leave His house in that condition. Yoash placed a box near the Mizbeach and proclaimed that instead of donating toward supporting the Kohanim, the people should instead donate toward the upkeep of the Beit Hamikdash. The Kohanim agreed to this, for the honor of the Beit Hamikdash was uppermost in their hearts. With the accumulated funds, they succeeded in renovating and repairing the Beit Hamikdash, thereby bringing glory to Heaven’s Name.

How can it be that only Yoash was inspired to repair the Beit Hamikdash? Why didn’t Yehoshafat and Asa, the righteous kings who had ruled before him, see the need to renovate? Moreover, the Beit Hamikdash was the House of Hashem. Why didn’t He see fit to keep it

standing in perfect condition, obviating the need for renovations in the first place? We know that there were ten constant miracles which occurred in the Beit Hamikdash. For example, a fire always burned; the showbreads remained fresh all week long; a fly never came into the Beit Hamikdash; a woman never miscarried, etc. (*Avot* 5:5). Why wasn't the Beit Hamikdash miraculously preserved as well? When Bnei Yisrael travelled in the desert, their garments and shoes remained intact (*Devarim* 29:4). It would seem appropriate for the Beit Hamikdash to maintain its freshness as well.

The Gemara states (*Berachot* 33b), "All is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven." Hashem runs the world as He sees fit. Health, sustenance, and all areas of life are under His control. There is only one area which is the exception, coming under man's domain. This is his level of *yirat Shamayim*. The Torah proclaims (*Devarim* 10:12), "What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem." Working on one's *midot* and fearing Hashem are the keys to elevation in Torah and mitzvah performance.

Hashem refrained from upholding the Beit Hamikdash in a miraculous way, making it necessary for man to maintain its upkeep, in order to teach us the following lesson. A person is a miniature Beit Hamikdash and must be inspired to make his own "maintenance check" every so often. This refers to the personal accounting and inner examination which are able to awaken one's heart to *yirat Shamayim*.

Yoash was the only king who was inspired to repair the Beit Hamikdash, for it had housed him for six years of his life. Growing up in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, in itself a miracle, brought him to great heights, until he was capable of recognizing the need for a maintenance check every so often. This not only applied to the Beit Hamikdash, but to every single Jew in Am Yisrael.

The story continues (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 24:17; see *Melachim*) that when the righteous king, Yehoyada, died, members of Am Yisrael approached Yoash. They said to him, "If you survived six years in the most holy part

of the Beit Hamikdash, you must be divine." Yoash was persuaded by their words, until he actually believed that he was a deity. How can we understand that someone who instituted such a wonderful custom of renovating the Beit Hamikdash could fall to such a level?

Yoash's service of Hashem was dependent on something. It was his uncle, Yehoyada. As long as his uncle was alive, Yoash remained righteous. But as soon as he died, Yoash did not have the wherewithal to maintain his spiritual level and veered from the path of piety.

"Do not believe in yourself until your dying day" (*Avot* 2:4). Commensurate with a person's level in Avodat Hashem is the level of his *Yetzer Hara*. Constant exertion in serving Hashem is necessary in order for a person to remain on his spiritual level. As an example, we might cite the following. A person who is covered with perfume smells good. As soon as he comes in contact with something putrid, the sweet scent turns rancid. There is no trace of the original delightful fragrance. Yoash brought Bnei Yisrael to higher levels, by revealing to them the deep secrets inherent in the maintenance of the Beit Hamikdash. He taught well, but he failed to practice what he preached. His Avodat Hashem was superficial, founded on his uncle, Yehoyada the Kohen Gadol. His piety crumbled when the foundation was gone.

The *Ba'alei Mussar* tell us that only something which comes with effort is destined to last. No pain, no gain. Yoash grew up in the Beit Hamikdash without having to face *nisyonot*. From there, he was rescued by his uncle, who appointed him the future king. Since his spiritual level was acquired without effort, it did not last long. At the end of his days, he left the fold. Had he invested effort into fortifying his *yirat Shamayim*, which he had originally received gratis, he would have become one of the great men of his generation, not dependent on any other person.

There is a well-known story regarding the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, zt"l. When he was a young boy, his father, the Beit Halevi once asked a question to those assembled, among whom was his son. Young Chaim jumped up immediately with an answer. On the spot, his father slapped

him. The boy, surprised at this response, hurried to check the sefarim, to see if, indeed, he had answered correctly. He found that he had given the right answer. He approached his father, asking why he had slapped him. The Beit Halevi responded, "Torah must be acquired through exertion. It is impossible to answer impulsively without turning over the question in one's mind and considering all angles. Torah which is studied without prior investigation has no guarantee of benefiting the person and advancing his Avodat Hashem."

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 699) relates that when Shlomo Hamelech wished to bring the Aron into the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, he found the space too narrow. How could this be? Shlomo built the Beit Hamikdash based on the blueprint of Hashem Himself (*Yalkut Shimoni, Divrei Hayamim I*, 681). Could there possibly have been some mistake in the planning?

Maybe we can say that Shlomo purposely erected the gates too close to each other in order to teach us the following. First and foremost, he wanted us to internalize the power of prayer. When he saw that the gates refused to part, he called out (*Divrei Hayamim II*, 6:42), "Remember the righteousness of Your servant David!" Upon hearing this, the gates immediately opened (*Shabbat* 30a). Shlomo Hamelech thereby proved the efficacy of tefillah, which can rescue and deliver a person from all harm.

The Aron Hakodesh, representing the Torah because of the *luchot* which it contained, could not enter the Beit Hamikdash until Hashem sanctified the Sanctuary in its honor. This teaches that Hashem refuses to rest His *Shechinah* inside a man's heart until it is purified and sanctified. In order to purify oneself, he must increase his prayers and his *yirat Shamayim*. This will transform him into a fitting vessel for Hashem's Presence.

The Aron's measurements were in halves, as the pasuk says (*Shemot* 25:10), "Two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height." Only one who regards himself as a "half," as being incomplete, can serve Hashem perfectly and merit having the

Shechinah's Presence rest within him. A person is a miniature version of the Beit Hamikdash. He must nullify himself before the Torah, for only in this manner can the Torah enter his heart.

However, the very commandment to build a Mishkan demands explanation. Hashem's glory fills the world, Why is it necessary to build a Sanctuary to house it? Hashem's desire to reside among His children is not for His sake, but theirs. The pasuk in Tehillim (115:16) says, "As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's; but the earth He has given to mankind." Hashem has no need for a residence in this world, for His place is in the heavens. He requested of Bnei Yisrael to erect a Mishkan in order to demonstrate His love toward them.

However, if the Mishkan is merely a symbol, and the main point is that Hashem's *Shechinah* should dwell in the heart of each person, why did He command Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan? Wouldn't His residence in the heart of each Jew have been sufficient?

Betzalel fashioned the Mishkan according to Hashem's Names, by which the world was created (*Berachot* 55a). Since it was comprised of Hashem's Names, the Mishkan had no need for the *Shechinah* in order to grant it sanctity. Conversely, a person is the handiwork of Hashem Himself, Who placed within him a *neshamah*, a Divine spark (*Pardes Rimonim* 32:1). A person is exalted above and beyond the Mishkan. The Mishkan contains the Names of Hashem, but a person contains a part of Hashem Himself, as it were. This is alluded to in the name **מֶנֶּא** (man), which is numerically equivalent to Hashem's Name **ה-י-ה-ו-**, with its letters spelled out. The entire goal of the Mishkan was to display Hashem's love for His people. He was even prepared to descend from His place on High, in order to live among them.

Let us learn a lesson from the Mishkan. If one had to take utmost care not to damage its sanctity, how much more care must be taken to preserve the purity of a person who possesses a *neshamah* from on High.

In Summary

- ◆ Why did Hashem request donations for the Mishkan before it was even constructed? Usually, one's products are displayed before demanding payment.
- ◆ We might answer based on the episode with Yoash Hamelech, who commanded the nation to contribute toward the maintenance of the Beit Hamikdash. He was the most fitting person to do this, since he had spent six years in the Beit Hamikdash. Just as it required *mesirut nefesh* for the nation to contribute toward the upkeep of the Beit Hamikdash, the Mishkan needed to be founded on *mesirut nefesh* also.
- ◆ Why didn't the Beit Hamikdash remain in a constant state of perfection, included in the many miracles which occurred there? Hashem wanted the nation to take the idea of maintaining the Beit Hamikdash to heart. Just as repairs were needed from time to time, so too, must a person conduct a maintenance check in his heart, a miniature Beit Hamikdash, weeding out the inappropriate.
- ◆ This is why Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to contribute toward the Mishkan even before it was constructed. Maintaining the Beit Hamikdash depended on them. This teaches that maintaining the miniature Beit Hamikdash in their hearts depended on them, as well. And just as donating toward a building which is not yet built demands a level of self-sacrifice, so too, does one's inner soul-searching demand a measure of sacrifice.
- ◆ Something which comes through hardship endures. But something which comes quickly is likely to disappear just as quickly. As the saying goes, "Easy come, easy go."
- ◆ Shlomo Hamelech purposely built the gates of the Beit Hamikdash close together, so that the Aron could not naturally enter them. This teaches us that through tefillah, one can accomplish anything. We also learn from this that the Aron Hakodesh can enter only a place of purity.

Building the Mishkan in Unity

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them”

(Shemot 25:8)

Hashem asked Am Yisrael to build a Mishkan, so that He might rest His *Shechinah* upon them. Why does the Torah state, “So that I may dwell among **them**,” instead of, “So that I may dwell inside of **it**,” in the singular version? Chazal teach us that Hashem desired to dwell not only inside the Mishkan, but inside each and every Jew, who is considered a miniature Mishkan (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4, in the *hagahah*).

However, there is a precondition for the Presence of Hashem resting upon us. It rests on the unity of Am Yisrael. As long as we are united, feeling mutually responsible for each other, Hashem can rest His *Shechinah* upon us. But where quarrel and dissention take over, Hashem’s *Shechinah* can find no rest. Hashem’s essence is peace (*Shabbat* 10b). The blessings of the Kohanim end with the blessing of peace. Likewise, the Shemoneh Esrei prayer, as well as the blessings of Kriyat Shema, all end with a blessing for peace (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:1). Peace and contention cannot co-exist.

Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah only after they were in a state of unity, as the pasuk testifies (*Shemot* 19:2), “And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain.” The commentaries explain that the word “encamped” is written in the singular form to indicate “as one man with one heart” (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 275). Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw fit to give His children the Torah when He saw their unity. Most of the mitzvot deal with man’s relationship with his fellow man. Therefore, in order for the Torah to remain with them, Bnei Yisrael first had to prove that peace and tranquility reigned among them.

“United we stand; divided we fall.” One single stick can be broken easily, but a bundle of sticks is much harder to break. When Bnei Yisrael

are apart, each involved in himself, it is easy to break their spirit. On the other hand, when they are a band of twelve Shevatim, united in peace and brotherly love, their very unity fortifies them and prevents any damage to them (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Amos* 549).

Chazal (*Osei Pelei* 62) relate that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Eliyahu Hanavi. Rabbi Yehoshua asked permission to accompany him, in order to observe his actions and learn from them. At first, Eliyahu declined, but after Rabbi Yehoshua promised not to ask any questions, he acquiesced. They walked together, until they reached a certain city. The townspeople did not greet them graciously. Upon leaving, Eliyahu blessed them, saying they should all be noted leaders. Rabbi Yehoshua was perplexed by this, not understanding why he had blessed them so generously, after the unfriendly welcome they had given. But he kept his thoughts to himself, for he had vowed not to ask any questions.

They went on to another town, where they were accepted with open arms. Eliyahu Hanavi blessed them that only one should become a leader. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yehoshua could not restrain himself any longer, and asked why he gave a seemingly smaller blessing to those who had treated him better.

Eliyahu answered the following: "You should know that the blessing I conferred upon the first city is not a blessing at all. When all of the people are leaders, each feels he is in control, and only his opinion counts. This leads to all types of disputes, and they cannot live in peace. Conversely, the second town merited a true blessing. When there is only one leader, who is unanimously accepted, unity is the order of the day. Everyone fulfills the orders of the one in charge, and peace and harmony reign."

The incident with the moon and the sun proves the point that two kings cannot wear the same crown. The moon complained that they were both equal in stature. Hashem recognized the truth in its words and reduced its size. In order to compensate the moon, however, He granted it the army of stars (*Chulin* 60b).

The Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:9) states that when Shaul Hamelech went out to war, many of his soldiers died in battle. Conversely, when Achav Hamelech waged war, all of his soldiers merited returning in peace, with no casualties. How can we understand the fact that Shaul's men, who were known for their righteousness, fell in battle, whereas the soldiers of Achav, the terrible rasha who sinned and caused the masses to sin, returned home unharmed? Shaul's men fell in battle due to the sin of *lashon hara* which was rampant among them. Although they were armed with Torah, their armies were defeated, for they lacked unity. But the men of Achav, despite their wickedness, were bound in unity. This provided them protection in battle.

Peace is tremendously beloved and desired by Hashem. He is willing to forego His own honor, but He will not overlook the disgrace of His children.

Beit Shammai is of the opinion that it would have been preferable for man to have not been created (*Eiruvin* 13b), because so much war and dissension has resulted from his creation. However, Hashem has given man the most powerful tool to help him confront the challenges of daily living: Unity. The attribute of unity bestows upon man the ability to live tranquilly with his fellow man. Unfortunately, a great portion of the population misuses this gift. Instead of according them peace and accord, their union unites them in jealousy, hate, and all forms of dissonance.

All of Creation was made by Hashem's word. Man is the sole being who was formed by Hashem Himself. Hashem "exerted Himself" in fashioning man, even breathing into him the breath of life from on High. The creation of man serves as a lesson for the way we should treat our fellow man. Hashem, Who is King of kings, toiled to make man. All the more so must one accustom himself to invest effort on behalf of his fellow.

Hashem breathed into man a part of Himself, so to speak (*Pardes Rimonim* 32:1). We must emulate Hashem, imitating His traits. Just as he is merciful, so should we be merciful... (*Masechet Sofrim* 3:13). Since Hashem's essence is peace, and His objective is to bestow favor on His

creations, so must we acquire this trait and strive to always live in harmony with our fellow men, doing favors and kindnesses with those in our environment.

A *chatan* once called me up two hours before his wedding was scheduled to begin. He asked me to pray for a certain rabbi, who was in need of Heavenly mercy. The *chatan* explained that although I was meant to participate in his wedding ceremony, he did not want to wait to ask me until then, for fear of forgetting about this rabbi in all of the hustle and bustle. The *chatan* did not suffice with merely receiving a blessing for this man, he exerted himself to pay him a visit, just hours before his wedding. Instead of being involved in his own personal matters, he put the man's needs before his own. I couldn't help but be awed at this young man's noble character. May there be more like him in Yisrael! I am sure that if we would adapt the *middah* of thinking of others instead of our own individual needs, we will certainly merit increasing peace and harmony among our nation, thereby hastening the *geulah*.

At the *chazan's* repetition of the Musaf prayer on Shabbat, we recite, "The angels on High, with Your nation below, will bestow upon You, Hashem, Elokeinu, a crown of glory. Together, they will deliver *kedushah* before You three times." On Shabbat, the angels crown Hashem. Why specifically then? It is because of the element of peace, depicted by the phrase "Shabbat shalom" which reigns on this day. Harmony and unity derive from the rest and tranquility of Shabbat. On this day, people are distant from discord. When the angels perceive this unity on Shabbat, they crown Hashem as a symbol of honor for His children's unity.

Torah has the potential to bring peace and *berachah* upon Am Yisrael. This is indicated in the following pasuk, "Hashem will give might to His nation, Hashem will bless His nation with peace" (*Tehillim* 29:11). Torah is called "might" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 31:5). Bnei Yisrael are worthy of the blessing of peace because of their Torah learning.

The connection between Torah and peace is very clear. The mitzvot habituate a person not to think of himself alone, but to consider all those

around him. By immersing oneself in Torah, exerting himself to fulfill its mitzvot, he merits improving his negative traits and replacing them with positive ones. Gradually, his personality is purified through the *middah* of unity.

Nowadays, when we have no Beit Hamikdash or Mishkan, the Jewish home is considered a miniature Mikdash. In order to merit Hashem's *Shechinah* resting among us, we must make sure to foster love and peace in the home. When Hashem observes a couple loving and respecting one another, He hurries to rest His *Shechinah* among them. This increases the level of unity and peace. But when a couple does not respect each other, and quarrel is the order of the day, He removes His Presence. Without the *Shechinah* and its accompanying *siyata di'Shemaya*, the path to divorce is short. This is said succinctly by Chazal (*Sotah* 17a) in the statement, "Man and wife – if they merit, the *Shechinah* rests among them. If they do not merit – a fire consumes them."

In Summary

- ◆ "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them." Why doesn't it say, "Dwell in **it**"? The words "among **them**," teach us that Hashem wishes to reside inside each and every Jew. Unity is a precondition for receiving the Torah and having the Shechinah reside among us. This is because Hashem's very essence is peace. Dissention contradicts His essence. Likewise, Hashem bestowed the Torah upon Bnei Yisrael only after they displayed unity, as the commentaries explain that they rested at the foot of Har Sinai "as one man with one heart."
- ◆ The soldiers of Shaul fell in battle, whereas the soldiers of the wicked Achav returned in peace. This is because Achav's men were united, as opposed to Shaul's, who spoke *lashon hara*. See how despicable is dissention and how beloved is harmony before Hashem.
- ◆ Hashem "exerted Himself" in the creation of man. This is to teach us how important it is to exert ourselves on behalf of our fellow man. Man's *neshamah* is carved from on High so that he is capable of cleaving to the *midot* of Hashem.

- ◆ The angels confer a crown of honor on Hashem every Shabbat. This is in recognition of His children, who are united with each other on this day. “Hashem will give might to His nation; Hashem will bless His nation with peace.” The Torah, termed “might,” bestows peace and blessing upon those who study it.
- ◆ Nowadays, when we have no Beit Hamikdash, every Jewish home serves as a miniature Mikdash. Each couple must exert themselves, so that Hashem should place His *Shechinah* among them and never remove it, *chalilah*, due to discord and dissension. Chazal (*Sotah* 17a) state, “Man and wife – if they merit, the *Shechinah* rests among them. If they do not merit – a fire consumes them.”

The Purpose of the Mishkan

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them”

(Shemot 25:8)

The Rambam and the Ramban disagree as to the purpose of the construction of the Mishkan and the offering of *korbanot*. The Rambam maintains that after Bnei Yisrael served *avodah zarah* in Mitzrayim, observing how the Egyptians made their sheep into deities, Hashem commanded them to slaughter the sheep and offer it on the altar. This would prove to all that the sheep have no divine powers whatsoever. Hashem alone is the G-d of heaven and earth (*Moreh Nevuchim* III, 46). “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me,” thus means, “For My Name” (*Tanchuma, Terumah* 1; Rashi, ad loc.). There they would bring the sacrifices to sanctify Hashem’s Name, proclaiming that He is King of the world.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 1:9) explains this in a different way. He maintains that the entire purpose of building the Mishkan and bringing *korbanot* is to teach a *mussar* lesson to Bnei Yisrael. Whatever is done to the animal on the altar should really have been done to the person bringing the sacrifice. He himself deserved to be brought as a *korban* to atone for his many sins. But Hashem has mercy on His children and instead asks them to just take a lesson from the sacrifices. For each and every sin, no matter how small, an offering is brought. This teaches that no matter how insignificant aveirot may seem, they warrant their executor being executed on the Mizbeach. This should arouse us to be more vigilant in our actions. If, for a small and seemingly minor act a person deserves death, how much more so for major transgressions, such as the three cardinal sins.

However, even if we were to combine all of the Upper and lower worlds, they could not contain Hashem's greatness and glory. This being the case, what was the point of building a Mishkan for His *Shechinah*? This is what mystified Moshe Rabbeinu.

Bnei Yisrael were instructed to construct the Mishkan after the sin of the Golden Calf. After seeing the revelation of the *Shechinah* with their own eyes, and meriting so many wondrous miracles in Egypt, how could they fall so low as to fashion an idol? They were exalted people, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory and subsisting on holy bread from on High. Their sin is quite astounding to us.

Why did Hashem allow Am Yisrael to form the calf in the first place, waiting until they had finished, to order Moshe to descend, as we find in the pasuk (*Shemot* 32:7), "Go, descend – for your people...has become corrupt." It would seem that Hashem condoned it, for otherwise, He would have stopped them. If He, indeed, allowed it, why did He punish them, wishing to wipe them off the face of the earth? This begs an explanation.

Hashem gives a person only challenges that he is capable of overcoming. One cannot withstand a temptation that is bigger than

himself. The greater a person, the greater his ability to withstand tests. In the Wilderness, Am Yisrael lived a life of miracles. Their clothing remained intact, and their shoes never wore out. They were like angels, who do not take care of their needs. Hashem spoke to them face to face. They were called the Generation of Wisdom. Although it seemed that Moshe tarried in *Shamayim*, they should have withstood the *nisayon* to fashion an idol. This test was commensurate with their elevated level. But their *Yetzer Hara* got the better of them and convinced them to sin.

“The people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant” (*ibid.* 14:31). Their faith in Hashem was a result of their faith in Moshe Rabbeinu. Of their own accord, they would not have been accorded the marvelous miracles, for they did not yet have the merit of the Torah. Whatever happened to them in the desert was in the *zechut* of Moshe Rabbeinu. Therefore, their faith in Hashem was also in his merit. They saw him as a conduit for the *Shechinah* and drew strength in Avodat Hashem from him.

When Moshe ascended to *Shamayim*, Bnei Yisrael felt deficient. He had been their conduit in Avodat Hashem. Before he ascended, Moshe sensed their reliance upon him and advised them to turn to Aharon and Chur for spiritual guidance in his absence. But Bnei Yisrael were so utterly dependent on him that they were lost in his absence. When he tarried, they capitulated and built the calf.

This shows the importance of being connected to a spiritual figure. In Egypt, Bnei Yisrael paid obeisance to Pharaoh. The Nile would rise in his honor, and they saw him as a deity (*Rashi, Bereishit* 47:10). When they observed Pharaoh bowing to Moshe, they transferred their trust to Moshe. When Moshe delayed in returning from the mountain, they feared that their leader had perished. They sought another figure who would connect them with Hashem. They felt completely lost on their own. They therefore fashioned the Golden Calf, which took them back to the abominations of Egypt, where sheep and cattle were served as idols.

Hashem wished to eradicate this terrible trait from them. Therefore, He kept Moshe from descending on time. Hashem felt that Bnei Yisrael were capable of elevating themselves to the level of serving Him directly without any agent. But after Am Yisrael surrendered to the inclination of forming an idol, Hashem told Moshe to descend. They had viewed him as their spiritual mentor, and as their sole means of connecting with Hashem. This reliance on a liaison was what corrupted them to the degree of fashioning the abomination of Mitzrayim.

A person's days in this world are measured. Everyone eventually passes on. Even Moshe was destined to pass away when his time would come. Hashem wanted the nation to learn how to serve Him directly, detaching themselves from the need for a representative. If they would not be able to serve Hashem directly, they would find themselves disoriented at Moshe's death. Allowing them to sin with the calf taught them a tremendous lesson. Only Torah is eternal, and therefore it is the only real means by which to serve Hashem. Man of flesh and blood cannot be relied upon absolutely. When a great man leaves this world, the generation is liable to find itself floundering in their Avodat Hashem, with no one to anchor them to safe shores. They are very likely to drown in their confusion. This is similar to the incident with the disciple of Rabbeinu Hakadosh, who committed suicide upon hearing of his teacher's demise. He simply felt that he no longer had a navigator to guide him through life.

Hashem asked Bnei Yisrael to construct a Mishkan for the *Shechinah*. From there, they were to draw strength, enabling them to serve Him to full capacity. Hashem emphasized, "So that I may dwell among **them**." This teaches us that every person is enjoined to make himself a fitting residence for the *Shechinah*. The Mishkan in the Wilderness was slated for eventual destruction, as were the two Batei Mikdash. This is borne out in the pasuk (*Shemot* 38:21), "These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony." The word Tabernacle is written twice, a reference to the two Batei Mikdash, which would be destroyed (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 2).

One should try to prepare himself as a fitting vessel for the *Shechinah*. This will keep him from feeling abandoned when the repositories of the *Shechinah* are gone. Our Sages refer to this in their injunction (*Avot* 2:5), “In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader.” The original Mishkan served as an example of how one should prepare himself for the Presence of Hashem to dwell within him.

After Shlomo Hamelech passed away, his kingdom was split in two (*Melachim* I, 12), forming the House of David and the House of Yisrael. Yeravam ben Nevat, who ruled the Ten Tribes, erected two houses of idol worship containing golden calves. One was located in Dan, and the other in Be’er Sheva. Yeravam was aware of the commandment to ascend to Yerushalayim three times a year. Yet there is a warning that only a king of the Davidic dynasty may sit in the *azarah* and address the people, who all stand before him, including the kings of the Ten Tribes (*Sanhedrin* 101b).

Yeravam feared that as soon as the nation noted that he was standing in the *azarah*, they would abandon him and support Rechavam, who was the king of Yehudah and Binyamin and came from the House of David. He therefore erected the houses of *avodah zarah*, imploring the people to come there, instead.

This is very perplexing. Yeravam could just as well have stayed put, enjoining the people to also stay home. Why did he see the need to have them ascend for the festivals, but arrive at different locations, places of abomination? Furthermore, he was promised by Achiya Hashiloni that were he to go in the way of Hashem, his kingdom would be solidified, just as Shlomo’s had been.

Yeravam understood that by nature, a person needs a spiritual emissary to connect him with Hashem. Am Yisrael would never have agreed to remain home on the festivals. They would disobey his orders and ascend to Yerushalayim on their own. He was also afraid that upon seeing his adversary, Rechavam, sitting in the *azarah*, they would rebel against him. In his desperation, he constructed houses of idol worship in

Dan and Be'er Sheva, commanding the nation to pay homage there. This would avert a rebellion, while filling their need for spiritual connection. This is similar to what happened in the Wilderness, when Bnei Yisrael thirsted for a spiritual guide. They made the mistake of drinking of forbidden waters and fashioning the calf when Moshe delayed his return.

Nowadays, we lack the Beit Hamikdash from which to draw forth energy for our bodies and souls. We have become accustomed, instead, to visit the graves of tzaddikim, praying at their plots. It is imperative to bear in mind that it is not the souls of the righteous ones which bring about salvation. Let us internalize the understanding that everything comes from Hashem. The merits of the tzaddikim help us to receive blessing. But we should never think that the tzaddik himself is the source of the blessing.

From the bitter, sweetness came forth. By sinning with the Golden Calf, Am Yisrael demonstrated that they were in dire need of spiritual connection. Hashem therefore commanded them to build a Sanctuary, from where they would draw forth strength for Avodat Hashem. The *Chet Ha'egel* is recorded in parashat *Ki Tisa*. The word נִשְׁאַל (Tisa) means “elevate” or “raise.” In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, they were commanded to construct the Mishkan, which elevated them spiritually.

In Summary

- ♦ The Rambam states that Hashem commanded the construction of the Mishkan in order to prove that animals were not deities. By offering them on the altar, everyone would realize that Hashem is the only Power in the world. The Ramban maintains that the offerings were brought in order to transmit to Klal Yisrael the message that they really deserved to die for each sin, just as the animal which was slaughtered and offered on the Mizbeach.
- ♦ Was it possible for the *Shechinah* to be confined in a house? Also, how can we understand that the Generation of Wisdom, who left Egypt, sinned

with the Golden Calf? And why didn't Hashem send Moshe down earlier, thereby avoiding the sin completely? It seems that He allowed them to sin.

- ◆ Hashem never gives a person a trial that he cannot withstand. Bnei Yisrael had the ability to withstand the temptation to form the calf. The nation had become entirely dependent on Moshe Rabbeinu. They felt that without his intervention, they were incapable of serving Hashem. They therefore sought another go-between and found it in the calf. Hashem wanted them to realize that the only medium that exists between Himself and His nation is the Torah.
- ◆ After Shlomo Hamelech's death, his kingdom was split in two. Yeravam ben Nevat ruled over the Ten Tribes, whereas Rechavam ruled over the two tribes in Yerushalayim and Yehudah. Yeravam was afraid that the nation would desert him in favor of Rechavam. He therefore prevented them from ascending on the festivals by building houses for *avodah zarah* on the way. Why didn't he just forbid them from ascending to Yerushalayim altogether?
- ◆ Yeravam knew that Bnei Yisrael need a medium to connect them with Hashem. They would never have acceded to his instruction to stay home. Therefore, he built these places of idolatry.

The Limitless Dimensions of the Aron

"They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height"

(*Shemot 25:10*)

Chazal differ in their opinions regarding the size of the Aron (*Bava Batra* 14a). The Gemara (*Megillah* 10b) states, in the name of Rabbi Levi,

"We have a tradition from our fathers that the Aron did not take up space. The Aron was ten cubits long on each side, and the *keruvim* were each ten cubits high. The *Kodesh Hakodashim* was twenty cubits long. How did the Aron fit inside? From here we learn that it fit in miraculously." Even though the Torah specifies the measurements of the Aron, this matter is unclear and requires investigation.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 699) relates that when Shlomo Hamelech wished to enter the Aron through the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, the space was not wide enough. Could it be that Shlomo did not calculate correctly when building the Beit Hamikdash? He was the wisest of all men; it is impossible that he did not know the measurements of the Aron.

The Aron is symbolic of the Torah. Just as the Torah has no boundaries, so does the Aron not have specific measurements. Shlomo calculated the size of the Aron according to the dimensions stated in the Torah. But the Aron contained the Torah within it, rendering it above physical measurements and limits. In order to have the gates open and allow the Aron to enter, he had to recall the *zechut* of David, his father, who loved Torah above all else, as the pasuk states (*Tehillim* 119:97), "O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation."

On Yom Kippur, when the Kohen Gadol entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the Aron was positioned so that he could place the pan between the two poles on the sides of the Aron (*Yoma* 52b). In the days of the second Beit Hamikdash, the Kohen Gadol likewise put the pan between the poles (*ibid.* 53b). They received the details of the Aron's location by tradition.

The Torah is not bound by any limits or limitations. In order for it to be eternally preserved in man's heart, he must know that it is impossible to ever master it completely. Therefore, one must labor over it constantly, day and night. The Torah was given during the forty days that Moshe was in *Shamayim*. It has the ability to transform man into a new being, like a newborn, who is created in his mother's womb during forty days (*Niddah*

30a). Just as it is impossible to estimate the lifespan of a person (*Shabbat* 30a), it is impossible to appraise the measurements of the Aron and its sanctity. It contained a Sefer Torah, as well as the *luchot habrit*, and the broken pieces of the original *luchot*, which had the writing of Hashem on them (*Bava Batra* 14a and b). Moreover, the Aron carried those who carried it, in a most miraculous fashion (*Sotah* 35a).

We might add here that there is significance in adults participating at a Bar Mitzvah celebration, instead of merely having friends of the boy join in. It is to impress upon them that the Torah is wider than the sea. It is said that there was no measure to the wisdom of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (see *Sukkah* 28a). If the wisdom of a human being could be said to be limitless, how much more so could we say this regarding the wisdom of the Torah.

A Bar Mitzvah celebration causes the adults to ponder and make a personal accounting and think: How far have we come since our Bar Mitzvah? Did we advance in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* in the decades that passed since that time? Or did we simply remain rooted to that spot, not making any progress at all? If that is the case, we are inferior to this Bar Mitzvah boy, just starting out on the road of life. One's participation in such a celebration should arouse him to cleave to Hashem and His Torah.

In Summary

- ♦ The Torah specifies the measurements of the Aron, yet there is still dispute among Chazal as to its exact dimensions. When Shlomo wished to bring the Aron through the gates of the Beit Hamikdash, he found the space too narrow. Could he not have originally made it wider?
- ♦ The Aron contained the Torah. This is why its measurements were not clear. For the Torah is wider than the sea, and has no boundaries. This is the cause of the dispute regarding the Aron's size. Shlomo could not manage to fit it through the gates naturally, in order to teach us that the Aron did not have a specific size.

- ♦ Even adults participate at the Bar Mitzvah of a young lad. This should inspire everyone to make a personal accounting and consider: Did I labor in Torah and mitzvot since the time of my Bar Mitzvah, or, *chas v'shalom*, the opposite?

Golden Inside and Outside

“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold, from within and from without shall you cover it, and you shall make on it a gold crown, all around”

(*Shemot 25:10-11*)

Hashem commanded the building of a wooden Ark, which should be covered in pure gold, outside and inside. It should also have a gold crown around it. The Aron was kept in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, and the Kohen Gadol saw it once a year, on Yom Kippur. What was the purpose of all this beauty and splendor if it was almost always concealed?

We might explain, by way of *mussar*, that every Jew is essentially a miniature Aron, covered inside and outside with gold. Therefore, every person who fears the word of Hashem must be punctilious in fulfilling mitzvot. This is not only outside, where he is observed by others, but even when he is in the innermost chambers of his own home, and no human eye perceives him. Chazal teach (*Avot 2:1*) that a person should know that there is “a watchful Eye, an attentive Ear, and all your deeds are recorded in a Book.” David Hamelech proclaimed (*Tehillim 40:9*),

“Your Torah is in my innards.” The Torah must be embedded deep within every Jew, just as the Sefer Torah is located inside the Aron.

It is the obligation of every Jew to have a mezuzah on the doorpost of his home. The mezuzah contains the message that Hashem sees us and our deeds, even when we are in private. A Jewish person can never escape the responsibility to study Torah and perform mitzvot. Just as one is obligated to perform mitzvot in public, so too, must he be strict in performing them in the privacy of his home. Even though the mezuzah is on the outside of the doorpost, not viewed from the inside, Hashem knows very well what goes on in one’s innermost rooms. The Aron, which was coated with gold and adorned with a crown of solid gold, even though it was out of the public eye, conveyed the same message.

Chazal relate (*Bava Batra* 99a) that when Bnei Yisrael did the will of Hashem, the *keruvim* would face each other. Conversely, when Bnei Yisrael turned down the Torah, the *keruvim* turned their backs on each other. However, apart from the festivals, the people did not see the (*Yoma* 54a) *keruvim*. What was the point of the symbolism that they represented, if nobody was aware of it?

Man’s self-improvement is constant. When a person is going in the right direction, he knows it. He feels Hashem’s satisfaction and does not need to see the *keruvim* facing each other to prove it. When a person leaves the right path, straying after the superficial, he knows it also. The *keruvim* are really not necessary to testify to the level of the nation. A person’s inner compass is fully capable of guiding him and proving whether or not he is on the right path.

The Aron represents Torah and faith. Its golden crown is symbolic of Torah, whereas the *keruvim* upon it represent faith. One is enjoined to believe that when he is doing Hashem’s will, the *keruvim* face each other, and when he turns away from it, they too, turn away from each other.

The coating of the Aron with pure gold from within and without, as well as the crown of gold surrounding it, allude to the fact that one must sanctify his inner thoughts. Just as he is righteous in the eyes of people,

he must ensure that his inner being is also beautiful, even when no human eye sees him and his thoughts.

On one of my trips to Mexico, a group of native Jews approached me, with *kippot* on their heads. On Shabbat, I found this group going to the Beit Hakeneset bareheaded. When they noticed me, their heads began to burn from shame. One of them even suggested going back, but he was unsuccessful, for one of the others, who did not recognize me, insisted on going further. When we met up with each other, I removed my *kippah* from under my hat and placed it upon his head. He was totally bewildered.

I thought the following: This is how a person looks when he is strict with mitzvot only at the time his heart moves him in that direction. Woe to the shame and embarrassment which will cover his face in the future!

One's actions should reflect his convictions, even when no one is watching. Hashem is always watching, for His glory fills the entire world.

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to build a wooden Aron, which should be coated with gold both on the inside and outside. The Aron stood in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, hidden from all eyes. What was the point of this splendor?
- ♦ There is a message here for all of us. A person is like the Aron; he must be beautiful on the inside as well as the outside. He must maintain his image, even in private. A crown of gold must encircle his deeds, even when nobody is watching.
- ♦ The mezuzah at the doorpost stands sentry, conveying the message that we should behave inside and outside in the same righteous fashion.
- ♦ The *keruvim* depicted Bnei Yisrael's closeness with Hashem. But they were hardly ever seen. What was the purpose of their symbolism? A person knows, deep down, whether or not he is close to Hashem. He does not need the *keruvim* to tell him this. Therefore, even if they were out of

the public eye, Bnei Yisrael knew which way they were facing, according to the spiritual level of the nation.

The Aron and Its Poles – Yissachar and Zevulun

“And insert the staves in the rings on the sides of the Ark, with which to carry the Ark”

(*Shemot 25:14*)

Hashem commanded Moshe to put the poles into the rings attached to the sides of the Aron, in order for the members of Kehat to carry it. This order seems to contradict the statement that the Aron carried its carriers. What, then, was the point of the poles? They were easily removed, proving that they were not an integral part of the Aron.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* (see *Alshich, Shemot 25:10-15; Shem Olam 1:17*) state that the Aron symbolizes Yissachar, who learn Torah, whereas the poles symbolize Zevulun, the supporters of Torah. Yissachar, in essence, supports Zevulun, the “supporters of Torah.” Our question remains: What was the purpose of the poles if the Aron carried its own weight?

There are people who fit the category of Zevulun. They work for a living, while supporting Torah causes. Sometimes, they participate in a Torah *shiur*. Then, they are similar to Yissachar, those who study Torah. They are not complete “Yissachars,” for Torah is not their sole occupation. But they are not only “Zevuluns,” for they set aside times for Torah study.

These people are similar to the poles fitted into the rings on the Aron. They are connected to Torah while they listen to the lecture, but then

they go about their business matters, abandoning the “Aron,” or the Torah. This person combines the attributes of Yissachar, as well as Zevulun, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 3:18), “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” The world draws sustenance from those who sit and study Torah, as well as from those who support Torah, as Chazal state (*Avot* 3:17), “If there is no flour, there is no Torah.”

The Aron was located in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, but its poles stuck outside of it (*Yoma* 54a). What was the reason for this?

It might seem that the Torah is the inheritance of only those who sanctify their entire lives to study it. Those who go out to work to earn a livelihood seem to be left out of the Sanctuary called Torah. This is represented by the Aron, which was kept in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, to which visitors to the Beit Hamikdash were denied entry. But this is far from the truth. Just as the poles placed inside the rings at the sides of the Aron were attached to the Aron but stuck out of the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, so are those who set aside time from their daily schedule in order to study Torah guaranteed a portion of it. Praiseworthy is the one who draws strength from Torah, for he receives a portion in this world, his wealth, as well as in the Next World, his Torah.

————— In Summary ———

- ♦ What was the point of the poles, if the Aron carried those who carried it?
- ♦ Why did the poles stick out of the *Kodesh Hakodashim*? If they had less sanctity than the rest of the Aron, why were they in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* to begin with?
- ♦ The Aron symbolized Yissachar, whereas the poles symbolized Zevulun. Zevulun supports Torah. There are those who work for a living, yet often attend a *shiur* in Torah. They maintain an element of Yissachar. They deserve to be placed in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, represented by the Beit Hamidrash, together with those who study full-time, symbolized by the

Aron, for they labor in Torah and labor for a living in order to support Torah. They are truly significant in Hashem's eyes!

Enlightening Lessons from the Mishkan

"You shall make a Menorah of pure gold, hammered out shall the Menorah be made, its base, its shaft, its cups, its knobs, and its blossoms shall be [hammered] from it. Six branches shall emerge from its sides, three branches of the Menorah from its one side, and three branches of the Menorah from its second side"

(*Shemot 25:31-32*)

Hashem commanded Moshe to fashion the Menorah, with all its intricate details. The Torah goes to great lengths in describing the parts of the Menorah. Hashem knew that Moshe Rabbeinu would not understand how to form the Menorah, even after being shown its image in fire. In the end, Hashem told Moshe to throw a brick of gold into the blaze, and the Menorah miraculously emerged. This is indicated by the fact that the pasuk states that the Menorah "shall be made." Chazal expound (*Tanchuma, Shemini* 8) that this indicates that it would be made on its own.

Since the Menorah was ultimately miraculously fashioned, why does the Torah describe the intricate process of how it should be made? If it was to let us know all the details of the Menorah's construction, this could have been mentioned in the parshiyot *Vayakheil-Pekudei*, where the Menorah is actually made.

This teaches us a tremendous lesson. Although Moshe Rabbeinu realized that he would not succeed in forming the Menorah, he studied its details and learned as much as he could about it. He did not dismiss himself from this charge by claiming that since he would not be able to form it, there was no point in trying to understand it. We learn from this that even if a person does not understand the deeper meanings of what he is learning, he should not despair nor relent in his Torah studies. He should persist time and again, until he gains a spark of understanding. Even though Moshe Rabbeinu knew that he would not understand all of the intricacies of the Menorah, he studied and wrote down the details, in depth and at length.

When a person toils in one area of Torah, the Torah itself asks Hashem to reveal to him secrets of other areas of Torah (*Sanhedrin* 99b; *Rashi*, ibid.). Even if a person will never fully comprehend what he studies, he is fulfilling a tremendous mitzvah merely by applying himself to its study. This is borne out by the pasuk (*Vayikra* 26:2), “If you will go in My statutes.” Rashi explains, “That you should be laboring in the Torah.” The main aspect of Torah study is arriving at its acquisition through labor and toil. Torah is the elixir of life for those who are involved in it.

The Midrash states that Yitro went to the yeshiva of Atniel ben Kenaz to study Torah (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim* 38). Even though he could not comprehend everything that was being taught, he did not leave. Instead, he said, “I will sit and listen. Maybe Heaven will open my mind and enlighten my eyes.” Hashem responded, “You are dedicating yourself for My sake; I promise to teach you everything.”

Chazal relate (*Shabbat* 28b) that there was an animal called *tachash*, whose skin was used in the construction of the Mishkan. It was created for this purpose, and afterward, it disappeared. Its entire creation was for a very short span of time. What was the purpose of creating this animal merely during the period that the Mishkan was being built? Hashem could have created it during the six days of Creation, like all the animals, at the ready when the Mishkan would be erected. He could have hidden it away in some distant forest until the time it was needed.

The Mishkan was in need of the hides of the *tachash*, and to that end, Hashem created a special animal to provide them. Man is a miniature Mishkan. His mind is like the Aron Habrit, his eyes like the Menorah, and his mouth like the Table of showbreads, etc. He must constantly create and renew his energies, in order to ascend in Avodat Hashem. And even if he weakens, he should not despair, but constantly exert himself to full capacity, with all of his remaining strength. This is the meaning of the pasuk in Mishlei (2:4-5), "If you seek it as [if it were] silver, if you search for it as [if it were] hidden treasures – then you will understand the fear of Hashem." If someone wishes to know how far he must exert himself to acquire Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, let him imagine how much energy he would invest in acquiring silver and treasures.

Let us picture the following scenario. A person is completely exhausted after a long day and lays down his head to rest a bit. If he would suddenly receive a phone call, notifying him that he has won the sweepstakes, he will jump up like a lion, forgetting the meaning of the word tired. He will rush to claim his winnings, afraid of missing the opportunity.

How unfortunate is it to observe people who spend all their days in the pursuit of money. When the time comes to learn a little Torah, they are suddenly sunk in sleepiness, and can't keep their eyes open.

Torah requires great fortitude. A person must literally create renewed energies for the sake of Torah study, which is more precious than gold and pearls. We learn this from the fact that the *tachash* was not created at the time of Creation, but during the time that the Mishkan was built. A person, who is compared to the Mishkan, must emulate the ways of Hashem, constantly replenishing his energy for the sake of Torah and mitzvot.

We should take the words of Chazal to heart (*Kiddushin* 30b). They state that every day, the *Yetzer Hara* refreshes its attack upon a person. Likewise, he should also revitalize his strength against the *Yetzer Hara*. If he is remiss in this area, for even one day, the path is paved to purgatory. This can be compared to a person driving uphill. As long as he has his

foot on the gas pedal, the car will go forward. But as soon as the driver desists from providing fuel for the engine, the car will immediately slide downward.

Many years ago, an earthquake of catastrophic proportions occurred in the lower city of Mexico. Tens of thousands were killed and wounded. The central shopping center was destroyed. A man who had been at the site told me this amazing account. He arranged a daily *shiur* in the shopping center, and afterward, Minchah services were held there. The earthquake destroyed the entire center, including his office, but the office where the *shiurim* took place remained completely intact, as though nothing had happened. Everyone came to see this wonder, how a single office stood upright, when all around was rubble and ruin.

This is exactly what we are referring to. In this room, energy was renewed for Avodat Hashem. People would literally sacrifice their lives to shut down their businesses in order to hear words of Torah and to pray. These energies were absorbed into the walls, reinforcing them against catastrophe.

A person is obligated to ascend in Avodat Hashem. His heart should be a mini-power plant, constantly fueled up with *ahavat Hashem* and *yirat Shamayim*. Even if he occasionally feels a sense of weakening and laxity, he should gather his strength and become powerful like a lion, finding and producing new resources with which to serve Hashem. When Hashem observes his *mesirut nefesh*, He grants him *siyata di'Shemaya* to succeed.

Rabbi Meir explains that the garments of skin (**עור**) which Hashem prepared for Adam and Chava after the sin, were actually garments of light (**אור**) (*Bereishit Rabbah* 20:12). A bulb can burn only as strong as the wattage it contains. A high wattage will produce strong light; if the bulb has low wattage, it will produce a weak light. Commensurate with a person's exertion in Avodat Hashem will be the amount of light he will generate. Every time that he strengthens his inner light, he is creating a new being. This is similar to the tunics of light with which Hashem clothed Adam and his wife.

When Adam sinned, his inner light was extinguished (*Bava Batra* 58a). Even after his sin, his heel was bright as the sun. Before the sin, his light would shine from one end of the world to the other. This light was removed with his sin (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:12). Adam sensed this lack, and felt bare and bereft. When Hashem observed his shame and regret, He hastened to fashion for him tunics of skin (*Bereishit* 3:21). Rabbi Meir calls these tunics of light, for they returned to him a measure of the light he had possessed before the sin.

Hashem specifically desired to create a new being, the *tachash*, for the purpose of using its skins for the Mishkan (see *Shabbat* 28b). These skins (עורות) were like shining beams (אורות). This is a hint to man. Just as Hashem created a new creature for the sake of the Mishkan, a person, too, must transform his beastly nature into a spiritual illumination. He should strengthen the light inherent within him, every single day. This is done by strengthening his Avodat Hashem, elevating himself to constantly greater heights. He will thereby be considered a new being. One must constantly strive to renew his service of Hashem, so that he should not come to serve Him by rote, *chalilah*, without any trace of enthusiasm and excitement.

Why did Hashem hurry to hide the *tachash* after it fulfilled its task in the construction of the Mishkan? This provides us with a profound message. A person must view himself as a complete servant of Hashem. His needs and desires do not exist at all, for he is merely dust and ashes. One who considers himself a miniature Mishkan must build his character. He must make himself an object of Hashem's will, his entire objective being to bring satisfaction to His Maker. He should feel as though he were created "for the moment," like the *tachash*, and utilize every minute of life to amass more and more mitzvot. There is no place, then, for his physical desires. All he wants is to bring pleasure to His Creator.

When a person truly feels that he was created, moment by moment, to serve Hashem to his utmost, his pride dissipates, just like air escapes from a balloon. His haughtiness shrinks before the glory of Hashem. He

merits fulfilling the pasuk (*Tehillim* 44:23), “For Your sake we are killed all the time.”

In Summary

- ◆ Why did the Torah specify the intricate details of the Menorah, if Hashem knew that Moshe would not manage to form it? There is a tremendous lesson for us here. Just as Moshe labored to understand the details of the Menorah, writing it at length in the Torah, and comprehending it to the best of his ability, so too, must one apply himself to understanding Torah, without exempting himself with the excuse that he does not understand all of it in any event, so what's the use of trying? If he maintains the proper attitude, he will receive Heavenly assistance, and his eyes will become enlightened in Torah.
- ◆ Why did Hashem create the *tachash* only for the construction of the Mishkan, and then hide it? Why didn't He make it along with the rest of Creation, during the six days of Creation, keeping it hidden in some forest and revealing it when necessary? It is to teach us a valuable lesson. Just as the construction of the Mishkan necessitated a new creation, so does a person, a miniature Mishkan, need to renew his energies in Hashem's service. He does this through labor and toil, seeking *yirat Hashem* like one seeks his fortune.
- ◆ According to the words of Rabbi Meir, whenever a person creates new strength in Avodat Hashem, he is considered to be creating a new being, similar to the tunics of light which Hashem created for Adam and Chava.
- ◆ When Adam sinned, the light of the world was extinguished. Therefore, Hashem prepared for Adam and Chava tunics of skin/light, which would, to some degree, return to them a measure of this light. Hashem commanded the nation to produce skins of *tachash*, reminiscent of this light. A person is enjoined to transform his animalistic “skins” into spiritual beams of luminosity, becoming a new being.

- ♦ Hashem hid the *tachash* after the construction of the Mishkan. A person should consider himself living for the moment, constantly striving to come closer to Hashem and nullify his desires before His will.

