



Excerpt from the book

PACHAD DAVID

PART TWO

Bereshit • Shemot

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BERESHIT

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Bereshith

“Distance Yourself From Evil and Do Good” – And Only Good!

It is written, “*And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering to the L-RD from the fruit of the ground. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. The L-RD had respect for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, He did not have respect. Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell*” (*Genesis 4:3-5*). Cain was the first person in the world to take the initiative of bringing an offering to Hashem. He did this because his heart motivated him, for there were three partners in Cain: Adam, Eve, and Hashem. As the Gemara states, “*There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother*” (*Niddah 31a*). Hence Cain decided to bring an offering to Hashem, for he wanted to thank Him for having infused him with the breath of life. Had it not been for Hashem, Cain would not have become a living being.

Upon closer examination, we discover something surprising here. Through his spiritual understanding, Cain realized where he stood and acknowledged the goodness of G-d, Who placed a sign of life on him. He understood that it was only because of G-d that he walked the earth, breathed, ate, drank, and slept, which motivated him to bring an offering of thanks to Hashem. Yet that being the case, why did Cain bring such a poor offering, one composed of inferior crops (*Bereshith Rabba 22:5*)? Was he forced into doing this? He himself took the decision to bring an offering to Hashem, and nobody forced him or even told him to do it! After all, he was the first person to take this initiative! Therefore why did he not bring a perfect offering by using his best crops? Furthermore, once Cain saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not appreciate his offering, he should have quickly realized his mistake and rectified it by immediately bringing another offering, one consisting of his very best crops. In that case Hashem would have obviously accepted his offering with joy! Yet instead of rectifying his action, Cain became angry. In fact he was so bitter with his brother that he attacked and killed him in the field, as it is written: “*Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him*” (*Genesis 4:8*). He ended up committing the most heinous of crimes.

We may say that in Cain, good and evil were constantly mixed together, for his good deeds were infused with evil. True, he constructed an altar and brought an offering to Hashem. Yet evil was infused in this good deed, for he brought inferior fruit as an offering to Hashem. As we know, fruit actually allude to mitzvot (*see Bereshith Rabba 33:1*). Thus for every mitzvah, Cain did not know the difference between good and evil. He performed mitzvot that were dominated by evil, failing to do them with the right intention. Instead he acted out of pride and sought honor for himself, for pride and a love for honor were mixed into everything he did. Thus Hashem said to him, “*If you do good, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do good, sin crouches at*

the door" (*Genesis 4:7*). This means that the way to distinguish between good and evil, and the way to do everything without any mixture of evil, is to devote oneself to the study of Torah. Thus Hashem told Cain: If you do good, if you devote yourself to Torah – which is called good, as it is written: "*I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah*" (*Proverbs 4:2*) – then you will be accepted. The Torah will elevate you, and you will merit serving Hashem in perfection. However in the opposite case, meaning if you fail to study Torah, your evil deeds will lead you to the brink, for the Torah cannot save a person if he possesses bad character traits. The Gemara records a similar situation with Jeroboam the son of Nabat, who sinned and caused others to sin (*2 Kings 17:21*). Hashem seized Jeroboam by his garment and said, "*Repent! Then I, you, and the son of Jesse [i.e., King David] will walk in the Garden of Eden.*" Jeroboam asked, 'Who will be in the lead?' Hashem replied, "*The son of Jesse.*" When he heard this, Jeroboam said: "*If so, then I refuse [to repent]*" (*Sanhedrin 102a*).

Let us think about this for a moment. Jeroboam, who sinned and caused others to sin, apparently had no chance to repent, or even to have his repentance accepted if he did. Nevertheless Hashem addressed Jeroboam and asked him to change his ways, and in return He promised to accompany him in the Garden of Eden. Is there anything more important or greater than this? The Holy One, blessed be He, personally asked him to repent and promised to accept his repentance. Not only that, but He also promised to walk with him in the Garden of Eden!

Despite all this, Jeroboam refused to accept Hashem's offer. Why? Because Hashem told him that the son of Jesse would be in the lead! Wasn't it enough that Hashem promised Jeroboam that He would accept his teshuvah and walk with him in the Garden of Eden? Was this a trivial promise? However Jeroboam was unable to submit to Hashem or yield his royalty before King David's. It was his ego that prevented him from doing this, for he was incapable of forgoing his pride and quest for glory. It was the same with Cain, for he was infused with jealousy, hatred and pride, which found their way into his good deeds. Therefore even when he understood, from an intellectual point of view, that he should bring an offering to Hashem and thank Him for the benefits that He bestowed upon him, Cain brought his inferior crops. Even when his brother Abel brought a superior offering and Hashem accepted it, Cain failed to learn from this. Instead his hatred continued to simmer. In fact it was difficult for Cain to learn from his younger brother, who had just realized (thanks to Cain) that he should also bring an offering to Hashem.

From here we learn just what kind of benefits a person acquires both for himself and the entire world when his good deeds are untainted by evil and done to perfection, when pride, honor-seeking, jealous and hatred are not found among his good deeds. We also learn just how much evil a person can bring upon himself and the entire world when good and bad are mixed in him. We must therefore always be careful to separate good from evil, ensuring that our good deeds consist only of the good.

The Infinite Wisdom of the Torah

It is written, “*I was then His nursing; I was then His delight every day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the inhabited areas of His earth. My delights are with the sons of man*” (*Proverbs 8:30-31*). The Sages have said, ‘Nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, the Torah was written and placed in the bosom of the Holy One, blessed be He, and it sang with the ministering angels, as it is written: ‘I was then His delight every day, playing before Him at all times.’’’ We need to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, rejoiced in the Torah during all that time, only giving it to man after a thousand generations. We must say that by this statement, Hashem is teaching everyone on earth that although the Torah was written 1,000 generations earlier, He never ceased to rejoice in it each day, and He found, as it were, more jewels in it which He did not find before. Now if such is the case for the Holy One, blessed be He, how much more does it apply for those born of women? Even if they were to live as long as the earth, they still would be unable to understand the equivalent of a single drop of water from the sea. The Torah’s words are compared to water, as it is written: “*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water*” (*Isaiah 55:1*), for just as water has no end, the Torah’s words have no end.

The Sages have said, “*It is impossible for a Beit Midrash to exist without finding new things in it [the Torah]*.” It is also said, “*I will walk in broad pathways*” (*Psalms 119:45*). Rashi explains that King David walked about freely in vastness. Similarly, the holy Torah is tremendously vast and no man can say, “*I have reached the end of the Torah and understand it all*.” Even with his tremendous wisdom, King Solomon stated: “*I said, 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me. What existed is elusive and so very deep. Who can fathom it?*” (*Ecclesiastes 7:23-24*). Scripture states, “*G-d gave wisdom and considerable understanding to Solomon, and greatness of heart as the sand upon the seashore*” (*1 Kings 5:9*), and the Sages explained that Solomon’s wisdom exceeded the wisdom of all Israel, who are compared to the sand of the sea in number, as it is written: “*The number of the Children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea*” (*Hosea 2:1*). Nevertheless, Solomon’s wisdom was still greater. In fact if his wisdom were placed on once side of the scale and theirs on the other, his wisdom would outweigh theirs. Despite all this, his wisdom was not greater than the Torah’s, and he could not penetrate its deepest meanings. Even Moses, the father of the prophets – concerning whom the Sages have said that Hashem taught him Scripture, Mishnah, Halachot, Talmud, Tosaphot, Aggadot, and everything that every Torah scholar would ever say before his teacher – even from Moses the words of the Torah were hidden, for he did not completely understand them during his lifetime.

This is alluded to by a teaching of the Sages, for they said: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world only for the sake of three things that are called reshith: The Torah, Israel, and the fear of Heaven*.” Why are they called reshith? It is because they have a beginning, but not an end. As soon as a person enters the Beit Midrash to study Torah, he can no longer stop studying by thinking: “*I’ve reached the end of the*

Torah,” for King Solomon, the wisest of all men, would contradict him. Similarly, it is impossible for a person to achieve a complete fear of Heaven in this world, for no one feared Heaven more than Moses. In fact the Gemara states, “*For Moses it [the fear of Heaven] was a small matter*” (*Berachot* 33b). Nevertheless the verse states: “*Because you did not believe Me to sanctify Me*” (*Numbers* 20:12), which implies that Moses was lacking something. The Children of Israel are also called *reshith*, thereby teaching us that the Jewish people will never be destroyed. In other words, it has a beginning but not an end, as it is written: “*Yet despite all this, when they are in the land of their enemies I will not cast them away, nor will I loathe them to destroy them utterly*” (*Leviticus* 26:44). Generally speaking, no person can say, “*I've finished the Torah.*” If the Holy One, blessed be He – Who studied it for 1,000 generations and rejoiced in it during all that time – could say, “*It has not become old before Me,*” how much more can a being of flesh and blood find jewels in it as he digs! In fact the Mishnah states, “*Turn it over and over again, for everything is in it*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:21). The wisdom of the Torah differs from all other forms of wisdom. The more a person familiarizes himself with other forms of wisdom, the more he understands them, until he finally discovers their ultimate meaning. As for the Torah, the more discoveries a person makes and the more he plumbs its depths, the more he realizes just how deep it is! Even King Solomon did not realize this before having studied much more than any other Jew. The greater a person is, the more he realizes that the Torah is infinite. Thus it is written: “*Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea*” (*Job* 11:9).

We should not think that in the future, all Jews will know Torah and nobody will have to study it, for it is written: “*Torah shall emanate from Me*” (*Isaiah* 51:4). The Sages have interpreted this to mean: “*New Torah explanations shall emanate from Me.*” This teaches us that even in the future, Hashem will uncover new Torah teachings for us, and therefore the holy Torah will never have an end; it has only a beginning. Just as the Torah is eternal and without end, the Jewish people are eternal and without end, as it is written: “*The eternity of Israel does not lie*” (*1 Samuel* 15:29).

This is why Hashem began the Torah with the term *bereshith*, which can be divided into *be-reshith*. This teaches us that the world was created for two (*beit*) things that are called *reshith*, meaning the Torah and Israel. Rashi states: “*This verse calls for a midrashic interpretation. ... As our rabbis stated, [G-d created the world] for the sake of the Torah, which is called reshit darko ['the beginning of His way' – *Proverbs* 8:22], and for the sake of Israel, who are called reshit tevuato ['the first of His crop' – *Jeremiah* 2:3].*” If one were to ask why the word *reshith* is cited two (*beit*) times, whereas above it is stated that the world was created on account of three things (*Torah, Israel, and the fear of Heaven*), the answer is that the Torah and Israel will never change, not even in the era of Mashiach. As we have said, they will never have an end, only a beginning (*reshith*). Yet the fear of Heaven will change in the future world, during the era of Mashiach, as the Rambam writes: “*During that time understanding, wisdom, and truth will prevail, as it is written: 'The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of*

the L-RD as the waters cover the sea' [Isaiah 11:9]." We also read, "They shall no longer teach – each man his fellow, each man his brother – saying, 'Know the L-RD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the L-RD" (*Jeremiah 31:33*). It is also stated, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (*Ezekiel 36:26*). Therefore in the future, all Jews will be equal in their fear of Heaven. No one will fear G-d more than anyone else, and everyone will know Him, from the smallest to the greatest. This is because everyone will be able to perceive Him, and the fear of Heaven will be equal among them all. There will therefore be an end to the fear of Heaven during the era of Mashiach, but not an end to Torah or Israel. Thus it is stated bereshith, for two (*beit*) things that are called reshit – the Torah and Israel – which have only a beginning, not an end.

There Is no End to the Holy Torah

Regarding the verse, "*I was then His nursing, I was then His delight every day, playing before Him at all times*" (*Proverbs 8:30*), the Sages have explained in the Aggadah: "*Nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, the Torah was written and placed in the bosom of Hashem, and it sang His praises with the ministering angels, as it is written: 'I was then His nursing'*" (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan, ch. 31*).

We shall try to explain why the Holy One, blessed be He, rejoiced with the Torah during all these years, giving it to created beings only after nearly a thousand generations had passed. It is because Hashem wanted to announce to the inhabitants of the world that although the Torah had been written close to a thousand generations earlier, it was still His delight every day, and He still found, as it were, precious stones within the Torah, stones that He had not discovered until then. That being the case for the Holy One, blessed be He, how much more is it the case for those born of women, for those who – even if they lived forever – could not understand the Torah even to the extent of a drop in the ocean!

The words of the Torah are compared to water, as it is written: "*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water*" (*Isaiah 55:1*). Just as water has no end, the words of the Torah have no end. The Sages say that it is impossible for there to be a session in the Beit Midrash without novel teachings arising from it (*Chagigah 3a*). King David said, "*I will walk in broad pathways*" (*Psalms 119:45*), and Rashi explains that King David walked in a very broad Halachah. Like an expanse that grows to a great degree, the holy Torah is very large, and no created being can say: "*I have reached the end of the Torah and have understood everything to the very end.*" Even King Solomon said in his wisdom, "*I said, 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me. What existed is elusive and so very deep. Who can fathom it?*" (*Ecclesiastes 7:23-24*), and yet of him it was said: "*G-d gave wisdom and considerable understanding to Solomon, and greatness of heart as the sand upon the seashore*" (*1 Kings 5:9*). The Sages have explained that Solomon's wisdom was equivalent to the wisdom of all the Children of Israel, who are compared to the sand of the sea in number, as it is written: "*The number of the Children of Israel will be*

like the sand of the sea" (*Hosea 2:1*). If all the Children of Israel had been placed on one side of the scale, and King Solomon on the other, his wisdom would have exceeded theirs. Nevertheless, his wisdom was not greater than that of the Torah, and he could not understand it to the very end. Thus he said, "*I said, 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me. What existed is elusive and so very deep. Who can fathom it?*" Furthermore, even Moses, the father of all the prophets – concerning whom the Sages have said that Hashem taught him Scripture, Mishnah, Halachot, Talmud, Tosaphot, Aggadot, and everything that every Torah scholar would ever say before his teacher (*Vayikra Rabba 22:1*) – even from Moses the words of the Torah were hidden, the Sages tell us, for he did not completely understand them during his lifetime (*Menachot 29b*).

The Sages have said, "*When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, fixing crowns on the letters. Moses said, 'Master of the universe, Who stays Your hand?' He answered, 'At the end of many generations, a man by the name of Akiva ben Yosef will arise, and he will expound upon each point [of every crown] heaps and heaps of laws.' Moses said, 'Master of the universe, permit me to see him.' He replied, 'Turn around.' Moses went and sat down behind eight rows. Not being able to follow their arguments, he felt uncomfortable. Yet when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master, 'How do you know this,' the latter replied, 'It is a law given to Moses at Sinai,' and he was comforted. He then returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said: 'Master of the universe, You have such a man, and you give the Torah through me?' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'*" (*Menachot 29b*).

It is possible that this idea is alluded to in the following teaching of our Sages: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world only for the sake of three things that are called reshit: The Torah, Israel, and the fear of Heaven.*" Why are they called reshit? Because they are things that have a beginning (*reshith*), but not an end. When a person starts going to the Beit Midrash and studies Torah, he cannot stop learning by saying, "*I have reached the end of the Torah,*" for King Solomon, the wisest of all men, would contradict him. As for the fear of Heaven, it is impossible for a person to completely achieve it in this world, for no one feared Heaven more than Moses. As the Gemara tells us, "*For Moses it [the fear of Heaven] was a small matter*" (*Berachot 33b*). Nevertheless the verse states, "*Because you did not believe Me to sanctify Me*" (*Numbers 20:12*), which implies that Moses was lacking something.

The Children of Israel are also called reshit, thereby teaching us that the Jewish people will never disappear from the world, that they only have a beginning, as it is written: "*Yet despite all this, when they are in the land of their enemies I will not cast them away, nor will I loathe them to destroy them utterly*" (*Leviticus 26:44*). This is why Hashem began the Torah with bereshith, which can be divided into beit-reshith, teaching us that the world was created for two (*beit*) things that are called reshit, the Torah and Israel. Commenting on Genesis 1:1, Rashi states: "*This verse calls for a midrashic interpretation, as our Sages said: For the sake of the Torah, which is called*

'the beginning [reshith] of His way' [Proverbs 8:22], and for the sake of Israel, who are called 'the first [reshith] of His crop' [Jeremiah 2:3]."

The principle here is that no man can say, "*I've finished the Torah,*" for he must draw a logical conclusion from the Holy One blessed be He. That is, if Hashem studied it for 1,000 generations and rejoiced in it during all that time, and yet it never became old to Him, how much more should that be the case for a being of flesh and blood! The Mishnah states, "*Turn it over and over again, for everything is in it*" (*Pirkei Avot 5:21*). The wisdom of the Torah is infinitely superior to all other forms of wisdom. The more a person studies other forms of wisdom, the more he understands them, and he will eventually be able to completely master them. Yet that is not the case with the words of the Torah, for the more a person studies them and plumbs their depths, the more he realizes just how infinitely deep they are! Even King Solomon did not realize this before having studied much more than any other Jew. The greater a person is, the more he realizes that the Torah is infinite, as it is written: "*Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea*" (*Job 11:9*).

We must not make the mistake of thinking that in the future, all Jews will know the entire Torah and no longer have to study it, for the prophet states: "*Torah shall emanate from Me*" (*Isaiah 51:4*). In the Aggadah, the Sages explain this to mean that the renewal of the Torah will come from Hashem (*Vayikra Rabba 13:3*). This teaches us that even in the future, Hashem will provide us with new Torah teachings.

Thus the holy Torah will never have an end; it has only a beginning. Just as the Torah is eternal and without end, likewise the Jewish people are eternal and without end, as the prophet states: "*The eternity of Israel does not lie*" (*1 Samuel 15:29*).

.Humility Is an Absolute Prerequisite for Observing Torah

When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to create man, He said to the ministering angels: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over the animals, over the whole earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth*" (*Bereshit 1:26*). There is good reason to examine the order of this verse, which begins with fish that swim in the sea, which we do not see, and proceeds to the birds of the heavens, which hover over man's head, and which he only sees when he raises his eyes. The verse then speaks of land animals and reptiles, which everyone can see. It seems that the verse should have used the reverse order, starting with animals that man sees, and then proceeding with birds, which man cannot see without raising his eyes. Only then should it have mentioned fish, which we find in the waters, covered and hidden from the eyes.

The Heart Yields When We Look to the Heavens

We may explain this according to the teaching of the Sages, who said that the ministering angels did not agree with man's creation, as the Gemara states: The angels

said before Him, “*Just how wicked will man’s deeds be!*” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “*Although he will ruin My work in the future, I will create him and give him the virtue of humility. Because he will be humble, he will yield before Me and obey My orders*” (*see Sanhedrin 38b*).

In other words, the Holy One, blessed be He, told the ministering angels: “*I created man and gave him the virtue of humility, which resembles water.*” Just as water flows from higher to lower, man will yield, and the Torah will endure in him when he resembles water (*Taanith 7a*). There is an added advantage to this, namely that when he raises his eyes to the heavens, the fear of G-d will enter his heart, as it is written: “*A man should not pray other than in a room that has windows*” (*Berachot 34b*). Rashi explains that windows encourage a man to focus in prayer, for he sees the heavens and his heart yields. Hence from here we learn that the heavens have the ability to imbue the heart with the fear of G-d, as it is written: “*Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these things*” (*Isaiah 40:26*).

Next, He told the angels that man would rule over the animals and everything that creeps upon the earth. In fact the Sages have said, “*Adam was created on the eve of Sabbath. Why? ... So that, if a man grows proud, he may be reminded that gnats preceded him in the order of Creation*” (*Sanhedrin 38a*). This teaches us that when a person grows proud, he will immediately become humble upon seeing the animals that were created before him. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to the angels in the following order: Fish (which symbolize water), birds (which symbolize the fear of Heaven), and creatures of the earth (which symbolize humility), for these answered the objections of the angels.

We find the same thing in the following verse: “*G-d said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the heavens, and every living thing that moves on the earth’*” (*Bereshit 1:28*). Here too, fish and birds come before creatures of the earth, teaching us that it was for this reason that man was created, in order to act with humility, to obey G-d’s decrees, and to learn humility from water and the fear of sin from the heavens. Furthermore, a man should look upon the creatures of the earth and learn how to behave from them, as the Sages have said: “*If the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, honesty from the ant, chastity from the dove...*” (*Eruvin 100b*).

A Trace of Pride Entered Him

We see how grave pride is from what the Gemara states: “*The wine of Perogaisa and the waters of Diomisis were the ruin of the Ten Tribes. When Rabbi Elazar ben Arach went there, he was attracted to these pleasures and his learning vanished. When he returned, he arose to read in the [Torah] scroll. He wished to read, Hachodesh hazeh lachem [‘This month shall be for you’ – *Shemot 12:2*], but he read: Haheresh hayah libam [‘Their hearts were silent’]. However the Sages prayed for him, and his learning returned*” (*Shabbat 147b*).

This is quite surprising, for how could Rabbi Elazar ben Arach have allowed himself to be attracted by physical pleasures and stopped learning? After all, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai said of him: “*If all the Sages of Israel, including even Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, were on one side of the scale and Elazar ben Arach were on the other, he would outweigh them all*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 2:9).

From here we learn just how grave pride is. In fact Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, the greatest of the Sages, was only attracted to these pleasures because a trace of pride had entered him. Could anyone possibly imagine that he did not think, before entering that city, that he would be drawn to these pleasures? However a trace of pride had entered him, and he relied upon his wisdom in order not to forget what he had learned, which is precisely what led him to forget his learning. Because he relied upon his own wisdom, the Holy One, blessed be He, took it away.

It is a great principle that we must not rely upon our own wisdom. Whoever fails to fulfill the words of the Psalmist: “*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem*” (*Tehillim* 111:10) – who relies upon his own wisdom and does not precede it with the fear of Heaven – such a person will not see his wisdom endure. Not only that, but his wisdom will leave him, as it is written: “*He removes the utterances of the trustworthy and takes reason away from the elders*” (*Job* 12:20). It is also said, “*Who makes wise men retreat and makes their knowledge foolish*” (*Isaiah* 44:25).

In general, a person’s wisdom will only endure when it is accompanied by a fear of Heaven and humility. The Sages have said, “*Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his [good] deeds, to what can he be compared? To a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few. The wind comes and uproots it, and turns it upside down.... But anyone whose [good] deeds exceed his wisdom, to what can he be compared? To a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous. Even if all the winds in the world were to come and blow against it, they could not move it from its place*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 3:17).

The Essential Role of Humility In The Creation of the World

Regarding the beginning of this week’s parsha, the book *Avodat Israel* states: “*In His wisdom, the Holy One, blessed be He, restricted His attribute of Ein Sof, and it became concrete with boundaries and limits. How can we understand the nature of this phenomenon, namely that from the attribute of ‘boundlessness’ emerged the attribute of ‘bounds and limits,’ which cannot be seen by human eyes? As the Rambam writes (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 5:5), our minds cannot understand the Creator, and therefore no one has the ability to probe the origins of Creation. We are like His children and servants, and we have faith, for it is the cornerstone and primary objective of Creation, namely that we should serve Him with fear and trembling, and make Him King to serve His Name.*”

This teaches us that we are forbidden to seek out the origin and goal of Creation, for it is beyond our ability to comprehend. It is incumbent upon us to simply know what concerns us in practice, meaning that the goal of the world’s creation is for man to take upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of G-d, to serve Him, and to fulfill all

His mitzvot like a servant fulfills his master's will. This is why we must pay close attention to pride, for when a person grows proud and does not take upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of G-d, he becomes liable to death before the King. A person does not have the right to grow proud, for pride only befits the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: "*Hashem is King. He has donned grandeur*" (*Tehillim 93:1*). As for a human being who grows proud, the Sages have said: "*Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares, 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'*" (*Sotah 5a*).

We find something similar to this in regards to Lashon Harah (*Arachin 15b*), for there is no one who speaks ill of others unless he has become proud, and we only find Lashon Harah among the arrogant. The Sages teach that the repentance of one who speaks Lashon Harah consists of humbling himself, for when he grows proud, he takes the place of Hashem and becomes liable to death. The Midrash states, "*If someone dons the royal garment of a king of flesh and blood, he has no hope of living. How much more if he dons the garment of the King of kings.*"

Overcoming the Evil Inclination

This is why the Torah was given only by Moshe Rabbeinu, whom the Torah describes as "*very humble, more than any man on the face of the earth*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*). Furthermore, the Torah was given not just anywhere, but on Mount Sinai, which was the lowest of the mountains, and which humbled itself before G-d. In fact the world was created only for the sake of Torah, and it does not endure among the proud. As the Sages say concerning the passage, "*It is not in heaven...nor is it beyond the sea*" (*Devarim 30:12-13*): "*It is not found with one who, because he possesses some knowledge of it, towers in his pride as high as the heavens. It is not found with one who, because he possesses some knowledge of it, is as expansive in his self-esteem as the sea*" (*Eruvin 55a*).

Since the goal of man's creation, in accordance with the goal of the creation of the world, is to acknowledge the yoke of the kingdom of G-d and to act with humility, the Torah was given to humans, among whom the evil inclination exists. The Torah was not given to the ministering angels (*Berachot 25b*), for they have no evil inclination that entices them to sin (*Shabbat 89a*). They do not fight their own instincts to do G-d's will, nor do they have to overcome the enticement of an evil inclination that pushes them into committing sin. The angels have nothing to prevent them from serving G-d. Hence their service of G-d does not infuse their hearts with subservience and humility. They are not like humans, who must work to overcome the evil inclination, which constantly burns in their hearts.

This is why the first mitzvah that a man fulfills is the mitzvah of circumcision. Each male is circumcised at the age of eight days, for due to the fact that man is circumcised, he will devote himself completely to fulfilling the orders of his master, learning that all his deeds must be those of a servant who fulfills what his master has decided for him. That is why this mitzvah is described as the covenant of our father Abraham. It is through this mitzvah that humility enters the heart of man, just as Abraham said of

himself: “*I am but dust and ashes*” (*Bereshith* 18:27). We know what the Rambam wrote in this regard, namely that circumcision diminishes the power of desire, and that when a man conquers his instincts, humility enters his heart (*Guide to the Perplexed* 3:49).

The Torah Does Not Endure Among the Proud

Furthermore, we find that humility played an essential role in the creation of the world, for in the Midrash the Sages say that when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create man, He took council of the ministering angels (*Bereshith Rabba* 8:8). This teaches us that the world was created through humility, for the King of the universe humbled Himself and took the advice of the ministering angels. Furthermore, humility was created before the Torah, for the Midrash states: “*Derech eretz preceded the Torah by 26 generations*” (*Vayikra Rabba* 9:3). The Torah teaches us that a person can only learn Torah if he first demonstrates humility in learning. Without humility, he will forget what he has learned, for the Torah does not endure with the proud, but with the humble.

Pride is at the root of all sin, and no person sins unless a spirit of pride has entered him. Rabbeinu Yona wrote, “*Pride encourages many sins and places a person under the sway of his evil inclination, as it is said: ‘Your heart will grow proud and you will forget Hashem your G-d’* [Devarim 8:14], and also ‘*Haughty eyes and a proud heart are the cultivation of the wicked*’ [*Mishlei* 21:4]. This means that pride is the ‘cultivation’ of the wicked, for sin grows as a result. Thus it is said, ‘*In his pride, the wicked persecutes the poor*’ [*Tehillim* 10:2], and ‘*Let the wicked be ashamed...who speak insolent words about the righteous with arrogance and contempt*’ [*ibid.* 31:18-19]. This is because, aside from causing a person to sin, pride in itself is a sin, as it is said: ‘*Every proud heart is an abomination to Hashem*’ [*Mishlei* 16:5]. When you are arrogant, you subjugate yourself to your evil inclination, and G-d no longer helps you because you are an abomination to Him” (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:27).

Man is the Crown of Creation...But Only if He Fulfills the Torah

It is written, “*And G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the entire earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d He created him*” (*Bereshith* 1:26-27).

By his very nature, man was created to rule the world – “*let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the entire earth*” – this being the goal of Creation, as we read: “*You placed everything under his feet*” (*Tehillim* 8:7).

We know that the first man was created in a great state of perfection, befitting the work of the Creator’s hands. In fact Rabbi Hoshaya says in the Midrash, “*When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, the ministering angels mistook him [for a divine being] and wished to exclaim ‘Kadosh’ before him*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 8:10). He was so perfect that even the angels erred in his regard. Thus G-d was forced to place him in a deep sleep, says the Midrash, in order to show the angels that he was nothing but the work of His hands, kneaded from clay.

Our Sages ask if the expression “*the work of His hands*” is proper when speaking of G-d. Did He not create the heavens solely by His word, as we read: “*He commanded and it stood firm*” (*Tehillim 33:9*)? Since G-d is not corporal, and the concept of a body does not apply to Him, how can man be described as “*the work of His hands*”?

The answer is quite simple: This expression is just figurative, as the Rambam states: “*What is the meaning of expressions in the Torah such as ‘beneath His feet,’ ‘the finger of G-d,’ ‘the eyes of G-d,’ ‘the ears of G-d,’ and so on? All this expresses the perception of man, who is only familiar with the body, which is why the Torah uses the language of man. Yet these are only descriptive terms. For example, it is said: ‘If I sharpen My glittering sword’ [Devarim 32:41], but does G-d have a sword? Will He kill with this sword? No, clearly this is but a metaphor.*” Nevertheless, we still need to explain why our Sages used the figurative expression “*the work of His hands*,” since we do not find this expression used for any other being created during the six days of Creation.

We may explain this by saying that everything created in the world was done by the word of G-d, as it is written: “*The world was created by means of ten utterances*” (*Pirkei Avot 5:1*). With man’s creation, however, a distinction is made: Man is the work of His hands, far superior to any other created being. As we read in the Midrash, “*He gathered and collected dust from the entire earth, from the four cardinal directions, to create the first man*” (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 3*), just as Rashi explains on Bereshith 2:7. Hence man’s creation was the result of great forethought and preparation. Furthermore, in regards to this great wonder that we acknowledge each day by reciting the blessing, “*Who formed man in wisdom,*” this blessing also states “*and created within him.*” In other words, He not only created man, but formed him as well. The Zohar alludes to this created being by describing him as “*the work of His hands*” (*Zohar 1:35b*), the Creator’s hands.

Nevertheless, even this requires an explanation: Why did Hashem feel the need to create man in such a complex and amazing way? Could He not have just given a verbal command to create him, as He did for all the other creatures? It certainly was not without a specific goal that He formed a being of such importance, nor that He created the first man at such a high level that the ministering angels erred in his regard. On the other hand, why is it written what we cited at the beginning of our discussion: That man should rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the entire earth? Have we resolved this question yet? Why is such an extraordinary being needed in order to rule the world?

That said, one who delves into the words of Rashi will understand: “*This expression [veyirdu] denotes rulership [ridui] and descent [yerida]. If he is worthy, he will rule over beasts and cattle. If he is not worthy, he will be subjugated to them and the beast will rule over him*” (*Rashi on Bereshith 1:26*). Thus the expression “*let them rule over the fish of the sea...*” is not the goal, but rather the consequence of man’s creation. The goal is to accept the yoke of the Torah and the fulfillment of mitzvot, the consequence being that man will “*rule over the fish of the sea.*”

It follows that the crown placed upon the head of the first man, which is the crown of Creation, still hangs in the balance. If he is worthy, meaning if he fulfills his duty, he will be a king (*"he will rule over beasts and cattle"*). However if he acts improperly towards his Creator and does not fulfill his mission, he will be a slave (*"the beast will rule over him"*).

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh provides us with an extraordinary explanation in his Sefer HaGilgulim: *"By using the term yerida [which can also mean 'descent'] in the sense of 'rulership,' the verse is hinting to us that by his actions, a person can descend from the level of a man to that of a fish, bird, cattle, or even a reptile. Depending on the severity of his sin, this descent can bring him very low, G-d forbid. That is what is being alluded to at the time of Creation: To the different degrees of descent that lead to punishment, or which can lead man back to his source."*

We therefore realize that the goal of Creation is for man to study the holy Torah and fulfill its mitzvot. The first phrase in the Torah alludes to this: Bereshith bara Elokim ("G-d created for reshith") – created for the Torah, which is called reshith. It was for the Torah that the world was created.

As our Sages explain in the Gemara, *"Resh Lakish said: Why is it written, 'There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day'? What is the purpose of the additional 'the'? This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, stipulated with the works of Creation and said to them: 'If Israel accepts the Torah, you shall exist. If not, I will turn you back into emptiness and formlessness'"* (Shabbat 88a). From here we learn that as soon as the first man was created, the survival of the heavens and earth depended upon the Children of Israel's fulfillment of Torah, for that was the goal of Creation.

In addition, our Sages explain in the Zohar (*Toldot 134:1-2*) something which people know perfectly well, but unfortunately do not feel to a sufficient degree: *"When G-d wanted to create the world, He consulted the Torah and was inspired."* We normally interpret this to mean that the Torah contains, as it were, a blueprint of the world, one in which it is possible to see the oceans, dry land, lakes and rivers. This may be the simple meaning, but much more may also be implied: When G-d created the world, He looked into the Torah to see what was required. A man was required, and so He created a man; a woman was required, and so He created a woman; oceans and rivers were required, etc. Everything that was created was done with a specific goal, and that goal was the fulfillment of Torah.

We may conclude that the Torah did not come after the creation of man, but rather that man was created in order to fulfill the Torah!

That is why man is considered the crowning achievement of creation, for his entire essence and nature consist of fulfilling the Torah. The Torah is not just a useful tool for him, as are the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms of Creation. Rather, the Torah constitutes his entire being in terms of his actions, attitude, and behavior. Let him fulfill the Torah, and thus fulfill the will of his Creator and enable the entire world to survive.

This is the reason behind man's tremendous importance. In fact he is so important that he was formed, if we may say, by G-d Himself, the very work of His hands. Furthermore, G-d explicitly said in regards to man: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*" That is, from the very outset G-d bestowed this being with a divine dimension, and therein lay his greatness. However it all depends on us: Will we merit to fulfill our mission as created beings who are worthy of being formed by G-d's hands, or will we want to resemble all other animals, setting ourselves apart so little from them that they dominate us and nobody can protect us from them? The choice is in our hands, for the call is addressed to us: Come, let us make man. Let us use the powers that we possess insofar as being "*the work of G-d's hands*"!

The Strategy of the Evil Inclination

It is written, "*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes...she took of its fruit and ate, and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate*" (*Bereshith 3:6*).

This verse describes the sin of Adam and Eve, when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Now we know that it was the serpent that convinced Eve to eat from it. We may want to reconsider this, however, given that Adam and Eve did not possess an evil inclination before they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. In other words, how did Eve allow herself to be convinced by the words of the serpent, which advised her to eat from it, since she did not yet possess an evil inclination?

One more thing is surprising here, something that the Midrash mentions: When the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Adam if he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he replied: "*I did eat, and I will eat*" (*Bereshith Rabba 19:12*). That is, he ate from it in the past and he would eat from it again in the future. How could he dare answer G-d in this way? After all, Adam was at an incredibly high spiritual level. The Midrash states that while the serpent was enticing Eve, Adam was walking with Hashem in the Garden of Eden, which indicates just what a spiritual level he occupied. We may therefore say that Eve was also at the same level. Yet in that case – and despite not possessing an evil inclination – how could they have sinned?

The answer is that the serpent convinced Eve by telling her that once she ate from the Tree of Knowledge, she would know how to distinguish between good and evil. In the Midrash, the serpent tells her that she would be like G-d. This is surprising, for did Eve actually think that she could be like Hashem? It's clear that nothing about such a claim could be true, for she obviously could never become like G-d. The explanation to this, as we know, is that the serpent is none other than the Satan (the numerical value of the term nachash [serpent], plus one for the word itself, is the same as that of satan). In its deceptiveness, the Satan does not tell a person to immediately transgress Hashem's commands. On the contrary, it encourages a person to do a given mitzvah "*for the sake of Heaven.*" As such, it brings a person down to the abyss. The serpent did the same here too: It convinced Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by claiming that it would

allow her to distinguish between good and evil. That, in turn, would allow her to cleave to good and distance herself from evil, thus becoming capable of cleaving to the Holy One, blessed be He, and bringing Him satisfaction by creating supernal worlds. In fact we know that when a person performs a mitzvah, he makes supernal worlds as a result, as it is written: “*which G-d created to make*” (*Bereshith 2:3*). The Holy One, blessed be He, designed creation in such a way that we too can make and fashion other worlds when we perform mitzvot and do good deeds. Hence the serpent told Eve: “*You will be like gods*” – you too will be able to develop and continue the work of creation by making new worlds through your ability to distinguish between good and evil.

This is why Eve, despite not having an evil inclination, allowed herself to be enticed by the serpent. It was because she thought that in heeding its words, she was acting for the sake of Heaven and bringing satisfaction to the Creator. Therein lay her mistake, one that was also committed by Adam. Although he refused to listen at first, she told him that eating from the Tree of Knowledge was for the sake of Heaven, and that it would provide him with great wisdom and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. As such, they would be able to completely distance themselves from evil and create supernal worlds to glorify the Holy One, blessed be He. Once Adam listened to Eve’s words, he agreed with her suggestion and ate the fruit. He was completely convinced that he was doing the right thing when Hashem asked him if he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, which is why he replied that he had, and that he would again in the future. He said this because he believed that doing so was actually a mitzvah, not a sin, and his only intention was to glorify Hashem. However we must remember that this is the evil inclination’s strategy: It makes a person believe that a sin is actually a mitzvah, thereby tricking him into committing a sin.

I once heard someone making disparaging remarks about a certain individual. When I heard it, I immediately reprimanded him, telling him that he was speaking Lashon Harah, which the Torah forbids. Yet he responded by telling me that what he was saying was for the sake of Heaven, and therefore permissible. I then reminded him that what he was saying wasn’t at all for the sake of Heaven. Instead, it was the strategy of the evil inclination, which is to make a person think that any wrong he commits is for the sake of Heaven. In fact after examining the reasons that had prompted his remarks, he admitted that they were not for the sake of Heaven, and that the evil inclination had deceived him into believing that they were. In reality, he had disparaged the person in question for personal reasons.

That being the case, what was Adam and Eve’s error? After all, once they ate from the Tree of Knowledge, they were able to distinguish between good and evil, knowing how to distance themselves from evil and cleave to the good, thereby bringing great satisfaction to the Holy One, blessed be He. The answer is that, having only received a single mitzvah, they wanted to add to it and do more mitzvot through their ability to distinguish between good and evil. That was the source of their error. In fact Hashem has no desire for man to create supernal worlds and make offerings to Him by

transgressing His orders. To Hashem, the essential thing is for a person to act as He has commanded him, without trying to play it smart and add to His commands.

After all that we have said, we may understand why Adam and Eve were not immediately punished when Hashem spoke to them. Instead, they were simply expelled from the Garden of Eden in this world. After they sinned, they were indeed able to distinguish between good and evil, and they were already prepared to live in this world and confront the evil inclination. The reason why they were not punished with death is that they had no intention of rebelling against G-d, for they had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge with good intentions, for the sake of Heaven..

Wisdom was Given to Overcome Material Desires

In regard to the verse, “*In the beginning [Bereshith], G-d created*” (*Bereshith 1:1*), our Sages have explained that “*the world was created for the Torah, which is called reshith [beginning]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 1:4*), as well as for Israel, which is also called reshith (*Jeremiah 2:3*). In fact the Torah and Jewish people constitute the goal of Creation, and we give meaning to Creation when we immerse ourselves in Torah. The Torah is the essential goal of Creation and constitutes its fulfillment.

The Torah has such an impact on anyone who studies it that our Sages describe it as an “*elixir of life*.” It is the foundation of all things, protecting and saving all of us. Nevertheless, and much to our surprise, some great scholars have devoted their lives to the study of Torah, yet in the end have succumbed to sin, including the High Priest Yochanan (*Berachot 29a*). How are we to understand that the Torah did not protect them from sin?

We cannot blame the Torah for this, G-d forbid, for we actually need to look at ourselves. Even if we do not avoid our obligation to study Torah, the smallest neglect is already worthy of punishment. In fact each small thing, or even a small negative detail caused by Torah scholars, takes on huge dimensions in Heaven, and a slight sin can lead to a spiritual catastrophe.

Proof for this comes from the first man. Fashioned by G-d, he was created to an extraordinary degree of perfection, as the holy Zohar describes: “*Adam's heel outshined the orb of the sun. He was so perfect that he didn't understand the concept of nudity, and he had nothing for which to be ashamed when he was discovered. Creation and all the supernal worlds depended on him. There was nothing superfluous about him, and his material condition was nothing compared to his spiritual condition*” (*Zohar III:306b*).

Thus who was responsible for the fact that the serpent, initially G-d's servant, was transformed into a crafty and ungodly Satan that led the first man astray and caused him to sin? It was Adam himself, who added to G-d's words by prohibiting the touching of the Tree of Knowledge (*Sanhedrin 29a*). Now our principle of imposing barriers and fences for each mitzvah results from the presence of the evil inclination within us and

our inability to resist it. That is why the Sages instituted a fence for the Torah, in order to distance ourselves from trials and transgression.

Yet when Adam, on the very day of his creation, received the order to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he had no reason to add a fence around this mitzvah by using the pretext that women are “frivolous” (*Shabbat 33b*). In fact the serpent did not yet possess the potential to become the Satan at that point. It did not yet possess the craftiness required to mislead Eve and incite her into eating from the Tree of Knowledge, just as it did not suggest evil thoughts to them when they were naked.

Adam should have been aware of the fact that G-d’s spirit was anchored in him to such a degree that he was able to discern good from evil. He praised G-d for having breathed into him the breath of life, providing him with a spiritual condition vastly superior to his material condition. He therefore had no need to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in order to distinguish good from evil, for his great wisdom surpassed his materiality.

Adam should have realized that all extraneous wisdom is harmful, as Kohelet states: “*He who increases knowledge increases pain*” (*Kohelet 1:18*). He was to represent perfection and the right measure in all things. Therefore why did he look for new risks and great trials by adding a prohibition that was not given to him?

He did so because he suspected his wife of being frivolous, which in fact was not the case because the evil inclination did not yet exist. They were indeed both naked, but in holiness and purity, without a trace of frivolousness. It was by adding this extra precaution that he erroneously opened a door for evil, which enabled the serpent to entice Eve by pushing her against the tree without dying.

Adam can also be blamed for having added to Hashem’s command. Contrary to Adam’s view of Eve, she was intelligent because during her creation G-d bestowed special wisdom upon her. Our Sages teach (*Niddah 45b*) that women are endowed with more intelligence (*binah*) than men, as it is written: “*The Hashem G-d built [yiven – same root as binah] the rib...into a woman*” (*Bereshith 2:22*).

That being the case, because of this special wisdom Eve should not have dared to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (*despite touching it without dying*) due to G-d’s command. However she erred due to the fact that Adam had incorrectly transmitted G-d’s command to her, making her think that by touching the tree, she had already transgressed. Hence the reason for Adam’s severe rebuke.

Adam’s weakness was thus discovered: He had no reason to set up a fence either for himself or for his wife. He had nothing to fear, for he was connected to Hashem and to the holy Torah.

Parsha Noah

The Influence of Torah Study and Prayer Even Extends to Others

From the verse, “*For it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me*” (*Genesis 7:1*), we learn of the greatness of the tzaddikim and those who study Torah. When they study, others see them and do the same, and they are also elevated in the service of Hashem. Similarly, when people see how someone continues to be upright because he studies Torah in yeshiva, they can also be favorably influenced and want to partake of the Torah. They will then merit seeing the light of Torah for themselves, a light that will extinguish the darkness within them. They will return to the right path, and Hashem’s Name will be sanctified as a result. In fact Noah had considerable merit of his own, for the environment in which he lived and worked was filled with evil, and moreover everyone scorned him. There was but a step between remaining a believer and being influenced by his environment, for Noah was an innocent man (*ibid. 6:9*), and the innocent usually believe what people tell them. The Holy One, blessed be He, was therefore concerned that because of Noah’s innocence, he would be influenced by crafty people and ensnared in their sins. Hashem therefore occupied Noah with building the ark. For seven days prior to the flood, people were mourning the death of Methuselah. Because of their grief, during these seven days people began to consider all the warnings that Noah had given them over the previous 120 years, which resulted in a small degree of teshuvah.

This is why Hashem warned Noah: Know that there will be a flood in seven days, and therefore you must wait and draw closer to them until these days of mourning end. If they truly improve their ways, the coming downpour will become a rain of blessing, and you can then come into contact with them. If they do not improve their ways, then the downpour will become a flood, and you will never be able to come into contact with them.

When Noah realized that he would only be saved from the flood if he distanced himself from the unhealthy environment of the people living at the time, he went to hide in the teva (“ark”), a word that has the same numerical value (142) as yeshiva. Noah sought to increase the satisfaction that he brought to his Creator, and in the ark he studied Torah and engaged in deeds of kindness, which helped him to survive while living there, since he was not tempted to stray. We see that Noah studied Torah while in the ark, for it was to Noah that the Sages applied the passage: “*His desire is in the Torah of the L-RD*” (*Psalms 1:2*) – a reference to the seven mitzvot that Noah received; “*and in His Torah he mediates day and night*” (*ibid.*) – deriving one thing from another; “*he shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water*” (*v.3*), for Hashem planted him in the ark. This also proves that on account of his Torah study, Noah was knowledgeable in the laws of shechita and everything that concerned offerings.