Gems on Parashat Terumah

Bnei Yisrael's Participation in the Mishkan

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion"

(Shemot 25:1-2)

Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe Rabbeinu, telling him to approach Am Yisrael with the request to raise contributions for the Mishkan. This is most astounding. Hashem is the Master of the entire world; everything belongs to Him. Why did He request donations for the Mishkan, and not just take what He felt necessary?

Throughout history, we do not find that a king asked his nation to help fund the building of his palace. It does not seem fitting for the King of kings to solicit funds from His nation.

Hashem is the One Who created this world, and everything therefore belongs to Him alone. Moreover, there are certain natural elements which were created solely for the construction of the Mishkan. An example is gold. Gold was created to beautify the Mishkan, and subsequently, the Batei Mikdash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 16:2). An incidental aspect of this

precious metal is that people derive pleasure from it. There was an animal called the *tachash*, whose sole purpose was to provide skins for the Mishkan. When its mission was completed, this animal disappeared (*Shabbat* 28b). Hashem is the Supervisor of the world, and everything was created for His glory. If we enjoy pleasure from nature, it is merely incidental to its prime purpose.

Hashem's kingdom is not like that of a human king. A human king's palace is his private domain, and no one may enter it without permission. Even after receiving permission, one may visit for a set time only, and according to specific conditions. Hashem, the All-merciful One, wished to let Bnei Yisrael participate in the construction of the Mishkan. This would grant them a connection to it, and they would feel a desire to enter it and do the Avodah there. Bnei Yisrael's voluntary contributions paved the way to the Mishkan, encouraging them to do the Avodah and offer *korbanot*. This is in opposition to the manner of human kings, who never allow strangers into their palaces without prior permission.

The nation's input in building the Mishkan engendered affection for Hashem's mitzvot and respect for the Avodah. By being involved in its construction, they felt associated with it and responsible toward it. This increased their appreciation of the House of Hashem.

Torah – The Only Daughter of Hashem

“Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion”

(*Shemot 25:1*)

Hashem asks us not to abandon His precious gift, the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei 4:2*), “For I have given you good merchandise, do not forsake My Torah.” When Bnei Yisrael were commanded to donate for the building of the Mishkan, the pasuk says, “וַיֹּקְרָב לִי תְּרוּמָה – Let them take for Me a portion.” The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah 33:1*) expounds that the words **לי תְּרוּמָה** (Me, portion) hint that Hashem was saying that He Himself was the portion that Bnei Yisrael should take. He was telling His nation, “I sold you the Torah. It is as if I was sold together with it.”

This is analogous to a king who had an only daughter. A king of a nearby province married her and wished to return home with his new wife. Her father told him, “The wife I gave to you is my only daughter. I cannot part with her, but at the same time, I cannot forbid you from taking her, for she is your new wife. I ask you one favor. Wherever you will live, build for me a small room, so that I may live with you and be near my daughter.”

Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, “I have given you the Torah. I cannot part with it, yet I cannot take it away from you. Wherever you go, build for me a small home, so that I can live in close proximity with it.” This is the reason for the command, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary.”

We see just how difficult it was for Hashem to part with the Torah. He granted it to Bnei Yisrael only on condition that they would delve in it, allowing Him to enter their midst. But just as soon as Bnei Yisrael are negligent in this area, the *Shechinah* leaves them, taking the Torah along with it. Nevertheless, Hashem has mercy on His people and does kindness

with them even when they are undeserving. It would be impossible to even imagine what would be if Hashem would detach Himself from us for even a moment.

I once observed a sick woman in the hospital. She was connected to various machines and tubes, which kept her alive. Without a respirator, she had no chance of survival. Likewise, even though we are full of sin, Hashem does not take our lives; He continues sustaining us.

Let us imagine a person on the moon. He has no air to breathe, and exists on artificial air. Without reserves of air, he has no chance of survival. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, grants us air to breathe in this world, even though we are not always worthy of it. We breathe this life-giving air free of charge. Our hearts beat regularly, without any machines. For these seemingly simple aspects of living we are obligated to thank Hashem for his kindness each moment. How do we do this? By inviting Him to live among us, in the tent of Torah.

Acquiring the Torah through Abandoning Wealth

“This is the portion that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper”

(*Shemot 25:3*)

This pasuk can be explained homiletically. The word “This” refers to the Torah, as the pasuk in Devarim (4:44) states, “This is the teaching.” The word **תרומה** (portion) is comprised of the words **מ' תורה**. This refers to the Torah, which was given after Moshe spent forty days and nights in Heaven. If we divide up the word **התרומה**, we have **מה-תורה**. The letters **מ"ה** are numerically equivalent to the word **אדם** (man). All mankind

should know that the Torah, which was given after forty days and nights, can exist within him only if he removes the gold, silver, and copper from himself.

The word **אשר** (that) also spells **ראש** (head). Man must remove from his mind the lust for acquiring money. Only in this way can he acquire the wealth of Torah.

The Prerequisite for the Presence of the Shechinah

“And this is the portion that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper”

(*Shemot* 25:3)

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them”

(*ibid.* 25:8)

The sefer *Nefesh Hachaim* (1:4), quoting the Midrash, explains that the Torah uses the words “so that I may dwell among **them**” instead of “so that I may dwell inside of **it**” to intimate Hashem’s relationship with each and every Jew. We must transform ourselves into fitting vessels for the *Shechinah*, as each of us is a miniature Mikdash. This is done by converting physicality into spirituality. According to the laws of nature, it is extremely difficult to change something physical into a spiritual entity. The Zohar enlightens us (II, 82b) by stating that the entire Torah is a book of advice, which has the potential to purify the materialism of this world, making it fit material for holiness.

This is alluded to in the words **וזאת התרומה** (and this is the portion). The letter 'א signifies man, who was created on the sixth day. The word **התרומה** can be split to read **תורה-ם**. The Torah, received after forty (numerical equivalent of 'ם) days and nights, is crucial for man, who was created on the sixth day. The Torah has the ability to raise man to untold heights, to the point of nullifying his physicality completely. His body then becomes a house for the *Shechinah*. The words "that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper" teach the following: Only after a person removes the shell of gold and silver, and nullifies them completely, i.e., he takes his mind off his money, and his sole desire is to become a chariot for the *Shechinah*, does he merit housing Hashem's Presence within him. It is only materialism that repels the *Shechinah* from our midst.

A Practical Lesson from the Mishkan

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them”

(*Shemot 25:8*)

The Mishkan in the Wilderness was constructed by Betzalel and erected by Moshe Rabbeinu when it was complete. Chazal state (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 417; *Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11) that the Mishkan was built in a miraculous manner. It came into existence through combinations of Hashem's Names, through which He created the world (see *Berachot* 55a). The Mishkan was made of forty-eight beams and was very heavy. The fact that Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in erecting them was a miracle in itself. It was beyond human strength to lift the parts of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan paralleled the three pillars of the world – Torah, Avodah, and *gemilut chassadim*. The Torah was alluded to by the Sefer Torah

contained in the Aron. Avodah was represented by the sacrifices. *Gemilut chassadim* was depicted by the central beam, which connected all the rest of the beams. This was built from the tree which Avraham Avinu had planted for the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*.

These correlations allude to the fact that were the Mishkan to become destroyed, the entire world would be in danger of dissolving. The Mishkan was built through combinations of Hashem's Names, by which the world was created, and based on the three pillars of the world. This indicates to Bnei Yisrael how careful they must be in Torah study and mitzvah observance, in order to avert the destruction of the Mishkan and the entire world with it.

We are of such small stature. We live in a generation that has never seen the Mishkan or the Beit Hamikdash. We must fulfill our calling and pray for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash speedily, in order that Hashem's Names should once more fill the world.

The Mishkan, as well as the Batei Mikdash lie in ruins, but man continues to live. This teaches us an important lesson. Man is the crown of Creation, more important to Hashem than the Beit Hamikdash! This is proven by the fact that He destroyed the Mishkan, together with the concentration of His Names in it. He likewise allowed for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. But Bnei Yisrael will endure forever, bringing sustenance to the entire world.

Man, in essence, is a Mishkan. This is borne out by the pasuk, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell among **them**." Chazal explain that the words "among them" teach us that Bnei Yisrael themselves are the Mishkan for the *Shechinah*. From the Mishkan, a person takes the message of how to combine the elements of Torah, Avodah, and *gemilut chassadim* within him.

The Vessels of the Mishkan

“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold, from within and from without shall you cover it, and you shall make on it a gold crown, all around”

(Shemot 25:10-11)

My grandfather, the tzaddik, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, discusses the Aron and the secrets of the *keruvim* in his sefer, *Kesef Nivchar*. He quotes the Gemara (*Yoma* 72b), which states that the Aron was made of pure gold. Inside of it was placed an Aron of wood, into which was placed another Aron of gold. The *keruvim*, who had the form of angels, were placed above the Aron. This demonstrated to all that mankind has the potential to reach the level of angels. They faced downward, toward the Aron. This hints to a person to be humble. It is insufficient to have outer beauty, depicted by the gold on the outside of the Aron. A person must possess inner beauty, depicted by the layer of gold covering its inside. Moreover, man’s mouth (his connection with the outside world) must be in sync with his heart (his feelings and thoughts).

In order to prevent haughtiness, a wooden Aron was placed between the two Arks of gold. Wood rots, and man will eventually rot in the grave. Where is there place for arrogance? The rings at the side of the Aron allude to the *talmidei chachamim*, who adhere to Torah with every fiber of their being. The bars which carried the Aron are the Torah supporters, for without them, Torah cannot endure.

The Table teaches a person to place his trust in Hashem. Just as Hashem protected the showbreads from becoming stale, from one Erev Shabbat to the next (*Chagigah* 26b), so does Hashem protect His nation from all harm, providing them with all their needs.

After Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they declined spiritually. They became bereft of faith in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem commanded them to build the Table in the Mishkan. The Table refers to faith in Hashem regarding one's sustenance. Bnei Yisrael, likewise, had descended to the worldview of "My strength and the might of my hand has granted me all this wealth." They did not think they could ever regain their former status, and fell into deep despair. Hashem's command to build the Aron with the *keruvim* addressed this condition, for the *keruvim* symbolized their power to reach the level of angels, if only they subjected themselves to the Torah.

The Glory of Torah

**"And insert the staves in the rings on the sides
of the Ark, with which to carry the Ark"**

(*Shemot 25:14*)

Chazal state (*Horiyot* 13a) that a *mamzer* who is a *talmid chacham* takes precedence over a Kohen Gadol who is an ignoramus, in deference to the Torah which he contains. It is mind-boggling to understand how a *mamzer* who is a *talmid chacham* is more important than an ignorant Kohen Gadol who received atonement for Bnei Yisrael on Yom Kippur. We learn from here how imperative it is to honor the *talmid chacham*. In the days of Shmaya and Avtalyon, the entire nation, including themselves, waited for the Kohen Gadol to emerge from the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, in order to pay him respect. They were ecstatic when he emerged safely. But then everyone immediately followed Shmaya and Avtalyon, the Torah giants, for the Kohen Gadol was an ignoramus (*Yoma* 71b).

The intrinsic difference between the *talmid chacham* and the Kohen Gadol is the following. The *talmid chacham* constantly sanctifies himself,

like the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, every moment of his life, whereas the Kohen Gadol who is an ignoramus is elevated to a high level of *kedushah* only once a year, on Yom Kippur. But he does not grasp an inner understanding of the Torah throughout the year. This Kohen Gadol holds onto the bars of the Aron, i.e., the external aspect of Torah study, but he has no connection to the internality of Torah, compared to the Aron with the *luchot* inside of it. On the other hand, the *talmid chacham* who is a *mamzer* does not suffice with this level of connection via the externality of Torah. He toils to dig deeply into the essence of the Torah. He merits the honor conferred on him, because of the honor of Torah that he embodies.

Tetzaveh

Mutual Responsibility

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot 27:20*)

Why is Moshe Rabbeinu's name not mentioned even once in this parashah?

Perhaps we can suggest the following explanation. After Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem wanted to wipe them out. Moshe was appalled by this thought, and he told Hashem that were He to do this, then, “Erase me now from Your book” (*Shemot 32:32*). Moshe felt that mention of his name in the Torah, and, indeed, his very life, were not worth anything were Am Yisrael to be destroyed.

Hashem wished to test Moshe's dedication to his nation. Therefore, He did not mention his name openly in parashat *Tetzaveh*, which begins with the details of the Menorah. Hashem linked Moshe to the Menorah, hinting that just as the Menorah symbolizes unity among the nation, Hashem wanted to see just how far Moshe felt responsible toward Am Yisrael.

Moshe displayed the loyalty of a loving father toward his son, despite the fact that his name is not openly mentioned in the parashah, whereas the following parshiyot do contain his name.

Hashem, Who examines man's innermost thoughts and feelings, saw how very deep this dedication was and did not want to eliminate Moshe's name completely from the parashah. Therefore, He hinted at it in the words, "You shall command." This would prove for all generations just how strong and intense was Moshe's connection with Bnei Yisrael, to the extent that he asked to be erased from the Torah, as long as Am Yisrael would endure.

Hashem informed Moshe that the oil to be used for lighting the Menorah is pure olive oil pressed for illumination. The first drop emitted from the olive, is the best and most fitting oil for lighting the *ner tamid*. The word *katit* (pressed) alludes to the fact that lighting the Menorah demands a specific sacrifice on the part of a person. Only through this self-sacrifice can the Menorah, analogous to Torah, be lit. The pasuk (*Mishlei* 6:23) says, "For a commandment is a candle and the Torah is light." When there is an element of sacrifice, one merits light. But without this sacrifice, one cannot be worthy of the light of Torah.

When Hashem offered the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, they called out as one, "*Na'aseh v'nishma!*" But Hashem did not suffice with this announcement. He demanded a sense of responsibility among the people. He wanted to see that they were prepared to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the Torah, in spite of the difficulties involved. Bnei Yisrael initially recommended the Avot as guarantors that the Torah would be upheld. But Hashem rejected their offer, stating that the forefathers are long gone. Even in their lifetimes, they could not provide this sort of guarantee, especially since Avraham had an idol worshipper, Terach, for a father. Bnei Yisrael then offered their children as guarantors for the observance of Torah. Hashem agreed to this, on condition that they understand the following: The children are responsible for their parents. If the parents transgress and abandon the Torah, their offspring will pay the price (*Midrash Tehillim* 8).

It is difficult to understand why children have to bear their parents' sins. The highest level of dedication is carrying another's burden to the point of self-sacrifice. Since Hashem knew that love of one's children is the strongest love that exists, He agreed to give Bnei Yisrael the Torah. Why was it necessary to give the Torah only through the guarantee of the children being responsible for their parents' transgressions? This is the demonstration of the "pressed oil for illumination." It is the self-sacrifice necessary for the Torah to be upheld. Without the responsibility of parents to their children and children to their parents, there would be no chance of Am Yisrael remaining loyal to their faith in the face of the challenges which would confront them. When Bnei Yisrael were prepared to appoint their children as their guarantors, they proved that they understood the necessity to devote themselves for the sake of Torah.

We might add that there is an allusion to Moshe Rabbeinu in the parashah. Hashem commanded him about the matter of the pure, pressed olive oil for light. The word שמן (oil) is numerically equivalent to the words משה אדן (the man, Moshe). Moshe is symbolized by oil, which floats on all the liquids in the world and never sinks. Moshe Rabbeinu, in spite of his humbleness, was the most elevated of men. This was his merit for not displaying pride over the nation, but taking care of their every need, with every fiber of his being.

In Summary

- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu's name is not mentioned in parashat *Tetzaveh*. This is because he had previously told Hashem that if He would wipe out Am Yisrael on account of the sin of the Golden Calf, he wished to have no part in the Torah. Hashem wanted to see just how far his dedication went; He therefore removed Moshe's name from this parashah. This shows us the mutual responsibility which Moshe felt toward Am Yisrael.
- ◆ Only pressed olive oil may be used for the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. The pressing process alludes to the exertion necessary in order to acquire Torah, hinted at by the light.

- ♦ The guarantors of Bnei Yisrael are their children. One's children are his most precious asset. This is why Hashem agreed to this arrangement. This is why sons suffer for the sins of their parents.

Connecting to Tzaddikim

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot 27:20*)

“Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother, and his sons with him from among the Children of Israel – Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon – to minister to Me. You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor”

(*ibid. 28:1-2*)

Hashem instructed Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to bring pure olive oil for the Menorah. He was referring to the first drop extracted from the olive, the best part of the oil, which was the most fitting part with which to light the Menorah (see *Menachot* 86a). This was described as oil “that they shall take for you (Moshe).” This is most perplexing. Shouldn’t it have said, “that they shall take for Me,” since this was a contribution toward the Mishkan, the House of Hashem?

In parashat *Terumah*, where we read about the construction of the Mishkan, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael to contribute to the Mishkan with the words: “Let them take for Me a portion.” What is the difference between that original donation toward the Mishkan and the donation here of pure olive oil for the Menorah?

The parashah continues with the command to anoint Aharon and his sons for the priesthood. Afterward, is the instruction to prepare special clothes for Aharon, for glory and splendor. What is the connection between these commands and the first command of the parashah to bring oil for the Menorah?

Before creating the world, Hashem delighted in the Torah (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 368). When He did create the world, it was based on the Torah, as the Zohar states (II, 161b), “He looked into the Torah, and created the world.” Torah is the foundation of the world. The Midrash relates (*Shemot Rabbah* 33a) that Hashem had difficulty in parting with the Torah and giving it to Am Yisrael. But when He perceived that the world cannot endure without it, He bestowed it upon them, commanding them to study it and guard it like the apple of their eye.

Chazal compare Hashem’s relationship with the Torah to a king who has an only daughter. He brought her up in pomp and pageantry, always delighting in her. When the time came for her to marry, he was loath to part with her, due to his tremendous love for her. He therefore stated that only the groom who would agree to build a small room in his house, in which the king could reside, would receive his daughter’s hand in marriage. A man who fit this criterion was found, and he indeed built a room in his home for the king to live in. In this manner, the king could spend as much time as he wished with his daughter.

Hashem, King of all kings, has the Torah, His precious only daughter. When He felt it was time to part with it, for the world cannot endure without Torah, He sought a groom who would study it without limit and protect it. Also, he would prepare a small room, where Hashem could rest His *Shechinah*, in close proximity of the Torah. This is why the pasuk

states (*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.”

Chazal teach us (*Avot* 5:10), “There are four types of people: One who says, ‘My property is mine and yours is yours’ is an average person, but some say this is characteristic of Sodom. One who says, ‘Mine is yours and yours is mine’ is an unlearned person. One who says, ‘Mine is yours and yours is yours’ is scrupulously pious. One who says, ‘Yours is mine and mine is mine’ is wicked.”

When Hashem granted the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, He clung to the trait of piety, conducting Himself like the third example in the Mishnah. The Torah had originally belonged solely to Him and now He gave it to them as a gift on Har Sinai.

When Hashem ordered Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to “take for Me a portion,” He was referring to the Torah, which is alluded to in the word **תְּרוּמָה** (portion), for it is composed of the letters **תֹּרַה-מִ** – the Torah, which was given after Moshe spent forty (**ט**) days in Heaven. Since the world can endure only by the strength of the Torah, Hashem ordered His children to learn Torah. This is the portion that they are enjoined to bring before Him. When Bnei Yisrael are engrossed in Torah study, Hashem rests His *Shechinah* upon them. The gain is all theirs.

How does bringing the oil to Moshe Rabbeinu bring the nation closer to Hashem and His Torah? The word **שֶׁמֶן** (oil) is similar to the word **נֶשֶׁמֶה** (soul). Am Yisrael are enjoined to offer their very *neshamot* to Moshe Rabbeinu, and to all of the tzaddikim. By their souls becoming attached to the tzaddikim, they become pure and pressed, fit for illumination, with which to light the Menorah, the symbol of Torah.

Now we see the connection between the two commands “Let them take for Me a portion” and “They shall take for you pure olive oil.” In order to bring a donation to Hashem, i.e., study His Torah, one must first and foremost bring his *neshamah* close to the tzaddikim. By connecting to the tzaddikim, one becomes a vessel for Torah. When the Torah rests within a person, Hashem hurries to rest His *Shechinah* upon him. The person

gains on both counts. He contains Torah within him, and he has the *Shechinah* residing in himself as well. This is borne out by the pasuk, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.” Chazal say that the words “among them” rather than “inside of it” teach us that Hashem wishes to dwell inside the heart of each and every Jew.

Adhering to tzaddikim and learning from their example serves as a living *mussar* sefer for a person. When he contemplates their way of life, he will emulate them as much as he can, thus improving his own deeds. For this reason, I try to read stories of tzaddikim as much as possible. I can tangibly feel how these stories have the power to transform a person and bring him to teshuvah.

Furthermore, this parashah teaches us how we must strive to emulate the *midot* of Hashem, Who gives us from what is His. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu, King of the universe, granted the Torah to His sons, even though it was as precious to Him as an only daughter, all the more so are we obligated to behave in this manner, giving of ours to others. How do we acquire this exalted character trait? By contemplating the deeds of tzaddikim, who exert themselves to provide for the needs of the public.

I was once asked why tzaddikim confess their sins with the words, “I sinned, I transgressed...” It would seem appropriate only for the resha’im to make such statements, for the righteous are surely far removed from such behavior. The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, zt”l, explains that all the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael are interconnected and accountable for each other, as Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to adhere to the tzaddikim. The tzaddikim actually confess the transgressions of the resha’im, whose *neshamot* are bound with their own. How pious are the righteous ones of Hashem! Instead of basking in their own admirable deeds, they feel a sense of responsibility toward the nation, whom they represent. This compels them to admit to sins they never contemplated, as long as the nation receives atonement.

Let us return to our second question: What is the connection between the command to anoint Aharon and his sons and the command to

contribute oil for the Menorah? In order to attain the exalted level of emulating Hashem in the aspect of “what is mine is yours” (*Avot* 5:10), we must make ourselves into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (*Shemot* 19:6). The Kohen merits a special relationship with Hashem, being allowed to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* garbed in holy garments. So, too, must we purify our *midot* and adhere to Hashem’s *midot*, as our Sages state, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful...” (*Masechet Sofrim* 3:13). The instruction, “You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor” means that we must clothe our *neshamot* with the garb of Torah and mitzvot. This will bring us to the level of glory and splendor both in this world, as well as the Next.

After Adam and Chava sinned and ate of the Tree of Knowledge, they suddenly became aware of the fact that they were unclothed. They became severely ashamed (*Bereishit* 3:6-10). Torah and mitzvot are our royal attire. When a person sins and transgresses the word of Hashem, he becomes bereft of these garments. Adam and Chava, after sinning, realized they were physically unclad, as well as spiritually bare. Hashem took pity on them and dressed them in garments of light for some time, until they would become accustomed to fulfilling the Torah and performing mitzvot. This would grant them clothing of sanctity, with which they would be able to serve Hashem all their days.

The body of a person is destined to be interred in the ground, whereas the *neshamah* will ascend on High, living eternally. It will ascend ever higher. If it merited being clothed in the garments of Torah and mitzvot, its reward in *Shamayim* will be tremendous. Conversely, one who stands before the Heavenly Tribunal bare of Torah and mitzvot faces a situation which is most difficult to bear. When Am Yisrael serve Hashem as a kingdom of priests, cleaving to His ways through the *neshamot* of the tzaddikim and the garb of their Torah, there is no honor or magnificence more mighty than this.

“Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out” (*Devarim* 28:6). Rashi explains that just as a person enters this world pure and free of sin, so must he toil to leave this world pure

and free of sin. It is self-understood that if one borrows an item of clothing from his friend, he must return it clean and free of any stain. Likewise, the *neshamah* was loaned to us for a limited time; our task is to return it to the Creator pure and clean, wrapped in the casing of Torah and mitzvot, the most precious and prestigious garments that there are (see *Shabbat* 152b).

In Summary

- ♦ Regarding the command to bring olive oil for the Menorah, the words “they shall take for you (Moshe)” are used. However, concerning the construction of the Mishkan, it says, “Let them take for Me.” Why is there a difference in wording? And what is the connection between the garments of the Kohen and the olive oil, which are contiguous in the pesukim?
- ♦ Hashem bestowed the Torah, His only daughter, on Am Yisrael. He asked them to build a small room for Him, in order that He could remain close to His “daughter.” This room was the Mishkan. He shared His most precious asset with us, without expecting anything in return.
- ♦ In parashat *Terumah*, the pasuk states, “Let them take for Me a portion.” This means that Bnei Yisrael should toil in Torah for Hashem’s sake alone. Afterward, He commands, “They shall take for you pure olive oil for illumination.” How does one merit closeness with Hashem? By becoming close to His tzaddikim. Toward this end, Hashem told Bnei Yisrael to bring the oil to Moshe.
- ♦ The section discussing the clothing of the Kohanim teaches us that a person is enjoined to wrap himself in garments of Torah and *kedushah*. This is the means by which Hashem can rest His *Shechinah* in the Mishkan, and within each and every Jew.

What's Mine Is Yours

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot 27:20*)

“Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother, and his sons with him from among the Children of Israel – Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon – to minister to Me. You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor”

(*ibid. 28:1-2*)

Why does the pasuk in parashat *Terumah* (25:2) state, “They shall take for Me a portion,” which is explained as, “For Me – for My Name” (*Rashi*, *ibid.*), whereas here, the pasuk says, “They shall take for you (Moshe) pure olive oil”? This oil was designated for lighting the Menorah. It should seemingly have said “For Me” here, as well. Just as the donations were for the benefit of the Mikdash, so too, was the oil donated for the Mikdash.

Additionally, why does the Torah state, “Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother.” This indicates that Moshe needed to persuade Aharon to minister to Hashem, telling him that he was fortunate to be able to do so. This is puzzling. Aharon was certainly delighted at the opportunity to ascend higher and higher in his Avodat Hashem by means of serving in the Mishkan. Why did Moshe need to appease him in this manner?

Here, too, we find the term “bring near to yourself Aharon your brother,” instead of “bring near to Me.” Aharon’s calling was to be close to Hashem, by means of his service in the Mishkan. Why does the pasuk relate his closeness with Moshe instead of his closeness with Hashem?

Why was the section of Aharon and his clothing written specifically after the section concerning the olive oil used for the Menorah?

We might preface our answer with a short introduction. Why did Hashem invest effort, so to speak, in the creation of man? He collected earth and breathed into it the breath of life. The commentaries explain (see *Ramban, Bereishit* 2:7) that “one who blows, blows of himself.” Hashem actually blew into man of His own spirit. Why didn’t Hashem just create man, as He created the rest of the beings, through speech?

He wished to demonstrate to the entire world just how important man is to Him, to the extent that He created him Himself, and bestowed upon him of Himself.

Man was created in a different manner than other creations, because the 613 mitzvot are engraved into his organs. These are the mitzvot of the Torah, which Hashem delighted in even before the world came into being (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 368). This is borne out by the statement of Shlomo Hamelech (*Mishlei* 8:30), “I was then His nursing; I was then His delight every day, playing before Him at all times.” Since the Torah is most precious to Hashem, He invested effort in the creation of man, who is considered to be equivalent to the Torah. This shows the entire world just how much Hashem loves the Torah. Hashem was hinting to Adam that he must cleave to the Torah, toiling in its mitzvot, just as Hashem, so to speak, toiled in his creation. Since a person is founded upon the mitzvot, he must find favor in Hashem’s eyes by living according to the dictates of the Torah, since this is the purpose of his creation.

Hashem lowered Himself in order to create man. He did this with utmost kindness and mercy, even though He knew that man would eventually sin. He placed His trust in him and granted him the prospect of return. This is the window of opportunity for teshuvah, open before

him always. How much more so must man behave with kindness and mercy toward his fellow, for he is also the handiwork of Hashem. One should not make do with helping his friend through an agent, rather, he himself should approach his friend, offering his help where necessary.

Rabbi Akiva taught (*Bereishit Rabbah* 24:7), “Love your neighbor as yourself – this is a great principle of the Torah.” Likewise, it says (*Tehillim* 89:3), “The world is build on kindness.” By doing acts of kindness with one’s acquaintances, just as Hashem did at Creation, a person brings the world to its perfection. By respecting one’s fellow man, he is in essence giving homage to the Torah, which dwells within him.

It would behoove man to live by the dictum (*Avot* 5:10), “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is yours.” Whoever behaves with this attitude is called a tzaddik. And if a person wonders how it is possible to arrive at this lofty level, let him remember that Hashem employed it in his creation, by blowing into him the breath of life, a part of Himself (*Pardes Rimonim* 32:1).

In the tefillah, we proclaim, “The *neshamah* is Yours, and the body is Your work.” Just as we are enjoined to emulate Hashem’s ways, we should strive to emulate his *middah* of giving from Himself to others. Adopting this type of approach is a form of gratitude to Hashem for granting us the gift of life. It is not a gratuitous act on man’s part at all. He himself will benefit the most from his good deed, since he will have the merit of upholding the entire world, which exists on the trait of *chessed*.

The Gedolei Yisrael, throughout the generations, are men of loving-kindness. They excel in the trait of *ahavat Yisrael* and exert themselves to help others. They are punctilious in fulfilling “What’s mine is yours.” They understand that this is the underpinning of the entire world, as well as the basis for the Torah. This is borne out by the pasuk describing Bnei Yisrael’s position at *Matan Torah*. It states (*Shemot* 19:2), “And Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain.” Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 275) that the word for “encamped” is written in the singular form to indicate that they were as one man, with one heart.

The unity they displayed when they received the Torah should serve as a lesson for all generations. Mutual accountability is the precondition for accepting the Torah. Only when Am Yisrael are united, concerned for each other's well-being, can the Torah endure within them. But when they are disconnected through dissention, all of the Torah in the world cannot protect them from harm.

When a person helps his friend who has fallen into depression and despair, lifting him above his problems, he is actually emulating Hashem Himself and is considered a "creator." His fellow Jew might have had suicidal thoughts, yet was granted a new lease on life through his intervention. He has essentially recreated him.

Keeping in mind the principle of "What's mine is yours and what's yours is yours," we might venture to explain our previous difficulty. We asked why the pasuk in Parashat *Terumah* (25:2) states, "They shall take for Me a portion," whereas in Parashat *Tetzaveh*, we read, "They shall take for you (Moshe) pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination."

Upon creating man, Hashem blew into his nostrils the breath of life. He blew of Himself (*Pardes Rimonim* 32:1). He conducted Himself with the trait of "What's Mine is yours," by giving of Himself to mankind. Similarly, Hashem engraved the Torah into man's heart. This is alluded to in the words, "They shall take for Me a portion," for the word **תְּרוּמָה** (a portion) can be read as **תְּוֹרָה מִן**, since the Torah was given after Moshe spent forty (**מֵנ**) days and nights in Heaven. And although the Torah originally belonged solely to Hashem, He granted it to Bnei Yisrael as a means to protect their souls from the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Hashem taught us a tremendous lesson by behaving according to the motto of "What's Mine is yours." He yielded full possession of the Torah in order to afford us protection from sin. How much more so is man enjoined to share his Torah erudition with others, enriching their knowledge with his insights. Conversely, a person who keeps all of his Torah wisdom to himself reduces its significance in Hashem's eyes, for he has not emulated his Creator. "For I have given you a good teaching, do

not forsake My Torah" (*Mishlei* 4:2). Do not suffice with having My Torah in your sole possession, but concern yourselves with sharing it with others.

Similarly, man must realize that fame and fortune belong to Hashem. If he feels that he is donating of his personal funds when contributing to Torah causes, he is sorely mistaken. Everything is Hashem's, including the money he donates to support Torah. One should internalize the concept that whatever wealth he owns is only a deposit entrusted to him by Hashem. He should use it for its intended purpose: maintaining the Torah world. The words "תְּרוּמָה לִי וַיֹּקְחוּ – they shall take for Me" can be read "They shall take Me as a portion." This reminds Bnei Yisrael that Hashem gave them a "part of Himself" as well as the Torah, in order to create them.

This understanding will motivate people to emulate Him by giving of their own Torah learning and possessions to others, increasing the glory of Hashem throughout the world.

"They shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination." Oil alludes to abundance of blessing, since oil always floats upward. The word "pressed" denotes the finest oil, for the first drop of oil pressed from the olive is the most superior for lighting (see *Menachot* 86a). The fact that it is squeezed out of the olive signifies self-sacrifice. This alludes to the kindness which man must confer on his fellow man. We must be pressed, of the highest caliber, to the extent of literally sacrificing ourselves on behalf of our fellow man.

Regarding the kindnesses which man is enjoined to do for his neighbor, the pasuk says, "they shall take for you." They should feel as though what is theirs is actually yours (i.e., his neighbor's). Their sweat and toil, that which "presses" them, is directed toward you. Man must ensure that his contributions are at the level of "What's mine is yours." The olive oil enlightens us with this lesson. Pure olive oil is obtained only through the hard work of pressing. If one gives the oil with the proper attitude of "What's mine is yours," he has given in the best way possible.

This, then, is why the Torah opens this parashah with the words, “They shall take for you,” and not, “They shall take for Me.” Bnei Yisrael are instructed to nullify their sense of self and their sense of ownership. In this manner, they are capable of giving completely to their fellow men, thereby strengthening unity among Bnei Yisrael.

The Ba’al Shem Tov, zy”a, (*Chakima Berimiza, Ki Tisa*, p. 240) goes so far as to say that even if someone gives generously to a poor man, but he does not truly feel the pauper’s sad state, he is considered to have shed blood. As well as donating charity, a person is expected to feel for the poor man and empathize with his situation.

The Rambam rules similarly in the halachot of *tzedakah* (*Matnot Aniyim* 10:4), “Whoever gives charity with a sullen expression, even if he has donated one thousand gold coins, has lost his merit. One is enjoined to donate with a pleasant expression and joyfully, and commiserate with the poor man’s plight...speaking words of condolence and consolation.”

In the sefer *Hagahot Yesh Nochalin L’achi HaShelah* (*Zehirut Hatzedakah V’Hama’aser* 22), we read, “One who gives as though he was compelled, in anger and anguish, transgresses the warning of the Torah (*Devarim* 15:10), ‘Let your heart not feel bad when you give him.’ Rather, he should feel the pain of the pauper who is forced to approach him. He should imagine how he would feel were he the poor man, lacking food and clothing in the winter, and the most basic essentials, and was forced to demean himself before others. How much comfort and consolation would he feel when the donor gives with an open hand and a compassionate heart, speaking words of encouragement and appeasement.”

The Torah is founded on knowing how to give to others, not only demanding and taking for oneself. After all, even he who is able to give, received what he has from Hashem, as a free gift. Let him not be tight-fisted when the time comes for him to open his hand toward others.

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil...” Moshe’s name is not mentioned here as the one who shall command, rather it is inclusive of all Bnei Yisrael. This teaches us

that each and every Jew must emulate the Creator, Who gave of His own for man's benefit. This was by blowing into him the breath of life from on High and engraving into his heart the holy Torah. Moshe's name is omitted from the pasuk, for each and every one of us must attach himself to Hashem's attribute of giving what is his to others.

"Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother." Let us not think that Aharon needed to be convinced to do the Avodah in the Mishkan. These words were written to teach us a lesson. When a person truly feels for his fellow man and treats him as though he is his brother, he causes a heightened level of closeness among Klal Yisrael. When everyone considers his friend his brother, the entire world becomes filled with goodness and *chesed*. Abundance of mercy is increased in all the worlds, for Hashem's light, so to speak, has become lit. Charitable acts and compassion between men light up the world from one end to the other, bringing tremendous satisfaction to Hashem. This is the purpose of Creation, as the pasuk in Tehillim (89:3) states, "The world is built on kindness."

Chazal explain (see *Tanchuma* 96:10) that Moshe had to appease Aharon and persuade him to do the Avodah in the Mishkan. It was not because Aharon wished to shirk his duties, but because he felt that Moshe, although younger than him, was more worthy of serving as the Kohen Gadol. Aharon truly desired the *zechut* of the sacred service in the Mikdash, but he behaved with the trait of "What's mine is yours" and came to the conclusion that his younger brother was more worthy. Therefore, Moshe had to coax and convince him to take the job, explaining that this was Hashem's will. He wanted Aharon to be the High Priest and Moshe to lead the people.

When all of Am Yisrael nullify themselves before others, to the point of feeling "What's mine is yours," they merit reaching the level of Aharon, the High Priest, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 19:6), "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." When do Am Yisrael merit being called a "holy nation"? This is when they regard their fellow man as the one appropriate to be the High Priest, who stands before Hashem.

The Torah placed the command to prepare the holy vestments of the Kohanim next to this section, in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that when they treat each other respectfully, they merit wearing the garments of sanctity. The entire purpose of man's existence in this world is that it be said upon him (*Bava Kama* 107a), "Blessed are you upon your arrival without sin, and blessed are you upon your departure without sin." How does one come to such a sanctified level? By clothing himself in the garb of holiness, in glory and beauty. There is no glory other than Torah. When a person enrobes himself in words of Torah, mitzvot, and loving-kindness, he merits glory and splendor, leaving this world free of sin, just as he was on the day he was born.

When a person clings to Hashem's *middot*, considering whatever he owns as belonging to his fellow, he earns the epithet of High Priest, wrapped in garments of *kedushah* and standing in the innermost sanctum, serving Hashem.

In Summary

- ♦ Why does Parashat *Terumah* open with the words, "Let them take for Me a portion," whereas Parashat *Tetzaveh* begins with the words, "They shall take for you pure olive oil"? Both pesukim refer to donations toward the Mishkan; why is there a difference in language? Also, why was it necessary to tell Moshe, "Bring near to yourself Aharon your brother"? Did Aharon really need to be convinced, in order to agree to do the Avodah in the Mikdash? And why was Moshe told to bring Aharon to himself, and not to Hashem? Lastly, why are the priestly vestments mentioned specifically here?
- ♦ Hashem blew into mankind the breath of life, granting him a *neshamah* from on High. This was done for the following reasons. First, it was to teach us just how important the Torah is in Hashem's eyes. Since a person's organs correspond to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, Hashem, so to speak, exerted Himself in man's creation. Second, Hashem behaved with the attribute of "What's Mine is yours" by granting man a *neshamah* from on High, together with the Torah, also from Above. This is in order

to teach man the following lesson. Just as Hashem gave to us from Himself, so must we behave with kindness and compassion with others, increasing charitable acts, and giving the recipient of our kindness the feeling that what is ours we truly wish to share with him.

- ◆ “Let them take for Me a portion (**תְּרוּמָה**)” refers to the Torah, which is Hashem’s portion. Hashem did not keep it for Himself, but gave it to Bnei Yisrael after Moshe spent forty days and nights in Heaven (**תּוֹרָה מ’**). Hashem behaved by the dictum, “What’s Mine is yours.” On the other hand, the pasuk referring to the donation of olive oil uses the words, “They shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed for illumination.” Oil refers to the good deeds which a person does with his fellow man. He must ensure that these are “pressed,” meaning of the highest caliber, just like the first drop squeezed out of the olive. Man must see to it that his giving to others is genuine, without ulterior motives.
- ◆ “Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother.” Let us not think that Aharon, *chalilah*, did not desire to do the Avodah in the Mikdash. However, he felt that Moshe was more deserving to serve in the Mishkan. He behaved by the maxim “What’s mine is yours.” Therefore, Moshe had to coax him into accepting the position of High Priest, explaining that this was Hashem’s will. When a person sincerely gives of his own for the sake of his fellow man, considering him his brother, he fosters unity among the nation.
- ◆ The instruction to fashion the priestly garments is written here to teach us the following. When a person clothes himself in holy garb, i.e., Torah and mitzvot, he merits glory and splendor, leaving this world free of sin, just as he was on the day he entered it.

The Exclusion of Moshe's Name from the Parashah

"Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually"

(Shemot 27:20)

Moshe Rabbeinu's name is omitted from parashat *Tetzaveh*. Chazal, as well as the Zohar on parashat *Pinchas* (246a), explain that the reason for this is the following. After the *Chet Ha'egel*, Moshe wished to defend the nation. He stated (*Shemot* 32:32), "And now if You would but forgive their sin! – but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written." His name was therefore erased from one parashah, *Tetzaveh*.

From here we see that words which emanate from the mouth of a tzaddik come true. Even though parashat *Tetzaveh* is written before parashat *Ki Tisa*, which discusses the sin of the Golden Calf, and Moshe's request had not yet been made, we know there is no chronological order to the Torah. In parashat *Ki Tisa* (*ibid.* 31:18) it says, "He gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him on Har Sinai, the two Tablets of the Testimony." Rashi expounds on this that "earlier and later events are not presented in chronological sequence in the Torah. The incident of the Golden Calf preceded the commandment of the work of the Mishkan by many days."

With the statement "erase me now from Your book," Moshe was actually saving Bnei Yisrael from annihilation. He should have received reward for his devotion to his nation. Let us imagine a king who wishes to kill his son out of anger. His servant comes along and appeases him by finding merit with the son. Certainly this loyal servant will receive a badge of honor from the king for saving his son's life. By trying to save the life

of the prince, the servant has demonstrated his loyalty to the royal house. This will certainly earn him reward, not retribution!

Moshe asked Hashem to spare Bnei Yisrael, His beloved children. Bnei Yisrael are compared to the Torah, which contains the exact amount of letters as the members of our nation. Therefore, it is most perplexing to find Moshe's name excluded from the parashah. He had sacrificed himself for the sake of the nation by asking Hashem to erase his name from His Torah, if He would not forgive them for the *Chet Ha'egel*. It does not seem fair that his name should be left out of this parashah.

There is a famous difference of opinions between Rashi and Ramban regarding the purpose of the construction of the Mishkan. Rashi states that the Mishkan was erected as atonement for the *Chet Ha'egel*. Rashi explains that this is not contradicted by the fact that the command to build the Mishkan precedes the account of the *Chet Ha'egel*, even though the Mishkan was built afterward, since events are not described in chronological sequence in the Torah, as we explained above (see *Rashi, Shemot* 31:18).

The Ramban, however, explains the pesukim differently. At the beginning of parashat *Vayakheil* (35:1), he says that Moshe was commanded to erect the Mishkan before he broke the *luchot*. He writes similarly in parashat *Eikev* (*Devarim* 10:1). According to the Ramban's understanding, the Mishkan was the place for the *Shechinah* to rest and was built before the sin of the Golden Calf took place.

Logically, it is easier to accept Rashi's view, for we know that sacrifices atone for sin. Before the sin of the Golden Calf, Am Yisrael was at the level of Adam Harishon before the sin, as Chazal explain. Had they not sinned, they would have had no need for offerings. Only after they fell at the *Chet Ha'egel*, were they in need of the atonement which the sacrifices offered.

Rashi's understanding of the sequence of events helps us understand the words of the Zohar. Moshe's request to have his name erased from the Torah was after the *Chet Ha'egel*, and the command to build the Mishkan came only later. However, since the events of the Torah are not

written in chronological order, Moshe's request to have his name erased from it is written in this parashah, which describes the building of the Mishkan.

But, according to the Ramban, the command to erect the Mishkan was already given at Har Sinai, before the *Chet Ha'egel*. Moshe Rabbeinu asked to be erased from the Torah only after the *Chet Ha'egel*. Based on his words, it is difficult to understand the Zohar's explanation that Moshe's name was erased from this parashah (dealing with the construction of the Mishkan) as a result of this request, because his request was only made at a later date.

It would seem fitting to explain the Ramban's position regarding the omission of Moshe's name from the parashah in another way. There is a fundamental principle in faith in Hashem and in Avodat Hashem in general: A person should nullify himself completely. He should have no personal interests, neither for fortune nor for honor. Torah and mitzvot should be uppermost in his mind, and everything he does should be for Hashem's sake alone. We face a daily battle against ulterior motives and hidden agendas, which prevent us from having faith and perceiving Hashem's hand in our lives. Complete subjugation to His will, and total detachment from all personal motivations, will bring us to full faith in Hashem's Presence.

In France, a Jewish couple built a huge office building to be used for businesses and conferences. Over one thousand people attended its inauguration, held on a Motza'ei Shabbat. On the following day, an estimated five thousand people were expected at the grand opening. Over seventy percent of these were Jews. But the next day, at 6:45 a.m., one and a quarter hours before the grand opening, a gas line under the building burst. The entire structure fell like a house of cards. It was a miracle that no one was hurt. Even the gentile who was scheduled to open the doors at 7:00 a.m. arrived late, and was uninjured.

After some time, the couple who had erected this building came to me. They had placed all their hope in this edifice. The woman asked why

Hashem allowed this to happen. "We have invested much effort into many ventures, and they have given us nothing but grief. Some time ago, we bought a new car. On one of our first trips in it, we got a hefty fine. When we tried opening a new business, my husband was imprisoned. And now when we finally succeeded in erecting the building of our dreams, the entire thing crumbled into dust."

I told her that I had never met anyone so bitter against Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Instead of thanking Him for the tremendous miracle that occurred in everyone being spared from certain death, which prevented their children from becoming orphans, *rachmana litzlan*, they had grievances toward Hashem. On the contrary, they should have arranged a festive meal of thanks to Hashem for saving them.

This warped logic is the way of thinking of those who are far from Torah and full of personal interests, just like this couple, who sought only money. The glitter of their gold blinded them from seeing Hashem's miracles. They had only indictments against Hashem. Had they contemplated the matter, they would have realized that instead of being buried alive under the fallen structure, Hashem granted them the gift of life. They should have been full of gratitude toward Him, for giving them another chance to open a business and succeed, but instead they were shrouded in complaints.

In Geneva, I once noticed a magnificent burial plot in the cemetery. It was almost the size of a plaza. I asked my friend, who had accompanied me, "Whose grave is this?" To which he answered, "It is the grave of the philanthropist, Edmund Safra." I approached the grave and felt the words of Shlomo Hamelech come alive. He stated in Kohelet (9:4), "A live dog is better than a dead lion." I spoke to the deceased, "When you, Edmund, were alive, one had to wait for a year in order to gain an audience with you. Sometimes, the waiting period was two years, or even longer. Elderly Torah sages waited and waited, and merited seeing your face maybe once. Now, at your gravesite, no one has to wait to meet you. When one is alive, there is always the opportunity to accomplish more, but once one has died, there are no more chances."

Upon his tombstone was an epitaph which taught me a great lesson. It stated, “Here rests Edmund Safra, who founded and supported many Torah institutions and places of worship. He donated much charity to the poor and to widows.” There was no record of the network of banks that he financed. Only his good deeds were documented for posterity. In the world of truth, the fiscal and financial are revealed as false and fraudulent. Only Torah and mitzvot are significant. These are a person’s true acquisitions, which he brings along with him to his eternal home.

The couple should have rejoiced over the opportunity granted them by Hashem in keeping them alive. Had the building caved in an hour later, they would have met their end there. Instead of thanking Him for His goodness, they had complaints against Him.

The Mishnah in Berachot (9:5) states, “A person is obligated to bless for the bad just as he blesses for the good.” People naturally expect good things to happen to them, so they do not thank Hashem for them. But when something bad occurs, they immediately have objections. One should understand that Hashem is constantly doing acts of kindness with him. All he needs to do is open his eyes, and he will surely notice them.

Not long ago, in our community in Ashdod, a child was choking and near death. A person qualified in First Aid happened to pass by and revived the child, saving his life. In truth, with every breath that we breathe, Hashem is granting us the gift of life. Must we wait, *chas v'shalom*, for someone to choke in order to see His great acts of kindness? Only after we divest ourselves of all personal interests, can we perceive Hashem’s Divine Providence in our everyday lives and invest ourselves with belief in Him.

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting” (*Kohelet* 7:2). How is going to the house of mourning better than going to a house of feasting, where one celebrates a *seudat mitzvah*, such as Simchat Torah, or a *brit milah*?

True growth in spiritual matters comes from completely negating personal interests. One who goes to a simchah may have personal

motives. He may go in order to meet friends, or for the good meal he expects there. Or he may feel that if he attends his friend's simchah, his friend is likely to attend his. But one does not visit a house of mourning for any of these reasons. He comes solely for the sake of the mitzvah – to console the mourners. This is why it is preferable to attend a house of mourning over a house of feasting.

I have found that specifically in the house of mourning, people are amenable to hearing words of rebuke. Many return to teshuvah in this manner. This is a place where everyone lacks personal interests. Observing death brings one to the realization that everyone eventually meets his end. This arouses the heart to teshuvah, opening it to words of Torah and reproach.

I had the opportunity to observe Divine intervention at work in the following story. I was invited to a family dinner. I originally thought it was a simple family meal, but when I arrived, I found a quorum of people there. Then I remembered that the date was the 7th of Adar, the day of Moshe Rabbeinu's death. I asked that the meal be a *hilula* in memory of Moshe Rabbeinu. As we were speaking words of Torah, one of the people began crying. I asked him why he was crying. He explained that the night before, he had dreamed that he participated in the *hilula* of Moshe Rabbeinu, and now his dream was actualizing. This made him very excited. This was an act of Divine Providence. One who does not keep his eyes open and his heart subjected to Hashem is liable to ridicule this notion. But one who is completely subjugated to faith and Torah clearly sees Hashem's hand, with every step he takes.