Similarly, when Noah emerged from the ark he understand that to truly serve Hashem with devotion, holiness and purity, a person must sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake, as it is written: "*And Noah built an altar*" (*Genesis 8:20*). The word *vayeven* ("and he built") also designates *havanah* ("understanding"). Thus Noah understood that it was solely by studying Torah with tremendous effort that one can achieve complete devotion in the service of Hashem. This is why he was ready to give up his life in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, and it was only because he had no other way of showing his devotion that he brought an offering. As we know, the offerings actually symbolize a person giving up his soul, for in bringing an offering, a person pictures himself as being the one who really should have been offered on the altar.

The Sages explain just to what extent the ark provided Noah with holiness and purity. They say that when Noah emerged from the ark and saw that the world had been destroyed, he cried out to Hashem: "*You should have shown compassion for Your creation.*" Hashem replied, "*Now you say this? Why didn't you say this when I told you that you would be safe in the ark? You didn't even bother to intercede for others! Yet now you open your mouth and pray?*" (See *Zohar Hashmatot, Bereshith 254b*.)

The reason why Noah only prayed after emerging from the ark was because he did not understand the tremendous power of prayer. He did not realize that if he had prayed, it would have been possible to save his entire generation, just as Abraham prayed for Sodom. Although Abraham's prayer was not answered in that case, he still did what he could. It was, moreover, his prayer that saved Lot and his daughters, from whom the kingship of the house of David emerged. Even if Noah would not have been able to save his generation had he prayed, he still would have suffered less by knowing that he had done all he could to save them, even if trying was pointless. Thus even if Noah could not have saved his entire generation, he could have possibly saved a few individuals, and even if he had been unable to save a few, he would have at least known that he did all he could. Yet that never happened, for he only prayed after the flood, since it was then that he experienced tremendous sorrow.

Thus Noah understood why Hashem had told him to build an ark. The ark (*i.e., Torah and prayer*) is what saves a person from the tribulations of his time. As long as we are not within the ark (*i.e., a yeshiva*), it is impossible to understand the power that hides within the walls of the Beit Midrash. It is impossible to know what we can obtain and how much we can grow by taking advantage of each moment that we are there.

Similarly, the faith of a yeshiva student, who is constantly studying Torah, is not the same as that of a person who does not study in a yeshiva, for the latter's faith is far weaker. Although he may perform mitzvot, pray in synagogue, and listen to Torah lectures, when he leaves the Beit Midrash we see that he hasn't changed at all. We see that he conducts himself as before, seemingly without any spiritual elevation. That being the case, such a person cannot exert a good influence on others.

As for someone who "kills himself" in studying Torah – as it written, "*a man that dies in a tent*" (*Numbers 19:14*) – and who fulfills the verse, "*Because for Your sake we are*

killed all the time" (*Psalms 44:23*), since he never stops elevating himself in the service of Hashem, such a person can influence others through his Torah study and prayer. This is because people will see and emulate him, and as such he can save many from a disastrous spiritual fall. He can elevate them to the heights, to the King of the universe, for that is the main thing, the most important thing of all.

Faith Cannot Exist Without a Love for Others

It is written, "*These are the offspring of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations*" (*Genesis 6:9*). Here Rashi cites a discussion of the Sages: "*Some of our Sages interpret it favorably: How much more if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison to his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.*"

We need to understand why our Sages disagreed as to whether Noah's righteousness was complete or not, since everyone acknowledged that he did not sin, and in his own generation he was a tzaddik. Even if we say that he was not as righteous as Abraham, could we ever imagine that his righteousness was not genuine, since the Torah testifies that he was a tzaddik? It states that Noah found grace in Hashem's eyes, for He said to him: "*It is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me*" (*Genesis 7:1*), and it was by Noah's merit that the world returned to normal after the flood. Can we even say in our time that the righteousness of a certain tzaddik is not perfect if it does not resemble that of another tzaddik? Each tzaddik has his portion in the World to Come according to his deeds in this world, and it is impossible to diminish the righteousness of one tzaddik due to the righteousness of another. The Midrash states, "*These are the offspring of Noah – Noah.... Surely Scripture should have written, 'These are the offspring of Noah – Shem...'*" (*Bereshith Rabba 30:5*). We may say that this doublet led some of our Sages to view it as a criticism of Noah, for they understood the name Noah as signifying rest (*menucha*). That being the case, it seems that Noah wanted to relax at home and occupy himself with Torah and mitzvot all by himself. He did want to participate in public life, either to reprimand people or bring them closer to Torah and good deeds, as Abraham did in his time. Thus the Sages said, "*Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women*" (*ibid. 39:14*). Sforno (6:8) explains this to mean that Noah did not teach the people of his generation to know G-d and walk in His ways, even though he was righteous in thought and deed.

Consequently, some of our Sages viewed this was a criticism, since it was shameful for a tzaddik to study Torah alone and not leave his home in order to reprimand others and encourage them to repent of their evil deeds. Since the text states, "*Noah – Noah...*" (*Genesis 6:9*), we learn that he wanted to rest and not confront his generation. Therefore had Noah lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been important, for Abraham was the one who confronted his generation and brought people under the wings of the Shechinah. The Mishnah tells us, "*There were ten generations from Adam*

to Noah.... There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to indicate how great His patience is, for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all” (*Pirkei Avot 5:2*). We need to understand the difference between Noah and Abraham, especially why Noah, although he was a tzaddik, did not receive the reward of all these generations, contrary to Abraham. We may explain this by what we said earlier, namely that Noah had no desire to reprimand the people of his generation. Not only that, but when Hashem said to him, “*Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation*” (*Genesis 7:1*), Noah did not pray for his generation, but simply began preparing his sons and family members to enter the ark. Yet what did Abraham do when Hashem said to him, “*Because the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see whether they act according to its outcry, which has come to Me*” (*ibid. 18:20-21*)? Before going to save his nephew Lot, Abraham began to pray for the inhabitants of Sodom, as we read: “*Far be it from You to do a thing such as this, to put to death the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous would be like the wicked. Far be it from You! Will the Judge of the entire earth not perform justice?*” (*v.25*). By saying this, Abraham received the reward of all the generations, even Noah’s generation, for had Abraham lived in that time he would have encouraged them to repent. In fact the Gemara states, “*‘Noah with his sons...went into the ark because of the waters of the flood’ [Genesis 7:7]. Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘He lacked faith: Had the water not reached his ankles, he would not have entered the ark’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 32:6*). Abraham’s faith, however, was strong, and of him it is said: “*He believed in the L-RD, and He counted it to him for righteousness*” (*Genesis 15:6*). Such was not the case with Noah, for nowhere is it written that Noah believed in Hashem, since his faith was lacking. In fact by reprimanding the people of his generation, bringing them closer to the Shechinah, and praying for the inhabitants of Sodom, Abraham clearly demonstrated the power of his faith.

We must perceive the great principle in this: Whoever possesses complete faith in Hashem, this faith will lead him to love others and want to establish peace among them. He will definitely not covet their possessions or try to take their money, for a person with faith realizes that his entire sustenance is determined by Hashem. Hence he will not want other people’s money, for this money has not been destined to him. It does not belong to him in any way, and he will never possess anything that is not meant for him. As for someone who does not love others, this definitely indicates that he does not firmly believe in G-d. In fact it is impossible for a person to believe in Hashem without loving others, since they were created in the image of the King, as it is written: “*G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’*” (*Genesis 1:26*). Therefore whoever loves the King will also love the work of His hands, and whoever does not love the work of His hands demonstrates that he does not love the King. Let us examine the implications of this from the verse, “*He who is hanged is cursed by G-d*” (*Deuteronomy 21:23*). Here the Sages have said that this constitutes a disgrace to the King, for men are made in His image and the Jewish people are His children. “*To what*

can this be compared? To twin brothers living in one city. One was appointed as king, while the other took to highway robbery. At the king's command they hanged him, but all who saw him exclaimed: 'The king is hanged!' The king then issued a command and he was taken down" (Sanhedrin 46b). The Sages also said, "When a man suffers, what does the Shechinah say? 'My head aches, my arm aches!'" (Chagigah 15b). Hence G-d grieves over the spilled blood of the wicked, and especially over the blood of the righteous.

The Gemara states, "*A non-Jew presented himself before Shammai and said, 'Convert me on condition that you will teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot.' He repulsed him with the builder's cubit that was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary; go and learn it'" (Shabbat 31a).* Rabbi Akiva said, "*'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' [Leviticus 19:18] is a great principle of the Torah" (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4).* When someone wants to draw closer to Hashem, he cannot cleave to Him directly, but only to His attributes, as the Sages have said: "*Is it possible, then, for a human being to walk after the Shechinah, for has it not been said, 'The L-RD your G-d is a devouring fire' [Deuteronomy 4:2]? However the meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked...so should you clothe the naked. ... [As He] visited the sick...so should you visit the sick. [As He] comforted mourners...so should you comfort mourners" (Sotah 14a).*

It is Impossible to Have Faith Without a Love for Others

The Mishnah states, "*There were ten generations from Adam to Noah...ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to indicate how great is His patience, for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all" (Pirkei Avoth 5:2).*

This teaching requires an explanation. Although Noah was a righteous and perfect man in his generations, he did not receive the reward of them all, and yet Abraham did. We can understand this according to the words of Sforno, who writes: "*Although Noah reprimanded people for their depraved conduct in his time, he did not teach them about G-d, nor how to follow His ways, even if he was righteous and perfect in thought and deed" (Sforno, Genesis 6:8).* Thus Noah did not truly admonish his generation. Furthermore, G-d said to him, "*Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation" (Genesis 7:1), meaning that he did not pray for his generation, but instead he began to gather his sons and family, and he entered the ark.*

As for Abraham, how did he react when G-d said to him: "*Because the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see whether they act according to its outcry, which has come to Me" (Genesis 18:20-21)? Before going to save his nephew Lot, he began to pray for the inhabitants of Sodom, as it is written: "Far be it from You to do a thing such as this,*

to put to death the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous would be like the wicked. Far be it from You! Will the Judge of the entire earth not perform justice?” (v.25).

Made in the Image of His Creator

It is known that if someone has complete faith in G-d, his faith will lead him to a love of G-d’s creations, meaning that he will love others and make peace between them. How much more will he not be jealous of what others have. He will not envy or put his hand on other people’s money, for since he has faith, he knows that all his sustenance is fixed for him by the Holy One, blessed be He. That being the case, why would he try to obtain money that belongs to others, which was not allotted to him and in no way belongs to him? All that has not been allotted to him will not come to him! When a person does not love others, it is a great indication that he does not firmly believe in Hashem. It is impossible for a person to believe in Hashem without loving Hashem’s creations, for they were made in the image of the King, as it is written: “*G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’”* (*Genesis 1:26*). Whoever loves the King loves His handiwork, and whoever does not love His handiwork proves that he does not love the King. We learn just where this can lead to from what the Sages have said on the verse, “*A hanging person is a curse of G-d*” (*Deuteronomy 21:23*), namely: “*This is a degradation of the King, in Whose image man is created, and the Israelites are G-d’s children. This is comparable to two identical twin brothers. One became king, while the other was arrested for robbery and hanged. Whoever saw him would say, ‘The king is hanging’”* (*Rashi ad loc.*). The Sages have also said, “*When a man suffers, what does the Shechinah say? ‘My head aches, my arm aches!’*” (*Sanhedrin 46a*). Therefore G-d suffers when the blood of the wicked is spilled, and even more so when the blood of the righteous is spilled.

When a person wants to cleave to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to demonstrate his great love for the Creator, he must cleave to His attributes.

As the Sages say in the Gemara, “*What is the meaning of the text, ‘You shall walk after the L-RD your G-d’ [Deuteronomy 13:5]? Is it possible, then, for a human being to walk after the Shechinah? Has it not been said, ‘The L-RD your G-d is a devouring fire’ [ibid. 4:24]? However this means to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He”* (*Sotah 14a*).

The Sages tell us that just as Hashem clothes the naked (having clothed Adam and Eve), we too should clothe the naked, and just as Hashem visits the sick (having visited Abraham), we too should visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, comforts mourners (having comforted Isaac), we too should comfort mourners, and just as He buries the dead (having buried Moses), we too should bury the dead. The Sages also say, “*Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so too should you be gracious and compassionate*” (*Shabbat 133b*).

Since Noah did not pray for the people of his generation or admonish them, it follows that he did not love them. If he had loved them, he would have worried that the waters of the flood would have destroyed them. He did not love them, however, since his faith in G-d was not perfect.

We learn something similar to this from the words of our Sages in the Midrash: “*Noah went in with his sons...because of the waters of the flood*” [Genesis 7:7]. ... *He lacked faith: Had the waters not reached his ankles, he would not have entered the ark*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 32:6).

This is extremely surprising. How could Noah, who is described as being “*a righteous man, perfect in his generations*” (*Genesis* 6:9), have possessed so little faith? The answer is that although he was righteous in his deeds, he still did not possess perfect faith. He was a tzaddik in deeds, but in faith he was no so firm. On the other hand, the faith of Abraham was firm and powerful, as the Creator of the world Himself testified: “*He believed in the L-RD*” (*Genesis* 15:6). This teaches us that Abraham possessed faith. Why did this faith exist in Abraham but not in Noah, although the Torah testifies that Noah was righteous? It is because Abraham prayed for the people of his generation, but Noah did not. Abraham admonished the people of his generation, but Noah did not. Hence Abraham received the reward of ten generations, including that of the flood, for had Abraham lived in the time of Noah, he would have prayed for them. He would have brought them to their senses, in which case the Holy One, blessed be He, may not have wiped them out in the flood.

Hence on the verse, “*Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations,*” some of our Sages have said: “*Only in his generations was he a righteous man. Had he flourished in the generation of Moses or Samuel, he would not have been called righteous*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 30:9). If Noah had lived in the time of Abraham, he would have been considered almost insignificant, for if Abraham had lived in the time of the flood, he would have prayed for that generation and encouraged them to repent. In that case the Holy One, blessed be He, might have not brought the flood upon them.

From Noah to Abraham

The Mishnah teaches, “*There were ten generations from Adam to Noah...ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to indicate how great His patience is, for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:2).

Why did Noah not receive the reward of all these generations? Why was it Abraham who came and took the reward of them all?

We may explain this according to what our Sages have said: “*When Noah rebuked them and spoke words to them that were as hard as fiery flints, they derided him. They said to him, ‘Old man, what is this ark for?’ He replied, ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a flood upon you.’ ‘A flood of what,’ they jeered. ‘If a flood of fire, we have a substance called alitha. And if He brings a flood of water, we have iron plates with which we can cover the earth if He brings [a flood] from the earth; and we have a substance called akov if [He brings a flood] from heaven.’ He replied, ‘He will bring it from between the heels of your feet’*” (*Sanhedrin* 108b). Abraham reprimanded people in

another way. He did not speak harshly to them, but instead would invoke the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, through the attribute of chesed. How did he do this? He would open the doors of his tent to everyone who passed by. When guests came to his home, he would give them something to drink and eat until they were satisfied. When they would arise to thank him, he would say: “*Did you eat something of mine? You ate from that which belongs to the G-d of the Universe. Thank, praise, and bless Him Who spoke and the world came into being*” (*Sotah 10b*). In this way, the Name of G-d spread among men.

Furthermore, when the Holy One, blessed be He, announced to Noah that He would bring a flood to inundate the earth, He said to him: “*Come to the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation*” (*Bereshith 7:1*). Noah did not pray for the people of his generation, but instead he began to gather his sons and family to bring them into the ark. As for Abraham, when G-d said to him, “*Because the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see whether they act according to its outcry, which has come to Me*” (*Bereshith 18:20-21*), he began to weep for the inhabitants of Sodom. Thus we read that Abraham said, “*Far be it from You to do a thing such as this, to put to death the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous would be like the wicked. Far be it from You! Will the Judge of the entire earth not do justice?*” (*v.25*).

Reprimanding in Love

Why did Abraham pray for the people of his generation, but Noah did not pray for his?

It is because Noah did not possess a love for people in his heart, as Abraham did. Abraham succeeded in greatly spreading faith in G-d only through the attributed of chesed, which was engraved in him and burned in his bones. It was because of this attribute that his generation saw that he loved people, and that his reprimands stemmed from love. Hence they accepted his words and improved their ways. A father who reprimands his son while giving him to eat and drink cannot be compared to a father who reprimands his son without giving him anything, especially if he reprimands him in anger and with harsh words. This is why the reprimands of Noah were useless, whereas those of Abraham were effective. Because people could see that Abraham loved people and gave them to eat and drink, they said: “*This one loves people, demonstrates kindness, and does good for them – a sign that everything he says is true, that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world. Because of his love for us, he sets us free from sin and wants to do good for us, so that we may not be judged like the first generations.*”

Good Only Towards His Family

In the Midrash our Sages have said, “*When Noah emerged from the ark and saw the world destroyed, he began to weep before G-d and said: ‘Sovereign of the universe, You are called compassionate! You should have been compassionate to Your creation!’ The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: ‘Foolish shepherd, only now do you say this to Me? Why did you not tell Me this when I said to you: “For it is you that I have*

seen to be righteous before Me in this generation” [Bereshith 7:1], or when I said, “*I will bring a flood*” [ibid. 6:17], or when I said, “*Make yourself an ark*” [ibid. 6:14]? I constantly delayed so you could ask Me to have compassion on the world. Yet when you heard that you were going to be saved in the ark, it never entered your mind to ask Me to have compassion on the people of the world. Instead you entered the ark and were saved. Now that the world has been destroyed, you open your mouth and utter prayers and supplications before Me?”” (*Hashmatot HaZohar, Bereshith 254b*). In other words, if Noah had possessed love for people in his heart, as Abraham did, he would have prayed for the people of his generation. In that case, the Holy One, blessed be He, may not have sent the flood, for people would have repented on account of Noah’s reprimands. Yet because he did not possess a love for people, and instead reprimanded them harshly and did not pray for them, the world was flooded.

Noah only demonstrated true kindness towards his family, not towards the people of his generation. He did not reprimand people in a pleasant way, but instead used harsh words in his reprimands, which is why they refused to listen to him. It is why Noah’s reprimands were useless, and it is why he did not receive a reward greater than his deeds. When Abraham came and observed the deeds of his predecessors, he realized that there were disputes and strife in the generation of the flood. He realized that the generation of the dispersion believed that they had achieved peace, but in fact there was no love among them. He took it to heart to rectify what the former generations had damaged. What did he do? He began to reprimand people through kindness, greeting them with a pleasant face and giving them to eat and drink, thereby bringing them under the wings of the Shechinah. That being the case, it was fitting for Abraham to receive the reward of the entire world, for people came to a knowledge of G-d through him, and he achieved what the previous generations had not.

Some View it as a Criticism

It is written, “*These are the offspring of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations*” (Bereshith 6:9). Why does the Torah mention Noah’s name twice? Furthermore, why did the Sages view this as a criticism of Noah, with same Sages saying: “*In comparison to his generation he was righteous, but if he had lived in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered of any importance*”? Does the Torah not state that Noah was a righteous and perfect man? Why did the Sages feel the need to move away from the primary meaning of the verse?

We may say that the generation of the flood corrupted the earth even in regards to things it did not touch. Noah and his family were the only ones not influenced by their generation, and the only ones who did not sin. Since Noah avoided sin, Hashem supported and encouraged him, for “*if one comes to purify himself, he is given help*” (Shabbat 104a). Although Noah did not fulfill mitzvot, Hashem gave him a reward as if he had done so, for he abstained from sin. This is due to the fact that if a person “*commits no transgression, he is rewarded as though he has fulfilled a mitzvah*” (Kiddushin 39b).

Regarding this, the Sages have said: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘My sons, present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will expand it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass’*” (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 5:3). Since Noah had made a small opening, Hashem immediately expanded it into a large opening, and he was the only one to survive in his generation. Hence the fact that Hashem supported Noah was not a criticism, but resulted from Noah creating a small opening of repentance, which Hashem expanded.

Generally speaking, a person does not find favor in the eyes of Hashem unless he separates himself from the wicked. Even if he does not have the opportunity to perform a mitzvah, if he distances himself from the wicked – if he does not live with them, heed their advice, or act like them – he is considered a righteous man, deserving for the world to have been created for him. Likewise with Noah, we see that the entire world was only saved by his merit because he distanced himself from the wicked. This was the good deed of Noah, that he did not follow the ways of the wicked. Had Noah lived in Abraham’s generation and simply tried to distance himself from sin, it would have been useless, for Noah’s generation was unlike the generation of Abraham. In Noah’s generation, it was sufficient to distance oneself from sin and not deal with the ungodly, whereas in Abraham’s generation it was not enough to simply distance oneself from sin. One also had to perform good deeds.

The World is Like an Inn

How was Noah able to not get enticed by the people of his generation? It was because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, like someone who travels from place to place, his “*home*” simply being the next place he is heading to. When a person considers himself to be a foreigner in this world, he does not fall into sin. Such is the way of the tzaddikim: They make themselves into foreigners in this world, reflecting their entire lives upon the fact that they must render an accounting to the Creator at the end of their days, and that they must return to a place of maggots and dust. If a person constantly thinks about the accounting that he will have to render, he will not feel at home. He will feel like a foreigner, and since the tzaddikim make themselves into foreigners in this world, they deserve to be citizens in the World to Come.

The present world is like an inn, and the people of this world are like clients who rent a room there. Now whenever someone rents a room at an inn and becomes responsible for it, but then starts to damage something inside, the owner will come and throw him out. Thus men in the generation of the flood believed that this world belonged to them, and they began to damage the earth and fill it with violence. What did the Owner do? He wiped them off the face of the earth. Yet Noah, because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, was saved from the waters of the flood.

How do we know that Noah did not consider himself as a citizen of this world? It is from what is said about him: “*These are the offspring of Noah – Noah.*” Now we know that one increase after another leads to a decrease. The name Noah evokes menucha

(“rest”), and since Noah’s name is mentioned twice, we understand that he had no rest in this world, but was like a foreigner in it. Perhaps this is what the Sages meant when they said, “*Talmidei chachamim have no rest in this world or in the World to Come*” (*Berachot 64a*). Since they consider themselves as foreigners, and since foreigners do not rest – for they do not consider themselves as permanent residents, but are constantly thinking about their next destination, not where they actually are – they find no rest, not even for an instant.

Some of our Sages, however, believe that this contains a criticism of Noah. They say that if Noah had lived in the time of Abraham, he would not have been considered of any importance, for our father Abraham said of himself: “*I am a foreigner and a resident among you*” (*Bereshith 23:4*). Let us think about this for a moment: If he was a foreigner, he could not have been a resident, and vice-versa. Yet our father Abraham, although Hashem gave him the land of Canaan as a gift – to him and his descendants after him – still did not consider himself a permanent resident, but rather a foreigner.

Abraham considered himself as a foreigner in this world with regards to his own affairs. Yet with regards to the affairs of Heaven, he made himself into a very powerful resident, reprimanding people and bringing them closer to G-d. Abraham spread His kingdom around the world, causing Hashem’s Name to be spoken by every living being (*Bereshith Rabba 39:16*). The result was that all the inhabitants of the world knew that this great city has a leader. Yet because he considered himself a foreigner, not a resident – not even with regards to the affairs of Heaven – Noah did not reprimand his generation. As the Sforno writes, “*Noah, even if he rebuked the evil deeds of the nations, did not teach them to know G-d and walk in His ways, despite being righteous and perfect in thought and deed*” (*Sforno, Bereshith 6:8*).

That is why some people believe that this is a criticism of Noah, for Noah considered himself a foreigner and did not reprimand his generation, since only a permanent resident can do so. As for Abraham, although he considered himself a foreigner, he only acted as such in regards to his own affairs. In regards to the affairs of Heaven, however, Abraham made himself a citizen and reprimanded his contemporaries.

Sages, Be Mindful of Your Deeds

It is written, “*Noah went with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives with him, into the Ark because of the waters of the flood*” (*Bereshith 7:7*). Rashi explains this by citing the Sages: “*Noah was among those of little faith. He believed and yet did not believe that the flood would come. He did not enter the Ark until pressed upon by the waters*” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Noah 56*).

This is surprising: Is it possible that Noah – to whose righteousness the Torah testifies by stating, “*Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations*” (*Bereshith 6:9*) – acted like a man of little faith by doubting in his heart whether G-d’s word would be fulfilled, and whether or not the flood would come?

Furthermore, we do not find that Noah was greatly punished, for Rashi states that Hashem protected him from the generation of the flood, who wanted to destroy the Ark (*Rashi on Bereshith 7:17*). This means that not only was Noah not punished for failing to truly believe, but on the contrary, Hashem protected him!

We may explain this by saying that in his heart, Noah certainly believed that Hashem's word would be completely fulfilled, especially after he saw all the animals which had not been corrupted, both near and far, coming to the Ark in pairs (*Bereshith 6:20*). However he knew that Hashem's kindnesses are infinite and His mercies without bound (*Eicha 3:22*), meaning that if the generation of the flood were to think of repenting – even at the last minute, and even if just some of them did – the Holy One, blessed be He, would not bring the flood. When Noah entered the Ark, he told the people of his generation: "*You have not repented or listened to my warnings. The decree will be carried out and the flood will come.*" It is possible that if Noah's suspicions and hopes were realized, they would have repented and the flood would have been avoided. Yet in that case, if he had already entered the Ark, some people would have mistakenly believed that it only proved that all his prophesies and warnings were meaningless, being nothing but lies. That is, they would not draw the connection between the flood being averted and their repentance, theirs or others, thereby resulting in a tremendous Chillul Hashem. In fact it would have seemed as if there were no justice or Judge in the world, and everyone would have done what seemed good in his eyes. That would have resulted in the opposite of what Hashem wanted by averting the flood, He who punishes the wicked and forgives those who truly return to Him.

We find a similar idea with the prophet Jonah, who fled from Hashem when He ordered him to travel to Nineveh and prophesy that it would be destroyed in 40 days (*Jonah 3:4*). Jonah thought the same as Noah, namely that the inhabitants of Nineveh would repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, would be filled with compassion for them and not destroy the city, meaning that his prophesy would have seemed meaningless. Alternatively, they would doubt his prophesy and think that Hashem had not sent him. The Sages say that the prophet Jonah was among the righteous who gave their lives for the Children of Israel. The book *Kesef Nivchar*, by the holy Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, discusses this issue at great length.

Hence it mattered little to Noah, who wanted to avoid a desecration of Hashem's Name, if his contemporaries regarded him as lacking faith, insofar as he entered the Ark at the last possible moment as the waters of the flood forced him in. If they had repented, it would have been clear that the flood had been averted for this reason, and that Hashem had accepted their teshuvah and forgiven them. That is why Noah was not punished, since the fact that he did not really believe was on account of his love for Hashem, so that Hashem's Name would not be desecrated on account of his faith.

The prophet Jonah was punished when he fled from Hashem's order, even though his intentions were pure, as we have explained. This is because Hashem's will was

for the inhabitants of Nineveh to hear his admonishments and to repent, which is exactly what happened, resulting in a sanctification of Hashem's Name. If Jonah had not admonished them, they would not have repented and would have died on account of their sins. In regards to the generation of the flood, however, G-d knew that because they had not repented up to that point, they would also not repent as Noah was preparing to enter the Ark, which they tried to destroy. The fact that Noah did not hasten to enter the Ark did not delay their repentance, something which Noah did on his own initiative to prevent a desecration of Hashem's Name.

In light of this explanation, we may understand Noah's conduct as he entered the Ark. However from what Rashi says, Noah was criticized for this approach. We cannot say that Noah was criticized because his actions led the people of his generation to think that his faith also wavered, for what did it matter what they thought? Let the evildoers be given food and die, since in any case the entire generation was about to perish.

It seems that Noah was criticized for having portrayed himself as someone who had little faith before his son Ham. The latter was righteous as first, but when he saw that his father did not enter the Ark at the same time as the animals, he wondered why he was not hurrying inside. Ham therefore thought that Noah did not believe so much in the flood, believing and yet not really believing that it would come.

This behavior, which Ham saw in his father Noah, aroused doubts in him. True, he had already entered the Ark and the flood was already raging outside, but his faith had already been shaken, which is what pushed him to sin and have relations aboard the Ark (*Bereshith Rabba* 36:7). Now one sin leads to another, meaning that because of Ham's sin – committed due to his father's conduct before entering the Ark – he committed another sin upon leaving the Ark, when Noah became drunk and uncovered himself in his tent (*Bereshith* 9:21). It was Ham who looked upon his naked father and damaged his circumcision.

It is frightening to realize how the tzaddikim must act with tremendous precision in order not to arouse any doubts in others, not even in the weakest among the generation. There was certainly no doubting, no lack of faith, in the righteous Noah. Yet because of his deeds, he caused a great void in the faith of his son Ham.

Here we see just how careful we must be in regards to the education of children, ensuring that they learn nothing harmful from our conduct. We must explain to them why we are doing things that may appear to them as not corresponding to Hashem's will. In fact Noah was proud of the education of his children, an education that enabled them to resist the influence of the generation of the flood. Yet because Noah did not explain why he delayed in entering the Ark, he caused doubts to arise in his son Ham, to the point that Ham transgressed Hashem's orders.

How We Influence Others

It is written, “*G-d said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them, and I am about to destroy them from the earth. Make for yourself an Ark of gopher wood’*” (*Bereshith 6:13-14*).

Rashi states, “*Make for yourself an Ark – there are many ways available to Him for bringing relief and deliverance. Why, then, did He burden [Noah] with this construction? So that the people of the generation of the flood would see him occupied with it for 120 years and ask him: ‘What do you need this for?’ He would answer them, ‘G-d will bring a flood upon the world,’ and [in this way] they might repent.*”

The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Noah to build an Ark, a command that seems to require an explanation. If G-d wanted to save him from the flood, could He not have simply put him some place where the waters of the flood would not reach? Why make Noah go to all the trouble of building an Ark?

The answer is that all this flowed from G-d’s compassion on His children. The Creator of the world does not desire the death of the wicked, but rather their repentance. Hence “*there are many ways available to Him for bringing relief and deliverance,*” meaning that the people of the generation of the flood would see Noah building an Ark and ask him about it. Noah would then tell them that because of their sins, G-d would soon bring a flood upon the world.

Let us try and imagine what may have happened: Noah was building the Ark for 120 years – 120 years of measuring and sawing. Now building an Ark of 300 cubits in length by 30 cubits in height is not something that is done inconspicuously, and there is absolutely no doubt that this work did not go unnoticed by the people of the generation, who definitely talked about it. At first, everyone began asking numerous questions, but his answers did not penetrate the heart of anyone. “*A flood?!*” they would respond with contempt. Nobody believed him, and thus years passed in this way. People were born and died, decades passed, and yet Noah was still adamantly building the Ark. It is likely that little by little, people began calling it “*Noah’s Ark.*” Nevertheless, nobody repented, not even one! Noah was an upright and just individual, a man who found grace in the eyes of G-d, and probably in the eyes of men as well. This is because the two are related, as the Sages say in the Mishnah: “*Anyone with whom his fellowmen are pleased, G-d is pleased with him. Yet anyone with whom his fellowmen are not pleased, G-d is not pleased with him*” (*Pirkei Avoth 3:10*). Noah was pleasing in the eyes of G-d and men, and yet none in his generation repented? How is that possible? With the exception of Noah and his family, none in his generation tried to enter the Ark, not even when the first drops of rain began to fall and he appeared to be right after all. What does that mean? Was Noah so unpersuasive? Did he not properly explain to people what he was doing, and that there was indeed going to be a flood that would affect the entire world?

Above all, how was our father Abraham successful in bringing those in his generation to believing in Hashem – as our Sages explain concerning the words, “*The souls that they made in Haran*” (*Bereshith 12:5*): “*Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women*” (*Bereshith Rabba 39:14*) – and yet Noah was not? Why?

The verse states, “*Noah with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him, went into the Ark because of the waters of the flood*” (*Bereshith 7:7*). Here Rashi explains, “*Noah was also among those whose faith was weak. He believed, yet did not believe that the flood would come, and he did not enter the Ark until he was forced to by the waters.*” This interpretation is drawn from the Midrash, which states: “*Rabbi Yochanan said, 'He lacked faith: Had the waters not reached his ankles, he would not have entered the Ark'*” (*Bereshith Rabba 32:6*). How are we to understand these words – that Noah lacked faith? That he believed, and yet did not really believe? The rain began to fall, and yet he still hesitated; he still did not really believe that the flood would come! How was it possible for Noah’s faith to have wavered, since G-d had spoken to him like one of the prophets, giving him the task of building the Ark? There is no way to imagine that his faith wavered. In fact it’s inconceivable, since he did what he was commanded to do for 120 years! If his faith had wavered, why would he do that? Yet if his faith was solid, why did he not enter the Ark before the waters reached his ankles?

We may say that Noah understood that the goal of building the Ark was to encourage those in his generation to repent. Hence he still tried to delay the end somewhat, hoping that someone might wake up and repent, rectify his sins and be worthy of entering the Ark. That is why Noah did what he did. However he was immediately criticized for it, since the Creator of the universe was fully aware of all that happens with man, and He knew that here Noah possessed a slight deficiency in his faith. In regards to a man of Noah’s stature, G-d’s demands are very stringent, to the point that Noah is said to have “*believed, yet did not believe.*”

In fact this may be the source of the great difference between Abraham and Noah. The faith of our father Abraham was so perfect that he harbored zero doubts, even when G-d told him to sacrifice his son Isaac, a command that was completely opposed to G-d’s promise that “*in Isaac shall your offspring be called*” (*Bereshith 21:12*). Even then, Abraham did not harbor the slightest doubt.

Noah was different in this regard, for he took Heaven’s intentions into consideration. He thought: It’s true that I was commanded to enter the Ark, but the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted people to repent, so perhaps I’ll wait here a little longer.” When he made this calculation, he introduced his own understanding into the mix, something that represented a certain deficiency in faith and absolute obedience to the Creator’s will. Hence of Noah it is said that “*he believed, yet did not believe.*” However our father Abraham did not ask any questions, which is why of him it is said: “*He believed in Hashem, and He accounted it to him as righteousness*” (*Bereshith 15:6*).

This is why Abraham, not Noah, succeeded in bringing those in his generation to faith. It was not because Noah did not speak well enough or exert enough influence. In

fact he tried to encourage people to repent, and he went to great lengths in this regard, even to the point of waiting for the waters to reach his ankles before entering the Ark. He also built the Ark in full view of the people, making public proclamations of the coming flood, which everyone was told of. Yet because he lacked perfect faith deep within his heart, his words failed to have an impact on people, contrary to the words of Abraham.

From here we must realize that if we want to increase the glory of Heaven – if we want to have an influence on others – then the best way of doing this is by starting with ourselves! Only then will our influence have an effect. When someone wants to influence another person in a certain area, but is not himself perfect in that area, he is bound to fail. It cannot be otherwise. Yet when he works on himself, people will be influenced and motivated to emulate him!

Parsha Lech Lecha

Performing Mitzvot With Enthusiasm, not Out of Simple Habit

It is written, “*There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.... Abram said to Lot, ‘Please, let there be no strife between me and you.... Please, separate from me. If you go to the left, I will go to the right, and if you go to the right, I will go to the left’*” (*Genesis 13:7-9*). According to our Sages, this dispute revolved around the fact that Abraham’s livestock went out muzzled, while Lot’s livestock did not (*Bereshith Rabba 41:5*). Lot’s herdsmen were wicked, grazing their livestock in other people’s fields and thereby profiting from theft.

This does not seem to have bothered Lot in any way, and no doubt he even agreed with what they were doing. In fact Lot possessed a love for money, a desire that makes a person become irrational and turns him away from his Creator. Even if we see a tendency towards hospitality in Lot (since he would later invite angels into his home), here Abraham said to him, “*Separate from me.*” Why did he say this? It is because good and evil were mixed together in Lot, and his proximity to Abraham would have only tarnished the latter’s name. People would have distanced themselves from Abraham instead of drawing closer to him. He would have been unable to bring them under the wings of the Shechinah, and thus the Name of Heaven would have been desecrated. The fact that Lot reached such a low point that good and evil were mixed in him, however, remains difficult to understand. On one hand Lot had a good heart, for he practiced hospitality like Abraham, but on the other hand he acted like a thief, allowing his livestock to graze in the fields of others. Abraham’s reaction is even more surprising, for why didn’t he try and convince Lot to repent? After all, Abraham had such a good influence on people that they repented and recognized Hashem. Therefore why didn’t he try to do the same with Lot, his own nephew?

In the Mishnah we read, “*Not study, but practice is the essential thing*” (*Perkei Avoth 1:17*). The Torah also tells us, “*Know this day and take it unto your heart*” (*Deuteronomy 4:39*), which means that in order to draw closer to Hashem, it is not enough just to know Torah; we must actually carry it out! We must infuse the knowledge of the Torah deep within our hearts, and we must live with that knowledge. Only in this way can we draw closer to Hashem and become completely spiritual beings.

As for Lot, he initially drew closer to Abraham and was actually quite close to him. He emulated all his deeds and walked in the same path as him. Yet after a certain time, Lot became accustomed to Abraham’s home, and thus the generosity that Lot demonstrated was purely superficial in nature. It did not come from his heart, nor did he put much effort into helping the community or the individual. Thus Lot descended

from his initially high level and eventually reached the abyss.

At that point Scripture says of him, “*Vegam [And also] Lot, who went with Abram*” (*Genesis 13:5*). The numerical value of vegam is 49, which means that Lot descended all the way to the 49th gate of impurity, for he returned from Egypt with all of its vices. The Egyptians were immersed in indecency, theft, and other crimes, and Lot learned from them all. Hence at that point it is written: “*Who went with Abram*,” for Lot had already separated from him completely. Lot was already performing every mitzvah out of habit, to the point that they did not provide him with sufficient merit to be saved from the sins of the inhabitants of Sodom.

We see something similar to this in our own time, when great Torah scholars are careless with regards to Lashon Harah, despite the gravity of this sin. How can this be? It is because they study Halachah only to teach others. With regards to learning it for themselves, they fail to understand it completely and with the utmost clarity. Furthermore, all their learning is superficial, for they study out of habit. They do not learn Halachah in order to put it into practice, to know and internalize it. Since we have reached this point, we can completely understand the questions that were raised earlier. That is, why did Abraham not try and bring his nephew Lot back to the right path, as he had done with so many others in his generation?

It is certain that Abraham tried to encourage Lot to repent, this being hinted at in the verse itself: When Abraham told Lot, “*Please, separate from me*,” he used the word na (‘please’), which is a request. In other words, Abraham did not express himself in a clear-cut way. He left Lot the possibility to repent and return. In fact if he really wanted to, Lot could have begged Abraham to help him return to the right path.

However Lot failed to do this, for he saw the vast plain of the Jordan, which was extremely lush (*Genesis 13:10*). He was drawn to the desires and futile pursuits of this world, not with being close to the tzaddikim. Thus he left his uncle Abraham because he preferred to live with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he became completely estranged from Judaism. Thus the Sages say: “*Lot journeyed mikedem [from the east]. ’He removed himself mikadmon [from the Ancient One] of the world, saying: ‘I want neither Abraham nor his G-d’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 41:7*). Because Lot repudiated the kindnesses of Abraham, he eventually repudiated the kindnesses of Hashem by saying, “*I want neither Abraham nor his G-d.*” All this happened because Lot did everything out of habit, not from his heart. Therefore even when Abraham left Lot with an opening for repentance, he refused to take it. He neglected this opening and instead rejoiced at the prospect of leaving Abraham and the faith of Israel, and moreover Lot felt superior to Abraham! Thus Lot arrived at an extremely low point. We must all learn from this and realize just how much we need to cleave to the tzaddikim and serve Hashem enthusiastically, not superficially. By doing so, we can all elevate ourselves in the service of Hashem until we reach the 50th gate of holiness.

The Deeds of the Fathers Are a Sign for the Children

The Sages say, “*Why was our father Abraham punished and his children doomed to Egyptian servitude for 210 years? Because he pressed scholars into his service, as it is written: ‘He armed his dedicated servants born in his own house’ [Genesis 14:14]. Shemuel said, ‘Because he went too far in testing the attributes of the L-RD, as it is written: “How shall I know that I will inherit it?” [ibid. 15:8].’ Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Because he prevented men from entering beneath the wings of the Shechinah, as it is written: “Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself” [ibid. 14:21]’ ”* (Nedarim 32a).

The book Be'er Mechokek asks how the Children of Israel could be punished for Abraham's sin, since the Torah states: “*Fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin*” (Deuteronomy 24:16). It is also difficult to understand how Abraham's sin consisted of sending Torah scholars into battle, since Hashem Himself helped Abraham in battle. In fact when Shem, the son of Noah, asked Eliezer, “*When the kings of the east and the west waged war against you, what did you do?*” he replied: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, summoned Abraham and seated him on His right. We threw sand upon them and a miracle happened, for the sand became spears; we threw stubble and it became arrows.*” Along the same line of thought, the Midrash states: “*Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah differed. One maintained: ‘This means that Abraham threw dust at them, which turned to swords; stubble, and it turned to arrows.’ But the other argued: ‘It is not written, ‘He makes dust,’ but ‘He makes them as the dust’ – they threw swords at Abraham, which turned to dust; arrows, which became stubble’ ”* (Bereshith Rabba 43:3). Therefore could anyone even think that the Holy One, blessed be He, would have helped Abraham and performed miracles for him if a trace of sin was involved?

It is also difficult to understand where Rabbi Eliezer learns that the Children of Israel were punished because Abraham had pressed Torah scholars into service, since the Name of Hashem was eventually sanctified. As the king of Sodom said to Abraham: “*Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself*” (Genesis 14:21). Abraham replied that he could not take this money, for the Holy One, blessed be He, saw to all his needs. He also said, “*I have lifted up my hand to the L-RD, the most high G-d, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a sandal strap. I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’ ”* (vv.22-23). Here Abraham was announcing to the king of Sodom that gold and silver meant nothing to him. As the Ben Ish Hai comments on the verse, “*Abram was very heavy in cattle, in silver, and in gold*” (Genesis 13:2), what does “very heavy” mean? It means that silver and gold weighed Abraham down, and only Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds were easy for him. He therefore sanctified Hashem's Name by sending his servants into battle. Therefore where did Rabbi Eliezer learn that this was a sin?

We may explain this according to what Hashem told Abraham: “*I will make your seed as the dust of the earth*” (v.16). Why does He say “as the dust of the earth,” rather

than “*as the sand of the sea*” or “*as the stars of the heavens*”? Abraham was being told that just as he overcame adversity, his descendants would overcome adversity without transgressing. Even if their enemies threatened to kill them, they would not deny their faith, for they would rather give up their lives than deny it, just as Abraham overcame adversity by the humility he possessed. In fact he made himself like the dust, as he said: “*I am dust and ashes*” (*Genesis 18:27*), for dust does not grow proud, since everyone tramples upon it. Such was Abraham’s distinguishing feature, as the Mishnah states: “*The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul*” (*Pirkei Avot 5:19*). Therefore the Jewish people demonstrate this humility and meekness before Hashem, and just as Abraham yielded before Him, they yield before Him like the dust of the earth and overcome adversity. This is a great principle: Whoever possesses humility and the ability to compromise, there is no obstacle that he cannot overcome, for he annuls himself before G-d and thereby fulfills all that He decrees for him, without ever questioning His decisions. Hence G-d told Abraham, “*I will make your seed as the dust of the earth*,” meaning that the Jewish people will be as humble as him, and by this trait they would merit to overcome adversity.

This is why Abraham was later punished for preventing his disciples from studying Torah when he sent them into battle. In fact Abraham knew that he would not die in battle and that the kings he was facing could not defeat him, for when he left Haran Hashem made him the promise of lech lecha, which has a numerical value of 100. This meant that he would live for another 100 years. He therefore had no right to take his disciples away from their Torah study. Even if he did this in order to make them fulfill a mitzvah, the fact that Hashem had promised that he would not be defeated in battle meant that he could have waged war alone. He did not have to take his disciples away from studying. Furthermore, as our Sages have said: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Abraham a sign that everything that happened to him would also happen to his descendants.*” That being the case, his descendants would learn from him to neglect the study of Torah, which is why he was punished. It was not because he had sinned, for he had diverted them from study in order to fulfill a mitzvah – without counting the fact that Hashem had helped him in battle, meaning that it could not have been an actual sin – but because it contained a teaching for all his descendants in every generation. They must not do the same, but instead they must constantly be engaged in the study of Torah. They cannot interrupt their learning as long as there is no urgent need. In fact the Sages have said, “*Schoolchildren may not be made to neglect [Torah study], even for the building of the Temple*” (*Shabbat 119b*). Here Abraham should have gone out to battle alone; there was no need for him to interrupt the Torah study of his disciples.

We should not be surprised that Abraham was punished despite the fact that no sin actually took place, for in this regard it is stated: “*Sages, be careful with your words, for you may incur the penalty of exile and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who follow you there will drink and die, and consequently the Name of*

*Heaven will be desecrated” (Pirkei Avoth 1:11). Along the same line of thought, the Gemara states that the disciples of Hillel hold that one may recite Shema while standing, sitting, reclining, walking on the road, or at work. The disciples of Shammai hold that in the morning one must recite Shema while standing, and in the evening while sitting. Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah were once dining at the same place, with Rabbi Yishmael reclining and Rabbi Eleazar standing upright. When the time came to recite Shema, Rabbi Eleazar reclined and Rabbi Yishmael stood upright. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah said to Rabbi Yishmael, “*Brother Yishmael, I will tell you a parable. To what can this situation be compared? It is like a man to whom people say, ‘You have a fine beard,’ and he replies, ‘I will cut it off just to spite you.’ So too with you: As long as I was upright, you were reclining. Yet now that I recline, you stand upright!*” He replied: “*I acted according to the rule of Hillel, while you acted according to the rule of Shammai. What’s more is that I had to act in this way, lest the disciples see and fix the Halachah for future generations accordingly*” (*Berachot 11a*). All the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children. This is why Abraham was punished, lest his children learn from him to neglect the study of Torah. He was punished for the desecration of Hashem’s Name, not because he committed a sin.*

Why Didn’t Abraham Fear a Neglect of Torah Study?

It is written, “*Abram heard that his brother had been captured, and he armed his disciples who had been born in his house, 318, and pursued them as far as Dan. He with his servants deployed against them at night and struck them. He pursued them as far as Hovah, which is to the left of Damascus*” (*Bereshith 14:14-15*). This is absolutely amazing: How could our father Abraham have imagined taking the disciples of his home away from learning Torah in order to save his nephew Lot? After all, we can assume that Abraham, the greatest among the people, had faith that G-d would help him in battle. He could have therefore gone out to fight his enemies alone! Why then did he take 318 of his disciples with him?

We also have to wonder about what our Sages have said in the Midrash: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: ‘You have killed My enemies from midnight until morning. By your life, I will descend to kill the enemies of your descendants from midnight until morning’*” (*Yilamdeinu Bereshith 71*). Were the four kings who took Lot captive G-d’s only enemies? Lot himself had left our father Abraham and denied G-d, saying: “*I want neither Abraham nor his G-d!*” (*Bereshith Rabba 41:7*).

Profaning G-d’s Name

It seems to me that we may say that Abraham only went out to fight against the four kings in order to prevent a desecration of Hashem’s Name in the world. In fact when these kings captured Lot, they thought they had captured Abraham because they greatly resembled one another (*Yilamdeinu Bereshith 70*). As such, our father Abraham feared that G-d’s Name would be profaned, and that the nations would say: “*In the past, his G-d saved him from Nimrod, but now his G-d has grown weaker and allowed him to be*

captured by the king of Sodom. They have no strength, neither him nor his G-d." This is why Abraham hurried, at the cost of removing his disciples from their learning, to sanctify G-d's Name in the world. He knew that forgiveness exists in this world for a neglect of Torah study, but profaning G-d's Name can only be atoned by death, a much graver sin. Since Abraham went out to fight for G-d's honor, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "*Just as you went out to war and killed My enemies – for if My Name had been profaned, these would have become My enemies – by your life, I will save your descendants from the hand of their enemies in the future!*" This is Hashem's great promise to Abraham, that He would immediately deliver his descendants from Egypt at midnight.

Earlier, Abraham's shepherds and Lot's shepherds had been quarreling with one another, for the latter had brought their animals to graze in the fields of the former, who protested against them (*Bereshith Rabba 41:5*). Abraham then said to Lot, "*Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are brothers*" (*Bereshith 13:8*). Our Sages have explained that they resembled one another (*Bereshith Rabba 41:6*), and that anyone who saw Lot's animals grazing in the fields of others thought to himself, "*Abraham lets his animals graze in the fields of others,*" and the Name of Heaven was profaned. Lot immediately separated from him.

What Proof is That?

According to all this, we can clearly understand the beginning of this week's parsha, where it is said that our father Abraham's first trial occurred when Hashem said to him, "*Go from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house*" (*Bereshith 12:1*). Rashi explains this to mean: "*For your benefit and for your good.*" It is difficult to understand what Rashi is adding by this. Furthermore, our father Abraham completely humbled himself before Hashem and said, "*I am but dust and ashes*" (*Bereshith 18:27*). Therefore how can we assume that it was difficult for Abraham to fulfill Hashem's order, and how can we say that it was a trial for him?

The answer is that although Abraham fulfilled Hashem's orders in all times and places – just as a servant fulfills the orders of his master – this particular order still constituted a trial for him. How so? It was because Abraham was afraid that Hashem's Name would be profaned and that people would say, "*How can leaving be for his benefit and his good?*" Hashem therefore told Abraham not to fear a desecration of His Name, and thus Abraham overcame this trial when he left his country and birthplace to fulfill Hashem's word. This is why Rashi explained that it was "*for your benefit and for your good,*" teaching us that this constituted the essence of his trial: Our father Abraham was afraid that Hashem's honor would be profaned.

Moshe's Consolation

Moshe Rabbeinu as well, when he stood in prayer before Hashem to ask Him for mercy on Israel after the sin of the golden calf, mentioned this merit, saying: "*Why*

should the Egyptians speak and say, ‘With an evil intention He took them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ ... Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself and told them, ‘I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven’” (Shemot 32:12-13).

As such, Moshe told G-d: Remember the deeds of the Patriarchs, who devoted their entire lives to preventing a desecration of Your Name. If you destroy Israel, Your Name will be profaned among the peoples.

Once Moshe said this, it is immediately written: “*Hashem repented of the evil that He declared He would do to His people*” (v.14).

Exile Yourself to a Place of Torah!

It is written, “*Hashem said to Abram, ‘Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you’” (Bereshith 12:1).*

Having to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father’s house constituted our father Abraham’s first trial, which he overcame. We need to understand the nature of this trial and its goal. We know that the goal of trials imposed upon the righteous is to elevate them, as in the verse: “*You gave to those who fear You a banner le’hitnoses [to be raised high]*” (Tehillim 60:6), and le’hitnoses can also mean “*to be tried*.” Our father Abraham accomplished extraordinary things when he was in Haran, as the Sages say: “*Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women*” (Bereshith Rabba 84:4; Bamidbar Rabba 14:11). They brought many people under the wings of the Shechinah and taught them to know Hashem. Thus for what goal did G-d interrupt Abraham’s spiritual work in Haran, where he was constantly growing, and command him to go to the land of Canaan? We also need to consider something else: G-d promised Abraham that once he left his land and went into exile, He would make him into a great people, blessing him and increasing his renown. This needs to be understood, for if G-d’s will was to bless Abraham and make his name great, then why did He not create a great people from him in his own land and birthplace, thus fulfilling all the blessings and promises that He made to him in Haran itself? Even without these blessings, G-d could have commanded Abraham to go to the land of Canaan, for Abraham would have certainly done His will without the need for encouragement or enticements!

Let us attempt to explain this as best we can. We know that the Sages have said, “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah*” (Pirkei Avoth 4:14), meaning that a person who wants to merit the crown of Torah must exile himself to a place of Torah. This is where sages and scholars live, a place where he must study Torah alongside them.

Exiling oneself to a place of Torah has another great benefit, as the Sages say: “*Words of Torah only endure with one who kills himself for it*” (Shabbat 83b; Berachot 63b). Now we know that exile atones for those deserving of death (see Sanhedrin 37b), for the difficulties and suffering of exile are regarded as a kind of death. Therefore a person

who exiles himself to a place of Torah, and who kills himself in order to learn and acquire it, is promised that it will endure in him, meaning that he will acquire it in a firm and permanent way. Furthermore, this exile will constitute an atonement for his sins, for if he unfortunately deserved death, his exile will atone for it. At that point, he will acquire life in the World to Come, for the Torah is a tree of life to those who grab hold of it (*Mishlei 3:18*), and it spreads an abundance of life upon those who study it (*Berachot 32b; Taanith 7a*). Also, a person who exiles himself to a place of Torah attributes value and importance to it, something for which the Torah will abundantly repay him, making him great and exalting him above all things (*Pirkei Avoth 6:1*). His learning will then earn him, starting in this world, great satisfaction as well as tremendous goodness.

One who studies Torah will enjoy its fruits in this world, while the principle will remain for him in the World to Come (*Peah 1:1*). He will also experience blessings in his spiritual life and in his learning, as it is written: “*And zot [this] is the blessing*” (*Devarim 33:1*), meaning that the Torah – which is designated by the term *zot* (*Avodah Zarah 2b*) – will be fulfilled in him. Furthermore, the Shechinah, which is also called *zot* (*Zohar 1:93b*), will watch over and protect him. How many lofty levels and eternal kindnesses await the person who exiles himself to a place of Torah, and who devotes himself to acquiring it!

According to this explanation, we can fully understand why G-d commanded Abraham to leave everything he had done in Haran, and why the blessing depended on him leaving his land. G-d’s will was for Abraham to exile himself to a place of Torah and reach the levels that it enables a person to reach. He commanded him to go to Eretz Israel, which is a holy place, a place intended for the study of Torah. We know what the Sages have taught concerning Abraham, namely that he had no father or teacher to instruct him about anything. However his two kidneys began to give him wise advice, and they taught him Torah (*Bereshith Rabba 61:1; Tanchuma, Vayigash 11*). Hence G-d told him to leave his land in order to perfect himself in Torah and mitzvot in a place of Torah, meaning in Eretz Israel.

Although Abraham had already obtained impressive results and accomplished many things in spreading G-d’s word while in Haran, there were still limits to what a man could do while living in his own land and in his father’s home, being attached to his family and circle of friends. Since this did not suit Abraham or his faith, he had to separate himself from his family and circle of friends, and to exile himself to a place of Torah in order to attain perfection in the service of G-d.

On the expression *lech lecha*, Rashi states: “*Go for yourself, for your own benefit and your own good.*” In other words: By leaving your land, you will benefit and attain perfect spiritual goodness, both for you and all the people you brought under the wings of the Shechinah by encouraging them to exile themselves to a place of Torah. As such they will make true Torah acquisitions, reaching heights that were impossible to reach in Haran. They will be worthy of a true and complete blessing, which only comes through Torah study and exiling oneself to a place of Torah. Where was he to go? “*To*

*the land that arecha [I will show you]" (Bereshith 12:1), the term arecha coming from the root ohr (*light*). In other words: You must go to a place where the light of Torah will shine forth – "For the Torah will come forth from Zion, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3) – and the air of Eretz Israel makes a person wise (Bava Batra 158b).*

According to what we have said – that leaving his land was Abraham's way of exiling himself to a place of Torah – we may add what Rashi states: "G-d said to Abraham, 'Go' – meaning, 'If you walk in My decrees and observe My mitzvot' [Vayikra 26:3]," a verse which Rashi explains as: "If you labor in [the study of] Torah." One who constantly improves his Torah learning and spiritual state will deserve to have everything, as it is written: "I will give rain for your land at the proper time" (Devarim 11:14). Because Abraham would leave for the Holy Land, he would merit to inherit it, he would merit a son, and he would merit a covenant. Furthermore, the Shechinah would dwell upon him in order to transform him into Hashem's Chariot.

As we previously explained, it was through overcoming trials that Abraham opened the way to his descendants and all the generations after him, making it much easier for us to overcome the difficulties that lie in our path. He also implanted in us the courage and strength to exile ourselves to a place of Torah so as to increase our wisdom, in which case we will obtain the true blessings that are found in the holy Torah.

Man is Led Along the Path Which He Desires to Take

It is written, "There was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. ... So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not all the land before you? Please separate from me: If you go left, then I will go right. And if you go right, then I will go left'" (Bereshith 13:7-9).

After journeying together for so many years, our father Abraham spoke to Lot and said: "Please separate from me." Abraham realized that during all the time that they had been together, Lot was not influenced by him for the better. Although Lot was not morally depraved at that point, Abraham knew that not everything was right with him. Hence he preferred to part ways with Lot.

The fact that Lot was close to our father Abraham, and yet was not influenced by him for the better, is somewhat surprising. After all, is it possible to live in the shadow of such a great tzaddik – to whom G-d had revealed Himself, and to whom He had spoken – and not to be influenced by him in the slightest way?

The Sages have said that everything is related to a person's desires. If a person wants to, he can learn even from a small child. However if he does not want to, then he cannot learn anything, not even from a person as great as Abraham. Lot, who did not want to learn, and who had decided to let himself be drawn towards vanity and glitter – desires and wealth – did not want to take advantage of Abraham's presence in order to learn from him.

Lot showed his true colors when he separated from Abraham, for he immediately went to live in Sodom. Why? Because “*Lot raised his eyes and saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere.*” The Sages and commentators explain how Lot chose the place where he wanted to live: By its external beauty! Here we retroactively see the true reason why, when Lot was still with Abraham, his heart was really in Sodom. When desires are actively at work, external beauty is enticing.

This is also why we do not find Lot’s response to Abraham in Scripture. The passage continues by simply stating: “*Lot raised his eyes.*”

This teaches us that Lot did not even try to argue with Abraham’s request that they part ways. He simply left for Sodom right away. This is similar to a child whose parents have forbidden him from playing with his toys. As soon as they allow him to play with them, he does so immediately, without even discussing it. Up until that time, Lot had been constrained by Abraham and thus unable to openly demonstrate his desires. He only did so through his herdsmen, whose thievery and violence testified to the fact that he was not upright. If the opposite had been true, Lot would have made certain that his flocks did not eat what was not his and indirectly benefit from theft. In fact when Abraham mentioned the idea of them parting ways, instead of begging Abraham not to send him away, Lot immediately fled and went in search of a place to live. The place that suited him best was Sodom – like a child who runs away from school!

When we consider all this, we discover a great ethical teaching here: Lot tried to flee from Abraham, to distance himself from him and his Creator. Where did all this take place? Near a certain city, Sodom! The Sages have taught, “*Man is led along the path which he desires to take*” (*Bamidbar Rabba* 20:12). We know this from the Torah, for at first Bilam was told: “*You shall not go with them*” (*Bamidbar* 22:12). Yet once he became so brazen as to want to go, G-d said to him: “*Rise up and go with them*” (v.20). We know this from the books of the Prophets as well, for it is written: “*I am Hashem your G-d, Who instructs you for your benefit, Who guides you in the path to follow*” (*Isaiah* 48:17). We also know this from the Writings: “*If to the scoffers, He will scoff. Yet He grants favor to the humble*” (*Mishlei* 3:34).

All this means that if a person desires to walk along a certain path, even if it is harmful, he will receive assistance. Naturally, he will eventually be reprimanded for it, since it was on account of his desires that such help was given to him. This is something that we learn from Bilam, for when he wanted to curse the Children of Israel, he was first told: “*You shall not go with them.*” Yet afterwards, since he desired it so greatly, he was given permission to go, for “*man is led along the path which he desires to take.*” Bilam wanted to see Balak, and he was given permission to go. To this incident, the Sages applied the verse: “*If to the scoffers, He will scoff.*”

That is what happened here. Lot wanted to leave, to distance himself from Abraham. He wanted to become wicked, to commit violence and theft, and not to see the good in others. Thus Heaven led him to a place that was fully in accordance with his desires, namely Sodom.

There is a great lesson to learn from this, be it for the good or not, for if a person has the misfortune of wanting to do evil, he will receive every opportunity to do so, whether this consists of money to steal, a desire for immoral behavior, forbidden work, or anything else. Nevertheless, G-d will call him to account for all these things. However G-d's compassion towards us is greater than the pull in the opposite direction, and as a result when a person desires to do evil, we can barely imagine how much help he will receive from Heaven if he desires to better himself. We learn this from what the Sages have said: "*If a man comes to defile himself, the doors are opened to him. If he comes to purify himself, he is helped*" (*Yoma 38b*). A person who wants to defile himself is just provided with an opening, but he is not helped! As for someone who wants to purify himself, he is actively helped! As a result, we are obligated to belong to that group which "*wants to purify themselves*," in which case we will receive unlimited help from Heaven.

Speak Well and Act Correctly

It is written, "*So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant – after ten years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan – and gave her to Abram her husband, to him as a wife*" (*Bereshith 16:3*).

Hagar was the daughter of Pharaoh. In fact Rashi recounts that when Pharaoh saw the great miracles that Abraham experienced at Ur Kasdim, as well as perceiving the greatness of Sarah, he declared: "*Better that my daughter be a servant in the house of Abraham than a mistress in another house.*"

Hagar was not an ordinary woman; indeed, she possessed merit. She was certainly a person of great importance for having cleaved to the sacred body of Abraham. Furthermore, our Sages have commented on her name *Keturah*, stating that her deeds were as pleasing as incense (*ketoret*), which is why she was bound to Abraham. In reality, the very fact of having been accepted as a maidservant was a sign of her self-sacrifice and complete submission. She could have been a queen, but since she understood the greatness of Abraham's house, she disdained honor and royalty. Instead, she preferred the life of a maidservant in the home of a tzaddik to a palatial existence filled with pleasure in the house of Pharaoh.

We should add that the numerical value of the name Hagar, plus one for the name itself, is equal to that of the term *acher* ("other"), namely 209. This means that after realizing the greatness of Abraham and Sarah, she decided to renounce her own personal status and royalty, and thus merited to become "other," meaning different. It sometimes happens that the term *acher* is used in a negative sense, as with Elisha ben Abuyah, the teacher of Rabbi Meir, when he renounced his faith in G-d. However in the case of Hagar, this term has a sacred meaning because Hagar yielded to a tzaddik and thus transformed herself into something "other." Likewise for Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who in the episode of the spies is said to have been motivated by "*a different [acheret] spirit*" (*Bamidbar 14:24*).

It is very surprising that only Hagar cleaved to Abraham after realizing his greatness. Why was Pharaoh – who was aware of the miracle that Abraham experienced in the furnace of Ur Kasdim, who had lived through the incredible “rescue” of Sarah in Egypt, and had decided to send his daughter with Abraham after having appreciated his greatness – not moved to repentance, but instead remained mired in sinfulness?

In truth, the evil inclination is very good at inciting people to “*speak well but act badly.*” The evil inclination encourages us to preach to others, and yet persist in our sinful ways and deeds. It even fills us with the illusion of being righteous...since after all, we’re encouraging others to repent! All the same, we still fail to work on ourselves. Pharaoh thought that since he had encouraged his daughter to follow Abraham, and since he had pushed her to admire the nobility of his household, he had no further need to change! Hence he persisted in his evil ways and did not try to repent.

Every person must constantly reflect upon his own conduct. It is not enough to listen to words of Mussar or the reprimands of others. We must internalize ethical teachings and learn how to undertake our own spiritual accounting in order to become a different person. Furthermore, we know of ordinary people who have reached great spiritual heights due to such spiritual accounting. For example, the maidservant of Rabbeinu HaKodesh once saw a man committing a transgression and excommunicated him. Even after the man died, Rabban Gamliel did not annul the ban of excommunication. Why not? According to the Rosh, Rabban Gamliel considered this maidservant to be at a higher level than himself, meaning that he was afraid to annul her decision.

How could Rabban Gamliel have thought that this woman was at a higher level, since she was just a maidservant? Why exactly did he feel this way? He concluded that the maidservant had reflected upon the greatness of G-d and thus transformed herself into a person of great value, despite the simple work and ordinary household tasks that constituted her daily life. Despite all this, she had been stirred by the transgression of the man in question and demonstrated her zealousness for G-d by excommunicating him. Rabban Gamliel therefore did not wish to annul the ban pronounced by this woman, for although she was a simple maidservant, she had elevated herself and become an “*other*” woman. As for Lavan the Aramean, he provides us with the opposite example of the right attitude. Despite witnessing the piety of Jacob and knowing the complete truth, he still failed to repent. Furthermore, he pursued Jacob with the aim of killing him! Nevertheless, Lavan realized that he had grown wealthy ever since Jacob began to live in his home, and he knew that all his endeavors were crowned with success and his possession were blessed on Jacob’s account. In fact Lavan detained Jacob for numerous years so that blessings could continue to rest on his home. Nevertheless, he still failed to repent and he remained with his idols. How can we explain such behavior? The answer is that it is not enough to meditate upon the greatness of the Creator and be momentarily awe-inspired. We must constantly be aware of our spiritual condition and keep a watchful eye on our own conduct. It is only by reflecting upon our deeds and behavior that we can improve them. Why did Lavan not experience any desire to

repent? It would seem that he was missing the foundation, since he failed to commit himself to the path of Torah. Now it is impossible to construct a solid building without a sound foundation. Having not studied or benefited from a foundation of Torah, Lavan did not commit himself to improving his character traits, but remained mired in his sins.

Who's Afraid of Charity Collectors?

It is written, “*Hashem said to Abram, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you’*” (*Bereshith 12:1*).

Rashi: “*Go for yourself – for your benefit and for your good.*” At first glance, an explanation isn’t necessary, for it is obvious that Abraham awaited neither rewards nor kindnesses from the Creator for obeying Him, nor for leaving his land and birthplace! In fact it is taught, “*Do not be like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward*” (*Pirkei Avoth 1:3*). That being the case, what did G-d mean by saying: “*Go for yourself – for your benefit and for your good*”? This seems to imply that without such promises, our father Abraham would not have listened to His word!

Let explain this at a deeper level: Abraham knew that his role in this world consisted uniquely of serving G-d, a responsibility that brought him only good. He derived intense spiritual joy from everything connected to serving G-d. For example, he considered it a divine benefit and immense kindness to be capable of fulfilling mitzvot. This was also his feeling when he converted numerous inhabitants in Haran, bringing them under the wings of the Shechinah (*Bereshith Rabba 39:14*). As such, Abraham felt that he was greatly favored by being allowed to lead these people to repentance, and it brought him joy and satisfaction.

Thus when Hashem commanded him to abandon everything, to leave his land for an unknown land, Abraham was faced with a very serious trial. That is, he had to leave the place where he had grown up and was raised, the place where he had studied and taught. There the name of G-d had been sanctified in public, something that brought Abraham satisfaction, happiness, and spiritual pleasure.

This is why Hashem assured him that “*one is allowed to follow the path that he wishes to pursue*” (*Makkot 10b*). In other words, just as Abraham had been happy in Haran that numerous mitzvot presented themselves to him, likewise in “*the land that I will show you*” he would have the opportunity to perform mitzvot by the thousands, and he would be satisfied by them. In particular, this consists of walking four cubits in the land of Israel (*Bava Batra 100a*), which could not be done in Haran. Thus by noting the numerous opportunities for doing good deeds being offered to him, Abraham would again be filled with supreme and intense spiritual joy.

This is the meaning of the phrase that G-d spoke to Abraham: “*Go for yourself – for your benefit and for your good.*” In fact by overcoming the trial of “*Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that*

I will show you,” Abraham would find happiness and goodness, for the fulfillment of numerous mitzvot would be possible for him there, and he considered that Heaven was benefiting him in this way. It was for this reason that we may affirm that he cherished the trials he faced, for he was confronted by ten trials and overcame them all (*Pirkei Avot 5:3*). In this Abraham saw an expression of Divine generosity, and he derived great satisfaction from it. The same applied to King David, who said: “*It is good for me that I was afflicted, so that I might learn Your statutes*” (*Tehillim 119:71*). In other words, “*The misfortunes and suffering that G-d sent me are proof of His love for me.*” As we know, “*Suffering is precious*” (*Sanhedrin 101a*), and King David reacted in the very opposite way of those who reject the yoke of Heaven as soon as they face trials or hardships. They lash out against Hashem whenever problems arise, not realizing that they are actually the recipients of great generosity. In fact G-d is sending them hardships in this world so they can merit eternal life in the World to Come.

Examples of this are not lacking. Those who rebel against the ups and downs of life are the same people who flee from charity collectors like the plague! They close their doors on them, considering them like angels of destruction intent on ruining their wealth! They should instead see them as an expression of great kindness from Heaven that allow them to do charity, which on its own has the power to save, as it is written: “*Charity saves from death*” (*Mishlei 10:2*). They could also realize that they have merited being G-d’s partners by acting with compassion to those in need. Finally, even when such people give charity, they will not feel favored by Heaven for having been a partner in supporting a charity institution, but instead they will feel wronged and exploited.

For example, when a merchant is on his way to open his shop, and someone asks him to come to synagogue to complete a minyan, he may sometimes feel exploited and offended for having been “*offered*” this mitzvah at that particular time.

However Abraham’s attitude was different, and he instilled his approach into his descendants for all the generations. He teaches us that if we are told, “*Go for yourself from artzecha [your land]*” – if circumstances lead us to depart from artziut [materiality], from the vanities and pleasures of this world to a spiritual place where we can study more Torah – then we should appreciate such an opportunity. In fact this proves that it is an infinite kindness of G-d, Who is pushing us to perform this great mitzvah, which is the study of Torah.

Thus if people ask us to help them in some way, we must consider it as a great merit from Heaven. We must realize that wealth belongs to G-d alone, and that He is the One Who gives us the ability to fulfill this incredible deed of supporting the poor, the bnei Torah, and the needy. Thus if a mitzvah presents itself to us as we are going to work, we should not feel wronged or exploited. On the contrary, we should rejoice for having been chosen by Heaven to fulfill mitzvot! This is the teaching the Abraham bequeathed to all the generations.

Parsha Vayeira

The Importance of Hospitality

From this week's parsha the Sages learn that "*hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Shechinah*" (*Shabbat 127a*). While the Holy One, blessed be He, was speaking to Abraham in a prophetic vision, he saw three men approaching him. What did he do? He apologized, as it were, to Hashem and interrupted the vision so he could run out to these men and invite them into his home.

One may ask how Abraham could have possibly rejected the tremendous opportunity of "*welcoming the Shechinah*" in order to deal with matters of hospitality. True, showing hospitality is a great mitzvah, but does it approach the level of welcoming the Shechinah? Anybody can practice hospitality, but only a few exceptional people are ever granted prophetic visions.

Another question is whether it was appropriate for Abraham to have acted in the way that he did. While the Holy One, blessed be He, was speaking to him in a prophetic vision, Abraham said: "*My L-rd, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass away from Your servant*" (*Genesis 18:3*). He then left and ran after his guests! Now imagine that someone important is speaking to you. Would you suddenly cut him off in mid-sentence and say, "*Sorry, but I have some guests to attend to now. We'll continue this conversation some other time*"? Obviously, it would be impolite to suddenly leave while he is speaking so you can go and welcome some guests. How much more is this true if we were speaking with the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He! We shall soon understand, however, how Abraham's actions were justified. The situation is like that of a king who had a fisherman among his royal servants, a man who was responsible for catching and cooking fish for him. One day this fisherman was sitting by the water for a long time, but had caught nothing. He began to wonder what he would do if he didn't catch any fish that day, for what could he prepare the king to eat? While he was immersed in thought, the king himself came by and spoke with him. He was obviously honored that the king had taken the time to do this, but during their conversation the fisherman suddenly felt a heavy tug on his net, for a large fish had finally gotten caught in it. What was he to do – continue his conversation with the king, or cut the conversation short in order to haul in the fish? Since he was a wise servant, he focused his attention on hauling in the fish, but asked for the king's forgiveness. He said to him, "*Sire, the only reason that I'm here is to catch fish and serve you the kind of food you love. I now have the opportunity to provide you with some exquisite fish, and I'm only interrupting our conversation to do my work. It's not because of a lack of respect on my part. On the contrary, it testifies to the immense respect that I have for your Highness, for I'm prepared to forgo the great delight of speaking with you in order to honor you.*"

When the king heard this, he praised the fisherman's wisdom by saying, "*Not only am I not upset with you, I'm going to greatly reward you for having focused all your energies on honoring and satisfying me.*"

Abraham had been deeply immersed in a prophetic vision, for the King of kings was speaking with him. Yet in the middle of this conversation, Abraham perceived that he had some guests, and he knew that the greatest way that a person can honor the Creator of the universe is to follow His ways and emulate Him. That is, just as Hashem is merciful, a person should also be merciful, and just as Hashem demonstrates generosity, a person should also demonstrate generosity. Here Abraham had an opportunity to do just that, thereby bringing satisfaction to the Creator.

The fact that Abraham brought guests into his home and offered them food and drink not only represented generosity of the material kind, but of the spiritual kind as well. The Sages say that Abraham provided food and drink to everyone who entered his home. Then as they were about to leave and wanted to thank Abraham for his generosity, he would say to them, "*I'm not the one you should thank, but rather the Master of the universe, for He created the food that you ate and the water that you drank.*" Thus by his hospitality, Abraham's guests began to have faith in the Creator. Therefore when Abraham decided to leave his personal discussion with the Holy One, blessed be He, not only did this not represent a lack of respect, it also demonstrated his great reverence for Him!

The Sages have also said that man is greatly loved, for he was created in the image of G-d. Nevertheless sinners tarnish this image on their countenance. When Abraham invited guests to his home, he restored this image to them by teaching that they should have faith in Hashem and by converting them. The Sages derived this from the verse, "*The souls they made in Haran*" (*Genesis 12:5*), from which they learn that "*Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women.*" Abraham was therefore completely devoted to honoring this Divine image in man. If this was true for all normal demonstrations of hospitality, how much more was it true when Abraham was ill and suffering on the third day after his circumcision, for he ran in the heat of the day and neglected his pain and frailty in order to show hospitality to wayfarers! What exactly did he see? He saw three men who looked like Arabs, and not only Arabs, but idol-worshippers! In fact when they entered his tent, Abraham brought them water so they could wash their feet, for he was afraid that they worshipped the dust of their feet (*see Rashi on Genesis 18:3*). Despite all this, Abraham put a great deal of effort into welcoming these guests, for he clung to the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, Who sustains the entire world, even if it contains sinners and rebels. Hashem does not say, "*Those who have sinned will not receive food or water from Me.*" Instead He demonstrates patience with them, awaiting their repentance until the day they die. Abraham therefore emulated the conduct of his Creator by drawing people closer to Him. Abraham did not check or evaluate them, nor did he ever lose hope that they would eventually recognize the truth, namely that there is a Creator Whom we must serve. In fact this is precisely

what motivated people to come under the protective wings of the Shechinah, for they saw a stranger going to great lengths in order to provide them with food and drink in copious amounts and with a smiling face. Therefore when Abraham told them to bless Hashem after they ate, they truly believed that there was a Creator Who ruled the world.

This is why Abraham said to the Holy One, blessed be He, “*Please do not pass away from Your servant.*” He was not neglecting G-d’s honor by leaving this prophetic vision. On the contrary, he was running to honor G-d and walk in His ways. He was running to do good, to bring men closer to G-d, and to restore the Divine image to them. Now that was honoring G-d!

Created to Change the Material Into the Spiritual

In this week’s parsha, which deals with the sacrifice of Isaac, we read: “*Abraham lifted his eyes and looked – and behold, a ram.... He offered it up as an offering instead of his son*” (*Genesis 22:13*). Our Sages say that this ram was created at twilight, and that no part of it was lost. The ashes of the ram formed the foundation of the outer altar, its tendons were used for the ten strings of King David’s harp, and its hide covered the loins of Elijah the prophet. From its left horn, the shofar was sounded on Mount Sinai, and from its right horn, the larger of the two, the shofar will be sounded in the future.

We may explain this Aggadah by citing the words of the Ramban in his *Iggeret HaKodesh*. There he writes, “*The holy Patriarchs, in everything regarding the body, acted only for the sake of Heaven. Not even for a single instant were their thoughts separated from the supernal light. Even when eating, drinking, and seeing to the body's other needs, their thoughts never strayed from the supernal light.*” The gaon Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen Zatzal wrote something similar in his book *Meshech Chochma*: “*The desire to eat and other physical desires are easy to overcome for a Jew, due to Hashem's will and His Torah. This is the greatest connection that one can have with Hashem, and even physical matter can merit a guiding light in this way.*”

This is why nothing was lost from Isaac’s ram, for it was sacrificed in his place, as it is written: “*He offered it up as an offering instead of his son.*” The Sages explained: “*Abraham said, ‘Sovereign of the worlds, consider this act as though the blood of Isaac were being sprinkled before You!’ He took the ram and flayed it, saying: ‘Consider this act as though I had flayed the skin of Isaac before You.’ He took the ram and dried its blood with salt, saying: ‘Consider this act as though Isaac's blood were being dried before You.’ He burnt the ram and said: ‘Consider this act as though Isaac's ashes were being heaped upon the altar’” (*Bamidbar Rabba 17:2*). The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to show Jews in every generation that everyone must sanctify himself like an offering before Hashem, such that no part of his body is without use.*

This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave man 248 limbs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 248 positive and 365 negative mitzvot of the Torah. A person must

fulfill them all, without missing a single one, just as nothing was missing from the ram, for it was offered in place of Isaac. We must learn from it and its body – created to be an offering before Hashem – not to possess anything in ourselves that is without use.

Each person must draw a lesson from Abraham's conduct. When he heard the angel saying, "*Do not stretch out your hand against the lad*" (*Genesis 22:12*), the Sages tell us that he wanted to extract a drop of blood from Isaac, which is why the angel added: "*Nor do anything to him*" (*see Bereshith Rabba 56:7*). From here we see the greatness of Abraham. We would certainly expect that when someone is commanded to take his only son and kill him – yet at the last minute he is told to refrain from doing so – he would be very happy. Such was not the case with Abraham, for when the angel told him not to harm his son, he did not rejoice. In fact it was the very opposite, for the angel was forced to tell him again not to harm his son in any way.

When Abraham saw that he was not going to kill his son before G-d, he took the ram in his place and began to slaughter and skin it. He regretted not having had the merit of sacrificing his son as an offering before Hashem, Whom he asked to regard the offering of the ram as that of his own son. Everything that Abraham did to the ram, he asked Hashem to accept it in place of his son Isaac. Why did Abraham take things so far? It was because he knew that a person comes into this world only to be an offering brought upon the altar. Although he was prevented from actually offering his son Isaac on the altar, and also from spilling a drop of his blood, this constituted a prayer that Abraham made for all his descendants over the course of the centuries, namely for them to have the possibility of being offered as a whole burnt-offering to Hashem, for that is man's goal in this world. From the passage on the offerings, we learn that man was created to be an offering brought upon the altar. In fact the Ramban states that when bringing an offering, a person must realize that were it not for the Creator's compassion in having accepted a substitute for him, his own blood should really be spilled and his own body should really be burned. The blood of a person's offering serves in place of his own blood, its limbs in place of his own limbs, and its life in place of his own life. When fasting, Rav Sheshet would say: "*When the Temple was standing, if a man sinned he used to bring a sacrifice, and although all that was offered of it was its fat and blood, it procured atonement for him. Now I have kept a fast and my fat and blood have diminished. May it be Your will to account my fat and blood, which have been diminished, as if I had offered them before You on the altar*" (*Berachot 17a*). Since man was created to emulate an offering, his entire life should be occupied with mitzvot, without missing a single one, nor a single day, in order to transform the material into the spiritual.

Along the same line of thought, it is said of Sarah: "*The years of the life of Sarah*" (*Genesis 23:1*). Here Rashi explains that all her years were equally good, meaning that there was not a single wasted day in her life. They were all the same, which is what the Midrash tells us, namely that all the years of Sarah's life were complete, since not a single day in her life was wasted.

A Great Principle in Education

It is written, “*For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may observe the way of the L-RD, to do righteousness and justice*” (*Genesis 18:19*).

This verse seems to indicate that the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Abraham because he possessed the special characteristic of “*command[ing] his children and his household after him.*” This is extraordinary, for Abraham was a great tzaddik and possessed many virtues, especially chesed. This goes without mentioning the fact that he overcame numerous trials and proclaimed Hashem’s Name to every wayfarer (*Sotah 10b*). He humbled himself before G-d in saying, “*I am but dust and ashes*” (*Genesis 18:27*).

How can we say that, out of all these characteristics, the only one that mattered had not yet occurred? This refers to the fact that Abraham would teach his children and household the ways of Hashem, the result being that Hashem revealed that He would not destroy Sodom – doing so despite the fact that Abraham’s son had not yet been born! How could this be more important than everything else Abraham had done? How could he have not merited this revelation on account of all his other good deeds?

From here we learn a very great principle in education. King Solomon said, “*One who spares the rod hates his son*” (*Proverbs 13:24*). He also said, “*Do not withhold discipline from the youth. If you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You should strike him with the rod and you will rescue his soul from the grave*” (*ibid. 23:13-14*). In the Midrash our Sages say, “*Ordinarily, if a man’s friend says to him: ‘So-and-so hit your son,’ he is ready to even deprive him of his livelihood. Why then: ‘One who spares the rod hates his son’? To teach you that anyone who refrains from chastising his son causes him to fall into evil ways and thus comes to hate him*” (*Shemot Rabba 1:1*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, knew that Abraham completely humbled himself before Him, and that he would do everything He commanded him. He told Abraham, “*Leave you land and your birthplace,*” and he took his staff and bag, and he left. When his wife was stolen from him, he did not protest to G-d. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give him a real trial so he could receive a tremendous reward. In fact Hashem knew that Abraham’s will was to spread His Name in the world and to teach his children to emulate him. Hashem therefore put Abraham to the test by means of his son, saying to him: “*Take your son, your only one, whom you love*” (*Genesis 22:2*). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*If I tell Abraham, ‘Take you only son from his mother’s bosom and place him on the altar as a burnt-offering to Me,’ he will certainly obey. On account of My command, he will quell the love that he has in his heart for his son. He knows that nobody possesses more love than I, and he will place his son upon the altar.*”

This is why, among the ten trials that Abraham faced, none is described as a trial other than the one involving Isaac, as it is written: “*And G-d tried Abraham*” (*Genesis 22:1*). This is because Abraham did not sense the others as being trials, given that he was constantly performing G-d’s will. When G-d told Abraham to offer his son as a burnt-

offering, Abraham thought: “*If I offer my son Isaac as a burnt-offering, and he dies as a result, how will I be able to teach my household the ways of Hashem? Because He commanded me, however, I will do so without arguing.*” Since he overcame this trial, G-d said to him: “*Now I know that you fear G-d*” (v.12).

Furthermore, Abraham was not afraid to carry out this order. He did not say, “*How can I fulfill this mitzvah to slaughter my son and be so cruel to him? He will die before having lived even half his life!*” Abraham knew that nobody is as merciful as Hashem, and that even if He tells a person, “*Take your son and slaughter him,*” he must obey.

True Mercy

It is forbidden for a person to demonstrate more mercy than Hashem. Sometimes a person will get up in the morning and find his son sleeping. He may have mercy on him by not waking him up, thereby going off to synagogue and letting his son sleep in. The time for reciting Shema and the morning prayer will then come and go. This is not called mercy, but cruelty. Since he did not wake his son up, the time for reciting Shema and the morning prayer will have passed. If he had been “*cruel*” by waking up his son, he would have fulfilled several mitzvot.

We learn a very great thing from this week’s parsha, namely that it was not the performance of another mitzvah that earned Abraham the revelation of Hashem’s secrets. Rather, it was the performance of this mitzvah: Teaching his children and household the ways of Hashem, without showing more mercy to them than the Torah does. Concerning this, our Sages have said: “*Whoever possesses the following three characteristics is of the disciples of our father Abraham...a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:19). Nevertheless, Abraham did not have mercy on his own son! Therein lay Abraham’s greatness, which justified Hashem’s love for him. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that Abraham did not possess artificial mercy, He told him that He would destroy Sodom on account of its sins. Although Hashem knew that Abraham would pray for them, He still revealed everything to him because He knew that he would not pray out of false pity, but out of true mercy. It was therefore conceivable that they were worthy of being saved.

When Does the Satan Come to Hinder a Person?

It is written, “*Abraham raised his eyes and saw, and behold, a ram behind, caught in the thickets by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and he offered it up as a sacrifice instead of his son*” (*Bereshith* 22:13).

The Sages have greatly admired the vision of the tzaddikim. Thus they say in the Midrash, “*The vision of the tzaddikim gives them enlightenment, for it raises them to the loftiest heights, as it is written: ‘He lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing over him’ [Bereshith 18:2]; ‘[He] saw, and behold, a ram’ [ibid. 22:13]; ‘He [Jacob] saw, and behold, a well in the field’ [ibid. 29:2]; ‘He [Moshe] saw, and behold,*

the bush...’ [Shemot 3:2]; ‘When Pinchas saw...’ [Bamidbar 25:7]. Therefore they rejoice in the sight of their eyes, as it says, ‘The upright see and are glad’ [Tehillim 107:42]” (Esther Rabba 7:9).

This raises a number of questions: First of all, what does raising the eyes mean here? Next, how did Abraham know that he was going to find a ram that was ownerless, and why was he not afraid that it belonged to someone who had left it there, or that someone had lost this ram, whose horns were now entangled in a thicket on the mountain? Perhaps its owners were looking for it, in which case he did not have the right to offer it as a sacrifice before Hashem! We also need to understand why it is said, “*and behold, a ram behind.*” Why behind? It should have said, “*and behold, a ram caught in the thickets by its horns*”!

The Satan Returned with Obstacles

We can begin to understand this by citing the words of our Sages in the Midrash Aggadah. They say that when Abraham and Isaac started their journey, the Satan preceded them in an attempt to place obstacles before them (*Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeira 22*). At first the Satan tried to prevent them from leaving, but it was successful. It then spread itself out and appeared as a great river. Nevertheless, Abraham and Isaac descended into the water up to their necks, until Hashem reprimanded the Satan, which left them alone.

When they climbed the mountain and G-d said to him, “*Do not stretch out your hand against the lad*” (*Bereshith 22:12*), Abraham saw the ram and wanted to sacrifice it in place of his son Isaac. He wanted to slaughter it in place of his son, sprinkle its blood in place of his son’s blood, and burn its innards in place of his son’s innards. The Satan immediately tried to prevent this, entangling the horns of the ram so it could not move and do Hashem’s will.

When Abraham saw that the ram’s horns were caught in the thicket, he immediately realized that it was there for him to slaughter in place of his son Isaac, and that the odor of the ram would ascend before G-d as the odor of his son. The proof was that its horns had become entangled in the thicket and that the Satan was again trying to prevent him from doing G-d’s will.

A Person Must be Stronger

It is a basic principle that whenever a person wants to do something good or perform a mitzvah, the Satan comes and tries to hinder him. One must be stronger than the Satan, taking action with boldness and courage.

As Abraham knew, the ram had clearly been sent to him and the Satan was trying to place obstacles in his way. This is why the text says that it was *achar* (behind). Now the term *achar* alludes to the power of impurity represented by the hind quarters. Throughout his life, our father Abraham worked to remove this power, known as *achar*, from both his heart and his home.

When the three angels came to Abraham, he thought that they were idolatrous Arabs (*Bava Metzia* 86b). He said to them, “*Let some water be brought to wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread so that you may sustain yourselves, achar [afterwards] go on*” (*Bereshith* 18:4-5). By saying this, Abraham in his wisdom wanted to annul the power of impurity – the power of achar – through the power of the holy Torah. We know that “*words of Torah are likened to water*” (*Taanith* 7a), and the Sages have also said: “*Bread refers to Torah, as it says, ‘Come, eat of my bread’ [Mishlei 9:5]*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 70:5).

Raise the Honor of Your People Israel

According to what we have said, we may understand the following statement of the Sages: “*Moshe addressed himself to the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: ‘Sovereign of the universe, how shall the honor [keren, which also means horn] of Israel be exalted?’ He replied, ‘Through ki tisa [when you raise up]’*” (*Bava Batra* 10b).

This requires an explanation.

We can understand this by applying the words of the Rambam: “*What is the way to achieve a love and fear of G-d? When one contemplates His actions and His wondrous and great creations, and sees in them His wisdom, that it has no limit and no end, immediately he will love and praise Him, and greatly desire to know His great Name*” (*Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2).

Our father Abraham acted in this way, for he was able to recognize his Creator by observing the hosts of Heaven (*Midrash Ma'aseh Avraham*). He did this throughout his life, raising his eyes to heaven in order to recall the One Who created the world by His word. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe Rabbeinu that the “*horn*” (*i.e., the honor*) of Israel would be elevated through *ki tisa* (“*when you raise*”). In other words, it would be by constantly raising one’s eyes to heaven and seeing the works of Hashem.

This is why the verse states, “*Abraham raised his eyes and saw.*” In his heart, he felt that he must perform G-d’s will, which is why the Satan came and placed all kinds of obstacles before him, trying to ensnare him with “*horns*” so the honor of Israel would not be raised. At that point, Abraham immediately saw “*a ram behind*” – the power of impurity known as achar – and he conquered it. He placed the ram upon the altar and offered it before Hashem, Who constantly recalls the merit of Isaac’s ram for the sake of his descendants.

Abraham the Hebrew

It is written, “*The fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew*” (*Bereshith* 14:13).

The term Ivri (“*Hebrew*”) is one of the names which designates a member of the Jewish people. We find this name in the Torah in connection with Potiphar’s wife, who said: “*He brought us a Hebrew man*” (*Bereshith* 39:14), as well as in connection with Joseph, who said: “*For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews*” (*ibid.* 40:15).

In regards to the verse, “*The fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew,*” the Midrash states: “*Rabbi Yehudah said, ‘The whole world was on one side [ever] while he was on the other side.’ Rabbi Nehemiah said, ‘He descended from Ever.’ The Sages said, ‘It means that he came from the other side of the river, and also that he spoke in the language of the dwellers from the other side of the river’” (*Bereshith Rabba* 42:8).*

The Ramban also writes: “*Abraham, the head of the lineage, was called Abraham ‘the Hebrew’ because he came from the other side of the Euphrates and he was honored among the nations, for in him was fulfilled the blessing: ‘I will make your name great’* [*Bereshith* 12:2]. It is for this reason that all his descendants are called *Ivrim* [Hebrews]. They retain this name in order not to intermingle with the various peoples in the Canaanite lands, and this name has been established as the name for all of Israel’s descendants forever” (*Ramban on Bereshith* 40:15).