The following seemingly small incident that took place in my home also illustrates this point. It taught me just how far Hashem's supervision extends, even to the tiniest creatures. Every Friday, I abandon all of my public obligations and help out with the household chores in honor of Shabbat. I spend my time then with my children. This is an unbroken rule, which I inherited from my father, zy"a. Erev Shabbat is completely sanctified for preparing the house for Shabbat.

One Friday, as I was getting ready for Shabbat, I noticed a small ant making its way downward toward the basement. I stood, entranced, watching it wend its winding way. Our household helper wished to kill it, but I refused to allow this. I stood guard, keeping my eye on it. When I was called away, I asked someone else to look after it. Finally, after two hours, I saw it as it arrived at the basement. There, a spider sat in ambush. It immediately attacked the ant and devoured it.

I stood awestruck. Hashem had prepared this ant already during the summer months. He knew that when winter would come, the spider would find refuge in my basement. One Friday, it would be without food. Therefore, Hashem saw to it to send this ant directly into its path. I thought to myself that if Hashem takes such care to feed spiders, how much more so does he care for us. Why, then, do we fret over our livelihood? Specifically Torah scholars should be confident that Hashem will provide for them, as the Chatam Sofer states that Hashem gives extra protection for those who learn Torah and teach it to others.

My father, zy”a, said that one may never say that anything in this world is coincidence, as Chazal (*Chulin* 7b) teach, “One does not stub his finger in this world, unless it was so decreed in the Upper World.” Even the smallest of actions takes place only by Hashem’s desire.

Everything a person does is only through Divine help. Why does Hashem grant a person the ability to move his limbs, then, when he transgresses and blatantly goes against His word?

Hashem gives everyone the power of free choice. When a person transgresses, aside from the actual sin itself, he is, so to speak, burdening Hashem with the added trouble of giving him the ability to do as he wishes. Woe unto those who “bother” Hashem to bring illegitimate children into the world, even though eventually they will become purified in the days of Mashiach (*Kiddushin* 72b). The reason for the multitude of miracles which Hashem performed both in Mitzrayim and in the Wilderness was in order to teach us for all generations that nothing is by chance.

A person who refuses to subject himself to Hashem's Divine Providence will ignore the miracles manifested in everything around him. He will refuse to see His hand in anything in this world, and will fail to learn the appropriate lessons from all that occurs.

Rabbeinu, Rabbi Gershon Liebman, zt"l, would often relate the following about Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zy"a. Once, late at night, he found a shoemaker hunched over, working by the light of a candle. He asked him why he was working so late into the night. The shoemaker responded, "As long as the candle burns, I can still make repairs." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter became greatly shaken by this incident and repeated the man's words to his host. He said that we, too, must repair ourselves as long as the candle of Hashem, meaning our *neshamah*, burns within us.

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; see its ways and grow wise" (*Mishlei* 6:6). The ant has a very short life-span. Nevertheless, it spends all its days collecting storehouses of food. Chazal explain (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:2) that the reason for this is because the ant hopes that maybe Hashem will have mercy and prolong its days, and it will indeed need all of its stores of food. If we use our good sense and negate all personal interests, we will learn much from the ant and the shoemaker. How much more is there to learn from all things in Creation!

Moshe Rabbeinu was our loyal shepherd. He dedicated himself to Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. He did not keep his Torah knowledge only for himself, but constantly shared it with the nation (see *Nedarim* 38a). Most people do not act in this way, including Torah scholars. Many learn Torah only to further their own growth, and refrain from bringing merit to others by sharing their vast storehouses of wisdom with them. In the future, when they will come before the Heavenly Court, they will be shown their rightful places, which they earned by their toil in Torah. But, alas! the seats adjoining theirs will be woefully empty. They will then be told that these places could have been filled, had they only fulfilled their responsibility by including others in their Torah studies.

Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential servant, subjected himself to others. His entire objective was to transmit Torah to Bnei Yisrael. He always fled arrogance, which is abominated by Hashem. I once met a man in a faraway country. He was unusually tall, and additionally, he had a very long, full beard. He approached me and said that everyone stares at him when he passes them in the street. I asked him what he prefers: that people should value his inner content, or content themselves with admiring his height and his beard. He understood my message, a hint to beware of haughtiness.

“Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur” (*Tehillim* 93:1). Pride belongs solely to Hashem. What does a mere mortal have to be proud of? Moshe Rabbeinu, humblest of all men, devoted his life to teaching Torah to Am Yisrael. The pasuk in Devarim (33:4) states, “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” All of Moshe’s undertakings were in order to bequeath the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. His sole desire was to nurture Am Yisrael in the way of Torah and mitzvot.

He was so devoted to the nation that he cried out, “But if not, erase me now from Your book” (*Shemot* 32:32). He preferred to be forgotten forever, and even die for the sake of his nation. Likewise, he would have been overjoyed, had all of the nation become prophets like himself, as the pasuk in Bamidbar states (11:29), “Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets.”

According to this, the Ramban explains the reason for the exclusion of Moshe’s name from parashat *Tetzaveh*. Moshe considered himself null and void, unworthy of being included in the Torah. He felt his name was not even eligible to be written in the Torah. Therefore, after the *Chet Ha’egel*, Moshe told Hashem that the Torah He was giving to Bnei Yisrael belonged only to them, and not to him or his tribe. It was thus fitting for his name to be removed from it, in order to prove that it belonged to the Jewish people collectively.

The Ponovezher Rav, zy”a, was likewise dedicated to Am Yisrael. He would encourage even the young children, nullifying himself before them. He once entered the institution he had founded for children who had survived the Holocaust and asked which pasuk they say at the conclusion of their prayers. It is known that when a person will face his future judgment before the Heavenly Tribunal, he will be asked his name. Out of sheer fright, he will forget what it is. A method of remembering one’s name in this future trial is to recite a pasuk at the conclusion of Shemoneh Esrei, which opens and closes with the letters of one’s name (see *Yalkut Yashar*). For example, for the name **David**, one can recite the pasuk in Tehillim (105:4), “*Dirshu et Hashem v’uzo, bakshu fanav tamid.*” After each child told him his pasuk, the Rav asked how often they mention their names each day. They said tens or maybe hundreds of times a day. Then he said, “See how great is the power of the Torah! Using one’s name morning and evening, every hour of the day, is not a guarantee to remember it on the Great Day of Judgment. But a pasuk of the Torah, recited just three times a day, at the end of each of the three prayers, will help a person remember his name.”

It seems that the reason for this is that we use our names throughout the day for mundane purposes. We call people by their names to come and eat, etc. Only by means of relating the pasuk for spiritual matters can we be ensured that we will remember our names when we arrive on High. The World to Come is reached only by means of sanctity, as the *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), “Your righteous deed will precede you.”

This may be why Moshe wished to have his name excluded from the Torah. He may have felt that it was now desecrated and not worthy to be written there. This was all due to his tremendous humility. “The way in which a man wishes to go, there he is led” (*Makkot* 10b). He was granted his desire and, at least in this parashah, his name does not appear.

But the truth is that Moshe, who devoted himself to teaching Torah to Am Yisrael, nullified his ego to such an extent that he merited that the entire Torah was called by his name. Chazal teach us (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1) that whatever any Torah student will discover was already said to

Moshe. Therefore, Hashem said (*Shabbat* 101b), “Moshe, you spoke well.” And even though Moshe’s name is deleted from parashat *Tetzaveh*, the Torah states, “Now you shall command.” Hashem still included Moshe in the Torah, after his request to be deleted from it, referring to him indirectly with the word “you,” even while not mentioning his name.

“They shall take for you pure olive oil.” These words also refer to Moshe. The letters of the word **תְמַשׁ** (oil) contain the same letters as the word **נֶשֶׁמֶת** (soul). All of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael are included in the *neshamah* of Moshe Rabbeinu (*Eitz Chaim* 32:1). The words “olive oil, pressed,” refer to the nullification and crushing of one’s ego. In the merit of his self-negation, Moshe Rabbeinu merited that the “oil,” the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael, were included in him. He thereby merited the end of the pasuk, “for illumination.” From him, all of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael were enlightened with the radiance of the Torah.

We should learn a lesson from this. If a person does not nullify himself to the words of Torah and *emunah*, his heart cannot be open to accepting them. This once happened when I delivered a shiur in Paris. I recognized one of the attendees as a man who used to thirst for Torah. He was sleepy, his face downcast, and not at all enlivened by the words of Torah. Throughout the lecture, he kept looking for ways to occupy himself. I pounded on the lectern, and this woke him up. I asked, “Why did Hashem see fit to give the Torah in the Wilderness? After all of the plagues He brought upon the Egyptians, was He too weak to bring them first into Eretz Yisrael to give them the Torah there?! Furthermore, Targum Yonatan says on the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:4), ‘I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me,’ that Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael, together with their livestock, on eagles’ wings to the Land of Israel. They brought the *korban* Pesach there, and then returned to Egypt. This would be hard to believe, if it was not stated in the Targum Yonatan, but it is spelled out clearly. Hashem could have brought them in this manner to Eretz Yisrael in order to give them the Torah there.

“Hashem wished to teach us and our children forever that just as the desert is devoid of Torah, every place in the world without Torah is

desolate, full of decadence and destruction. A person should know that if he does not thirst for words of Torah, his heart is empty like a wasteland, with no connection at all to Torah. We must behave with an opposing mindset. The *Tanna* in *Avot* teaches (1:4), ‘And drink in their words thirstily.’ This is by means of subjecting ourselves completely to the Torah and clinging to it. All of our aspirations should be to acquire greater levels in Torah.

“I was amazed at the diligence of my master and mentor, Rabbi Binyomin Zev Kaufman, shlita. When I wished to speak with him, his family told me that he was available only from 7:00-8:30 p.m. During the day, he was in the Kollel in Manchester. He would come home for this short amount of time, and then return to his studies until 12:30 a.m. Then he would retire. All this at the age of eighty years old! He was so attached to Torah and subjected himself to it totally. He constantly yearned to learn more and more. This should also be our desire.”

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe’s name is not mentioned in parashat *Tetzaveh*. The Zohar explains that this is because he asked to be erased from the Torah after the *Chet Ha’egel*.
- ♦ Rashi and the Ramban differ in their opinions regarding the purpose of the Mishkan. Rashi states that it atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Ramban claims that it is one of the 613 mitzvot, and even preceded the *Chet Ha’egel*.
- ♦ The words of the Zohar concur with Rashi’s position, which is that Moshe asked Hashem to erase his name from the Torah before the Mishkan was constructed. Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to construct the Mishkan only after the *Chet Ha’egel*. But according to the Ramban, who states that Hashem commanded them to construct the Mishkan before Moshe made this request, it is difficult to explain the reason for the exclusion of his name from this parashah.

- ◆ A person is enjoined to nullify himself before Hashem and rid himself of any self-interest. He should strive to see Hashem's hand in everything. One need not wait for an accident to occur, *chas v'shalom*, in order to perceive Hashem's Providence.
- ◆ Where there is self-negation, there is elevation. Therefore, it is preferable to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, even a *seudat mitzvah*.
- ◆ Hashem is concerned to feed even the lowly spider. All the more so does He see to our every need, especially to the needs of the Torah scholars. This is discussed by the Chatam Sofer.
- ◆ My father, zy”a, would say that it is forbidden to say that anything in the world happens by chance.
- ◆ One who is divested of all self-interest is capable of learning *mussar* from everything. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter learned from a simple shoemaker that as long as one is alive, he has the potential to improve himself.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu completely devoted himself to the needs of Am Yisrael. This is unlike those who refrain from teaching Torah to others. They will be held accountable for this in the future.
- ◆ According to the Ramban, Moshe's name was omitted from parashat *Tetzaveh*, because he felt so humble that he did not want his name recorded in the Torah, to prove that it belonged to the Jewish people collectively.
- ◆ The Ponevezher Rav stated that in the future, a person will remember his name only by means of the pasuk associated with it. Mentioning one's name countless times a day will not accomplish this, for it is used at these times for mundane purposes.
- ◆ The entire Torah is called by Moshe's name (Torat Moshe), for he sacrificed himself for the sake of the nation.
- ◆ The words, “Now you shall command” refer to Moshe Rabbeinu. The oil refers to the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael. The words “for you” mean for Moshe. “Pressed” indicates his total submission to others. And the words

“for illumination” refer to the Torah, written in his name, due to his tremendous humility.

- ♦ The Targum Yonatan states that Hashem carried Bnei Yisrael, together with their cattle, on eagles’ wings to Eretz Yisrael. They brought the *korban Pesach* there.
- ♦ The Torah was given in the Desert. Without Torah, a person or a place is desolate and deserted, full of desecration and depravity.

Garments of Torah

“And you shall speak to all the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with a spirit of wisdom, and they shall make the vestments of Aharon, to sanctify him to minister to Me”

(Shemot 28:3)

Hashem commanded Moshe to search for people invested with wisdom and appoint them to prepare the holy vestments of Aharon, the Kohen Gadol. Why did someone need to be wise in order to sew these clothes? Any professional tailor is capable of fashioning beautiful garments.

As an example of the exalted level which the clothing must attain, let us look at the *Me'il* that Aharon wore. It had bells at the bottom. As long as the nation heard their tinkling when Aharon was in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, they knew he was faring well. As soon as it ceased, they began to worry and checked up on him.

Apart from this task, the bells were there to remind the Kohen before Whom he was standing and serving in the Beit Hamikdash. The bells constantly rang in his ears, peeling away the layers of indifference and

laxity. He was always enjoined to be meticulous in his work, and take care to do it properly. This is borne out by the pasuk in Tehillim (16:8), “I have set Hashem before me always.” Likewise, our Sages exhort us (*Berachot* 28b), “Know before Whom you stand.” A person must constantly remember Hashem and be scrupulous with his actions, as if he were standing before a king. If we are full of fear and trepidation when confronting a king of flesh and blood, how much more so must we fear Hashem, King of all kings.

The clothes of the Kohen Gadol were not merely physical garb. They were saturated with *yirat Shamayim*, which would become transferred to the wearer. This would help the Kohen reach great heights in Avodat Hashem and be meticulous in his Service in the Mikdash. He would constantly remember before Whom he stands. The Torah infused purity and holiness into these garments by the mere fact that they are mentioned in it.

This is why only men of great wisdom and knowledge of Hashem were chosen for the job of sewing the garments. Their magnificent *midot* would be transferred to the clothes they made, weaving a level of loftiness in Avodat Hashem into the garments, so that no mishaps would occur through them, *chalilah*.

The Chozeh of Lublin, zy”a, was once presented with a commentary on the Torah. He was asked to give his approbation to the sefer. He studied it for a few moments and then put it aside. When asked why he did this, he responded that although the sefer was replete with Torah wisdom, it lacked *yirat Shamayim*. The writer, apparently, was knowledgeable in many aspects of Torah, but his writings testified to his lack of fear of Heaven. The Chozeh of Lublin could not bring himself to approve the sefer. David Hamelech taught us (*Tehillim* 111:10), “The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem.” Torah knowledge cannot endure without fear of Hashem.

In a similar incident, the sefer of the Ba’al HaTanya, zy”a, was brought before Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a. After taking one look at it, he

proclaimed, “This sefer does not need my approbation, for it is saturated with *yirat Shamayim*, as is evident in each and every line.”

After 120 years, a person will stand before the Heavenly Court. If he toiled in Torah throughout his life, he will be dressed in the garb of the Torah scholars. This is actually the cloak of Torah, which he devoted his life to master. Each and every item of clothing will testify to what extent he sanctified himself for Torah, designating it as his guiding light, as the pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), “Your righteous deed (the Torah) will precede you.”

In Summary

- ♦ It would seem sufficient to appoint professional tailors to prepare the clothing for the Kohanim. Why did the Torah command Moshe to seek “wise men” for their task? The garments infused their wearers with faith and fear of Heaven, reminding them before Whom they stood. Therefore, it was imperative that their fashioners were men of spiritual caliber. Their exalted attributes would become absorbed in the holy vestments, helping the Kohen to do his work properly.
- ♦ After 120 years, one will come before the Heavenly Tribunal. One who invested his days with Torah will be garbed with the vestments of the Sages, the Torah, which will testify to his virtues.

The Tamid Offering

“You shall offer the one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep shall you offer in the afternoon”

(*Shemot 29:39*)

The Ben Ish Chai (*Shanah Rishonah, Pinchas*) explains the reason for the two *tamid* offerings (תְּמִיד). The morning *olah* atoned for sins committed at night, whereas the evening offering atoned for sins done during the day. Since these offerings were purchased with public funds, they were able to atone for the sins of the entire nation. He adds that the word עולת (offering) contains the same letters as the word תולע (worm). These are negative forces which emanate from the *kelippah*. They worm their way into our lives, nibbling away at everything in their path. The power of the *tamid* weakens them, rendering them incapable of harming us and ultimately annihilating us.

Hashem created the world in perfect synchronization. Just as there is a negative force called תולע, there is a power of purity by that very same name, commissioned with the job of preventing the power of impurity from prevailing. The good force of תולע gains nourishment by the nation offering the *tamid* offerings (תְּמִיד) in the morning and evening. In the merit of this sacrifice, the good can eradicate the negative one. This is the reason for Hashem's assurance to His nation (*Yeshayahu 41:14*), "Fear not, O worm of Jacob." He tells us not to be afraid of the תולע. This is the *kelippah* and the powers of impurity. We, too, contain the traits of the תולע, with which we can strike our enemies. (See the Ben Ish Chai for further elaboration.)

Chazal ask (*Nedarim 81a; Shabbat 119b; Bava Metzia 30b*), "What was the cause for the destruction of the Land?" The *tamid* offering should have had the ability to grant power to the good תולע to fend off the *kelippah*. How were the gentiles able to destroy the Land? Additionally,

Yerushalayim was home to tremendous *talmidei chachamim*, men of *ruach hakodesh*. Their greatness is unimaginable. They nurtured the Administering Angels with their good deeds, enabling them to combat the evil forces and preventing the gentiles from destroying the Beit Hamikdash (*Midrash Zuta, Eichah* 1:7). How could the destruction, then, have happened?

All the Torah Sages and prophets were asked this question, but no one had a fitting response. Until Hashem Himself answered (*Yirmeyahu* 9:12), “Because of their forsaking My Torah.” The Gemara expounds (*Nedarim* 81a) that they did not make a blessing prior to their Torah study. Also, they prevented the young children from learning Torah, and they were strict in their interpersonal relationships. Their stock of animals used for the *tamid* offering became depleted. Since this *korban* atoned for sins done during both the day and night, they were left without atonement, and therefore without protection.

Am Yisrael overcame their enemies only as long as they brought the **עליה התמיד**. It symbolized **עליה** (elevation). This injected power into the **תולע** of *kedushah*. This is necessary on a constant basis, as inferred from the fact that it is called *tamid*: a “constant” *olah* offering. We might compare this to an airplane during take-off. As long as it ascends, it gains altitude. If it were to remain at one level, it would lose altitude and plunge downward. When Am Yisrael ceased bringing the *korban tamid*, the **תולע** of purity had no strength to overcome the *kelippah* of impurity. This led to their downward spiral, empowering the nations to destroy Yerushalayim.

The *korban tamid* terminated on the 17th of Tammuz, for by then, they had no sheep left (*Arachin* 11b; *Rashi*, *ibid.*). But instead of pondering why they had arrived at this sad state, they remained placid and clung stubbornly to their wicked ways.

A mother who notices that her son is not developing properly, or is inclined to sleep more than the usual amount, immediately suspects that something is amiss. She rushes to seek medical attention, in order to

discover the cause of the problem. One who perceives that he is not ascending as he should, but, rather, constantly trudging along the same tired trail, should concern himself with this and not rest until he has found a remedy.

Hashem has created people so that their hair turns white as they age. Likewise, older people's faces do not remain smooth and beautiful, as in their youth. Why did Hashem make people become frail and weak before they pass away? Signs of old age are a signal to awaken a person. They inform him that he has no immunity against death, and his days are limited. The day will come when he will bid good-bye to this world and be buried in the ground. Bearing this in mind, every Jew should awaken himself to utilize his life for Torah study and keeping mitzvot. The day will come when he will be bereft of the opportunity to ascend spiritually. He will be judged by what he attained up until that point, without ever being able to change again.

At the time of the *churban*, Am Yisrael should have contemplated why they were being denied the chance of offering the *tamid* sacrifice. The lack of livestock signified that they had damaged their Torah study and had not fulfilled it properly. But since Am Yisrael remained unaffected, and did not seek ways to maintain the **תולע** of *kedushah*, the powers of impurity prevailed, destroying Yerushalayim.

Nowadays, when we neither have the Beit Hamikdash nor the ability to bring the **עלות התמיד**, every Jewish person should ensure that he ascends (**עליה**) in Torah, constantly examining whether his deeds need improvement. This gives increased strength to the powers of purity, enabling them to combat the negative forces.

By way of *remez*, we might add the following. The *korban tamid* refers to *bitul temidi* (constant self-nullification). One should constantly subject himself to the Torah. The word **תולע** shares letters with the word **התעלות** (elevation). When a person negates his own self-interests, he paves his path toward elevation in *kedushah*.

In Summary

- ◆ The Ben Ish Chai writes that the *tamid* offering of the morning atoned for sins committed at night, and the *tamid* of the evening atoned for sins done during the day. The word **עולה** (offering) is closely connected with the word **תולע**, the name of a destructive force. Parallel to this force, is a positive power by the same name. Bringing these *korbanot* empowered the good forces.
- ◆ Chazal did not understand the reason for the *churban*, until Hashem said it was because the people forsook the Torah. How was the angel of destruction able to destroy Yerushalayim? On the 17th of Tammuz, they stopped bringing sacrifices, because they had no sheep left to offer. This gave strength to the negative forces, called **תולע**, granting it the power to destroy Yerushalayim.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael were charged with not scrutinizing their actions in order to discover the reason for the lack of sheep. It is incumbent upon every person to examine his actions on a daily basis, making whatever improvements necessary.

Gems on Parashat Tetzaveh

The Precedence of the Oil

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot 27:20*)

The very first item which Hashem tells Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to contribute toward the Mishkan is oil for illumination. Why doesn't the Torah begin with fashioning the vessels of the Mishkan, such as the Aron?

Whenever one mixes oil with water, the oil rises to the top. I recall my father, a”h, often filling many cups with oil and lighting them. He even said that if he had eye problems, it was due to the smoke of the lights. He did all this in memory of the tzaddikim.

Once, a man by the name of Mr. Amram ben Chamu came to my father when he was lighting the candles. This man stated that he had a weak heart, and the doctors had warned him that if he were to have another heart attack, his heart would stop completely. My father asked him if he liked the number twenty-six, to which the man answered yes. My father blessed him with another twenty-six years of life.

A few years ago, this man had another heart attack. His wife called me up, asking me to visit him in the hospital. I asked to talk to him on the phone. He told me, “You should know that I am at the end.”

I asked why he was talking like this.

He answered, “Your father blessed me many years ago that I would live another twenty-six years. These years will end this coming Monday. This is how I know that I am nearing my end.”

He indeed died the following Monday.

See how great is the power of faith! All this was in merit of the oil which my father would light.

Hashem asked Bnei Yisrael to contribute the oil first. Oil alludes to the *neshamah*, as is hinted by the fact that the word נֶשֶׁמָה contains the letters of נִשְׁמָה. The *neshamah* will one day return on High. The request to contribute oil for the Mishkan hints that we should offer our *neshamah* to Hashem’s service, keeping it pure and unsullied. The words “They shall take for you (Moshe) pure olive oil” indicates that Bnei Yisrael should take their *neshamot* and raise them to the level of Moshe’s *neshamah*. Hashem had no need for the light of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. Rather, its purpose was to hint to the *neshamah*. Just as Bnei Yisrael donated oil, pressed and processed, so must we take care of the *neshamah* within us, spending our days in the Beit Hamidrash, allowing the light of Torah to illuminate our lives.

How do we “press and process” the *neshamah*? By learning Torah, increasing our *yirat Shamayim*, and becoming humble. This makes the *neshamah* beloved by Hashem. Hashem cannot tolerate an arrogant person (*Sotah* 5a). Oil may seem to be a small item, but Hashem requested it first, for it alludes to the essence of our *avodah*, which is to elevate the *neshamah*. The body of a person is mostly water. The *neshamah*, containing the same letters as the word *shemen* (oil), must rise above the physical components of man, and rule it. It should never, *chas v’shalom*, become submerged in the materialism of the body.

I witnessed the following incident in Ashdod. A man, who had passed away the previous year in Lyon, was brought to Eretz Yisrael for burial. I told the burial society that I felt there was water in the coffin. They explained to me that the entire body turns to water. Since it was in the coffin an entire year, there was water in the coffin. When they opened it, they found this to be the case. Inside of this liquid mass called a body, Hashem has placed oil, the *neshamah*. We must see to it that this *neshamah* floats upward, becoming radiant through the Torah and mitzvot which we fulfill.

The Menorah – A Hint to the Beit Hamikdash

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot 27:20*)

The Ba'al Haturim writes that the word כהית (pressed) is numerically equivalent to 410 and 420. These sums allude to the first Beit Hamikdash, which stood for 410 years, and the second Beit Hamikdash, which stood for 420 years. The mitzvah of kindling the Menorah would last for this amount of time. The author of Toldot Yitzchak adds (Parashat Tetzaveh) that the words “for illumination” refer to the third Beit Hamikdash, which will stand forever, hinted by the word “continually.”

Based on this, we might venture to explain why the Greeks, at the time of Chanukah, merely defiled the oil, and did not completely destroy the Beit Hamikdash. They actually wished to spoil the third Beit Hamikdash,

which is destined to stand forever. Since the third Beit Hamikdash can be erected only after the full amount of כהית (830) years of the two previous Batei Mikdash, the Greeks, in their diabolical and depraved minds, developed a devilish scheme. They defiled the Menorah and extinguished its lights. This would delay the building of the third Beit Hamikdash.

The great miracle that occurred with the flask of oil was that Bnei Yisrael continued to kindle the Menorah, returning the sum of כהית to its rightful place. They thereby salvaged the third Beit Hamikdash, which will stand eternally.

In light of this, we can resolve the question of the Beit Yosef (*Orach Chaim* 670). He asks why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days. Since there was enough oil to burn for one full day, it seems that the miracle occurred only when the Menorah remained lit for another seven days.

We can answer according to our previous thought: The actual discovery of the flask of oil and kindling the Menorah on the first day was the great miracle that will ensure the preservation of the third Beit Hamikdash, granting Am Yisrael revival and eternal survival. This miracle began on the first day of Chanukah.

The Torah Is Not in Heaven

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(*Shemot* 27:20)

The word שמן (oil) contains the same letters as the word משנה (Mishnah). Am Yisrael are supposed to take the Mishnah and study it.

They are meant to delve into all areas of the Torah. This will connect all of their *neshamot*. The word נֶשֶׁמֶת is also associated with the words משנה שמן and תצוה. The word תצוה (you shall command) contains the same letters as the word צוותא (together). When Bnei Yisrael learn Torah in unity, they bring together their *neshamot*. This causes the *Shechinah* to rest among them.

The word זית (olive) can be divided into ז-ת. The letters ז are numerically equivalent to the word טוב (good). Good refers to Torah. The letter ת equals four hundred, parallel to the four hundred *kelippot* of tumah, prevalent in our world. The study of Torah in unity weakens them. This study connects all of the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael and makes pure oil of the dregs.

“You ascended on High, you have taken captives, You took gifts of man” (*Tehillim* 68:19). The Arizal says that this psalm refers to Moshe Rabbeinu, who ascended to *Shamayim* and returned with the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The word שבוי (captives) is the acronym of the name שמעון בר יוחאי. What was the reason for Moshe doing this? Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) represents the secrets contained in the Torah. As soon as his *neshamah* descended into this world, all of the hidden aspects of Torah descended with him; they were no longer in Heaven. This is the meaning of the pasuk (*Devarim* 30:12), “It is not in heaven.” Torah is down here with us on earth, accessible to all who wish to learn it (*Yoma* 72b; *Kiddushin* 66a).

The fact that all of the Torah’s deepest secrets, which are found in the mystical work of the Zohar, were brought down to earth with the *luchot*, obligates us to study the Torah in-depth. We cannot release ourselves from this obligation by claiming the Torah is too difficult to acquire. All of the facets of the Torah were handed down to us when the Torah was given, and are thus within everyone’s reach.

Everyone Must Sanctify Himself

“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually”

(Shemot 27:20)

Moshe's name is not mentioned explicitly in this parashah, but is only referred to obliquely. What is the reason for this? Also, what is the reason for the word “you” in this pasuk? It could have been written “Now command...”

Chazal teach us (*Berachot* 33b) that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven. Every person, even the smallest, has the ability to ascend to the heights of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. Since the Torah is a book of advice for good living, full of counsel in perfect service of Hashem, it brings us a sample of a parashah in which Moshe's name is missing. Everyone who studies it can relate to it in a personal way, as though it were speaking to him directly. The word “you” is addressing every member of the nation. Everyone should maintain his position and protect his *neshamah*, keeping it at the level of pure olive oil.

Maintaining the purity of the *neshamah* requires constant toil. This is the *avodah* of the heart. Man must constantly be connected to Hashem, feeling united with all of Am Yisrael. Specifically in our times, much work and sacrifice is demanded, in order that we not fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*, who wishes to cool off the fire of our enthusiasm in serving Hashem. He would like us to slip on the ice of coolness and indifference to all that is sacred.

Yosef Hatzaddik, one of the seven exalted guests on Sukkot (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Chag HaSukkot* 3), stood firm in his faith, refusing to surrender to the abominations of the Egyptians. Even though he was away from his

father, Yaakov, he fortified himself to withstand temptation in the form of Potiphar's wife. Hashem saw his great efforts and helped him, by placing the image of his father before his eyes, protecting him from sin (see *Sotah* 36b).

Conversely, we find that Yeravam, who was a descendant of Yosef, was a rasha. He was originally a tzaddik (*Sanhedrin* 102a), but fell to this low level because he did not exert himself to overcome his *Yetzer Hara* and protect his *neshamah*, upholding its purity as pure olive oil. He ended up losing everything.

Ki Tisa

The Half-Shekel

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: When you will take a census of the Children of Israel according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, and there will be no plague among them when counting them”

(Shemot 30:11-12)

Hashem asked Moshe to command Am Yisrael to bring the half-shekel in order to count them. This half-shekel was considered atonement for Bnei Yisrael, which would protect them from an epidemic that could occur if they were counted in the wrong way. Further in the parashah, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael about Shabbat, as the pasuk states (*Shemot 31:14*), “You shall observe the Shabbat, for it is holy to you; its desecrators shall be put to death.” Afterward, the sin of the Golden Calf is recorded. When Bnei Yisrael discovered that Moshe was tarrying, when, according to their calculations he should have descended, they hurried to fashion a golden calf, coronating it as their deity and leader.

What is the connection between the mitzvah of bringing the half-shekel coin and the sin of the Golden Calf? And what is the overall connection

between Shabbat and all the other subjects of the parashah? The topics of the half-*shekel* coin and the *Chet Ha'egel* are written in the Torah near each other to teach us a *mussar* lesson. Every single penny a person owns must be sanctified for pure purposes, for the sake of doing mitzvot. But when a person wastes his money on inconsequential and trivial matters, even the insignificant sum of a half-*shekel*, he is wasting his life. One coin is added to another, and the cumulative coins accumulate to destroy his soul and cool the fire of *yirat Shamayim* within him. He can eventually come to deny Hashem, just as we see with Am Yisrael at the *Chet Ha'egel*.

A person might think, "What can I accomplish with a simple coin? How can I possibly do *chessed* with such a meaningless amount of money?" On the contrary, constantly giving even a small sum accustoms a person to good habits and character traits. This has the ability to carve *yirat Shamayim* deep in his heart. Chazal in Avot (3:15) state, "Everything depends on the abundance of deeds." The Rambam (*ibid.*) explains that it is preferable for a person to give a small amount to charity many times, than to give a one-time donation of a large amount. Opening one's hand trains him to open his heart. Constant giving, even in small doses, develops within a person the trait of giving and purifies his *midot*.

We unfortunately see people who are prepared to invest millions in luxuries and frivolities, always concerned to increase their possessions. But when they are approached with the request to donate *tzedakah* and do acts of kindness with their resources, they begin to pinch their pennies, paralyzed from opening their purses and sharing with those less fortunate. Man should take to heart the message that abundance of materialism and investment in trivial matters are liable to affect him negatively. These idols of worldliness are nothing but that – idolatry. Conversely, a person who donates to charity, even a small amount, becomes accustomed to giving and is elevated in character. This is the connection between the half-*shekel* and the sin of the Golden Calf. See the woeful effect of those who throw their money to the winds of nothingness!

The mitzvah of Shabbat is mentioned between the sections of the half-*shekel* and the Golden Calf in order to teach us the following. One

who is vigilant to invest his money only in causes of *kedushah*, proves that he fears Hashem. He is putting his money where his mouth is, by donating to charity and ascribing to *yirat Shamayim*. This trait will help him be punctilious in *Shemirat Shabbat*. On the other hand, one who invests in ventures of materialism will slowly but surely lose every last vestige of *yirat Shamayim*. The day will not be long in coming when he will find himself desecrating Shabbat in public. *Shemirat Shabbat* is the symbol of our faith. Our faith is built up, step by step, by our minuscule, daily acts. Choosing where to allocate one's funds testifies to his level of fear of Hashem. This fear brings him to sanctify Shabbat, or, *chalilah*, to desecrate it.

"A mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23). If a person wants his mitzvot to illuminate his soul, he must fulfill the condition, "Torah is light." He must first and foremost enlighten his eyes with the study of Torah. Only through exertion in Torah study is one guaranteed that his mitzvot will be pure and luminous. This is in contrast to those who do mitzvot by rote, without experiencing their sweet taste. A candle without light has little value. Similarly, doing mitzvot without the fire of Torah is cold and empty. It is a mitzvah deprived of the flame of enthusiasm, lacking in value.

At times, one acquires eagerness and excitement in Avodat Hashem specifically in the seemingly small matters. The issues that seem worth about a half-shekel accumulate until they are united in strength, enough to purchase a *korban nedavah*. Great levels in Avodat Hashem are acquired by means of small acts, often shoved into a corner of man's heart. But these acts are actually the cornerstone of his growth, for they eventually raise him to exalted levels.

Concerning the half-shekel: "The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease" (*Shemot* 30:15). In order to contribute to charity, one need not be wealthy. Even a small contribution is helpful, for it is the thought that counts. The goodwill generated by the generosity of man's act outshines the glitter of the gold he gives. There is nothing which stands in the way of man's desire.

I can testify about myself that at the beginning, it was very difficult for me to part with huge sums for the sake of charity. I would always give a small amount. After a while, I discovered an interesting phenomenon. No matter how much I gave, my money did not become diminished. Therefore, I decided to raise the bar, and increased the sums distributed for charitable purposes. Even after doing this, I still saw blessing in my money, not noticing any lack. This reality strengthens the words of Chazal. Not only does *tzedakah* not reduce a person's assets, but on the contrary, it brings blessing upon them. This is what our Sages expound (*Ta'anit* 9a) on the pasuk, "Surely you shall tithe." They say, "Tithe in order that you become rich." The two are interconnected, as is hinted by the fact that the word תִּתְعַשֵּׂר – you shall tithe, is similar to the word תִּתְعַשֵּׂר – you shall become rich.

In Summary

- ◆ What is the connection between the mitzvah of the half-shekel coin and the sin of the Golden Calf? Additionally, why is the mitzvah of Shabbat mentioned here in Parashat *Ki Tisa*? Every simple penny, even the value of a half-shekel, must be sanctified for matters of *kedushah*. One coin adds up with another. Spending one's money on mundane matters is liable to result in a catastrophe, even reaching the proportions of the *Chet Ha'egel*.
- ◆ Donating even small sums to charity accustoms a person to the trait of giving and to good *middot* in general.
- ◆ Shabbat is the symbol of *emunah*, which is acquired by seemingly small acts, such as contributing a half-shekel to charitable causes. Also, one who invests in causes of *kedushah* fortifies his *yirat Shamayim*, which will assist him in being punctilious with the mitzvot connected with Shabbat.
- ◆ Oftentimes, the zest and zeal so beneficial for Avodat Hashem are acquired in small acts, which accumulate over time. This is demonstrated by the half-shekel, which, when combined with the others, provided the funds for the *korban nedavah*.

- ◆ “The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease.” This pasuk teaches us that nothing stands in the way of a person’s will. It is not the amount of funds which sets the tone, rather, the amount of goodwill.

Maintaining Perfection

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: When you will take a census of the Children of Israel according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, and there will be no plague among them when counting them”

(Shemot 30:11-12)

The Torah prefaces recording the *Chet Ha’egel* with the topic of the half-shekel, the washbasin, the oil for anointing, and the ketoret. It also mentions the vessels of the Mishkan – the Table, the Mizbeach, and the garments of the Kohanim. Why are these items listed before mention of the sin of the Golden Calf?

This introduction serves to describe man’s perfect spiritual structure:

The Half-shekel – By having both the poor and the rich contribute the same amount, they become united and accountable for one another.

The Washbasin – This was constructed from the mirrors that the women had used in Egypt, to arouse their husbands’ desire for them in order to perpetuate Klal Yisrael. They were used in the Mishkan for the holy purpose of the Kohanim washing their hands and feet before performing the Avodah. Just as a mirror reflects a person’s outward

appearance, so too, must one ensure that his internal being is clean and pure, as befits a servant of Hashem. He is then perfectly prepared to serve in Hashem's army.

The Oil for Anointing – This was used to confer an added measure of *kedushah* upon the Kohen. Man must try to distance himself from impurity. The effort invested is compared to the oil with which the Kohen was anointed, shielding him from negative forces.

While travelling once by plane, I felt that my thoughts were disorganized. I searched for the cause of this. I finally realized that my seatmate, who was reading inappropriate literature, was inadvertently touching me. I then made sure to keep my distance, as much as possible. Where impurity is concerned, even slight touching can do damage. We find that even brushing against a woman who is a *niddah* is forbidden.

The Ketoret – This offering emitted a most pleasant fragrance. We learn from this that one should maintain a positive reputation, as the pasuk states (*Kohelet* 7:1), “A good name is better than good oil.”

The Table – This is where the showbreads were placed. The Table alludes to a person. Just as the table accepts whatever is put on it, so too, should people perform all mitzvot which come their way. Also, eating should be elevated to an act of sanctity, only in order to gain strength to serve Hashem.

The Mizbeach – The altar, upon which the sacrifices were offered, hints at self-sacrifice in serving Hashem.

A man once approached me, stating that he worked from dawn to dusk, in order to support his twelve children. He had only the hours of 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. in which to sleep. I asked what he did from 12 midnight until 3 in the morning. He said that these hours were designated for studying Torah, which he cannot manage to do during the daytime. This is an example of self-sacrifice!

The Menorah with Pure Olive Oil – This is the source of Torah wisdom.

The Holy Vestments – These refer to the garb of the Torah scholars, with which a person will clothe himself in the World to Come.

A person is a miniature Beit Hamikdash. All of the parts of the Mishkan correspond to the organs of the human body. The vessels are parallel to the positive traits which Hashem put into man. The beams hint to man's feet, etc. Constant vigilance was necessary in order to maintain the sanctity of the Mishkan. When the preconditions were not met, the nation fell and committed the *Chet Ha'egel*. This does not refer only to the sin of the Golden Calf in the Wilderness. Any association with the frivolities of this world is a form of idolatry.

During one of my flights, I noticed a Jewish acquaintance watching the in-house movie. I tapped him on the shoulder and upon seeing me, he immediately became ashamed. I told him that he reminded me of the words of the holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, before his death. He told his disciples, "Let your fear of Heaven be as great as your fear of men." His students asked if that is all they should aspire to. To which he answered, "Would that your fear of Heaven be that great" (*Berachot* 28b).

"You are afraid of me, but not of Hashem," I rebuked him.

My daughter, who was travelling together with me, asked why I embarrassed him like that. I answered, "Better that he suffer somewhat in this world than suffer eternally in the World to Come."

"A carcass is better than a *talmid chacham* who lacks good character" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 429). Rabbi Natan Merejen, shlita, Rosh Yeshivat Nefesh Chaim, asks why the term "carcass" is used instead of stating "a non-kosher animal."

A *talmid chacham* who does not have good character lacks basic *middot*. Even the animals preserve their natural tendencies. A person who abandons the good character traits with which Hashem created him is more beastly than a dead carcass. When the animal was alive, one could learn from its traits. Chazal teach us (see *Eiruvin* 100b) that even without the Torah, we could learn good qualities from the animals. The ant

teaches diligence; the stork teaches kindness; the mouse teaches self-sacrifice, etc. The word “carcass” was used to indicate that after death, the animal will get neither reward nor retribution, but the *talmid chacham* who does not have good character, will be duly punished after he dies.

Our *Chachamim* (*Sanhedrin* 38a) teach that if a person merits, he is told that he is the most exalted member of Creation, for everything was prepared before him. But if he is not worthy, he is told, “The measly fly preceded you.”

In Summary

- ♦ The Torah precedes the *Chet Ha'egel* with various descriptions of man's perfection. Maintaining this level will prevent him sinning in other forms of idolatry.
- ♦ The half-*shekel* teaches us to bear our friend's burden. The washbasin and the oil for anointing, allude to *kedushah*, whereas the vessels of the Mishkan refer to the parts of the body.
- ♦ A *talmid chacham* who lacks good *midot* is inferior to the carcass of an animal. Animals preserve their innate good qualities, whereas this person perverted his ways.

Bnei Yisrael Are Accountable for One Another

"This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census – a half shekel of the sacred shekel, the shekel is twenty geras, half a shekel as a portion to Hashem"

(Shemot 30:13)

Why were Bnei Yisrael commanded to bring only a half-shekel, and not a whole shekel? We can explain based on the saying (*Rashi, Rosh Hashanah* 29a; *Sotah* 37b), “All of Bnei Yisrael are accountable for each other.” Every person should feel united with his fellow man and responsible for him.

The *neshamot* of all Jews are interconnected and have their roots in Adam Harishon (see *Shemot Rabbah* 40:3). The Rashash, zy”a, writes that even the tzaddikim participate in the recitation of viduy, stating, “I have sinned, I have transgressed, etc.” even though they never contemplated sinning. This is because all of the *neshamot* are interdependent, all coming from the same source. The tzaddik is obligated to confess the sins of his fellow Jews and therefore says this prayer together with everyone else.

Moshe Rabbeinu was a *gilgul* of Hevel, the son of Adam Harishon (based on the secret of *gilgul*, *Tikkunei Zohar* 114a; *Eitz Chaim* 32:7). Rabbi Akiva, in turn, was a *gilgul* of Moshe Rabbeinu (*Megaleh Amukot, Kedoshim*). All of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael are intertwined. If the *neshamah* of a sinner would return as a stone, for instance, a tzaddik might sit on that stone and learn Torah there or pray on it. This would rectify the sinner’s *neshamah*. This is all in the merit of the mutual accountability of all Jews.

With this understanding, I would like to explain the custom of eating fish on Shabbat. There are countless types of fish; certainly the *neshamah* of a wayward Jew has found its way into one of them, begging

rectification. By our eating it in honor of Shabbat, we elevate his soul, bringing it to its eternal rest.

This is the reason for the command to contribute a half-*shekel* coin to the Mishkan, and not a whole *shekel*. When one gives only half a *shekel*, he is compelled to bond with his friend, donating a complete *shekel* between them. This creates unity among the nation, for everyone is completing the sum of a *shekel* for his friend.

Haman's decree resulted from the lack of harmony in Bnei Yisrael, as he told Achashveirosh (*Esther* 3:8), "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed." Esther, through *ruach hakodesh*, understood that the way to repair this breach was (*ibid.* 4:16), "Go, assemble all the Jews." Unity among the people would nullify Haman's decree.

We conclude the Shemoneh Esrei prayer with the words, "He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Yisrael." We are responsible for maintaining peace among ourselves and our fellow Jews.

Before the reading of Pirkei Avot, we recite (*Sanhedrin* 90a), "All Yisrael has a share in the World to Come." When we actually feel like "all Yisrael," united and accountable for each other, we will merit a portion in the World to Come. The sin of Korach was that he caused a tear in the fabric of our nation. The Torah states (*Bamidbar* 16:1), "Korach took himself." Chazal (see *Tanchuma, Korach* 2) explain that he separated himself from Klal Yisrael, feeling no sense of connection with the rest of the nation.

The sin of Rabbi Akiva's disciples was that they did not sufficiently respect one another (*Yevamot* 62b). The word כבוד (honor) has the same *gematria* as the word לב (heart). Respecting one's fellow man demonstrates the inner connection between people. On their level, they were lacking in this area. This was the cause of their deaths.

Chazal teach (*Eiruvin* 21b) that when Shlomo Hamelech instituted the mitzvot of *eiruvin* and *netilat yadayim*, a Heavenly Voice emerged, saying, "My child, when your heart becomes wise, then My heart, too, will

rejoice" (*Mishlei* 23:15). We previously explained that the essence of these mitzvot is *achdut*. An *eiruv* wire joins two lots into one joint property, connecting the inanimate. *Netilat yadayim* produces *kedushah*, the symbol of unity among Am Yisrael. Conversely, when one's hands are dirty and defiled, they defile the hands of the Jew who was touched by them, creating distance. Furthermore, the hands are the external expression of connection between people, representing the feelings of the heart. A handshake transmits a feeling of camaraderie between people.

Shlomo Hamelech established these mitzvot in order to impress upon us the necessity for unity and responsibility among Bnei Yisrael. But this refers only to true, inner unity, the wisdom of the heart. Outer expressions of concord are easily accorded, but are nothing more than mere lip-service. When one maintains true love for his fellow Jew, true *achdut* flows from a place deep within him. This, then, is why the Heavenly Voice praised Shlomo Hamelech with the words, "My child, when your heart becomes wise, then My heart, too, will rejoice." The heart refers to inner wisdom, an allusion to *achdut*, for which Shlomo established these mitzvot.

The reason for Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Egypt was also due to dissension. Moshe Rabbeinu cried out (*Shemot* 2:14), "Indeed the matter is known." Rashi explains that after observing Datan and Aviram quarreling with each other and informing on their fellow Jews, he understood the cause of the nation's bondage in Egypt.

The Arizal Hakadosh explains (*Sha'ar Hapesukim, Bo*) that Bnei Yisrael descended to Mitzrayim in order to rectify the sparks of *kedushah* which had become scattered after Adam Harishon sinned. These sparks of holiness were gathered by the *kelippah* and remained in his jurisdiction until Bnei Yisrael arrived in Egypt. Then, they rectified them. These were the 288 sparks of *kedushah*. When Bnei Yisrael improved their level of *achdut*, they merited redemption. All of the sparks of Adam, referred to as עניים (poor ones), were concentrated in the matzah that they ate in Mitzrayim. This is why we state, on Pesach eve, "הִיא לְחֵמָא עֲנֵיָא – This is the bread of poverty."

Bnei Yisrael preserved their purity in Egypt. They did not defile the *oht brit* (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:12), and they were punctilious with the laws of *taharat hamishpachah*. Through this level of *kedushah*, they attained *achdut*. This *achdut*, combined with their efforts to restore the sparks of Adam Harishon, which had fallen away, brought about their redemption, rescuing them from the *kelippah*.

There is a disagreement in the Gemara regarding the days of Mashiach (*Berachot* 34b). Some say the world will be spiritually elevated. Shmuel, however, contends that there will be no intrinsic difference between those days and these days, except that we will no longer serve the nations. This is how the Rambam rules (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 9:2; *Hilchot Melachim* 12:2). He concludes that all of Creation will be united. Even the animals will live in peace with each other, the weak with the mighty. This is based on the words of the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 11:6), “The wolf will live with the sheep.” The entire foundation for the *geulah* is *achdut*.

In Summary

- ♦ Each person was commanded to bring a half-*shekel*. Why not a complete *shekel*?
- ♦ This was in order to facilitate unity among the people, as “all of Yisrael are accountable for each other.” Each person was compelled to unite with his fellow man in order to contribute a whole *shekel*.
- ♦ The Rashash states that tzaddikim confess sins that they never did. All of the *neshamot* are interconnected, having their source in the *neshamah* of Adam Harishon. Therefore, the tzaddik is responsible for the sins of his fellow Jews, and confesses them.
- ♦ The reason for the custom of eating fish at the Shabbat meals is in order to rectify the souls which became reincarnated in them.
- ♦ Haman attacked Bnei Yisrael because of their disunity. This state was repaired by Esther’s instruction to gather all of the Jews together.
- ♦ The sin of Rabbi Akiva’s disciples was that they did not have inner harmony, on their level.

- ◆ The essence of the mitzvot of *eiruvin* and *netilat yadayim* is *achdut*, which should be heartfelt.
- ◆ The purpose of *galut* Mitzrayim was to reunify the nation. Based on mystical teachings, the nation had to gather the sparks of Adam Harishon and unite them. When Bnei Yisrael were finally united they merited rectifying the 288 sparks of Adam Harishon.

In the Shadow of Hashem

“See, I have called by the name: Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft; to weave designs, to work with gold, silver, and copper”

(Shemot 31:2-4)

The Mishkan which Betzalel constructed was created through the Holy Names (*Berachot* 55a). Hashem's house had to be crafted with appropriate substance. Betzalel was the one most fitting for the job. His very name attests to this. The word בְּצַלְאֵל is comprised of the words בְּצַל-אֵל (in the shadow of Hashem). Hashem's Presence constantly accompanied him.