For those who explain the term Ivri as referring to a descendant of Ever, it is clear that their intention is to point out that he followed the right path, that of his ancestors Shem and Ever. In fact Shem and Ever represented the first man and the path of Hashem, which Abraham followed. That is why he is called an Ivri. Likewise, the interpretation which states that the entire world was on one side (*ever*), while he was on the other, underlines the greatness of our father Abraham, who by himself was as important as the rest of the world. However why did some Sages link this term to the fact that Abraham came from the other side (*ever*) of the Euphrates, for why mention his birthplace and thus record it for eternity, since his birthplace was not a source of praise, but rather a place of idolatry? In that case, better to mention where Abraham was going – not where he was coming from – namely Eretz Israel. Why did the Sages explain the term Ivri in this manner? Even Rashi and the Ramban only mention this interpretation for the term. This requires an explanation.

It seems that the Torah is teaching us something extremely important here, something comparable to giving life-giving water to a parched soul: Everyone can rise to the greatest of heights, ones that our father Abraham reached. In fact if Abraham – who came from the other side of the river, from a family like that of Terah and Nahor, from a world of denial and disbelief – could attain great heights, to the point of counterbalancing the entire world by himself, then we can do the same.

Our Sages mention this in stating, “*Every Jew is obligated to say: ‘When will my deeds reach the level of the deeds of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?’*” (*Tanna D’vei Eliyahu* 25). This means that every Jew can climb to tremendous heights. The explanation given by Rav Bunim of Peshischa is well-known: We note that it does not say, “*Every Jew is obligated to reach the level,*” but rather “*Every Jew is obligated to say, ‘When will my deeds reach the level....’*” This means that everyone must yearn for his deeds to be like those of his forefathers. In fact if Abraham was able to reach such great levels despite his immediate family, friends, and the evil society that surrounded him, then everyone can.

This is what the Torah is teaching us by describing Abraham as “*the Hebrew*.” It is telling us that if Abraham, who came from the other side of the river, was able to reach such heights, then the same applies to you, me, and every other Jew.

We’ll now recount the incredible story of Rabbi Akiva, for although it is well-known, it can strengthen and encourage anyone who thinks about it, enabling people to courageously advance in the ways of Torah: “*Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd of Ben Kalba Savua. The latter’s daughter, seeing how modest and noble he was, said to him, ‘Were I to betroth you, would you go away to [study at] a yeshiva?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied. She then secretly betrothed him and sent him away. When her father heard, he drove her from his house and prohibited her by a vow to benefit from any of his estate. [Rabbi Akiva] departed and spent 12 years at a yeshiva. When he returned, he brought with him 12,000 disciples. He heard an old man saying to her, ‘How long will you lead the life of a living widow?’ She replied, ‘If he would listen to me, he would go [learn for] another 12 years.’ [Rabbi Akiva] said, ‘It is with her consent that I am acting,’ and he again left and spent another 12 years at a yeshiva. When he finally returned, he brought with him 24,000 disciples. His wife heard and went out to meet him, and her neighbors said to her: ‘Borrow some respectable clothes and put them on.’ She replied, ‘The tzaddik knows the soul of his animal. [Mishlei 12:10].’ On approaching him, she fell upon her face and kissed his feet. His attendants were about to push her aside, but he cried out to them: ‘Leave her alone. Mine and yours are hers.’ Upon hearing that a great man had come to town, her father said: ‘I shall go to him. Perhaps he will annul my vow.’ When he came to him, [Rabbi Akiva] asked: ‘Would you have made your vow had you known that he was a great man?’ The other replied, ‘[Not even for] a single chapter or a single halachah.’ He then said to him, ‘I am the man.’ [Ben Kalba Savua] fell upon his face and kissed his feet, and he also gave him half of his wealth” (*Ketubot* 62b-63a).*

Here Tosaphot explain that it is forbidden to annual a vow by using the excuse that a new situation has arisen. What exactly does “new” mean? It refers to something that does not fall within everyday norms, something that, logically speaking, should not happen. This would mean, for example, that someone makes a vow about a certain person, and that person dies. That being said, how could Rabbi Akiva have annulled Ben Kalba Savua’s vow, for when the latter disinherited his daughter, Rabbi Akiva did not know a single chapter or halachah? In fact he was an uneducated shepherd, a man who suddenly became the spiritual leader of the generation and the teacher of 24,000 students! Could there be a situation more novel than this?

The explanation given by Tosaphot is very impressive: This is not a “novelty.” Rather, “*The normal result of someone who goes to learn is that he becomes great.*”

We may draw a powerful lesson from this: Even Rabbi Akiva, who only started learning at the age of 40, became a great man in Israel. Even for him – someone who began as an uneducated shepherd, so unlearned that he did not even know a solitary halachah or a single letter from the alphabet – it was not unnatural to become the

greatest among his generation! This is the way – the natural order of things – that one who goes to study Torah becomes a great man. That being the case, all we have to do is to be among those who “*go and study*”! As soon as we advance and head towards a yeshiva, a place of study, we can be certain that these steps will lead us, after a certain time, to becoming a “*great man*.”

Thus if “*Abram the Hebrew*” became Abraham the father of a multitude of nations (*av hamon goyim*), and if the shepherd Akiva the son of Yosef became a man through whom the Torah could have been given, then everyone can do the same!

Circumcision: A Permanent Connection to Hashem

It is written, “*Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre.... He raised his eyes and looked – and behold, three men were standing by him*” (*Bereshit 18:1-2*).

We have already asked why Hashem appeared to Abraham without speaking to him, or even giving him a command. Furthermore, our Sages say that G-d appeared to him on the third day of his circumcision in order to “*visit the sick*.” However we notice that He did not even mention his condition or inquire about his health!

We also have good reason to examine the words, “*He raised his eyes and saw – and behold, three men.*” Why stress the fact that Abraham raised his eyes? It would have been enough to say, “*He saw three men*”!

The order of this passage also raises questions, since it states that Abraham raised his eyes prior to mentioning the presence of the men. Now these men first reached the vicinity of Abraham’s tent, and only then did he see them. In that case, the passage should have said: “*Behold, three men, and Abraham saw them.*” Why does the Torah reverse the order of these events?

Let us try and answer all these questions. In the introduction to his book HaMapa on the Shulchan Aruch, the Rama states that the verse, “*My eyes are constantly toward Hashem*” (*Tehillim 25:15*) constitutes a great Torah principle and one of the fundamental values of the righteous who follow G-d’s way. The need to look “*constantly toward Hashem*” is incumbent on man, for “*the whole world is filled with His glory*” (*Isaiah 6:3*), and no place is excluded. Whoever is convinced of the truth of this principle will apply the following words of the Sages to himself: “*Know before Whom you stand,*” for he will understand that there is “*an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book*” (*Pirkei Avot 2:1*). His thoughts, speech, and deeds will then be weighed and measured, just like a person who stands before a king.

If a person has a chance to internalize this realization (that Hashem’s glory fills the whole world), he will experience the supreme pleasure that flows from a permanent connection to G-d, and from the feeling that he lives near Him at all times. As King David wrote, “*He who sits in the shelter of the Most High, who dwells in the shadow of the Almighty*” (*Tehillim 91:1*) does not need to worry about unforeseen events or the

dangers of this world, as it is written: “*You shall not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day.... A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right*” (vv.5-7). In fact he will be sheltered in the safest place possible, namely in the shadow of the Shechinah, as we read: “*Hashem is your protective shade at your right hand*” (*Tehillim 121:5*).

Likewise, when a person lives in the shadow of Hashem, his service of Hashem and fulfillment of mitzvot will take on a completely different dimension. In fact such a person senses the Shechinah at all times and will automatically yearn to fulfill G-d’s will, thereby giving Him great satisfaction. He will try every possible way to please his Creator – the One Who loves him, covers him with His protective wing, protects him, and gives him all that he needs. As such, he will perform mitzvot with enthusiasm and sincerity, like some who serves the king.

Now that we have developed these ideas, we will be able to explain Hashem’s appearance to Abraham and the fact that the latter raised his eyes. In fulfilling the mitzvah of circumcision, our father Abraham removed the flesh of his foreskin from his body. In doing so, he destroyed the last barrier that existed between himself and Hashem, and he attained perfection. This is how he created a close connection between himself and G-d, and it is how he was able to tangibly sense the Shechinah in every place.

The expression, “*Hashem appeared to him*” is not describing a revelation whose objective was to transmit a prophecy or command. Rather, it is expressing the fact that Abraham attained perfection and merited to permanently see Hashem because of his circumcision. Once Abraham carried out this deed, he constantly felt G-d’s protection and Presence by his side. We can now easily understand why the passage does not describe any word or command from G-d to Abraham. Concerning the Sages’ explanation that G-d appeared to Abraham in order to visit the sick, we may also say that just sensing the Shechinah hovering above him – that G-d was protecting him in the shadow of His wing – and knowing that he was connected to the source of life, constituted visiting the sick for Abraham.

When Abraham found himself completely in the shadow of the Shechinah and protected by Hashem’s glory, he tried to procure satisfaction for Him and fulfill His mitzvot despite his painful condition. It was this intense desire that led Abraham to “*raise his eyes*,” for he was seeking a way to raise and sacrifice himself for Hashem. Hence the Torah specifies that Abraham raised his eyes precisely after G-d appeared to him. After having sensed the Shechinah, Abraham wanted to perfect his connection to Hashem and serve Him. He therefore raised his eyes so as to achieve this.

Faced with Abraham’s self-annulment, and in view of his sincere desire to perfect his connection to Him – despite the fact that he was suffering at the time – G-d gave Abraham an opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah: To welcome guests. He therefore sent him angels in the guise of Arabs, in accordance with the teaching: “*If [someone] says, ‘I have labored and found, ’ you may believe him*” (*Megillah 6b*).

Abraham merited all this because he raised his eyes. This action preceded the arrival of the men, for by “*raising his eyes*,” he merited to “*see*” them. Hashem therefore sent him angels so that, through them, he could fulfill the mitzvah that he greatly yearned for in order to connect with G-d.

In light of what we have said, we can fully understand the teaching of our Sages regarding King David: “*As David entered the bath and saw himself standing naked, he exclaimed: ‘Woe is me, for I am naked without any mitzvot!’ Yet when he reminded himself of the circumcision in his flesh, his mind was put at ease*” (*Menachot 43b*).

How could King David have rid himself of guilt on account a mitzvah fulfilled many years earlier? At that very moment, he was not actually fulfilling one!

Through this study, we have come to realize that the goal of mitzvot is to connect ourselves to Hashem and cleave to Him. In the bath, King David was upset because he was unable to connect to G-d (*through a mitzvah*). However he realized that the mitzvah of circumcision allowed him to be truly connected to Him at all times. In fact it eliminates the boundary that exists between man and his Creator, which is precisely what entails a covenant with the Creator. That is why King David’s mind was put at ease.

How Far Should Hospitality Extend?

It is written, “*And he said, ‘My L-rd, if I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not away from your servant’*” (*Bereshith 18:3*).

After Abraham received the order to circumcise himself, Hashem went to visit him when He saw how greatly he was suffering. Yet when Abraham noticed guests at a distance, he asked Hashem to wait so he could run out to meet them, as Rashi explains. From here, the Sages tell us, we learn that “*hospitality is greater than welcoming the Shechinah*.”

We may ask the following question: In tractate Berachot we read that it is forbidden to stop in the middle of prayer to greet someone. Even if a king is passing before us as we are praying, we are forbidden to stop. This is due to the fact that we are standing before the King of kings at that point, and we must show Him even more respect than a human king. Yet here Abraham left the presence of Hashem in order to run out and meet guests! Why does the Halachah not allow us to interrupt our prayer in order to fulfill the mitzvah of demonstrating hospitality, as Abraham did?

We may also ask – since the Halachah does not allow this, meaning that we are not permitted to interrupt our prayers in order to welcome guests – why Abraham did just that. To these questions, which I put before the students of Rabbi Yehonatan Lugassy, I responded, after some reflection, that ordinary people sense Hashem’s presence when they are standing before Him during Shemoneh Esrei. It is only then that they sense the full power of His presence, whereas in normal life they have no opportunity to sense it. On the other hand, Abraham could sense the reality of G-d at every moment of his

life, which is apparently why every instant he was doing something mundane was considered as an interruption for him, since he was continually living in the shadow of Hashem's presence.

In reality, nowhere do we find that Abraham was excessively criticized for having excused himself before Hashem for the sake of a mundane matter. We may therefore conclude that although Abraham departed from the Shechinah in order to welcome guests, that was what he needed to do, for the reality of the Shechinah wasn't something new to Abraham, given that he constantly lived in Hashem's presence for his entire life.

As for ourselves – ordinary human beings who don't even reach Abraham's level – we only sense Hashem's reality when we are standing before Him in prayer. Now because these are precious moments in a Jew's life, we must derive all that we can and take away spiritual sustenance from such occasions. Hence the Halachah forbids us from interrupting our prayers in order to welcome guests. The verse, "*Abraham was advanced in days*" (*Bereshith 24:1*) signifies that Abraham had control over his days and did with them as he pleased, meaning that his days did not control him. As for ourselves and our days, there are numerous people who claim that they don't have any free time and are not in control of their time. This is because they are controlled by time rather than being in control of their time. As for Abraham, who served G-d throughout his life and felt His presence at every instant, he could interrupt himself in the middle of Hashem's visit in order to go out and greet guests. As for ourselves, who have not reached such a high level, we are forbidden from acting in the same way, and hopefully we can at least sense Hashem's presence during Shemoneh Esrei.

When the King's Anger is Not Aroused

We also need to explain why demonstrating hospitality is actually more important than welcoming the Shechinah. We may explain this by saying that Abraham had a goal that was a sign unto itself, namely to lead the people of his generation to repentance and draw them closer to their heavenly Father. If a person warms his hands by a fire, it is inevitable that anyone who touches his hands will in turn be warmed. Likewise, because Abraham was entirely infused with Torah, with the fear of Heaven, and with a love of G-d, guests who ate at his home would also absorb this spiritual heat and acknowledge G-d's presence in the world. Welcoming guests precedes the welcoming of the Shechinah only when the Shechinah is constantly with someone, as was the case with Abraham. That being the case, leaving the Shechinah and going out to meet guests was not considered an interruption because the reality of Hashem was continuous and did not depend on any particular moment in time. Yet for someone who has not yet reached such a level, it is clear that welcoming the Shechinah takes precedence over demonstrating hospitality, which is why we are not allowed to interrupt our Shemoneh Esrei prayer even for a king.

The situation is like a king who is invited to his friend's home every day, an invitation that the king always accepts, going to meet his friend every day. If, for

whatever reason, his friend cannot meet him one day, the king will not be upset because he is often in his presence. However if the king only visits his friend one single time, and yet his friend is absent then, the king's anger will certainly be aroused. The same applies to Abraham: Since the Shechinah was constantly with him, the King's anger was not aroused when Abraham went out to meet guests, for demonstrating hospitably takes precedence over welcoming the Shechinah only when a person has reached the level of constantly sensing Hashem's presence throughout his life.

Let's Invest in Education

At the end of this week's parsha, we see the greatness of Abraham and the self-annulment with which he went to offer his son, completely putting aside all his love for Isaac, who was to carry on his ways. Abraham put aside the century that he awaited and hoped to proclaim the Name of G-d in this world, and he removed all his love for his son and everything that connected them to one another. From the very moment that G-d commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, the latter belonged completely to the Holy One, blessed be He, as if he was no longer Abraham's son. It was for this reason that Abraham called him na'ar ("lad") in the verse, "*I and the lad will go yonder*" (*Bereshith 22:5*).

We find something similar in a Halachah cited by the Rema (*Orach Chaim 98:11*), according to which it is forbidden to kiss children in synagogue, all so as to instill in them the idea that there is no greater love than G-d's love. Hence when Abraham went to fulfill Hashem's command, he controlled his great love for his son, who was no longer a "lad," so he could instill in him the idea that there is no greater love than that of G-d. Indeed, the Torah testifies that Abraham concealed his compassion for his son Isaac.

Abraham gave no thought to what people would say, for they would say that he was an idolater offering his son to Molech. Nor did Abraham give any thought to what the evil inclination might say, a completely logical argument: "*Yesterday You said to me: 'In Isaac shall your seed be called'* [*Bereshith 21:12*], *but today You say: 'Take your son... and bring him up there as a burnt-offering'* [*ibid. 22:2*]!"

Abraham did not allow room for such thoughts, and he arose early and eagerly set out to perform this mitzvah. He personally saddled his donkey, not relying on his servants to do so, because of his great love. On the way, they crossed a river whose waters rose to the neck, but he still continued willingly and joyfully to fulfill G-d's will.

Hence in the end, when Abraham did not slaughter Isaac, it is still considered as if he did slaughter him, and on Rosh Hashanah we mention the merit of the Akeidah, as the Sages cite Rabbi Abahu as stating: "*Why do we blow on a ram's horn? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Sound before Me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham, and account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before Me'*" (*Rosh Hashanah 16a*).

Abraham's self-annulment shows us the magnitude of his love for G-d and his desire to serve Him, to the point that he no longer had any love for the vanities of this world, as he himself stated: "*I am but dust and ash*" (*Bereshith* 18:27). Although this mitzvah was very difficult and fraught with difficulties, he had such love for it that it was easy for him.

Abraham transmitted this love to his son Isaac, and the verse actually testifies to how much effort he put into the education of his relatives, as it is written: "*For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice*" (*ibid.* 18:19).

Along the same lines, it is said that the Chatam Sofer wasn't feeling well one day, and he could not give a course to his students as he usually did. He suggested that they ask his son, the gaon Rabbi Shemuel Binyamin (who later succeeded him and became known as the Ketav Sofer) to give the course in his stead.

At the time, Rabbi Shemuel Binyamin wasn't yet known, and the Chatam Sofer's students were stunned by his suggestion. How could Rabbi Shemuel replace his father the gaon? Nevertheless, he immediately agreed to his father's request when asked, and he gave a course that encompassed all realms of Torah, a course that astounded the best of his father's students.

The Chatam Sofer's students asked him how he knew that his son was capable of giving such a course, since nobody was familiar with him. He replied, "*Were the tears that I shed and the prayers that I made for my son to become a talmid chacham and be great in Torah nothing to you? I invested so much effort into him that I was certain these efforts would bear fruit.*"

This is what we said earlier. Abraham infused a tremendous degree of love and a true and genuine fear of G-d into Isaac during the trial of the Akeidah. Abraham didn't need to ask him if he agreed with being sacrificed, for it was obvious that he would willingly agree to be sacrificed with joy. Indeed, "*the two of them went together*" (*Bereshith* 22:6) – together with the same joy to fulfill Hashem's command.

With us, when a father focuses all of his effort into the education of his children, instilling in them a love and fear of G-d, this produces fruit and his children love Hashem with all their heart and all their might. However when a father gets up in the morning to go pray out of a sense of obligation, rather than joy, and when he awakens his son to go to synagogue and displays a somber face rather than the joy of fulfilling mitzvot, then his son will also fulfill mitzvot without enthusiasm. And all because his father did not instill in him a true love of G-d, which in turn leads to joy in fulfilling mitzvot, to the point of being willing to sacrifice one's life for them.

Parsha Chayei Sarah

Everything Depends on Good Middot

It is written, “*Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who controlled all that was his, ‘...I will make you swear by the L-RD, G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. Rather, to my land and to my birthplace shall you go and take a wife for my son, for Isaac’”* (*Genesis 24:2-4*).

The commentators ask why Abraham insisted that Eliezer not choose a wife for Isaac from among the wicked Canaanites (*accepting a girl from among the daughters of his homeland instead*), for the people of his homeland were also wicked, since they too were idolaters! As we say in the Passover Haggadah, “*At first our ancestors were idol worshippers.... Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor.... I took your father Abraham from beyond the river and I led him through the whole land of Canaan.*” That being the case, why were they better than those from Canaan, concerning whom Abraham warned Eliezer and made him vow not to choose a wife for his son? The question becomes even more pronounced when we see which family Eliezer selected, the family of Bethuel and Laban! Were they tzaddikim? Laban was an idol worshipper! In fact when his daughter Rachel stole his idols, he was so lost that he searched through Jacob’s things in the hope of finding them. The house of Bethuel was also filled with idolatry, as Rashi notes in regards to Laban’s statement to Eliezer: “*I have cleared the house*” (*Genesis 24:31*). Rashi explains that he cleared the house of idols. Therefore why were these homes preferable to the homes of the Canaanites?

Furthermore, Abraham was allied with Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. Therefore why didn’t he select a wife for Isaac from among their households? Could he not have found an honest woman that would have suited Isaac from them?

There is another question that we need to answer. On the verse, “*The souls they made in Haran*” (*Genesis 12:5*), Rashi states: “*Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women.*” Hence Abraham could have found a wife for Isaac from among all the families that he had converted and brought under the wings of the Shechinah. Was there no suitable woman for Isaac among all those souls?

The answer to these questions is that there is a vast difference between the sins of those who lived beyond the river, Abraham’s homeland, and those who lived in Canaan. Although the residents of Abraham’s home beyond the river strayed by worshipping idols, theirs was an intellectual sin. That is, their characters remained pure. For example, take Laban the Aramean himself. Even though he was an idolater, he demonstrated hospitality with Eliezer and pushed himself to clear his home of idols for his sake. Similarly at a later time, many years afterwards, he welcomed

Jacob to his home. From this we see that his character wasn't completely corrupt. Their main sin lay in a failure to recognize that the world is governed by a Creator, and they erred by worshipping idols. On the other hand, the people of Canaan were extremely wicked, and their characters were corrupt. It was there, in the land of Canaan, that Sodom developed, and it was there that men swallowed each other alive. The Midrash recounts that people stole and spilled blood without mercy (*Tanhuma, Vayera 7*). Their wickedness did not stem from erroneous concepts, but from fundamentally flawed characters. They possessed evil middot, and to them we may apply the description that the spies gave when they returned from exploring the land of Canaan: "*All the people that we saw in it were men of middot*" (*Numbers 13:32*) – meaning bad middot. We also read that when the Jewish people entered the land of Israel, they were ordered to place a ban on all the seven peoples living there, and to leave none of them alive. From here we understand just how the depravity that reigned among the Canaanites was liable to have an influence on all who approached them. There was no reason to believe that they would improve, which is why they had to be completely destroyed.

Hence Abraham did not want to select a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamre, nor among the souls that they had made in Haran, whom they had brought closer to G-d. In fact the environment in the land of Canaan was so detrimental to middot that Abraham was afraid it would harm even the best families, those of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, as well as the souls they had brought under the wings of the Shechinah. This is why he told Eliezer that the only place where he could be sure to find a woman with good character traits was in his land of his birth. There the people were immersed in error, even in idolatry, yet they could change if they learned the truth and opened their eyes to see the right path. In that case they would be on the path to the Tree of Life. A single ray of light is enough to reveal the truth in the midst of deep darkness. However people who possess profoundly harmful middot – jealousy, anger, cruelty, and rage – have a wicked heart, and it is very difficult to change them. It is extremely difficult for a person to improve his own character flaws.

We see this during the time of the prophet Eliyahu, for almost everyone followed the prophets of Baal, and idolatry was then rampant in the land of Israel. In fact Eliyahu had to assemble all the people on Mount Carmel and declare, "*How long will you dance between two opinions? If the L-RD is G-d, go after Him! And if Baal, go after it!*" (*I Kings 18:21*). At first the people did not say that Hashem is G-d, and the prophets of Baal continued to claim that their idolatry represented the truth. As Scripture states, they cut themselves and cried out, "*O Baal, answer us!*" (*v.26*). Then in one fell swoop, the situation suddenly reversed itself and all the people proclaimed, "*The L-RD, He is G-d. The L-RD, He is G-d*" (*v.39*), for a little light casts out great darkness.

The Sages teach that the generation of Ahab, even though it worshipped idols, was victorious in warfare because it did not speak slander or Lashon Harah. As for the generation of Saul, many of them died in battle because there were slanderers and

traitors among them.

Therefore when Eliezer went to find a wife for Isaac, he first made sure that Rebecca was imbued with kindness. When he asked her for something to drink, she hastened to get it for him. In fact she fully understood the needs of guests, and she ran to draw water for all of Eliezer's camels. She spared no effort in demonstrating kindness to Eliezer, who was stunned when he saw the goodness of her heart. This is the great lesson of our parsha, for the main thing in the service of Hashem is to elevate ourselves in good middot.

Man Was Created Only to Overcome Trials

It is written, “*The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years; the years of Sarah’s life. Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her*” (*Genesis 23:1-2*). Our Sages said, “*From where did he come? ... In fact he came from Mount Moriah, Sarah having died of grief. Therefore the account of Isaac’s binding comes close to the passage, ‘The life of Sarah was’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 58:5*). This is difficult to understand, for is this how Hashem rewards a tzaddik who overcomes a trial? Instead of returning to his wife Sarah and telling her that he was able to overcome this trial, and that their son Isaac had raised himself to an extremely high level, he returned to find his wife dead. Is this the kind of reward that Hashem gives to tzaddikim in this world?

We can understand this passage by keeping in mind that every mention of death in Scripture is preceded by a description of old age or illness. Old age is mentioned with regards to Abraham: “*Abraham was old, advanced in days*” (*Genesis 24:1*), which is later followed by, “*Abraham expired and died at a good old age*” (*ibid. 25:8*). Old age and illness are mentioned with regards to Isaac: “*It came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see*” (*ibid. 27:1*), as well as death: “*Isaac expired and died*” (*ibid. 35:29*). Concerning Jacob it is said, “*Israel’s eyes were heavy with age, and he was not able to see*” (*ibid. 48:10*), as well as: “*The days of Israel drew near to die*” (*ibid. 47:29*). This is followed by the account of his illness: “*Behold, your father is sick*” (*ibid. 48:1*), and finally his death: “*Jacob finished to command his sons, he gathered his feet into the bed and expired, and he was gathered to his people*” (*ibid. 49:33*). The same occurs with King David, for illness, old age, and death are mentioned with regards to him as well. Thus we read: “*King David was old, advanced in years*” (*1 Kings 1:1*), as well as “*King David’s days drew near to die*” (*ibid. 2:1*), and finally “*David lay with his forefathers*” (*ibid. 2:10*). Concerning our Matriarch Sarah, however, death is mentioned but illness and old age are not. There must be a reason for this.

Why is neither illness nor old age mentioned with regards to Sarah, as they are with the other figures mentioned above? From here we see the greatness of Abraham, who did not protest against Hashem’s actions, since our Sages state: “*Abraham said, ‘I will not move from this place [Mount Moriah] until You swear to me that You will never*

again put me to any test! For had I, Heaven forbid, not obeyed You, You would have destroyed everything that I had worked for all my life!' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: '*By your life! So it shall be!*'" (*Bamidbar Rabba* 17:2). Yet as soon as Abraham returned from the trial on Mount Moriah, he endured another horrendous trial: His wife died from grief, for she was not ill and old age had not affected her. Although the Holy One, blessed be He, had sworn to Abraham that He would no longer put him to the test, He sent him this one! Abraham would have been justified in protesting, "*Master of the universe, what happened to the oath that You swore to me on Mount Moriah, the oath never to test me again?*" However Abraham did not object; he accepted this trial with love.

Furthermore, even when Abraham wept over the death of Sarah, he did not weep excessively because he did not want to make it appear that he was rebelling against Hashem's decision. Hence the letter caph in the word *velivkotah* ("and to weep for her") is smaller than usual, teaching us that he only wept a little (*see Baal HaTurim*). Even with his tears, this tzaddik was careful not to appear as if he were complaining against Hashem, even though He did promise never to try him again.

This is why the Torah mentions neither illness nor old age prior to describing Sarah's death. From here we see that the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Abraham the trial of his wife's death despite His promise. Why? It is because He wanted to proclaim to all the generations that a person cannot ask Him never to send him trials, given that man was placed in this world only to be put to the test, to overcome trials, and to receive the reward for doing so in the World to Come.

True, our Sages in the Gemara say that a person should never put himself in a situation where he will be tested, as King David of Israel did and failed (*Sanhedrin* 107a). What kind of trial does this refer to? It refers to one that a person brings upon himself. On the other hand, when it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who sends him a trial, He does so in order to prepare him for life in the World to Come. This is the meaning of what we say in our morning blessings: "*Do not bring us...into temptation or scorn.*" We ask Hashem not to send us a trial that will be followed by shame. Hashem understands a person's heart and knows if he can overcome a trial or not. He therefore sends a trial upon a person only when He knows that he can overcome it, as it is written: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal imperiously with His creatures*" (*Avodah Zarah* 3a). Thus if a person experiences a trial and does not overcome it, it is a great shame for him. It is for this reason that we ask Hashem to only send us trials that we can actually overcome. All this concerns the trials that Hashem sends to a person. However when it is the person who brings trials upon himself, he does not know if he will be able to overcome them. It is therefore forbidden for him to do so. The underlying principle here is that a person cannot elevate himself unless he overcomes the trials that Hashem sends him. Hence the Sages have said, "*The tzaddikim are greater than the ministering angels*" (*Sanhedrin* 93a), for concerning the tzaddikim who overcome trials it is said: "*Although the tzaddik may fall seven times, he will arise*" (*Proverbs* 24:16),

whereas ministering angels never experience trials. Furthermore, the Mishnah states: “*With ten trials was our father Abraham tested, and he withstood them all*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:3). Despite the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Abraham an additional trial by the sudden death of his wife Sarah – even though He had promised never to send him trials again – her death is not counted among the ten with which Abraham was tested. This is because the only reason she died is to teach us that a person must not ask G-d to never test him.

The Death of Sarah is a Teaching for All the Generations

It is written, “*The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years; the years of Sarah’s life. Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her*” (*Genesis* 23:1-2).

In the Aggadah our Sages have said, “*From where did he come? ... In fact he came from Mount Moriah, Sarah having died of grief. Therefore the account of Isaac’s binding comes close to the passage, ‘The life of Sarah was’*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 58:5). This is extremely surprising, for is this how the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards a tzaddik who overcomes a trial? Instead of returning to his wife Sarah and telling her that he was able to overcome this trial, and that their son Isaac raised himself to an extremely high level – to the point of being considered a burnt-offering before Hashem – he returned to find his wife dead! Is this the kind of reward that the Holy One, blessed be He, gives to the tzaddikim in this world?

To explain this passage, we must first say that wherever we find a mention of death, it is preceded by a mention of old age or illness. With regards to Abraham, we find a mention of old age: “*Abraham was old, advanced in days*” (*Genesis* 24:1), which is later followed by, “*Abraham expired and died at a good old age*” (*ibid.* 25:8). Old age and illness are mentioned with regards to Isaac: “*It came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see*” (*ibid.* 27:1), as well as death: “*Isaac expired and died*” (*ibid.* 35:29). Concerning Jacob it is said, “*Israel’s eyes were heavy with age, and he was not able to see*” (*ibid.* 48:10). We also read, “*Behold, your father is sick*” (*ibid.* 48:1), which is followed by his death: “*Jacob...gathered his feet into the bed and expired, and he was gathered to his people*” (*ibid.* 49:33).

Illness, old age, and death are also mentioned with regards to King David. Thus we read, “*King David was old, advanced in years*” (*I Kings* 1:1), as well as, “*King David’s days drew near to die*” (*ibid.* 2:1), and finally: “*David lay with his forefathers*” (*ibid.* 2:10). Yet with regards to Sarah, death is mentioned, but illness and old age are not. We must look into the reasons for this.

We cannot compare it to the death of Rachel, who also died suddenly and in the absence of illness or old age, as we read: “*Rachel died and was buried on the road*” (*Genesis* 35:19). This does not help solve our problem, for the Sages have looked into this

and said that Rachel died on account of sin, having stolen the idols of her father Laban (*Bereshith Rabba* 74:9). When Laban came to look for them, Jacob told him: “*With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live*” (*Genesis* 31:32). Hence Rachel died. That being the case, why does the Torah not say that Sarah was sick or old, as it says with everyone else?

What Happened to the Oath?

From here we learn the extent of Abraham’s greatness, for he did not contest G-d’s decision. Our Sages state that after having overcome the trial of the Akeidah, Abraham said: “*I will not move from this place [Mount Moriah] until You swear to me that You will never again put me to any test! For had I, Heaven forbid, not obeyed You, You would have destroyed everything that I had worked for all my life*” (*Bamidbar Rabba* 17:2). Hashem then swore an oath to never again put him to the test. However as soon as Abraham returned from the Akeidah, he endured another horrendous trial: His wife died before him on account of grief, without having been sick or old, and despite the fact that Hashem had promised to never test him again! Abraham could have protested, “*What happened to the oath that You swore to me on Mount Moriah, the oath to never test me again?*” However Abraham did not object, for he accepted this trial with love.

Furthermore, even when Abraham wept over the death of Sarah, he did not weep excessively. He restrained himself in order not to make it appear that he was protesting G-d’s decision. Hence the letter caph in the term *velivkotah* (“and to weep for her”) is smaller than usual, teaching us that he only wept a little. This is why the Torah mentions neither illness nor old age prior to mentioning Sarah’s death, showing us that the sudden death of Abraham’s wife was a trial sent to him by Hashem, despite His oath. Why? It is because Hashem wanted to tell future generations that a person must refrain from asking Him to never send trials, for a person was placed in this world only to be tried by Hashem, in order to receive a reward in the World to Come.

It is true that our Sages in the Gemara have said that a person should never put himself in a situation where he will be tried, as King David of Israel did and failed (*Sanhedrin* 107a). However these are trials that a person brings upon himself. When it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who sends a person a trial, He does so in order to prepare him for life in the World to Come.

Every day we recite the prayer, “*Do not bring us...into temptation or scorn.*” In other words: “*Do not send us a trial that is followed by shame.*” Hashem understands the heart of man, and He knows whether he can overcome a trial or not. He therefore sends a trial upon a person only when He knows that he can overcome it.

Be that as it may, the Mishnah states: “*With ten trials was our father Abraham tested, and he withstood them all*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:3). Although the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Abraham still another trial (the sudden death of his wife Sarah), her death is not considered to be in the same category as the others trials, for Hashem had promised to never try Abraham again. He only sent him this trial in order to teach us that a person

should refrain from asking G-d to not send him trials. The goal was not really to test Abraham.

Spiritual Perfection and Material Perfection

It is written, “*The life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years; the years of Sarah’s life*” (*Bereshith 23:1*). Rashi says that “*the years of Sarah’s life*” means that they were all equally good. He is compelled to explain things in this way because he found it difficult to understand why the Torah wrote “*the years of Sarah’s life*” after having said, “*The life of Sarah was*” at the beginning of the verse.

We may expand upon this issue by saying that this verse alludes to the fact that everyone should establish two paths for himself: One material and the other spiritual. When he is dealing with one, he should not deal with the other, as we read with regards to the festivals: One verse says, “*An assembly for Hashem*” (*Devarim 16:8*), while the other says: “*There shall be an assembly for you*” (*Bamidbar 29:35*). We therefore divide it: Half for Hashem and half for ourselves. When a person is occupied with material pursuits, he will benefit from them and rejoice in the festival. Likewise when he is occupied with spiritual pursuits, he will study Torah without paying attention to other things. If he mixes both pursuits, he will succeed in neither.

Also on this subject, King Solomon wrote: “*Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under heaven*” (*Kohelet 3:1*), and the Gemara states: “*At first Israel were like hens picking in the dunghill, until Moshe came and established a definite mealtime for them*” (*Yoma 75b*). Furthermore, a person must pay attention to not mixing both endeavors because each has a specific time that has been designated for it, as it is written: “*The times for prayer and Torah [study] are distinct from one another*” (*Shabbat 10a*).

Along the same lines, Rabbeinu Yona explains the teaching of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai to his disciples, “*Go and see which is the good way to which a man should cleave*” (*Pirkei Avot 2:10*). Of all virtues, a person should cleave to one in particular and perfect himself in it, rather than trying to possess numerous virtues and perfecting himself in none.

Even When Eating and Drinking

This was how Sarah lived. Throughout her life, she had two paths: One material and the other spiritual, and she clearly differentiated between the two. She certainly did not mix them together! This is why, once the verse details the number of her years, it again states: “*the years of Sarah’s life*.” The term *shenei* (“years”) should be understood in the sense of “two” (*shenei*) – “*the two lives of Sarah*.” In other words, throughout her life Sarah had two paths that she did not mix together, and she followed each to perfection.

We should not think that in her material endeavors, Sarah had no thoughts of acting for the sake of Heaven. This tzaddeket clearly had two paths – one spiritual and the

other material – and she sanctified herself even in regards to her material pursuits, doing them for the sake of Heaven. As the Ramban writes in his Iggeret HaKodesh (Letter on Holiness), “*The minds of the Patriarchs were not distracted from the supernal light, not even when eating and drinking.*” This is what Rashi is saying: All the years of Sarah’s life were equally good. In other words, although she had clearly established two paths during all the years of her life, we should not think that her material pursuits were not done for the sake of Heaven. Rather, everything she did was equally for the good, and there is nothing “good” but the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: “*Taste and see that Hashem is good*” (*Tehillim 34:9*). That is, each of the two paths were equal in this regard, for she devoted both of them entirely to Heaven.

Since Sarah did this for her entire life, she was not pleased with Ishmael the son of Abraham. In fact she drove him out of her home, along with his mother, as it is written: “*Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, mocking. So she said to Abraham, ‘Drive out this slavewoman and her son, for the son of this slavewoman shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac’*” (*Bereshith 21:9-10*). The Sages are divided as to the nature of this mockery. Some say that it consisted of indecent behavior, Sarah having seen Ishmael violating young women. Others say that it consisted of idolatry, Sarah having seen him build altars, catch locusts, and sacrificing them (*Bereshith Rabba 53:11*).

When Sarah saw these revolting things in Ishmael, she began to fear that he would have a disastrous influence on her son Isaac. She therefore told Abraham to drive him away along with his mother. This is difficult to understand, for how could Sarah have seen these things in Ishmael, while Abraham did not? And if Abraham had seen them, can we possibly think that he would watch his son Ishmael doing such things without reacting, without saying a single word, until finally Sarah mentioned it to him?

Furthermore, if Ishmael practiced idolatry, was it possible that Abraham had allowed idols into his home? How could this be? After all, Abraham did not even allow guests into his home before they washed their feet, for he was afraid that they had bowed to the dust of their feet!

Without Losing Focus

All the things that the Sages mention, however, come to teach us that Ishmael mixed good with evil. Within him were character flaws that resembled idolatry, flaws such as pride – which is as grave as idolatry, as the Sages have said: “*Every man in whom pride dwells is as if he worships idols*” (*Sotah 4b*) – and anger: “*It is as if he worshiped idols*” (*Midrash L’Olam 15*). A love of money is also compared to idolatry (*Iggeret HaKodesh at the end of the book Noam Elimelech*). Nevertheless, Abraham believed that Ishmael could still achieve faith in Hashem while possessing such flaws.

Since Ishmael did possess these flaws, however, he did not choose the right path to follow, which is why Sarah told Abraham: “*There are wicked character flaws in Ishmael. He mixes good with bad, and I’m afraid that he will have a harmful influence on my son Isaac, who will learn from him. I beg you, drive out this slavewoman and*

her son!” The Holy One, blessed be He, agreed with her, as it is written: “*All that Sarah tells you, heed her voice*” (*Bereshith 21:12*).

The verse describes these character flaws as “*mocking*” because whoever mixes good and evil, failing to choose a single path, will not succeed even in one area. The entire Torah will seem like a joke to him, since it is impossible for such a person to love Hashem and possess pride at the same time, or to love both Hashem and money. It may be that this is what King Solomon meant when he said, “*Anger is better than mockery*” (*Kohelet 7:3*), meaning that it is better for a person to show his true flaws, even in a bad way (such as by getting angry), than to put on a façade of deceit and mockery, so that nobody really knows what is going on within him.

Generally speaking, it is impossible for a person to believe in G-d unless he chooses a path from which he will not stray, as Sarah did when choosing two paths, one material and the other spiritual, though both were directed towards Hashem. With regards to Sarah, the Torah says that everything was equally for the good. We also read, “*You shall love Hashem your G-d with all levavecha [your heart]*” (*Devarim 6:5*), which the Sages have interpreted as “*with both your hearts*” (*Midrash Tannaim, Devarim 26:16*), meaning that even when we deal with material matters, we must not turn away from G-d, from the Torah, or from the mitzvot.

The Life of Sarah and the Kingdom of Esther

It is written, “*The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty-seven years; the years of Sarah’s life*” (*Bereshith 23:1*). The Sages have said, “*The Satan went to Sarah and appeared to her in the form of Isaac. When she saw him, she said: ‘My son! What has your father done to you?’ He replied, ‘My father took me and made me climb to the top of a mountain, where he built an altar, arranged the wood, and tied me upon the altar and took a knife to slaughter me. If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not said to him: ‘Do not touch the lad,’ I would have already been slaughtered.’*” He had barely finished speaking when her soul left her” (*Tanchuma, Vayeira 23*).

This is very surprising, since in the Midrash the Sages state: “*It is written, ‘Hashem knows the days of the complete, and their inheritance will be forever’ [Tehillim 37:18]. As they are complete [i.e., unblemished], so are their years complete*” (*Bereshith Rabba 58:1*). We also find in the Gemara, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, sits and completes the years of the tzaddikim [precisely] from day to day and month to month*” (*Kiddushin 38a*). Therefore if we say that Sarah died suddenly, how can we reconcile this with the teaching that Hashem completes the days of the tzaddikim precisely? After all, she died suddenly on account of the Satan’s trickery. This is the problem that was presented to me by Rabbi Yedidia Assaraf Shlita, one of the leaders of our kollel, from a student: It’s either one thing or the other: If Sarah’s time had come to leave this world, then why did the Sages say that her soul did not depart until she heard what the Satan told

her? Yet if her time to die had not come, how is the verse, “*Hashem knows the days of the complete*” fulfilled?

We cannot answer this with the teaching that some people die before their time (*Chagigah 4b*). Which people does this refer to? It refers to other people, as the text clearly explains. As for the tzaddikim, the Holy One, blessed be He, completes their years precisely from day to day. Furthermore, there remains one question that we have already asked elsewhere: Why is neither illness nor old age mentioned prior to Sarah’s death, as is the case in regards to the Patriarchs? Thus we read, “*Abraham was old, advanced in days*” (*Bereshith 24:1*), after which it is said: “*These are the days of the years of Abraham’s life, which he lived: One hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his people*” (*ibid. 25:7-8*). In other words, his death is not mentioned suddenly. From the fact that Sarah’s death is mentioned suddenly, we understand that she died suddenly. Yet in that case, how can we say that the teaching “*Hashem knows the days of the complete*” was fulfilled?

No One Knows

To answer this, I first cited a teaching of the Sages: “*Seven things are hidden from man. These are: The day of death...*” (*Pesachim 54b*). King David praised G-d for having hidden the day of death from man (*Midrash Tehillim 9*), for if people knew when they would die, they would sin for their entire lives and repent at the end of their days. G-d would then forgive them, despite the fact that they sinned throughout their lives. Since the day of death is not known, however, the tzaddikim fear the day of death and repent each day, for to them each day is potentially their last.

Since the day of death is hidden from man, and since this principle applies to everyone, it is not even revealed to the greatest tzaddikim. Hashem did not even answer King David’s request to reveal the day of his death. As the Gemara states, “*What is meant by the verse, ‘Hashem, let me know my end and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know when I will cease’ [Tehillim 39:5]? David said before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the universe, let me know my end!’ He replied, ‘It is decreed before Me that the end of flesh and blood is not made known’*” (*Shabbat 30a*).

Our mother Sarah therefore died suddenly, even though she was not sick or extremely old, for her time had come to leave this world. She could not overcome the Angel of Death, as the Midrash states: “*A man cannot say to the Angel of Death, ‘Wait for me until I complete my accounts, and then I will come’*” (*Kohelet Rabba 8:11*). Hence the Torah did not precede the account of Sarah’s death with any mention of her being ill, teaching us that even if someone is in good health, he will suddenly leave this world when his time comes. The day of death is hidden from man, and although a person may not be old or sick, the day of death will still come and fulfill its mission.

I knew someone who went to see his doctor when he was 50 years old. The doctor performed some heart tests on him, each one more bizarre than the other. When it was

over, the doctor told him that his heart was as good as a baby's, and that nothing was wrong with him. He left the doctor's office and returned to his wife all content, telling her what the doctor had said. On that very same day, while he was eating, he had a heart attack and was found dead at the table. Although he had not been sick, the Angel of Death had come for him because his time to leave this world had arrived.

How do we know that Sarah's life had been fixed at 127 years, at which time she suddenly died? It is from the fact that the Torah details the years of her life. The Midrash states, "*There were 22 righteous women in the world, and Scripture does not give the years of any of them except for Sarah, for by her merit Esther governed 127 lands*" (*Midrash Hagadol Bereshith 23:1*). These correspond to the years of Sarah's life, each land by the merit of one year. We must therefore say that her years had been fixed at 127.

The Reason Behind Eliezer's Oath to Abraham

It is written, "*Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who controlled all that he had: 'Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will have you swear by Hashem, the G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. Rather, to my land and to my family shall you go and take a wife for my son, for Isaac'*" (*Bereshith 24:2-4*).

Abraham asked Eliezer to find a wife for his son Isaac in his land and among his family, and especially not to bring Isaac a woman from among the Canaanites, where he dwelled. True, he lived among Canaanites, but he was not like them. The Canaanite was cursed, whereas Abraham was blessed, and the cursed cannot adhere to the blessed.

The Ohr HaChaim writes, "*[Abraham said] 'Although I am living in his land and the people are blessed in me, it nevertheless does not free the accursed from his curse.' He also wanted to prevent people from saying that since he lived among them, he would not harm his neighbor and therefore they could marry them. It is in regards to this that he said 'among whom I dwell' – Yes, I dwell among them, but that is still not enough to marry them.'*"

In his request to Eliezer, Abraham was not content with just a promise, but wanted an oath. And not just a simple oath, but one that requires an explanation, for if Abraham was afraid that Eliezer would not keep his word, then what purpose would an oath serve? However if Abraham did trust him, then why make him take an oath?

We may explain this by saying that Abraham was afraid that Eliezer would break his word out of self-interest, as the Sages explain in the Midrash: "*Thus it is written: Canaan, the balances of deceit are in his hand. He loves to oppress [Hosea 12:8]. Canaan – this was Eliezer; the balances of deceit are in his hand – for he sat and weighed his daughter: Is she fit [to be Isaac's wife] or is she unfit? He loves to oppress – to oppress the beloved one of the world, namely Isaac. So he spoke to him until*

he came to the word ‘perhaps’ [Bereshith 24:5], i.e., ‘I will then give him my own daughter.’ ‘You are cursed,’ said [Abraham] to him, ‘but my son is blessed, and the cursed cannot adhere to the blessed’” (Bereshith Rabba 59:9).

This means that Abraham knew that Eliezer wanted to cleave to someone who was blessed and to give his own daughter to Isaac as a wife. Hence Abraham feared that Eliezer would break his word, not because he was already trying to give his daughter to Isaac as a wife, but because he would find reasons to extricate himself from his promise. In fact by making Eliezer swear an oath by “*the G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth,*” Abraham knew that he would not transgress it. Due to this oath, each time that Eliezer wanted to break his word, he would recall the moment that he made this oath, a lofty spiritual moment when Abraham made him swear by “*the G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth,*” and thus he would not break it.

The Greatness of Palti ben Laish

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin says something similar in regards to Palti ben Laish, to whom King Saul had given his daughter Michal in marriage, despite the fact that she was already married to David. By order of the king, Palti ben Laish was commanded to live with her, although he did not approach her. Of him the Sages said, “*You surpass them all [Mishlei 31:29] – [this refers] to Palti son of Laish*” (*Sanhedrin 20a*). The Sages also said, “*His name was really Palti, so why was he called Paltiel? Because G-d [E-l] helped him to escape [palti] from sin. What did he do? He planted a sword between her and him, and he said: ‘Whoever tries this shall be struck with this sword’*” (*ibid. 19b*).

Day after day, Palti was with her in his home. Day after day he was next to her. What did he do so as not to sin? What did he do to conquer his desires? He planted a sword between himself and her.

Here Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin asks, “*What good was it to plant a sword? How could it have prevented him from sinning? He could have simply removed the sword and broken his word by approaching her! When a person is assailed by his desires, does a sword have the power to stop him? He planted it, and he could have also removed it!*”

He replies that this sword only served as a reminder to Palti, a reminder of his decision. Having planted this sword was enough to constantly remind him of the oath that he took and the feelings he had on the day he planted it, which is how he maintained his resolve.

We learn something amazing from this: “*The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children,*” meaning that sometimes even a small deed to strengthen ourselves – such as an oath between two people, or planting a sword between a man and a woman, even if not done publicly, but rather in secret – can prevent a person from falling into the abyss. Even under those circumstances, he can control his desires.

In reality, Eliezer was a great man with a pure heart. It was not without reason that Abraham put him in charge of all his possessions. Furthermore, on the verse “*he armed his trained servants*” (*Bereshith 14:14*), the Sages say that Eliezer was equal to 318 men,

and that a miracle occurred for his sake during the war of the kings. He succeeded in his mission, and furthermore a kefitzat haderech [miraculous shortening of the path] was performed for him.

Yet Abraham knew that despite Eliezer's purity of heart, as well as his spiritual greatness and stature, he would have been unable to resist his desires arising from self-interest if he did not take an oath. In fact after strengthening his resolve in this way, Eliezer prayed to G-d for success like a faithful servant. He was not obligated to pray, especially since he would lose out in the process, given that success meant that his daughter would not marry Isaac. Nevertheless Eliezer prayed to find a wife for Isaac, and his prayer was granted.

All this happened on account of Eliezer's oath, for that small deed recalled his promise to Abraham. Sometimes a small deed, in fact, is all that is needed to reach great heights in the service of Hashem.

The Servants of the Patriarchs

Rabbi Acha said, “*The mere conversation of the servants in the household of the Patriarchs is more important than the Torah of their children*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 60:8). In fact the story of Eliezer is not only recorded, but also repeated, while some important mitzvot are only hinted at in the Torah.

The conversations of the Patriarchs' servants have an advantage over some important Torah points and mitzvot. This is because the Torah recounts the story of Eliezer twice, from which we learn proper conduct and ethics. It is not without reason that the Torah chose to go into great detail concerning these conversations, since refined conduct precedes the Torah. Furthermore, because they are more significant than matters of prime importance in the Torah, as well as being crucial to promoting the positive image of a Jew, they take precedence. In fact they describe the duties of the heart and the virtues that make a person suitable for receiving the Torah and fulfilling its important mitzvot. We shall attempt to examine the beauty in the words of Abraham's servant Eliezer, as well as to learn from his conduct. We will then understand why his story is so important, and why the Torah repeats it.

We are familiar with the Sages' statement that Eliezer had a daughter, and that he wanted Abraham to ask him to give her in marriage to Isaac. Instead, Abraham said to him: “*You are accursed and my son is blessed, and the accursed cannot unite with the blessed*” (see *Bereshith Rabba* 59:9). In reality, Eliezer's great hope to connect himself with Abraham was not so far from reality. We cannot say that Eliezer demonstrated a wild imagination by wanting Isaac to marry his daughter. In fact Eliezer was not an ordinary servant, for the Sages say that he transmitted his master's Torah to others (*Yoma* 28b). Abraham himself had chosen Eliezer because he saw that he was skilled, someone who was fit – either because of his knowledge and understanding, or because of his character and conduct – to be among those who transmit tradition in order to spread

the Torah of their master. The Sages also said, “*Abraham said to his servant, the elder [zekan] of his house [Bereshith 24:2] – this teaches that his features resembled his own [ziv ikunin]*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 59:8). As surprising as this appears, the Sages compared Eliezer’s level, from a certain point of view, to that of Abraham. That being the case, was there anybody better suited than Eliezer to connect himself with Abraham through marriage? This was especially true of that generation, in which Abraham was on one side and the rest of the world was on the other, being idolaters. This included Abraham’s own family in Aram Naharaim, since Bethuel and his son Lavan were evildoers and idolaters.

Eliezer knew his place and his level, which is why he had the brazenness to suggest that his daughter should marry Isaac. However Abraham categorically refused, since the accursed cannot unite with the blessed. Eliezer was no doubt stunned by this refusal, unable to understand how the idea of being cursed corresponded to the description given of him, and how a girl from Abraham’s family was preferable to his own daughter, since they were evildoers and idolaters. Nevertheless, Eliezer did not let himself get carried away by these thoughts, and he yielded before his master Abraham and faithfully proceeded to carry out his mission. As soon as Eliezer arrived at his destination, he stood by a well and poured out his supplications before Hashem, hoping that He would demonstrate His kindness to his master and allow him to find a woman who possessed every virtue and was especially kind. Eliezer rose above his own interests to such a degree that he could wholeheartedly pray for the good of his master, even if it was detrimental to his own interests.

When Eliezer’s prayer was answered and he saw in Rebecca the signs he had requested as proof that the young girl was worthy of Isaac, he was not saddened to realize that his hopes had no chance of being fulfilled, meaning that Isaac would not marry his daughter. On the contrary, he prostrated himself to thank Hashem for having demonstrated His kindness to Abraham by allowing him to find a wife worthy of Isaac. This is the greatest proof of Eliezer’s genuine gratitude and joy over the good and success of his master Abraham, for it marked the end of his chances to give his daughter to Isaac. This is an instructive example of a person rising above self-interest and annulling his will and desires before the opinion and wishes of his master. This is what the Torah teaches us from the conversation of the Patriarchs’ servants.

That is the reason why the Torah describes Eliezer’s encounter with Rebecca twice: The first time when it actually happened, and the second time when Eliezer recounts events to Lavan and Bethuel. It is in order to make us understand Eliezer’s joy and fervor in having succeeded in his mission due to an incredible miracle, such that he was unable to contain his enthusiasm and the need to express his joy by sharing it with Rebecca’s family.

We may also say that this is why the Torah twice recounts this story of providence in finding a wife for Isaac. It teaches us that Eliezer felt the need to repeat this miracle of providence to Lavan and Bethuel, thus engraving in his heart the realization that the matter came from Hashem. This meant that G-d’s will was the same as Abraham’s,

even if Eliezer had different plans. Thus all doubts would be removed from Eliezer's heart, meaning that he would be free to rejoice over his master's success. In fact the words of Eliezer, which emerged from a sincere heart and accepting soul, made their way into the hearts of Lavan and Bethuel, and they too recognized that this came from Hashem. Hence they agreed to send Rebecca with him.

We can now see the beauty in the conversation of the Patriarchs' servants. We can see how Eliezer, who was a great Torah figure as well as a man of great character – one who controlled his desires like Abraham – completely yielded and annulled himself before his master Abraham, hoping for his good and his happiness. We have already cited the Midrash, which states that because Eliezer faithfully served a tzaddik, he earned a blessing and went from cursed to blessed, as we read: "*Come, blessed of Hashem*" (*Bereshith 24:31*). We also read that because Eliezer did good for Isaac, he attained eternal freedom (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 16*). This is the Torah that we learn from the conversation of the Patriarchs' servants, and this is the reward for yielding and annulling oneself before the will of one's master – and how much more before the will of the Creator!

The Importance of Men of Goodness

It is written, "*Rather, to my land and to my kindred shall you go and take a wife for my son, for Isaac*" (*Bereshith 24:4*).

Abraham made Eliezer swear to take a wife for Isaac from his homeland, from Haran. In his Torah commentary, the Ran asks why Abraham guided his servant to the daughters of his homeland, completely excluding those of Canaan, since both peoples were idolaters! How were the inhabitants of Haran different than those of Canaan?

Abraham knew that, despite being idolaters, the people of Haran were endowed with a certain degree of goodness. Now anyone who possesses this attribute will eventually improve and become better, even if at first they seem to be acting badly. In fact it is written, "*The world is built on kindness*" (*Tehillim 89:3*), for everyone is a world in microcosm, and if he possesses this character trait, he can "*build himself*" and improve. Hence this character trait existed in Haran, but was lacking among the Canaanites.

In fact the land of Canaan harbored the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants ridiculed the concept of kindness and charity. In these cities, anyone who begged for money or gave to charity was killed on the spot. Furthermore, the king of Sodom had told Abraham, "*Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself*" (*Bereshith 14:21*), his goal being to control those people.

The inhabitants of Haran, on the other hand, despite also being idolaters, possessed the virtue of chesed. For example, when Lavan heard that Eliezer had arrived in town and noted the jewelry given to his sister Rebecca, he coveted Eliezer's wealth and went out to meet him with the purpose of killing him. When Eliezer saw Lavan arriving

armed, he spoke G-d's Name and "vanished" with his ten camels. Forced into realizing that he could not defeat him, Lavan then exclaimed: "*Come, O blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house, and a place for the camels?*" (*Bereshith 24:31*). Here Rashi comments, "*when I have cleared the house – of idolatry.*" Lavan did this because he had certainly thought of welcoming Eliezer into his home, and he knew that Eliezer would not agree to stay in a house filled with idols. This is difficult to understand: If Lavan had initially gone out to kill him, why did he intend on inviting him to stay in his home? Actually, even while going out to commit such a grave act as murder, Lavan thought that it may not be possible for him to defeat Eliezer. At that point the attribute of generosity, which slumbered in him until then, awakened and he cleared his house of idols so he could welcome Eliezer if he couldn't defeat him.

This is why Abraham made Eliezer swear to look for a girl only from Haran, whose inhabitants were capable of goodness.

Thus Eliezer found Rebecca, this great righteous woman who did not follow the ways of the ungodly people around her. In fact when she arrived in Beersheba, she saw Isaac from afar and bowed to the ground, for she perceived the Divine Presence above him. (*Isaac had merited the Divine Presence after the Akeidah, for angels taught him Torah for three consecutive years.*)

Why did the young girls accompanying Rebecca not bow as well? Because they did not perceive the Divine Presence. Likewise, all the girls of Beersheba who regularly saw Isaac did not revere him either! None of these girls were capable of discerning the Shechinah that hovered over him. Only Rebecca, who was a righteous woman, was capable of doing so, which is why she bowed.

Yet what was it that made Rebecca a righteous woman? It was the development of exceptional kindness, which was deeply rooted in her. It was this characteristic which Eliezer perceived, for here was a young girl of three years old who was offering water to his entire entourage as well as his camels! With her limited strength, she drew water numerous times until all the camels had finished drinking, meaning at least 25 gallons per camel (*the amount that a camel can drink*), and there were 10 camels! This represents an enormous quantity of water, to which we must add the water that she brought for the men accompanying Eliezer. It was this attribute of chesed which she developed that gave her the energy to draw such large amounts. Hence as soon as she arrived at Isaac's home, she benefited from the blessing of Sarah in the bread, in the candles, and in the cloud.

Additional Years

Our Sages say, "*The mere conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs' household is more important than the Torah of their descendants*" (*Bereshith Rabba 60:8*). In fact numerous Torah passages containing fundamental principles are written briefly and by allusion, whereas the journey of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, is described in a repetitive and detailed way! How are Eliezer's words superior to other Torah teachings?

The answer is that they contain the fundamental concept of kindness, the virtue

upon which the world stands. This is why Eliezer searched for a kind-hearted girl, meticulously examining Rebecca with this in mind. It is also why the deeds of kindness performed by our Matriarch Rebecca are stressed in this account.

In this regard, the Gemara relates the story of an Amora who let out a heavy sigh, wept, and then arose and laughed. He was asked why he did this, to which he responded that he had wept when the angel of death came to find him, for his time on earth had reached its end. He then began to laugh when he saw G-d preventing the angel from taking his soul. Since he had been generous and kind with others, G-d gave him good years over and above his allotted time. To this he added, “*Whoever shows kindness to others will also be judged for his sins with kindness.*”

Taking an Oath to Strengthen Faith

Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was a great talmid chacham who transmitted his master’s teachings to others. He also dressed with great modesty, for he was very humble, self-effacing and submissive to his master Abraham, even when far from him. In fact Eliezer experienced great miracles such as in the war against the kings, in which he fought alone by Abraham’s side, and from which they emerged victorious. Eliezer also knew the Divine Name through which miracles are accomplished, as the Sages have said (*Yalkut Shimoni Chayeis Sarah* 109): When Lavan ran out to meet him, Eliezer realized that he wanted to harm him and he immediately invoked the Divine Name. At that point he and his camels rose into the air, and Lavan could no longer reach or harm them. Thus Lavan understood that Eliezer was a righteous man, and the Sages speak very highly of him in numerous places.

Hence when the time came for Isaac to get married, Eliezer was the best person to faithfully bring Isaac a wife who conformed to Abraham’s will. Nevertheless, when Abraham explained to Eliezer what he wanted, he asked him to take an oath that he would not be unfaithful to this mission.

This seems very strange, for regardless of how we look at the situation, this oath was unnecessary. In fact if Abraham believed that Eliezer would faithfully carry out his mission, and he was relying upon Eliezer’s integrity and piety, why then did he need to take an oath? However if Abraham suspected that Eliezer wanted to betray him, since Eliezer was still a Canaanite slave after all, and thus under a curse, how was an oath going to render him faithful, since his loyalty was already in doubt? Not to mention the fact that Eliezer had a personal interest at stake, since the Sages said he had a daughter whom he wanted Isaac to marry. As a result, why did Abraham give this mission to Eliezer?

This is why we must say that Eliezer was honest and faithful to Abraham, and that Abraham was fully aware of all his virtues. He trusted in Eliezer’s integrity and piety, and did not suspect him in the least of wanting to betray him.

However selecting a wife for Isaac was a serious matter, as the Torah states:

“Abraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Abraham bakol [in everything]” (*Bereshith 24:1*). Here Rashi states that the term *bakol* has the same numerical value as *ben* (“son”), and since he had a son, he had to marry him off.

As a result, to whom could Abraham entrust such a crucial mission, if not to Eliezer? This mission consisted of traveling to Abraham’s land and birthplace, and there to select a wife for Isaac because the daughters of the Canaanites – even the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre – were not suitable for him. As for the daughters of Lot and Ishmael, they would only have been suitable if nothing better could be found.

Hence the Torah itself takes the initiative and testifies to the tremendous character traits of Eliezer, who was the most suitable person to fulfill the essential task of finding an upright and virtuous wife for Isaac. This is what the Torah says in the verse, “*Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household*” (*Bereshith 24:2*). Eliezer was perfectly suited for this role, for he was faithful, upright, and possessed great virtues. Hence he is described as “*the elder [zekan] of his household*,” for the term *zekan* designates a sage who studies and ripens (“ages”) through the study of Torah. His hair had grown white because of the effort he had invested in his master’s Torah in order to transmit it to others.

That is why a man who considered himself as nothing and who lived and grew old in the study of Torah was worthy of being entrusted with the crucial mission of finding a wife for Isaac. He controlled his passions with all his might, and there was no reason to worry that he would let himself be enticed into doing otherwise and diverting from his mission.

Yet despite all this, Abraham made Eliezer take an oath. Why? Not because Abraham suspected him of being unfaithful (he had no reason to), but because the righteous have the custom of taking an oath for every good endeavor so as to accomplish it with the maximum of perfection, and to overcome everything that can mentally distract them from their task.

In reflecting upon all this, we may draw a lesson of capital importance from this passage. In fact Abraham’s servant Eliezer – who in the opinion of the Sages (*Bereshith Rabba 60:7*) was a descendant of Canaan the son of Ham, who had been cursed by Noah and was to be cursed and become the servant of servants, and whose skin had grown dark – when he cleaved to Abraham and studied Torah with him to such an extent that he “*grew old*” in this study, this same Eliezer managed to escape that curse and become blessed. He completely dominated his passions, witnessed miracles, and even merited to accomplish them, and his face took on the appearance of Abraham’s.

How much more do we as Jews – the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the blessed and chosen people – have the ability to arrive at such lofty levels, and even greater levels, if we make an effort to study Torah until such effort turns our hair white and testifies to the Creator of the universe about the devotion with which we study.

One day I saw an older man whose eyes were puffy, his skin shiny because his body

was tanned by the sun, and his face full of wrinkles. To answer my question, the man explained that all this resulted from years of sitting in the sun to tan himself. Because of the sun, his face had grown dark and wrinkled, and his eyes were puffy due to a lack of sleep, for he spent his time at night pursuing the pleasures of this world.

When I heard this, my entire body was overtaken by fear. I said to myself, “*What will this old man say when asked to give an accounting? Will he dare say the same thing as he said to me?*” Conversely, I thought: “*Happy is the man whose eyes are puffy because he refuses to sleep in order to study Torah at night, whose face has grown dark and wrinkled, and whose hair has grown white in the labor of Torah. Happy is he and happy is his lot!*” We may say that such a man is truly the servant of Hashem, the servant of His household, who grows old in the study of Torah and who completely masters his passions with all his might.

Parsha Toldot

Exiling Yourself to a Place of Torah Guarantees the Torah's Existence Throughout the World

It is written, “*The children struggled together within her, and she said: ‘If so, why am I thus?’ And she went to inquire of the L-RD*” (*Genesis 25:22*). Rashi cites our Sages in stating, “*When she passed the doorways of Torah study of Shem and Eber, Jacob would run and struggle to come out. When she passed the doorway of idolatry, Esau would run and struggle to come out.*” Where did she go? The Sages say, “*Surely she went only to the academy of Shem and Eber*” (*Bereshith Rabba 63:6*) in order to learn of her fate. This is surprising for several reasons: (1) Why was it only when she passed synagogues and places of idolatry that this struggle occurred? Why would Rebecca’s unborn children, especially Jacob, not struggle while she was in the home of Abraham and Isaac? Why did Jacob not want to emerge when Rebecca was there so he could learn Torah? (2) Why did Rebecca go to the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber instead of visiting Abraham, a great prophet and tzaddik, to ask him for advice?

We are familiar with what the Sages have said in the Mishnah: “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah*” (*Perkei Avoth 4:14*). This means that a person will only retain the Torah that he studied when he went far away, to the yeshiva, and studied under difficult circumstances. This is not the case when a person studies at home, where he lacks neither material or spiritual comforts. In that case it becomes difficult for him to acquire Torah. Such is the path that our fathers conquered for the entire Jewish people: Exiling oneself to a place of Torah. We find an example of this with Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, who did not want to exile himself with his friends to a place of Torah, but instead went to a pleasant area where he could study Torah in peace and tranquilly. The result was that his learning vanished, for when he was called upon to read from the Torah, he erred by misreading every word (*Shabbat 147b*). In fact the Sages say, “*Do not rely on your own understanding*” (*Perkei Avoth 4:14*), meaning that we should not rely on our abilities, thinking that we will do better by learning at home. Instead, we must leave for a place of Torah.

Since we have reached this point, we can understand the matter of Rebecca’s two children struggling within her. Jacob did not want to emerge in the house of Isaac, his own home, because he wanted to fulfill the teaching, “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah.*” That is, he did not want to study in his own home in peace and tranquility. Hence it was precisely when Rebecca passed the academy of Shem and Eber that Jacob struggled to emerge, for he wanted to exile himself there to learn Torah and grow spiritually. However the wicked Esau had no intention of exiling himself to a place of Torah, and he only wanted to emerge near a place of idolatry. The Midrash

states, “*Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan [i.e., by troubles concerning Joseph]*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:3). From within his mother’s womb, Jacob decided to exile himself to a place of Torah, not to live in peace. So why change course later on in life?

Furthermore, from the time that he was in his mother’s womb, Jacob understood the meaning of the soul’s exile from the supernal world by living in this world, which is also an exile. He therefore realized that he could fulfill the purpose of living in exile by leaving his home and going to study in a yeshiva. Hence he struggled to emerge in order to fulfill both exiles: The exile from the supernal world to this world, and the exile from home to study in a yeshiva.

It is not without reason that the Torah says, “*Jacob was a tam [upright] man, abiding in tents*” (*Genesis* 25:27), for the letters of the word tam are the same as those of met (“dead”). That is, he was constantly like one who kills himself for the Torah by exiling himself to a place of Torah, toiling in its study under difficult circumstances.

This is why we merited, in exchange for the two exiles that our father Jacob endured, only two destructions, that of the First and Second Temples. The Third Temple, however, will never be destroyed. Similarly, every yeshiva is like a miniature Temple (see *Megillah* 29a), and the Torah will never cease from Israel, all because everyone will exile himself to a place of Torah. Even if that place has been destroyed, the Torah will certainly shine elsewhere because of a tzaddik who exiled himself there, a place where he opened a Torah center, a place where the Torah can shine.

We have already heard of towns that were completely devoid of Torah, yet due to the merit of a tzaddik who exiled himself there, its residents were brought back to Torah. This may be what our Sages meant when they said, “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah.*” That is, exile yourself in order to bring people closer to Torah and repentance. Or perhaps they simply meant that we should exile ourselves to a place of Torah, where we can elevate ourselves to an even greater extent.

Esau’s path was completely different. He did not struggle to leave his mother’s womb when she was at home, for it was a place of Torah. This is also why he did not struggle to leave when she was in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber. He wanted nothing to do with places of Torah. He simply wanted to be a hunter, as it is written: “*Esau was a man familiar with hunting, a man of the field*” (*Genesis* 25:27). He therefore did not struggle to leave his mother’s womb when she was in Abraham’s home, for he wanted nothing to do with Abraham’s Torah. He simply wanted to emerge near places of idolatry. In reflecting upon this, we see that Esau’s path was more difficult for Rebecca to bear than Jacob’s. In fact Jacob was studying Torah while in his mother’s womb, as the Sages have said concerning every baby (*Niddah* 30b). Therefore Jacob only tried to emerge when his mother was near a Beit Midrash. He wanted to exile himself to a place of Torah, not remain at home in peace. This was in contrast to the wicked Esau, who always wanted to leave and commit sins. Hence the pain that he caused his mother was much greater.

Rebecca was told that the child who struggled to emerge near places of idolatry was wicked, whereas the other child was righteous, wanting to emerge and exile himself to a place of Torah. From here we see that one who exiles himself to a place of Torah – like the young men who leave home and travel to a distant yeshiva – resemble Jacob, “*an upright man, abiding in tents.*” It is on account of these men that the world endures. Hence we must exile ourselves to a place of Torah, for then we will be able to completely establish the Torah throughout the world.

Jacob and Esau: Looking at the World in Different Ways

It is written, “*And the children struggled together within her, and she said: ‘If so, why am I thus?’ And she went to inquire of the L-RD*” (*Genesis 25:22*). Rashi cites the Midrash (*Bereshith Rabba 63:6*) in equating the expression *vayitrotzatzu* (“and they struggled”) with the term *ratza* (“to run”), meaning: “*When she passed the doorway of idolatry, Esau would run and struggle to come out.*”

The Gemara cites Rabbi Simlai as saying, “*What does an embryo resemble when it is in its mother’s bowels? Folded writing tablets. Its hands rest on its two temples respectively, its two elbows on its two legs and its two heels against its buttocks. Its head lies between its knees...a light burns above its head and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other, as it is said: ‘Then His lamp shined over my head, and by His light I walked through darkness’ [Job 29:3]. Do not be astonished at this, for a person sleeping here might see a dream [elsewhere]. There is no time in which a man enjoys greater happiness than in those days, for it is said, ‘If only I could be as in the months of old, as in the days when G-d watched over me’ [Job 29:2]. Now which are the days that make up months, but do not make up years? The months of pregnancy...for it is said, ‘He taught me and said unto me: Let My words sustain your heart. Observe My commandments and live’ [Proverbs 4:4].... As soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth, and causes it to forget the entire Torah*” (*Niddah 30b*).

We need to understand this. Let us suppose that Esau wanted to leave his mother’s womb as she walked past places of idolatry, since he had no desire to stay where he was and learn Torah from an angel, for all he dreamed of was reaching a place of idolatry. It therefore makes sense that he tried to leave each time he felt close to a place of idolatry, since that is what he desired from the time he was in his mother’s womb.

As for Jacob, why did he try to leave each time that Rebecca walked past places of Torah study? Why was he not content on staying in his mother’s womb, since it was there that an angel taught him the entire Torah? Could there be a greater joy than that? Furthermore, when he would leave his mother’s womb, the angel would strike his mouth and make him forget everything that he learned. Therefore what did he have to gain by trying to leave the womb near places of Torah study and prayer, since it meant forgetting all the Torah that the angel had taught him? If we consider

whether it was better for him to have remained in his mother's womb or to have left it for houses of study, there is no doubt that it was better for him to stay in the womb as long as possible in order to benefit from the incredible opportunity of learning the entire Torah from an angel. Therefore why did Jacob try to leave? The answer is that he and Esau had a dispute over the way of looking at the world, over its purpose and the best way to benefit from it. The Midrash states, "*When Jacob and Esau were in their mother's womb, Jacob said to Esau: 'My brother, we are two and before us there are two worlds: This world and the World to Come. This world contains food and drink, business, marriage, and bringing forth sons and daughters. However the World to Come is not like this. If you want, you can take this world and I will take the World to Come, as it is written; "Sell me this day your birthright"*" [Genesis 25:31], just as we agree to here in the womb.' At that point Esau took his part in this world and Jacob took his part in the World to Come. As Jacob was returning from living with Laban, and Esau saw Jacob's sons, servants and maidservants, he said to him: 'My brother, did you not tell me that you would take the World to Come? Where did all this wealth come from? Are you using this world as I am?' Jacob replied, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, gave me these possessions to use in this world,' as it is written: 'The children whom G-d has graciously given your servant' [Genesis 33:5]" (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zutah 19*).

Thus Jacob and Esau had completely different ways of seeing things. Esau saw before him two distinct worlds – this world and the World to Come – and to him this world was meant for pleasure, for eating and drinking, getting married and having boys and girls, whereas the World to Come was a world of spiritually. When Esau was asked to choose between both worlds, he chose the world of pleasure, meaning this world. Hence he did not need his birthright, for it conferred spiritual benefits that he did not want. He sought only pleasure. Therefore he said, "*Of what use is a birthright to me?"*" (Genesis 25:32).

As for Jacob, he saw both worlds as one. This world is a passageway designed to prepare a person for the World to Come. Hence as soon as Jacob entered this world, he chose the World to Come, meaning that he considered this world not as an end in itself – not as a place in which a person should seek as much pleasure as possible – but as a preparation for the World to Come, which is spiritual.

When Esau encountered Jacob and his family after many years, and when he noticed that Jacob also had sons, daughters, servants and maidservants, he was surprised: "*My brother, did you not tell me that you would take the World to Come? Where did all this wealth come from? Are you using this world as I am?"*" However Jacob replied, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, gave me these possessions to use in this world."*" In other words: "*It is true that I also have sons, daughters, and wealth, but my goal is not simply to enjoy these things, for Hashem gave me them to use in this world. They are the means by which I can serve Hashem and merit life in the World to Come!"*" Now, since we have seen that Jacob viewed this world as only a means for meriting life in the

World to Come, we can fully understand why he wanted to leave his mother's womb to such an extent that he struggled to emerge each time she walked by houses of Torah study and prayer. Earlier, we asked why Jacob did not want to benefit from learning the entire Torah from an angel, and the answer is that he knew that a person comes into this world only to achieve merit for life in the World to Come. How do we achieve such merit? Is it by being taught Torah from an angel, without any effort on our part? Since such learning is not difficult in any way, it does not deserve a reward. It is a gift from Heaven, so why should it be rewarded? As we read: "*Man is born for toil*" (*Job 5:7*) – "*for toiling in the study of Torah*" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua 6*). The essence of Torah study and mitzvot performance lies in the effort and work that we put into them. When we confront trials and challenges and emerge victorious, we merit a reward in the World to Come. This is why Jacob was eager to leave his mother's womb for houses of study, where he was to invest his efforts and confront the difficult hardships that surrounded him. By emerging victorious, he would merit the great reward that is reserved for the righteous in a world that is entirely good, namely the World to Come.

Isaac's Love for Esau: A Way of Drawing Him Closer to Hashem

It is written, "*Isaac loved Esau, for game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob*" (*Bereshith 25:28*). This is astonishing, for what kind of reason does "*for game was in his mouth*" constitute? Furthermore, the Midrash states that Isaac loved Esau because "*choice meat and choice wine were reserved for his mouth*" (*Bereshith Rabba 63:10*). This too is surprising, for how can we say that our father Isaac, who was sanctified by a tremendous degree of holiness, loved Esau more than Jacob (who studied Torah) because of the delicious meals that he brought him?

If this was how Isaac loved his sons, to the point that he sought Esau in order to bless him with the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, and that the nations of the earth should bow before him, then why did he want to bless Esau more than Jacob? After all, Jacob was an upright man who lived in tents, and he was even more deserving of a blessing than Esau. Although Isaac did not suspect Esau of unsightly deeds, he still knew that one son studied Torah and the other went out into the fields. Did Jacob, who studied Torah, not deserve a blessing even more than Esau, who spent his entire day in the field and brought his father delicious meals?

We may explain this by saying that Isaac knew that Esau committed vile deeds. As the Sages say in the Midrash, the Shechinah dwelled in Isaac's home, but when Esau took wives for himself from among the daughters of Canaan, they began to burn their idolatrous incense and the Shechinah left Isaac. When he saw that Esau had taken to a bad path, that he had married the daughters of Canaan, and that they had turned his heart away by enticing him to commit evil – as they were accustomed to seeing their fathers doing in Canaan – Isaac was greatly distressed and wanted to bring Esau back to the right path.

Yet Isaac could not openly reprimand Esau and ask him to behave like Jacob and study Torah. If he were to have said to him, “*My son, look at how badly you are behaving, at how vile your deeds are! I beg of you, enter the Beit HaMidrash and study Torah like your younger brother Jacob,*” Esau would not have listened because he was steeped in evil. As the Midrash states, Esau committed all the sins that Hashem detests. This is why Isaac could not ask Esau to study Torah, for he certainly would not have listened to him. In fact evildoers detest being reprimanded. What did our father Isaac do? He demonstrated his great love for Esau and began to speak with him: “*My son, I also love game as you do. Please, make me some delicious meals that I love!*” When Esau heard this, he began to listen to what his father was telling him. Once Isaac’s words entered Esau’s ears, he began to chat with him, saying: “*My son, pay close attention not to bring me nevelot or treifot to eat. Slaughter the animals according to the law, and salt the meat according to the law, for I love delicious food.*” In this way, Isaac wanted to educate and accustom Esau to performing mitzvot, for if he paid attention to this mitzvah, he would eventually pay attention to other mitzvot. And when he would pay attention to the mitzvot, he would eventually study Torah. Isaac began with small things, telling himself: “*I will give Esau an easy mitzvah to perform, and in the end he will pay attention to all the mitzvot.*” As the Sages say, “*If you take hold of too large a thing, you may lose your hold. However if you take hold of a smaller thing, you will retain your hold*” (*Yoma 80a*). Hence Isaac told Esau, “*If you bring me nevelot or treifot, I will not bless you.*” He did this in order to infuse Esau’s heart with a love for Hashem.

On the other hand, Isaac did not need to demonstrate his love for Jacob, even though he loved him dearly, for Jacob studied Torah all day long. Isaac did not openly demonstrate his great love for him, as he did for Esau, because Jacob studied Torah and followed the ways of Hashem. It was therefore better not to demonstrate his love, as it is written: “*One who spares his rod hates his child, but he who loves him disciplines him*” (*Mishlei 13:24*). Since Esau had taken to a bad path and his father wanted to bring him back to the right one, he demonstrated his love for him by pretending to be interested in game. In this way, he would accustom Esau to performing mitzvot.

We should not be surprised by the fact that Isaac commanded Esau to bring him delicious meals consisting precisely of game. By so doing, Esau was at least practicing (albeit reluctantly) ritual slaughter, as well as verifying and salting meat in order to kasher it so his father Isaac could eat it. In reality, Isaac did not have to send Esau into the field to bring him delicious meals, since Isaac had domesticated and wild animals in his home. Why did he send Esau into the field to bring him game?

Isaac thought: “*Since Esau will put an effort into performing mitzvot by going into the field and bringing me game – by slaughtering it and kashering the meat according to the law – he will cleave to Torah and mitzvot.*” Hence he did not command Esau to wear his beautiful garments, which he had taken from Nimrod, so that all the animals of the field would fall before him. If the animals of the field were to fall before Esau,

he would not have needed to put an effort into this mitzvah, and the Torah only endures with a person who puts an effort into it.

Isaac's sole intention was to infuse a love for Hashem into Esau's heart by making him perform easy mitzvot; he even promised to bless him if he did so. Furthermore, because Esau would perform these easy mitzvot for selfish reasons, he would eventually perform difficult mitzvot for non-selfish reasons. This is how we progress: By doing things with ulterior motives, we come to doing things for their own sake. Isaac believed that by accustoming Esau to performing easy mitzvot, he was readying him for all mitzvot.

From what we have said, we can understand Rashi's comments: "*In his mouth – as the Targum renders: In Isaac's mouth. The Midrashic interpretation is: With Esau's mouth, for he would entrap him and deceive him with his words.*" These two explanations are really one, for why did Isaac demonstrate his great love of Esau? It was because he saw that Esau was taking to a bad path and trying to deceive him by saying, "*I would have liked to study Torah today!*" Isaac proved to be more cunning by asking Esau to bring him some game. In doing so, he was accustoming Esau to the performance of mitzvot.

A Covenant of Peace That Did not Last

It is written, "*They said, 'We have seen that Hashem was with you, so we said: Let there now be an oath between us, between ourselves and you, and let us make a covenant with you. If you do [not] harm us, as we have not touched you, and as we have done with you only good, and we sent you away in peace, [so do] you now, blessed of Hashem. 'So he made a feast for them, and they ate and drank*

 (Bereshith 26:28-30).

This raises a great question: Why did our holy Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac make a covenant with Avimelech, given that he was liable to make our holy Matriarchs, Sarah and Rebecca, impure if G-d had not prevented him? Even if Avimelech was not an evildoer, the Torah prohibits the making of covenants with non-Jews, as it is said: "*You shall not seal a covenant with them, nor shall you show them favor*" (Devarim 7:2). Were our holy Patriarchs afraid of him, afraid that he might harm them? How could this be, given that they trusted Hashem to save them from the hands of the wicked, as He had saved them in the past?

To Prevent them from Sinning

We may explain this passage in light of what the Sages have said in the Midrash, namely that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made converts and brought them under the wings of the Shechinah (Bereshith Rabba 84:4). This is why Abraham made a covenant with Avimelech, in the hope that this evildoer would learn from Abraham's good deeds and change his ways, and that by making a covenant with him, he would feel closer to him and avoid sin. Isaac also wanted to do the same, and so he tried to bring Avimelech closer to the Shechinah in order to save him from sin, hoping that he would repent and stop sinning.

However that may be, Avimelech did not learn from the good deeds of Abraham or Isaac, nor did he distance himself from sin, meaning that these covenants were useless. Not only that, but Avimelech canceled the first covenant with Abraham and wanted to profane Rebecca. Why? Because such is the way of the peoples of the world: Since they have no Torah, their conduct is constantly changing. Later generations do not resemble previous generations, for their lifestyle is in line with the views of thinkers and scientists in every generation. All the peoples listen to them, even though they say the opposite of what their predecessors said.

It is difficult to understand what our Sages in the Gemara meant when they said, “*When a man takes leave of his fellow, he should not say to him, ‘Go in peace,’ but ‘Go to peace.’*” For Moshe – to whom Jethro said, ‘*Go to peace*’ [Shemot 4:18] – went up and prospered, whereas Absalom – to whom David said, ‘*Go in peace*’ [2 Samuel 15:9] – went away and was hanged” (*Berachot* 64a). We therefore need some way to explain why, once Avimelech and his men concluded a covenant with Isaac, the verse states: “*They departed from him in peace*” (*Bereshith* 26:31). It is also difficult to understand why the following verse states, “*Vayehi [And it happened] on that day, that Isaac’s servants came...and they said to him, ‘We have found water.’*” After all, the Sages teach, “*Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates misfortune*” (*Megillah* 10b). However no misfortune occurred on that day, since they found a well! Furthermore, they ate and drank on the previous day, and they celebrated and made a covenant, so what misfortune could have occurred?

The Children of Israel are not like the peoples of the world. Since the time that the Torah was given to them on Mount Sinai, Torah and mitzvot have been established for them for all time, and words of Torah will never be annulled, not even in the era of Mashiach. The Children of Israel are not influenced by the morals of the people among whom they live, just as our forefathers did not change their names, garments, or language in Egypt, despite having lived among the Egyptians for centuries (*Lekach Tov, Shemot* 6:6). Since they preserve the traditions of their fathers, they do not allow themselves to get swept into sin. Indeed, for thousands of years Jews have been taking an etrog and lulav, and for thousands of years Jews have eaten matzah on Passover. In fact not only do they not put chametz into their mouths, they do not even let it into their homes on Passover. This will never change. The same cannot be said of the peoples of the world, for they have no Torah or mitzvot, and their way of life is not constant, for they are always changing according to time and place.

A Temporary Covenant

This is why Isaac was immersed in sadness on the day that this covenant was made, for he knew that it was not a true covenant, and that in the end it would be annulled, for non-Jews do not keep their word. Furthermore, the way of life among the nations of the world fluctuates with the generations, which is why the verse states: “*Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace*” (*Bereshith* 26:31), for he experienced no joy in this. In fact he regretted knowing that Avimelech would return to his evil deeds, which

is why Isaac did not hesitate to bless him when he left. Thus the Torah states, “*they departed from him in peace,*” which was written so as to inform us that the tzaddik did not make a covenant with Avimelech out of love. He only did so in order to bring him closer to the Torah. However he was unsuccessful, which is why Avimelech returned to his evil ways.

When he came to make a covenant with Isaac, Avimelech knew that it would be temporary and end up being annulled, as he had annulled the first covenant with Abraham. How do we know this? We learn it from Avimelech himself, for upon concluding a covenant with Abraham he said, “*Swear to me here by G-d that you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my grandson*” (*Bereshith 21:23*). At that point, Avimelech did not think that he would be unfaithful to the covenant, which is why he concluded it for all the generations. Yet when he left Abraham, he said: “*I don't want to learn from his good deeds, and it's impossible to distance myself from sin, so I'm canceling the covenant.*” Some time later, when he saw Isaac's success, he immediately wanted to renew the covenant out of jealousy. Nevertheless, Avimelech did not use the expression “*nor with my son, nor with my grandson*,” as he had done with Abraham. He simply said, “*Let there now be an oath between us, between ourselves and you,*” without mentioning future generations, for he knew that this covenant would not endure. He therefore entered it superficially, knowing that it would not last long.

The Tzaddik Perishes, But No Man Takes it to Heart

It is written, “*Jacob cooked a stew, and Esau came in from the field and was exhausted. Esau said to Jacob, 'Please pour some of that very red stuff into me, for I am exhausted.'* ... *Jacob said, 'Sell me, as of this day, your birthright.'* Esau said, ‘*Look, I am going to die, so why do I need this birthright?*’ ... *He swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.* ... *[Esau] ate and drank, and arose and left. Thus Esau despised the birthright*” (*Bereshith 25:29-34*).

Let us consider a few things that require further explanation in the story of Esau selling his birthright to Jacob: Esau returns from the field exhausted and starving, and he asks Jacob to give him something to eat. Why does he ask in such an odd way, requesting that Jacob feed him as one feeds an animal? As Rashi explains on verse 30, Esau said: “*I will open my mouth, and you will pour a lot into it.*” Why did he not just eat it by himself?

We also need to understand why our father Jacob, the chosen one among the Patriarchs, decided to act with such indifference towards his twin brother, his closest relative, when he was starving. Instead of demonstrating kindness to Esau, he took advantage of his weakened state to take his birthright by means of a coerced sale. Furthermore, Jacob should have been afraid that Esau would die of hunger while they were still agreeing on the details of the sale, as we read in the story of Nachum Ish

Gamzu: As he was traveling on the road with three donkeys loaded with food, a poor man stopped him and asked for something to eat. While still unloading food from his donkey, the poor man died of hunger (*Taanith 21a*). That said, why was Jacob not afraid that the same thing would happen to Esau?

Furthermore, why was Jacob so attached to Esau's birthright and tried to buy it from him? Commenting on verse 31, Rashi states that Jacob thought: "*Since the sacrificial service is performed by the firstborn, this evildoer is not fit to perform the sacrificial service for G-d.*" It still remains difficult to understand Jacob's reasoning, for it is clear that Esau was wicked, meaning that he would never have brought offerings to G-d. Furthermore, Esau committed five sins on that day, including the sin of denying G-d (*Bava Batra 16b*)! Since it is clear that he even denied G-d, he would never have brought Him offerings. Therefore what did it matter if Esau was designated as the firstborn, since it meant nothing to him? In the end, Jacob and his descendants would be the ones standing before G-d to serve Him and bring Him sacrifices and offerings.

We can understand all this by the words of our Sages, which Rashi cites here: "*Avraham died on that day in order to prevent him from seeing Esau, his grandson, taking to an evil path, for that would not be 'the good old age' which G-d had promised him. It is for this reason that G-d shortened his lifespan by five years.... Jacob cooked lentils as a first-meal for mourners.*" Now five years of a tzaddik's life represent an entire world, and we have no idea of the eternal benefit that Creation draws from each instant in which a tzaddik lives on earth. This applies even more to the life of Abraham our father, for each day and at every moment he radiated and spread faith in G-d within the world, laying the foundations of faith in the existence of G-d and in His guiding hand. It is certain that with five more years, he would have done incredible things to further increase faith in the world. The tzaddik also draws an immense benefit from each moment in which he lives and serves G-d here in the world of action. As G-d answered King David when he asked Him to take him out of the world on the eve of Shabbat, not during Shabbat itself (which was His intention): "*Better to Me is one day in which you sit and engage in [Torah] learning than the thousand offerings which your son Solomon is destined to offer before Me on the altar*" (*Shabbat 30a*). Despite all this, G-d wanted to keep His promise to Abraham and allow him to live out his final days in joy. He therefore shortened his lifespan by five years in order to prevent him from seeing his grandson Esau taking to the wrong path.