How did Betzalel have the ability to erect the Mishkan by means of the Holy Names? He did not ascend to Heaven in order to learn them. When Hashem sees that a person dedicates himself to a lofty cause, He immediately comes to his aid. Hashem observed Betzalel's fiery enthusiasm to build the Mishkan in the best way possible. He therefore revealed to him the Holy Names, which fueled him with the power to use

them toward this end. It was as though he had been in *Shamayim* and heard the message directly from Hashem, just as Moshe had, when he ascended for the *luchot*.

Every person has a shadow accompanying him. This is the Torah which he studied while yet in Heaven. For this reason, there is a strong accusation leveled against one who abandons this shadow, not exerting himself sufficiently in Torah. From the time that Moshe ascended to Heaven, and learned all there is to learn, the Torah was brought down to this world and is accessible to all. Everyone, therefore, is obligated to draw near to this shadow and labor in Torah. Whoever reveals insights in Torah is in “the shadow of Hashem,” just like Betzalel. Hashem gives distinction to the person who displays concern for Torah. He makes him distinguished, by helping him accomplish his desires, just as He helped Betzalel.

Similarly, the Beit Hamikdash is said to have been built by David Hamelech, as it says (*Tehillim* 30:1), “A psalm, a song for the inauguration of the Temple by David.” Why does the pasuk say that the Beit Hamikdash was inaugurated by David; it was Shlomo who built it? Hashem saw just how much effort David invested into the building of the Beit Hamikdash, and therefore called it by his name (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua* 2). Shlomo Hamelech displayed enthusiasm in building the Beit Hamikdash, and this made him worthy of coming under the shadow of Hashem, and receiving *ruach hakodesh* in its construction.

I read a story about my mentor, Rabbi Gershon Liebman, zt”l, in a sefer written by a young Torah scholar. When Rabbi Liebman was in Lakewood, a student asked him the following question.

When the Men of the Great Assembly built the second Beit Hamikdash, there was great rejoicing among the young people. They danced and pranced in honor of the Temple. But there were elders there who remembered the first Beit Hamikdash (*Ezra* 3:12-13). They raised their voices in anguish, louder than the shouts of joy of the youngsters.

"Why," asked the student, "did the old men cry out, and not rejoice at finally having a Beit Hamikdash? Furthermore, why did they find it fitting to cry precisely as the young ones rejoiced?"

Rabbi Liebman responded with a wonderful answer, quoted in that sefer.

I thought of the following explanation. There was a noticeable difference between the first Beit Hamikdash of Shlomo and the second Beit Hamikdash, built by the Men of the Great Assembly.

The elders of the generation, who witnessed the young ones returning from exile, bereft of Torah, and bare of mitzvot, could not bear the contrast before them. The previous generation was one of wisdom, overflowing with Torah knowledge. These men knew that the first Beit Hamikdash had been built with the Holy Names, unlike the second Beit Hamikdash. They knew that these Names fortified each other, granting vitality and sustenance to one another. But without Torah and the Holy Names, the Beit Hamikdash has no chance of survival. What, then, is the cause of all the happiness?

They cried precisely at the time of joy, in order to awaken the young people to repent and study Torah. This would enable the Beit Hamikdash to stand staunchly in its grandeur for long years to come, for it was lacking many of the spiritual aspects of the first Beit Hamikdash (*Yoma* 231b).

What were the angels afraid of when they found Moshe in *Shamayim*, to the extent that they desired to burn him? We find others who also ascended alive, such as Chanoch, Serach bat Asher, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and Eliyahu Hanavi, who went to Heaven in a chariot of fire? Why weren't they threatened with being singed by the angels?

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven before *Matan Torah*, whereas the others did not ascend until after *Matan Torah*. Although Moshe observed the mitzvot of his own free will even before they were given, just like the Avot, he had not yet mastered all of the Torah. This gave the angels the

power to prosecute against him. The other great people who ascended to *Shamayim* already had the strength of Torah to protect them. One who is perfect in Torah is shielded from all harm. (This needs further clarification, because Chanoch and Serach bat Asher also lived before *Matan Torah*).

The Ohr Hachaim (*Shemot* 14:27) states that when Moshe commanded the waters of the Yam Suf to split, they did not immediately do so. Conversely, when Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair wished to cross a river, it instantly parted. This was because Am Yisrael were standing at the sea before they had the *zechut* of the Torah, whereas Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair came much later and had the *zechut* of Torah to defend him and cause the waters to split.

When Moshe faced the angels, he turned to Hashem to come to his aid. He was accustomed to pray on behalf of his fellow men, but this was the first time he was enjoined to nullify a decree of those on High. Moreover, he was even among them, in *Shamayim*, where they had authority. Hakadosh Baruch Hu instructed him to respond to their charges, because he had the ability to do so (see *Shabbat* 88b). Moshe, indeed, succeeded in this formidable task. When Hashem observed his tremendous exertion in bringing down the Torah, He helped him overcome the allegations of the angels. This victory vested him with the power to pray on behalf of Am Yisrael after they fashioned the Golden Calf. He was able to ask for mercy for Bnei Yisrael while yet in *Shamayim*, something he was unable to do before.

Not long ago, the writings of the Shach were discovered. They were full of insights and addendums, written in his own hand. He passed away at the age of forty-six. The Arizal was only thirty-six when he died. Some claim he was only twenty-eight. Rabbi Chaim Vital, zt”l, committed the Ari’s works on Kabbalah to writing when he was twenty-eight. Betzalel was only thirteen years old when he constructed the Mishkan (*Sanhedrin* 69b).

At first glance, these major accomplishments seem incredible. But the truth is that everything depends on willpower. There is no limit to what one can achieve by the power of his will. Great distances can be swallowed by sheer stamina. If we would only transfer our drive and determination for the physical to spiritual desires and involvement in Torah, the path to our perfection would be paved before us.

Betzalel so desired to build the Mishkan as Hashem wanted that he was granted access to the use of the Holy Names, with which to build it. This is as Chazal say (*Makkot* 10b), “In the way in which a man wishes to go, he is led.”

In Summary

- ♦ Betzalel built the Mishkan at the age of thirteen, with the Holy Names. How did he gain access to these Names? He had never been in Heaven. Man receives strength according to his desire. Betzalel had such a strong yearning to reach great heights that he merited building the Mishkan through the Holy Names.
- ♦ “A psalm, a song for the inauguration of the Temple by David.” Shlomo was the one who actually built the Beit Hamikdash, but it is called by David’s name, because had such a great longing to build it.
- ♦ At the conclusion of the building of the second Beit Hamikdash, the youth rejoiced and danced, but the elders cried. Why did they cry exactly when the young ones rejoiced? They still remembered the days of yore, when Bnei Yisrael toiled in Torah, thereby maintaining the first Beit Hamikdash. But the situation during the times of the second Temple was different. The nation was on a much lower level than in earlier times. The old men were indicating to the youth that if they would not invest in the study of Torah, this Beit Hamikdash would also not last.
- ♦ The angels wished to burn Moshe when he ascended on High. But there were others who ascended alive and were not threatened by the angels. What was the reason for this? It is because Moshe went up prior to *Matan*

Torah and did not have the merit of Torah to protect him. Those who ascended after the Torah was given, gained its protection, which shielded them from the prosecution of the angels.

Setting Our Priorities Straight

“The Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimonial-tablets and the Cover that is upon it, and all the utensils of the Tent”

(*Shemot 31:7*)

Usually, the foundation of a building is erected first. Then, the rest of the building is constructed over it. After the entire edifice is complete, all of the furniture and possessions are put in it. Hashem commanded Moshe to tell Betzalel to construct the Mishkan in this order. Only after the entire Tent is erected, should he fashion the utensils. When the utensils would be complete, they would find a home in the Mishkan.

But Moshe Rabbeinu did not transmit Hashem's words as he received them. He changed around the order of things. He asked Betzalel to fashion the utensils first and to begin working on the Mishkan itself only afterward. This did not sit well with Betzalel, who told Moshe that it makes more sense to build the Mishkan before the vessels. Moshe Rabbeinu appreciated his words and told him, “Your name is בצל אל because you are living בצל-אל (in the shade of Hashem). This has influenced you to understand what is best in order to preserve the *kedushah* of the *Shechinah*” (*Berachot 55a*).

Why did Moshe change Hashem's words, rather than transmit them to Betzalel as he was told? Moreover, the order in which he gave the command was liable to damage the sanctity of the utensils. Also, why was Moshe so impressed by Betzalel's wisdom, to erect the Mishkan first, and

only afterward, to fashion the vessels? There was no novelty in this idea; Hashem Himself had commanded him to tell Betzalel to make the Mishkan in this way.

Moshe Rabbeinu switched the order purposely. He wished to test Betzalel to see if he was worthy of constructing the Mishkan. Did he really have the necessary wisdom and understanding to know Hashem's will, and how it would best be preserved from all harm? Betzalel passed the test with flying colors, by not accepting Moshe's words at face value. He sought ways to improve on what he was told. He proved, thereby, that all of his being and all of his thoughts were devoted to Hashem. He proved that he was truly worthy of building the edifice for the *Shechinah*.

The Mishkan symbolizes spirituality, whereas the vessels symbolize materialism. By being brought inside the holy Mishkan, they became transformed, sanctified to the exalted level of the Mishkan itself. This should teach us a lesson. Everything in the physical world can be harnessed for *kedushah*. All materialism has the potential to change from mundane to majestic. It all depends on the way it is used and what it is used for. [See the Ben Ish Chai on the Torah (*Shanah Sheniyah, Vayakheil*), on the words, "More than enough regarding the contributions for the Mishkan. The phrase is seemingly contradictory; was it enough, or too much?"]

The order of building the Mishkan first and then fashioning the vessels teaches us to set our priorities straight. Spiritual matters, alluded to by the Mishkan, always precede the physical, alluded to by the vessels. The way in which a person schedules his day, and the importance he places on each aspect of his life, indicate his level of *yirat Shamayim*.

Betzalel proved to all that he was fitting for the great job which was placed on his shoulders, by the fact that he erected the Mishkan before forming the vessels. Walking in the shadow of Hashem, as his name indicates (**בצָלָאֵל**), gave him the perception of priorities.

When a person awakens in the morning, the first thing he proclaims is, "I gratefully thank You, O living King, for You have returned my soul

within me with compassion – abundant is Your faithfulness!” This is the clarion call, arousing him to a spiritual reality, an existence which has the power to influence his entire day and help him navigate it correctly. By putting one’s spiritual obligations at the top of his “To do” list, he demonstrates that the sacred precedes the mundane.

Conversely, there are those who, upon awakening, have not yet removed the cobwebs of sleep from their eyes, and they are already enmeshed in the web of work and acquisition. Their minds are muddled with thoughts of physicality. There is therefore no room for that which actually stands at the helm of the world – tefillah, Torah study, and mitzvot. Being scrupulous with beginning one’s day with holiness effects a good impression on the entire day. A person thus has the power to put spirituality before the physical. Moreover, he can actually elevate the physical to become spiritual. I saw similar ideas expressed in the writings of the Ba’al Shem Tov.

In Summary

- ♦ Hashem told Moshe to command Betzalel to first construct the Mishkan and only afterward to fashion the vessels. This way, the vessels could immediately be housed in the Mishkan. Moshe Rabbeinu changed the order, telling Betzalel to fashion the vessels first. But Betzalel took exception to Moshe’s words, stating that it was more sensible to construct the Mishkan before the vessels. Moshe was impressed by Betzalel’s understanding and told him, “You live in the shadow of Hashem.”
- ♦ Why did Moshe switch the order of instructions, rather than transmit them as Hashem had commanded? Furthermore, why was he so impressed by Betzalel’s words? Hashem had originally commanded that the Mishkan should be built in this order.
- ♦ Moshe switched the order purposely. He was testing Betzalel to see if he was worthy of building the home of Hashem. If Betzalel would take exception to Moshe’s words, he would prove that Hashem’s glory was uppermost in his mind, and he was worthy of the task. Moshe was happy

to see that this was the case, stating that Betzalel lived up to his name: he was truly in the shadow of Hashem.

- ♦ The Mishkan demonstrated spirituality, whereas the vessels depicted physicality. By being brought into the Mishkan, the vessels became sanctified. By man's service of Hashem, all things mundane can be elevated to become sacred.
- ♦ Hashem commanded that the Mishkan should be erected first, in order to teach us what our priorities should be. Betzalel, in his wisdom, understood that the spiritual Mishkan should be erected first.
- ♦ One who opens his eyes with the words of "Modeh Ani," is opening his day with spiritual content, which will have an effect on the entire day.

Retaining the Luchot

"When He finished speaking to him on Har Sinai, He gave Moshe the two Tablets of Testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of G-d"

(Shemot 31:18)

"It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances that Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain"

(ibid. 32:19)

Moshe spent forty days and nights in Heaven, learning Torah directly from Hashem. At the end of this period, after Moshe had sanctified his

body and spirit to the level of angels, Hakadosh Baruch Hu handed him the two *luchot*, for him to take down to Bnei Yisrael. Before Moshe returned from Heaven for this purpose, Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf. They thought he was tarrying and had ceased being their leader.

Hashem was terribly angered by their flagrant act of idol worship and commanded Moshe (*Shemot* 32:7), “Go, descend – for your people has become corrupt.” Chazal explain (*Berachot* 32a) that Hashem was telling Moshe that all of the greatness which he merited in his ascent to Heaven, living among the *Shechinah* and the angels, was only in the merit of Am Yisrael. But now that they sinned, Moshe lost the *zechut* to remain at his exalted level. This is why he was told to descend.

The sefer *Hor Hahor* asks an obvious question. Why did Hashem leave the *luchot* in Moshe’s hands, enabling him to bring them down to the earth, when Am Yisrael was no longer eligible to receive the Torah? Why didn’t Moshe himself seek ways of returning the *luchot* to Heaven, rather than bringing them down to the people, only to smash them on the mountain?

The sefer *Hor Hahor* answers that Hashem intentionally allowed Moshe to keep the *luchot*. It was in order to test him to see if he understood on his own that Bnei Yisrael had lost their privilege of receiving the Torah. Did Moshe perceive the point that Torah without faith in Hashem, as demonstrated by the *Chet Ha’egel*, is no Torah at all? Faith is the foundation of fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot; without it, one’s Torah has no value.

Moshe Rabbeinu passed this test. He refused to grant the Torah to Am Yisrael as long as they were sinning. He hurried to break the *luchot* at the foot of the mountain. With this act, he demonstrated to the people the level of Hashem’s wrath at their idolatry.

But this answer does not resolve the question completely. It explains why Hashem did not take back the *luchot* from Moshe. But why didn’t Moshe, of his own accord, simply return the *luchot* to Hashem, when he

realized that Bnei Yisrael were unworthy of receiving them? Why did he specifically take them down to the people and then deliberately demolish them at the foot of the mountain?

We can answer based on what the Torah tells us. Before Hashem gave the *luchot* to Moshe, He commanded him about the mitzvah of Shabbat, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 31:16), “The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbat, to make the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations.” The word **שבת** is contained within the word **תשובה** (teshuva), indicating that the two are connected. Moshe presumed that Hashem was reminding him of Shabbat, which hints at teshuvah, because He knew that Am Yisrael would sin. But they would not remain with their sin for long, because they would do teshuvah and receive atonement.

Moshe decided against returning the *luchot* to Hashem. He opted to descend with them and see if Bnei Yisrael indeed succeeded in repenting their deeds, which would make them worthy of receiving the Torah. But, alas! as Moshe descended, he found the nation deep in festivity, singing and dancing before the calf. He understood that they were immersed in sin, completely unworthy of receiving the Torah. He therefore hurried to break the *luchot* at the foot of the mountain, in order to awaken them to the severity of their act.

There is an opinion (*Yerushalmi, Ta'anit* 7:5) stating that Hashem wished to retract the *luchot* from Moshe, but Moshe held fast to them and would not surrender them. This is a very puzzling statement. How could Moshe behave in this way; wasn’t it outright brazenness and rebellion against Hashem?

We might be able to say that Moshe found the audacity to act like this because he knew that teshuvah preceded Creation. This concept was further consolidated in his mind by the fact that Hashem taught him the mitzvah of Shabbat earlier, a reminder of teshuvah. Moshe held tenaciously to the *luchot*, for he was telling Hashem that if He would not allow him to bring them down to Bnei Yisrael, the entire concept of teshuvah would become shaky, and with it, the existence of Am Yisrael.

Hashem recognized the truth in his words and allowed him to descend with the *luchot*. This is what is meant by His words (*Bava Metzia* 59b), “My children triumphed over Me.” Hashem agreed that Moshe was correct in concerning himself over the fate of his nation.

In parashat *Vayakheil*, Moshe gathered all of Bnei Yisrael for the sake of donating toward the Mishkan. There, he commanded them about the mitzvah of Shabbat. Moshe hinted to them that the *Shechinah* parted from them due to the *Chet Ha'egel*. The return of the *Shechinah* was not dependent solely on the building of the Mishkan, but also on doing teshuvah. This is hinted at in the close connection between the words *Shabbat* and *teshuvah*, as mentioned above.

When Moshe attempted to thwart the decree of the epidemic, he so to speak, grabbed hold of Hashem’s clothing and cried out (*Shemot* 32:32), “And now if You would but forgive their sin! – but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written” (*Berachot* 32a). He did not want Bnei Yisrael to think that he was incapable of asking for mercy on their behalf. What is the meaning of the statement that Moshe Rabbeinu grabbed hold of Hashem’s clothing? Hashem has no body or form; He certainly does not wear clothes.

His clothing refers to His attributes. Moshe clung to Hashem’s attributes, as Chazal state (*Masechet Sofrim* 3:13), “Just as He is merciful, so too, should you be merciful.” By trying to appease Hashem through His own traits, he managed to tilt the scale in favor of Am Yisrael, rescinding the evil decree against them.

Am Yisrael was the Generation of Wisdom. They merited experiencing fantastic miracles. How is it, then, that they fell to the abyss of sinning in *avodah zarah*? They saw the *Shechinah* of Hashem face-to-face, so to speak, at the sea, declaring (*Shemot* 15:2), “This is my G-d and I shall beautify Him.” The Midrash states (*Mechilta Beshalach, Parashat Hashirah* 3), “A maid servant saw at the sea what the great prophet, Yechezkel ben Buzi, did not merit seeing.” How, indeed, could they fall so low?

Initially, Am Yisrael wished to decline the Torah. But they did not have the boldness to refuse it, after all of the amazing miracles Hashem had performed for them. They were too full of gratitude to say anything but "We will do and we will hear!" But their hearts were not completely in it. Evidence of this is the fact that when the day came to receive the Torah, Moshe had to wake them up to gather at Har Sinai. After Hashem gave them the Torah, they rushed to escape, as a child who hurries away from school at the moment of dismissal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 729; *Yerushalmi, Ta'anit* 4:5).

But even if at first, they were compelled into accepting the Torah, why weren't their hearts warmed up at the sight of Moshe ascending to Heaven in a cloud of smoke? Where there's smoke, there's fire. Where was the fire of their enthusiasm for receiving the Torah? All of the miracles pointed to the sacredness of the Torah. Why weren't they enflamed in eagerness to learn more about it?

"They stood from afar" (*Shemot* 20:15). They did not try to come close, in spite of the many opportunities to do so. They preferred to remain distant and detached. It was this choice to stay away from Hashem, in spite of His gestures of goodwill, time and again, which brought them to the debased level of sinning with the Golden Calf. This sin is so colossal that we are paying for it till this very day.

In Summary

- ◆ The sefer *Hor Hahor* asks why Hashem did not take back the *luchot* after Am Yisrael were found undeserving of the Torah, rather, He allowed Moshe to take them and ultimately break them. Alternatively, why didn't Moshe himself return them to Hashem, preferring, instead, to descend with them and smash them at the foot of the mountain? The author answers that Hashem wished to test Moshe. He wanted to see if he understood that only with faith is one capable of receiving the Torah. Moshe withstood this test, and therefore broke the *luchot*.
- ◆ But we are still left with the question: Why didn't Moshe himself return the *luchot* to Hashem, while yet in *Shamayim*? Before Moshe ascended,

Hashem taught him the mitzvah of Shabbat (**תַּבְשִׁשָּׁה**), closely connected with the word teshuvah (**תְּשׁוּבָה**). Moshe concluded that the purpose of this was to tell him that Am Yisrael would eventually repent and become worthy of receiving the Torah. For that reason, Moshe brought down the *luchot*. He wished to examine whether or not the nation regretted their act and was worthy of receiving the Torah. When he discovered that they were still engrossed in sin, he smashed the *luchot*.

- ◆ There is an opinion which states that Hashem wanted to confiscate the *luchot* from Moshe's hands, but Moshe held them tight. This seems a bold act of brazenness on Moshe's part. Moshe wished to hint to us the following. Teshuvah is the basis for the existence of the world. Furthermore, Hashem had taught him the halachot of Shabbat, which alludes to teshuvah. If He would refuse to let Moshe take the *luchot*, the concept of teshuvah, upon which the world rests, would waver. Hashem recognized the truth in his words and stated, "My children have triumphed over Me." He therefore allowed him to bring down the *luchot*.
- ◆ What do Chazal mean by their statement that Moshe "grabbed hold of Hashem's clothing?" Hashem has no body or form. Rather, Moshe held onto the *midot* of Hashem. Just as He is merciful, he attempted to be merciful. In this way, he asked for forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael.
- ◆ How could the Generation of Wisdom have fallen so low as to sin with the calf? We might explain that they accepted the Torah through force. They were merely afraid to show ingratitude for the great miracles performed on their behalf. Accepting the Torah without willingness and joy brought them to the low level of sinning. This was the reason why Moshe Rabbeinu broke the *luchot*.
- ◆ How could they witness Moshe ascending to Heaven in a cloud of smoke and not be fired up with love of Hashem? They did not sufficiently seek Hashem's closeness, and they therefore remained cold and distant.

In Explanation of the Chet Ha'egel

“The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him: Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe who has brought us up from the land of Egypt – we do not know what became of him!”

(Shemot 32:1)

“He took it from their hands and bound it up in a cloth, and fashioned it into a molten calf. They said: This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt”

(ibid. 4)

Perusing the parashah will raise a puzzling phenomenon. How can we understand that Bnei Yisrael fell to such depths, demanding to fashion an idol? Such great miracles were wrought for them. They had observed the waters of the sea splitting with their own eyes. This demonstrated Hashem's Providence in the world. Furthermore, they saw the pillar of fire and the pillar of the cloud, which showed their way in the Wilderness. These brought into focus the intrinsic difference between light and darkness, depicting the reward for those who learn Torah, and the retribution for those who violate it.

Furthermore, all those who did not believe in Hashem perished during the plague of darkness. At the Exodus, only the elite of the nation was released. These were the loyal followers of Hashem, as is borne out by the Navi (*Yirmeyahu 2:2*), “I recall for You the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an

unsown land.” How can we explain the fact that because Moshe tarried for six hours, based on their own calculations, they decided to fashion an idol? There were even those among the people who realized that they had miscalculated, and Moshe was not yet meant to descend.

Additionally, why didn’t Hashem tell Moshe to descend immediately, when the calf was still in the making? Why did He wait until the people actually began serving it, telling Moshe at that time (*Shemot* 32:7), “Go, descend”? The entire episode might have been avoided, had Moshe been sent back down earlier.

Also, why did Moshe decide to destroy the calf by grinding it to a fine powder? Couldn’t he just as well have hidden it, by using one of the Holy Names?

The pasuk in parashat *Bereishit* (6:9) states, “Noach walked with G-d.” Hashem guided Noach, walking before him to show him the way to go. Avraham’s level of service, however, was much greater. Avraham walked before Hashem without any outside help. He overcame the temptations of this world all alone. The *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), “Your righteousness will precede you.” This refers to the Torah, which is our shield and protection, guiding our way in life. But Am Yisrael wished to go in the way of their father, Avraham, who forged his own trail in Avodat Hashem. He walked before Hashem, even before the Torah was given. How much more must Bnei Yisrael follow in Hashem’s ways, after having received the Torah, our guidebook for daily living and our protection from all harm.

Bnei Yisrael were dependent on outside sources of help in their service of Hashem. This found expression in their query “Where is Moshe?” They simply could not last another moment without a leader. Man must learn to remain steadfast even in difficult situations. It would be ludicrous to say that if the Rav of the Beit Hakeneset is prevented from coming to the synagogue due to mitigating circumstances, all of the congregants will leave. On the contrary, they must strengthen themselves all the more and continue their learning and prayer schedules as usual.

Bnei Yisrael were taken to task because their question “Where is Moshe?” was out of place. It became a thorn in their side. The underlying reason for this question was that they wished to continue living like the Egyptians. Even though they had desisted from *avodah zarah*, they had not completely severed their connection with it. This is what brought them to their downfall, causing them to sin with the Golden Calf.

The subject of the *Chet Ha’egel* is clarified with the statement of Rabbi Shimon (*Avot 3:7*), who says that one who halts his learning in order to admire nature is held accountable. Am Yisrael sat engrossed in study for forty days prior to *Matan Torah*. Each day elevated them to a new level in Avodat Hashem, in preparation for receiving the Torah. Then the *Yetzer Hara* stepped in, showing them Moshe’s casket (see *Shemot Rabbah 41:7*). Viewing this vision was the beginning of their downfall, just as one who stops his learning to view nature, naturally declines. After they then halted their studies, they fell to the level of fashioning the calf.

My grandfather, the tzaddik, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, zy”a, expounds on this topic in his sefer *Kesef Nivchar*. He explains the subject of learning Torah for its own sake. Torah which is studied *lishmah* provides protection for the person. But Torah which is learned with ulterior motives does not benefit man at all. One should take this message to heart and strengthen himself to learn Torah for its own sake. This is his only defense against the *Yetzer Hara*. Since the Torah which Bnei Yisrael learned before *Matan Torah* was not learned for its own sake, it was incapable of shielding them from fashioning the calf. The fact that they demanded another god to go before them proved that the Torah they had learned previously was not *lishmah*.

It can happen that a person who goes to pray in the Beit Hakeneset, may, upon his departure, go to watch improper sights. This happens because his tefillah was not genuine and lacked concentration. It was mere lip-service, and left no lasting impression upon him.

Am Yisrael proclaimed “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” because they were forced into it (*Shabbat 88a*). They did not say it out of love of the Torah. Tehillim

states (34:9), “Taste and see that Hashem is good.” One must “taste” the Torah in order to experience the sweetness in it. Even something which does not seem tasty at first glance can become sweet after some time. One must taste of it and give it a chance. Am Yisrael should have waited for Moshe to return. Then they would have savored the flavor of Torah. Its sweetness would have drawn them to the Torah, and they would never have sinned. But they never gave Moshe the opportunity to come down and share his knowledge with them. They surrendered their chance to savor the splendor of Torah. They tasted the bitter taste of sin instead.

We have no Golden Calf nowadays. But its counterpart is prevalent throughout the world. The glamor of gold and the lure of immorality are modern-day icons. And there are those who revere television and sports to the degree of idol worship.

When I was once sitting in the airport, a man spread out a newspaper before him. My gaze unwittingly fell upon an immodest photograph. This picture gave me no rest. I asked Hashem to remove this corrupt sight from my mind. Bnei Yisrael, in Egypt, surely saw forbidden sights, which remained etched in their minds. These images are what caused them to sin with the calf when they were later redeemed.

This explains why Hashem did not send Moshe down immediately, before Bnei Yisrael finished fashioning the calf, thereby preventing their actual service of it. Hashem wanted to teach them a most important principle. When one’s shadowy past is not completely erased, totally uprooted, it is liable to rear its ugly head at a later time. It is likely to lure a person into sinning. The improper sights which they saw in Egypt led to the downfall they experienced at the *Chet Ha’egel*.

One of the *Ba’alei Mussar* refers to the *Yetzer Hara* as צפוני (hidden). This is based on the Gemara (*Sukkah* 52a). The *Yetzer Hara* is hidden deep within a person’s heart, concealed from view. He suddenly bursts forth, without notice. The element of surprise catches the person unawares, depriving him of the opportunity to prepare himself for his onslaught.

When a garment becomes soiled, one can spot-clean it. But the fabric still has the stain embedded in it. Likewise is the case with sins. It is insufficient to do a spot-cleaning. Sin must be dug out from the roots, in order that it does not leave an impression. This is why Moshe felt the need to burn up the calf and grind it. He did not suffice with using the Names of Hashem. A conflagration must be completely extinguished, without leaving a trace of what started it.

There are three areas which demand fortification in our days. They are: guarding against *lashon hara*, watching one's eyes, and true Avodat Hashem. When we walk in the ways of Hashem, even the gentiles notice it. But when we waver, even a bit, the gentiles realize this, as well. They see the sham of our service. This has a tremendous impact on the world at large.

During WWII, the world was blind to the appalling acts of the infamous murderer, may his name be obliterated. People simply did not see the horrific and frightful deeds which he enacted against the Jews. How can we understand how a despot of his caliber could be met with silence by the world at large? There was blatant evidence to his butchery. But they were stricken with blindness. When Am Yisrael defects from Torah and absconds to the path of falsehood, this is felt even among the nations. Each and every one of us is obligated to ask, "When will my actions reach those of my forefathers?" Only in the merit of learning Torah for its own sake, will we be worthy of excising the *kelippah* of the Golden Calf by its root.

Chazal explain (*Tanchuma, Terumah* 8) that the Mishkan which Bnei Yisrael were commanded to construct in the Wilderness was atonement for the *Chet Ha'egel*. Had they not sinned, Hashem would have continued resting among them. There would have been no need for a special Sanctuary for His *Shechinah*. But because the *Shechinah* departed after their sin, Hashem commanded them to build a Mishkan. Chazal add (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11) that Moshe Rabbeinu erected and dismantled the Mishkan for seven days. This symbolized the drawing down of the *Shechinah* from each of the seven heavens. On the eighth day, Moshe

constructed the Mishkan and left it standing, for the *Shechinah* had descended upon it.

Bnei Yisrael forfeited the spiritual elevation they had gained by what they had heard and seen at Har Sinai, because of the *Chet Ha'egel*. Their level of “seeing the sounds” (*Shemot* 20:15) returned to them at the construction of the Mishkan. One must make every effort to maintain the level of greatness acquired when he witnesses *kedushah*. Otherwise, he is liable to lose everything. In order to build an edifice, one must invest much sweat and toil. But with one strike, the entire building can come toppling down. Therefore, after one has experienced spiritual elevation, he must exert himself to preserve the experience and not let it fade into oblivion.

In Summary

- ◆ How could Am Yisrael have sinned at the *Chet Ha'egel* after experiencing such wonderful miracles in Egypt and at the sea? Furthermore, we know that the resha'im perished in the plague of darkness. How, then, could the righteous ones come to sin so terribly? Also, there were those who realized that it was not yet time for Moshe to descend the mountain; why, then, did they hurry to form the calf?
- ◆ Why did Hashem tell Moshe to descend only after Bnei Yisrael began worshipping the calf? Had He told him sooner, much strife could have been avoided. And why did Moshe see fit to grind the calf to a fine powder, instead of eliminating it through the Holy Name?
- ◆ Am Yisrael were at the level where they should have been able to stand on their own two feet, not in need of a leader to walk alongside them at every step. Our forefather, Avraham, forged his own trail, without the aid of a spiritual mentor. But Am Yisrael constantly sought the services of a leader. As soon as their teacher, Moshe, was gone, they fell into sin.
- ◆ Am Yisrael sinned because the *Yetzer Hara* prevented them from learning. He did this by showing them Moshe’s casket. As soon as they halted their Torah study, they fell into sin. Based on the words of my grandfather,

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, the Torah is the only thing that can protect a person from sin. Perhaps before *Matan Torah*, they did not learn *l'shem Shamayim*. Additionally, they had originally accepted the Torah through force, and not willingly. Therefore, it did not stand by them when they were tested by the *Yetzer Hara*.

- ◆ We have no Golden Calf nowadays. But the *Yetzer Hara* has many disguises. We must be on our guard at all times.
- ◆ Although sending Moshe down earlier would have prevented the sin, Hashem wished to teach us an important principle by sending him down after the people had already sinned. If a person does not eradicate his sins completely, he is liable to return to them. Because Bnei Yisrael did not entirely repent the sins they had done in Egypt, they returned to sin with the Golden Calf.
- ◆ When Am Yisrael sin, the nations of the world realize this, and they are given control over our nation.

Torah Unites All Aspects of Man's Personality

"He took it from their hands and bound it up in a cloth, and fashioned it into a molten calf. They said: This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt"

(*Shemot 32:4*)

It is most difficult to grasp how Am Yisrael, the Generation of Wisdom, who saw Hashem's miracles on a daily basis, could fall to the debased level of sinning with the calf. This difficulty is strengthened by the fact

that Am Yisrael were aware of their lofty status, ruled by supernatural laws, above and beyond any of the other nations. This should have spurred them to remain attached to Hashem at all costs, constantly seeking ways to come closer to Him. The fact that Bnei Yisrael sacrificed offerings to the Golden Calf showed how easily they exchanged their relationship with Hashem for the calf, sacrificing their closeness with Him for it. By way of analogy, they can be compared to a man who has the most updated, state-of-the-art car. Instead of enjoying it, he trades it in for a simple bicycle. Am Yisrael surrendered supervision of the King of all kings in exchange for a simple piece of metal, which had no power to protect them at all.

The Ramban, among other commentaries, explains that Bnei Yisrael's sin was that their thoughts were flawed. They believed the words of the *Erev Rav*, who joined their ranks when they left Egypt. They therefore capitulated to their claims, following after them. They were so deficient in their thought process that they followed them blindly, not even protesting when the *Erev Rav* killed Chur.

When one observes his fellow man sinning and remains silent, he is considered to have sinned as well, for he was capable of preventing sin by reprimanding his friend. Because he desisted, the iniquity was done. He is considered to have had a hand in it. This is based on the words of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:17), "You shall reprove your fellow, and do not bear a sin because of him." A person is obligated to chastise his fellow Jew up to three times for his sin. If the person still sins, the rebuker has done his part and is clear of all sin. He will be free of any further sins on the part of his fellow Jew. Bnei Yisrael were held accountable for Chur's murder at the hands of the *Erev Rav*, since they did not protest it. They chose to remain indifferent, as though it did not relate to them at all. For this, they were taken to task and ultimately punished.

How could such perfect people, suffused with *yirat Shamayim* and constantly accompanied by the *Shechinah*, descend to such a level of sin, which caused the worst sin of all?

People often exhibit a dual identity. Externally, they seem to be righteous and innocent. But inside, they are rancid and rotten. This is just like the impure swine, who displays his split hooves, claiming, "I am pure" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 13:5). There are those who dress in the way of the Torah scholars, but one who is closely acquainted with them knows just how far they are from fear of Heaven. When they are out of sight, they do not hesitate to transgress the Torah, clothing themselves in iniquity.

There are couples who take walks together. They look like the picture of harmony. One admires their perfect relationship. But after some time, word gets out that this beautiful pair has split up. News of their divorce is especially difficult to digest, since they seemed like the model match, having set the tone for happiness and bliss. But their children, who lived in their home, knew just how far they were from peace and harmony. Their outward appearances were nothing more than a charade.

The Torah teaches a person to be perfect in his behavior when in public and when in the confines of his home. One who follows the path of Torah is consistent in all his deeds. The Torah forbids us from acting in a way contradictory to how we actually feel. At the time of the *Chet Ha'egel*, Am Yisrael had not received the Torah. They therefore had a somewhat dual identity. Their inner essence pushed them to connect to Hashem, yet their external aspect caused them to sin, believing that the truth lay with the *Eirev Rav*.

Only the Torah can unite these two facets of man. It alone has the power to perfect a person internally and externally. Am Yisrael, despite their standing as the Generation of Wisdom, sinned with the calf and degraded their thoughts, because they were lacking the power of the Torah's protection. Torah reins in man's thoughts and deeds, harnessing it to the one and only truth.

In Summary

- ♦ How could the Generation of Wisdom descend so low that they sinned with the Golden Calf?

- ♦ The Ramban states that Bnei Yisrael had a deficiency in their thoughts and this facilitated their following the *Eirev Rav*. They were so blind in their behavior that when the *Eirev Rav* killed Chur, there was no protest. One who does not rebuke his fellow man is considered to have sinned as well. Their sin with Chur eventually led to their sin with the calf.
- ♦ Many people have a double identity. They may seem righteous on the outside, but are completely void of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. Only Torah has the power to unify all of man's strengths, making them true and perfect. The Generation of Wisdom had not yet received the Torah. They therefore were lacking its remedial qualities and descended to the level of sinning with the Golden Calf.

Torah Protects and Shields

"Hashem spoke to Moshe: Go, descend – for your people that you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it, and they said: This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt"

(Shemot 32:7-8)

After spending forty days in *Shamayim* learning Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu received the *luchot* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Then Hashem told him to descend, informing him that his people had formed an idol. Hashem wanted to take back the *luchot*, but Moshe would not let go of them. Each one was tugging at it, until Moshe triumphed, and took them (*Yerushalmi*,

Ta'anit 4:5). He brought them down from Har Sinai, where he broke them in front of the nation.

This raises several difficulties. First, Moshe certainly saw the body of Chur, the *Navi* and tzaddik, who was killed by the people when he condemned the Golden Calf. Wasn't he afraid that the people would kill him, just as they had killed Chur, in order to cast off the yoke of Heaven from their shoulders? Second, why didn't they kill Moshe? Third, how do we understand the tug-of-war which took place between Hashem and Moshe in Heaven, and the fact that Moshe prevailed?

From here we learn the power of Torah, which protects and shields (*Sotah* 21a). The Torah itself is comprised of the Names of Hashem (*Zohar* II, 90b), which are written in the pesukim. It is what protects us from the *Yetzer Hara* and all of our enemies. The Torah shields us from forbidden temptations.

I recall the simplicity in the home of my mentor, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l. His sefarim were his furnishings. Eventually, everything physical will deteriorate. Every person will meet his end, for nothing in this world is permanent. Hashem is eternal, as the pasuk says (*Eichah* 5:19), "You, Hashem, are enthroned forever." The Torah, the word of the living G-d, is everlasting. It is what bestows eternity upon a person, as the Gemara tells us (*Berachot* 18a), "Tzaddikim are considered living even after death." By learning Torah and observing it with all our 248 organs and 365 sinews, parallel to the 613 mitzvot, we merit a portion of eternity. Torah is truly the elixir of life!

This was tangibly felt at the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. A fire literally descended from Heaven and engulfed his casket (*Zohar* III, 296b). Similarly, Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were cast into a furnace and emerged unscathed. Daniel in the lions' den was untouched. There is no force against the power of Torah. Neither fire nor wild animals are equal to its potency.

There were a few moments of close connection when Hashem gave Moshe the *luchot*. Moshe represented Am Yisrael, for he was equal to the

entire nation. He received the Torah directly from Hashem. Thus, Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael were united as one, as the Zohar states. A person has the ability to return to those majestic moments when he is engrossed in the study of Torah, for at that time he is united with Hashem and His Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* is powerless when he sees the three of them together.

Now we might understand how Moshe could pull the *luchot* away from Hashem. He was actually pleading, "Hashem, if You take back the Torah, we will never be united. In that case, my life will be worthless, so You may as well kill me. Your entire desire is, after all, that there should be unity among us." Hashem accepted his words and allowed Moshe to take the *luchot*.

Moshe descended with the power of *achdut* in his hands. One who learns Torah and internalizes it until it becomes an integral part of him is one with it and with Hashem. He carries it with him always, even when he does not have a Gemara with him. Therefore, when Am Yisrael saw Moshe Rabbeinu descend with the power of Hashem and the Torah, together with the merit of Bnei Yisrael who had not sinned with the Golden Calf, they were in awe. The *Erev Rav* feared him, for he had the Torah as his protection.

We should use Moshe Rabbeinu as our role model in Torah study. He incorporated the Torah into his being, internalizing its truths. The Gemara states (*Kiddushin* 40b), "Great is Torah, for it brings one to action." Furthermore (*Avot* 1:17), "Not study, but practice is the main thing." One who learns but transgresses what he knows to be right is considered as having broken the *luchot*. But one who learns in the correct way, unites with all of the *neshamot* of Klal Yisrael. He causes a connection in *Shamayim*, as well. This is the connection between Hashem, Yisrael, and Torah.

In Summary

- ♦ The only thing in this world which is eternal is the Torah. Therefore, one who adheres to the Torah gains eternity and is protected from all harm.

This is why Moshe Rabbeinu did not fear that the people would kill him when he descended with the *luchot*, as they had killed Chur.

- ♦ Furthermore, Moshe pulled the *luchot* away from Hashem, as it were. He claimed, “If man will learn Torah in this world and internalize its message, he will be one with it and with Hashem. This is, after all, Your desire. Therefore, it is fitting for the Torah to come down to this world.” In the merit of this unity, Bnei Yisrael had no power to harm him.

Moshe’s Tefillah on Behalf of Bnei Yisrael

“Moshe pleaded before Hashem, his G-d, and said: Why, Hashem, should Your anger flare up against Your people, whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a strong hand?”

(*Shemot* 32:11)

How is this prayer, which Moshe offered in order to save Bnei Yisrael from destruction after the sin of the Golden Calf, different from his other prayers? We find that here he “pleaded before Hashem,” which is not mentioned elsewhere.

Let us understand how Moshe managed to appease Hashem’s anger toward Bnei Yisrael after they sinned. At that time, Hashem told him, “I will make you a great nation.” But Moshe was not agreeable to such a deal, and he relinquished this great honor. Instead, Moshe immediately “pleaded before Hashem.” The word ויחל (pleaded) shares letters with the word חולין (mundane) (*Berachot* 32a). Moshe negated his own interests for the benefit of Klal Yisrael. He said, “If I am so important in Your eyes, to the extent that You wish to make a nation from me, it is

proof that when You proclaimed ‘I am Hashem, your G-d,’ at Har Sinai (*Shemot* 20:2), You were speaking only to me. Due to this privilege, I ask that You forgive Bnei Yisrael. Since You did not intend to give them the Torah directly, please do not be angry over the *Chet Ha’egel*. You spoke only to me at Har Sinai. Forgive the nation.”

Hashem, indeed, accepted Moshe’s words and was mollified. Then, He wrapped Himself in a tallit as the *sheliach tzibur* (*Rosh Hashanah* 17b). He was demonstrating that the entire nation was wrapped up in His prayer. He Himself was enrobed together with them. Then He recited the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

The pivotal point of Moshe’s prayer, and the major factor in Hashem’s forgiveness, was Moshe’s close relationship with Hashem at Har Sinai. This is hinted at in the words “Moshe pleaded before Hashem.” He used the merit of his closeness to Hashem in order to receive pardon for his people.

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy begin with the words (*Shemot* 34:6), “Hashem passed before him and proclaimed.” The words **על פניך** (before Him) are used, alluding to Moshe’s closeness with Hashem, as indicated by the phrase “Moshe pleaded before Hashem” (**את פניך**). It was the intimacy which Moshe enjoyed with Hashem that was capable of revoking the decree against Bnei Yisrael.

Afterward, Moshe asked (*Shemot* 33:18), “Show me now Your glory.” Hashem answered, “No human can see Me and live.” As long as man is alive, he cannot perceive Hashem. Even the angels could not tolerate Moshe’s presence among them, demanding, “What is a human being doing among us!?” (*Shabbat* 88b). Materialism and spirituality are diametrically opposed. When Hashem created the woman from Adam’s rib, He first cast a slumber upon Adam, because the spiritual forces at work were too great for him to bear. When materialism comes in contact with spirituality, it becomes consumed. Physical pleasures pale into nothingness next to sanctity and saintliness.

Only after death, when the *neshamah* ascends to the fiftieth gate of *kedushah*, is it capable of perceiving Hashem. This is alluded to in Hashem's reply, "No human (בָּנָן) can see Me and live," as the word בָּנָן (man) is numerically equivalent to fifty. In life, it is impossible to rise higher than the forty-ninth level of *kedushah*. Perfection is possible only after death. In life, there is always the chance of sinning, as Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:4), "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." Tehillim bears this out in the words (8:6), "You have made him but slightly less than the angels."

In Summary

- ♦ Why did Moshe "plead before Hashem" specifically here, and not in any of his other prayers?
- ♦ The Torah is hinting to Moshe's winning appeal in his pleading with Hashem. He asked Hashem that his close relationship with Him, as indicated by the fact that Hashem addressed him at Har Sinai, should stand on behalf of Bnei Yisrael.
- ♦ In merit of his pleading with Hashem, Moshe was rewarded with Hashem passing before him and proclaiming the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.
- ♦ Moshe could not see Hashem and live, for this is impossible. The reason why man cannot perceive Hashem and remain alive is that as long as a person lives, it is probable that he will sin.

The Message of the Broken Luchot

"It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, that Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his

hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain”

(*Shemot 32:19*)

Chazal tell us that when Moshe was still in *Shamayim*, and Bnei Yisrael sinned with the calf, Hashem refused to give him the Torah, fearing for its fate. Chazal add (*Yerushalmi, Ta'anit* 4:5), that Moshe tugged at it from one side, wishing to bring it down, while Hashem tugged at it from the other side. Moshe ultimately prevailed, and brought down the *luchot*. Hashem said about this, “My children have triumphed over Me.”

This Midrash demands explanation. How can we understand this tug-of-war between Moshe and Hashem? And why was Moshe so adamant about bringing down the *luchot* altogether? Immediately upon returning, he smashed them. Moreover, if Moshe had no intention of giving them to the nation, why didn’t he simply hide them? What was his objective in breaking them and keeping the broken pieces in the Aron?

Originally, the angels wished to burn Moshe, demanding, “What is a human doing among us?” (*Shabbat* 88b). They asked Hashem to desist from giving the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, for they would sin with the calf and desecrate the Torah. Indeed, when Bnei Yisrael sinned, Hashem feared that the angels would come before Him and remind Him of what they had claimed at the time of Creation. This was that He should refrain from creating mankind altogether, for man would eventually sin. They were now proven correct, for Am Yisrael was embroiled in the sin of the Golden Calf. It would seem appropriate to hold back the Torah from them.

Hashem, so to speak, quarreled with Moshe over the Torah. His purpose was to show the angels just how far Moshe’s *mesirut nefesh* extended on behalf of the Torah. Moshe announced to all in the Heavenly spheres that now that he had tasted the flavor of Torah, he would not surrender it for anything. He preferred death over life without Torah. When the angels observed how resolute was his desire to receive the Torah, they resolved to allow him to keep it. All of their claims fell flat. Moshe proved to them that specifically because of the *Chet Ha’egel*, the

nation was in need of the Torah, which would help them battle their war with the *Yetzer Hara*.

Through Moshe's triumph over Hashem in taking the Torah, Moshe offered Bnei Yisrael a potent lesson in self-sacrifice. He showed all generations that one must negate himself completely in order to receive the Torah and fulfill it properly. Man must be prepared to sacrifice his life rather than transgress the words of the holy Torah.

As Moshe descended the mountain, he smashed the *luchot*, because Am Yisrael were not worthy of receiving them. He hid them in the Aron Ha'eidut. This impressed upon the people the level of their sanctity. If the broken *luchot* received such honor, hidden in the Aron in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, how much holiness was there in their original, complete state!

Moshe purposely smashed the *luchot* and did not keep them whole in order to teach us the following lesson. When a person is idle, not involved in learning Torah as he should be, but seeks distractions from his studies, his Torah learning is disrupted and loses a measure of its efficacy. His studies are similar to the broken *luchot*.

In order for one to maximize his learning and bring glory to Hashem's Name, he must learn in an organized fashion. He should have a set time for his studies. Only learning done in an orderly manner will last. But when a person becomes involved in a million and one other issues, he ends up losing on all fronts. Woe to the shame of Torah learning in such a manner!

In a lighter vein, we can imagine a person who passes by the *genizah* bin. He stands before pieces of all types of holy works, his heart saddened at their sorry state. He decides to take action and gathers all of the pages together. He binds them into one sefer, and begins learning from it. How ludicrous it is for him to learn from such a book, when each page is taken from a different place and discusses completely different subjects.

I merited settling a difficulty of the *Baal Hahafla'ah* recently, even though I learned the subject over thirty-five years ago. I am sure the topic became rooted in me, due to the effort I had invested in its study, based on the learning patterns of my mentors. When I was a yeshiva student, I left home for a place of Torah. I did not see my family for seven years straight! In the yeshiva, we subsisted on spiritual sustenance. The food was simple fare, meant to keep body and soul together. The bedding and linens were plain, nothing fancy or fluffy, like one can find nowadays. But the mattresses didn't matter to us. Our objective was to learn in order to fulfill the Torah *lishmah*. I merited, with *siyata di'Shemaya*, to resolve the difficulty, in spite of the many years which had passed.

In breaking the *luchot*, Moshe taught us that Torah study without self-sacrifice is incomplete. As long as one does not clarify the Mishnah that he is learning, he will never understand it or be able to fulfill its directives. On the other hand, Moshe saw fit to hide the broken *luchot*. This teaches us that all words of Torah are intrinsically sacred, regardless of how they were learnt. If man wishes to make his Torah learning complete, he should learn with great exertion and be ready to sacrifice his life for it.