We need to understand just how wicked Esau was: He became such a sinner that it was preferable for Abraham to forgo five years of his life rather than to be disturbed by the sight of his grandson distancing himself from G-d's ways, denying his faith, the resurrection of the dead, and so on. As we read in the Gemara, "*Bad upbringing in a man's house is worse than the war of Gog and Magog*" (*Berachot 7b*). Furthermore, Esau's deeds and wickedness led to Abraham's death five years too early, and all the detrimental effects which this had on the world and his personal development must be imputed to him.

Abraham died and everyone was in mourning, grieving over his death. It was now time for people to do some soul-searching, to examine their deeds. At that point everyone related to the deceased had sudden bursts of repentance, especially since Abraham was a great man. The greater the loss, the greater the interest in knowing who can replace him. Yet the wicked Esau, who was the cause of all this, went out into the field to quench his desires on that very same day. At that point he fulfilled the verse, “*The tzaddik perishes, but no man takes it to heart*” (*Isaiah 57:1*). Not only that, but when he returned and saw Jacob preparing lentils for the meal of mourners – whose objective is to awaken in the mourner’s heart the realization that the wheel turns – Esau’s soul was unmoved. On the contrary, he rejected from his mind any thought of mourning and had no desire to think about his mission or the day of his death. All that mattered to him was how to quench his desires and eat. In fact he asked Jacob, “*Please pour some of that very red stuff into me.*” He did not even want to make visual contact with the lentils, nor did he mention them by name, since to him it was just red food. Esau also did not want to let himself be reminded or think about what the lentils alluded to, which is why he asked someone else to cram the food into him, a very unusual way of eating! Let the lentils reach his stomach alone, not his mind or thoughts.

When Jacob saw Esau’s indifference to the mourning of their family, not sharing in their pain, but rather disdaining his grandfather and father, he responded in kind by showing indifference to his hunger, refusing to feed him “*for free.*” Jacob thought, “*This evildoer, who ridicules everything that’s holy, isn’t worthy of being called the firstborn, whose holiness is tied to being the ‘first born.’*” Even if it was clear that this rebel, this heretic, would not stand before G-d to bring Him offerings, the fact that he was designated as the firstborn – which in principle implied the offering of sacrifices – was a great sacrilege. Stripping him of the birthright would therefore be a good thing. Hence Jacob attempted to take it from him in exchange for a meal of lentils. It was also for this reason that Jacob was not afraid that Esau would die of hunger, for if Esau really felt that he would faint, he would have eaten anything to regain his strength. However he stubbornly insisted on gulping down his food, like an animal, for he sought to ridicule the mourning of the tzaddik. Jacob therefore concluded that Esau was not in danger, and as mentioned earlier he demonstrated his indifference towards Esau by stripping him of his birthright, since he was not worthy of being shown kindness or benefiting from being the firstborn.

Jacob’s Garments

It is written, “*So he drew close and kissed him; he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him; he said, ‘See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed’*” (*Bereshith 27:27*).

The Midrash recounts that when Jacob went to see his father Isaac, the latter smelled something in his garments. We need to ask what exactly this was, and what was the significance of that fragrance. We note that the term beged (“garment”) has a numerical

value of nine, as well as a value of ten when adding one for the term itself. This corresponds to the ten Sephirot that emanate from the supernal light, meaning Hashem. A tremendous spiritual fragrance emanated from Jacob's garments, symbolizing the close connection between himself, the ten Sephirot, and the ten emanations that are the foundation of the entire Torah. The reason for this lies in the fact that Jacob's essence was the holy Torah, to which he cleaved with all his strength, all his heart, and all his soul.

At a deeper level, we may say that even Jacob's garments had the fragrance of the Torah that dwelled in him. In fact garments symbolize the Torah, for just as garments provide warmth, so too does the Torah. And just as garments are used against the cold, Jacob completely eliminated the evil inclination – which is called “*cold*,” as stated in regards to Amalek (which is also the evil inclination), as it is written: “*He met you [karcha] on the way*” (*Devarim 25:18*), the term karcha being derived from kar (“cold”) – by means of the Torah. Jacob exhibited warmth in serving G-d, and it was from this warmth that he derived all his strength, as we read: “*Jacob was an upright man [tam], dwelling in tents*” (*Bereshith 25:27*). Now the term tam is formed by the same letters as met (“dead”), for Jacob literally killed himself in the tent (i.e., the learning) of Torah.

This is precisely what Isaac said: “*The voice is the voice of Jacob*” (*Bereshith 27:22*), for when the voice is Jacob's – when his voice in Torah is heard – at that point the hands of Esav are no more, meaning that Esav cannot disturb him because heat overpowers cold. When Esav would seek to harm Jacob or his descendants with his hands, they would immediately be burned with fire, this being the fire of Jacob's voice. The term bigdo (“his garment”) has the same numerical value as the Divine Name Yud - Hei, which symbolizes the World to Come (created with the letter yud) and the present world (created with the letter hei). Thus we read, “*The heavens are Hashem's, but the earth He has given to man*” (*Tehillim 115:16*). Man's work consists of connecting both worlds, to unite the yud with the hei, by living in this world along with the World to Come. We achieve this by deriving our joy from the spirituality of Torah, thereby making the Name Y-H reign over the entire world, as it is written: “*For in Y-H, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds*” (*Isaiah 26:4*). This is the meaning of the fragrance that Isaac perceived in Jacob's garments.

Since we have reached this point, we should be able to understand the connection between Jacob's garments, when he went to see his father, and Adam's garments after he sinned. When Adam sinned and realized that he was naked, the Holy One, blessed be He, took him out of the Garden of Eden. This left Adam feeling truly separated from G-d. Only the garments that G-d had given to Adam still connected him to his Creator, for a garment represents the holy Torah, which clothes, warms, and connects man to the ten Sephirot, as explained above.

Furthermore, the Holy One, blessed be He, fashioned a belt for Adam. Now a belt separates the upper part of the body from the lower part, alluding to the fact that a person can choose to distinguish between good and bad, or he can confuse them and

live according to his instincts. In fact before Adam's sin, this ability to choose did not exist, for the divide between good and evil was perfectly clear. Before the sin, we read that Adam and his wife were naked but not ashamed, and it was only after the sin that they were found together and confused. Man's role is to "*distance himself from evil and do good,*" and garments (which symbolize the Torah and a connection to Hashem) are a way to achieve that goal.

Be that as it may, Adam was able to wear these garments while still in the Garden of Eden, for after the sin he remained there until the end of Shabbat. This is why, when Jacob went to see his father while wearing Esav's garments (who, as we know, had stolen them from Nimrod, who in turn had taken them from Adam), they still possessed the fragrance of the Garden of Eden. Hence Isaac sensed the level of Adam in the Garden of Eden through the intermediary of Jacob's garments. Isaac sensed the connection that Jacob had with Hashem, with the Torah, and with the ten Sephirot. That reality gave Isaac tremendous satisfaction, to the point that the Shechinah rested upon him.

Esav also wore Adam's garments. Yet unlike Jacob, the fragrance of the Garden of Eden did not emanate from them. Rather, it was the odor of Gehinnom. This is because Esav's body was infused with filth and uncleanness as a result of the sins he committed. Such was not the case with Jacob's body, which was entirely devoted to Hashem. Jacob was therefore worthy for Adam's garments, which he wore, to add still more sanctity to him, to the point that he seemed to be walking in the Garden of Eden. Hence when Jacob wore Adam's garments, the fragrance of the Garden of Eden emanated from them.

Such was the essence of Jacob, who was very careful to prevent the Satan from having even the smallest influence on him. Jacob fought with immense strength to protect his virtues, to the point that the dust around him flew up because he did not allow it to cling to him. And when the Satan touched Jacob's thigh, the sun immediately arose, alluding to the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, healed Jacob from that attack. This is because when a person fights against evil with all his strength, Hashem comes to his aid and heals him. From here Jacob learned that a person's role in life is to rid himself of the dust of the evil inclination, preventing it from ever clinging to him or disrupting him in serving G-d. Conversely, he must cleave to the dust of the Sages, meaning to their good deeds and teachings, which are called dust, as it is written: "*Sit in the dust at their feet*" (*Pirkei Avot 1:4*).

Whoever is Grateful can Receive!

In accordance with the Midrash, Rashi explains that on the very same day that Esav returned from the field exhausted, Abraham died so he would not see his grandson turning to the wrong path, which would have ruined the "*good old age*" that G-d had promised him (*Bereshith 15:15*). Hashem therefore shortened Abraham's life, and Jacob prepared a meal of lentils to comfort his grieving father.

It is surprising that G-d shortened a tzaddik's life by five years in order to prevent him from seeing his grandson veering from the right path. Thus it is said that King David asked Hashem, "*Sovereign of the universe, on what day will I die?*" He replied, "*You will die on Shabbat.*" However David asked to die on a Sunday, to which G-d responded: "*The reign of your son Solomon shall already have come due, and one reign may not overlap another even by a hairbreadth.*" David then made the following suggestion: "*May I die on the eve of Shabbat,*" to which Hashem replied: "*One day in your courtyards is better than a thousand*" – in other words: "*I prefer the one day that you sit and learn instead of the thousand burnt-offerings that your son Solomon is destined to offer before Me on the altar*" (*Shabbat 30a*).

We therefore see the importance of a single day in a tzaddik's life on earth. G-d is not prepared to take back even a single day too early. Yet in that case, how could Hashem have cut short Abraham's life by five entire years? After all, Abraham was the pillar of goodness in the world, turning numerous people away from sin each day! Why did G-d not simply prevent Esav from turning to evil for five more years, thereby respecting the promise of a "good old age" for Abraham, who in that case would not have seen his grandson turning to the wrong path?

Furthermore, why did Esav ask Jacob to stuff lentils down his throat, rather than eating them in a normal way? We've never seen a human being eat like this, so why did Esav attempt to do so?

Finally, it is very surprising that Jacob asked Esav to sell him his birthright. In fact Esav was a complete evildoer who was never going to serve in the Temple, which was destined for the Jewish people – and they were to descend from Jacob, not Esav. In other words, the birthright served no purpose for Esav. Furthermore, it is written that Esav despised it. In that case, why was Jacob ashamed that Esav should be called the "firstborn," since in practical terms it meant nothing to him?

The explanation resides in a statement made by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "*A bad son in a man's house is worse than the war of Gog and Magog*" (*Berachot 7b*). In fact parents suffer greatly when seeing their child veering from the right path, especially when they deny G-d.

It was precisely on the day of Abraham's death that Esav came to despise the Temple service. Even in light of the blessing that he and Jacob were preparing to receive, Esav did not strengthen his faith, nor did he mourn for his grandfather Abraham. On the contrary, he went to see Jacob and scorned all the good that he received.

The wicked Esav acted this way only next to Jacob, however, for in their parent's home Esav's behavior was actually dignified, and he misled them through his words. Yet Jacob had grown up with Esav, and he knew him well. Hence Esav went to see him to ridicule and mock the good path advocated by their grandfather Abraham, and precisely on the day of the tzaddik's death.

In addition, Esav did not want to eat in a normal way, but wanted lentils to be poured into his mouth. Although Jacob had prepared them as a mourning symbol for

Abraham's passing, Esav was filled with scorn and wanted to eat them as camels do, for camels open their mouths to eat food in huge amounts.

It is obvious that if Esav had asked to eat normally, Jacob would not have prevented him from doing so by immediately asking him to sell the birthright. Yet upon seeing the disdain with which Esav viewed the passing of his grandfather the tzaddik, and how he stubbornly insisted on eating like an animal, Jacob did not want to feed him for nothing, and therefore he insisted that Esav first sell him the birthright.

We can now understand why Hashem shortened Abraham's life by five years. In fact he himself would have wanted to die prematurely rather than see his grandson Esav denying the goodness of G-d and disparaging the promise that "*kings shall descend from you*" (*Bereshith 17:6*).

Despite the fact that, from a halachic point of view, Esav's firstborn status had no practical importance because he had no possibility of serving in the Temple, Jacob did not want Esav to possess that privilege when he saw him neglecting the goodness of Hashem. That is why he incited him to sell the birthright.

Once he sold the birthright out of contempt, the blessing no longer had any value to him, for it could no longer take effect on him. In fact by holding the birthright in contempt, Esav had provoked Abraham's premature death, and as a result he prevented the coming of great salvation to the world in honor of G-d. Thus Esav, who was the source of all this evil, was not worthy of being called the "*firstborn*," even if it changed nothing in practice.

Nevertheless, we see that Isaac wanted to bless Esav before dying. He had certainly sensed, through a prophetic spirit, that the wicked Esav had no merit to protect him in this world, since he had denied the goodness of G-d and sold his birthright. However Isaac did not know that his son had scorned the blessing, which is why he wanted to bless him. Now G-d, Who was aware of this, arranged things such that the blessing reverted to Jacob.

Parsha Vayeitzei

The Study of Torah Prepares us for Confronting Life's Trials

It is written, “*Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran*” (*Genesis 28:10*). Rashi states, “*This tells us that the departure of a tzaddik from a place makes an impression, for while a tzaddik is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor; he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed.*”

A few questions need to be raised concerning this verse, the first in our parsha. First of all, why does the Torah use such a drawn out expression to tell us that Jacob left Beersheba? We already know this from what we read near the end of the previous parsha: “*Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went toward Paddan-Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau*” (*Genesis 28:5*). Even if the Torah wants to return to this subject in order to continue the description of Jacob’s journey to Haran, it would have been sufficient to state, “*Jacob went to Haran*.” Why does the text again tell us that he left Beersheba? Furthermore, if the Torah wanted to tell us that Jacob left Beersheba, it could have used a much briefer expression (e.g. “*Jacob went from Beersheba to Haran*”). Why the need for the lengthy, “*Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran*”?

There is another issue that needs to be addressed. From the words that the verse uses, it would seem that Jacob left Beersheba and journeyed directly to Haran. Yet he did not go to Haran right away, but rather 14 years later! Commenting on the last verse of Parsha Toldot, Rashi tells us that Jacob “*hid for 14 years in the house of Eber; and afterwards he went to Haran*.” That is, Jacob hid in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Ever for 14 years in order to study Torah. Thus the question becomes why the Torah concealed this fact by giving the reader the impression that Jacob immediately traveled to Haran upon leaving Beersheba.

The answer is that the Torah is telling us by allusion that Jacob’s main journey was from Beersheba to Haran. Although he lingered for 14 years in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber to study Torah, that was not an objective in and of itself. Rather, it constituted part of his journey from Beersheba to Haran. Learning Torah was a way to prepare for his journey to Haran. Thus Jacob did leave Beersheba and traveled to Haran. How did he succeed? By preparing himself for 14 years through the study of Torah. Why did Jacob require such a long and difficult preparation of 14 years? The answer is that when Jacob left for Haran to live near Laban the Aramean, trials of a different kind awaited him there, trials that he had never confronted until then. True, he was used to living near the wicked Esau, but at least Esau had studied Torah when he was a child, until he finally grew up and became, as the verse states, “*A man familiar*

with hunting, a man of the field" (*Genesis 25:27*). Yet the treacherous Laban never studied Torah in his entire life. There was another difference between Esau and Laban, namely that Esau believed in G-d. He committed wrongs simply because he chose to follow his evil inclination. He nevertheless possessed the principle of faith, proof being that when Isaac blessed Jacob in his place, Esau wept and bitterly cried out. If he had not believed in Hashem, he would not have attributed any importance whatsoever to these blessings of Isaac, nor would he have regretted losing them. Yet Esau felt that he had lost his share in this world when the blessings were stolen from him, which proves that in his heart he believed in Hashem.

As for Laban the Aramean, he never had the slightest contact with holiness, nor did he possess any faith. He also lived in a place of evil, in Haran, whose name evokes charon af (Divine wrath). It is not easy to live with such a rasha for so many years. Indeed, it was a tremendously difficult trial for Jacob, one that he hadn't needed to confront until then.

Yet a man like Jacob did not allow himself to lose hope. When he realized the trials that awaited him in Haran, he prepared himself in the necessary way, a preparation that would make those trials easier to overcome. What did this consist of? He remained concealed within the Beit Midrash of Eber to study Torah with great diligence for 14 years, corresponding to the time that he worked for Laban in order to marry his daughters. By the fact of having diligently labored in Torah, he carried in himself the power to remain upright through all the trials he faced, and to eventually return upright to his father's home, as it is written: "*Jacob returned whole*" (*Genesis 33:18*).

According to this explanation, we can understand why the Mishnah states, "*Not study, by practice is the essential thing*" (*Perkei Avoth 1:17*). In fact when we study in the Beit Midrash, we naturally become influenced for the good. We become meticulous in performing mitzvot and our fear of Heaven grows. The study of Torah also protects us from the temptations of the evil inclination. However that in itself is not the main thing, for the battle begins when we leave the Beit Midrash. That is when our real battle starts, when we must confront the evil inclination. It is then that we are far from the influence of our parents and teachers, being without the special atmosphere that the Torah offers to those who study it. There is no middle ground in this war, for we must either defeat the evil inclination or fall before it, as our Sages have said: "*He who places himself in the arena stands either to fail or win*" (*Shemot Rabba 27:9*). It is in this sense that the Tanna said, "*Not study, by practice is the essential thing*." The essential thing is the realm of action – leaving the palace of Torah, surrounded as it is with the atmosphere of Gan Eden, and journeying toward a mundane world that is devoid of Torah, where nobody is watching us and nobody is there to protect us. It is a place where a person must confront hardships and prove that he can overcome them. Thus actions constitute a proof of study.

The Torah tells us this by stating, "*Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran*." True, we already know that Jacob left Beersheba, as we mentioned,

and we also know that Jacob did not immediately travel to Haran. Yet here the Torah is teaching us the secret to finding strength in trials. Jacob departed from Beersheba, from the great and holy house of Isaac, in order to face the extremely difficult task of remaining for a long time near wicked men such as Laban the Aramean in Haran, a place of evil. How did he confront this trial? By studying Torah in the Beit Midrash. The Torah states that Jacob went from Beersheba to Haran, but does not mention that he went from Beersheba to the Beit Midrash, and from the Beit Midrash to Haran, for studying Torah in the Beit Midrash prepared him for Haran. He departed from Beersheba for Haran with the Torah. That is, from “*study*” he departed for “*practice*,” which serves as a lesson for us all. In order to go out into a vast world that is filled with trials and temptations, we must prepare ourselves in advance. We must arm ourselves with the weapon we need to overcome, that weapon being the study of Torah.

Making a Person Sin is Worse than Killing Him

It is written, “*Laban had two daughters. The name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger one was Rachel. Leah’s eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. ... Laban said, ‘Better that I give her to you than to give her to another man. Remain with me.’ So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, but they seemed to him like a few days because of his love for her*” (*Genesis 29:16-19*). Further on we read, “*Reuben went out in the days of the wheat harvest. He found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah his mother. Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.’ But she said to her, ‘Was your taking my husband insignificant? And now to take even my son’s mandrakes!’ Rachel said, ‘Therefore he shall lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.’ When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, ‘It is to me that you must come, for I have clearly hired you with my son’s mandrakes.’ So he lay with her that night*” (*ibid. 30:14-16*).

Needless to say, these passages are difficult to understand. How can we say that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah because of her beauty? Could we possibly think that Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, considered the beauty of a woman, and that he loved the beautiful one and despised the ugly one, since the Torah says of him: “*Jacob was a just man, living in tents*” (*Genesis 25:27*)? We also need to understand the true meaning of the second passage cited above. For what reason did Leah initially refuse to give the mandrakes to her sister Rachel? After all, Rachel had been kind to Leah by providing her with the secret signs that had been arranged with Jacob, prior to Laban’s attempt to deceive Jacob by having him marry Leah instead of Rachel. When Rachel saw her father taking her sister to marry Jacob instead of her, she thought: “*Now my sister will be put to shame*” (*Megillah 13b*). She therefore gave Leah the signs that Jacob had provided her with, so she would not be put to shame. That being said, how could Leah be so ungrateful to Rachel?

Before explaining all this, let us raise two more questions regarding Parsha

Vayeitzei. The Midrash states: “ ‘This heap [of stones] is a witness’ [Genesis 31:52]. Thus the verse states, ‘Bilam’s foot was crushed against the wall’ [Numbers 22:25] – the heap is this wall, for Bilam had transgressed the oath made to Jacob, as it is written: ‘Nor may you cross over to me beyond this heap’ [Genesis 31:52]. Now Bilam is Laban, as it is written: ‘An Aramean tried to oved [destroy] my forefather’ [Deuteronomy 26:5]. Because he tried to destroy Israel, he is called an Aramean, as it is written: ‘Come invoke wrath against Israel’ [Numbers 23:7]. Hence the wall made him pay” (*Tanhuma, Vayeitzei* 13). All this is very surprising. First of all, what does the Midrash mean by saying: “*Bilam is Laban, as it is written: ‘An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather’*”? How does this verse prove that Bilam is Laban?

There is another problem. The verse states, “*An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation – great, strong, and numerous.*” In the Midrash our Sages said, “*Laban wanted to uproot everything*” (*Sifrei, Devarim* 301). We need to understand how his wickedness was greater than that of other evildoers, and for what reason the Torah says that he sought to *oved* (“destroy”). After all, other evildoers also wanted to destroy Israel, yet they are not described by the same term. We can even make the following inference: If Laban, who wanted to destroy everything but could not, is called *oved*, then why are other evildoers such as Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and those like them – who wanted to destroy everything and almost did – not called *destroyers*? We also need to understand what it means that he wanted to uproot everything, for was that not the goal of those other evildoers?

Let us try to answers all these questions. According to the Sages (*Sifrei, Devarim* 252), one who makes a person sin has committed a worse deed than killing him, for by killing him he has taken him out of this world, yet by making him sin he has taken him out of this world and the World to Come. Laban was also aware of this, and since he knew that Jacob observed the entire Torah – and that Jacob would not fall into his hands as long as he studied Torah and performed mitzvot – he wanted to deceive Jacob in order to make him fall into his hands. What did Laban do? When Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, he saw that twelve tribes were to emerge from her. In fact the Sages have said, “*Joseph was worthy that twelve tribes should issue from him, as they issued from his father Jacob*” (*Sotah* 36b). Hence Jacob told Laban, “*I will work another seven years for you in order to marry your younger daughter Rachel, so that I may have twelve tribes of tzaddikim from her.*”

What did Laban do? He put Leah in Rachel’s place, thinking that as soon as Jacob realized that he had married Leah instead of Rachel, he would be forced to marry Rachel in addition to Leah, which would violate the Torah’s command: “*You shall not take a woman in addition to her sister*” (*Leviticus* 18:18). Thus if Jacob were to transgress the Torah, he would immediately fall into Laban’s hands and have no portion in this world or the World to Come. How much more would he not bring forth twelve tribes! Laban could thereby destroy the descendants of Abraham. Since Laban had tried to

make Jacob sin, the Torah describes him by the term oved, for there is nothing that destroys Israel more surely than making them sin, which causes them to lose this world and the World to Come. Hence the Sages said that Laban wanted to destroy “*everything*,” not “*everyone*,” for he was not only acting against Jews in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense as well, since he wanted to deprive Israel of both worlds by making Jacob sin.

Esau sensed that Jacob had married two sisters, and therefore he went to meet him in order to kill him. Esau thought, “*Up to now Jacob’s Torah protected him. Yet because he transgressed it by marrying two sisters, he has forfeited the Torah’s protection and is liable to death. I therefore have the right to remove him from the world.*” When Jacob encountered his brother Esau, he said to him: “*I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now*” (*Genesis 32:5*). Our Sages explained this to mean, “*I have sojourned [garti] with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot*” (*Midrash Aggadah*). In other words: I did not transgress the words of the Torah, as you may think, for I kept them all, even the mitzvah not to marry two sisters together. Actually, the fact that I married two sisters is not a sin on my part, for the Torah has not yet been given, and I have the status of a ben Noah. Now a ben Noah is considered to be the son of his mother, not his father. Leah and Rachel were sisters through their father, not their mother. Thus as the early Sages said (*see Ramban, Yebamot 98a; Maharil, Likutim 22*), Jacob did not marry two sisters.

When Esau heard that, he wanted to know if it was true. He therefore fell on Jacob’s neck to kiss him, trying to bite him in the process. He then noticed that Jacob’s neck was like a marble column, and his teeth were shattered (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 35*). Esau then understood that Jacob was right, for he felt weakened. Therefore he immediately departed.

How to Merit the Crown of Torah

It is written, “*Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.’ But she said to her, ‘Is it a small matter that you have taken my husband? And now you also want to take my son’s mandrakes?’ Rachel said, ‘Therefore he shall lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes.’ Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, ‘You must come to me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.’ So he lay with her that night. G-d listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son*” (*Genesis 30:14-17*).

Rashi explains: “*In the days of the wheat harvest – to praise the [progenitors of] the tribes. It was harvest time, and he did not stretch out his hand upon stolen property, to bring wheat or barley, but only upon an ownerless thing about which no one cares.*”

This is surprising. Since Reuven found mandrakes in the field, which belonged to everyone, why did Rachel ask Leah to give her some? She could have gone out into the field and gathered some herself, just as Reuven had done. At the very least, Rachel

could have gone to purchase them at the market!

If we say that these mandrakes were more important to her than the presence of the tzaddik by her side, which she relinquished, why did Leah refuse to give her these mandrakes before Rachel said, “*He shall lie with you tonight*”?

A Lesson for the Generations

We may explain this according to the words of our Sages: “*Whoever does not make himself like a desert, which is open to all, cannot acquire the Torah*” (*Tanhuma, Yashan Bamidbar* 6). This is why Rachel wanted to profit from these mandrakes, since they belonged to no single person. It was in order to teach the generations to come that a person cannot merit the crown of Torah or produce the holy tribes of G-d unless he devotes himself entirely to that cause, to the exclusion of all else. Hence Rachel did not go to the market to buy mandrakes, for she wanted to merit something that belonged to everyone. Perhaps if she had gone to where Reuven had found them, she would not have found any more, which is why she asked Leah to give her some.

We note that such behavior was the norm for this tzaddeket, namely to annul herself for the sake of Heaven, something that she did her entire life. In fact when Laban replaced her with Leah, Rachel completely annulled herself and gave Leah the signs she needed so as not to be humiliated (*Megillah* 13b). Rachel did not say, “*I won’t give my sister the signs that the tzaddik gave me.*” Since Rachel was afraid that her sister would be humiliated, she annulled herself and give her these signs, without wondering what would become of her when her sister married the tzaddik.

This is why Rachel merited for even the children of Leah to be considered as hers, as it is written: “*Rachel weeping for her children*” (*Jeremiah* 31:14). By her merit, the Children of Israel who went into exile among the nations would return from there, as it is written: “*Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work shall be rewarded – the word of the L-RD – and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future – the word of the L-RD – and your children will return to their border*” (vv. 15-16). If Rachel had not given these signs to Leah, she would not have married Jacob, and all the tribes would have descended from Rachel. Hence they were all considered as hers, and they were all saved by her merit.

Therefore whoever says that Rachel disdained her husband Jacob is mistaken. She had no intention of disdaining the presence of the tzaddik, exchanging it for the mandrakes that she wanted. She simply wanted to benefit from what belonged to everyone, something that she had done throughout her life. Her children would thereby learn to do the same, and Hashem would answer her prayers by opening her womb.

True, the Sages have said: “*Because she [Rachel] treated the tzaddik so slightly, she was not buried with him*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 72:3). However since all she wanted was to completely annul herself for Hashem, she relinquished the presence of the tzaddik. Hashem therefore arranged things such that Rachel was buried on the road, her grave being a public monument, available to everyone. This was not a punishment, but rather

the opposite, for even her burial place reflected her lifelong desire to help everyone, a desire that was fulfilled.

The Duty to Make an Effort

The proof that this was not a punishment in any way comes from the words of the Midrash: “*Rachel was buried according to the will of Hashem, Who knew that the Temple would be destroyed, that her children would go into exile, that they would take this road and pray by the grave of Rachel, and that she would intercede for them, and He heard her prayer*” (*Pesikta Rabbati* 3).

Therefore this was not a punishment in any way. Furthermore, Hashem himself told Jacob not to bury her in Hebron, but along the road, in a place that everyone passes, because her wish was to help everyone in this world. Hence she would be available to everyone after her death as well, and the Children of Israel could pray by her grave when they went into exile. What the holy Patriarchs were not able to obtain through their prayer, Rachel was able to obtain through hers, as the Midrash says.

Given that this was not a punishment, we may ask why the Sages said that she was not buried with the tzaddik because she slighted him.

The answer is that they did not mean that she actually slighted the tzaddik. Everyone is responsible for making an effort to achieve everything that is incumbent upon him (*Midrash Tehillim* 23:3). A person does not have the right to rely on a miracle and do nothing. Rachel, however, did not make any effort other than to rely on the mandrakes. This is what prompted the Sages to say that Rachel, with regards to her level of holiness, “*treated the tzaddik so slightly*.” In reality, Rachel did not demonstrate an attitude of indifference towards him.

We now understand why Leah did not initially want to give the mandrakes to Rachel. She knew that Rachel was only asking for these mandrakes in order to awaken Divine mercy. She therefore told Rachel, “*My sister, listen to me. Leave these mandrakes alone. If you are relying on their mystical value, you are like someone who has no bread to eat and yet does not leave his home. When asked why he does not go out to look for food, he will say: 'I don't need to earn a living, for the Holy One, blessed be He, will certainly not forget me, and He will send me bread.' Even if this person waits all day for bread, it will not come to him. Why? Because he makes no effort to get it on his own.*”

Leah continued addressing Rachel, saying: “*You must also do something. Share the tent of the tzaddik.*” Rachel replied, “*I don't want to, but I want these mandrakes and prayer.*” When Leah saw that Rachel was insistent, she gave her the mandrakes.

The Temple: Source of Israel's Prosperity

It is written, “*He came upon the place and spent the night there.... He dreamed, and behold: A ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached the heavens. And behold,*

angels of G-d ascending and descending on it. ... Jacob awoke from his sleep...and he was frightened and said: ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of Heaven’” (*Bereshith 28:11-17*).

When Jacob reached this sanctified place, the Temple Mount (*Chullin 91b*), he rested and slept. In his dream, he saw a ladder whose feet were set up on earth and whose top reached the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it. In his dream, G-d promised him: “*Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth*” (*Bereshith 28:14*). Yet it was only when Jacob awoke that he understood the sanctity of this place, for he said: “*This is none other than the house of G-d.*”

This incident is difficult to understand, and it leaves us puzzled.

Why did Divine Providence lead Jacob to sleep at the very place where the Temple would be built, rather than elsewhere? Furthermore, why did G-d reveal Himself to Jacob precisely there, since He could have also revealed Himself to Jacob and blessed him elsewhere?

We also need to understand and explain the connection that exists between the ladder which the angels were ascending and descending, and G-d’s promise to Jacob that “*the land upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants*” (*Bereshith 28:13*). What did G-d mean by this?

G-d’s will was for Jacob, “*the chosen one among the Patriarchs*” (*Bereshith Rabba 76:1*), to rest in this very place – where the Temple would be built – in order to teach us what enables Jews to enter the Temple, to approach the Holy of Holies, and to cleave to G-d; it is to make us understand that prosperity, blessings, and success come from this place. In fact on that very night, Jacob enjoyed a lofty physical and spiritual level by sleeping in that place after having spent 14 years without sleep, as the Sages have said: “*Here he lay down to sleep, but he did not sleep during the 14 years of his seclusion in the land when he studied under Eber*” (*Bereshith Rabba 68:11*).

In fact after having sensed the holiness of this place, Jacob was seized with fright and exclaimed: “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d.*” In other words, such great holiness and purity could only be found in the Temple, and he therefore understood that from this place – from the area destined for the Temple – the source of all holiness springs forth. Those who visit it will bathe in the sanctity of “*the house of G-d*” – the Sanctuary – and the hearts of Jews will remain drawn and attached to G-d (the word Mishkan [Sanctuary] and the word moshech [to drawn in] come from the same root), and they will sanctify themselves. “*The gate of Heaven*” means that the Temple (and the merit that it confers upon us) elevates, sanctifies, and makes us cleave to the Torah, which is acquired through 48 attributes (*Pirkei Avoth 6:6; Kallah 8*). When a person cleaves to his Creator, he enjoys supreme elation and resembles “*a ladder set up on the earth...its top reach[ing] the heavens*” (*Bereshith 28:12*), elevating himself higher and higher.

Nevertheless, the Jewish people are liable to “*ascend and descend*” in their spiritual

lives, sometimes defeating the evil inclination and sometimes being defeated by it. As the Sages have said, “*He who places himself in the arena stands either to fail or win*” (*Shemot Rabba* 27:9).

This teaches us a valuable lesson that applies throughout our lives. Today, when we are in exile – when the Temple has been destroyed because of our sins, and when our glory, our protection, and our sanctification has left us – we only have the Torah that remains, which alone can save us from the influence of this bitter exile (*Zohar I:152b; III:176a*). All that remains to sanctify us are our houses of study and houses of prayer, each of which constitute a “*miniature Temple*” (*Megillah 29a*). We must therefore frequent them in order to escape harmful influences. The Sages have said, “*Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but four cubits of Halachah*” (*Berachot 8a; Zohar III:202a*), meaning four cubits of Torah and prayer. It is also said, “*Hashem loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*” (*Tehillim 87:2*). “*The gates of Zion*” – these represent the gates of Heaven that Jacob saw in his vision; “*the dwellings of Jacob*” – these represent the houses of study and houses of prayer that we have in place of the Sanctuary and Temple. It is only when we frequent them that we are saved from falling, as the Sages have said: “*The Torah protects and saves*” (*Sotah 21a*).

The Mandrakes

It is written, “*Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest. He found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah his mother. Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes’*” (*Bereshith 30:14*).

Reuven ventured into the field at the time of the harvest, and there he found mandrakes and brought them back to Leah his mother. Rachel, who yearned to have children, had recently told Jacob, “*Give me children, or else I am dead*” (v.1). When Rachel saw Reuven bringing so much satisfaction to his mother, she also wanted to partake of this pleasing fragrance, and so she said: “*Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.*” In other words: “*Since you’ve merited children, give me some of your son’s mandrakes. Although I’ve not been fortunate enough to have children, I would like to at least benefit from what they bring you, that at the very least I should have the same as you in this regard.*” However Leah refused and bitterly replied, “*Was your taking my husband insignificant?*” (v.15). That is: “*It’s true that you are suffering from not having children, but you have Jacob in your tent, and he is more important than ten sons.*” Hence she protested, “*Isn’t it enough that Jacob gives you his love, that you also want my son’s mandrakes? It’s a fair trade-off: I have children, and you have Jacob.*” Rachel understood what her sister Leah was saying, and made an agreement with her: “*Give me the mandrakes, and tonight Jacob will sleep your tent.*”

This requires an explanation. First of all, Leah’s answer is not clear, for is this the way to speak to a childless woman, especially when she is your sister and had the merit

to marry Jacob? In fact Leah only married him because her sister gave her the agreed-upon signs! Secondly, Rachel's conduct is not clear either, for what benefit did Rachel derive from these mandrakes? What did they signify, such that she was ready to forgo Jacob's presence?

Our Sages have already looked into the subject of the mandrakes, having perceived allusions in it to extraordinary mysteries. We shall cite the salient points raised by the author of Beer Mayim Chaim, who explained it in detail.

As the Torah states, Reuven was upset by the fact that Jacob did not live in Leah's tent, so much so that he "*moved his father's bed.*" Thus when he found these mandrakes, which have the ability to rekindle love – for the term dudayim ("mandrakes") comes from the same root as dodim ("lovers") – he wanted to bring them to his mother, his hope being that Jacob's love for her would grow and he would live in her tent.

For her part, Rachel felt that Jacob's love for her had diminished, believing that after so much time without her having children, his love for her had changed. When she saw the mandrakes, she feared Jacob's love for Leah even more, which is why she asked for a few mandrakes. It was in order for Jacob's love for both of them to at least be the same. To this Leah responded, "*Isn't it enough that Jacob is constantly in your tent, that you also want to have all his love to yourself?*" Once Rachel saw that Leah refused to give her some mandrakes, she offered a compromise: "*Give me some of your son's mandrakes, and if you fear for Jacob's love, I will go without his presence tonight, and he will spend the night in your tent.*" Leah agreed, for even if it meant that Jacob's love for Rachel would grow, it would enable her to give birth to the tribes more quickly, which was preferable.

In this regard we may also say that both of them, Rachel and Leah, had pure intentions. Leah did all this so that Rachel would be happy with her lot and not be bitter, telling Rachel that she had something for which to rejoice. True, she did not have children, but Jacob was better for her than ten sons. She merited the love of the greatest man in the generation, the love of Jacob, a wholesome man who abided in tents, and thus participated in his share of serving Hashem and learning Torah. Rachel also did everything with pure intentions, showing Leah that she should also rejoice in her share, in her children, and not think that Jacob did not love her. That is why she agreed to forgo Jacob's presence on that night, in order to show Leah that the share she had been given, namely children, was better for her than Jacob. All this was to encourage her, not to treat the presence of the tzaddik as something trivial (she was nevertheless criticized for it, since she should not have expressed herself in this way). Yet as we have said, she did all this in order to show Leah just how she should rejoice in her share. Thus not only did this not constitute a sin in regards to the relationship between people, it was precisely the opposite: Everything they did stemmed from their great love for one another. Neither was there an absence of satisfaction with their lot, for each of them understood what G-d wanted, and they were content with the share destined to them by the Creator of the universe.

Yet when these two sisters saw one another, they each thought that the other was not happy, being miserable with her lot. Hence they said what they said in order to encourage one another.

The Torah in Exile

It is written, “*He looked, and behold – a well in the field. ...and the stone over the mouth of the well was large. ... When Jacob saw Rachel...he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well*” (*Bereshith 29:2-10*).

Rashi cites the Midrash (*Bereshith Rabba 70:12*) in explaining that Jacob moved the stone “as one removes a cork from a bottle, to let you know how great his strength was.”

It is somewhat surprising to say that the Torah is praising Jacob for his great strength. When it comes to our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, the third support of the Divine Chariot – who remained within the four cubits of Halachah without moving from the tent of Torah throughout his life – praising him for his strength seems like an affront to his honor. What can this be compared to? It is like a talmid chacham who gains complete mastery of the Talmud, but is praised for being able to pray Ashrei by heart! The prophet Jeremiah transmitted Hashem’s word: “*Let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength...for only with this may one glorify himself: Contemplating and knowing Me*” (*Jeremiah 9:22-23*).

We also need to understand why Jacob rolled away the stone only when he saw Rachel arriving with Lavan’s flock. The shepherds were already waiting for their friends to help them roll away the stone and water their flocks. Therefore if Jacob was capable of doing this all by himself, why did he wait for Rachel to arrive? We cannot say that Rachel arrived as soon as they finished telling Jacob that they were waiting for their friends to help them move the stone, at which point Jacob moved it. In fact the Torah explicitly connects Jacob’s action to Rachel’s arrival, even before he approached and kissed her. The act of rolling away the stone is specifically connected to Rachel’s arrival (see what the Sforno says in this regard). We need to ask what the connection is between the two.

Concerning the arrival of Jacob’s future wife at the well, we know that the Sages have highlighted this detail. In fact when Moshe fled to Midian in order to escape from Pharaoh, the Torah states: “*He sat by a well*” (*Shemot 2:15*). Rashi explains: “*He [Moshe] learned from Jacob, who found his mate at the well.*” We need to ask why a man meets his wife by a well, and why Moshe learned this precisely from Jacob, not from the other Patriarchs.

We may say that when Jacob departed for Haran after having left the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Ever, he feared for his future and that of his descendants, since he would have to live among evildoers for a long time. Hence he turned to a well – for as we know, water always represents Torah (*Bava Kama 82a*) – and thereby demonstrated his thirst and quenched it at the well with spiritual energy before confronting the dangers

awaiting him in Haran. Now the term *be'er* ("well") has the same numerical value as *ger* ("stranger"). This means that when the Torah is in exile, when it is not in the *Beit HaMidrash*, it is like a "well" that we can only draw water from with effort. That is, the Torah is concealed and requires an effort to be revealed. Yet when it is in the *Beit HaMidrash*, it is like a spring of living water from which water spontaneously gushes. In that case, all we have to do in order to quench our thirst is to open our heart and mind. The passage, "*How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel. They stretch out like streams, like gardens by a river, like ales planted by Hashem*" (*Bamidbar* 24:5-6) is explained by the Sages in the following way: "*Just as streams raise man from a state of impurity to one of purity, likewise tents raise man from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit*" (*Berachot* 16a). Rashi explains that these "tents" are houses of study, meaning that Torah learning must take place in the *Beit HaMidrash*, which is compared to an abundantly flowing stream.

Jacob saw a large stone over the mouth of the well, meaning the evil inclination, which is compared to a stone (see *Kiddushin* 30b: "If it is of stone, it will dissolve [i.e., wear away]"). This is the stone that prevents a person from drawing the waters of understanding, for it blocks the opening of the well. It blocks the heart of man, as it is written: "*Sin is crouching at the door*" (*Bereshith* 4:7). This is the difficulty that exists in exile, when the Torah is belittled. The Sages explain that after the destruction of the Temple, the wellsprings of wisdom were blocked, for all wisdom emanated from the Temple and the Divine service taking place there. At the present time, it is like a well from which we can only draw water with great difficulty.

Now that Jacob was in exile and yearned to cleave to the Torah and draw forth its life-giving strength, he threw himself at this stone. He saw Rachel coming with the flock, and when Rachel arrived – the one who was to be his helper in life – just her very presence helped him to roll away the heavy stone from the well. In fact, the whole *raison d'être* of a wife is to help her husband in learning Torah, as the Gemara says: "*Any man who has no wife lives...without Torah*" (*Yebamot* 62b). When Jacob saw Rachel coming to help him draw from the well of Torah even in Haran, a place so far removed from the atmosphere of the *Beit HaMidrash*, he gathered the strength of all 63 years that he had spent learning Torah, distanced the evil inclination, and drew water from the well.

This explanation is marvelously in line with what we have said elsewhere, namely that Jacob, who by his nature was a man "*abiding in tents*," was completely connected to the Torah like Ben Azzai. He did not need the help of a woman, for at that point his Torah was like a spring from which he could obtain water without any help whatsoever, the evil inclination being annulled within the walls of the *Beit HaMidrash*. We know that the Sages have advised us to "*drag him [the evil inclination] to the Beit HaMidrash*" (*Kiddushin* 30b). Furthermore, Jacob was completely immersed in learning Torah for 63 years, without fearing the evil inclination in any way. Yet by Hashem's will, he was forced to flee from Esav in Beersheba in order to father 12 tribes. Thus

when he went into exile by leaving the walls of the Beit HaMidrash, the Torah became a well, and therefore he needed a helper to roll away the stone from its opening.

All this allows us to fully understand the teaching of the Sages, who said that Moshe followed Jacob's example and went to sit by a well in order to look for a wife. Moshe also found himself in a situation like Jacob's, having been forced to flee into exile from his home and surroundings. Indeed, Moshe was a stranger in Midian, as it is said: "*I have been a stranger in a foreign land*" (*Shemot* 2:22), and he also feared for his life outside the walls of the Beit HaMidrash, when he was far from his Jewish brothers. He therefore followed in the footsteps of Jacob and went to sit by a well in order to cleave to the Torah and drink from its waters. From Jacob, he learned that the Torah constitutes the only objective and hope of survival in a foreign land, amid a completely different way of life. Thus in Midian, when Moshe found himself in a strange environment and the Torah was like a well, he sought a wife, one who would help him cleave to the Torah. That is precisely what Jacob did when he emerged from the Beit HaMidrash in fleeing from Esav, when his Torah also became like a well. In order to confront the evil inclination in exile, he needed a helper in life and he sought a wife, namely Rachel.

The Value of Torah Knowledge Acquired through Effort

It is written, "*And he dreamed, and behold – a ladder was set earthward and its top reached to Heaven. And behold – angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it*" (*Bereshith* 28:12).

Midrash Tanchuma explains that the angels who appeared in Jacob's dream were the princes of the nations of the world. G-d showed Jacob that just as all these princes were ascending, they would eventually descend. G-d asked Jacob to also ascend the ladder, promising him that he would not descend. Jacob refused to believe this, however, and he remained below. Hashem then said to him, "*Since you have no faith in My promise, your descendants will be struck by the princes of the nations.*" Jacob asked if this punishment was permanent, to which G-d responded: "*But as for you, My servant Jacob, fear not – the word of Hashem – and do not be afraid, O Israel, for behold, I am saving you from afar [Jeremiah 30:10] – every exile and all sufferings will end, and I will deliver the Children of Israel, regardless of how distant they may be!*" How could Jacob have refused to ascend to Heaven? After all, G-d had assured him that his ascension would be certain, not followed by a fall! What was Jacob's underlying fear, the one that made him skeptical to the point of ignoring G-d's reassuring words?

The nations of the world lose their greatness through immorality, and as a result their downfall is certain. However Jacob, who was faithful to G-d, was not to fear the same fate. Why did he not listen to G-d's promise, Who assured him of progressing without risk? This question becomes even more relevant when Hashem punished Jacob for his refusal to ascend, telling Jacob that his descendants would be victims of the princes of

the nations. How are we to understand that Jacob preferred the punishment of exile to an elevation toward Heaven?