In Summary

- ♦ Chazal tell us that Moshe argued with Hashem and the angels in *Shamayim* regarding bringing down the *luchot habrit* to Am Yisrael. This is most puzzling, for just as soon as he descended, he smashed them. Why, then, did he insist on taking them? Furthermore, why did he see fit to break them, and not simply hide them, ready to be given to Am Yisrael when they would be found worthy?
- ♦ Already at man's creation, the angels opposed his existence, for he would eventually sin. Now, at the *Chet Ha'egel*, their allegations seemed well-founded. Hashem wrestled with Moshe over the *luchot*, until Moshe finally wrested them from His hands. This was in order to demonstrate to the angels just how far Moshe's *mesirut nefesh* extended for the sake of bringing the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

- ◆ After Moshe descended the mountain, he smashed the *luchot* and placed them in the Aron. This taught our nation that the Torah is intrinsically sacred, for even in their broken state, the *luchot* were accorded honor. By smashing the *luchot*, Moshe broke the news that incomplete Torah is not the real thing. Torah must be studied through utter *mesirut nefesh*. Torah studied half-heartedly is compared to the broken pieces of the *luchot*, placed in the Aron, which is an allusion to man's body.

Shattering Complacency

"It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, that Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain"

(Shemot 32:19)

As Moshe descended the mountain, he observed the Golden Calf. He saw Bnei Yisrael dancing and rejoicing with it. He could not tolerate this and hurried to smash the *luchot* which he had just received. The *luchot* were the words of the living G-d. How could Moshe do such a thing out of anger? Why didn't he see fit to hide them, instead, until Bnei Yisrael would repent and be worthy of receiving them?

Furthermore, how can we understand that Moshe did not fear the people when he broke the *luchot* and burned the Golden Calf, grinding it to a fine powder? They could have made an uprising and killed him, just as they killed Miriam's son, Chur, when he protested the fashioning of the Golden Calf. Bnei Yisrael were fervent and fanatical in their worship of the

calf, seeing it as their savior. Whoever tried to chastise them was chased away.

We might resolve all of the questions with one answer. Moshe wanted to shake up Bnei Yisrael by his actions. This would awaken them to complete teshuvah, meriting atonement for their grave sin. When Moshe broke the *luchot* and burned up the calf, he did not pay attention whatsoever to his own well-being. All of his concerns were for his people. He always sought methods to help them improve and mend their ways. He felt that only something drastic and desperate would get their attention and bring them to teshuvah. He hurried to do these acts without thinking of his own safety. His deeds indeed reached their mark and spurred the people to do complete teshuvah, repenting their heinous acts.

The following story once circulated in the Torah city of Bnei Brak. A rich man left his sons two wills. One was to be opened upon his death, whereas the other was to be opened only after the seven days of shivah ended. After he passed away, his sons opened the first will. They were surprised to read that their father requested to be buried wearing white socks. They hurried to the Rav with this unusual request, asking him how to proceed. According to halachah, it is forbidden to bury a person that way. The Rav, indeed, ruled that they should not put socks on their father, but bury him just as everyone else is buried. They should beg his forgiveness, though, for not fulfilling his request.

At the end of the shivah, the children opened the second will. This is what it stated, "My dear ones, I am sure that you did not get approval to bury me with socks on. I wished to prove to you that with all the wealth I accumulated, I could not even take with me a pair of socks to the World of Truth."

I am sure that had the father lectured to his sons every day, day in and day out, about the end of man, and how, after 120 years, he leaves this world with nothing at all, he would not have made the same impact as he did with his strange request. The reason is as follows. An extreme act

which is unexpected and unusual has the power to agitate a person. He becomes unnerved and improves himself with newfound strength. Words of *mussar*, on the other hand, need to be repeated often in order to make an impression on a person. The act of Pinchas was also an unusual act. He stood up, against all odds, and killed the leader of a tribe. This unsettled the nation and drove his message straight to their souls.

There is a famous story told of a wealthy man who, before his death, divided up his estate among his sons. To everyone's surprise, he bequeathed to his youngest son a three-meter long bolt of fabric. At first, everyone was riddled with questions, but after some time, they began to realize that this son actually received the best inheritance of all. None of the money would accompany them to their final rest. But this son received a piece of cloth, in which he would eventually be buried. He internalized its eternal message, which would escort him to his final rest.

Moshe knew that a severe step on his part would shake the nation out of their smugness. They would contemplate their actions and hopefully arrive at the correct conclusions. Had he merely approached them with words of *mussar*, they would have ignored him, or even worse, harmed him, in their zest and zeal for sin.

In Summary

- ♦ When Moshe observed the *Chet Ha'egel*, he immediately broke the *luchot* he was holding, and burned up the Golden Calf. Why didn't he hide the *luchot*, to be available when the nation would deserve them? Furthermore, how did he not fear that the people would kill him as they had killed Chur?
- ♦ Moshe did not consider his own well-being at all. All of his concerns were solely for Am Yisrael. Since he understood that only a drastic act would shake them up and bring them to teshuvah, he acted the way he did in spite of the danger involved.

- ♦ We find that Pinchas, too, acted brazenly. He stood up against the nation and killed the *Nasi* of the tribe of Shimon. His zealousness brought the epidemic to a halt.

The Cause of the Chet Ha'egel

“Now, go and lead the people to where I have told you. Behold! My angel shall go before you, and on the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them”

(Shemot 32:34)

There is no punishment that comes upon Israel which does not have in it some retribution for the sin of the Golden Calf (*Rashi*).

This entire episode is astounding! Here was Bnei Yisrael, about one month after *Matan Torah*, still standing at the foot of Har Sinai, the most sanctified place, where the Torah had been given, veering from the right path and sinning with the calf. Additionally, they were so overcome with their obsession to fashion the calf that they killed Chur, who tried to protest. They even threatened to kill Aharon, as well, if he would not cooperate with them. This is very difficult to understand.

Chazal explain (*Shemot Rabbah* 42:6) that it was not the entire nation that sinned with the Golden Calf, but the *Erev Rav*. What was so terrible about their sin, then, that we are still suffering for it to this very day?

Even if it was only the *Erev Rav* who participated, they too, stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah. How could they fall so low?

This incident teaches us a fundamental principle in Avodat Hashem. A person often desires to come close to Hashem or do a certain mitzvah. In

his over-enthusiasm, he forgets the halachah and transgresses. For example, a Jew decides to rise at *neitz*, and pray *kivatikin*, the ideal time for the Morning Prayer. But when he reaches the synagogue, he might shove his fellow worshippers in his haste to reach his seat. Alternatively, upon arising early, he might inadvertently wake up his family members, stealing their sleep. A Jew might wish to give *tzedakah* to a pauper. Interrogating him and asking all types of embarrassing questions will surely shame him, often in public. This is all in his zeal to be charitable.

What would be a king's reaction to someone who pushes and elbows his way in to see him? He would surely be enraged. Even though the man's intentions are honorable, his deeds are wanting.

When we want to serve Hashem, we must be careful to remain within the confines of halachah, and should not, *chas v'shalom*, transgress sins in our eagerness to elevate ourselves. This would fall under the category of "a mitzvah which comes through an aveirah" (*Sukkah* 30a). Nadav and Avihu are examples of people who wanted to connect with Hashem. In their burning desire to come close to Him, they brought "an alien fire which He did not command" and were punished with death (*Vayikra* 10:1).

The *Eirev Rav* also wished to cling to Hashem. They felt that Moshe was the perfect conduit between them and Him. But when he left them, they sought other ways of connecting with Hashem. In Egypt, the standard intermediary with a deity was through an idol. They therefore felt the urge to create the calf. Through good intentions, they transgressed the most heinous sin of *avodah zarah*.

One should always consider the outcome of a mitzvah before he does it. He should ensure that no mishap occur, *chas v'shalom*, as happened at the *Chet Ha'egel*. The saying "Last in deed, but first in thought" is constantly uppermost in one's mind when he is involved in business transactions. It should be one's motto, as well, when in the process of performing mitzvot.

Why were Bnei Yisrael punished, if it was just the *Eirev Rav* who sinned? It was because the nation stood by silently, instead of rebuking

the *Eirev Rav* for their abominable deed. Their lack of protest was held against them.

The sefarim state that tzaddikim pass through Gehinnom on their way to Gan Eden. What is the reason for this? It is in order to point out various resha'im who are there. Had the tzaddikim only reproved these resha'im, they may have done teshuvah. At least, they would have refrained from some of their sins. We bear the huge responsibility of concerning ourselves with the sins of our fellow Jews. We are obligated to rebuke them in a pleasant manner.

I was once approached by a man who was scheduled to marry a gentile woman. I told him that this was a most serious offense. He replied, "The Torah tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. I am only fulfilling what it says."

I thought to myself, "How far this man has gone, that he cannot distinguish between Jew and gentile." We must try our best to prevent sin.

The Golden Calf symbolizes *avodah zarah*. But we must realize that we also worship idols. For example, in foreign countries, parents wake up their children to another day of learning secular subjects. However, on Shabbat morning, when it is time for prayer, they have compassion on their children, allowing them to sleep a little longer. They don't worry about them missing tefillah. Placing secular studies above tefillah and Torah is a form of *avodah zarah*. One must be on the lookout constantly, for the *Yetzer Hara* is in ambush every day, year after year. Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:4), "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." This is because, as the *Chovot Halevavot* (*Sha'ar* 5:5) teaches, the *Yetzer Hara* accompanies a person throughout his life.

In Summary

- ♦ How could Bnei Yisrael descend to the level of serving the calf, after all the miracles they had witnessed at *Matan Torah*? Chazal tell us that it was the *Eirev Rav* who fashioned the calf. Why, then, was the entire nation punished?

- ◆ The *Eirev Rav* formed the calf, because they sought an agent through which to serve Hashem. We should be careful to do our mitzvot based on halachah.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael observed the *Eirev Rav* sinning, but did not protest. For this, they were punished. The tzaddikim arrive at Gan Eden through Gehinnom. They are shown just how many sins were committed because they did not protest.
- ◆ Mixed-up priorities give our children the wrong message. The *avodah zarah* of our time is the corruption in our value system, placing greater emphasis on secular studies than on Torah and tefillah.

The Broken Luchot

“Hashem said to Moshe: Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones, and I shall inscribe on the Tablets the words that were on the first Tablets, which you shattered”

(*Shemot 34:1*)

Moshe was told to carve (*פסול*) the *luchot*. Rashi explains that Hashem showed him a quarry of sapphire from within his tent and said to him, “The chips (*פסולות*) shall be yours.” Moshe became very wealthy from them.

The chips teach us a piece of wisdom. These *luchot*, which Moshe carved, replaced the original *luchot*, which he had broken. Hashem demonstrated to him that even from the fragments of the *luchot*, one can become wealthy. A Jew always has the ability to produce pearls of wisdom when he studies Torah, even if he feels that he is nothing but a broken vessel. Studying Torah fills one with pleasure.

I once had the *zechut* to bring back a fellow Jew to the love of Torah. He indeed became attached to Torah and had a great affection for it. He approached me some time later, stating that he was on the verge of closing his store and declaring bankruptcy. He had decided to learn in kollel full-time, and would not have any time to tend to his store, even though he had no other source of income. I asked him why he didn't consider opening his shop in the morning and reserve his learning session for the evening hours. He answered that at night he is tired, and he would never manage a learning session then. His intention was to declare bankruptcy, and he would hope for the best concerning a livelihood. This man had many financial worries, yet he was not willing to yield a moment of Torah study. This is just as we explained; even a dispirited person collects gems of Torah and delights in its pursuit.

Chazal tell us (*Berachot* 8b), "The broken *luchot* rest in the Aron." What significance did the broken pieces have that they were kept in the Aron Ha'eidut in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. According to our previous premise, these fragments themselves are the *eidut* (testimonial). They testify to the fact that even a broken Jew contains innumerable mitzvot. This is why they were kept in the Aron Ha'eidut. Bnei Yisrael are never alone. Specifically at a time of hardship and suffering, one can navigate his way by means of the healing waters of Torah.

After Moshe smashed the first *luchot*, Hashem thanked him for doing so (*Shabbat* 87a). According to our line of reasoning, Hashem was endorsing the breaking of the *luchot*, since this gave Bnei Yisrael the message that wherever a Jew can be found, he has opportunities to do mitzvot and good deeds. Even the broken *luchot* were priceless. This is why they were placed in the Aron in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. One should constantly remember that even when he feels down and out, he has the ability to grow in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, finding balm in the soothing words of Hashem.

I met the Gaon, Rabbi Nissim Bigaoui, zt"l, who wrote a French commentary on *Seder Zera'im*. When he was in the midst of his final illness, he held in his hand a volume of *Masechet Demai*, which is a very

difficult subject. Amidst all of his suffering, he didn't cease learning for a moment, until he finished his wonderful treatise. This is a perfect example of a *talmid chacham* who succeeded to learn and teach even under the most trying circumstances.

Similarly, I witnessed the Gaon, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Mir. He was ill with Parkinson's, a most debilitating and demoralizing disease. Yet he gathered all his strength to wage the war of Torah. He never missed a shiur of disseminating Torah, and the yoke of supporting the yeshiva rested on his shoulders. Even when one is broken, like the *luchot*, a Jew finds opportunities for Torah and mitzvot.

Conversely, I noticed a Jew who is bound to a wheelchair. He passes his time by watching television. Similarly, a Jew who found it difficult to make ends meet wanted to keep his shop open on Shabbat. These people do not realize that even when the going gets rough, one must adhere to Torah and mitzvot. Particularly at a time of hardship, a person has the power to bring forth precious gems of Torah.

I think that the reason why Hashem told Moshe to take the chips that fell from the second *luchot*, rendering him wealthy, was the following. Moshe broke the *luchot* in order to protect Bnei Yisrael from the indictment of the *Chet Ha'egel*. But he felt tremendous anguish at smashing the handiwork of Hashem. Hashem comforted him by saying, "By breaking the *luchot*, you taught your nation the following lesson: When a Jew will find himself sick or depressed, broken in spirit, and full of pain and suffering, he should always feel connected to Torah." This reassurance was worth much to Moshe.

When a person feels that he is at the end of his rope, he should grasp the thread of Torah, wrapping himself up in its warmth. He should involve himself in it, extracting diamonds and pearls. He will feel bound with Torah and find enjoyment in each and every word.

In Summary

- ◆ Moshe was told to “carve for yourself” the *luchot*. Hashem was telling him that the chips of the *luchot* were for him to keep. Diamonds are hewn from the broken *luchot*. This is analogous to a broken man. When he is engrossed in Torah, it provides him with pleasure and is a balm for his spirit.
- ◆ The broken *luchot* were stored in the Aron. Even a depressed Jew, as depicted by the broken *luchot*, is obligated to fulfill mitzvot, as depicted by the Aron.
- ◆ Hashem thanked Moshe for breaking the *luchot*. He was thanking him for showing the nation that even when their spirit is broken, they should be involved in Torah, bringing forth pearls of wisdom.

Torah Is the Vessel That Holds Blessing

“No man may ascend with you, nor may anyone be seen on the entire mountain. Even the flock and the cattle may not graze facing that mountain”

(Shemot 34:3)

When Hashem commanded Moshe to carve new *luchot* to replace the broken ones, He added that when these *luchot* would be brought to the nation, no one should approach the mountain. He included the prohibition of grazing the sheep and cattle near the mountain.

Why did Hashem forbid them from grazing their animals before the mountain? Was there any fear that maybe the animals would seize the crown which rightfully belongs to Am Yisrael? The animals could not

relate whatsoever to the Giving of the Torah; why then, were Bnei Yisrael forbidden from pasturing their sheep nearby?

The sheep and cattle represent the mundane and material. They symbolize the physical pleasures of this world. When Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai to accept the Torah, Hashem wanted them to be completely detached from all things physical. Torah is spiritual and cannot coexist with the materialism which marks this world. One who truly desires to acquire Torah must first disconnect himself from the frivolities of this world.

This is hinted to by the fact that Har Sinai is described in our pasuk (*Shemot* 34:3) as “that mountain – הַהוּא הַהָר.” The word **הוּא** (that) is numerically equivalent to the word **טוֹב** (good). Torah is the true good, as David Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 119:72), “The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands in gold and silver.” In order to receive the full flavor of Torah, it is paramount to keep the sheep and cattle at a distance from the mountain, in order that they not damage this good thing.

When I was in Miami, an elderly woman approached me, surprised to hear that I am the grandson of the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a. She told me that she owes her life to the blessing of my grandfather. She related the following narrative.

Many years ago, her father came to my grandfather, crying to him that his sons were dying young. His wife was now expecting a baby, and he feared for its life. He asked for the tzaddik’s *berachah* that the baby might live, requesting a guarantee that it would have a long life. My grandfather told him that the day his wife would give birth, he would come to bless her and the baby for good health and a long life. The man was quite taken aback at the words of Rabbi Chaim. His wife was only in her second month of pregnancy; there were still another seven months. How could the Rav obligate himself, when there was still a long way to go until the birth? However, my grandfather assured him that on the day of the birth, he would come to them, and bless them.

Indeed, on the day of the baby's birth, my grandfather paid the family a visit and blessed both mother and baby with good, long life. This woman before me was that baby, born in the merit of the blessing of my grandfather.

Upon pondering this incident, I came to the following conclusion. My grandfather concerned himself with everyone's plight. This *middah* of caring for others was so etched in his soul that he could promise, with a secure heart, to arrive on the day of the birth, even though it was scheduled months away. He counted the days like one counts Sefirat Haomer. I am sure that he received Divine assistance to come to the new mother exactly on the right date, without having to burden himself by coming many times for nothing. If we would contemplate the source of his total self-negation for the benefit of Klal Yisrael, we could ascribe it to his complete nullification of materialism. This is the reason for Hashem's command to keep the sheep at a distance from the mountain. The word רעה (grazing) is related to the word רעות (friendship). Affability with materialism averts closeness with Torah.

In a different vein, we might explain the following. Sheep and cattle represent the *avodah zarah* of the Egyptians, who deified the sheep and worshipped it. At the time of receiving the Torah, Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to be completely detached from this abomination, in order to be able to accept the Torah.

Another incident occurred to me on my trip to Miami. A man of about sixty years told me his story. When he was a young man, he lived in Los Angeles. He became engaged to a young lady there. After some time, though, they broke the engagement, because he had been brought up in an ultra-Orthodox home, whereas she was secular. They came to the conclusion that such a home had no hope of lasting.

After a while, this young man met a modest religious woman. They got married and established a beautiful Torah home. Just a few days ago, this man continued, he was riding the bus when a woman dressed most immodestly approached him, asking if he recognized her. At first, he

couldn't remember who she was, but after a few moments, he realized that she was the very girl whom he had been engaged to forty years earlier. She told him that she had also married, but her marriage ended in divorce.

After returning home, this man found himself constantly thinking about this woman. He could not get rid of her image. He came to me in despair, asking what he could do to erase her picture from his mind. I told him that if her image haunts him, it is a sign that he is not sufficiently involved in Torah study. Foreign thoughts enter a mind devoid of Torah (*Rambam, Issurei Biah* 22:21). In order to completely eradicate her memory from his mind, he must immerse himself in the depths of Torah, through exertion and toil. This is the only way to return to his former state. This story teaches us that in order to merit Torah study, absolute severance from all abomination and frivolities of this world is necessary.

Parashat *Yitro* begins with the words (*Shemot* 18:1), "Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard." Rashi expounds, "What report did he hear that he came? The Splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the war with Amalek." This poses a difficulty. Were the reports of *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the war with Amalek the only factors that brought him to join the nation? His son-in-law was Moshe, the leader of the nation. He surely told Yitro about Hashem's miraculous supervision of Am Yisrael. What was so significant about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek, that his joining our nation is attributed to them?

Furthermore, at this point, Yitro had been demoted from his post as the minister of Midian, because the populace had heard about his intentions to join Am Yisrael. Why, then, does the pasuk call him, "Yitro, the minister of Midian"?

When Yitro was awakened to cling to Hashem and His Torah, his *Yetzer Hara* told him, "Why are you going through with this? Until now, you were the minister of Midian, basking in glory and honor. If you join the Jews, you'll be a nobody." But Yitro paid him no heed. Yitro surely knew good and well about the greatness of Moshe, his son-in-law. But this knowledge

became rooted into his consciousness only after he heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek. It gained greater impact through his overcoming the persuasions of the *Yetzer Hara*. He was able to gain a deep recognition that Hashem runs the world and Moshe leads His people. Through this deep-seated understanding, he joined the Jewish nation.

"Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, came to Moshe with his sons and wife, to the Wilderness" (*ibid.* 5). We know that he intended to go to the Wilderness. What was the purpose in stating it? It teaches us that Yitro gave up all of his honor and worldly possessions, making them free to the public, just like the desert is a place that is free for all. This was in order that he should be able to accept the Torah perfectly. This is referred to in the pasuk (*ibid.* 34:3), "The flock and the cattle, too, shall not graze facing that mountain."

It is fitting to add the following thought. It is not likely that the nations of the world did not want to receive the Torah. They heard about the wonders and miracles which occurred to Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim and the Wilderness. They surely desired to be the Chosen Nation. Their drawback was that they refused to give up the pleasures of this world for the sake of Torah. Torah and materialism cannot co-exist. Therefore, Hashem sought a nation that would agree to accept the yoke of Torah on its shoulders and would yield physical pleasures to a Higher cause.

In his sefer *Da'at Umussar*, the Gaon, Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, zt"l, writes that there are two types of vessels. One contains blessing, and one does not. The one which does not, cannot hold even one drop above its rim. But the vessel which contains blessing can be filled above its rim. More can be added without any worry that it will spill. This defies nature. If we were to take a bottle which is filled to the top, it would be impossible to fill it further. It would overflow and spill out. What is meant by the concept of a vessel which contains blessing?

He explains that the vessel is man and the blessing is our sense of hearing. A person who wallows in the nonsense of this world has no

reception for words of Torah. He is a vessel which does not contain blessing. On the other hand, we find that a person who is brimming with Torah is capable of retaining more and more words of Torah. He is a vessel which contains blessing. As much as he hears, he internalizes. He becomes better and better, not losing a drop of what he previously mastered.

If the person who is not fitting for blessing would just empty his head of the foolishness of this world, turning his heart instead to words of Torah, he will become transformed into a vessel which contains blessing.

The great *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, is an example of this. When he was yet an ignoramus, he told his family, “Bring me a *talmid chacham*, so that I might bite him like a donkey” (*Pesachim* 49b). With time, he became the greatest *talmid chacham*. He turned into a vessel containing water, which is an analogy to Torah, by internalizing the message of the water dripping constantly on the stone. He said, “Just as the stone became worn away due to the constant dripping, so too, can words of the living waters (meaning Torah) enter my heart” (*Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 6b). In order to grow in Torah, Rabbi Akiva went into exile, leaving his home for twenty-four years (*Ketubot* 63a). Through completely disconnecting himself from physicality, he merited reaching such tremendous heights.

Rabbi Avraham Chalimi, zt”l, of Algeria, asks the following. The pasuk states (*Vayikra* 18:17), “You shall reprove your fellow.” There is a mitzvah to reprove the rasha over and over again (הוֹכֵחַ תָּוכִיחַ). If he did not listen the first time, he is responsible for his misdeeds. Why is there a command to repeatedly reprove him? He answers that it could be that the sinner’s heart was not amenable to accepting chastisement. But with time, the words of rebuke might find a way in. At the right moment, they will spring forth before him and bring him to complete teshuvah. He will regain his former status as a vessel containing blessing.

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 15a) relates that Elisha ben Avuyah was called “Acher” (Another), because he defected. A Heavenly Voice proclaimed, “Everyone is enjoined to do teshuvah and receive a portion in the World

to Come, except for Elisha ben Avuyah.” When Elisha ben Avuyah heard this, he became filled with anger and despair and committed even more acts of wickedness. But he was certainly filled with sorrow over this announcement, until he actually did do teshuvah. We know that he cried at the time of his death. How great is the power of hearing. It can bring a person back to the path of righteousness and steer him away from his former iniquities. Even if the results are not immediate, nothing a person hears is lost. It vibrates within him, to produce results at a later time.

“This shall be the reward when you hearken” (*Devarim* 7:12). The word עַתָּה (when) means, “at the end of your hearkening,” since the word עַבְעֵד (hearkening) means a heel, which is at the bottom of the body. We can take the following message from this pasuk. Everything positive a person hears has an impact. Even if at the time, it did not seem to make an impression, the day will come when it may save his soul, bringing him back to the right path. Therefore, let a person listen to many words of Torah, for this is what brings to action (*Kiddushin* 40b).

In Summary

- ◆ Hashem instructed Moshe to tell the people to keep their sheep at a distance from the mountain. What was the reason for this? The sheep could not take away Bnei Yisrael’s status and receive the Torah instead of them.
- ◆ Sheep and cattle represent materialism. Since materialism contradicts the very fabric of Torah, they cannot co-exist. One who desires to make himself into a receptacle for Torah must first remove any shadow of physicality from himself. Moreover, the sheep symbolized the deity of Egypt. Bnei Yisrael had to remove any vestige of *avodah zarah* before accepting the Torah.
- ◆ “Yitro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard.” Rashi expounds, “What report did he hear that he came? The Splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the war with Amalek.” Moshe Rabbeinu was Yitro’s son-in-law. Certainly, Yitro heard many instances of Hashem’s miracles

from him. Why is his joining the nation attributed specifically to these two factors? Additionally, he had previously been demoted from his post. Why, then, is he referred to here as the minister of Midian?

- ◆ Yitro's *Yetzer Hara* tried to convince him to keep his former position, with all the glory involved. But Yitro paid him no heed. He had the stamina to disregard his Evil Inclination in the merit of Moshe, his son-in-law. He constantly heard about Hashem's miracles, but it was only after hearing about *Kriyat Yam Suf* and the battle with Amalek that this hearing made a strong impact on him. It was what eventually drew him to join the Jewish nation.
- ◆ Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, zt"l, states that there are two types of people. One is compared to a vessel that contains blessing, while the other does not. One who is filled with Torah thoughts always has room for more, without detracting from what is already there. Whereas one who fills his head with the idle pursuits of this world, cannot hold words of Torah. He is like a vessel which cannot contain blessing.
- ◆ “Do not be scornful of any person.” One can never know when words of rebuke will enter the heart of even the most hardened sinner. Elisha ben Avuyah is an example of someone who transgressed for much of his life, but did teshuvah at the end.
- ◆ “This shall be the reward when you hearken.” The word **בְּקֻעַ** (when) denotes “at the end.” Every good thing a person hears can eventually bring him to repent. The reports that Yitro heard entered his ears and his heart, because he abandoned his former glory, satisfying himself with being the father-in-law of Moshe.

Gems on Parashat Ki Tisa

Hashem's Love for Am Yisrael

"When you take a census of the Children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them"

(Shemot 30:12)

Why does the parashah begin with the census of Bnei Yisrael, and only at the end is the sin of the Golden Calf mentioned? It would seem that the *Chet Ha'egel* is more significant than counting the nation. Why was the parashah named after the counting (**נַפְשׁוֹת**), and not after the calf?

Hashem loves His nation fiercely. He did not want to allow room for indictment against His people, so He placed the incident of the calf toward the end of the parashah. This is also why the parashah is not named after the sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem wanted the entire episode to be relegated to obscurity.

This should teach us a tremendous lesson. Hashem loves us so very much. We must see to it to repay kindness with kindness and never, *chalilah*, show ingratitude for all His goodness toward us.

Likewise, Hashem preceded the remedy to the malady. “Charity rescues from death” (*Mishlei* 10:2). In order for people to be protected from retribution due to their future sin, they were enjoined to donate charity, by contributing the half-*shekel* in order to count them. This would provide them with atonement.

By Virtue, Not through Charity

“Hashem spoke to Moshe: Go, descend – for your people that you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt”

(*Shemot* 32:7)

When Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem ordered Moshe to descend to the earth, for His children had sinned and were no longer worthy of receiving the *luchot habrit*. Rashi expounds on this pasuk, “Descend from your greatness. I only gave you greatness on their account.” Hashem was telling Moshe that all of the prominence he received, living in Heaven for forty days and nights and learning Torah directly from Hashem, was in the merit of Bnei Yisrael. Had he not been commanded to transmit the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, in its perfect form, he would never have merited this distinction of living among Hashem and His angels.

But after they sinned, he was no longer worthy of remaining on High. As soon as they lost their right to the Torah, Moshe lost his privilege of remaining in Heaven. He was there as their emissary; when they reneged, his stature, too, was diminished. His *zechut* was dependent on Am Yisrael.

When Moshe heard this, he wanted to prove to Hashem that he was worthy of this distinction, not only in the merit of Bnei Yisrael, but in his

own merit. He loved the Torah with every fiber of his being, not only because he was appointed to transmit it to the nation, but because it was Hashem's word. In order to return to his previous exalted level, Moshe exerted himself tremendously in Torah study, until he achieved it. Only this time, it came through his own merit.

After Moshe received the Torah, the Satan came before Hashem, asking where the Torah was. Hashem answered that it was on earth. After scrupulous investigation, the Satan returned to Hashem, asking where exactly on earth it was to be found. Hashem informed him that it was with ben Amram (*Shabbat* 89a). This Midrash is difficult to understand. Why was the Satan interested in the whereabouts of the Torah?

Why did Hashem enter into discussion with the Satan, instead of immediately getting rid of him? Hashem purposely sent the Satan to Moshe, to prove to him just how beloved the Torah was to Moshe, who labored over it day and night.

"He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain" (*Shemot* 32:19). There is a deeper meaning to these words. Moshe shattered the Torah, which had not been granted to him in his own merit. When Bnei Yisrael would merit obtaining the second *luchot*, though, it would be through Moshe's efforts and personal investment in Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu, indeed, merited receiving the second *luchot* by virtue, and not by charity. This is why Hashem tells Bnei Yisrael (*Malachi* 3:22), "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant." The Torah is rightfully called by Moshe's name.

Moshe Breaks the Luchot

“It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, that Moshe’s anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain”

(Shemot 32:19)

Moshe perceived the Divine Attribute of Justice dancing around the calf, which Bnei Yisrael had just fashioned. He smashed the *luchot* in order to silence its voice. Bnei Yisrael were being seriously charged for their iniquity, for they had just received the Torah, in which the sin of idolatry is clearly stated. He broke the *luchot* in order to minimize the indictment against them. They were thus able to break free of all accusation against them.

By smashing the *luchot habrit*, written by Hashem Himself, Moshe was transferring the prosecution from the people to himself. Hashem accepted Moshe’s deed, which calmed the voice of allegation. In fact, He thanked Moshe for breaking the *luchot* (*Shabbat* 87a).

Torah and Materialism Are Mutually Exclusive

“No man may ascend with you, nor may anyone be seen on the entire mountain. Even the flock and the cattle may not graze facing that mountain”

(Shemot 34:3)

Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem commanded Moshe to warn the nation to keep their distance from Har Sinai, where the Torah was about to be given. Hashem also commanded that they should not allow their sheep and cattle to graze near the mountain.

Why were they forbidden from allowing their animals near the mountain? It is understood that the nation had to keep their distance, due to the great *kedushah* there. But animals lack intelligence; they cannot perceive *kedushah*. What was the point of keeping them away from the mountain?

The simple explanation, according to many of the commentaries, is that it was unfitting to allow animals to graze at the place where Hashem would rest His *Shechinah*.

But there is a deeper layer of understanding than just the topsoil which the sheep would graze. Animals symbolize shallowness and superficiality. They exemplify the materialism of this world. And just as the animals were forbidden to come near the mountain, so too, physicality and materialism cannot co-exist with the Torah. When the trivialities of this world fill a man's mind, they leave no room for Torah thoughts. Hashem therefore commanded Moshe to draw a line of demarcation between Torah and the frivolities of this world. They are diametrically opposed and cannot exist together. Only after man removes animalistic tendencies from himself can he hope to become a vessel accepting the words of the holy Torah.

The word רעוּ (graze) has the same root as the word רעה (friendliness). Materialism and Torah do not co-mingle. The mountain is described as “הזה – that,” which has the same *gematria* as the word טוב (good). Torah is the only true good. Since the Torah is the essence of goodness, one must cling to it without other interests, such as physical lusts.

Moshe's Second Ascent to Heaven

“Hashem said to Moshe: Write these words for yourself, for according to these words have I sealed a covenant with you and Israel. He remained there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights – he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water – and He wrote on the Tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments”

(*Shemot 34:27-28*)

These pesukim describe Moshe Rabbeinu's second ascent to Heaven in order to receive the second *luchot*, after he broke the first ones on account of Bnei Yisrael's sin. He ascended for another forty days and nights, in which he sanctified himself by abstaining from food and drink. After studying Torah directly from Hashem for that entire time, Hashem wrote a second set of *luchot*, and Moshe brought them down to the nation.

The Sefat Emet asks an obvious question. Moshe had learned the entire Torah on his previous ascent. What was the point of going up to Heaven for a second time and learning the Torah all over again? Wouldn't it have

been enough for him to just transcribe the second *luchot*, without having to go through the whole process?

We might resolve this difficulty with the words of the Ben Ish Chai (see *Shanah Rishonah, Ki Tisa*). When Moshe Rabbeinu asked for forgiveness and mercy for Am Yisrael, he included himself, as though he had also sinned. Why did he do this?

The Ben Ish Chai answers that the tzaddik atones for the generation. If the generation sinned, it is an indication that their leader was remiss. Had he rebuked them and encouraged them, they might not have fallen into sin. Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he was somehow responsible for their sin. Maybe he had not fortified the people sufficiently before he ascended the mountain. Had he inspired them correctly, they might not have fallen into iniquity. He wanted Hashem to forgive this shortcoming of his, as well as the sin of the rest of the nation.

According to this line of reasoning, we might say that Moshe ascended to Heaven a second time in order to learn the entire Torah once more, so that his Torah study should be pure and clear, free of any connection to the *Chet Ha'egel*. Additionally, Moshe felt that his first ascent was in order to gain Torah wisdom, whereas this second ascent was to benefit Am Yisrael. He wanted the second *luchot* to be totally pure, without any trace of sin. By ascending a second time and learning Torah anew, Moshe invigorated Am Yisrael with the power to fulfill the Torah free of sin.

The Light of Torah

“When Moshe descended from Har Sinai – with the two Tablets of the Testimony in the hand of Moshe as he descended from the mountain – Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant when He had spoken to him”

(Shemot 34:29)

Chazal tell us that the reason why Hashem was appeased and agreed to forgive Bnei Yisrael for the *Chet Ha'egel*, even though at first He had intended to destroy them, was because Moshe Rabbeinu found favor in His eyes. He therefore acquiesced to Moshe's request that He pardon their sin.

This shows us just how great is the power of Torah. In the merit of Moshe's *mesirut nefesh* on behalf of Torah, ascending to Heaven and learning directly from Hashem, in spite of the threats of the angels to kill him, he merited that the light of Torah shone from his face. When Hashem observed Moshe's shining face, He was able to countenance Bnei Yisrael. He was filled with mercy for His nation, for He truly valued Moshe's sacrifice for the Torah.

Moshe's self-sacrifice caused his face to shine. And it ultimately radiated the forgiveness and good will of Hashem toward Bnei Yisrael, regarding the *Chet Ha'egel*.

Vayakheil

Shabbat – A Taste of the World to Come

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death”

(*Shemot 35:1-2*)

The day after Moshe descended from *Shamayim*, he gathered all of Am Yisrael and taught them the mitzvah of Shabbat. Moshe always transmitted Hashem's word with alacrity (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 281). Why did he act differently when it came to the mitzvah of Shabbat, teaching it only the day after he had learned about it?

Moreover, why did Moshe teach them about the mitzvah of Shabbat here? The objective of the gathering was to encourage them to donate toward the Mishkan, as the pasuk attests (*Shemot* 35:5). How is keeping Shabbat relevant to the donations for the Mishkan?

Shabbat is a taste of *Olam Haba* (see *Berachot* 57b). Concerning *Olam Haba*, the *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 64:3; see *Berachot* 34b), “No eye had ever seen it.” Human beings lack the ability to comprehend *Olam Haba*. When Hashem created the world, it was entirely a Garden of Paradise. But after Adam sinned, Hashem removed Adam and Chava from Gan Eden, concealing it in *Olam Haba*. Only after death, if a person is replete with Torah and mitzvot, does he merit life in the World to Come.

According to the words of Chazal (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:24), Hashem’s original intention was that people enjoy Gan Eden already in this world. Therefore, the climax of Creation is Shabbat. Just as a wedding cannot take place without the *kallah*, so too, the entire world is meaningless without Shabbat.

Shabbat is the symbol of our *emunah*. One who observes Shabbat demonstrates that he is a believer. He believes that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. On the other hand, one who desecrates Shabbat is showing that he does not believe this, for a person who believes in this fundamental principle would never have the audacity to desecrate Shabbat.

This belief brings a person to a state of bliss. He trusts that whatever happens to him is Hashem’s will. Nothing happens against Hashem’s desire. Conversely, one who does not believe in Hashem, and does not trust that there is a Guiding Force supervising him, may easily become depressed. He tries to settle his troubles with his own paltry powers. But he is incapable of resolving his difficulties by his own means. This brings him to extreme despair. This is why the pasuk in *Tehillim* states (32:10), “As for one who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him.” Trust itself is a tremendous kindness from Hashem. A person knows his fate is in good Hands. Just as parents want only what is best for their children, our Father in Heaven seeks ways to do kindness with His creatures.

Oftentimes, it seems as though tragedy and tribulation strike at us from all sides. They seem to contradict all things good and kind. How are we meant to understand that they come from a loving Father?

Let us picture the following scenario. A father brings his son to the doctor. Even though the doctor might cause the child pain, the father knows it is for the child's benefit, so he continues with the treatment. Similarly, even when troubles fall upon us in quick succession, they are sent with a purpose. Hashem wants us to succeed in life and use these trials as a springboard to come closer to Him through teshuvah. If He did not love us so much, He would not bother awakening us to do teshuvah and return to His loving embrace.

As mentioned, Shabbat is the symbol of our faith. Since it is a taste of *Olam Haba*, it has the potential to bring a person to believe in the World to Come, even though it is an intangible concept. Shabbat is a wonderful gift that Hashem bestowed upon His people. Peace and tranquility reign, and the warmth of the family wraps everyone in its comforting embrace.

The Ben Ish Chai tells us (*Shanah Sheniyah, Parashat Shemot*) that Torah study on Shabbat is elevated manifold times above the study any other time during the week. And its reward, in turn, is increased. If Torah study on Shabbat, a taste of *Olam Haba*, is so much greater than Torah study during the week, how much greater is Torah study in *Olam Haba*, the actual Gan Eden. It is impossible to imagine the eternal ecstasy of the *neshamah* when it learns Torah with the *Shechinah*, under the Heavenly Throne of Glory.

When Moshe descended from Har Sinai, he wanted to transmit to Bnei Yisrael the sense of sweetness awaiting them in *Olam Haba*. He did this by imbuing them with the desire to keep Shabbat, a taste of the World to Come. The spice of Shabbat would whet their appetite for the pleasures of *Olam Haba*, with its accompanying joy and tranquility.

Now let us examine why Moshe was in no hurry to teach them the laws of Shabbat. Moshe descended Har Sinai on Yom Kippur, the day Hashem granted the nation forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf. The nation once again enjoyed Hashem's favor (see *Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11). When Moshe descended with the second set of *luchot*, their joy knew no bounds. In order not to mingle one joy with another, Moshe waited until the next

day to tell them about the mitzvah of Shabbat, a taste of the World to Come.

Shabbat has the power to confer joy and blessing upon the entire week. When a person believes in Hashem and therefore observes Shabbat, this belief becomes reinforced in his heart, escorting him throughout the entire week. It influences every sphere of his life. There is no greater joy and pleasure he can hope for in this world.

An Arab once met up with a Jew and claimed, "We have more holidays than you."

The Jew answered, "You are mistaken. We have more."

They could not come to an agreement, so they decided on the following. Each would strike the other on the back, corresponding to the number of holidays his religion celebrates throughout the year.

The Arab struck the Jew twelve times.

The Jew then struck the Arab for the number of the Jewish festivals, and added another fifty-two lashes corresponding to the amount of Shabbatot in a year.

The Arab asked, "Why are you giving me so many lashes?"

The Jew responded that each Shabbat is essentially a holiday, for it is saturated with peace and joy. Only when a person establishes his Shabbat rest on observing its laws scrupulously does he merit savoring the flavor of the taste of *Olam Haba*.

Before asking Bnei Yisrael to contribute to the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu spoke about the mitzvah of Shabbat. He knew that when faith is lacking, there is no point in building a Mishkan. He first taught them the laws of Shabbat, for Shabbat has the ability to instill faith into mankind. After they would internalize its message, they would contribute to the Mishkan with fervor and feeling, for their hearts would be inclined toward Hashem.

Parashat *Ki Tisa* ends with the words (*Shemot* 34:35), “And the Children of Israel would see Moshe’s face, that the skin of Moshe’s face had become radiant.” Rashi expounds, “And they would see the rays of splendor on his face.” The commentaries explain that two rays of light shone from Moshe’s face as he descended from *Shamayim*. These paralleled man’s ordinary *neshamah* and the additional *neshamah* which a person receives on Shabbat. If on Shabbat, which is only a taste of the World to Come, a person gets an additional *neshamah*, how much more so will he receive an elevated *neshamah* once he is actually there.

Upon descending the mountain, Moshe Rabbeinu contained two *neshamot* within himself, as depicted by the two rays of light emanating from his face. When Bnei Yisrael perceived these rays, they were enlightened to the *kedushah* of Shabbat, a taste of *Olam Haba*. When Moshe saw their great desire to observe Shabbat, he explained to them that the two rays paralleled the two commands שְׁמֹר וְזִכּוֹר (you shall keep and you shall remember). Only one who is meticulous to maintain both aspects of Shabbat will merit the two rays, meaning the two *neshamot* which a person possesses on Shabbat.

At first, the people were afraid to come close to Moshe Rabbeinu, due to the holiness radiating from his face. Only after he gathered them around him and explained the essence of these rays, did they agree to accept Shabbat with love and fortify themselves with faith. By consenting to keep Shabbat, faith in Hashem was reinforced in their hearts. The desire to deserve the *Shechinah* grew within them. They therefore hurried to contribute toward the Mishkan.

————— In Summary ———

- ♦ Why did Moshe not tell Bnei Yisrael about the mitzvah of Shabbat immediately upon his descent from *Shamayim*, as he did with the other mitzvot? Likewise, why did he first teach them the laws of Shabbat, and only afterward ask for contributions toward the Mishkan?

- ◆ Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come, about which the *Navi* says, “No eye has ever seen it.” Shabbat is also the foundation of faith, for one who observes Shabbat testifies that he believes that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Since Shabbat is the foundation of our faith, it has the power to bring a person to believe in *Olam Haba*, which is distant and removed from our understanding.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu did not hurry to teach the nation the laws of Shabbat, for the day of his descent was Yom Kippur, when Hashem had granted the nation atonement. Since we do not mingle joyous events, Moshe did not want to merge the delight of forgiveness with the pleasure of Shabbat. For this reason, he waited until the next day to tell them about Shabbat.
- ◆ When Moshe did tell Bnei Yisrael about Shabbat, he mentioned it before mentioning the details of the Mishkan. Shabbat is the foundation of our faith. Since there is no point in a Mishkan without belief in Hashem, he first commanded them about Shabbat, the sign of our faith. Only afterward, did he ask for contributions toward the Mishkan, which were given most generously.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Har Sinai with two rays of light radiating from his face. They represented the two *neshamot* which a person obtains on Shabbat. One is his regular *neshamah*, and the other is the additional *neshamah* of Shabbat. If, on an ordinary Shabbat, which is merely a taste of *Olam Haba*, a person gains an additional soul, how much more elevated will his soul be in *Olam Haba*.

The Importance of Shabbat

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death”

(Shemot 35:1-2)

“Take from yourselves a portion for Hashem, everyone who is generous of heart shall bring it, as the gift for Hashem: gold, and silver, and copper”

(ibid. vs. 5)

Parashat *Vayakheil* begins with Moshe's command to observe the laws of Shabbat. The main purpose of this gathering was to request contributions for the Mishkan, but the Torah precedes this with citing the prohibitions of Shabbat. Only afterward, does Moshe make his appeal for contributions of gold, copper, and silver for the Mishkan.

The order of what is recorded in the Torah is never random. It comes to teach us a lesson. Moshe Rabbeinu wished to bequeath to Am Yisrael the understanding that although he was gathering them for the wonderful cause of building the Mishkan, *Shemirat Shabbat* is significantly superior, even overriding the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. There are many people who trample the sanctity of Shabbat, desecrating it brazenly. Yet they comfort their conscience by scattering their money toward various charities. They alleviate any feasible feelings of guilt by claiming that although they do not honor Shabbat, they are scrupulous regarding *tzedakah*. The pasuk

states (*Mishlei* 10:2), “Charity rescues from death.” They rest assured that no harm will befall them.

Moshe Rabbeinu wished to imbue the nation with an appreciation of the beauty of Shabbat. He first spoke glowingly of the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, stressing the fact that one who is punctilious in this mitzvah will merit great reward. Rabbi Chaim Vital, zy”a, writes (*Sha’arei Kedushah* II, 7) that merit for mitzvot can be confiscated due to sin, but the mitzvah of *tzedakah* is a person’s eternal asset. Yet, Moshe wanted to impress upon Bnei Yisrael that keeping Shabbat is even more important. We honor Shabbat and sanctify it for Hashem, for this is the day He rested from the six days of Creation.

Betzalel was commissioned to construct the Mishkan. The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that he had lofty intentions and used secrets of the Torah and Holy Names in its construction. These were the Names used at the Creation of the world. This is why the nation was barred from doing work on the Mishkan on Shabbat. That would have defiled the Holy Names with which the Mishkan was permeated. Abstaining from building the Mishkan on Shabbat proved to the people that Shabbat takes precedence over *tzedakah*.

This should not, *chalilah*, detract from the tremendous mitzvah of giving *tzedakah*. Rather, it should teach us the importance of Shabbat and the meticulous measures one must take to observe it correctly.

Megillat Esther opens with the words (1:1), “And it came to pass in the days of Achashveirosh.” The word וַיָּהּ (and it came to pass) denotes sadness (*Megillah* 10b). Vashti, the wicked queen tortured the Jewish women, forcing them to work on Shabbat (*ibid.* 12b). Am Yisrael were punished in this way for betraying their faith. This betrayal brought them to assimilation. They were lax in *Shemirat Shabbat*. This brought them to an overall lack of faith in Hashem. They eventually fell to the level of assimilating with the gentiles (*Ezra* 10:2). Vashti’s torment of the Jewish women, forcing them to work on Shabbat, was measure for measure for their scorning it. This punishment was meant to bring them to repent.

One who lives with perfect faith merits that the entire Torah endures within him. Shabbat is the catalyst for this great distinction. The Ben Ish Chai writes (*Shanah Sheniyah, Shemot*) that every person should attempt to learn Torah on Shabbat. One might refrain from learning Torah during the weekdays, due to his obligations to earn a living. But on Shabbat, he has no excuses. His time is his own, for Shabbat is a day of rest, the day Hashem Himself rested from all work.

The word וַיַּקְהֵל (Vayakheil) can be divided in two. The letters י, adding one for the unit, is numerically equivalent to the word טוֹב (good). This refers to the Torah, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 4:2), “For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” And the letters קָל are found in the words of the verse (*Bereishit* 27:22), “הַקֹּול קוֹל יַעֲקֹב – The voice is Yaakov’s voice.” This teaches that the sound of Torah must echo throughout Shabbat, whose laws are discussed in parashat *Vayakheil*, with renewed vigor.

It is well-known that Yerushalayim was destroyed on account of *chillul Shabbat* (*Shabbat* 119b). The people certainly kept Shabbat, however they were not scrupulous to study Torah on Shabbat. Learning Torah on Shabbat is the loftiest level of Torah study. If one is beset with suffering, he should examine his actions to see if they demand improvement. If he did not find any lack, he should attribute his tribulations to *bitul* Torah (*Berachot* 5a). The most serious form of wasting time from Torah study is when one does so on Shabbat. That is when man is free of his other obligations and must commit himself to increased Torah study.

In Summary

- ♦ Although Moshe gathered the nation together in order to raise funds for the Mishkan, he first taught them about Shabbat. This was in order to impress upon them the significance of Shabbat, which is even greater than the mitzvah of *tzedakah* (as demonstrated by their contributions toward the Mishkan).