This can all be explained by the fact that Jacob was a living symbol of Torah, as it is written: “*Jacob was an upright man, dwelling in tents*” (*Bereshith 25:27*). He embodied the study of Torah through tenacious effort, and by his refusal he sought to lay out a path for the generations to come. He wanted to transmit to his descendants the concept that Torah is not offered to man free of charge. Rather, the acquisition of Torah knowledge requires diligence and effort. If we want to spiritually elevate ourselves and improve our relationship with G-d, we must persevere in the study and understanding of Torah from every angle. It is only after we have entirely devoted ourselves to it that we can acquire all of its riches.

A Message for All the Generations

When Jacob had this dream and G-d asked him to ascend the ladder without having to descend, he refused because he knew that only Torah knowledge acquired through effort is the best and most authentic kind there is.

By this offer, Hashem wanted to grant Jacob Torah knowledge without weariness. However Jacob declined, for it was opposed to the very nature of his being: A man who put body and soul into learning Torah. Moreover, Jacob admitted that although he might not fall from the ladder, the same might not be the case for his descendants. Jacob sought to transmit to them the concept that effort is crucial in order to gain Torah knowledge, which is why he did not agree to G-d’s offer. Instead, he preferred to remain on earth in order to acquire Torah knowledge himself, by toiling in its pursuit rather than receiving it “*free of charge*.”

Indeed, it was precisely for the very same reason that Jacob preferred for his descendants to go into exile. In fact by the yoke of servitude, his descendants would acquire Torah knowledge through effort, for difficulties and suffering would lead them to learn with greater vigor. Their Torah understanding, acquired through adversity, would increase their merits and finally deliver them from exile, bringing them from darkness to light. How great was Jacob’s capacity to sacrifice himself for Torah! He preferred that his descendants remain in exile so that their Torah understanding would be genuine and result from effort and toil, the best and most commendable Torah knowledge possible!

Threatening yet Filled with Blessings

At this point, we still need to understand whether or not Hashem approved of Jacob’s choice. It would seem that He did, since He did not punish Jacob directly, but only demanded an accounting from the succeeding generations.

Furthermore, despite the fact that at first glance the exiles endured by the Jewish people were severe and appalling, a source of suffering and pain, we cannot deny their beneficial effects. In fact they brought about a great spiritual elevation among the Jewish people, for the Egyptian exile led to miracles upon their departure, as well as to

the festival of Pesach, which is the festival of faith.

As for the Babylonian exile, it gave birth to the Babylonian Talmud. And thanks to the exile of Persia and Media, the Children of Israel accepted the Torah with love, as it is written: “*The Jews confirmed and took upon themselves*” (*Esther 9:27*). The exile of Greece is the origin of Hanukkah, the festival of praising and thanking G-d. Finally, the exile of Edom gave birth to the Tannaim and Amoraim, who illuminated the Jewish people in Torah study by compiling the Mishnah and Gemara.

Look to Your Parents

In the Midrash the Sages say, “*Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman cited the following verse: ‘A Song of Ascents. I raise my eyes to the harim [mountains].’ [Tehillim 121:1]. This signifies my teachers and those who conceived me [horim]. From where will my help come? [Jacob said:] When Eliezer went to bring Rebecca, it is written: ‘And the servant took ten camels...’ [Bereshith 24:10], but I have not a single ring or bracelet!’*”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that Isaac sent Jacob off with many possessions, but Esav arose and took everything from him. At that point Jacob said, “*Shall I lose faith in my Creator? ... ‘My help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to falter; your Guardian does not slumber’ [Tehillim 121:2-3]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 68:2*).

The Sages explain that Esav sent his son Eliphaz to pursue Jacob and kill him. Yet when he caught up with Jacob, the latter convinced Eliphaz to take his money instead, for a poor man is considered like the dead (*Nedarim 64b*). Eliphaz agreed to let Jacob live, taking only his money from him.

However when Jacob encountered a similar situation in Haran, he hesitated for a moment and said: “*From where will my help come?*” In other words, Jacob thought: Abraham’s servant Eliezer came here with all kinds of valuables, but he still had a difficult time leaving with my mother Rebecca, which means that the people who live here are deceptive cheats who thirst for money. Yet I have absolutely nothing will me, so how will I be able to find a wife, especially since I’m already old!

Yet Jacob immediately renewed his faith in G-d and told himself that he wouldn’t lose anything. Instead he would “*raise my eyes to the harim [mountains]*” – to those who conceived me [horim] – and benefit from the merit of the holy Patriarchs. Above all, “*My help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.*” This means that just as Hashem created the whole world ex nihilo [from nothing], He can certainly lead me out of this wicked place and broaden my paths.

Jacob bequeathed this behavior to his descendants, the Jewish people, for all the generations. Even when we find ourselves faced with difficult hardships, to the point of thinking that we have no way out, even then we must beseech Hashem and constantly pray to the Creator of the universe, for nothing is impossible for Him. He can save any

Jew from whatever situation in which he finds himself.

Furthermore, we must always remember the “*mountains*” – meaning our parents, the holy Patriarchs – who even in the most difficult of times, in every trial they faced, did not fall into despair, but persevered in their prayers to the Creator. Even when they saw no way out, they had faith that He would save them, and so “*my help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth*” was fulfilled in them. The same applies to every Jew.

Now the Sages have taught us that Jacob’s face is engraved on the Throne of Glory. Does this mean that images are found in Heaven? To explain this, let us recall that every Jew is composed, as we know, of two parts: A soul that is a divine spark, and a material body. The soul originates from the supernal world; it is engraved beneath the Throne of Glory, and it is sent into this world to don a material body. It must purify and rectify this body in order to lead it to perfection and thus bring satisfaction to the Creator.

On the other hand, the body is constantly drawing us toward materiality. It is constantly fighting against the soul and allowing it no respite, for the body originates from the dust of the earth, from the lowest part of the world. The result is that by donning this corporal body, the soul must work to improve and perfect it for its ultimate purpose.

What is the difference between the body and the soul? When a person leaves this world, the two are separated: The soul, as we know, ascends to Heaven, to its supernal origins, for that is its natural abode. As for the body, it enters the grave below, for that is where it comes from – it comes from the earth and returns to the earth. However if a person has worked on perfecting all his deeds during the time that he has spent on earth, by purifying his material body to such a degree that it becomes holy like the soul, then his body also merits to be engraved on the Throne of Glory, for he has elevated it to the point of truly resembling the holy soul.

Therein lay Jacob’s uniqueness, as well as his greatness. He so purified his material body by acting with wholesomeness and complete faith in G-d that he carried its likeness to its origins in the supernal realm. That is why his image is engraved on the Throne of Glory.

In addition, Jacob was an upright man, which is why he merited for his likeness (*temuna* – which evokes *temimut* [wholesomeness, integrity]) to be engraved on the Throne of Glory. The word *temimut* has the same numerical value as the expression *temunat Hashem yabit* (“he gazes at the image of Hashem” [*Bamidbar 12:8*]). In fact only a man who possesses such wholesomeness, as we read in regard to Jacob, can merit such greatness.

From here we learn that all Jews, who are the descendants of Jacob, will also merit for their image to be engraved above when they fully perfect their material body. Their image will be engraved within Jacob’s, which is already there, for Jacob merited it for

all the generations. And when a Jew purifies his body and likeness, it shines even more above.

It is precisely to Jacob that we cleave, for a deficiency existed in Abraham and Isaac, and it was manifested through Ismael and Esav. However with Jacob we find absolute perfection, a wholesome man dwelling in the tents of Torah. His descendants – the 12 tribes of Hashem – are entirely pure, which is why all who purify themselves merit to cleave to Jacob. (This concept came to me at the Barcelona airport, following an airplane engine problem that forced me to wait for the next flight. It was during the delay that I wrote this article.)

Parsha Vayishlach

Observing Torah is Like Living in Eretz Israel

It is written, “*Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: ‘...I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now’*” (*Genesis 32:5*). Rashi understands this to mean: “*I have sojourned [garti] with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot.*”

The commentators ask why Jacob told Esau that he kept the 613 mitzvot while he was living with Laban. How would that diminish Esau’s hatred for him? Furthermore, we may question whether Jacob truly kept all 613 mitzvot while staying with Laban. There are numerous mitzvot that can only be done in the land of Israel, others that only apply when the Temple is standing, and still others that can only be performed by the priests. Therefore how could Jacob claim to have kept all 613 mitzvot?

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said on the verse, “*We will offer the words of our lips instead of bulls*” (*Hosea 14:3*). The Sages said, “*Whosoever occupies himself with the study of Torah is as though he were offering a burnt-offering*” (*Menachot 110a*). This means that studying the regulations concerning a mitzvah is considered as having actually performed that mitzvah. Therefore even when Jacob was not living in the land of Israel, but was with Laban the Aramean, he was able to keep all 613 mitzvot. He could do this by studying the regulations concerning each mitzvah, for in this way it was considered as if he had, in fact, performed them all.

This explains why Jacob told Esau that he had kept the mitzvot while living with Laban. How would this diminish Esau’s hatred for him? Esau went to meet Jacob with 400 men, a number that certainly hid a purpose. By this number, Esau was hinting that Jacob did not possess the greatness or the merit of Eretz Israel, since he had been living in exile. During the covenant of the parts, Abraham was told, “*Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them and they will oppress them 400 years*” (*Genesis 17:13*). Since the exile began with Jacob, as the Zohar states (*Zohar II:2b, 5a*), Esau tried to bring the decree of exile upon the head of Jacob, telling him that he had neither the merit nor the greatness of Eretz Israel to protect him.

Jacob therefore sent messengers to tell Esau: Know that I have the greatness of Eretz Israel along with all the mitzvot. I am not yet in exile because even when I was living with Laban, I observed all 613 mitzvot by studying the laws of each mitzvah, including the mitzvot specifically related to Eretz Israel. Therefore the merit of Eretz Israel will accompany me into battle against you.

In reality, Esau could not understand this. To him, Jacob’s stay in Laban’s home must have inflicted some spiritual damage on him, as the Sages have said: “*Whoever lives outside the land may be regarded as one who worships idols*” (*Ketubot 110b*). Hence

Esau hinted to Jacob that the decree (“*they will serve them and they will oppress them 400 years*”) had already been put into motion. Yet Jacob replied that it was the opposite! True, “*Whoever lives outside the land may be regarded as one who worships idols,*” but this applies only when living outside Eretz Israel without Torah. It does not apply to a person who studies Torah and Halachah. For such an individual, the Shechinah lives, as it were, with him in exile. As the Sages have said, “*A disciple who goes into banishment is joined in exile by his master*” (*Makkot 10a*), this being in order for the disciple to continue learning Torah while exiled to a city of refuge. Therefore Jacob, who studied Torah in the Beit Midrash of Eber before going to live with Laban, was connected to the Holy One, blessed be He. Even when he traveled to Haran, the Shechinah was, as it were, exiled with him, meaning that Jacob did not feel that he was in exile. Instead he felt close to the table of our Father in Heaven, just as if he were living in Eretz Israel.

This view also allows us to understand Rashi’s claim that the messengers (*malachim*, lit. “angels”) which Jacob sent to Esau were malachim mamash (“*real angels*”). We need to understand why it was necessary for Jacob to send angels rather than human messengers. The answer is that by doing so, Jacob was showing Esau that he was not in exile, nor had he descended from the spiritual level he occupied when he lived in Eretz Israel. The proof was that he now had real angels at his disposal! This is alluded to in the word *mamash* (“real”), a word formed by the initials of *MiMitzvot Sheassiti* (“*from the mitzvot that I did*”). In fact these angels had been created by Jacob’s good deeds, proving that while he was in Haran his spiritual level did not deteriorate in any way. On the contrary, it was by studying Torah and performing mitzvot that Jacob was supported throughout his life.

Although Esau listened to what Jacob’s messengers had to say, he still proceeded to advance against Jacob as if nothing had happened! As the Zohar states, he went to war along with great forces of impurity (*Zohar III:163b*). The fact that Esau did not take any of this into account, and that he still went out to fight Jacob, demonstrates just how proud he was. This pride was characteristic of Esau throughout his life. Even upon their father’s death, when Esau and Jacob went to bury him, Esau still walked in front of his brother, as we read: “*Esau and Jacob buried him*” (*Genesis 35:29*). Esau did this despite the fact that he knew the truth, meaning that he had sold his birthright to Jacob. Even when his father lay dead before him, Esau’s heart did not soften. Since Esau had greatly revered his father and honored him in life – even serving him in royal robes (*Bereshith Rabba 65:16*) – his death should have stunned and awakened feelings of repentance in him. Yet that did not happen, and Esau remained rebellious and immensely proud.

As for Jacob, he prepared himself to face Esau by means of the opposite character traits that dominated his brother. As he prayed, “*I am too small for all the mercies and all the truth that You have done for Your servant*” (*Genesis 32:11*), Jacob cloaked himself with incredible humility, not feeling that he deserved anything. He asked Hashem, “*Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau*” (*v.12*). He

asked to be saved from Esau's dangerous influence, from having his unbearable pride reflected upon him. It is in this regard that Jacob said, "*Save me...from the hand of my brother;*" the word yad ("hand") having the same numerical value as ga'avah ("pride"). Esau should naturally have had pity on Jacob, since he was his brother, his own flesh and blood. Yet because of his tremendous pride, Esau was not willing to admit that he had sold his birthright to him, and instead he advanced to kill him. Hence Jacob prayed: "*Master of the universe, save me from being influenced by him, and allow me to retain my humility.*" From here we learn that to overcome pride, we must work at being extremely humble. In fact the word ga'avah ("pride") has the same numerical value as hod ("glory"), for the proud attribute glory to themselves. In reality, pride does not befit creatures of flesh and blood, but rather the King of glory, as it is written: "*The L-RD...has donned geiut*" (*Psalms 93:1*). When a person conducts himself with humility and recognizes that pride does not befit him, but rather Hashem, he can overcome those who plot against him.

The Wickedness of Esau

It is written, "*Jacob sent malachim [messengers] before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying: 'Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: So says your servant Jacob – I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants, and I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes'*" (*Genesis 32:4-6*).

Our Sages have said (*Bereshith Rabba 75:4*) that Jacob sent Esau actual angels (*malachim*). This is difficult to understand, for was Jacob unable to send messengers of flesh and blood, such that he was forced to use angels? What did he gain by this?

It is also difficult to understand another statement of our Sages: "*I have sojourned [garti] with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot and did not learn from his evil deeds*" (*Midrash Aggadah on Genesis 32:15*). Why did Jacob go and tell Esau that he had remained righteous while living with Laban? Furthermore, even the verse itself says: "*I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes,*" which means that he relayed all this to him in order to find favor in his eyes. Yet what he actually told Esau was that he had lived with Laban and now had oxen and donkeys! Was Esau meant to be pleased by this news? Our Sages have said, "*I have oxen and donkeys. Oxen allude to Joseph, as it says: 'His firstling ox, majesty is his' [Deuteronomy 33:17]. Donkeys allude to Issachar, for it is written: 'Issachar is a large-boned donkey' [Genesis 49:14]*" (*Bereshith Rabba 75:12*). It is difficult to understand what message Jacob was trying to convey to Esau by all this.

We may explain by saying that Jacob was afraid of Esau, for of Esau it is written: "*Game was in his mouth*" (*Genesis 25:28*). This cannot mean that he hunted beasts and birds with his mouth, for the hunting that this refers to consisted of using words to draw in prey. What the verse is telling us is that Esau used his words to lead people into

sinning. Esau was fundamentally evil, and he committed every kind of sin (*Tanhuma, Toldot 8*). Therefore Jacob sent him real angels, for he was afraid that this evildoer would lead human messengers into sin. Jacob did not send him men endowed with freewill, lest they be drawn into sinning and not complete their mission. From the fact that Jacob sent him actual angels, it is clear that Esau would be unable to deceive them with his fine-sounding words. This meant that they would be able to transmit his words to Esau, which would calm him and prevent him from killing Jacob. We see the power of words in the story of Onkelos the proselyte, concerning whom our Sages said: “*Onkelos the son of Kalonymus became a proselyte. The emperor sent a contingent of Roman [soldiers] after him, but he enticed them with verses from Scripture, and they converted to Judaism. Thereupon the emperor sent another Roman legion after him, bidding them not to say anything to him. As they were about to take him away with them, he spoke to them.... Then they also converted. Again [the emperor] sent another legion, ordering them not to enter into any conversation whatsoever with him. So they took hold of him, and as they were walking he saw a mezuzah that was fixed on a doorframe. He placed his hand on it, saying to them: ‘What is this?’ They replied: ‘You tell us.’ He said, ‘According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells within while his servants keep guard outside. Yet with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard outside, as it is said: “The L-RD will guard your going and your coming, from this time and forever.”’* Then they also converted to Judaism. [The emperor] no longer summoned him” (*Avodah Zarah 11a*).

From here we learn that words are more powerful than armies, for Onkelos defeated the emperor’s legions by the words of his mouth; the emperor’s legions did not defeat him. Jacob was afraid of sending human messengers to Esau, for he knew how to entice people with his persuasive words and lead them into sin. In fact even tzaddikim can sin as a result of what they hear, which is why Jacob sent Esau angels, which are not influenced by the words of men.

Why did Jacob send angels to placate Esau? It was because he wanted to lead him to repentance (*Bereshith Rabba 75:11*). This was Jacob’s habit throughout life, to bring people under the wings of the Shechinah. He even drew idolaters under its wings, something that he learned from his father Isaac, who in turn learned it from his father Abraham (*ibid. 84:4*). What did Jacob tell Esau? He said: You were raised for your entire life in the home of our parents, who were tzaddikim, and yet you failed to learn from their good deeds. Not only that, but you deceived our father, for you pretended to be a tzaddik as you attended to him, but as soon as you left you engaged in shameful practices, committing every possible sin! I implore you, please repent! Then angels of destruction will not take your soul, as they come to take those who act like you. I am sending you these angels as a reminder.

This is why Jacob said to Esau: “*I have sojourned [garti] with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot.*” In other words: You lived in our father’s home and saw him studying Torah and serving his Creator. Nevertheless you did not learn

for his good deeds. I lived with Laban for 20 years, but I did not learn from his wicked deeds, and not only that, but I observed all the mitzvot. If you ask how I managed not to learn from Laban's wicked deeds, it is by the Torah that I toiled to learn in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber. I did not sleep in a bed for many years (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:11), and just as you cannot have a harmful influence on these angels and lead them into sin, likewise you cannot have a harmful influence on me, for I have studied a great deal of Torah and I am like an angel, which cannot be enticed. The word mitzvah has the same numerical value as malach ("angel"), and because I observed the 613 mitzvot under difficult conditions, I am certain that you cannot harm me in any way.

Generally speaking, it is impossible for a person to protect himself from the influence of evildoers unless he toils in the study of Torah, which protects and saves. If a person fails to diligently study, the Torah will not protect him. This is why Jacob told Esau, "*I have oxen and donkeys,*" which alludes to Joseph and Issachar. This was his way of saying: All my life I progressed in the service of G-d, and I was not content with what I did yesterday, for each day I sought to elevate myself a little more. I also studied Torah under difficult circumstances, like a donkey that carries heavy burdens. As our Sages said, "*As a donkey bears burdens, so does Issachar bear the Torah*" (*Bereshith Rabba* 99:10). There is another allusion contained in Jacob's mention of oxen and donkeys, namely that he put an effort into studying like oxen and donkeys that act as such, as it is written: "*In order to study the words of the Torah, one must cultivate in oneself the [habit of] the ox for bearing a yoke, and of the donkey for carrying burdens*" (*Avodah Zarah* 5b). What does this refer to? It refers to the diligent study of Torah – which protects a person – when he does not grow proud of his Torah learning. However if he becomes proud of his Torah, believing that it will earn him a crown and honors, the Holy One, blessed be He, will pay absolutely no attention to him and his Torah will not protect him. This is why Jacob said, "*I am too small for all the mercies*" (*Genesis* 32:11). In other words: Although I did all these things, studying a great deal despite a lack of sleep during all those years, I still have not done anything, and I am not worthy that a miracle should be performed for me.

Learning Torah for its Own Sake

It is written, "*Jacob sent messengers [literally "angels"] before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying: 'Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: So says your servant Jacob – I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now'*" (*Genesis* 32:4-5). Our Sages have said that Jacob sent Esau actual angels (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:4). At first glance, it seems that several things in this passage require an explanation:

1. Could Jacob not have sent human messengers to Esau? Why was he obligated to use angels?
2. If Jacob merited to be served by angels, what could he fear from Esau? In fact why was he so afraid of him, to the point that we read: "*Jacob was greatly afraid*" (*Genesis* 32:8)?

3. Why did our Sages teach that Jacob said to Esau, “*I have sojourned [garti] with Laban, but I observed the 613 [taryag] mitzvot*” (*Midrash Aggadah on Genesis 32:5*)? This is surprising, for what did it matter to Esau if Jacob observed the mitzvot with Laban or not?

4. Why does Scripture use the term angels in this account, whereas concerning Abraham, the angels who visited him are described as men, as it is written: “*Behold, three men were standing over him*” (*Genesis 18:2*)? The Sages have explained that these were the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (*Bava Metzia 86b*).

5. After Abraham’s three visitors left, the verse explains that they were angels, as it is written: “*Two angels came to Sodom*” (*Genesis 19:1*). Now if the Torah wanted to tell us that they were angels instead of men, why did it wait until they had already left? It is also difficult to understand why Jacob thought that it was good to call Esau “*my lord*.”

We may say that our father Jacob’s greatness stemmed from that of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. This emerges from the earlier parshiot. At the beginning of Parsha Vayeitzei we read, “*He dreamed, and behold: A ladder was set up on earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven. And behold: Angels of G-d ascending and descending on it*” (*Genesis 28:12*). Then at the end of Parsha Vayeitzei we read, “*Jacob went on his way, and angels of G-d met him. When he saw them, Jacob said: ‘This is the camp of G-d, and he called the name of the place Mahanaim’*” (*ibid. 32:2-3*).

From these two passages we learn that Jacob would normally have revelations, for he often saw angels. When he left Eretz Israel to venture into another country, the angels who accompanied him in Eretz Israel departed, and other angels accompanied him in their stead. Therefore when Jacob saw an angel, he immediately knew that it was an angel rather than a man. Such was not the case with Abraham, who was not as accustomed to seeing angels as Jacob, and who did not always know how to distinguish between men and angels.

A Great Deal of Torah

We should not be surprised that Jacob reached a higher level than Abraham, for the prophet Isaiah said: “*Thus says the L-RD, Who redeemed Abraham*” (*Isaiah 29:22*). Here the Sages have explained, “*Abraham himself was only created for the sake of Jacob*” (*Vayikra Rabba 36:4*). Furthermore, the Zohar teaches: “*The Patriarch Jacob is the Throne of Glory...as it is written: ‘Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob’ [Leviticus 26:42]. The Holy One, blessed be He, established a covenant with Jacob alone, more than the covenant that He established with all his fathers. He made him a Throne of Glory for His Divine Presence to rest upon, distinguishing him from his predecessors*” (*Zohar, Va’era 22*). This teaches us that Jacob’s power was greater than that of his fathers, and he merited things that they did not.

We may ask how Jacob managed to reach such a level, one greater than that of the other holy Patriarchs. It is because he studied a great deal of Torah. As our Sages have said in the Midrash, Jacob would go from the Beit Midrash of Shem to the Beit

Midrash of Eber, and from the Beit Midrash of Eber to the Beit Midrash of Abraham (*Tanhuma, Vayishlach* 9). The Mishnah states, “*Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake merits many things*” (*Pirkei Avot* 6:1), for it makes him grow spiritually and elevates him and all his deeds. Since Jacob was constantly studying Torah for its own sake, he merited what his fathers did not.

Yet in that case, why did Jacob – who had all this power of the Torah – fear Esau?

The answer is that Jacob was not afraid that Esau would harm him, for he had faith in Hashem. Furthermore, since Jacob used angels, he could avenge himself on Esau. In fact the Sages say that the angels struck Esau and his men during the night until they uttered Jacob’s name, at which point they halted their attack (*Bereshith Rabba* 78:11).

Despite all this, Jacob was afraid of Esau. He was not afraid of death, but of sin, for he sent the following message to Esau: “*Be careful. I’ve observed all the mitzvot while I was with Laban, and you cannot harm me because my Torah is protecting me. If you don’t fear the Torah, I am sending angels that will strike you, both you and your men. If you fail to fear one or the other, and if you don’t change your ways, I will invoke G-d’s Name.*” Jacob mentioned this to Esau by way of allusion, for he said: “*to my lord, to Esau,*” with G-d’s Name in mind.

When Jacob realized that this evildoer was hiding his true intentions and coming to his meet him along with 400 men, without fearing Torah, mitzvot, angels, punishment, or the Holy One, blessed be He, he immediately felt great fear. Actually, such is the way of the tzaddikim: When they see someone committing a sin, they immediately begin to examine their own deeds and think, “*This is certainly a result of a slight sin that I committed, for if I had watched my every deed, I certainly would not have seen this man commit a sin.*”

This concept is mentioned by the Sages in the Gemara: “*Jacob was greatly afraid [Genesis 32:8]. He thought that some sin might cause [G-d’s promise to go unfulfilled]*” (*Berachot* 4a). When Jacob saw Esau committing a sin and realized that Esau was still intent on doing evil – despite having been warned that angels would strike him and that he (*Jacob*) would invoke G-d’s Name – Jacob immediately began to search his own soul. He wanted to know why the Holy One, blessed be He, had made him see this evildoer acting with scorn towards the Torah and towards G-d. Likewise King David was afraid when he saw evildoers, saying: “*Trembling seized me because of the wicked who forsake Your Torah*” (*Psalms* 119:53).

Esav’s Wickedness

It is written, “*Jacob sent emissaries [literally: angels] ahead of him to Esav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom*” (*Bereshith* 32:4). Here the Sages have said, “*This means real angels*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:4). This is difficult to understand, for Jacob could have sent human emissaries. He did not need to resort to angels, so why was it necessary?

It is also difficult to understand another statement by our Sages in the Midrash: “*I have sojourned [garti] with Lavan, and I observed the 613 [taryag] mitzvot. I did not learn from his wicked deeds*” (*Midrash Aggadah, Bereshith 32:5*). This is surprising, for why did Jacob feel the need to tell Esav all this, that he had remained a tzaddik while living with Lavan? In reality, the verse itself states: “*I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes*” (*Bereshith 32:6*), meaning that Jacob sent them to say all this so he could find favor in Esav’s eyes. What did he say? “*I have sojourned with Lavan...and I acquired ox and donkey.*” Would he find favor in Lavan’s eyes with such words?

The Sages also say in the Midrash, “*I acquired ox and donkey. ‘Ox’ alludes to Joseph, as it says: ‘His firstling ox, majesty is his’ [Devarim 33:17]. ‘Donkey’ alludes to Issachar, for it is written: ‘Issachar is a large-boned donkey’ [Bereshith 49:14]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 75:12*). It is difficult to understand what Jacob wanted to tell Esav by saying these things.

We may explain this by saying that Jacob was afraid of Esav because it is written in his regard: “*Game was in his mouth*” (*Bereshith 25:28*), and we know how this has been explained. Esav may have hunted wild animals and oxen, but the hunt mentioned here is the way in which he deceived people with his words. In that case, the verse is telling us that he deceived (*i.e.*, “hunted”) people by drawing them into sin with his words. Esav was fundamentally evil and committed every conceivable crime (*Tanchuma, Toldot 8*), which is why Jacob sent him real angels. He was afraid that this evildoer would draw human emissaries – who possess freewill – into sin by allowing themselves to be enticed by Esav and not fulfill their mission. By sending Esav real angels, Jacob was certain that he would be unable to lead them astray with his words. They would therefore be able to transmit Jacob’s message to Esav, appeasing him so he would not kill Jacob.

Jacob Wanted Him to Repent

Jacob was afraid of sending human beings to Esav, lest they be drawn into sin. Even tzaddikim can sin as a result of what they hear, which is why Jacob sent him angels, which are not influenced by the words of men.

Why did Jacob send emissaries to appease Esav? It was because he wanted Esav to repent (*Bereshith Rabba 75:11*). Such was Jacob’s habit: He brought people, even idolaters, closer to the Shechinah. He learned this from his father Isaac, who had learned it from his father Abraham (*ibid. 84:4*). What did he say to Esav? “*For your entire life, you have grown up with our father and mother, who were tzaddikim. How could you not learn from their good deeds? Furthermore, you deceived our father by pretending to be a tzaddik when you were around him. Yet when you left him, you went to commit horrendous deeds, perpetrating every possible sin. I beg you to repent, so that angels of destruction do not take your soul, as they do to those who commit these kinds of deeds. I am sending you these angels as a reminder.*”

This is why Jacob told Esav: “*I have sojourned [garti] with Lavan, and I observed the 613 [taryag] mitzvot*” – whereas you lived with our father, you saw him learning

Torah and serving his Creator, and yet you didn't learn from his good deeds. I lived with Lavan for 20 years, and I didn't learn from his evil deeds. In fact I observed all the mitzvot. If you ask me how I managed not to learn from all of Lavan's wickedness, it was because of the Torah that I absorbed, which I toiled to learn in the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Eber, where I did not sleep in a bed for numerous years (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:11). Just as you cannot have a bad influence on these angels, nor can you push them into sin, likewise you cannot have a bad influence on me, for I studied a great amount of Torah and I'm like an angel that cannot be enticed. Since I observed the 613 mitzvot amidst hardship, I'm certain that you cannot do anything against me.

The Torah Protects and Saves

In general, it is impossible for a person to protect himself from evil influences unless he studies Torah with all his might, in which case it will protect and save him. If a person fails to study it with all his might, it will not protect him. This is why Jacob told Esav, "*I acquired ox and donkey*," an allusion to Joseph and Issachar, to show Esav that throughout his life, Jacob did not stop advancing in the service of G-d, not being content with what he accomplished on the previous day. Each day he rose to a higher level as he studied with all his might. He was like a donkey upon which people lay many burdens, but which carries them despite being heavy.

What does this refer to? It refers to the Torah that we study when devoting ourselves to learning. If a person does not grow proud of his learning, then the Torah protects him. However if he grows proud of it, thinking that it will earn him a crown and honors, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will not protect him at all, and the Torah that he learned will not save him. Hence Jacob said: "*I am too small for all the mercies*" (*Bereshith* 32:11) – although I did all these things, having studied Torah without giving my eyes sleep during those many years, I have not yet done anything. It is as if I have done nothing, and I do not deserve a miracle.

Keep Your Word!

It is written, "*Now Dinah – the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob – went out to look upon the daughters of the land*" (*Bereshith* 34:1).

The verse which appears further on, "*Arise, go up to Bethel...and make an altar there to G-d, Who appeared to you*" (*ibid.* 35:1) is explained by the Ben Ish Hai as follows: "*With a unanimous view, our Sages understood by tradition that G-d told Jacob that the entire ordeal connected to Dinah occurred because he had delayed in fulfilling his vow by needlessly lingering along the way. The result was that G-d made him hasten to Bethel in order to fulfill his vow.*"

Jacob was now being called to account for having delayed in the fulfillment of his vow, which he formulated upon awakening: "*Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know!' He became frightened and said, 'How awesome is this place!'*" (*Bereshith* 28:16-17). Jacob arose early that morning,

took the stone which he had placed beneath his head, and set up a pillar upon whose top he poured oil. He then uttered a vow, saying: “*If G-d will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going, will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father’s house...then this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will become a house of G-d*” (vv. 20-22). The incident involving Dinah came to punish him for this sin, which is actually the interpretation that appears in our commentaries. Rashi also states, “*Because you lingered on your journey, you have been punished and this [ordeal] regarding your daughter has come upon you*” (*Rashi on Bereshith 35:1*).

This statement requires some clarification. Actually, have our Sages not explained on numerous occasions that G-d always deals with an individual “*measure for measure*”? In that case, how was this demonstrated in the incident involving Dinah? Was there something that Dinah did which was comparable to Jacob’s delay in fulfilling the vows he had made? (*Note: Rabbeinu Bechaye gives others reasons for this punishment.*)

The Ben Ish Hai underlines that immediately after the incident involving Dinah, G-d told Jacob: “*Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there, and make an altar there to G-d, Who appeared to you when you fled from Esau your brother.*”

Let us try to understand this: If the punishment that Jacob incurred through the sin of Dinah was due to the fact that he did not fulfill his vow, then why – when G-d said to him: “*Arise, go up to Bethel*” – did He mention Jacob’s situation at that point (“*when you fled from Esau your brother*”) rather than the vow he had made? Furthermore, how was the negligence for which Jacob was criticized so grave? Had he not already set up an altar at Shechem, as it is written: “*He set up an altar there and called it, ‘G-d, the G-d of Israel’*” (*Bereshith 33:20*)? The commentators explain that he set up an altar to thank G-d for having saved him from Esau (see *Rashi, Ramban and Rashbam*). In fact even if Jacob did not immediately return to Bethel to fulfill the vow which he made, he nevertheless set up an altar!

In reality, this is quite simple to understand. A specific power has been given to man – the power of speech – and through it he can transform the mundane into something sacred, an animal into a burnt offering for example, sanctifying it and elevating it to the highest spiritual level. In short, he can transform mundane objects into sacred objects. This power is specific to Jews. In return, there is something that is demanded of Jews: “*When you make a vow to Hashem your G-d, you shall not delay to pay it, for Hashem your G-d will demand it of you, and there will be a sin in you. ... You shall observe and carry out what emerges from your lips, just as you vowed a voluntary gift to Hashem your G-d, whatever you spoke with your mouth*” (*Devarim 23:22-24*). This contains both a positive and a negative commandment: “*You shall observe*” is a positive commandment, and “*you shall not delay*” is a negative commandment. To this the Torah adds still more: “*Hashem your G-d will demand it of you.*” Why such insistence? Because the power of speech, which was given to man, constitutes his essence. Thus Onkelos translated “*the man became a living soul*” (*Bereshith 2:7*) as “*the man became a speaking soul.*” Through speech, the power of holiness was bestowed

upon man. Thus if a person carelessly uses this power, he will profane the breath of sanctity that was infused in man so as to make him a “*speaking soul*.”

However if a person develops the incredible power that he has been granted, then he will act on what he says, and it is certain that he will keep his word. Nevertheless, a person sometimes justifies himself with excuses such as “*I didn’t really mean it*,” “*I tried but didn’t succeed*,” or even, “*Had I known that things would turn out this way, I would never have said that*.” Sometimes a person will keep his word, but not in the proper way, keeping it “*somewhat*” or “*more or less*.” If asked what became of his promise, he will pretend that he doesn’t understand. He will respond with statements like, “*Isn’t that more or less what I said?*” as if to say: “*Why are you nitpicking and being so strict with me?*” However all these excuses and replies will not help him in the least, for if he has given his word, he is obligated to keep it. A person must keep his word! As long as words have not emerged from his mouth, as long as they have not breached his lips, he is not obligated to keep them. He can change his mind and his views. However as soon as a person has voiced them, he is obligated to respect and fulfill them, literally, without changing a thing!

Things are now clearer: When Jacob awoke, he was fleeing from his brother Esau. He therefore made a vow and set up a pillar in order to offer his sacrifices and pour out his libations. Yet because of delays and obstacles, he did not literally keep his word, although he did keep it in spirit: As promised, he set up altars and offered sacrifices – though not at Bethel – to thank the Creator for having appeared to him there and for saving him from Esau. It was for this reason that Jacob was punished, because he should have fulfilled his word to the letter.

The Ben Ish Hai therefore writes in regards to this subject, “*A person must draw a great lesson here: Since Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, was punished for not having fulfilled his vow on time, and since his piety was not enough to have saved him, how much more should each of us be scrupulous in this area and not take our words lightly when they concern sacred issues.*”

Nevertheless, we have not yet explained how this is related to the story of Dinah. Where do we see conduct that was “*measure-for-measure*”? If we look more closely, however, we see a clear connection, for Rashi states: “*The daughter of Leah. Not ‘the daughter of Jacob’? Yet because of her ‘going out,’ she is called ‘the daughter of Leah,’ for she [Leah] too, was in the habit of ‘going out,’ as it is said: ‘Leah went out to meet him’ [Bereshith 30:16].*” The Midrash asks if it is fitting to compare these two “*going out*”s. Was the “*going out*” of Leah not justified, insofar as an extra tribe was obtained among the tribes of G-d as a result? The Sages derived an important principle here: “*Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: A woman who solicits her husband to the [marital] obligation will have children the likes of whom did not exist even in the generation of Moshe. For of the generation of Moshe it is written, ‘Provide for yourselves men who are wise, understanding, and known’ [Devarim 1:13], which is followed by: ‘So I took the heads of your tribes, men who*

were wise and known' [v.15]. However he could not find men of 'understanding.' As for Leah, Scripture writes: 'Leah went out to meet him and said: "You must come to me, for I have hired you"' [Bereshith 30:16], and elsewhere it is written: 'Of the children of Issachar, men with understanding of the times, to know what Israel should do' [I Chronicles 12:33]" (*Eruvin* 100b).

As a result of her "going out" and request that Jacob should come with her, Leah merited sons like Issachar. Her "going out" was therefore something positive! That said, why was she criticized for it, as Rashi writes: "for she [Leah] too, was in the habit of 'going out'"? The commentators explain that Leah actually had to "seek her husband." However the proper way of going about this is described in tractate *Eruvin*, and in a very subtle way we see a lack of modesty on her part. The *Ohr HaChaim* is also greatly surprised by Leah's conduct: "*She had reasons to act in this way, but it was not exemplary conduct.*" In other words, her way of doing things was inappropriate.

Thus the whole situation can be fully explained. In fact there was nothing more fitting and holy than Leah's "going out." However Dinah "took" this virtue and used it in the wrong way, for she "went out to look upon the daughters of the land." Analyzing things very carefully shows that Jacob acted in the same way: He took what is most sacred in man, the power of speech, and used it improperly. These actions were thus identical! How greatly should a person make the most of the powers that G-d has given him for the sake of holiness and purity – not, G-d forbid, for other purposes that are inappropriate! In fact man, who is a divine spark, the crown of Creation and created in the image of G-d, should make the most of this aspect of holiness and purity in order to study Torah, perform good deeds, and give to charity – not, G-d forbid, for other purposes!

Jacob's Fight with the Angel: A Symbol of Man's Fight with His Evil Inclination

It is written, "Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. ... He said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken'" (Bereshith 32:25-27).

Certain points call for an explanation here, in this description of Jacob's fight with the angel. First of all, we need to understand why the angel sought to fight and harm our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, especially since the angels were aware of his greatness and lofty status. In fact his likeness is engraved on the Celestial Throne, and when Jacob slept on Mount Moriah, the angels wanted to descend and look upon him (*Yonatan ben Uzziel* on Bereshith 28:12). Clearly, this angel had been sent by Hashem to fulfill a mission, and it is incumbent on us to understand what the goal of that mission was.

Let us also examine the timing of this fight and the way it ended. The fight began when Jacob returned to retrieve some small jars that he had forgotten. It was then that

the angel found and confronted him. This fight continued throughout the night, without a winner or loser, until the morning. The angel then said to Jacob, “*Let me go, for dawn has broken.*” This means that Jacob had managed to defeat the angel by daybreak, and therefore it asked him to be released so it could go and sing praises before G-d (*Chullin 91b*). As the Midrash recounts, “*Rabbi Berekiah said: We do not know who was victorious, either the angel or Jacob. Yet since it is written, ‘And a man vaye’avak [fought] with him’ [Bereshith 32:25], it follows: Who was covered with avak [dust]? The man who [fought] with him!*” (*Bereshith Rabba 77:3*).

Our Sages explain that this was none other than Esav’s guardian angel, which had come to fight Jacob and weaken him (*Bereshith Rabba ibid.*). In previous articles, we have already gone into detail concerning the permanent fight between Jacob and Esav (i.e., *between good and evil, purity and impurity*). At that point in time, Jacob was at the pinnacle of his greatness and glory. He had just returned from the home of Lavan, perfect in heart and soul, for there he had succeeded in observing all 613 mitzvot. It was fitting for Jacob to return to the land of his fathers, yet it was precisely then that the Satan and the evil inclination tried to make him stumble and sin (see the explanation of the *Kli Yakar*). If it succeeded in making him fall from the heights that he had reached, its victory would have been complete.

We can now explain why the angel committed itself to fighting Jacob precisely as he was going to look for the small jars that he had forgotten. These represent the mitzvot that people typically look down upon. Our father Jacob did not forsake them, nor did he leave them behind. He went off to acquire and merit them, and it was precisely then that the angel came to fight him. It was through these mitzvot that the evil inclination seeks to test man and make him sin, for it knows that if it were to try and lead him directly into sin per se, he would dismiss it without a second thought. Hence it attempts to make people stumble through simple mitzvot, those which people tend to neglect. It is here, at this vulnerable point, that the evil inclination applies pressure. Once it has managed to enter the domain of man, it becomes easier to make him fail little by little. One day it tells him to do this, and the next day it tells him to do something else (*Shabbat 105b*), until it eventually leads him into sin itself.

However Jacob did not give in. The fight continued throughout the night, and he was only able to defeat the angel by daybreak. From here we learn that our fight with the evil inclination lasts for the entire night, meaning for the entire duration of our stay here below, as it is written: “*You make darkness, and it is night [Tehillim 104:20]* – this refers to this world, which is like the night” (*Bava Metzia 83b*). Even a person who reaches great heights in his service of Hashem is fully engaged in fighting the evil inclination as long as he remains in this lower world, all throughout the night until the break of dawn.

At dawn, the angel grew weak and said to Jacob: “*Let me go, for dawn has broken.*” Dawn symbolizes the World to Come, when G-d will make the sun rise, carry the evil inclination away, and destroy it before the eyes of the righteous, those

who defeated and controlled it. It will then be delivered to them for all eternity. That is why the angel could not leave: It was Jacob's prisoner and under his control. Indeed, is it not said that the righteous are masters of their own heart and that they control their own desires?

Thus as long as a person lives in this world, the evil inclination does not leave him alone. Each day it renews its tactics, its goal being to defeat each person according to his importance and level, as we read: "*The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him*" (*Tehillim* 37:32). This battle rages in all its intensity until the dawn of the World to Come. The light coming from the sun will then be increased, becoming seven times greater than the light of Creation, and the evil inclination will be destroyed and delivered to the righteous.

I was happy to find support for these remarks in Midrash Lekach Tov. There it is written, "*Until the break of dawn – until the break of dawn arrives for Israel. The deliverance of Israel is like daybreak, since exile is compared to the night. The nations of the world and the kingdom of Edom fight against Israel to veer it off the path of G-d, as it is written: 'Return, return, O Shulamite. Return, return, that we may look upon you'* [Shir HaShirim 7:1]."

I also found proof for our assertions in the Midrash regarding the verse, "*The sun rose for him*" (*Bereshith* 32:32): "*Said Rav Huna in the name of Rav Acha: The sun healed Jacob our father, but burned Esav and his generals. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jacob: 'You are a sign for your children. Just as the sun healed you while burning Esav and his generals, likewise the sun will heal your children and burn idolaters.' For your children, 'A sun of righteousness will shine for you who fear My Name, with healing in its rays' [Malachi 3:20]. As for idolaters, 'Behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace...' [v.19]*" (*Bereshith Rabba* 78:5). This verse speaks of the future, when the sun will shine, a time when the wicked will be judged in their light, and evil will be banished from the earth, as the Gemara tells us (*Avodah Zarah*).

This is why the angel wanted to recite praises at dawn. When the evil inclination, which is none other than the Satan, realizes that it cannot make a tzaddik stumble, the accuser changes into a defender and is forced to ascend towards the Celestial Throne. There it sings praises to Hashem, Who possesses such a world, one in which His faithful servants – after having been victorious in battle over the evil inclination, despite its tricks and the obstacles that it puts in their way – have maintained their faithfulness and continue to serve Him with all their heart and soul. It is clear that the evil inclination is a messenger of G-d, as it is written: "*Everyone who is called by My Name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have fashioned, perfected*" (*Isaiah* 43:7). It allows Hashem's Name to be sanctified through the righteous who, despite their battles with the evil inclination, fulfill His word and commandments to perfection. It is in their regard that Esav's guardian angel, which is the Satan, comes to sing praises before Hashem.

The Torah Learning of Jacob in the House of Lavan

It is written, “*I have sojourned with Lavan and I have lingered until now*” (*Bereshith 32:5*).

Midrash Pliyah recounts that during his stay with Lavan, Jacob observed Shabbat. This seems like a surprising remark, since we already know that Jacob continued to observe all the mitzvot while there. In fact Jacob used the expression, “*I have sojourned*” (*garti, which has a numerical value of 613*) to inform Esav that he continued to observe all the mitzvot while living with Lavan. That being the case, why does this midrash specify that he observed Shabbat, as opposed to the other mitzvot? Besides, is the concept of Shabbat not included in the rest of the mitzvot?

As we know, Jacob’s primary characteristic was Torah learning. In fact we read that Jacob “*was an upright man, abiding in tents*” (*Bereshith 25:27*) as well as, “*You [G-d] give truth to Jacob*” (*Micah 7:20*) – and the Torah is called “truth.” At this point we have a problem: How could Jacob have succeeded in learning Torah during the 20 years that he lived with Lavan? After all, he worked day and night, as he himself told Lavan: “*By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; and my sleep drifted from my eyes*” (*Bereshith 31:40*). Hence it’s difficult to assert that he could have studied Torah during all those years!