- ◆ Just as Hashem Himself rested on the seventh day, so must we rest on Shabbat. One should not appease his conscience over desecrating Shabbat with the excuse that he donates to charitable causes.
- ◆ Betzalel built the Mishkan based on the Holy Names by which the world was created. By desisting from work on the Mishkan on Shabbat, the nation demonstrated that Shabbat is more significant than the mitzvah of *tzedakah*.
- ◆ Megillat Esther begins with the word וַיְהִי (and it came to pass), which is a word that implies sadness. Vashti tortured the Jewish women, forcing them to work on Shabbat. This retribution was measure for measure. The Jews were lacking in faith, a state which eventually brought them to assimilation and desecration of Shabbat.
- ◆ The Ben Ish Chai states that it is every person's moral obligation to learn Torah on Shabbat. This is the loftiest type of Torah study. It is guaranteed to bring a person to a higher level of faith in Hashem.
- ◆ The word וַיַּקְהֵל (Vayakheil) can be divided in two. The letters י, adding one for the unit, is numerically equivalent to the word טוֹב (good). This refers to the Torah, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei* 4:2), "For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah." And the letters ל are found in the words of the verse (*Bereishit* 27:22), "הַקּוֹל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב – The voice is Yaakov's voice." The sound of Torah must echo throughout Shabbat. This is what Moshe taught in this parashah.
- ◆ Chazal teach us that if a person is suffering, he should examine his actions. If he found nothing amiss, he should attribute his suffering to *bitul* Torah. This indicates the severity of *bitul* Torah. One should commit himself to learn Torah on Shabbat.

Bringing down the Shechinah

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death”

(Shemot 35:1-2)

Moshe Rabbeinu gathered all of Bnei Yisrael together, in order to convince them to contribute toward the Mishkan. But instead of beginning immediately with the purpose of the gathering, he began by teaching the laws of Shabbat. Why did he do this?

In *Shamayim*, Moshe encountered the most marvelous spiritual experience of the World to Come. He wished to share with Bnei Yisrael the pleasure of Gan Eden and *Olam Haba*. Therefore, he began by teaching them about Shabbat, a sample of the World to Come. Giving Am Yisrael a taste of Shabbat would whet their appetite for *Olam Haba* itself. He wanted them to relish the thought of the greatness of *Olam Haba*. For if Shabbat, with all its delicacies and delights, is merely a taste of the World to Come, how much sweeter and more savory must *Olam Haba* itself be.

Moshe transmitted the message that since Shabbat is the source of unity, in order to observe it properly, the nation must be united as one. *Olam Haba* is called “the day which will be completely Shabbat” (end of *Tamid*). The first step to take in order to arrive at *Olam Haba* is to observe Shabbat, which is a taste of Gan Eden. Moshe gathered the nation to request contributions toward the Mishkan. The entire purpose of the Mishkan was to provide a place for the *Shechinah* to rest upon Am Yisrael (*Shemot* 25:8). Since the *Shechinah* rests only where there is unity, Moshe

commanded them about Shabbat, the source of unity. By keeping Shabbat, they would become as one, a fitting vessel to contain the *Shechinah*.

The word וַיַּקְהֵל (*Vayakheil*) can be divided in two. The letters י, adding one for the unit itself, are numerically equivalent to the word טוב (good). This refers to the Torah (*Avot* 6:3). The other three letters spell the word קהָל (congregation). Torah studied in large groups is most desirable. All of the good which is hidden in the Torah awaits Am Yisrael only when they are in unity. As soon as they become disconnected, their Torah study is lacking.

The Ben Ish Chai states (*Shanah Sheniyah, Shemot*) that Torah study on Shabbat is the most lofty level of learning Torah. On Shabbat, man is liberated from his weekday obligations, free to pursue Torah with a clear head. This type of learning is the most pure. Likewise, Shabbat is the symbol of unity. Since the Torah is founded on unity, they are interdependent. Learning Torah on Shabbat is most cherished by Hashem.

Before requesting donations for the Mishkan, Moshe spoke about the two pivotal factors in its upkeep – *Shemirat Shabbat* and Torah study, especially study on Shabbat. Through toil in Torah on Shabbat, one savors the flavor of *Olam Haba*, an intrinsic part of Shabbat. Both Torah study and *Shemirat Shabbat* strengthen the unity of Am Yisrael and draw the *Shechinah* upon the nation. Thus, Moshe prefaced the request for donations to the Mishkan with the mitzvah of Shabbat, so that the people would comprehend the importance of *Shemirat Shabbat*, which is a taste of *Olam Haba*. One acquires his portion in the World to Come by means of Torah study. Unity among the nation is acquired through *Shemirat Shabbat*, as well as through Torah study.

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe gathered Bnei Yisrael in order to convince them to contribute toward the Mishkan. But he taught them first about *Shemirat Shabbat*. What was the reason for this?

- ♦ The main purpose of the Mishkan was to draw the *Shechinah* upon the nation. The *Shechinah* can rest only where there is unity. Torah unifies Bnei Yisrael. Shabbat is the source of the nation's unity, since that is when they are together. Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come. By keeping Shabbat, they would become as one, a fitting vessel to contain the *Shechinah*.

Moshe Speaks to All of Bnei Yisrael

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them”

(Shemot 35:1)

The parashah describes how Moshe gathered the people, conveying to them the word of Hashem. At the time of their sojourn in the Wilderness, there was no modern technology. They had no access to loudspeakers and the like. How, then, did Moshe manage to communicate with a nation numbering in the millions?

Similarly, at *Matan Torah*, Moshe passed on to the people the word of Hashem. Everyone was able to hear him, without the use of a microphone. Millions were gathered around the mountain, yet they all managed to hear Moshe's words. Likewise, in parashat *Ha'azinu*, before his death, Moshe chastised all of the people, as the pasuk states (*Devarim* 32:44), “Moshe came and spoke all the words of this Song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea son of Nun.”

Rabbeinu Yosef Chaim, zy”a, the Ben Ish Chai, used to deliver lectures in the main synagogue every Shabbat. Approximately three thousand

people would gather in the Beit Hakeneset to hear his pure words. There were no loudspeakers there. Yet his words rang loud and clear before all his listeners. Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri, zt”l, the elder of the Kabbalists, testified to the veracity of this.

Unfortunately, in our generation, we have lost the true voice, the voice of Torah. Therefore, we are in need of artificial equipment to raise the sound level, transmitting Torah words to the masses. This is actually hinted at in the word **רמקול** (loudspeaker), which can be divided in two, spelling **בר קול** (the bitter voice). Do to our many sins, we denigrate the sound of Torah, and it becomes bitter. Due to our many vices, it is necessary to raise the decibel level of Torah words by means of special devices.

At *Matan Torah*, “the entire people saw the sounds” (*Shemot* 20:15). How is it possible to sense sound with sight? At the time of the Giving of the Torah, Bnei Yisrael were on the level of angels, for they preceded “We will hear” with the statement “We will do!” As they stood at the foot of the mountain, they surmounted physical limitations. Using merely their sense of sight, they were able to perceive the sounds.

Hashem’s voice is actually the sound of Torah. In order to understand it, it is necessary to study Torah, wherein lies the voice of Yaakov. They saw the voice of Hashem emanating from His Torah. The pasuk states (*ibid.* 19:19), “Moshe would speak, and G-d would respond to him with a voice.” Moshe is true and his Torah is true. Therefore, Hashem raised Moshe’s voice until it could be heard among all of Klal Yisrael.

The voice of the tzaddikim is the voice of Torah. In order to hear and understand their words, one must be involved in Torah, the medium through which one hears the tzaddikim. This, then, is how Bnei Yisrael were able to hear Moshe’s voice without the aid of machines and gadgets. The Torah dwells within the depths of the tzaddikim, and when they speak, the sound of Torah can actually be seen. The fact that nowadays we cannot manage to hear clearly without a sound system indicates a

deficiency within us, not within the Rabbanim. We are simply lacking the tools with which to detect the vibes of Torah in the air.

In the Beit Hakeneset in Alexandria, Egypt, the number of congregants sometimes swelled to twelve hundred thousand people! In order for the people to know when to answer “Amen” to Kaddish, the *sheliach tzibur* would signal with a flag (*Sukkah* 51b). This does not mean to say that the *sheliach tzibur* was lacking, rather, the overall spiritual level was low, outshouting the voice of the *chazan*.

In our day and age, loudspeakers are arranged in order to broadcast the words of our Torah leaders. This does not imply a flaw in them, rather, in us. If we were sufficiently involved in seeking the treasures of Torah, the pearls of wisdom pouring forth from our leaders would be easily heard, averting the need for microphones and sound systems.

When a tzaddik passes away, the voice of Torah is stilled. The angels on High bewail this sorrowful state. When Yaakov left Be’er Sheva, the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 28:10), “And Yaakov departed Be’er Sheva.” Rashi comments that when a tzaddik departs from a place, “its magnificence has departed, its splendor has departed, its grandeur has departed.” The voice of Torah, which emanated from Yaakov’s mouth, had been the beauty of the city. Once he left, that voice was silenced in the city, and its absence was felt by all.

A person experiences periods of growth and periods of decline in Torah study. This is due to one’s weakness and the annoyances which disturb a person, distracting him from his learning. The way to combat this state of things, overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*, is the following. Let a person go to a Rav who is a *talmid chacham*, in order to listen to his teachings. The sound of Torah which comes from the mouth of the Torah Sage chases the *Yetzer Hara* away from the person. Even by looking at a photograph of a tzaddik, a person can absorb a measure of his voice of Torah. Yeshayahu Hanavi enjoins us (30:20), “Your eyes will behold your teacher.” The tzaddikim are considered living even after death, because the sound of their Torah study reverberates throughout the world.

In Summary

- ◆ How did Moshe manage to speak to the entire nation, who numbered in the millions, all at once? This was the case in our parashah, as well as at *Matan Torah* and elsewhere.
- ◆ The Torah is above physical limitations. At the Giving of the Torah, the nation was able to see the sounds. They had no need for their sense of hearing. One who is completely immersed in Torah has no difficulty understanding words of Torah. But since we are involved in other pursuits as well, we have spoiled our sensors and therefore have to depend on machines and devices to help us hear.
- ◆ We find that tzaddikim of previous generations, such as the Ben Ish Chai, would deliver lectures before thousands and had no need for a loudspeaker. This was in the merit of his and the public's elevated level, since the Torah was a fiber of their being.

Bnei Yisrael Take Leave of Moshe

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them”

(Shemot 35:1)

“The entire assembly of the Children of Israel left Moshe’s presence”

(ibid. vs. 20)

Why does the Torah mention the fact that Bnei Yisrael left Moshe's presence when he finished teaching them the laws of Shabbat, the

Mishkan, and the garments of the Kohanim? Isn't it self-understood that when he was done, they departed?

There are three times in my life that stand out as exceptional experiences of being in the presence of a tzaddik. The first time was in my youth, in the city Armentières, when the Rav Hagaon Hatzaddik, Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, zt"l, visited. He was the son-in-law of the Saba MiNovardok, author of the sefer *Madregat Ha'adam*. Everyone was excited to see him. His face was like that of an angel.

The second time was when I was approximately twenty years old. I went with my brother to comfort the mourners in the home of the Baba Sali, zt"l. I watched as the Baba Sali went to wash his hands. A husband and wife were talking nearby. When the Baba Sali noticed them, he became enraged and began shouting. They told him it was merely a husband and wife talking together. He said, "It doesn't matter. Let them speak somewhere else." On his elevated level, he was afraid of yielding to his *Yetzer Hara*.

This brings to mind the story of the Chafetz Chaim. In his later years, he would pray Ma'ariv in the yeshiva. During the cold winter months, they would prepare a glass of tea for him so that he could warm himself up from the frigid trek. A woman once placed the glass of tea before him. He kept quiet about it. But when this happened again the next day, he asked why they wanted to cause him to sin. His students told him, "Rabbeinu, you are elderly. The woman is an old lady. Where is there room for sin?" The Chafetz Chaim replied, "The *Yetzer Hara* considers both myself and the woman young."

The third time was when I was about forty years old. It was when I visited Rav Shach, zt"l, together with Harav Hagaon, Rabbi Chaim Walkin, shlita.

Each of these occasions provided me with a special experience. On the one hand, we are astounded at the tremendous *kedushah* of our Torah giants, and we bask in their sanctity. Yet, at the same time, our self-image shrinks to nothing. We realize just how small and insignificant we really

are. A person can always delude himself into thinking he is important, ignoring his shortcomings. But when faced with the countenance of truth, radiating from the visage of the tzaddik, there is no room for self-deception.

This, then, is why the Torah mentions that Bnei Yisrael left the presence of Moshe. Moshe taught them about the Mishkan on the day after Yom Kippur, when he returned from his forty-day sojourn in *Shamayim*. The fragrance of Gan Eden still lingered with him. Just as one who enters a perfume shop smells the delightful scents, without even sampling the merchandise, Bnei Yisrael enjoyed the perfume of Gan Eden which still clung to Moshe. This scent is the sense of boundless joy. In this world, there are moments of joy, as well as moments of sorrow. But in the World of Truth, all is joy. Shabbat is but a sample of that joy, for Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come.

Anoter example in this world which depicts the joy of *Olam Haba* is the happiness of learning Torah. One who ever succeeded in resolving a difficulty of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, zt"l, has an idea of what this sweet joy is like.

When Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Gan Eden, he brought with him the aura of the joy of *Olam Haba*. This was certainly on account of his tremendous greatness, as well as his steadfastness to Hashem's Torah. He built up his inner being to be a suitable home for the *Shechinah*. This is what he instructed each and every Jew to do, with the words (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them." The pasuk does not only refer to the Mishkan constructed in the Wilderness, but to each and every individual Mishkan, constructed in the heart of each Jew (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4, in the *hagahah*).

Moshe is an example of a person who prepared himself to be a fitting conduit for the *Shechinah*. He made a Mishkan of himself by building up his inner essence. He thus merited that Hashem rested within him. We find that many tzaddikim, likewise, devoted their lives to self-improvement. The Vilna Gaon, zy"a, was on a lofty spiritual level, yet

he was constantly vigilant to guard against sin. In this manner, he built himself into a magnificent Mishkan. Rabbi Yisrael MiSalant, zy”a, is another such example.

Harav Hagaon, Rabbi Menachem Berlin, shlita, related the following incident. The granddaughter of the Chafetz Chaim, through the influence of the times, went to learn science. She was visiting her saintly grandfather at the time that the airplane was invented. She saw how he labored over Torah study. She excitedly told him about this new phenomenon called the airplane, a giant eagle which can soar to the heavens. The Chafetz Chaim turned to her and stated, “It’s easy to create and invent without end. But building a person is a real feat. This can be done only in the yeshiva, and only by means of Torah.”

Moshe Rabbeinu built himself in this way, bringing himself closer and closer to Hashem. He was so close to Him, to the extent that Chazal say (see Zohar III, 232a) that “the *Shechinah* spoke from the throat of Moshe.” Bnei Yisrael sensed this holiness radiating from Moshe in a most tangible way.

When Moshe finished teaching them, they felt the termination of this divine feeling. They went back to business, keenly aware of their lowly status. This is hinted at in the words “The Children of Israel left Moshe’s presence.”

The True Servant of Hashem Is Liberated from the Yetzer Hara

We might explain that “the Children of Israel left Moshe’s presence” in another light. In tefillat Shacharit of Shabbat, we recite the prayer, “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion: that You called him a faithful servant.” A servant is subjected to many detailed responsibilities. A servant of Hashem is subservient to the Torah and mitzvot, with all their intricacies. The halachot are very limiting. What brought Moshe to rejoice over being called a faithful servant of Hashem?

The free man is the one who is a true servant of Hashem, scrupulous in following every detail of halachah. He is the one liberated of the yoke of the *Yetzer Hara*. This, then, was the cause for Moshe Rabbeinu's happiness. Hashem accorded him the title "faithful servant," indicating that he was completely free from the employ of the *Yetzer Hara* and his evil ploys.

Hashem gives everyone free choice whether or not to follow the Torah. No one is forced to serve Him. One who does choose Torah demonstrates his love for it.

One evening, at a very late hour Rabbi Aryeh Levine, zt"l, once noticed a woman bent over her sewing. He asked why she didn't go to sleep and get some rest. To which she responded that her son, Betzalel, had to be sent to learn with the Rabbi in the Talmud Torah. She needed to pay his salary, aside from earning money to buy food for her family. To this end, she took in work around the clock. The very fabric of her life was Torah. She sewed a tapestry of love and dedication to Hashem, and her self-sacrifice paid great dividends. With time, her young son grew to become the esteemed gaon and tzaddik, Harav Betzalel Zolty, zt"l, the Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim.

This woman willingly devoted herself to the love of Torah. Unconditional love, which emanates from a place deep within a person for a cherished cause, results in a labor of love. Her labor bore fruits, as she reaped tremendous *nachat* from her son, who became a great tzaddik.

At the time of the Exodus, when Moshe came to release the nation from Egypt to become the servants of Hashem, they certainly asked him what the difference was between bondage to Pharaoh and bondage to Hashem. Moshe answered that servitude to Pharaoh is physical slavery (see *Shemot* 1:14), whereas servitude to Hashem is freedom from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. This is possible only by means of service of the heart, as the pasuk states, (*Devarim* 6:5), "You shall love Hashem...with all your heart, with all your soul, etc."

I had a friend who made a complete turnaround in his lifestyle due to this concept. He had been brought up in the lap of the Reform movement. They preached liberalism, throwing off the yoke of Torah. Immodesty was the order of the day, and kashrut was merely a taste of the past. Their Rabbi was a woman. When he had the opportunity to step into a bona fide Beit Hamidrash, his eyes suddenly opened. He saw a genuine Rav, who taught halachah. He finally understood that true liberation means servitude to Hashem. Today, he is a true servant of Hashem.

The *gematria* of the word **מָנָ** (man) is forty-five. The *gematria* of the Name **הַ-יְ-הִ-יְ-**, with its letters spelled out, is also equal to forty-five. Man is directly connected to Hashem, for each person contains a Divine spark within him (*Shelah, Assarah Ma'amarot, Ma'amar Sheini* 17). One who connects to Hashem through servitude to Torah, is actually lighting the Divine spark within himself. He is thereby connecting to his inner essence and gains authority over himself. There is no man more free than he.

An example of this is a person who ignores his tiredness, straining to stay awake, in order to maintain the strains of Torah. He does so out of free choice. He is combating the *Yetzer Hara*, who would have him go to sleep. This man proves himself the master, and the Evil Inclination, the slave. But if a person stays awake in order to sin, what will be his justification when he arrives at the Day of Judgment before his Creator? Hashem will rejoice with His *talmidei chachamim*, who remained awake in order to study Torah, and with those who reduced their hours of sleep in order for their loved ones to grow in Torah, like the mother of Rav Betzalel Zolty.

Similarly, the Chatam Sofer, zt"l, was once approached by people, who asked with what merit were his sons such great *talmidei chachamim*. At times, they even delivered greater *shiurim* than those of their father. He responded, "I have shed many tears beseeching Hashem to open their hearts to Torah, and they should grow to become *talmidei chachamim*."

This comes from love of Torah, from a person's free will. This is the definition of a free man. After a person enjoys the momentary pleasure

provided by a sin, he is left with nothing but sorrow and regret. But the joy gained from doing a mitzvah is eternal, awaiting the person in the World to Come.

In the Pesach Haggadah, we recite, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out of there.” In order to be true slaves of Hashem, we must first be released from the *Yetzer Hara*.

Now we can understand why the verse stresses that Bnei Yisrael left Moshe’s presence. Moshe, as stated, was the ultimate servant of Hashem. He rejoiced in this title, and Bnei Yisrael felt it when they were in his presence. They likewise sensed their own lowly level, still subservient to the *Yetzer Hara* and attached to physical pleasures. This was proven in their fashioning the Golden Calf. They left Moshe with the feeling of being humbled in the face of such greatness, before the truly liberated man.

In Summary

- ♦ Why did the Torah emphasize that Bnei Yisrael left Moshe’s presence?
- ♦ I had three wonderful experiences upon encountering greatness. They were when I met Maran Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, zt”l; the tzaddik, the Baba Sali zt”l; and Maran Harav Shach, zt”l. The feeling upon meeting magnificence is both uplifting and humbling. This was the feeling felt by Bnei Yisrael when they were in Moshe’s presence.
- ♦ The fragrance of Gan Eden still clung to Moshe Rabbeinu even after he descended to earth. This is the scent of everlasting joy, untainted with sadness. Moshe merited the fragrance of Gan Eden, for he built up his essence to be a fitting Mishkan for the *Shechinah*. He succeeded to the degree that Hashem spoke from his throat.
- ♦ “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion: “that You called him a faithful servant.” What type of joy is there when one is in bondage?
- ♦ One who serves Hashem does so from free choice. He has cast off from himself the yoke of the *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, he is called “the servant of Hashem.”

- ◆ Servitude to Hashem and servitude to Pharaoh are diametrically opposed. Bnei Yisrael served Pharaoh with physical labor, whereas serving Hashem demands the service of the heart.
- ◆ The *gematria* of the word **מ־נָךְ** (man) is forty-five. The *gematria* of the Name of Hashem, **ה-י-ה-ו-**, with its letters spelled out, is also equal to forty-five. This teaches that by connecting to Hashem, one is connecting to his inner Divine spark, igniting a state of self-autonomy, free of the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*.
- ◆ “The Children of Israel left Moshe’s presence.” Bnei Yisrael were impressed by Moshe’s utter servitude to Hashem, feeling ashamed at their low level, which had already triggered their sin with the calf.

Walking in the Ways of Halachah

“And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them”

(*Shemot* 35:1)

The Gemara in *Masechet Niddah* ends with the words of the Tanna d’vei Eliyahu, stating that whoever reviews halachot each day is guaranteed a portion in the World to Come, as the pasuk states (*Chavakuk* 3:6), “**הַלִּכּוֹת** – The ways of the world are His.”

The wording of the pasuk is **הַלִּכּוֹת** (ways), not (laws). Why then, does the Gemara state that this pasuk teaches us the review of halachot?

At the *Siyum HaShas* (Adar I, 5765), the Torah leaders, shlita, announced that in the framework of learning the daily daf, people should

also learn a halachah relevant to that page of Gemara. Maybe because at a siyum, the words of the above Midrash are quoted, they decided it was fitting to learn a daily halachah as well.

The Vilna Gaon, zt”l, states that wherever we find the language of obligation used by Chazal, it means that a person is literally obligated to do whatever is being demanded. For instance, the Gemara (*Pesachim* 116b) states that a person is obligated to consider himself as though he himself left Mitzrayim. This is true even though we were never in Egypt, and we have no idea of what slavery is all about. Feeling like we ourselves were freed will bring us to a greater level of *yirat Shamayim*. The Vilna Gaon is telling us that a person should make *Yetziat Mitzrayim* as tangible as possible. Similarly, I personally try to visualize, to the best of my ability, any narrative I come across regarding the Torah giants of our nation.

The pasuk says (*Shemot* 35:1), “And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, ‘These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them.’” This raises the obvious question. How did Moshe manage to gather all of Bnei Yisrael together? There were no sound systems or loudspeakers in his time. The nation was hundreds of thousands strong. How did Moshe succeed in assembling them all?

Moshe said, “These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them.” He used the word **םֹנְאָק** (them), whose letters can be transposed to spell the word **תְּהִמָּה** (truth). It was the Torah, the only truth, that brought the people to join him. Words that emanate from the heart penetrate the heart. As soon as he began to gather the people together, to share Hashem’s words with them, all of Am Yisrael gathered around him to listen. This was a means of uniting the nation.

Moshe Rabbeinu taught Bnei Yisrael the laws of Shabbat. The world exists on three pillars. They are: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and Bnei Yisrael. In actuality, they are all one, as the Zohar states (see II, 90b), “Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are one.” By observing Shabbat, a person becomes a partner with Hashem in Creation, as Chazal tell us (see

Shabbat 119b). A person who is partners with Hashem also has a share in upholding the world.

Shemirat Shabbat atones for the *Chet Ha'egel*. By Bnei Yisrael fashioning the Golden Calf, they denied Hashem's existence. By keeping Shabbat, the nation becomes partners with Hashem in the Creation of the world, admitting that they erred in making an idol. This mitzvah was taught when the nation was gathered together, in order that they would accept it joyfully, united as one. They would be considered as having observed it, for a good thought is considered a deed. They would unite with the Torah and with Hashem to become one. Once they had reached this exalted level, it was easier for Moshe Rabbeinu to convince them to contribute toward the Mishkan. Their donations would be accepted by Hashem, for they had become His partner in creating the world. This is why Moshe began with the mitzvah of Shabbat, and only afterward, asked for contributions for the Mishkan.

Thus, the pasuk states, "And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel." The entire nation appeared before him. In front of them all, Moshe commanded them about the Torah, which is truth. This pasuk, then, refers to Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael.

The Sin of the Golden Calf

Regarding the *Chet Ha'egel*, Hashem told Moshe (*Shemot* 32:8), "They have strayed." It is truly mind-boggling how Bnei Yisrael could fall to the level of worshipping an idol. Only a short time earlier, they had proclaimed "*Na'aseh v'nishma*." Hashem was very impressed by their staunch loyalty, asking who revealed this secret to His sons, a statement which only the angels on High know about (*Shabbat* 88a). How could they have stooped so low, as to sin with *avodah zarah*, shortly afterward?

It would seem correct to say that when the nation made their proclamation, they did not do it with full hearts. This can be compared to asking a person how things are. He answers that everything is fine, when in reality, everything is far from fine. People don't think into their

words. Bnei Yisrael, likewise, seemed not to have paid attention to what they were saying by proclaiming “*Na’aseh v’nishma.*” This was the cause of their downfall.

Were You Honest in Your Business Dealings?

Chazal tell us that when a person will come up to Heaven after 120 years, one of the questions he will be asked will be, “Did you deal honestly in your business?” This also implies “Were all your transactions done with integrity?” He will also be asked if he set aside fixed times for Torah study. Certainly, one who was honest in his business dealings spent time learning Torah; why is he asked whether or not he fixed times for Torah study?

Every person is asked both these questions, for they are interdependent. If a person never learns Torah, how will he know the halachot regarding business?

I knew a man who, although far from Torah, was scrupulous in allocating a tenth of his earnings to *tzedakah*. After he became a *ba’al teshuvah*, he learned the halachot, and discovered that he had never fulfilled them properly. He had tremendous regrets for not having learned the halachot previously. He came to me, asking what he could do to fix this mess. Without Torah knowledge, how can a person expect to know the halachot?

Awaking in the morning and going to the synagogue for prayer is a correct mode of conduct. It is a *הליכה* (lit. walking) for the sake of a mitzvah. But a person cannot go to pray without knowing the *הלקה* (Torah law) regarding tefillah. And without the walking, it is not possible to do mitzvot. Therefore, both aspects of the mitzvah are mutually dependent. This is how Chazal were able to learn the matter of reviewing halachot from the pasuk regarding behaviors, or walking.

I was once present at a wedding ceremony. I asked the *chatan* if he was aware of the halachot of *niddah*, to which he responded in the negative. I then asked the *kallah*, and she responded in like fashion. She was ready

to give him her hand in marriage, with no idea of the halachot involved. Laws and behavior go hand-in-hand.

Moshe Rabbeinu gathered the entire nation, in order to teach them the mitzvot. Chazal question why the whole nation: men, women, and small children all needed to be in attendance (see *Chagigah* 3a). We can understand that the adults needed to attend in order to learn Torah. But what was the reason why even the youngest children were instructed to come? Chazal explain that this was in order to give them the merit of going to listen. If there is reward given for the mere motion of walking (*היליכה*), there is surely reward awaiting those who adhere to the *halacha*. Adults should not suffice with the former, but constantly review halachot every day. This will afford them with merit for the World to Come, as stated by the *Tanna d'vei Eliyahu*.

I heard of a man in *chutz la'aretz* who employs a huge number of workers in his factory in Eretz Yisrael. Once, he informed his employees that he intended to pay a visit. Everyone immediately sprang into action, straightening up the place and preparing him a room in which to rest. A few days later, he informed them that his wife was coming, as well. The workers went into a frenzy and did their utmost to ensure a successful visit.

A little while later, the boss called in that he was sending his dog on an earlier flight, and they should please meet it at the airport. The workers rushed to do his bidding. Imagine their surprise, when they came to meet the dog and opened the closed package they were given, only to find a dead dog inside. Fearing their boss's wrath, they went out in search of a similar dog, to present to him. Luckily, they found an exactly similar one, which they intended to give their boss upon his arrival. A few hours later, the boss and his wife arrived. They asked after the dog which they saw the workers holding. The workers told him this was the dog he had sent. To which the boss answered, "I sent you my dead dog, to bury in the Land. This is not my dog."

We can learn a lesson from this story. A person must be a faithful servant to his Creator. The dead cannot compare with the living. And a living person may not act lifeless. How is one truly alive? Only by means of Torah study.

On one of my visits to Mexico, I stayed at the home of a wealthy man. His house was truly his palace, resplendent with everything money could buy. But I didn't see true happiness on the faces of my host or his family. A person can live in the lap of luxury, but not be living at all. For this reason, we need *הליםות* (proper behaviors), as well as *הלכות* (laws). Torah is vital; only it can give a person true life, breathing vivacity into him.

I know a person who learns the halachot of *Shemirat Halashon* from the sefer of the Chafetz Chaim every day. One day, as I entered the Beit Hamidrash, I discovered a group of gossipmongers. They were busy, heaping scoops of *lashon hara* into their discussion. To my surprise, this man was among them. I turned to him and asked, "You constantly review the laws of *lashon hara*; how can you possibly stand among such people?" How, indeed, was it possible for him to associate with them? It must have been that although he learned the halachot, he did not internalize them.

Such a person is considered dead by Heaven, even though his heart beats. This is because he does not live according to the Torah. The parashah states, "These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them." The letters of the word **אתם** (them) can be transposed to spell **אמת** (truth). One who is not connected to the Torah, the ultimate truth, is simply dead.

A Lesson from the Bird

It is well-known that when the weather turns cold, the birds migrate to warmer climates. I once read an article about a flock of birds which migrated to a warmer climate. But one bird was lazy and stayed behind. Only after it got really cold where she was, did she decide that the time had come to leave. But by then, it was too late. Her legs and wings had

already frozen. One day, the sun burst through the clouds, thawing her frozen little body. She wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to leave. Unfortunately, in her flutter of excitement, she created a ruckus, attracting the attention of a nearby cat. It pounced upon her and immediately devoured her.

This whimsical little story teaches us how very limited our lives are. Sometimes, they are cut short at an early age, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, we should ensure to utilize every moment in the right way. Chazal teach us (see *Pesachim* 54b, *Rashi* ad loc.) that we never know what awaits us the next moment. We should consequently never believe in ourselves until our dying day.

I felt this reality most powerfully when a student of mine passed away in Paris at the early age of forty-one. He had always been healthy. Suddenly, he contracted a terrible illness, and within three weeks, he was gone. May Hashem protect us.

Whenever someone would refer to the next day, my father and mentor, zy”a, would always respond in this manner: “If Hashem will decree life upon us,” or, “If we will live until then.” He constantly lived with the awareness that nothing is guaranteed. Even if today everything looks fine and routine, it can all come to an end the next day, without forewarning.

The migration of the birds teaches us the following lesson. Just as the birds fly off to warmer skies, we too, must flee coldness and apathy toward Torah. We should fly to the warmth of Torah, soaring in its study and finding comfort under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

A person should not display laziness in seeking the warming hearth of Torah. One who is complacent in his place will fall into the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. He will eventually be frozen into numbness, unable to thaw out when he finally realizes what has happened. The *Yetzer Hara* disregards those who are fired up with passion for Torah. Instead, he focuses his gaze upon those who are cold and indifferent. They are his regular customers. What is the definition of a cold man? One who does not bother to review halachot.

The Yetzer Hara Is Powerful

On one of my visits to the States, I was preparing to deliver a *shiur* to a group of those far from Torah. I prayed for Heavenly assistance. The people who attended were completely secular, neither sporting *kippot* on their heads nor involved in Torah study. They did have Rabbanim, though, and even learned Kabbalah. It was very difficult for me to reach their hearts. When I entered the room, I discovered that most of them were bare-headed. I explained to them that they had not come to hear a lecture, but to hear the word of Hashem. Therefore, it was incumbent that they wear *kippot*. Those who immediately acquiesced merited eventually becoming *ba'alei teshuvah*. But those who put on the *kippot* scornfully did not become strengthened at all. We should learn from this to follow all of the instructions of the Torah truthfully, according to pure halachah.

With Hashem's kindness, I merited preventing three people from studying Kabbalah inappropriately. See how great is the power of the *Yetzer Hara*! He will allow a person to learn Kabbalah, with intentions of the Holy Names. This is to appease their conscience when it comes to eating non-kosher and going around bare-headed. Just as the *Yetzer Hara* can cause a person to stumble with the Zohar in his hand, so too, can he make a person stumble while holding a Gemara. One who refrains from reviewing halachot every day will fall into his trap. *Olam Haba* is acquired by means of *halichot* (walking, i.e., doing), as well as halachot (laws, i.e., Torah knowledge).

Rabbi Teboul, shlita, the Rosh Kollel of our institutions in France, told me that once when he was on his way to the yeshiva, a group of immodestly-clad women was walking toward him. He wished to cross the street, but there were improperly-dressed women there, as well. He therefore continued on his way. When they passed in front of him, he turned his head toward the wall. But there was a mirror hanging there, and their image was reflected in the glass. See how the *Yetzer Hara* pursues a person! Even when we try to escape him, turning away from inappropriate sights, we can never elude him completely. It is therefore

crucial to constantly learn and review the halachot of daily living. It is of utmost urgency to beware of the *Yetzer Hara* at all times.

On a trip in Strasbourg, France, I was talking in learning with my companion, the entire duration of the ride. I lifted my eyes for one moment. At that precise instant, a deplorable billboard caught my eye. I told my companion that I didn't look at it at all. I wished to be free of any trace of sin. But this incident showed me just how strong the *Yetzer Hara* is, and how hotly he pursues people. This is why we ask Hashem, in our Morning Prayers, not to place a *nisayon* in our path. Tests can be hard to pass. One who wants to make the grade would do well by studying halachot, ensuring Hashem's help that he not fail his exams.

The tractate of *Bava Metzia* begins with the words, "When two people grab hold of a tallit, each claiming it as his, they should share it." This Mishnah alludes to man's life in this world. At the end of a person's life, he is wrapped in a tallit and buried that way. Throughout his life, there were two forces grappling for control over him. These are the *Yetzer Hatov* and the *Yetzer Hara*. Each one claims he is theirs. In the end, if man does not watch out, they will share him. Therefore, he must exert himself tremendously in order not to fall into the grip of the *Yetzer Hara*.

There are two methods to avoid the *Yetzer Hara*. The first is to learn halachot and observe them. It is impossible to live the right way without knowing what the right way is. And the second is to pray frequently to be spared from *nisayon*.

————— In Summary ———

- ♦ The Gemara in *Masechet Niddah* ends with the words of Chazal, "Whoever reviews halachot each day is guaranteed a portion in the World to Come, as the pasuk states (*Chavakuk 3:6*), 'The ways of the world are His.' Do not read 'ways' (הַלִּכּוֹת), but 'laws' (הַלְּכָדָה)." Why doesn't the pasuk mention halachot if that is the true intention? The answer is that it is impossible to observe "ways," i.e., walking on the path of mitzvah, without knowing the halachot. And knowing the halachot without doing

them is not worth very much. There are mutually dependent. The pasuk states **הֲלֵיכוֹת**, and we learn from it the matter of **הֲלָכָה**.

- ◆ The pasuk says, “And Moshe assembled.” The three pillars of the world are alluded to in this pasuk. They are: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and Yisrael. Moshe had gathered the entire nation, telling them the word of Hashem. This is the Torah of truth. The letters of the word truth (**אמת**) are the same as those of the word you (**אתם**).
- ◆ After the *Chet Ha’egel*, Hashem told Moshe, “They have strayed.” How could the Generation of Wisdom, so shortly after having received the Torah, stray from the path in such a terrible fashion, as to form the Golden Calf? They themselves had cried, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” But because this resolution had not come from deep within them, it did not endure.
- ◆ In the Heavenly Court, a person will be asked whether or not he conducted his business dealings honestly, and if he set aside fixed times for Torah study. These two questions are interdependent. Without dedicating a set time each day for the study of Torah, it is impossible to be perfectly straight in one’s business transactions.
- ◆ Moshe gathered all of Bnei Yisrael, including the children. Chazal explain that the young ones were brought, in order to give them the merit of walking there. A small child can suffice with the reward he gets for walking (**הֲלִיכָה**), but a mature adult should see to it that he is also involved in learning (**הֲלָכָה**).
- ◆ The birds annually migrate to warmer climates. This should teach us that we, too, should move from a place which is cold and aloof from Avodat Hashem, to a place which provides warmth by the fire of Torah.
- ◆ The Mishnah in *Bava Metzia* discusses two people who grab hold of a tallit, each claiming it to be his. They should share it. This alludes to a person’s life in this world. Two beings constantly wrestle for control over him. They are the *Yetzer Hatov* and the *Yetzer Hara*. A person must be on constant vigil that he should not become divided between them, but completely under the jurisdiction of the *Yetzer Hatov*.

- ♦ The *Yetzer Hara* is most powerful. There are two means by which one can escape him. The first is to learn halachot each day, resolving to observe them. And the second is to pray to Hashem to be spared *nisayon*.

Shabbat Is the Source of All Blessing

“On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death”

(*Shemot* 35:2)

Moshe Rabbeinu gathered the nation together and taught them the laws of Shabbat. “Work may be done” during the six days of the week. This implies that it is not man who earns his livelihood, rather, his “work may be done” on its own, by the command of Hashem. This is just like the Creation of the world, which came about through the command of Hashem. There is no room for pride in one’s business acumen. It is not his astuteness which accumulates his wealth, but only Hashem’s word.

There are many people who don’t put much effort into making a living. With merely a few phone calls, they close world-wide business transactions. Conversely, there are day laborers, who sweat and toil to put a piece of bread on the table. But they live meagerly, for the glow of success never shines upon them. This should teach us that the key of livelihood is not in man’s hands. His investments do not support his earnings. Man’s sustenance is decreed on High, at the beginning of every year (*Beitzah* 16a). Hashem is the One Who decides who will become wealthy and who will be poor.

This pasuk teaches us, also, that work is to be done only during the six days of the week. Shabbat is meant to be a “complete rest for Hashem.” We often see people far from Torah observance, who open their businesses on Shabbat. When they are rebuked for this, they reply, “But I do the most business on Shabbat! If I were to close my business, I would stand to lose vast amounts of money!” *Rachmana litzlan.*

Such claims are the wiles of the *Yetzer Hara*. One will never see blessing from money earned on Shabbat. It seems, superficially, as though one is gaining by keeping his business open seven days a week. But the truth is that work is able to be done only during the first six days of the week. It is not feasible to work on Shabbat and see fruits in one’s labor. He claims he is earning more by desecrating Shabbat. He imagines that his bank account is becoming more inflated as he conducts business on Shabbat. In reality, this is all hot air.

Moshe Rabbeinu wished to arouse faith in the hearts of Am Yisrael, teaching them that livelihood is decreed from Above. Everything has its time and place. It is forbidden to pursue *parnasa* by desecrating Shabbat. This only harms a person and does not bring him any blessing at all.

Similarly, there are those who are not scrupulous to pray with a minyan, claiming that they have to rush off to work. When a person does not set his priorities straight, delineating times for spiritual matters and times for work, his losses offset his profits. He thinks that opening for business extra early, at the expense of praying properly, will bring him more income, but the truth is that he loses his true assets, those which await him in the World to Come.

After 120 years, a person is lowered into the grave. All of his worldly goods, which he toiled all his life to amass, will remain behind, inaccessible to him. Therefore, it is most crucial for a person to make a personal accounting, weighing his material pursuits against his mitzvot and good deeds. His mitzvot and good deeds are what will accompany him to the World of Truth, defending him in his ultimate judgment.

The initials of the words שְׁשַׁת יְמִים (six days) spell שֵׁי (gift). The last letters spell the words תָּם (innocent) and מֵת (dead). Whoever works only during the six weekdays merits the gift of Hashem. He sees blessing in his work and reaps the fruit of his labors. One who behaves innocently with Hashem, walking in His ways and following His commands, sees success in his endeavors. Conversely, one who seeks to do work even on the seventh day will find himself in the category of the dead, as the pasuk states, “Whoever does work on it (Shabbat), will be put to death.”

One should not think that the more money he earns, filling his coffers, the longer he will live. Everyone ends up filling his coffin. What will he say to justify himself for desecrating Shabbat, missing the opportunity for eternal life?

A man came to me, stating that his wife harbors ill feelings toward him. She constantly complains that he invests too much time in mitzvot, at the expense of earning a living. He asked me how to handle the situation. I tried convincing the woman that one never loses out by observing Torah and performing mitzvot. On the contrary, Torah and mitzvot are what draw blessing and bounty and all goodness upon a person. But she refused to listen. When I realized that I was getting nowhere, I suggested to the man to obey his wife and spend more time on *parnasa*.

A year later, the man came to me once again, dispirited and depressed. “Why did you tell me to invest more time in *parnasa*?” he demanded. “Now I went bankrupt, losing all of my assets!” I explained to him that I had advised him in this way, because I was afraid he’d lose his marriage as well as his money.

The man retorted, “And what do you think happened? Exactly that! I lost all my money, and I lost my marital harmony!”

After he had unburdened himself to me, I recommended that he should return to his original lifestyle. He should devote his days to Torah study and mitzvah performance. I assured him that Hashem would help him, granting him *siyata di'Shemaya* in all of his undertakings. I added that even if we do not perceive, in this world, the gift and blessing which

Hashem bestows upon those who learn His Torah, it is not an indication that there is none. Oftentimes, Hashem sees fit to repay a person for his good deeds only in *Olam Haba*. That is where he will receive **שֵׁשׁ עֲולמּוֹת**. By using the six days of the week properly and resting on the seventh, he merits 310 (the *gematria* of the word **שֵׁשׁ**, referring to the **שְׁשָׁת יְמִים**) worlds of salvation and blessing (*Sanhedrin* 100a).

Another time, a man approached me, demanding to know why he was not successful in business. All of his endeavors ended up in failure. I asked if he observes Shabbat, to which he answered yes. I then asked if perhaps he watches television on Shabbat, to which he responded that he does, albeit with a Shabbat clock. I then told him the following, "Although you don't actively desecrate Shabbat, because you don't directly turn on and off the machine, merely watching television on Shabbat gives that day a secular slant. Television defiles the holiness and the sanctity which are the distinction of Shabbat. TV viewing on Shabbat cools off the flame of *kedushah* which is the trademark of this lofty day." I added that Shabbat is the source of all blessing (see *Zohar* II, 88a). Therefore, he should make every effort to protect it and preserve it as much as possible. In this manner, he will merit seeing success in his business.

Shabbat is called a taste of the World to Come (see *Berachot* 57b). This means that a person can actually taste the sweetness of *Olam Haba* here in this world, by means of *Shemirat Shabbat*. Tasting Shabbat will also whet his appetite for *Olam Haba*. Since the path to *Olam Haba* is paved with Torah study and mitzvah performance, *Shemirat Shabbat* causes a person to be strengthened in these two areas.

We can compare this to the following scenario: A cup of steaming tea is placed before a person. Its pungent aroma is most tempting. But he can't drink it all at once, because it is too hot. He drinks a little at a time, until his mouth becomes used to the hot temperature. Then he can enjoy its sweet taste. Likewise is our situation in this world. The World to Come is the peak of pleasure and perfection. But in order for a person to be capable of absorbing all of its divine delights, he must first accustom

himself to spiritual pleasures while here in this world. This he does by means of observing Shabbat, learning Torah, and observing mitzvot.

The Chafetz Chaim, zt"l, as well as other commentaries (*Ben Ish Chai, Shanah Sheniyah, Shemot*) state that Torah study on Shabbat is manifold times more effective than Torah study during an ordinary weekday. Why is this so?

I thought of the following explanation. During the week, a person is busy earning a living. The house, also, demands his attention. Therefore, one cannot throw himself completely into his Torah study. When he eventually sits down to learn, his mind is occupied with one hundred and one different things. He is thinking about unpaid bills, upcoming meetings, etc. His Torah study is not perfect. But on Shabbat, peace and tranquility reign. His mind is free of the worries of the workweek. He can dedicate himself completely to Torah study and plumb its depths to his heart's content. This type of study is worth many times the study of the weekdays. His reward is commensurately greater, as well. The Ben Ish Chai states that the only reason that Shabbat was given to us is to enable us to learn Torah with peace of mind.

The Gemara relates the disagreement between Rabbi Yishmael and the *Chachamim* (*Shabbat 12b*) regarding whether or not one may learn Torah on Shabbat by the light of a candle. The Sages claimed it is forbidden, for one might come to move the candle inadvertently, while deeply engrossed in his learning. On the other hand, Rabbi Yishmael claimed that a person could never forget that the day is Shabbat, even while deeply involved in Torah study. Therefore, it is unnecessary to forbid the study of Torah on Shabbat by the light of a candle.

A short time later, Rabbi Yishmael himself was learning Torah on Shabbat, together with his disciples. Thoroughly absorbed in his learning, he accidentally moved the wick of the candle. He immediately caught himself in the act and was terribly aggrieved that he had not listened to the *Chachamim*. Had he consented to their opinion, he would never have

desecrated Shabbat. His distress was so great that he vowed that when the Beit Hamikdash would be rebuilt, he would offer a fat sin offering.

If Torah study on Shabbat is so exalted, why didn't Hashem see to it that a person would never come to desecrate Shabbat while pursuing it? This teaches that even though Torah study is tremendous on Shabbat, nevertheless, *Shemirat Shabbat* takes precedence, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 31:14), "Those who profane it shall be put to death." This severe punishment is not the lot of one who desists from learning Torah on Shabbat, but for one who desecrates it. Notwithstanding the importance of learning Torah on Shabbat, one must exert himself even more to keep the sanctity of Shabbat, the source of all blessing.

In Summary

- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu told Bnei Yisrael, "On six days, work may be done." This implies that the work gets done on its own. We learn from this that a person may never feel that it is his business acumen which earns him his livelihood, and if he works on Shabbat, he will earn more. Everything a person earns is decreed on High and comes from Hashem. Desecrating Shabbat will never earn a person more money.
- ◆ The initials of the words **שְׁשָׁת יְמִים** (six days) spell the word **ש'** (gift). And the last letters spell the word **מַת** (dead). One who works only on the six weekdays will merit the gift of **ש"י עולמות** (310 worlds). Conversely, one who insists on working on Shabbat is considered **מַת**. This is borne out in the pasuk, "Those who profane it shall be put to death."
- ◆ The reward for Torah study on Shabbat is many times greater than that of Torah study during the week. This can be understood simply by the mere fact that during the week, a person is occupied with his many obligations. His mind is not free to field the intricacies of Torah. But on Shabbat, he is liberated of his weekday demands, allowing himself to plant and plow in the meadows of Torah. He will reap the dividends when his harvest comes in.

- ◆ Rabbi Yishmael disagreed with the *Chachamim*, claiming that one may learn Torah by candlelight on Shabbat. He ended up sinning in this matter. If Torah study on Shabbat is so great in Hashem's eyes, why didn't He see fit to protect His people from falling into sin in such a way?
- ◆ Although Torah study on Shabbat is indeed tremendous, it does not take priority over *Shemirat Shabbat*. Rabbi Yishmael should have taken care to be extra vigilant in this matter.

Consecrating the Mundane

“And the work was sufficient for them for all the work, to do it – and there was a surplus”

(*Shemot 36:7*)

If the contributions toward the Mishkan were “sufficient” this suggests that Bnei Yisrael brought exactly enough materials to build it. However, the word “surplus” suggests that their contributions provided more than enough materials. The Ohr Hachaim explains that Bnei Yisrael had actually brought more than necessary, but by a miracle, everything that they had brought was incorporated into the Mishkan. (See the Ohr Hachaim for further details.)

The Ben Ish Chai takes exception to the Ohr Hachaim’s explanation (*Shanah Sheniyah, Vayakheil*). How could it be stated, at one and the same time, that Am Yisrael brought the exact amount necessary, and more than necessary for building the Sanctuary?

He clarifies this question in the following way. When Moshe was asked to build the home for the *Shechinah*, he had difficulty understanding this. Hashem is holy and His Name is holy. He is purely spiritual. How, then, is it possible to build a building of physical matter to contain the *Shechinah*?

There seems to be a contradiction between holiness and a home made of material mass.

The Ben Ish Chai elucidates. Heaven forbid that we think Hashem wanted to rest His *Shechinah* in a physical edifice. Spirituality cannot be confined in a physical container. Rather, Hashem asked Moshe and Betzalel to establish a house for His *Shechinah* by means of collecting donations from the nation. And although these donations were gold, silver, and copper, by using the Holy Names of Hashem to build this house (*Berachot* 55a), they sanctified the physical, transforming it from mere mass into a spiritual entity. This enabled the *Shechinah* to rest upon it.

The Ben Ish Chai thus explains the pasuk in the following way. Bnei Yisrael donated physical substances for the sake of building the Mishkan. They brought just enough, as implied by the word “sufficient.” But by sanctifying the material matter, through injecting Hashem’s Names into it, Betzalel produced “a surplus.” It was an excess of material, which became transformed to spiritual matter, the purpose of holiness and purity. This is proven by the fact that Hashem was able to rest His *Shechinah* in this Sanctuary. Had Betzalel not used the surplus of materials and sanctified them, it would not have been possible for the home of materialism to house spirituality.

Rashi, in explaining this pasuk, states, “And the work of bringing was sufficient for those who made the Mishkan.” What does he mean by the words, “the work of bringing”? Bnei Yisrael were not directly involved in constructing the Mishkan. They simply donated toward its construction.

We can answer this question based on the words of the Ben Ish Chai. Am Yisrael contributed their donations for Hashem’s sake, as the pasuk states (*Shemot* 25:2), “For Me – dedicated to My Name” (*Tanchuma, Terumah* 1). Through donating toward the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael intended to raise and honor Hashem’s Name. Therefore, the physical objects which they gave attained a level of *kedushah* even before they were given. Their entire purpose was to glorify Hashem’s Name. It is appropriate to say that

Am Yisrael were partners with Betzalel in constructing the Mishkan, for the physical matter had become spiritual while yet in their hands. This is because of the sanctified objectives which were put into the physical objects. Their sole intention was to construct a resting place for the *Shechinah* in this world.

All of the accomplishments of Betzalel were in the merit of Am Yisrael, who did everything *l'shem Shamayim*. They sanctified the physical from the very start. Therefore, the construction of the Mishkan is attributed to them.

The verse in Eichah states (3:23), “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!” We can translate the word “great” according to what was mentioned above. Sleep is one sixtieth of death (*Berachot* 57b). When a person sleeps, his *neshamah* ascends to *Shamayim*. If he sanctified Hashem’s Name throughout the day, and recited Kriyat Shema with the correct intention, he merits his *neshamah* ascending higher and higher on the ladder of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. When he awakens in the morning, the faith in his heart has become increased and intensified on account of the *neshamah*’s experience on High.

We see from this that the *neshamah*’s nightly Torah study with the *Shechinah* is beneficial to the person the next morning. His level of Avodat Hashem is ever the greater, and he is capable of fathoming that which was previously difficult for him. The Torah studied in Heaven reinforces one’s *emunah* and the power to innovate Torah thoughts. This is what is referred to in the phrase, “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!”

It would seem that Moshe attained complete perfection with his ascent to Heaven. This seems to be the very highest level of spirituality that one can ever hope to achieve. It is the level where the body simply loses its form, transformed into a spiritual entity. But Chazal (see *Shabbat* 88b; *Sanhedrin* 93a) tell us otherwise. In the Heavens, Moshe did not have to contend with a *Yetzer Hara*. It was only after he returned to this world, where his *Yetzer Hara* awaited him and sought every way of making him

trip, that he rose in spirit. By remaining at his elevated stature even in this lowly world, he reached greater heights than he could have ever attained in *Shamayim*.

Adam Harishon, the handiwork of Hashem, was created “sufficient.” He was the perfect creature; what more could have been expected of him? Chazal relate (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 2) that before he sinned, the light emanating from Adam was tremendous. His heel overshadowed the brightness of the sun. Had he merely maintained his perfection, he would have gained greatly. He was not obligated to pursue higher levels of spirituality, because he was already at the peak of perfection. All that was demanded of him was that he refrain from doing wrong. He was commanded to abstain from eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Complying with this command would have kept him at his lofty level.

Chazal say (*Makkot* 23b; *Zohar I*, 170b) that the mitzvot correspond to the body parts of a person. There are 613 mitzvot, and they are parallel to the 248 organs and 365 sinews of a person. A person who has an added appendage is considered flawed. Similarly, it is forbidden to add a mitzvah to the Torah. A Sefer Torah with an extra letter is defective and must be repaired.

The command to Adam to refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge is not included in the 613 mitzvot, and there is no body part parallel to it. This was not considered a negative commandment, rather, a barometer by which to gauge Adam’s commitment to Hashem. Had Adam passed this test, and refrained from partaking of the fruit, he would have merited earning an added level in Avodat Hashem. The benefits accrued would have affected all future generations.

Man’s purpose in this world is to sanctify the worlds by utilizing physicality for spiritual goals of purity and holiness. The pasuk in Tehillim (140:8) states, “You protected my head on the day of battle.” Chazal explain that the word **נִשְׁבַּע** (battle) can also mean “connection” (see *Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 653). It is man’s duty to connect heaven and earth; he must raise the mundane to the level of spirituality. How does one

accomplish this? By fulfilling the pasuk in Shir Hashirim (1:2), “May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.” The word kisses is נֶקְשׁוּ, which has the same root as “battle” and “connection.” We connect heaven and earth via Torah study, adhering to spirituality, just as a kiss is a form of deep connection. Every Jew in the world can acquire greatness by improving himself and elevating the physical. As we are enjoined (*Yevamot* 20a), “Sanctify yourself even in permitted behavior.”

“And the work was sufficient for them for all the work, to do it – and having a surplus.” This pasuk teaches us a *mussar* lesson. Every morning, Hashem gives a person sufficient strength to perform all of his obligations of the day. Yet, we know that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven (*Berachot* 33b). Therefore, the Torah tells us (*Devarim* 10:12), “Now, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem.” The powers Hashem gave us are enough to energize us to do His will. But there is one quality which we must obtain through our own ability. This is *yirat Shamayim*. One who succeeds in acquiring this exalted trait by improving himself has reached the level of “surplus,” for he has added a level to his Avodat Hashem.

Another way to explain the pasuk is the following. The body is considered “sufficient,” and the *neshamah* is called “surplus.” Bodies were accorded to the gentiles as well as the animal kingdom. But the *neshamah* of a Jew, carved from on High, was bestowed only on the Crown of Creation. It provides us with a privilege as well as a responsibility. We must be vigilant in sanctifying our *neshamah* and protecting it constantly through Torah study and mitzvah performance. A Jew constantly sanctifies the physical and mundane throughout his life. By making a *berachah* before eating a fruit, he elevates it to a level of spirituality. When he takes it to his mouth, he reaps the fruit of his labor, meriting additional holiness, for he has consumed a sanctified food.

Chazal teach that Moshe would construct and dismantle the Mishkan every day, for the duration of the seven days of inauguration (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11). He left it erect only on the eighth day. The Mishkan was made of forty-eight heavy beams of wood. Approximately one hundred people

were needed just to stand them up. How was Moshe able to take it apart and put it together every day, on his own, aside from anointing the vessels and attending to his other duties?

Chazal explain (*ibid.*) that Moshe Rabbeinu would merely touch the beams and the other parts of the Mishkan, and they would instantly stand at attention, falling into place on their own. How did Moshe merit such a miracle? The secret was in the very fabric from which the Mishkan was formed. It was fashioned from the *mesirut nefesh* of the nation, who contributed for Hashem's sake. Additionally, Betzalel injected *kedushah* into it, by means of the Holy Names with which he constructed it (*Berachot* 55a).

The *Ba'al Haturim* writes (see *Pesikta Rabbati* 5; *Ba'al Haturim, Shemot* 40:18) that when Moshe began erecting the Mishkan, Hashem turned to the angels and asked them to construct a Mishkan on High, parallel to the Mishkan on earth. Why? Hashem wanted to prove to them that Moshe was on a higher level than they themselves. When Moshe had ascended to Heaven in order to bring down the *luchot*, the angels wished to strike him down, claiming, "What is a human being doing among us?!" (see *Shabbat* 88b). Ordering the angels to erect a Tabernacle in *Shamayim* would demonstrate Moshe's superiority. They were in need of a vast amount of angels for this task, whereas Moshe managed to erect the Mishkan on his own, without any outside help whatsoever.

Let us end this discussion with the following point (*Rashi, Shemot* 35:34). Hashem wanted that even Ahaliav, the son of a maidservant, should participate in the erection of the Mishkan. This was in order to establish Betzalel's righteousness in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael. He was not jealous of Ahaliav's wisdom in any way, even though Ahaliav was the son of a maidservant. He constructed the Mishkan together with him, in unity and brotherly love.

In Summary

- ♦ The Ohr Hachaim finds the words "sufficient" and "surplus" in this pasuk to be contradictory. At first glance, it seems that the nation brought exactly

enough materials for the Mishkan, but then it seems that there was extra. He explains that they actually brought more than enough, but through a miracle, everything went to good use.

- ◆ The Ben Ish Chai explains this in a different vein. Moshe Rabbeinu was unable to understand how a physical edifice could possibly house the *Shechinah*, a spiritual entity. Physicality and spirituality are mutually exclusive. He explains that the material items used to build the Mishkan were sanctified and reached a level of holiness. This was due to Betzalel's use of the Holy Names when building the Mishkan. Likewise, Bnei Yisrael instilled *kedushah* into their contributions, by donating with a full heart, for Hashem's sake. Therefore, there was "sufficient" physical matter, but a "surplus" of spirituality.
- ◆ In this physical world, man can ascend to even greater heights than those reached by Moshe Rabbeinu when in *Shamayim*. This is because this world contains the element of free choice, enabling a person to elevate the mundane to the spiritual.
- ◆ There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah, parallel to the 613 parts of a person's body. Each mitzvah consecrates a different organ. Adam Harishon was commanded just to refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge. This command was not one of the 613 mitzvot. He had no need to sanctify his being, for he was already perfect. It was, rather, a command to preserve his inherent purity. But, unfortunately, he failed and fell in stature.
- ◆ Based on *mussar*, we might say the following. Every day, a person receives the ability to succeed in his mission for that day. This is expressed in the word "sufficient." But not everything is in Heaven's hands. *Yirat Shamayim* is dependent solely on a person. He must exert himself, investing his own energies into his Avodat Hashem. This is expressed in the word "surplus," for he must add of his own in order to grow in spirit.

Gems on Parashat Vayakheil

The Connection between Parshiyot Ki Tisa and Vayakheil

“On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death”

(*Shemot* 35:2)

Parashat *Ki Tisa* ends with the words (*Shemot* 34:35), “When the Children of Israel saw Moshe’s face, that Moshe’s face had become radiant, Moshe put the mask back on his face, until he came to speak with Him.” Parashat *Vayakheil* begins with the words of the above pasuk, describing *Shemirat Shabbat*. What is the connection between these two subjects?

Chazal tell us (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 37) that when Moshe Rabbeinu spoke with Hashem, his face lit up and shone from a distance. He did not want Am Yisrael to consider him different from themselves, when they perceived the rays of light emanating from his face. Therefore, he would cover his face when speaking with the nation (see *Rashi, Shemot* 34:33). When he spoke with the *Shechinah*, he would remove this mask.

This mode of behavior illustrates Moshe’s extreme humility. He wanted

to be on equal footing with the rest of the nation, not feeling any sense of superiority whatsoever. He feared that if the people would face the luminosity radiating from him, they would feel intimidated and be afraid to approach him. By covering his face when speaking with them, he maintained a feeling of similarity to them, and they were amenable to accepting his teachings.

We could suggest that the underlying common factor between these two topics is the quality of unity. Moshe covered his face in order to feel equal with the rest of the nation and to give them a feeling of connection to him. Similarly, Shabbat is the symbol of harmony. The entire family joins together, regardless of age and stage, enjoying the delights of the day. Shabbat has a special power to unite the hearts, as well as strengthen the bond between husband and wife. The connection between the subject of Moshe covering his face and Shabbat is that they both contain an element of unity, the cornerstone of the Jewish nation.

Additionally, these portions of the Torah are read during the season of Purim, when it was written about Bnei Yisrael (*Esther* 9:27), “The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves.” I always wondered about this wording. How is it possible to “confirm” the Torah, before actually “undertaking” to uphold it? Usually, a person receives a contract and afterward, confirms to maintain it. Without first receiving it, how can one hope to keep it?

Am Yisrael understood that Haman had gained power and desired to annihilate the entire nation (*ibid.* 3:8) because they lacked unity. They quickly realized that unity is the cornerstone of their existence. Rushing to re-accept the Torah, through upholding its prerequisite of unity, they merited accepting it wholeheartedly. This is the meaning of “the Jews confirmed and undertook.” First, they accepted the precondition for receiving the Torah, which is unity. Only afterward, did they actually accept the Torah. In this manner, they were able to preserve and maintain it.

Pekudei

The Obligation to Make a Personal Accounting

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

After all of the donations for the Mishkan were collected, Moshe counted them up, in order to let everyone know just how much had been collected for each item (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 5*). This is similar to the job of the *gabbai* in the Beit Hakeneset. After he arranges appeals, he informs the congregation of how much money was raised. The people appreciate knowing exactly where their money is going, and this increases their trust in him. Likewise, all charity donors like to get a receipt after they have contributed to a cause.

But why did Bnei Yisrael need Moshe to tell them what their money was used for? Moshe was their leader, the eyes of the nation. It was self-understood that their donations would be spent wisely, and he would

not, *chas v'shalom*, siphon off any for himself. Why, then, did he see fit to tally up the amount before them? And why didn't they protest this act?

When Moshe recorded the exact amount of all the donations, Bnei Yisrael noticed that one sum was missing. When they notified Moshe of this, he counted up the monies again, and everything was accounted for. How are we to understand Moshe's mistake, which was rectified only after he prayed for Heavenly assistance to reveal where the money went?

Furthermore, what is the reason for the double language, “**אלֹהֶיךָ פְּקוֹדִי**” – **הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכָּן הַעֲדֹת** – These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony”? Why is it not sufficient to mention the Tabernacle one time?

Every person is a miniature Mishkan, because the *Shechinah* rests within him. But a person might come to think that he is **the** Mishkan, i.e., a perfect specimen. In reality, this is far from the truth. The first time that the Mishkan is mentioned, it is written **הַמִּשְׁכָּן**, the ‘ה’ referring to the Tabernacle of perfection, whereas the second time it is mentioned, it is spelled without the ‘ה’ as **מִשְׁכָּן**, referring to the Tabernacle we build inside ourselves. Let us not become arrogant over the fact that we walk in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot, for the road to perfection is long. There are always more levels to attain in Avodat Hashem. Only when a person considers himself a miniature Mishkan does he merit reaching the level of “the Tabernacle.”

Moshe Rabbeinu intentionally recorded what each and every donation was used for, even though the nation trusted him implicitly. He insisted on making a detailed calculation, in order to teach us that from time to time, a person is obligated to take stock of his actions. Are they at the level of “donations for the Tabernacle”? They should be analyzed from their source, in order to see if there is room for improvement.

Moshe's miscalculation also teaches us a valuable lesson. Every person, no matter how great he is, is human, and therefore liable to err. Even Moshe Rabbeinu, the great tzaddik, who merited living in *Shamayim* and speaking to Hashem face-to-face, made a mistake. Yet he was not ashamed

to admit it. If Moshe, at his exalted level, was able to err, all the more so are we, small in stature, likely to go wrong at times. Let us recognize this weakness and make a personal accounting to see where we slipped up and how to mend our ways.

The Torah is compared to a tree, as the pasuk states (*Mishlei 3:18*), “It is a tree of life for those who grasp it and its supporters are praiseworthy.” What is the connection between the Torah and a tree? I remember that as a young boy, I once tore off all the leaves of a tree. I thought that by doing this, I had killed the tree. To my surprise, after a few months, the tree renewed itself and began growing fresh, green leaves. A tree naturally grows new leaves. Even if its branches have been removed, as long as its roots have not been damaged, it will rejuvenate and produce new leaves. Likewise, the Torah exists inside each and every Jew, either consciously or subconsciously. Even if a person sins, he has the potential to make a complete turnaround, and return to his Heavenly Father.

There is a famous story about the Ba’al Shem Tov, zy”a, the great advocate of our nation. He once met a man in the street who was removed from anything Jewish. When the Ba’al Shem Tov asked how he was, he answered, “Baruch Hashem.” The Ba’al Shem Tov asked him again and again, each time receiving the same reply, “Baruch Hashem.” His disciples wondered why he was repeating the question so many times, and asked him to explain. The Ba’al Shem Tov responded, “See how great is the Jewish people! Even a Jew who is disconnected from any vestige of Judaism has a Jewish heart beating within him. The words ‘Baruch Hashem’ are fluent on his lips, and he accredits Hashem with his success.”

One can achieve tremendous inspiration by making a personal accounting. Although he may be distant from Hashem, this reckoning can return him to his roots and to his Maker. Moshe Rabbeinu understood the beauty and the power of every Jewish *neshamah*. It is capable of bringing the person back to the right path. He therefore felt the need to teach Bnei Yisrael the value of making a personal accounting. It has the ability to stir

one from his shortcomings and spur him to probe ways of correcting himself.

Making an accounting of one's actions, just as Moshe reckoned the donations for the Mishkan, brings special *siyata di'Shemaya* for growth in Torah and fear of Heaven. By doing so, one can even reach the level of being considered a Tabernacle. But if a person has the audacity to view himself as *the Tabernacle*, not understanding the need for making occasional accountings of his lifestyle and improving his *middot*, Hashem will be quick to show him his true place. He will not even merit being a miniature Tabernacle.

Oftentimes, a person feels he is on the right track, doing what is demanded of him. But after some time, his eyes open, and he finds he had been sorely mistaken. A married woman once called me up, asking that I bless her with success in her studies. This woman was married two years, yet still had no children. When I asked her about this, she responded that she was under a lot of stress in her studies, and she was postponing parenthood until after receiving her degree. I told her she was mistaken in her logic and had no right to think that way. Moreover, she had no guarantee of a respectable job even after she earned her degree. Who knows to what degree her refusal to bear children now, would affect her later on? Maybe she wouldn't even be interested in having children after she ended her studies.

This woman was observant, yet she did not realize that what she was doing was forbidden. She was not permitted to plan her family according to her whim, preventing the birth of Jewish children just because it wasn't convenient for her just then. Only after I enlightened her did she admit to her error, understanding the fault in her logic.

One often makes a personal accounting, but sometimes things just don't add up. He doesn't see where he went wrong. This is because (*Berachot* 5b) "a prisoner cannot release himself from prison." An inmate needs an outside source to provide his release from jail. So, too, a person is subjective and therefore cannot see his own faults. He needs someone

with an objective outlook to enlighten him to his deficiencies and rebuke him for his faults. This is what is meant by the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:17), “You shall reprove your fellow, and do not bear a sin because of him.” “Man is not an island,” as the saying goes. He often cannot rectify his own shortcomings and prepare a proper personal accounting. Therefore, one should concern himself with the welfare of his fellow and awaken him to his failings.

But one must understand that a personal accounting is his personal obligation. His friend’s rebuke is only to help him fulfill his task. Moshe Rabbeinu acted most responsibly in accounting for each and every contribution donated toward the Mishkan. Even though the people did not demand this of him, he felt it necessary to show them where their funds were directed. When a person focuses on self-improvement, he merits *siyata di’Shemaya* and becomes elevated from the level of “Tabernacle” to that of “**the** Tabernacle.”

In Summary

- ♦ Moshe Rabbeinu accounted for all of the contributions donated toward the Mishkan. The people surely trusted him; why did he do this? Furthermore, Chazal state that at one point, he miscalculated, and Bnei Yisrael brought it to his attention. Why did such a thing happen?
- ♦ “These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony.” Why the double language of “Tabernacle?” There is a message in these words. Every person is a miniature Tabernacle. Yet the ultimate Tabernacle is written with the letter ‘ה’, referring to “**the** Tabernacle.” A person who is involved in self-improvement can achieve amazing things, rising to the level of “**the** Tabernacle.”
- ♦ Moshe Rabbeinu intentionally counted the donations, which hinted at man’s deeds. He was teaching us by this that everyone is obligated to make a personal accounting for all his actions. And he even miscalculated. Every person can make a mistake, but everything can be repaired. The Torah is compared to a tree. A tree will always rejuvenate itself and grow

new leaves. So, too, with the power of Torah, every Jew has the ability to rectify his actions.

- ♦ Sometimes, a person is so caught up in his own world that he is blind to his shortcomings. The Torah therefore gave a special mitzvah of chastising one's friend for his faults.

Man Is a Miniature Mishkan

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

All of the details of the Mishkan are mentioned in parashat *Pekudei*. The utensils are delineated here. Examples are: the Menorah, the Table, and the Mizbeach, which were needed for service in the Mishkan. But they were not needed only for that. They also alluded to serving Hashem with self-sacrifice, in thought and in Torah study. The Mishkan was called “the Tent of Meeting.” The Torah endures only in one who sacrifices himself in the tent of Torah (*Berachot* 63b).

This explains why Hashem gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael specifically in the desert, and kept them there for a long time afterward. He could certainly have given them the Torah after they entered Eretz Yisrael, or close to their arrival there. What was the purpose in bestowing the Torah upon them in the Wilderness? Throughout their travels in the Wilderness, He wished to impress upon them that only through trials and travails can the Torah remain with a person.

Let us take an example from a seasoned businessman. He will travel for long periods of time to faraway places, all in the name of earning a living. This is how a person should approach Torah. A person may be motivated to arise early and work long hours, but when it comes time to study Torah he's a closed book, making no effort to learn. This demonstrates that his love for money outweighs his affection for Torah. Let us examine ourselves and see whether we put as much effort in Torah pursuits as in the quest for currency.

David Hamelech proclaims (*Tehillim* 84:3), “**נכפָה** וְגַם **כָלֹתָה נֶפֶשִׁי** – **לְחֶצְרוֹת ה'** – My soul yearns, indeed it pines, for the courtyards of Hashem.” The word **נכפָה** (yearns) has the same root as the word **כָסֵף** (money or silver). The word **כָלֹתָה** (pines) also means “consumed/finished.” David is hinting that all his material possessions will eventually be finished, but his love for Torah is constant.

A man once asked me how he can be sure that he truly loves Hashem.

I asked him, “What do you do when your child wakes up at night?”

He answered, “I rush to see what is wrong and take care of him.”

I continued, “And if, after a few moments, he cries again?”

“I go and check up on him a second time,” was his reply.

“You surely love your son, and that is why you are prepared to wake up for him countless times,” I said. “Here is the barometer to see just how much you love Hashem. Would you get up numerous times at night for the sake of Torah study? One who is ready to sacrifice his comfort for the Torah indicates that he truly loves Hashem.”

Hashem wanted the Mishkan to be erected in the Wilderness, rather than waiting until Bnei Yisrael would enter the Land. Why was this so? Additionally, since there are many mitzvot which are dependent on the Land, it would seem more appropriate to wait until Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, before building the Mishkan. Then they would have built the Beit Hamikdash, more solid and stable.

The Mishkan was also known as the “אֹהֶל מוּעֵד – Tent of Meeting.” Every person is enjoined to be a “Tent of Meeting.” The word (meeting) has two connotations. It can mean a holiday, and it can also be an allusion to the day of death (מוּעֵד לְכָל חַי). The words remind a person of his allotted time in this world. In Morocco, there is a sign outside the cemetery with the words מוּעֵד לְכָל חַי printed on it.

The ultimate festival in a person’s life is his day of death. As long as he lives, he is likely to sin. Chazal teach (*Avot* 2:4), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” After one passes on, he will never sin again. If he spent his entire life involved in Torah and mitzvot, he will be able to face his day of death with serenity.

The concept of the Tent of Meeting, then, teaches us the following. If one wishes to make his last day a holiday, he must pursue Torah and mitzvot his entire life. He must sacrifice himself in the tent of Torah. Then his day of death will be a happy day for him. This is why Hashem insisted that Bnei Yisrael build the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting, when they were in the Wilderness, before they entered the Land. It would serve as a constant reminder that one must sacrifice himself for the sake of Torah, thereby preparing his day of death to be a true holiday.

On one of my visits to Paris, a couple approached me, stating that they wished to divorce. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is quite common in the Torah world. I asked the wife why she wanted a divorce, and she answered that her husband wanted to bring into the house things which contradicted a Torah lifestyle. I asked the man to give me an example of what she meant, but he refused. The woman insisted that her husband’s desires contradicted the way that her mother had brought her up, as well as the Torah’s outlook. In our sorry state, there are many people who do not want to live according to the Torah. Their obsession with the pleasures of this world is greater than their devotion to Torah, however much they transmit to the world the message that they love Hashem.

We began with the subject of the Tent of Meeting. Let us add that this is a most fitting epitaph for a person who truly yearns for Torah. He must

make himself into a tent, which is put up and dismantled constantly, taken from place to place. A person should not plant himself in one place and stay there. If he finds he is able to flourish elsewhere, he should uproot himself and put down roots elsewhere.

Constructing the Mishkan

“They brought the Tabernacle to Moshe, the Tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its planks, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets” (*Shemot* 39:33). Rashi, quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, explains that the people brought the Tabernacle to Moshe, because they were unable to erect it. Since Moshe had not worked on the construction of the Mishkan, Hashem gave him the job of erecting it. No man was able to erect it because of the weight of the beams. Moshe asked Hashem how a man could erect the Mishkan. Hashem told him to involve himself in doing so. The Mishkan would rise upright and stand by itself, but it would appear as if Moshe were setting it up.

The Mishkan was too heavy for anyone to erect. But Hashem chose Moshe for the task. He was the nation’s devoted shepherd, who had brought down the Torah to them. He was therefore most fitting for this job.

But we find that throughout their travels, the Levi’im dismantled and erected the Mishkan. They certainly had the strength to put it together. Why was it necessary to have Moshe do it the first time?

When Moshe erected the Mishkan in this world, the angels on High erected a Mishkan in *Shamayim* (see *Pesikta Rabbati* 5; *Ba’al Haturim*, *Shemot* 40:18). This is alluded to in the word **המשכן**, the letter ‘ה’ indicating the Heavenly Mishkan. But the Mishkan does not exist only in the Wilderness. Each person is a miniature Mishkan, containing the vessels necessary to serve his Creator. Moshe managed to erect the Mishkan only with great *siyata di’Shemaya*. This is to teach us that without Heavenly assistance, it is impossible to conquer the *Yetzer Hara* and build oneself up. He therefore asked for Hashem’s help. The people

saw that without this help, he would never have succeeded. This is borne out by the statement of Chazal (*Sukkah* 52b), “If not for Hashem’s help, he would not succeed in overcoming him.”

Man – A Miniature Mishkan

The sifrei Kabbalah state (see *Zohar* I; *Tosefta* 60:1) that every person has a corresponding image in *Shamayim*. One who is deficient in mitzvot in this world is lacking in his Heavenly image. After a person dies, he faces his spiritual countenance. If he damaged a specific organ due to his iniquities, that organ will be flawed. The anguish at confronting this reality will be tremendous. Hashem told Moshe that when he erected the Mishkan on earth, a corresponding Mishkan was erected in Heaven. When a person does a good deed in this world, it nourishes his image on High.

Why does the Torah specify “and Moshe made it” (וְיָשַׁאֲבָד) when each item was fashioned? This could have been stated once, at the very end. This statement comes to teach us that a person, a model Mishkan, must also “make and do” (וְיָשַׁאֲבָד), not claiming that he already completed his mission. Just as the Torah was not sparing in describing Moshe’s accomplishments, although it is comprised of Hashem’s Names and is usually succinct in its language, so too, must we be munificent in our deeds, doing mitzvot magnanimously.

The Torah uses various words regarding the work of the Mishkan. One time, it uses the words, “You shall make.” Another time we find the words, “You shall put.” And yet a third time, the wording, “You shall bring” is used. Regarding the Aron, it says (*Shemot* 40:3), “There you shall place the Ark of Testimony.” What was the reason for the numerous choices of actions?

We might say the following. Since the Mishkan was parallel to the parts of man’s body, the Torah used words referring to the body. Words like “take,” “bring,” “put,” “give,” and “make” all denote physical acts. A person must constantly be “in the act,” never resting on his laurels.

The Aron was carried with poles, which stuck out of the sides. Chazal (see *Yoma* 54a) say that they would show these poles to those who went up to Yerushalayim. I thought this might refer to a person's power to study Torah, just as the Aron (a hint to Torah) was lifted by the poles. The word **בְּדִים** (poles) indicates this. Its first and last letters spell **בָם** (in them), alluding to the words **וּדְבָרֶת בָם** (and you shall speak in them – words of Torah). The other two letters, 'ד', adding one for the word itself, are numerically equivalent to 15, the *gematria* of Hashem's Name, **ה-י-**. This refers to Hashem's glory, as Tehillim states (68:35), "Acknowledge invincible might to G-d." Might refers to Torah.

"These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony." When a person nullifies himself before Hashem, he sanctifies all of his organs for His service, thus becoming a "Tabernacle of Testimony," a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*. But if he does not serve Hashem with all of his faculties, he forfeits this wonderful opportunity.

In Summary

- ◆ A person is considered a miniature Mishkan. Therefore, the vessels refer to his service of Hashem.
- ◆ The Mishkan was called, "The Tent of Meeting" (**אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד**). This implies sacrificing oneself in the tent of Torah.
- ◆ The word **מוֹעֵד לְכָל י֥הוָה** also means a holiday, as well as referring to **י֥הוָה יְמִינָה** (the day of death). If a person wants his last day to have the joy of a holiday, he must sacrifice himself in the tent of Torah.
- ◆ Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah while they were yet in the Wilderness, not waiting until after they entered the Land. This taught them that the Torah endures only in one who kills himself over it. Likewise, the Mishkan was dismantled and erected over and over again in the Wilderness. They were not told to wait until they entered the Land before building it, for one cannot survive without the "Tent of Meeting," meaning, without sacrificing his life in the tent of Torah.

- ◆ A person can gauge his love for Hashem by considering whether or not he places as much effort into studying Torah as he puts into business matters, or any endeavor which is important to him.
- ◆ Bnei Yisrael did not manage to erect the Mishkan. Moshe was the one appointed to do this, as payment for his endless efforts on their behalf.
- ◆ There is a Mishkan on High, which corresponds to the Mishkan in this world. Man, who is a miniature Mishkan, has a spiritual form in Heaven, which is nourished through his deeds.
- ◆ The Torah uses many terms regarding the building of the Mishkan. This is to show man that he has multiple powers and must not become lazy in serving Hashem.

Lessons from the Mishkan

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

Rashi explains that this parashah details all the weights of gold, silver and copper donated toward the construction of the Mishkan, as well as all the implements used in its service.

When Betzalel constructed the Mishkan in the Wilderness, all of Bnei Yisrael came before Moshe with their contributions toward it. Each one brought what he could afford. Rashi tells us that after receiving all of the donations, Moshe counted them and calculated how much of each item,

such as silver, gold, and fabrics were brought. This is astounding. Am Yisrael in the Wilderness were called the Generation of Wisdom, for their lives were conducted by miracles. They were nourished by bread from Heaven and drank from the well which accompanied them in their journeys. The Cloud of Glory protected them from all harm. They were on an exalted spiritual level; why did Moshe need to present them with an accounting of what they had given, and how it had been used?

We are used to the *gabbai* preparing a statement of every member's donation toward a cause in the Beit Hakeneset. This is a good thing to do, because it is important for the people to know just how much was raised, and what it will be used for. But why did Moshe do this? Was there anyone who doubted Moshe's integrity, suspecting that he would, *chalilah*, take some of the funds for himself? [Tanchuma states that Moshe said, "I know Bnei Yisrael like to complain. I will therefore account for every item taken." This would sound like they did suspect him somewhat.]

It is obvious that Moshe did not make this reckoning upon demand, rather, out of his personal honesty. I don't know exactly what prompted him to do it. In any event, this parashah teaches us how meticulous one must be with public funds. Involvement with communal accounts demands great accountability. If Moshe put himself out to account for every donation, how much more must each *gabbai* be punctilious in his job, announcing before everyone exactly where their funds are going.

"These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony." Why is the word "Tabernacle" repeated in the pasuk? Rashi explains that the double language refers to the two Batei Mikdash which would be built in Eretz Yisrael, but would eventually be destroyed because of Bnei Yisrael's sins. The third Beit Hamikdash will stand forever.

The Admor of Sanz, zy"a, asks a wonderful question. It is known that "happiness is a time for joy" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 27:4). When there is a happy occasion, joy fills the air. There is no place for sorrow to mar the

joy. On the day that the Mishkan was inaugurated, the ecstasy was palpable. The home for the *Shechinah* was finally complete. Yet it was on this day that Hashem informed Bnei Yisrael that on this date in the future, both Batei Mikdash would be destroyed.

This can be compared to a person who is standing under the chuppah. At the height of his happiness, he is told that his wife will die. His next wife will die, as well. Only the third will merit living a long life together with him. It is self-understood that even if this were the case, this is not the way to speak to a *chatan* on the day of his happiness. On the contrary, the bliss and beauty of marriage are stressed, even though there will be times of stress and sadness as they are building their new home.

Yet, we know of the custom for the *chatan* to break a glass under the chuppah. This is in memory of the two Batei Mikdash which were destroyed. Where is there place for sadness over the *churban* under the chuppah, on the happiest day of a person's life?

We wish to teach the *chatan* the following lesson. He is now at the peak of his pleasure, when life is shining on him, just like the magnificent Beit Hamikdash shone in all its splendor. But beauty and majesty are not the main aspects of life. Without internal goodness and exalted *midot*, glory and grace dissolve into nothingness. The two Batei Mikdash were destroyed due to the internal rotting of the people, for they were immersed in baseless hatred (see *Yoma* 9b).

Smashing the cup is a means of breaking the following news to the *chatan*. Only the Torah has the power to help a person improve his *midot*, in order that he will be able to establish his home on a sound foundation. The Torah will give it the energy to stand firm for many years to come. But if one does not follow the Torah, *chalilah*, and instead, follows the dictates of his desires, his house will have the same end as the Beit Hamikdash, which was destroyed on account of baseless hatred.

The Mishkan is the symbol of Hashem's *Shechinah*. Chazal explain (*Zohar* II, 162b) that the Mishkan corresponds to a person. Just as Hashem rested His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan, so too, does He rest it

upon every person. This is based on the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8) which states, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.” The words “among them” are used instead of “in it” to tell us that each and every person has the capacity to contain the *Shechinah* within himself (*Eitz Hada’at Tov, Ki Tisa*; see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4, in the *hagahah*). If they are remiss, their iniquities will bring about the destruction of this Beit Hamikdash. This is the reason for the mention of the *churban* on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan.

Perhaps we can suggest the following reason as to why Moshe saw fit to count up all of the contributions of the Mishkan. He was teaching us that a person is enjoined to make a personal accounting of his deeds every day. He should examine his innermost thoughts and feelings. Is he going along the path of Torah and mitzvot, or did he, *chas v’shalom*, deviate somewhere along the way? When Bnei Yisrael do Hashem’s will, He rests His *Shechinah* among them, and the Beit Hamikdash stands firm and upright. But, *chalilah*, when Bnei Yisrael grow lax and do not properly account for their actions, their end is liable to be bitter. This is what causes the *churban*.

Thus we see that these two explanations of why Moshe accounted for all the contributions are interconnected. Moshe was indicating to the people that in order for the Mishkan to stand, as well as for each person’s “miniature Mishkan” to stand, they must examine their actions on a constant basis. This message needed to be stressed on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan to impress its importance on the nation.

A person is a miniature Mishkan. His development is always connected to personal accountings, both internal as well as external. One should channel his love for money toward love of Hashem and His Torah. Safeguarding one’s physical wealth should serve as an example of how one should preserve his spiritual level, constantly examining himself.

I heard that Rav Shach, zt”l, had a custom to cry every morning, at 8:00. This went on for a long period of time. When he was asked about this, he answered the following. “At this hour, thousands of pupils who are far

from Torah and mitzvah observance are beginning their day without any knowledge of Kriyat Shema.” Due to his strong sense of responsibility for Klal Yisrael, he expressed his anguish in this way. He knew that the youth who do not take stock of their lives and disregard Kriyat Shema, place themselves in grave danger. When a person does not bother to prepare himself as a fitting vessel for the *Shechinah*, Hashem removes His supervision from him. All types of illness and misfortune are liable to come upon him. He has no way of realizing that it all comes from Hashem, because he disassociated himself from Him long ago.

A baby cries as soon as it is born. This comes from the knowledge that this world is paved with *nisyonot*. What, then, is the point of being born at all? Chazal have taught (*Avot* 4:22), “Against your will you were created; against your will you were born.” Since a person is not asked whether or not he wishes to be born, he must fulfill the mission for which he was sent here, sanctifying Hashem’s Name in all that he does. He does this through perfecting his *midot* and making personal accountings, just as Moshe made an accounting after receiving the donations for the Mishkan.

I read a study which claimed the following. Had six million of our people not perished in the Holocaust, they could have multiplied, and the Jewish nation would now be twenty-two million strong. Today, there are only about twelve million Jews in the entire world, even though between six and eight million survived the Holocaust. Why didn’t they increase in number, as would have been expected? In the European countries, the Jewish population has hardly expanded at all. The tide of assimilation is responsible for this sad truth. Jews are so submerged in the deluge of mixed marriages, *rachmana litzlan*.

The word משכן is related to the word *Mishkan* (drawing). Every person should draw his fathers’ tradition upon himself, and live by it, in spite of all the trials that he faces in his life. The word “Mishkan” is repeated in order to teach us the following. When a person is not punctilious in following in his fathers’ tradition, he brings double trouble to his family. He is shortchanging himself, as well as his sons after him. Severing the connection with previous generations deprives his children from

recognizing the ways of Torah and mitzvot. The two destructions refer to the devastation of the father and the devastation of the son.

When David's days drew to an end, he called his son, Shlomo, and told him (*Melachim I*, 2:2-3), "I am going in the way of all the earth; be strong and become a man. Safeguard the charge of Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways, to observe His decrees, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies." David Hamelech knew that his son's spiritual development depended on him. Therefore, he told him to "be a man." Who is deserving of the epitaph "man"? One who detaches himself from the frivolities of this world and sanctifies his days with Torah study.

This is borne out by the pasuk in Tehillim (1:1-2), "Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners. But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night." Before his death, David left a solid lesson for his son after him. This is so that he should continue the magnificent tradition of his fathers, and not be responsible for the destruction of the two Temples.

Another example of maintaining the tradition can be found by Menashe and Ephraim, Yosef's sons. They grew up amidst the filth of Mitzrayim, the hotbed of immorality and idolatry. In spite of their surroundings, they merited being considered among the Shevatim of Hashem. How did Yosef succeed in raising them to Torah and *yirat Shamayim* in all of the impurity that was Egypt, especially when he was involved in national affairs?

The secret of his success lay in the fact that he brought them up according to the tradition of his forefathers. Menashe and Ephraim were taught from infancy that they were the scions of the founding fathers of our nation. This knowledge nourished them with the strength to withstand all of the decadence which their society offered. Before his death, Yaakov Avinu called for Yosef's sons and blessed them with the words (*Bereishit* 48:16), "May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they proliferate

abundantly like fish within the land.” With this *berachah*, Yaakov instilled in them the knowledge that they must walk the path of their fathers, for this is the path of Torah. Only in this way will they be called by their fathers’ names.

My name is David Chananya Pinto. But I do not suffice with that. I refer to myself as David Chananya ben Moshe Aharon, ben Chaim, ben Yehudah... up until Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Only the continuance (*גַּם־הַמִּשְׁכָּן*) of the tradition, as learned from the word *משְׁכָּן*, has the potential to put a person on his feet and connect him to the tradition of his fathers. “The Tabernacle of Testimony” refers to each father’s obligation to tell his sons about their wonderful tradition, so that he, too, as well as his future generations, can become a link in the chain of Am Yisrael.

In Summary

- ◆ “These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle.” Rashi explains that all of the donations for the Mishkan were counted. Why did Moshe calculate all of Am Yisrael’s donations? Certainly the Generation of Wisdom counted on Moshe’s integrity. It was in order to serve as a model for the *gabbai* of the Beit Hakeneset. He should be most punctilious with public funds and be answerable for every donation.
- ◆ Why the double language, “The Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony?” Rashi explains that this refers to the two Batei Mikdash, which would eventually be destroyed. Only the third would endure. Why did Hashem inform the people of the *churban* specifically at the inauguration of the Mishkan? We do not mingle sorrow with our joy, as the Admor of Sanz explains. Similarly, we find that the *chatan* breaks the glass under the chuppah. Why do we remember the sadness of the *churban* at the height of our happiness?
- ◆ The *chatan* is being reminded of the following. Just as the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed on account of baseless hatred, his house, too, is liable to fall if it is not built with good *middot*. Outward beauty and splendor do not guarantee endurance. The *churban* was alluded to at the

inauguration of the Mishkan specifically to drive home this point. A person who is likened to the Mishkan must take a lesson and make himself, as well as his home, into an everlasting edifice to house the *Shechinah*. He should not let his actions lead to destruction.

- ♦ By calculating the exact amounts of the donations, Moshe taught us the following lesson. Each and every person is enjoined to make a daily personal accounting of his deeds, in order to keep himself on the proper path. Otherwise, he is liable to evoke Heavenly wrath, ending in the *churban* Beit Hamikdash.
- ♦ The word **מִשְׁכָּן** is closely connected with the word **מִשְׁכָּנָה** (drawing). All Jews are obligated to continue in their fathers' ways, drawing upon the tradition of their ancestors. The double language alludes to the Mishkan of the father and that of the son. When a person is disconnected from the continuation of the heritage of his fathers, he brings devastation upon himself and his son, who will be deprived of his rich legacy, not knowing at all what Judaism is about.
- ♦ David Hamelech felt the need, prior to his death, to strengthen his son, Shlomo, with the words, "Be a man." Similarly, Yosef's sons, Menashe and Ephraim, merited being considered a Shevet despite their decadent surroundings, because their father raised them in the true tradition of his fathers. They were therefore worthy of Yaakov's blessing, "May my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers."

Protecting the Mind and the Heart

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

Many commentaries ask why the Torah writes the word “Tabernacle” twice, when once would have seemed enough. There are many explanations for this, one of them being that the Torah is hinting to the two Batei Mikdash which would rise and fall with the sins of the people. An interesting explanation is that there were two Tabernacles – one was big, and one was small. When Moshe finished tallying up the amounts contributed, he was left with more money than needed. When he asked Hashem what to do with it, He told him to build a small sanctuary, which would house the Aron Ha’eidut within it.

Why was it necessary to have an additional Mishkan for the Aron, aside from the large Mishkan which contained all of the vessels? Furthermore, why was the Aron the chosen utensil to place within it? Why not another item, such as the Menorah?

We might answer these questions based on the pasuk (*Bamidbar 15:39*), “And [do] not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray.” The *Ba’alei Mussar* explain that the eyes and the heart are the agents of sin. The eye sees forbidden sights; then the heart is drawn after them. The mind then tells the organs of the body to perform the misdeed. In order to prevent the heart from being drawn after sin, one must guard his eyes so that they not stumble into forbidden terrain. This way, the heart and mind will be pure and remain clear of forbidden thoughts.

In order to demonstrate just how sensitive the heart and the mind are, and how much they must be guarded, Hashem did the following. He made

these organs physically sensitive and in need of layers of protection, so that they should not become injured. Harm to these organs would impair the rest of the body, which is dependent on their ability to function.

This is illustrated by the fact that the bones in the head of a newborn are widely spaced. His head is therefore very delicate and demands special protection. Similarly, an elderly person must take care of his heart, so that it should not become injured, since this would damage the entire body. We should learn from these examples that it is vital to protect these organs at every age and in all situations. All the more so must a person protect himself spiritually.

Hashem instructed Moshe to place the Aron, which hints to Torah, in a separate, additional Mishkan. This is to teach us that words of Torah need especial guard and protection. Just as the body cannot function without the mind and the heart, a person cannot endure without the Torah, man's *raison d'être*. The Aron, placed inside of two sanctuaries, teaches us that the mind and the heart need constant protection to shield them from falling into sin, which distances a person from Torah and *yirah*. A person's protection for these organs is the Torah which states, "And [do] not explore after your heart and after your eyes." Guarding one's eyes and maintaining the purity of his heart are prerequisites for closeness with Hashem and true *yirat Shamayim*.

In Summary

- ◆ The commentaries explain the repetition of the word "Tabernacle" in the pasuk. One explanation is that in fact, there were two sanctuaries. One was the Tabernacle that we generally refer to, which contained all of the holy vessels, whereas the second one was smaller and housed the Aron Ha'eidut, which Moshe fashioned from the extra money left over from the nation's contributions.
- ◆ Why did the Aron, of all the vessels, deserve its own Mishkan?
- ◆ The eyes and the heart are the agents of sin. The eye sees and the heart craves. Then the brain tells the organs to perform the sin. Physical life

depends on the proper functioning of the mind and the heart, for they are the most vital organs of the body. Hashem made it this way so that we can realize the urgency of protecting them properly, both physically and spiritually.

- ♦ The Aron, which housed the Torah, was placed in its own Mishkan. The main aspect of life and the upkeep of the entire world rest upon Torah, the mind and heart of a person. Therefore, the Aron is in need of added protection.

Building on the Foundations of Our Forefathers

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

Rashi explains that the word “Tabernacle” (**מִשְׁנָה**) is written twice, to allude to the two Batei Mikdash, which were taken as collateral (**מִשְׁכָּן**) on account of the sins of Bnei Yisrael. Since the nation did not exert themselves properly to observe the mitzvot that they had received in the Wilderness and at *Matan Torah*, Hashem poured His wrath on wood and stones, destroying the Beit Hamikdash.

The Admor of Sanz, zy”a, asks why Hashem reminded the nation of the future destructions, specifically at this time of joy, when they were inaugurating the Mishkan and were in an elevated state of bliss. There

were many opportunities to convey this message to them; why was it important to stress it here? He answers beautifully (see *Lessons from the Mishkan*).

I would like to give a different response. The letters of the word **משכן** (Mishkan) can be transposed to spell the word **נִמְשָׁךְ** (drawn). This is a reference to Am Yisrael, who should continue the chain of their legacy, drawing themselves close to their traditions. Every person is essentially a miniature Mishkan. Just as Hashem rests His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan, so does He rest it within each and every kosher, Torah-observant Jew. Therefore, we are enjoined to take responsibility for this Divine image within us and preserve it, by maintaining our rich heritage and being punctilious to observe all the mitzvot. When a person scorns Hashem's mitzvot, abandoning the ways of his fathers, the *Shechinah* departs from him, as well as from the Beit Hamikdash. The situation deteriorates to the point of destruction.

Hashem wished to impart this message to the nation specifically during the inauguration of the Mishkan. Remembering the *churban* would be a painful reminder to be careful to keep Hashem's mitzvot and continue in the way of our fathers, who sacrificed their lives for His word. This is borne out in the pasuk (*Bereishit* 48:16), "And may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak." By cleaving to the ways of their forefathers, Am Yisrael would merit that their forefathers' holy names would be joined to them. The *Shechinah* would then rest upon them.

This is also the reason why the *chatan* remembers the destruction at the time of his joy, as he stands under the chuppah, beginning to build his home. If the *chatan* and *kallah* want to build an everlasting edifice, replete with love and peace, they must establish it on the foundation of Torah. Otherwise, it will crumble just as the Beit Hamikdash did, due to Am Yisrael's rejection of Hashem's mitzvot.

When I was once in the city of Lyon in France, a Mrs. Levy approached me. She told me the following story. Her mother did not have children for

many years. In anguish, she turned to the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, asking for a blessing for children. To her surprise, he asked her to donate three times a certain sum of money. The *zechut* of the mitzvah of *tzedakah* would stand by her, enabling his blessing to take effect. When asked why she should donate the amount in triplicate, he replied that he wished to bless her, her daughter, and her granddaughter. She did as she was told. With Hashem’s kindness, this woman merited having a baby.

A few years ago, all the headlines blared out the news of an airplane which was scheduled to fly from Lyon to Strasburg, but crashed mid-flight, leaving one survivor. How amazing it was to hear that the survivor was none other than Mrs. Levi. She came to me with her mother, telling me her entire story. Only after the accident, did the mother understand why the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, had asked for the sum in triplicate. It was atonement for the life of her daughter and future granddaughter. What good would it do to be blessed with children who would be struck down after only one generation?

This story gave me the chills. It drove home to me just how great is the foresight of our tzaddikim, who see well into the future and plan their steps accordingly.

In a similar vein, there is a story related about the gaon, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, zt”l. He was presented with a man who refused to divorce his wife, causing her untold grief. Rabbi Akiva told him, “There are two means by which a woman can be freed of her husband. Either by divorce or by his death.” The man merely ridiculed him, adamantly refusing to give his wife a *get*. Shortly thereafter, the man met his death in a most gruesome manner.

Reading these stories imbues us with faith in our *Chachamim*. But it should not remain merely inspiring. One must do a tangible act by taking a lesson for himself, and being punctilious to observe the commandment (*Devarim* 17:10), “You shall do according to the word that they will tell you.” Even if the Rav’s words seem puzzling, one must follow him blindly

(see *Sifri, Shoftim* 11). Only the Torah leaders, with their sharp sense of sight, can foresee what will be in the future.

The reason for their farsightedness is that they immerse themselves in the mitzvot of Hashem. The mitzvot “light up the eyes.” By engrossing oneself in Torah study and mitzvah observance, one can make himself into a Mishkan for the *Shechinah*.

In Summary

- ♦ The word **מִשְׁבֵּחַ** is mentioned twice in the pasuk. Rashi explains that this hints to the two Batei Mikdash that were destroyed. The Admor of Sanz asks why this is mentioned at the time of inaugurating the Mishkan.
- ♦ The word **מִשְׁבֵּחַ** contains the same letters as the word **מִשְׁבָּחַ**. One should always draw himself after the tradition of his fathers, clinging to Torah and mitzvot. It was important to mention this at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan, because if the people would be remiss in following the example of their forefathers, their end would be bitter, indeed.
- ♦ The *chatan* remembers the *churban* under the chuppah by breaking a glass. This is in order to remind the new couple that if they establish their home on the foundation of Torah and fear of Heaven, it will last. But if not, it will crumble like the Beit Hamikdash.

The Correct Order

“Betzalel, son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah, did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe”

(*Shemot 38:22*)

Betzalel did “everything that Hashem commanded Moshe,” rather than doing “everything that Hashem commanded.” This implies that even with regard to matters which his master Moshe did not tell him, Betzalel’s mind was in accord with that which had been said to Moshe at Har Sinai (*Rashi*). Moshe had told Betzalel to fashion the vessels first and only afterward, to erect the Mishkan itself. But Betzalel logically reasoned that the building should be constructed first, in order to house the vessels. Moshe confirmed Betzalel’s actions, since Hashem had in fact commanded Moshe that the Mishkan should be constructed before the vessels. He told him that this proved the validity of his name: “You were in the shadow of Hashem (בצל א-ל).”

Why did Moshe tell Betzalel to fashion the vessels first, when usually the edifice to house such vessels is built first? It is also difficult to understand why Betzalel changed the order of Moshe’s command, since the Mishkan was built according to deep and hidden secrets; it surely did not need to follow the usual way that a structure is built.

We might answer in the following way. The Mishkan served as atonement for the *Chet Ha’egel* (*Tanchuma, Terumah 8*). At *Matan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael reached the elevated level of the very angels, with their proclamation, “Na’aseh v’nishma!” Hashem was pleased with this response, asking, “Who revealed this secret to My sons, which the administering angels use?” (*Shabbat 88a*). This was a fitting rejoinder to the angels, who had wanted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from receiving the Torah. He told the angels, now, that Bnei Yisrael were actually on the level of angels, even though they were mere mortals of flesh and blood.

But when they sinned with the Golden Calf, they fell from this exalted level. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 33:6), “So the Children of Israel were stripped of their jewelry from Mount Chorev.” These were the crowns which they had received at *Matan Torah*, when they said, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” Yielding to the temptation to fashion the calf meant surrendering their crowns (*Shabbat* 88a). The Mishkan, which atoned for the calf, raised them, once again, to the level they had reached by proclaiming, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”

At first, Moshe could not understand the purpose of the Mishkan. Did Hashem actually need a house in which His *Shechinah* could reside? Hashem finally explained to him that the Mishkan is essentially an analogy to a person. The pasuk states (*Shemot* 25:8), “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them.” Hashem wishes to reside inside each and every one of us.

The vessels of this Mishkan are Torah, referred to as **כלי זין** (weapons). The Midrash tells us (*Rut Rabbah* 4:12) that the tzaddikim are called **כלי מלחמה** (tools of war), as we find that after the death of Rabbeinu Hakadosh it was said that now “the tools of war have been lost” (**אבדו כלים**). Moshe wanted Bnei Yisrael to form the vessels first, accepting the Torah upon themselves, which was the equivalent of proclaiming “*Na’aseh*,” and only after reaching the appropriate level, would they deserve to construct the Mishkan itself, which corresponded to “*nishma*.” For this reason, he switched the order of the command.

But Betzalel took exception to Moshe’s order of things. Betzalel explained that the way of the world is to first build the house, and only afterward, to put in the vessels. After Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they descended to the level of the nations of the world. The gentiles are not capable of performing mitzvot before preparing themselves to be suitable vessels. Therefore, it was necessary to first build the Mishkan, meaning one’s spiritual character. Only afterward, would the people be worthy of accepting the vessels within themselves, referring to keeping the Torah and mitzvot. At *Matan Torah*, by proclaiming, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*,” they had reached the level of being able to house Hashem’s

Presence. But then they sinned with the calf, and fell to the level of all the nations. Their upward climb would be slow, one step at a time, until they would reach the level of being able to house the Torah itself.

Moshe told Betzalel that although Hashem had originally preceded the command of the construction of the Mishkan to the command of forming the vessels, he, Moshe, had intended to raise the people to the level they had reached by crying, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” But he saw that Betzalel was correct in his order, understanding that Bnei Yisrael were not yet worthy of rising so high in such a short time. Moshe told him, “You were in the shadow of Hashem (**בצל אל היהת**). Because you negated yourself before Hashem, His ultimate desire was revealed to you.”

There are two pieces of evidence to support Betzalel’s view.

First, when Hashem created man, the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 2:7), “And Hashem...formed the man of dust from the ground.” Only after the body was formed, are we told (*ibid.*), “And He blew into his nostrils the soul of life.” The *neshamah* was created only after it had a body in which to be placed. The body is the Mishkan, which houses the *neshamah*, an allusion to the Torah. The *neshamah* is a spark of the Divine image within us (*Shelah, Assarah Ma’amarot, Ma’amar Sheini* 17), and the Torah is a combination of Hashem’s Names (*Zohar II*, 124a), the vessels inside this Sanctuary. Just as Hashem made the body and then imbued it with the *neshamah*, so too, is it fitting to prepare the Mishkan before the vessels.

Second, Hashem created man’s body with 248 organs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot (*Makkot* 23b; *Zohar I*, 170b). A dead person cannot perform mitzvot and is therefore exempt from them. Only a living being, who has made himself into a fitting vessel for the Torah (which is called **תורת חיים** – the Torah of life), is capable, and therefore obligated, to observe the 613 mitzvot.

This teaches that first one must make his body into a Sanctuary for Hashem, and only afterward bring into it the “vessels” i.e., the Torah and mitzvot with which we serve Hashem, in order that he may be called truly living.

In Summary

- ♦ The pasuk states that Betzalel did as Hashem instructed Moshe, not as Moshe had commanded him. Moshe had told him to form the vessels first and only afterward, to construct the Mishkan. But Betzalel first built the Mishkan, claiming this is the way it is usually done. Why did Moshe switch the order from how Hashem had originally commanded? Also, why did Betzalel think it should be built according to the normal manner? The Mishkan was a spiritual edifice; wouldn't it supersede the natural way of doing things?
- ♦ By worshipping the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael fell from the level they had reached at their proclamation, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*” Moshe’s intention was to bring them back to this exalted level. He did this by the allusions contained in the Mishkan. The Mishkan represents a person, and the vessels are the Torah and mitzvot. Moshe felt they should initially prepare the vessels, i.e., the Torah, as hinted at in the word “*Na’aseh*.” Afterward, they would reach the level of being a fitting Sanctuary for the Torah, i.e., the Mishkan itself, as hinted at in the word “*nishma*.” But Betzalel countered that with the sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael had debased themselves to the level of the gentiles. They therefore were unfitting of the level reached at *Matan Torah*, the level of, “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”
- ♦ The creation of man is evidence of the veracity of Betzalel’s opinion. Hashem first created the body of man, similar to the Mishkan, which housed the *Shechinah*. Only afterward, did He blow a *neshamah* into it. This is the Torah, alluded to by the vessels of the Mishkan.
- ♦ Another proof to boost Betzalel’s view is that even though the *neshamah* lives forever, a dead body is exempt from performing mitzvot. When there is no longer a living being, there is no longer a Sanctuary to contain the Torah and mitzvot.

The Ark of Testimony

***“There you shall place the Ark of Testimony
and screen the Ark with the Partition”***

(Shemot 40:3)

The Ark of Testimony was placed in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. There was a Partition that separated between the Aron and the Menorah, which was outside of the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. The poles at the sides of the Aron, also, stuck out of this Partition (*Shemot* 40:2-5). When the Kohen lit the Menorah each day, he saw the poles at the sides of the Aron.

Why was the Aron kept hidden in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, where no one could see it, save for the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, when he entered to bring the incense offering (*Vayikra* 16:12-14)? Wouldn't it have been preferable that Bnei Yisrael could have seen it?

The Aron symbolizes Torah, the purpose of Creation. It contains the *luchot ha'eidut* within it, hence the name Aron Ha'eidut. Had Am Yisrael had easy access to the Aron, they would have been constantly reminded of the *luchot* inside it. This would have taught them that the Torah needs to be deeply ingrained within a person, as David Hamelech states so eloquently (*Tehillim* 40:9), "Your Torah is in my innards."

Moreover, if the people would have the opportunity to gaze at it, they would be strengthened in upholding the dictum that their existence is based on toil in Torah. It would remind them that every man eventually ends up in an Aron-like coffin, and the Torah will be his only asset. The *Navi* states (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), "Your righteous deed will precede you." "Righteous deed" refers to Torah (*Devarim* 16:20).

When a person studies the Aron, he comes to the conclusion that his body, too, must be an ark in which to house the Torah. A person's body is comprised of 248 organs and 365 sinews, parallel to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah (*Zohar I*, 170b). If a person succeeded in sanctifying his body

by keeping mitzvot, his lips will continue murmuring words of the holy Torah, even in the grave (*Yevamot* 97a).

It is difficult to understand why the poles at the sides of the Aron stuck out of the Partition (*Melachim* I, 8:8; *Menachot* 98a). The Aron was hidden away in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, away from human eyes, aside from the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. Why wasn't the Menorah hidden, as well? And why was there a barrier partitioning off the Aron?

According to the hidden Torah, there are certainly deep secrets within every aspect of the Mishkan. The entire Creation is alluded to in the Mishkan. Betzalel constructed the Mishkan with *ruach hakodesh*, for he was "in the shadow of Hashem." He knew the secrets behind each facet of the edifice, and the intentions which alluded to the secrets with which the very world was created (see *Berachot* 55a). We are too small to stand on the mountain of Hashem, understanding these deep secrets. Let us suffice with the simple meanings and the *drush* to explain the concepts.

Chazal relate (*Yoma* 52b) that Yoshiyahu hid the Aron Ha'eidut, the fire, the jar of manna, and the staff of Aharon. This certainly demands explanation. Chazal further tell us (*Ezra* 3:12; *Pesikta Rabbati, Parashah 35*) that when the later *Nevi'im* witnessed the second Beit Hamikdash, they immediately broke down in tears. They grieved the lack of the Aron and the rest of the vessels, which had been hidden by Yoshiyahu Hamelech. How did he have the boldness to do this, causing a reduction in its *kedushah* and glory? The Gemara says that he hid all these items in order to avoid exile. Since the holiness of the second Beit Hamikdash was thus decreased, the indictment against Am Yisrael for their many sins would not be as great. Yoshiyahu hoped that this would avert a *churban*.

Rabbi Pachifichi, one of the *Maggidei shiur* in the kollel in Lyon, France, asked me a tremendous question. The pasuk states that the Partition stood before the Aron. But during the second Beit Hamikdash, the Partition stood directly before the *Even Hashetiyah*, for the Aron had been hidden by Yoshiyahu Hamelech. Why, then, is the specific spot for the Partition mentioned, if it was not relevant during the second Temple?

Wouldn't it have been preferable to write that it stood by the *Even Hashetiyah*, as well as before the Aron?

With Hashem's help, we will explain lofty concepts. The Torah is not in heaven, or across the sea. Wherever a person may find himself, the Torah is with him. He is capable of learning it anywhere and performing its mitzvot at any time (*Devarim* 30:11-14). Man's main purpose in coming to this world is to be engrossed in Torah (*Sanhedrin* 99b). Study brings to action (*Kiddushin* 40b). One should never suffice with merely learning Torah; he should put his lessons into action. Chazal expound on this thought (*Kiddushin* 40a), by stating that Hashem considers a good thought as a good deed. But this is only when a person is prevented from translating his good intentions into action. When a person is capable of actually doing good deeds, thoughts alone will not provide him with the power of the act.

Similarly, our Sages teach (*Megillah* 6b; see *Shem Olam* 1:13), "We can believe one who claims he sought and discovered, but we do not believe one who claims that he sought but did not discover." The Torah is compared to a discovery. When someone loses something precious to him, he is saddened and aggrieved. When he finds it, his joy knows no bounds. How much greater is the joy when one's life is dependent on this thing. When he discovers it, he feels like his life was given to him anew.

Torah is our life and the length of our days, in which we are enjoined to meditate day and night. Likewise, the Torah is compared to a good wife, as the pasuk in Mishlei states (18:22), "One who has found a wife has found goodness." Torah is the true goodness (*Avodah Zarah* 19b). The *Yetzer Hara*, therefore, constantly attempts to turn a person's attention away from Torah. When one finally attains a level of teshuvah and connects to the Torah, great joy envelops his heart.

The one who claims he sought but did not discover should not be believed. He most probably did not seek well enough. Hashem used the Torah as the blueprint by which to create the world (*Zohar II*, 161b). It is therefore impossible not to find the Torah if one searches correctly.

L'havdil, scientists arrive at stupendous discoveries because they spend years in investigations and experiments. Technology has exploded to untold levels, because researchers invest their finances and energies completely toward this cause. In the way man wishes to go, he is led (*Makkot* 10b). If these scientists succeeding in discovering secrets of the universe after years of sweat and toil, all the more so will one who exerts himself succeed in discovering the Torah. The dictum “In the way man wishes to go, he is led” applies many times more to spiritual matters. In this arena, a person receives as much help as he requires.

Regarding our original question, we might pose the following. The Aron Ha’eidut was kept in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* to hint that a person must constantly seek the truth, until he finds it. One who seeks will find. The truth is never far away. The Aron was not actually far away from the people; it was just covered and separated with a curtain. This is because it contained the *luchot ha’eidut*, which symbolized the Torah. Although the Torah might seem concealed and hidden from our eyes, one must toil in order to attain it, thereby meriting to acquire it.

The poles which were attached to the sides of the Aron stuck out and were seen past the Partition. These poles signify *sifrei kodesh*. By grasping our holy works, a person will discover the treasure of Torah, which is deeper than the sea. Once he allows himself a taste of the words of Torah, he will have an appetite for more.

The Tanna d’vei Eliyahu Rabbah (21) states, “How fortunate we are, how good is our lot, and how pleasant is our fate, and how beautiful is our inheritance.” The word חילקנו (lot) contains the same letters as the word לחק (teaching). This refers to the Torah, as the pasuk in Mishlei states (4:2), “For I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah.” As soon as one takes a portion of the Torah for himself, he will attain a feeling of deep satisfaction, feeling that he is fortunate to have the *zechut* to delve into the Torah.

The poles which stuck out of the Partition point to a winning argument against the *Yetzer Hara*. The *Yetzer Hara* attacks us with the following

ploy. “Who is the brazen one who comes to Hashem’s mountain and stands in His Temple?” He tries his best to weaken man’s resolve by telling him that the Torah is a consuming fire. Man is nothing but dust and ashes, to be devoured by the worms in the dirt. Who do we think we are, attempting to cleave to Hashem’s Torah and climb His mountain? We are likely to be consumed by the fire of Torah.

The poles which stuck out even as the Aron remained hidden, indicated the following point. Through the revealed Torah, referred to by the poles which were revealed to all, one can attain the wisdom of the hidden Torah, hidden inside the Aron. The concealment of the Aron uncovered the truth that the secrets of the Torah are not meant for everyone. One must first fill himself up with the revealed Torah, learning Shas and Poskim thoroughly. Only after being sufficiently prepared, can one hope to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, discovering the depths of the hidden Torah (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah* 4:13). The poles were exposed to teach us that the revealed Torah is accessible to every member of the Jewish nation, each according to his level of understanding. Only after learning the revealed Torah, can one enter the inner sanctum of the hidden Torah.

The Aron inside the *Kodesh Hakodashim* signified that a person should not study Torah superficially. Rather, he should toil in Torah until he arrives at its innermost workings. This is stated by Chazal in Avot (4:20), “Do not look at the wrapping, but at the contents.” Similarly, we are told (*ibid. 1:17*), “Not study, but practice is the main thing.”

The Partition separated the Menorah and the Aron. The Menorah, which was crafted of seven branches, alludes to man, whose life is seventy years. His entire goal is increasing Torah and mitzvot for “a mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light” (*Mishlei 6:23*). The *Yetzer Hara* tries to separate a person from Torah and prevent him from performing mitzvot. There is one unique day in the year, called **יום כפור** (Yom Kippur). The word **כפור** contains the same letters as the word **פרוכת** (Partition). The purpose of this day is to grant atonement for a person who did proper teshuvah. When one does complete teshuvah, the curtain moves aside, allowing him to enter into the inner sanctum. This is similar

to the Kohen Gadol, clean and pure of all sin, who was allowed entry into the *Kodesh Hakodashim* on Yom Kippur.

The implication of this is the following. When a person is full of the filth of sin, he is separated from the Torah and has no access to it or to its mitzvot. But when he does teshuvah, Yom Kippur allows him atonement for his sins. The dividing Partition opens, allowing him entry, to connect with the secrets of the Torah.

How great is the sorrow of one whose sins divide between himself and the Torah. After 120 years, it is only the Torah which will accompany him to his eternal rest and speak in his defense. The Zohar states (II, 82b) that the mitzvot are like wise counsel for a person, providing him with tactics to overcome his *Yetzer Hara* and cling to Hashem. One who takes their advice and cleaves to Torah can ascend to higher levels than that of the Kohen Gadol. The Kohen Gadol merited entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* only once a year, on Yom Kippur. But one who delves in Torah constantly is in the inner sanctum every moment of his life. How wonderful is the *zechut* to ascend to this tremendous level, above that of even the Kohen Gadol!

The Aron Ha'eidut was hidden during the second Beit Hamikdash. This was because the people had scorned the Torah (see *Nedarim* 81a; *Ran*, ad loc.). Hashem did not want to pour His wrath upon His children. Therefore, He spilled it, instead, on sticks and stones (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 824). Even though Hashem forgave Bnei Yisrael for the sins which caused the first destruction, allowing them to build the second Temple, the scars of scorn for the glory of Torah and its Sages still remained. The Aron, symbol of Torah, could not exist in such circumstances. This deficiency in the second Beit Hamikdash reminded the nation of the severity of *bitul* Torah. And it taught them that if they did not rectify this sin, the second Beit Hamikdash, too, would fall.

For this reason, the Torah writes that the Partition was before the Aron. There is no mention that it was before the *Even Hashetiyah* at all. This is so that we should constantly feel the lack of the Aron. During the second

Beit Hamikdash, the Aron should have stood in place of pride in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. But, due to our many sins, especially the sin of *bitul Torah*, Yoshiyahu Hamelech was forced to conceal it (*Yoma* 52b). It is our sacred obligation to fill the chasm created by this lack, through toil in Torah. Chazal tell us (see *Eiruvin* 54a) that had Moshe Rabbeinu not smashed the *luchot*, Bnei Yisrael would have easily understood the Torah. Since he did smash them, on account of the *Chet Ha'egel*, Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to exert themselves to a greater degree, in order to comprehend the words of Torah.

During the second Beit Hamikdash, although the Aron Ha'eidut did not dwell in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the Partition divided between the Menorah and the *Even Hashetiyah*. There is a lesson for us to learn from the stone called the *Even Hashetiyah* (the Foundation Stone). A person should break the rock-hard layers of his heart, and drink thirstily from the fountain of Torah. Torah upholds the entire world, as Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world, by means of the *Even Hashetiyah*. Since the Aron, which alludes to the Torah, was removed from behind the Partition, it is our duty to fill this void by means of increasing our Torah learning and *yirat Shamayim*.

A person must attempt to be like the Aron Ha'eidut, strengthening himself like a lion over his *Yetzer Hara*. This is most necessary nowadays, when we have no Beit Hamikdash, Kohen Gadol, or Menorah to arouse us to fulfill our task in this world. Learning brings to action. A person, therefore, is capable of building himself anew, to the point of being considered an Aron Ha'eidut.

Today, the Beit Hamidrash is considered a Beit Hamikdash, its light shining from afar, just like the Partition which was seen from the outside. But in order to see the Torah scroll inside the Ark in the Beit Hamidrash, it is necessary to take steps inside. The more one exerts himself to come close, the more he will merit entering the inner sanctum. He will eventually remove the Partition, which are the aveirot that separate him from holiness. Yom Kippur has the capacity to atone for his sins, by

means of the service of the Kohen Gadol in the Beit Hamikdash. He lit the Menorah, symbolic of man's *neshamah*.

How central is the Torah to our world! The second Beit Hamikdash lacked *kedushah* because it did not contain the Aron Ha'eidut. When a person ascends spiritually in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, he merits being an Aron Ha'eidut. In this manner, he fills the void created by the lack of the Aron. Even though there was no Aron Hakodesh during the second Beit Hamikdash, the people drew *ruach hakodesh* on the festivals (*Rut Rabbah* 4:9; *Ramban, Bereishit* 29:2). One who did not see the Simchat Beit Hasho'evah did not see real happiness in his life (*Sukkah* 51a). There were many rectifications made in the Beit Hamikdash, based on the secrets of Torah.

During the second Beit Hamikdash, the *Chachamim* warned the people that they should make sure to cleave to Torah, filling the gap of the missing Aron. Hashem had already rent His anger on sticks and stones. If Bnei Yisrael would continue forsaking the Torah, Hashem would have no choice but to strike down the people themselves, eliminating them completely, *rachmana litzlan*. Nowadays, when we have no Beit Hamikdash or Kohanim, the Beit Hamidrash is the place from where we can draw Torah and wisdom, sanctity and purity.

“And screen the Ark with the Partition” (*Shemot* 40:3). The word וְסָכֵת (and screen) contains the same letters as the word סֹכֶךָ (booth). This is an allusion to the future, when Hashem will reinstate the “booth of David,” the Beit Hamikdash, which has fallen. It will be restored forever, never to fall again.

In Summary

- ♦ Wouldn't it have been preferable for the Aron to be positioned before the eyes of the people, serving as a constant reminder of the *luchot* inside it? Why was it kept deep within the *Kodesh Hakodashim*? Furthermore, why did the poles stick out of the Partition, and why was the Menorah kept

apart from the Aron by the Partition? What was the purpose of the Partition?

- ◆ Yoshiyahu Hamelech hid some of the vessels, among them the Aron Ha'eidut. How did he have the boldness to do this, significantly reducing the level of *kedushah* of the second Beit Hamikdash? Additionally, why does the Torah state that the Partition separated the Aron from the rest of the vessels? The second Beit Hamikdash did not even have the Aron. The *Even Hashetiyah* took its place. The Torah seemingly should have mentioned the *Even Hashetiyah*, as well, stating that the Partition must stand before the Aron and the *Even Hashetiyah*.
- ◆ Man's purpose in this world is to learn Torah, which brings to action. Chazal teach that a good thought is considered as a good deed. However, this is only when a person is prevented from doing the actual deed. We are also taught, "One who claims that he sought and found, believe him." If one did not discover, it means that he did not seek well enough. The Aron was sheltered deep within the Beit Hamikdash to teach us the following. Man must exert himself in order to discover Torah, for it is within his reach. The Aron was not far from the people, it was just covered. Just as the *luchot* were placed inside the Aron, so too, should Torah be internalized deep within a person.
- ◆ The poles at the sides of the Aron stuck out of the Partition, whereas the Aron itself remained hidden. This teaches that it is not sufficient to learn Torah superficially. Rather, one must strive to uncover the secrets of the Torah, compared to the hidden Aron.
- ◆ The seven-branched Menorah alludes to the seventy years of man's life in this world. The Partition which divided the Menorah from the Aron alludes to sin, which separate us from the Torah. Only by atonement for a person's sins (**כפרת מעשין**), hinted at in the word **פרכת** (Partition), is it possible to push aside this divider and connect to the Aron, the symbol of Torah.
- ◆ The *Even Hashetiyah* was in place of the Aron Ha'eidut in the second Beit Hamikdash. This teaches us that we must smash the hardness of our

hearts and drink in the words of Torah, upon which the entire world is founded.

- ◆ Nowadays, the Beit Hamidrash is like a miniature Beit Hamikdash, its lights shining from afar, just like the poles of the Aron which peeked out of the Partition. The more one exerts himself in his Torah study, the closer to the inner sanctum he will merit to reach. Repenting one's sins is an act of lifting the veil of the Aron. By doing so, one gains access to the secrets of the Torah.

Gems on Parashat Pekudei

My Sin Is Before Me Always

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

Rashi states that the double use of the word “Tabernacle” refers to the two Batei Mikdash, which would eventually be destroyed.

The day that Moshe calculated the donations for the Mishkan was a day of happiness. Why specifically then did Hashem remind Bnei Yisrael of the future destructions?

I would venture to say that this is in order that Bnei Yisrael should remember why the Batei Mikdash would fall. It was due to the *Chet Ha’egel*. If not for this sin, the first Beit Hamikdash would have stood forever. When the nation would take to heart the far-reaching effect of this sin, they would never dream of returning to it. David Hamelech put it succinctly in Tehillim (51:5), “My sin is before me always.” Constantly remembering one’s sin prevents a person from repeating it.

The word פְּקֻדָּה (reckonings) can also mean “absent.” The pasuk would then mean “Why were the two Tabernacles destroyed?” It was because of the *Chet Ha’egel*. At the time of the tallying of the contributions, Bnei Yisrael would remember this and never come to sin again.

The word פְּקֻדָּה can also mean “remembering.” The nation was enjoined to remember the reason for the *churban*. Another meaning of the word פְּקֻדָּה is “mitzvot.” Cleaving to the mitzvot will assure the endurance of the Beit Hamikdash.

The Effect of Sin

“These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe’s bidding. The labor of the Levi’im was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohen”

(*Shemot 38:21*)

Chazal relate (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 7*) that when the nation tallied the contributions toward the Mishkan, they found a discrepancy. They immediately suspected Moshe Rabbeinu of stealing. When they re-counted, by Moshe’s order, they found that they had miscalculated, omitting the hooks used for the beams.

How could they allow a shadow of suspicion to cross their minds that their mentor and guide, who had brought them out of Egypt and brought down *selav* from the heavens on their behalf, had betrayed their trust and siphoned off some of the funds allocated for the Mishkan?! Besides which, Moshe was exceedingly wealthy, for he was given the chips of the second

luchot (see *Shemot Rabbah* 46:2). Moshe had also demonstrated his complete indifference to wealth after the Splitting of the Sea, when he did not take of the spoils of the Egyptians. He abandoned the glimmer of the gold, for the mitzvah of dealing with Yosef's casket glowed more greatly in his eyes. How, then, could they mistrust him?

This was nothing more than the machinations of the Satan, who attempted, in every way possible, to detract from the sanctity of the Mishkan. The Satan greatly feared the Mishkan, where each sinner brought his offering and received atonement. On Yom Kippur, in particular, the entire nation was forgiven, and the *kelippah* stood to lose out.

Therefore, the Satan injected a spirit of impurity into the nation. This spirit came into the world with the *Chet Ha'egel*. Even though Hashem had granted the nation forgiveness, the impact of the sin remained. The Satan infused this spirit of impurity into the hearts of Bnei Yisrael at the time of the construction of the Mishkan. It was so forceful that it incited them to suspect Moshe Rabbeinu. The Satan figured that causing a separation between the nation and Moshe Rabbeinu would cause Hashem to punish them, instead of resting His *Shechinah* upon them.

But then Hashem reminded Moshe to count the hooks of the beams. When Bnei Yisrael discovered their mistake, they realized the terrible effects of the *Chet Ha'egel*. This had lowered their spiritual level, to the extent that they were capable of suspecting even the great tzaddik, Moshe.

Haftarah of Parashat Shekalim

The Story of Yehoash Hamelech

“Yehoash was seven years old when he became king”

(Melachim II, 12:1)

The *haftarah* of parashat *Shekalim* describes the rule of Yehoash. Chazal explain (*Melachim* II, 11; *Yalkut Shimoni*, ad loc.) that his grandmother killed out the entire royal house, leaving only little Yehoash as the sole survivor. His aunt took him, hiding him in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* for six years. How could he have been put in this most sanctified place, where only the Kohen Gadol was allowed entry, and only on Yom Kippur? And how did he receive his sustenance there for the duration of six years?

The *Navi* explains how Yehoash was involved in improving the Beit Hamikdash, concerning himself with its upkeep. He even called upon Yehoyada the Kohen, as well as the entire nation, enjoining them to help him in this venture. After Yehoyada passed away, the nation deified Yehoash. Certainly a person who survived six years in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* was nothing less than divine. Everyone began bowing to him. Yehoash did not protest at all. His silence was considered acquiescence (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 24:17-22).

Suddenly, Yehoash took a turn for the worse. He began “doing bad in the eyes of Hashem.” How can we understand that someone who lived in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* for six years could become corrupt? The answer lies in the words of Chazal (*Avot* 2:4), “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.” Man must wage a constant war with his number one adversary – his *Yetzer Hara*. Throughout the generations, there were tzaddikim who stumbled, and resha’im who repented. As long as a person lives, he has not completed the mission for which he was sent here. He can utilize every moment of life to rise or, *chas v’shalom*, to fall.

If someone would approach me and begin bowing down to me, calling me a god, I would chase him out on the spot. Why, then, didn’t Yehoash remove the people who bowed before him? How can we understand that he spent all that time in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, but was not at the apex of righteousness?

We might suggest that Yehoash asked himself in what merit he remained alive for six years in such a holy place. He concluded that he deserved this due to his righteousness. This caused him to feel arrogant, which is akin to *avodah zarah*. Falling into the trap of haughtiness caused his downward spiral, and brought him to sin.

The Torah commands a Jewish king to have two Sifrei Torah (*Sanhedrin* 22a). This is in order that he should constantly focus on Hashem and not become proud. A king is honored by the people, who subject themselves to his orders. He has authority over their very lives. This can easily bring him to thoughts of arrogance, transgressing the mitzvah (*Devarim* 17:20), “so that his heart does not become haughty over his brethren.”

“Yehoash did what was proper in the eyes of Hashem all his days that Yehoyada the Kohen taught him” (*Melachim II*, 12:3). As long as Yehoyada educated him, Yehoash went in the ways of Hashem. But once the lessons stopped, his good behavior stopped as well. Man must be independent in his service of Hashem. Every youngster learns about Avodat Hashem from his father. But there comes a time when a person must take matters into

his own hands. Ultimately, it is a person's free choice which determines the road he will take.

Once, when travelling on a plane, I saw a yeshiva bachur watching inappropriate things. When he noticed me, he got startled. I told him he needn't be afraid of me; he should know how to behave and be ashamed only before Hashem.

We find that all of the Jewish kings had mentors and tutors. But only Yehoash had a teacher who taught him the proper way to act in Hashem's eyes. It would seem that this was because Yehoash had spent such a long time in a place of sanctity and came out alive. Without a teacher constantly at his side, he was in danger of veering off the right track. Indeed, with Yehoyada's death, this is what happened.

Yehoash should have realized that he was kept safe in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* in the merit of being a link in the chain of the Davidic dynasty. Hashem had promised David that his kingdom would endure. He sustained Yehoash in order to preserve the kingdom. Yehoash should have realized this, but instead he assumed that it was his own *zechut* which had kept him alive.

A plane crash claimed all the lives of its passengers, except one. Instead of giving thanks to Hashem for saving his life, this man attributed his rescue to the fact that he had sat at the back of the plane. I asked him, "How could you deny this phenomenal miracle? Where's your gratitude?! What was the purpose of keeping you alive if you still don't believe in Hashem, even after such an amazing thing happened to you?" A person can come to such a low level of denial only through a lack of Torah study.

Yehoash Repairs the Beit Hamikdash

Yehoash noticed that the Beit Hamikdash lay in disrepair. He immediately took it upon himself to make appropriate renovations. A box was installed, and whoever visited would drop in some coins. This needs explaining. Was there no one who was willing to pay for the repairs, forcing them to collect funds in this way? Even nowadays, when there is

something needed for the yeshivot, finances are found to cover the costs. How could it be that there was no one interested in donating the monies needed for improvements in the Beit Hamikdash? Additionally, it states that this box was placed near the Mizbeach. This seems to indicate that had it not been put in such a holy location, the people would have simply ignored it. How could this be so?

Once, in a yeshiva in France, I found the dining room in terrible condition. It lacked the most basic hygienic conditions. I immediately called upon a couple of philanthropists, who saw to it to repair the room completely. It is difficult to understand how there were no volunteers to revamp the Beit Hamikdash, to the extent that they had to set up a box near the Mizbeach in order to solicit funds.

I think that what lay at the heart of this problem was Yehoash's personal pride. He wanted to make improvements in the Beit Hamikdash because it was where he had grown up. He did not consider the sanctity or significance of the Beit Hamikdash at all. He had ulterior motives in his mission. Therefore, he did not receive Divine assistance in his project. Subsequently, he had to come up with all sorts of tactics to obtain funds. The people were not prompted to donate, due to his impure motives. As stated above, Yehoash should never have accepted the honor granted upon him for being a deity. He should have chastised them for such an improper attitude. He did not, because somewhere deep inside himself, he agreed with them.

There is another reason why the nation did not willingly offer funds toward the renovations of the Beit Hamikdash. It is because *avodah zarah* was prevalent at that time. When *avodah zarah* abounds, a certain sense of apathy enters the hearts, and the people are aloof even to matters pertaining to the Beit Hamikdash. What is *avodah zarah*? Anything that is foreign to Torah. Any time a person has an inappropriate thought during tefillah, or receives a message in the middle of his learning session, this is a form of *avodah zarah*. There were idol worshippers in Yehoash's time. They were put to death, but their impact remained. And Yehoash considered himself a deity, thereby maintaining a certain level of *avodah*

zarah in the world. It influenced the people to the degree that they refused to donate toward the upkeep of the Beit Hamikdash, and he had to resort to the above tactics.

Enemies Come upon Yerushalayim

Chazal relate the following narrative concerning the *churban* Beit Hamikdash. When the Romans came to destroy the Temple, they were afraid to enter it, lest Hashem punish them as He had punished Pharaoh and Sancheirev. Therefore, they asked one of the Jews to enter first. After he would defile the Sanctuary, they would have the boldness to come in, as well. They promised that the first one to deface the Beit Hamikdash would be allowed to keep whatever vessel he desired. A Jew by the name of Yosef Meshita agreed to enter. He went in and came out with the golden Menorah, which he wished to keep for himself, according to their agreement. But the enemies claimed, "We want to keep this for ourselves. The Menorah represents the Torah. It does not behoove a plebian like you to take it. Go in again and take something else."

Then Yosef Meshita replied, "Is it not enough that I angered my Creator when I entered and touched the holy vessels? Do you think I would do such a thing again!?" He refused go back in (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:22).

Yosef Meshita was obviously a rasha, since he dared to enter the holy Beit Hamikdash without authorization. How did he change his colors in such a short time, refusing to anger his Creator a second time? We must say that his very visit to the Beit Hamidrash was what affected him and brought him to teshuvah. It is difficult to understand how this wicked man was influenced by the sanctity of the Beit Hamikdash, whereas Yehoash spent six years of his life in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* and put effort into its repairs, yet was not influenced to stay on the right track.

The difference between these two people lies in the following. Yosef Meshita never learned Torah and even considered becoming a Roman. When he entered the Beit Hamikdash, and saw the Mizbeach, he sensed the *kedushah* in the atmosphere. It had a great impact on him. He realized

that it is forbidden to transgress Hashem's will. He immediately subjected himself to a Higher Being, and thereby merited to do teshuvah. But Yehoash, on the other hand, never subdued himself to Hashem. He felt that his survival in the Beit Hamikdash for six years was on account of his own righteousness. He therefore did not merit being influenced by its sanctity.

Many people do teshuvah. How can a person tell if his teshuvah is genuine? If he can honestly say that he severed his ties with his previous opinions and he has no inclination to repeat the sins of his past, he can be sure he has done complete teshuvah. But if he still maintains his past outlooks, it is a sign that he never severed his connection with them. He has not done complete teshuvah. The cause of Yehoash's corruption was that he did not cut the cord with the improper thought that it was his own merit that had sustained him in the Beit Hamikdash for six years. This was the source of his downward spiral, ultimately doing wrong in Hashem's eyes.

Yehoash considered himself sanctified like the Tabernacle of Testimony, since he had spent so much time in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the location of the Aron Habrit and the *luchot*. The fact that he remained alive was testimony, in his perverted way of thinking, that he was significantly superior to everyone else. This thought brought him to his downfall.

But when Yosef Meshita entered the Beit Hamikdash, he saw its full glory. This caused him to make a personal accounting, taking stock of his life up until that time. The grandeur of the Sanctuary brought him to the realization of what he had disdained all his life. He finally arrived at the conclusion that the Beit Hamikdash was most hallowed and holy, the residence of the *Shechinah*. Consequently, he subjugated himself, proclaiming, "There is none other than Him!"

Yehoash ended his life in wickedness. Why, then, did Chazal institute the reading of the *haftarah*? It is in order to teach us that we should not

imitate his ways. If Hashem performs miracles on our behalf, it is not due to our virtue, but due to His loving-kindness.

None of the previous kings had the boldness to repair the Beit Hamikdash. Only Yehoash dared to do this. Why? It was because he had spent so many years of his life there, and he felt it was like his house. Just as one makes home repairs, he felt the desire to repair the Beit Hamikdash. He did not do this for the sake of Hashem's glory, but due to personal motives.

As long as Yehoyada was alive, the nation did not deify Yehoash. They knew Yehoyada would protest this form of behavior. But after he passed away, they felt no inhibitions in deifying Yehoash, especially since Yehoash himself believed it, deep within his heart.

Yehoash was very active in repairing the Beit Hamikdash, concerning himself with quality workmanship. He even reproved Yehoyada the Kohen Gadol when necessary. But, at the end of it all, he fell into sin. This should teach us a great lesson. The Ben Ish Chai states that the entire Torah is a guide to proper living. We see a similarity with the sons of Eli Hakohen. They were decreed to die, and this decree was not rescinded even after they brought offerings. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said that their sins were not atoned by means of their *korbanot*, but Torah study did atone for them (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel I*, 99). Had Yehoash sat in the tent of Torah, he would never have become spoiled. But he only followed the orders of Yehoyada, not applying himself to improve himself. This is why he fell so low.

In Summary

- ♦ Yehoash Hamelech spent the first six years of his life in the Beit Hamikdash. At the age of seven, he became king. He renovated the Beit Hamikdash, but at the end of his life, he sinned. How could someone who literally lived in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* eventually transgress? Chazal explain that it is forbidden for a person to believe in himself until his dying day. Yehoash believed it was his own righteousness that sustained

him. He did not attribute his salvation to Hashem's kindness, in order to uphold the chain of the Davidic dynasty, as He had promised.

- ◆ Yehoash entertained prideful thoughts regarding his six-year stay in the Beit Hamikdash. "Pride goes before a fall," as the saying goes. This arrogance, akin to *avodah zarah*, is what led to his eventual downfall.
- ◆ A king is enjoined to have two Sifrei Torah, since he is the most powerful member of the nation. Reading from them on a steady basis will preclude any feelings of haughtiness.
- ◆ The pasuk states that Yehoash did just as Yehoyada instructed him. He was in need of Yehodaya's guidelines, for his own heart did not steer him in the right direction.
- ◆ Why was it necessary for Yehoash to solicit funds for the improvements of the Beit Hamikdash, to the extent that he had to place a box near the Mizbeach, so the people would be reminded to donate? Weren't there individuals who would be only too happy to contribute to the repairs? Yehoash did not collect funds for the Beit Hamikdash with pure motives, rather it was because he felt an attachment to the place where he grew up. The people sensed this incongruity and therefore desisted from contributing.
- ◆ Another explanation is as follows. The power of *avodah zarah* is so strong that it can prevent a person from contributing even toward the Beit Hamikdash. During the time of Yehoash, *avodah zarah* was prevalent. *Avodah zarah* takes on many shades. Any thought or deed not directed toward Hashem is considered *avodah zarah*. Yehoash's actions, which were done with selfish motives, are in this category.
- ◆ The Romans were afraid to enter the Beit Hamikdash. They looked for a Jew who would initially desecrate the Temple, and then they would finish the job. Yosef Meshita, a defector from Judaism, offered to enter. He came out bearing the golden Menorah. The Romans asked him to go inside once more, but he refused to listen, having repented his past when witnessing the glory of the Beit Hamikdash.

- ◆ How could the Beit Hamikdash have had such a tremendous effect on the rasha, Yosef Meshita, to the degree that he would not dare enter again, yet Yehoash, who had spent six years in the Beit Hamikdash was not affected? Yehoash thought it was in his own merit that he was saved, and that is why the Beit Hamikdash did not have the same effect on him.

Glossary

Achdut – unity

Ahavat Hashem – love of Hashem

Ahavat Yisrael – love of one's fellow Jew

Akeidah, Akeidat Yitzchak – the Binding on the Altar of Yitzchak

Amora'im – the Sages of the Gemara

Aron Ha'eidut – the Ark of Testimony (in the Beit Hamikdash)

Aron Kodesh – the Ark in the beit Hakeneset

Asseret Hadibrot – the Ten Commandments

Aveirah, aveirot (pl.) – transgression

Avodah – service, in the Temple; or service of Hashem, specifically referring to prayer

Avodat Hashem – service of Hashem

Avot – Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Avot Hakedoshim – our holy forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Avrech, Avrechim (pl.) – Torah scholar

Ayin hara – evil eye

Azarah – main sanctuary of the Beit Hamikdash

Ba'al Teshuvah, ba'alei teshuvah (pl.) – (lit. master of return) one who has returned to Jewish observance

Ba'alei Mussar – Masters of Ethics

Batlanim – wasters

Bavel – Babylon

Be'ezrat Hashem – with the help of Hashem

Beit Din – rabbinical court

Beit Hakeneset, Batei Kenesiot (pl.) – house of prayer, synagogue

Beit Hamidrash, Batei Midrashot (pl.) – house of study

Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple

Ben, bnei (pl.) – son

Berachah, berachot (pl.) – blessing

Berachah l'veatalah – blessing made in vain

Bitul Torah – time wasted from Torah study

Bnei Yisrael – the Children of Israel

Brit – covenant, pact

Brit milah – circumcision

Chachamim – (lit. wise people) – Sages, teachers

Chag, chagim (pl.) – Jewish festival(s)

Chametz – leavened bread, which is forbidden to be eaten on Pesach

Chanukat habayit – inauguration of a new house

Chas v'shalom, chalilah – May G-d have mercy

Chashmonaim – Hasmoneans

Chassid – righteous person

Chatan – groom

Chazal – our Sages, may their memory be for blessing

Chazan – cantor, one who leads the prayers

Chessed – acts of kindness

Chet Ha'egel – sin of the Golden Calf

Chiddush, chiddushim (pl.) – novel thought in Torah learning

Chillul Hashem – desecration of Hashem's Name

Chitzonim – negative, impure forces

Chuppah – wedding canopy

Churban – destruction (of the Beit Hamikdash)
Chutz La'aretz – Diaspora

Eifod – priestly garment containing the names of the Shevatim
Eiruv, eiruvin – a rabbinical enactment defining an area in which one can carry on Shabbat
Eiruv Rav – Egyptians who converted and joined Bnei Yisrael at Yetziat Mitzrayim,
Emunah – belief, faith
Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel
Erev – the eve of (Shabbat)
Eved Ivri – Jewish slave
Even Hashetiyah – the Foundation Stone

Gabbai – manager of synagogue affairs
Galut – exile
Gan Eden – Garden of Eden; Paradise
Gematria – numerical value
Gematria katan – numerical value, attained by subtracting the zeros and then adding the total
Genizah – Holy manuscripts requiring burial
Ger, geirim – proselyte
Get – bill of divorce
Geulah – redemption
Gilgul – reincarnation

Hachnasat Orchim – welcoming guests
Haftarah – reading from the Prophets after the Torah reading on Shabbat
Hakadosh Baruch Hu – Hashem
Halachah, halachot (pl.) – Jewish law; edict

Hilchot – the laws of...

Hilula – celebration conducted on the anniversary of a tzaddik's death

Hod – glory

Issur – prohibition

Kabbalah – hidden facets of the Torah

Kabbalat HaTorah – the receiving of the Torah

Kallah – bride

Kashrut – food permissible by Jewish law

Kedushah – holiness; also a prayer inserted in the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei

Kelippah, kelippot (pl.) – force(s) of impurity

Keruvim – Cherubs, which were on top of the Aron in the Beit Hamikdash

Ketoret – incense

Kodesh Hakodashim – Holy of Holies, the innermost section of the Beit Hamikdash

Kohen – priest

Kohen Gadol, Kohanim Gedolim (pl.) – high priest(s)

Kollel kollelim (pl.) – Torah institution(s) for married men

Korban, korbanot (pl.) – offering(s), sacrifice

Korban chatat – sin offering

Korban nedavah – voluntary offering

Korban Pesach – Pesach offering

Korban tamid – offering brought twice a day

Kriyat Shema – the recital of the Shema

Kriyat Yam Suf – the splitting of the Sea

L'havdil – to separate the holy from the mundane

L'shem Shamayim – for the sake of Heaven

Lashon Hara – evil speech, slander

Lishkat Hagazit – place in the Beit Hamikdash where the judges sat

Lishmah – for the sake of Heaven, with no ulterior motives

Luchot – the Tablets

Ma'ariv – the nighttime prayer

Ma'aser – a tenth portion of one's earnings, given to charity

Mamzer – one who is illegitimate according to Torah law

Masechet – tractate

Mashgiach – spiritual supervisor

Mashiach – the Messiah

Matan Torah – the giving of the Torah

Me'il – Robe worn by the Kohen Gadol

Menorah – Candelabra in the Beit Hamikdash

Merkavah – Chariot, an allusion to Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and David

Mesirut nefesh – self-sacrifice

Mezuzah – parchment containing Torah verses, commanded to be affixed to every doorpost

Middah – trait

Middat Hadin – Divine Attribute of Justice

Middat Harachamim – Divine Attribute of Mercy

Midrash – homiletical teachings of the Sages

Mikveh, mikvaot (pl.) – body of water for ritual immersion and purification

Minchah – the afternoon prayer

Minyan – quorum of ten men necessary to conduct prayers

Mishkan – the Tabernacle in Shiloh

Mitzrayim – Egypt

Mitzvah, mitzvot (pl.) – good deed; commandment

Mizbeach – altar

Musaf – additional prayer on Shabbat morning

Mussar – Jewish ethics

Nachat – joy or pleasure from another's accomplishments

Nasi, Nesi'im (pl.) – prince, leader of the Jewish people

Navi – prophet

Neitz – sunrise

Ner tamid – light which constantly burned in the Beit Hamikdash

Neshamah, neshamot (pl.) – soul

Netilat yadayim – ritual washing of the hands

Netzach – eternity

Niddah – a woman who became impure due to her menstrual cycle

Nisayon, nisyonot (pl.) – test, challenging situation

Ohel Mo'ed – the tent where the Shechinah spoke with Moshe

Olah – burnt offering

Olam Haba – the World to Come

Parashah, parshiyot (pl.) – chapter

Parnasah – livelihood

Pasuk, pesukim (pl.) – verse

Pesach Sheini – a second opportunity to offer the korban Pesach, on the 15th of Iyar

Pirkei Avot (or Avot) – the Chapters of the Fathers

Poskim – halachic authorities

Rabbanim – rabbis

Rachmana litzlan – May G-d's mercy be upon them

Rasha, reshaim (pl.) – evil person

Ruach hakodesh – Divine spirit

Sandek – one who holds the baby at a brit

Sanhedrin – the High Court

Sefarim Hakedoshim – holy books of Torah thought

Sefer – book

Sefer Torah, Sifrei Torah (pl.) – Torah scroll(s)

Sefirah – behavior by which we perceive Hashem

Selav – quail

Seudat mitzvah – a festive meal celebrated on a festival or on the occasion of a mitzvah, e.g., a brit

Shacharit – the Morning Prayer

Shamayim – Heaven

Shas – the thirty-six tractates of Gemara

Shechinah – Divine Presence

Sheliach tzibur – one who leads the prayers

Shemoneh Esrei – prayer containing eighteen blessings, recited three times a day

Shevet, Shevatim (pl.) – tribe(s)

Shirah – song, praise

Shiur – Torah lecture

Shivah – the seven days of mourning

Shlita – may he live many good years, Amen

Shofar – ram's horn

Simchah – joy, joyous event

Simchat Beit Hasho'evah – the celebration of the water drawing ceremony, held in the Beit Hamikdash during the days of the Sukkot holiday

Sitra Achra – the Satan

Siyata di'Shemaya – help from Heaven

Siyum – completion of a tractate (and celebration thereof)

Sugya – a topic in Gemara

Sukkah – temporary dwelling, which is used on the festival of Sukkot; thatched shelter for human or animal use

Taharat hamishpachah – Laws of family purity

Tahor – pure

Tallit – prayer shawl

Talmid chacham, talmidei chachamim (pl.) – Torah scholar(s)

Tanna, Tannai'm (pl.) – Sages of the Mishnah

Techum Shabbat – the distance permitted to walk on Shabbat

Tefillah – prayer

Tefillin – phylacteries

Teshuvah – repentance

Tikkun – rectification

Tumah – impurity

Tzaddik, tzaddikim (pl.) – righteous person

Tzara'at – a spiritual impurity which is a result of lashon hara (often translated as leprosy)

Tzedakah – charity

Tzeniut – modesty

Tzitzit – four-cornered garment with fringes, worn by men and boys

Viduy – confession

Yam Suf – the Sea of Reeds

Yerushalayim – Jerusalem

Yeshiva – rabbinical college

Yesod – foundation

Yetzer Hara – evil inclination

Yetzer Hatov – good inclination

Yetziat Mitzrayim – Exodus from Egypt

Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven

Zechut – merit

Zt'l – May the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing

Zy'a – May his merits protect us