We cannot say that Jacob stole time from his work in order to study, since he said: “*You know that I served your father with all my might*” (*Bereshith 31:6*). Our Patriarch Jacob did not steal anything from Lavan, although the latter was an idolater. Indeed, being dishonest with a non-Jew is a very grave matter. The Ben Ish Hai recounts that when a Jew cheats a non-Jew, the latter’s guardian angel goes before Hashem and says: “*Just as this Jew diminished this non-Jew, likewise I will diminish his mitzvot!*” From here we learn that stealing from a non-Jew is a serious offense, one that can lead to a loss in the mitzvot that we have acquired.

In reality, Jacob was very careful not to steal anything while living with Lavan, the result being that he studied Torah as he was working! Even in our days, the great men of Israel are capable of studying Torah while speaking with someone! How much more could Jacob, whose abilities were vast, have done the same by devoting himself to work while simultaneously being absorbed in the study of Torah!

On Shabbat, however, Jacob obviously did not work because he observed this holy day. He therefore took advantage of the day to study Torah with even greater intensity. We even find an allusion to the fact that he observed Shabbat, for this day is called a “*time*,” as it is written: “*It is a time [et] to act for Hashem*” (*Tehillim 119:126*). Now Jacob said, “*I have lingered until now [ata]*” (*Bereshith 32:5*). As such, he delayed the study of Torah until Shabbat, when he could apply himself even more, even completing what he could not complete during the week. Hence this is how we must understand the statement found in Midrash Pliyah: It is obvious that Jacob observed all the mitzvot while living with Lavan. However the midrash stresses Shabbat because Jacob did not

work during this holy day, and therefore he could catch up with his Torah learning for the entire week. Hence the mitzvah of Shabbat was that much more essential to our Patriarch Jacob, and the midrash underlines that he observed it.

Furthermore, we know that G-d gave the Children of Israel two gifts – the first being Shabbat and the second being the study of Torah – and each gift has its particular aspects. Although Shabbat corresponds to the World to Come (*being a foretaste of it*), Jacob experienced this foretaste both during Shabbat and while learning Torah. Despite the fact that Jacob's Torah study was accompanied by hardship and great effort during his sojourn with Lavan, it was the only thing that provided him with a foretaste of the World to Come.

This midrash teaches us that a person who pays special attention to a particular mitzvah throughout his life is considered to have observed the Torah in its entirety. Although Jacob observed the entire Torah, the midrash mentions only his respect for Shabbat in order to teach us that this mitzvah, having been perfectly fulfilled, is equivalent to the entire Torah. Hence the midrash did not need to mention that Jacob also continued to observe every other mitzvah.

Along the same lines, our Sages tell us of a man who studied tractate Chagigah throughout his entire life. Upon his death, a woman wrapped in tzitzit appeared and exclaimed: “*Come and eulogize this man!*” Following his eulogy and burial, the woman disappeared, at which point everyone realized that she was the embodiment of tractate Chagigah, and that she had appeared because the deceased had studied it throughout this life. A single mitzvah that is perfectly fulfilled is therefore extremely important!

Finally, let us add a few remarks on the value of learning Torah during Shabbat. The Chafetz Chaim affirms that “*one hour of learning Torah during Shabbat is equivalent to one thousand hours of learning during the week.*” What does this mean? In reality, one thousand days for us is but a single day for Hashem, as it is written: “*A thousand years in Your eyes are but a day that has passed*” (*Tehillim 90:4*). Likewise, what we call “*one thousand hours*” is but one hour in G-d’s eyes. Now Shabbat is a snippet of the World to Come, which is why Hashem considers our one hour of learning on Shabbat according to His measure of time. The result is that “*one hour of learning Torah during Shabbat is equivalent to one thousand hours of learning during the week.*”

When the Satan Ascends to Sing Before G-d

It is written, “*A man wrestled with him until the break of dawn*” (*Bereshith 32:25*).

This verse requires an explanation. First, why did they wrestle throughout the night? Why did Jacob not defeat the angel right away? And how did Esav’s angel still succeed in wounding Jacob in the hip, such that he ended up limping?

Our Sages explain that the hip symbolizes those who support Torah (*Zohar I:171a*).

When Esav's angel realized that it could not harm those who study Torah, it decided to strike those who support them, those who help them. This is a serious punishment: In fact how did they sin, such that they suffer as a result of the bnei Torah who resist their own evil inclination? Finally, how will these bnei Torah survive without those who support them?

It is also surprising that on the same day that Esav's angel was preparing to sing praises before Hashem, it went out to fight Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs! How could it dare sing praises before Hashem while seeing the image of Jacob engraved beneath the Celestial Throne, and while realizing that Jacob is loved by G-d? Was it not ashamed to have harmed the greatest of the Patriarchs?

I thought of explaining this in the following way: The Satan also fulfills G-d's will when it comes to disrupt the tzaddikim during their divine service. If they overcome their own evil inclination, this becomes a wonderful sanctification of the Divine Name, and a tremendous upheaval is created by the merit of the tzaddik. In such a case, even the Satan comes to thank and praise G-d for having created such a tzaddik, through whose merit the world endures.

This is the song of praise that the Satan itself sings before G-d, Who gives life to this tzaddik, who did not succumb to it. Aside from the song of praise itself, the Satan must also thank G-d and declare Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh before Him. In fact when it realizes that even its spiritual tricks are not enough to make the tzaddik stumble, it comes to sing G-d's praises.

What does the war of the Satan entail? When fighting against the tzaddik, its feet raises up dust – an allusion to filth – to the heavens. When seeing that it cannot succeed in defeating the tzaddik, the Satan uses trickery to entice him, to sully him with small amounts of dust. It tries to lead him into committing a small transgression in order to make him cleave to it afterwards.

Yet even small specks of dust do not penetrate the tzaddik, for he is careful that his entire being (*body, heart, and mind*) is devoted solely to G-d.

Esav's angel, in its role as the Satan, felt no shame in going out to fight Jacob. Its role is to weaken people in their service of G-d so they can resist temptation and therefore receive a greater reward. The goal is to propel them from the level of Jacob to the level of Israel, which is far higher.

Esav's angel then went to praise the Creator for having created such a pure soul. That is why this war is permanent, having no beginning or end, for it only ceases when the strongest has won.

This is what Jacob hinted to his descendants: We cannot defeat the Satan immediately. When it presents itself, it is in order to fight us, to defeat us, and to take us out of this world. It sends us great trials, and even if it fails, it continues to fight without weakening. It is an angel that only the tzaddikim who are immersed in Torah

can conquer, and without G-d's help, a person could never defeat it. It is also written, "The sun rose for him" (*Bereshith* 32:32), for the light of the sun alludes to Hashem's help, which immediately makes the Satan flee.

When it is defeated by a person, however, it ascends to Heaven and praises the Creator for the presence of such a person in the world. Furthermore, the increasingly brilliant image of Jacob is proof of his victory over the Satan. Hence this is the praise that it offers before G-d: That in His world there is a tzaddik who defeated it, and whom no one can overcome.

Jacob laid out the path for his descendants to take during this fight. Just as he dominated the battle against Esav's angel, which represents the evil inclination, there will always be a battle between Jews and the Satan. And when it loses, it praises the Creator and acknowledges the blessings received by Jacob, which raises a Jew from the level of Jacob to the level of Israel. Faced with its inability to weaken us, it leaves us for a while before returning with even greater strength. However it then sees that G-d Himself comes to our aid.

This is why Jacob let the Satan harm those who support our teachers: They have grown rich because of our teachers, and they occupy themselves solely with providing money to the tzaddik, who has no time to manage his own money. Hashem turns wealthy men into financial managers and supporters of the tzaddikim and bnei Torah, who are our teachers.

Thus He permitted the Satan to attack them in order for the tzaddikim and Torah institutions to also experience the trial of sustenance, to overcome it, and to continue making an effort for Torah. If they successfully pass this trial, their sustenance will arise from elsewhere, and their Torah will be complete and established on sanctity.

Parsha Vayeishev

The Tragedy of Joseph

It is written, “*Jacob dwelled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan*” (*Genesis 37:1*). Here Rashi cites the Midrash in stating that when Jacob wanted to settle down in peace and tranquility, Hashem said: “*Is what is prepared for the righteous in the World to Come not enough for them, such that they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world?*” At that point he was struck by the tragedy of Joseph (*see Bereshith Rabba 84:3*).

This is difficult to understand. Did Jacob ask to live a life of ease and idleness? He certainly wanted some rest from his troubles and worries in order to study Torah and perform mitzvot in tranquility. Yet how could this be considered such a tremendous fault that the tragedy of Joseph immediately struck him?

Furthermore, Jacob was the one who enclosed himself in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber for 14 years in order to study Torah. There, during all those years, he did not rest his head or lie down to sleep. In fact when he left for Haran, the verse states: “*He lay down in that place*” (*Genesis 28:11*). Rashi explains: “*In that place he lay down, but during the 14 years that he served in the house of Eber, he did not lie down at night, for he was engaged in Torah study.*” Jacob therefore exemplifies the study of Torah with a minimum of creature comforts. The teaching of the Sages is completely fulfilled in him, for they said: “*The words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it*” (*Berachot 63b*). It is certain that even afterwards, for the rest of his life in fact, Jacob killed himself in studying Torah. Therefore his only intention in wanting to settle down in peace was to be free of the worries that surrounded him, this being in order to devote and “*kill himself*” in the tent of Torah study. That being the case, why was his desire considered inappropriate? To answer this, we must realize that Jacob’s deeds were not only evaluated with regard to himself, but also with regard to how they would influence his descendants. In fact the Sages have said, “*The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons.*” Everything the Patriarchs did, and all that happened to them, was a foretaste of their descendants’ experiences. As the Ramban states concerning Abraham, “*Now Abraham went down to Egypt on account of the famine to dwell there...but the Egyptians oppressed him for no reason [and attempted] to take his wife. The Holy One, blessed be He, avenged their cause with great plagues and rescued them from there with cattle and silver and gold, and Pharaoh even commanded his men to escort them from the land. He thereby alluded to Abraham that his children would go down to Egypt on account of the famine...and the Egyptians would do them evil and take their women from them, just as Pharaoh said: ‘And every daughter you shall save alive’ [Exodus 1:22]. Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, would avenge their cause with great plagues until He brings them out with silver and gold, sheep and*

oxen...with the Egyptians pressuring to send them out of the land. Nothing was lacking in all the events that happened to the Patriarchs that would not occur to the children. ... ‘Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: “Go forth and tread out a path for your children.” Thus you find that whatever is written about Abraham is also written about his children. For Abraham it is written, “And there was a famine in the land,” and for Israel it is written, “For these two years the famine has been in the land”’ [Bereshith Rabba 40:8]” (Ramban on Genesis 12:10).

Now just as what happened to Abraham was a sign that the same would happen to his descendants – nothing happening to the father that would not happen to the son – similarly everything that happened to Jacob, and all that he did, would happen on a greater scale to his descendants over the centuries.

On account of this, Jacob’s request to settle down in peace and tranquility was considered inappropriate. Although it was a positive request with regards to Jacob alone (since all he wanted was to serve G-d without difficulty), it was nevertheless not the right path for his descendants to follow. True, Jacob only asked for tranquility in order to study Torah and perform mitzvot in a peaceful state of mind. However since the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons, it is clear that if Jacob had settled down in peace, his children would have also followed the same path and want peace and tranquilly. They viewed the deeds of the Patriarchs as a sign to their descendants, and they wanted to emulate their deeds and follows in their footsteps. Now with regard to the descendants of Jacob, there was a great danger that if they chose the path of tranquilly, they might think that the Torah could be acquired through peace and tranquility, meaning without effort. Yet the reality of things is the very opposite, as the Sages have said: “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah*” (*Perkei Avoth* 4:14) and, “*This is the path to Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and toil in the Torah. If you do this...you will be happy in this world and it will go well with you in the World to Come*” (*ibid.* 6:4).

This teaching can be found in the term *vayeishev* (“and he dwelled”). The Sages have said, “*Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates trouble*” (*Megillah* 10b). In the same way, we can interpret the term *vayeishev* as alluding to trouble: *Vaisehev* – by settling down in this way, trouble will visit the coming generations because they will err by learning to settle down without difficulty. They will make the mistake of not studying Torah with effort or through adversity.

This is why Joseph was struck by the tragedy of Joseph. What exactly did this misfortune entail? It was that Joseph was sold into Egypt, that he went into exile, and that he endured horrendous trials which he had to overcome. As a result, these experiences rectified Jacob’s desire to live in peace and harmony, for here the very opposite was happening: His son was exiled to another land and yet observed the Torah through hardship and suffering.

What’s more is that on the verse, “*He entered the house to do his work*” (*Genesis* 39:11), the Midrash states that it was Shabbat, so what “work” did he have to

accomplish? In fact Joseph had come to study Torah and the Mishnah that his father had taught him (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeishev* 146). Joseph had been exiled in order to study Torah. This represented the absolute opposite of Jacob's idea of settling down in peace and tranquility to study. In fact it was the rectification of this idea, for if Jacob had actually settled down in peace and tranquility, his offspring were liable to stray from the Torah because they lived in tremendous comfort, as it is written: "*Yeshurun grew fat and kicked*" (*Deuteronomy* 32:15). Instead, Jacob was struck by the tragedy of Joseph, which resulted in his children fortifying themselves in the study of Torah through exile and hardship.

The fact that the Torah is acquired precisely in exile is alluded to in the verse, "*If you walk in My statutes*" (*Leviticus* 26:3), which Rashi explains as meaning: "*You must toil in the study of Torah.*" This means that Scripture describes the effort that we must exert in learning Torah as "*walking.*" We must exile ourselves to a place of Torah, not seek to study it in peace and tranquility. We can fully understand why Jacob was struck by the tragedy of Joseph, not another of his 12 sons. Actually, Joseph was the only son to whom Jacob had transmitted the entire Torah that was handed down to him by Shem and Eber, as the Midrash states (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:8). This goes without mentioning the fact that "*everything that occurred to Jacob also occurred to Joseph,*" as Rashi mentions. Therefore Joseph, more than anyone else, exemplified the fact that "*the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons.*" Hence it was precisely through Joseph that the Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrated that for the future of Jacob's offspring, it was not good for Jacob to settle down in peace. It was far better for them to get used to observing Torah even through hardship and in exile.

The Only Free Man is One who Studies Torah

It is written, "*Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings*" (*Genesis* 37:1). Our Sages have said, "*When the righteous wish to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: 'They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but they wish to live in peace even in this world!'*" (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:3). When Jacob wanted to live in peace in this world, the Satan struck him through Joseph.

This passage was written to teach people the greatness of the words of our Sages, who said: "*There is no free man except one who occupies himself with the study of Torah*" (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:2). Let us examine the difference between the early generations and the later generations. The early generations devoted themselves entirely to Torah and did not turn away from its study for even a moment. As stated with regards to King David, the Angel of Death could not take his soul because his lips were moving at all times, and the Angel of Death does not have the right to interrupt a man when he studies (*Shabbat* 30b). It is also said (*Midrash Tehillim* 1) that David learned Torah with one study group after another in order to fulfill the verse, "*From all my teachers I grew wise*" (*Psalms* 119:99).

Similar to this concept is the statement by our Sages: “*Torah scholars have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World to Come*” (*Berachot 64a*). Rashi explains that they proceed from one yeshiva to the next and from one Beit Midrash to another. Rabbi Yochanan said of himself, “*In my case [it is a profanation iff] I walk four cubits without Torah or tefillin*” (*Yoma 86a*). It is also said, “*A scholar is forbidden to stand in a place of filth, because he must not stand still without meditating on Torah*” (*Berachot 24b*). We also read, “*It was reported about Rabbi Eleazar ben Harsom that his father left him 1,000 cities on the continent, as well as 1,000 boats on the sea. Every day he would take a sack of flour on his shoulder and go from city to city and from province to province in order to study Torah*” (*Yoma 35b*). In the Midrash our Sages cite Hashem as saying, “*Torah scholars who force themselves to go from city to city and from country to country in order to study Torah, I exempt them from the yoke of government*” (*Midrash Otiyot*). Thus the early generations gave themselves no rest in the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot. Even the wealthy among them went from place to place in order to study Torah, not diverting their attention from learning for even an instant.

As for the later generations, they do exactly the opposite: During the summer, people put religious concerns aside and neglect the study of Torah in order to go on vacation. Even when they leave their homes for a vacation destination, when they return they immediately want to rest and relax some more, for they are never content with however many vacations they may have in life. Why is that so? It is because the soul of a Jew can never be satisfied by this fleeting life and its pleasures, but only by eternal life and the study of Torah. Whoever studies Torah does not need a vacation, for the Torah itself constitutes the greatest freedom that exists. As for those who fail to study it, even if they were to spend all their time on vacation, it would still not be enough, for the Sages said: “*Exile yourself to a place of study*” (*Pirkei Avoth 4:14*), not “*Exile yourself on a vacation*.”

People of earlier generations felt at peace despite never resting from the study of Torah. Why was this so? They felt at peace because they studied Torah, as it is written: “*These are the generations of Noah – Noah...*” (*Genesis 6:9*). This teaches us that whenever Noah wanted to rest (*nach*) from Torah study, he would continue studying. Concerning the saintly Rabbi Chaim of Sanz Zatzal, it is said that at the end of Yom Kippur, when he felt exhausted after an entire day of pouring out his soul to Hashem, he told his assistants that he wanted to rest a little, and he proceeded into his room. When they followed behind to see what he was doing, they saw him leafing through a Gemara (*tractate Sukkah*) and studying it from the very first page, not moving from there during all the time they were watching him. They went back home to sleep, and the next morning they returned to the Rav’s room and saw him with his book still open, near the end of the tractate. He had studied during the entire night!

This was how the tzaddikim rested after an exhausting Yom Kippur – through the study of Torah. Why did they do this? It is because they only find rest through words of Torah, not needing physical rest but rather spiritual rest.

We also find that our Sages said, “*Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva*” (*Yoma 28b*). It is difficult to understand why they needed a yeshiva, for were they unable to study Torah by themselves? Regarding this subject, it is said that Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph in order “*to set up [lehorot] before him*” (*Genesis 46:28*) – meaning to set up a house of study for the words of Torah, a place where the tribes could study. This is surprising, for could Jacob not have studied at home? Why did he need a yeshiva?

From here we learn that the only free man is one who studies Torah. The early generations, even if they did not leave their homes for a vacation, did indeed find rest. How did they find it? It was by studying Torah. They studied only in a yeshiva, for a yeshiva is a place of rest, as the Sages have said: “*The word yeshiva means dwelling*” (*see Megillah 21a*). Hence they rested by the very fact that they studied in one yeshiva after another. As for the later generations, even when going on vacation after vacation, they still do not find rest. This is normal, for the only free person is one who studies Torah, and his soul can only be satisfied by its words.

Generally speaking, a person cannot remain at rest in this world. This is an ancient decree, as it is written: “*Man is born for toil*” (*Job 5:7*). When he seeks rest, hardship comes and hinders him, depriving him of his rest. If he is worthy, the Torah will prevent him from resting; if he is unworthy, hardship will prevent him from resting. When a person studies Torah, however, he is liberated. Hence Jacob was punished when he wanted to settle down in peace. Hashem said to him, “*You think that you can settle down in peace and study Torah in peace? By your life, I am sending disaster upon you that robs man of all his peace, makes him suffer; and does not allow him to rest in this world!*”

Man Was Born to Toil

It is written, “*Jacob dwelled in the land of his father’s sojournings*” (*Genesis 37:1*). Our Sages have said, “*When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: ‘They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but they wish to live in peace even in this world!’ The proof lies in the fact that the Patriarch Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:3*).

This truly requires an explanation. From here it seems that the Holy One, blessed be He, allows the Satan to bring hardships upon the tzaddikim, as he did with Jacob. Now our Sages have said, “*Three things deprive a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his Creator*” (*Eruvin 41b*), and one of them is hardship. We also find that when some early Sages experienced hardships and were asked if they welcomed them, they replied: “*Neither they nor their reward!*” (*Berachot 5b*). Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, allow the Satan to bring hardships upon Jacob? They were liable to prevent him from wholeheartedly serving Hashem, and we also find (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 37*) that the Shechinah did not rest upon Jacob during the 22 years that Joseph was not with him.

We can explain this by first citing a saying of our Sages: “*Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for them*” (*Berachot 63b*). A person will only merit an understanding of Torah when he puts a great effort into it, as we read in Parsha Bechukotai: “*If you walk in My statutes*” (*Leviticus 26:3*). Here the Midrash explains that Hashem yearns for the Children of Israel to study Torah (*Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1*). If they fail to study it, the 98 curses written in the book of Leviticus will come upon them.

When Jacob wanted to settle down in peace and tranquility, he also wanted to relax a little from all the effort that he normally invested in studying Torah. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw this, He said: “*As long as this tzaddik studied Torah, I did not bring hardships upon him. Yet now that he wants to relax from the study of Torah, I will send him hardships, and because of them he will exert himself.*”

This is the result of an ancient decree, namely: “*Man is born for toil*” (*Job 5:7*). If he focuses all his efforts into learning Torah, Hashem will not send him hardships. Not only that, but hardships will flee from him. However hardships will come upon him if he distances himself from Torah, and he will focus his efforts on these hardships instead of putting them into Torah study (*see Berachot 5a*).

Because He Studies Torah

As long as Jacob did not think of resting from his Torah study, the Holy One, blessed be He, protected him from hardships, as the Sages have stated in the Midrash. According to one view, Jacob did not lie down to sleep during the entire 14 years that he spent with Shem and Eber, while according to another view he did not lie down to sleep during the entire 20 years that he spent with Laban (*see Bereshith Rabba 68:11*). Hence the wicked Esau did not try to meet him during all the years that he was with Laban, although he knew that Jacob was there, for he told himself that Jacob was studying Torah. As Jacob said, “*I sojourned [garti] with Laban*” (*Genesis 32:5*), which our Sages have interpreted to mean: “*I have observed the 613 [taryag] mitzvot*” (*Midrash Aggadah ad loc.*).

The underlying principle is that Torah only endures with a person who puts an effort into it. When he fails to put an effort into learning Torah, hardships immediately come upon him, just as they did to our forefathers in Rephidim, as it is written: “*They encamped in Rephidim*” (*Exodus 17:1*). Here the Sages have explained that they slackened in Torah (*Sanhedrin 106a*). They did not say that they neglected Torah, but that they simply slackened in it, meaning that they did not study it with sufficient effort. Once that happened, the Holy One, blessed be He, immediately sent them a hardship, for Amalek came and attacked them, as we read: “*Amalek came*” (*Exodus 17:8*). Our Sages added that because they distanced themselves from Torah, their enemy came upon them.

Until He Develops a Taste for It

Along the same lines, the Sages have taught: “*If a man sees that hardships come upon him, let him examine his conduct. ... If he examines and finds nothing, let him attribute it to neglect in the study of Torah*” (*Berachot 5a*). This is surprising! If a person examines his conduct and finds nothing, and then he examines it once more

and discovers some neglect in learning Torah, it means that his first examination left something to be desired. What difference is there between the second examination and the first, during which time he found nothing?

The explanation is that when he first examined his conduct, he did not find the sin of Torah neglect because he had never in his life neglected study. Yet now that he continued to experience hardships, he examined himself again and realized that he had not put enough effort into learning Torah. He did not discover it the first time because he did not consider it to be a sin, and he did not perform a sufficiently thorough examination because he did not usually study Torah with total effort.

When he examined himself once again, he realized that since he did not initially find the sin of negligence in the study of Torah, the persistence of unexplained hardships nevertheless proved that it was there. It is impossible to study just once. A person has to put a great deal of effort into learning Torah, and he must review what he has learned until he develops a taste for it. That is why he failed to discover this sin the first time.

He Who Seeks Rest, Let Him Study Torah!

It is written, “*Jacob dwelled in the land of his father’s sojournings*” (*Bereshith 37:1*). The Sages have said, “*When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: ‘Are they not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, that they wish to live in peace even in this world!’ The proof lies in the fact that the Patriarch Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:3*).

I believe that this parsha was written for all the generations in order to teach people just how great are the words of our Sages, who said: “*There is no free man except one who occupies himself with the study of Torah*” (*Pirkei Avoth 6:2*). Look at the difference between the early generations and the later generations: The early generations devoted themselves entirely to learning Torah without stopping to rest for even a moment, as the Sages said in regards to King David: The Angel of Death could not take his soul because his lips were moving at all times, and the Angel of Death cannot interrupt a man who studies Torah (*Shabbat 30b*).

Everything Has Been Reversed

The Sages also say, “*Torah scholars have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World to Come*” (*Berachot 64a*). Rashi explains that they go from yeshiva to yeshiva, and from Beit HaMidrash to Beit HaMidrash. Rabbi Yochanan said of himself, “*In my case, [it is a profanation if] I walk four cubits without Torah or tefillin*” (*Yoma 86a*). The Sages also say in the Midrash, “*Torah scholars who go from town to town and from country to country in order to study Torah, I remove the yoke of government from them*” (*Midrash 400*). This is why the early generations gave themselves no rest from the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot. Even the wealthy among them went from place to place in order to study Torah, not diverting their attention from learning for

even an instant.

As for later generations, everything has been reversed: In the summertime, people put spiritual matters aside and neglect the study of Torah so they can go on vacation. Although they leave their homes for a vacation destination, they return and immediately want to rest and relax some more, for they never have enough in life. Why does this happen? It is because the soul of a Jew can never be satisfied by this ephemeral life and its pleasures, but only by eternal life and Torah study. Whoever studies Torah does not need a vacation or free time. The Torah itself constitutes freedom, the greatest kind of freedom. As for those who fail to study it, even if they were to spend their entire lives on vacation, it would still not be enough. As the Sages have said, “*Exile yourself to a place of study*” (*Pirkei Avot* 4:14), not “*exile yourself on vacation*.”

The early generations enjoyed rest, despite never taking time off from the words of Torah. How? By learning Torah! It is also written, “*These are the generations of Noah – Noah*” (*Bereshith* 6:9). Now the name Noah is formed from a root that means “rest,” teaching us that whenever Noah wanted to rest from words of Torah, he returned to learning. I have heard that at the end of Yom Kippur, the saintly Rabbi Chaim of Sanz Zatzal, after an exhausting day of prayer and pouring out his soul before Hashem, told his Shamash that he wanted to rest a little from his service of G-d on that day. He then went to his room, with his Shamash following behind to see what he would do. He saw Rabbi Chaim take tractate Sukkah and begin studying it from the very first page. He did not move before having completed the entire tractate on that night. His servants even went home to sleep, and when they returned the next morning, they saw him with the book still open, about to finish the entire tractate. This is how the tzaddikim rested from the exhaustion of Yom Kippur, by a different service of G-d, the study of Torah. Why? Because they only found rest through words of Torah, meaning that they did not need a physical rest, but a spiritual one.

Regarding our forefathers, our Sages have also said: “*Our fathers were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva*” (*Yoma* 28b). This is curious: Why a yeshiva? Could they not have studied Torah at home? Concerning our father Jacob, we read: “*He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to teach*” (*Bereshith* 46:28). What is implied by “*to teach*”? The Sages say, “*To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal fathers would study Torah*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 95:3). Could they not have studied at home? Why did they need a yeshiva?

They Studied Only in a Yeshiva

From here we learn that there is no free man except one who studies Torah. Although earlier generations never left their homes to go on vacation, they still managed to rest. How? By studying Torah. They studied only in a yeshiva, a term that comes from the root *yashav* (*to sit*), which indicates rest. As the Sages have said, the term yeshiva denotes lingering (*Megillah* 21a). By going from one yeshiva to another, they found rest. As for later generations, despite going on vacation after vacation, they still find no rest.

This is understandable, since the only free man is one who studies Torah, and man's soul is only satisfied by words of Torah.

This is why our father Jacob was punished when he wanted to settle down in peace. G-d said to him, “*You think that you can settle down in peace and study Torah in peace? By your life, I am sending you misfortunes that take away a person's peace and do not allow him to rest in this world.*”

Jacob Wished to Dwell in Peace

It is written, “*Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph, at the age of 17 years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock*” (*Bereshith 37:1-2*).

Here Rashi explains: “*Jacob was seeking to dwell in peace when the troubles of Joseph were thrust upon him. [Whenever] the tzaddikim seek to dwell in peace, G-d says: 'Is it not enough for the tzaddikim [to have] what has been prepared for them in the World to Come, that they should also want to dwell in peace in this world?'*”

Rashi is trying to explain why the parsha begins with the words “*These are the generations of Jacob,*” and yet continues with the account of Joseph. It is the account of Joseph that constitutes the generations of Jacob, who wanted to live in peace, but troubles resulting from Joseph came upon him.

These words of Rashi have their source in the Midrash, which states: “*Rabbi Acha said: When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace in this world, Satan comes and accuses them: 'They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but wish to dwell in peace even in this world!' The proof lies in the fact that the Patriarch Jacob wished to dwell in peace in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph's Satan. Thus Jacob dwelled in the land – 'I was not at peace, neither was I quiet, neither was I at rest, and trouble came upon me' [Job 3:26]: 'I was not at peace' – from Esau; 'neither was I quiet' – from Lavan; 'neither was I at rest' – from Dinah; 'and trouble came upon me' – through Joseph*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:3*).

This seems to require an explanation. Jacob did not seek to dwell in peace. In fact he had no intention of being left in peace, in folding his arms without doing anything. We are speaking of the greatest of the Patriarchs, an upright man who lived in tents, and who merited to fight and defeat Esau's ministering angel! His rest was therefore a rest of Torah. He simply wanted to dwell in peace, meaning to study Torah, for there is no rest but Torah. In that case, why did the accuser unleash his wrath against him, saying: “*They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but wish to dwell in peace even in this world?*” After all, it was this wrath that brought misfortune upon Jacob.

Numerous years earlier, Hashem revealed himself to Jacob's grandfather Abraham. In the covenant between the parts, Hashem said to him: “*Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own...*” (*Bereshith 15:13*). As we know,

the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children. True, in announcing “*your offspring shall be aliens*,” the verse is speaking of the exile in Egypt. However it also contains an allusion for every Jew: He must realize that the present world is not his home; he is only in this world temporarily, as an “*alien*.” This is not his home, but “*a land not their own*.” When he realizes this, he will automatically realize that this world is filled with trials from one end to the other, there being no day without one.

We see that the Jewish people’s existence began while they were still in Egypt. It was not in their own country that they became a people, but rather in a foreign land. And not just a foreign land, but the darkest place in the world, namely Egypt, “*the nakedness of the earth*” (*Bereshith* 42:9). It was a place of sorcery and the worst kind of impurity, a place concerning which the Torah says: “*You shall not follow the ways of Egypt*” (*Vayikra* 18:3). It was there, amid the greatest darkness, that the Jewish people were formed.

This concept was hinted at as early as the six days of Creation, with the creation of the stars. Regarding Isaiah’s statement that G-d “*forms light and creates darkness*” (*Isaiah* 45:7), it is clear that He forms light, since light is something created. But is darkness also something created? In the absence of light, darkness automatically reigns! Therefore what is being created? We may say that it is exactly as the verse says: Formation and creation. Light is formed, in which case darkness automatically appears, for in the absence of light there is darkness.

We may therefore say by allusion that many great things have been created precisely by means of darkness. In fact everything related to light is also related to darkness, for we would be unable to perceive light if it were not for darkness. It is only when light replaces darkness and chases it away that everything becomes clear. “*Though I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light to me*” (*Micah* 7:8), for sometimes darkness is the reason for light. In other words, it is precisely amid the darkness of the earth that light shines. It is precisely amid such darkness that the smallest spark, the slightest glimmer of light, takes on its full meaning.

This is also what occurred during the formation of the Jewish people in Egypt. It was only there, amid the greatest darkness, that their light broke out like dawn. It was precisely amid hardship and pain that success is to be found. Hence this was the accusation raised against Jacob: “*They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but wish to dwell in peace even in this world!*” In the World to Come, the World of Truth, everything is prepared. However this world is but an “*alien*” land, so why ask for peace in this world? Even if this peace is to be used for the service of G-d, for the study of Torah, the proper kind of work in this world involves a lack of peace, meaning continual improvement, trial after trial, as we have said.

Jacob Lived in an Era of Servitude

We may also explain that a special accusation was raised against Jacob, for as we know, the exile of Egypt already began with the birth of Isaac. Thus on the verse, “*Know*

with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own – and they will serve them and they will oppress them – 400 years” (*Bereshith 15:13*), Rashi explains: “From Isaac’s birth until Israel left Egypt was 400 years. How is this so? Isaac was 60 years old at Jacob’s birth, and when Jacob descended to Egypt, he said: ‘The days of the years of my sojourns have been 130 years’ [*Bereshith 47:9*], making a total of 190. They were in Egypt 210 – the numerical value of *redu* [‘go down,’ *Bereshith 42:2*] – making a total of 400 years.” We may therefore say that Jacob was already living in the era of the Jewish people’s servitude. That said, how could he have wanted to dwell in peace, since he was living in such an era? This is why “*the Patriarch Jacob wished to dwell in peace in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan.*” As we know, this consists of what eventually led the Children of Israel into Egypt, teaching us that in an era of servitude, we do not have the right to dwell in peace, but instead to work without respite, constantly progressing with each passing day.

The Ultimate Goal of the Exile in Egypt

It is written, “*Jacob settled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan*” (*Bereshith 37:1*).

The Sages have explained, “*When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace in this world, Satan comes and accuses them: ‘They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, that they wish to dwell in peace even in this world!’ The proof lies in the fact that the Patriarch Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:3*).

It is clear that Jacob wanted peace and tranquility in order to better serve G-d. That said, what harm was there in asking for such peace and tranquility in order to study Torah? After all, have the Sages not said: “*The discussion of a legal matter requires clarity, like a clear day*” (*Megillah 28b*), so why accuse him for this?

In my humble opinion, Jacob was an upright man throughout his life, dwelling in the tents of Torah. For 14 years, he withdrew to the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Ever, and he studied Torah wherever destiny brought him. After all those years of intensive learning – which allude to exile and instability – Jacob believed that the time had finally come in which he could study Torah regularly and in peace, since we have no peace of mind when we are constantly on the move. This is the peace that Jacob sought, for he had studied Torah on the move until that time, but now he wanted to establish a fixed place of Torah where he could study in tranquility and peace of mind.

The verse, “*Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house*” (*Bereshith 33:17*) is translated by Jonathan ben Uzziel as: “*Jacob journeyed to Succoth and sojourned there for the twelve months of the year, and he built a Beit HaMidrash.*” He felt that the end of the exile had arrived, that the time had come for rest and regular learning in a Beit HaMidrash. He therefore emerged from the “*tent*” of Torah to study in a “*house*” (*beit*) of Torah.

Jacob thought that from then on, there would be no reason for his descendants to be exiled in Egypt, since the time of stability and deliverance had arrived. He believed that the reasons for the exile would be diminished by the regular study of Torah, since our ancestors had to descend into Egypt in order to rectify and elevate the 288 sparks of holiness that had been scattered by Adam. Jacob believed that because his beauty was a reflection of Adam's beauty, and because he represented his rectification (*Bava Batra* 58a), he was therefore capable of elevating these sparks through his study of Torah. Thus his descendants would not be forced into exile in Egypt, nor run the risk of breaching the 49 gates of impurity.

However G-d said to Jacob, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, and the time for deliverance and stability has not yet come.*" Hence G-d disrupted Jacob through the misfortune of Joseph, in order to make him understand that they were still in exile and needed to descend into Egypt and be enslaved, as He told Abraham during the covenant between the parts. Only then could they ascend to Eretz Israel, remain there permanently, and build the Temple.

Although it was possible for Jacob to have gathered the 288 sparks through his service of Hashem and Torah study in the land of Canaan, the exile in Egypt had another goal: To prepare the Children of Israel for becoming G-d's people and to inherit the land of Canaan. As long as they had not descended into Egypt and experienced that crucible, they could not permanently settle in Canaan. This was because of the danger of being overly attracted to tranquilly and security, which could lead them into allying themselves with the neighboring peoples and imitate the depraved lifestyle of the Canaanites. They would then be drawn to them and eventually become assimilated. Yet when they descended into Egypt, they were automatically separated from the Egyptians because they were not considered important there. They settled in Goshen, where they preserved their language, their way of dress, and their names, allowing them to remain pure. In Egypt, the Jewish people became accustomed to being separated from the other nations, as it is written: "*It is a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations*" (*Bamidbar* 23:9). Thus even when they would return to Eretz Israel, their native land, they would conserve their lineage, distinguishing themselves from the other nations and not mixing among them. They would then be called G-d's people. Thus everything that happened to our ancestors in Egypt – the signs, wonders, and the ten plagues, as well as what happened when they left, including the splitting of the sea and the war of Amalek – contributed to fashioning the Jewish people into G-d's people. In fact it separated them, those for whom everything happens in a supernatural way, from all the other nations. All the nations of the world would then see that G-d is their King, and that He chose them as His people. The difference between Israel and the other nations would then become clear in the eyes of everyone.

From all that we have said, it follows that Jacob feared the difficulties of exile and enslavement, as well as the danger of impurity that threatened his descendants in Egypt, the most depraved of all lands. To protect his offspring, he thought that he

could rectify the 288 sparks of holiness through the regular study of Torah in Canaan. This meant that the decree of the covenant between the parts would be achieved in a different way, by the construction of a fixed house of Torah and permanent study. Yet Hashem, Who sees to the end of all the generations, and Who knows what is best for man (since everything that the Merciful One does is for the good), did not agree with Jacob's assessment. He therefore caused the misfortune of Joseph's disappearance in order to fulfill the verse "*your descendants shall be strangers...*" (*Bereshith 15:13*).

In fact when Joseph sent his father the message that he was still alive and ruled over all the land of Egypt – thereby telling him that even in Egypt, a place of impurity, he controlled himself, maintained his purity, and remained righteous (*Tanchuma, Nasso 28*) – and when Jacob saw the wagons (*agilot*) that Joseph had sent him, thereby informing him that Joseph was still learning the passage on the heifer (*egla*) whose neck is broken (*Bereshith Rabba 94:3*), Jacob realized that one can serve G-d and study Torah even in Egypt. At that point all of Jacob's worries left him, and he descended into Egypt with his entire family in order to fulfill Hashem's will and decree. Hence they went into exile; they went to become strangers in a strange land, and to be separated from the other peoples.

This is why Jacob sent Judah before him into Egypt, so he could prepare for him a house of study where teachings for the Jewish people would emerge (*Bereshith Rabba 95:3*). At that point, Jacob understood what his Creator wanted. He had to continue learning Torah even while in exile, for the time of deliverance and stability had not yet come. He therefore sent Judah to prepare a place of study precisely in exile, for the study of Torah is the only guarantee that his descendants would continue to exist among the nations. If they devoted themselves to the study of Torah, they would not be drawn to seeking peace and idleness. This fully explains why the anger manifested against Jacob occurred precisely through the sale of Joseph, which led him into Egypt. It is because Jacob had to be troubled because he wanted to dwell peacefully in the land of Canaan by annulling the decree of exile. It was at that point that the misfortunes surrounding Joseph came upon him, this being the sole reason for the Jewish people's descent into Egypt, contrary to Jacob's intentions.

Remember the Merit of Yosef HaTzaddik

It is written, "*These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph, at the age of 17 years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph would bring evil reports about them to their father*" (*Bereshith 37:2*).

How are we to understand the statement, "*These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph*"? After all, Jacob's descendants were numerous! The commentators explain that the Patriarch Jacob transmitted all his Torah knowledge to his son Joseph. Since all the Torah infused in Jacob was transmitted to this particular son, the text considers that "*these are the generations of Jacob: Joseph*."

This seems surprising, for did Joseph study more than Reuven, Jacob's firstborn, who was therefore older than him? Furthermore, why do we in the Jewish community normally describe Joseph as Yosef haTzaddik (*"Joseph the Righteous"*)? Why is Joseph alone described in this way, since his brothers were just as pious, and certainly not inferior to him?

I think that the answer to all of these questions resides in one and the same thing, something found in the affirmation that Joseph "*was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah.*" In reality, Joseph acted as a youngster among the sons of these maidservants. He took a backseat role and acted with humility by creating a special bond with these sons, not trying to dominate them. Rashi underlines that Joseph "*arranged his hair;*" meaning that he was very handsome and could have grown proud as a result. Furthermore, we know that he enjoyed a special relationship with his father, who made him a fine woolen tunic. Despite all this, Joseph maintained his great humility, expressing his affection for the sons of the maidservants and thereby lifting himself to an elevated spiritual level. Over the course of time, when he found himself in Egypt and was even appointed as viceroy, Joseph could have dethroned Pharaoh because he understood one language more than Pharaoh. Yet through gratitude to the king who put him in charge of all the regions of Egypt, Joseph did not try to take advantage of his superiority. Hence Joseph was endowed with tremendous modesty, remaining humble despite mastering every language and knowing how to interpret dreams that remained a mystery to all the magicians of Egypt. Instead of growing proud and becoming arrogant, on the contrary, Joseph clung to the virtue of restraint, from which he was fashioned. This is the sense of the expression, "*he was a youth [na'ar] with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah*" – he acted like a youngster (*mena'er et atzmo*), ridding himself of all feelings of superiority among the sons of the concubines.

A Name: Witness to Identity

After I carefully thought about these Torah verses, I concluded that among all the brothers, only Joseph could qualify as a tzaddik and inherit the Torah of his father. This is because all of Joseph's actions were infused with decency and modesty. The holy Torah is acquired by affection for others and humility before them, just as Joseph humbled himself before the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Now we are well aware that anyone who shares in the difficulties of others merits a great reward.

We also know that Torah only endures with a person who sacrifices himself for it. Since Joseph studied with humility and self-effacement, he was able to quickly learn all the Torah that his father had acquired with Shem and Ever.

One day, a woman came to tell me about the problems she was having with her son, who was named Shemuel [Samuel]. Unfortunately, he wasn't like the Prophet Samuel! (*Note: In the time of the Judges, even before the Prophet Samuel was born, a celestial voice proclaimed that a child would be born and named Samuel, and that he would be equal to Moshe and Aaron. Hence all the women at that time named their*

son Samuel.) Now this woman told me that when they were deciding on what to name their son, she and her husband hoped that he would follow the way of the Torah. She didn't understand why "her" Shemuel was making her life so bitter and not taking the path of the prophet of the same name. I then explained to this unhappy woman that when Chana named her son Shemuel, she meant that shemo ("his name") would be E - l ("G-d"), meaning that he would be called "like G-d." When the celestial voice was heard, Chana declared: "*May it be Your will that I give birth to this child, and that he be as great as Moshe and Aaron,*" as it is written: "*Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who invoke His Name*" (*Tehillim 99:6*).

I once read from Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Mann Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, that in our days some people choose this name for their son without realizing the profound meaning that lies behind it. I told the woman that since she gave her son this name, she was obligated to make some sacrifices for his Torah education, for his growth in Torah and fear of G-d, just as Chana was concerned for the future of her son and brought him to the Sanctuary as soon as he was weaned so he could be infused with words of Torah.

It is written that as Samuel was sleeping one day, he heard a voice calling out to him. He then got up and ran to Eli the Kohen, thinking that he had called him. However Eli told him that he hadn't. Not long afterwards, Samuel heard his name once more, and again he went to see Eli, who told him that he hadn't called him this time either. When this happened a third time, the Kohen realized what was happening. He then told the boy that Hashem was apparently calling him, and that the next time he hears his name, he should respond: "*Speak, Hashem, for Your servant is listening.*" Yet when Samuel heard his name the next time, he responded: "*Speak, for Your servant is listening*" (*1 Samuel 3:1-3*) – omitting Hashem's Name. Why?

As I see it, the Prophet Samuel in his great modesty did not believe that he had reached the level of perceiving G-d in a direct manner. Thus when he heard a voice calling him again, in his humility he decided not to mention Hashem's Name in his response. That is, he didn't think that he was great enough for Hashem to address him directly. It was for this reason that the Prophet Samuel was worthy of being compared to Moshe and Aaron, of whom it is said that they never inconvenienced a Jew for their own benefit without compensating him.

"Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who invoke His Name" – because of his self-annulment and extraordinary modesty, the Prophet Samuel was worthy of being compared to Moshe and Aaron, being among those who invoke G-d's Name. In the books of the Prophets, it is said that Samuel would travel from place to place in order to deal with the problems of the people, rather than waiting for them to come to him. Such behavior was typical of Moshe and Aaron; indeed, Aaron loved peace and pursued peace, putting his honor aside and traveling to people's homes in order to establish peace there. Likewise Moshe Rabbeinu, ignoring his role

as the leader of Israel, went to see Dathan and Abiram in order to assuage their anger during the rebellion of Korach and his followers.

In light of all that we have said, we learn that in order to acquire Torah and grow spiritually, we must act with humility and strengthen our ability to annul ourselves and yield before others, just as Yosef haTzaddik, Moshe, Aaron, and the Prophet Samuel did. Torah is only acquired by those who sacrifice themselves for it, meaning by fighting against and eradicating negative character traits.

Torah Study Protects us from Catastrophe

The Midrash examines the juxtaposition of Parsha Vayishlach and Parsha Vayeishev. Parsha Vayishlach ends with the verse, “*These are the chiefs of Edom...*” (*Bereshith 36:43*), while Parsha Vayeishev begins with the words, “*Jacob settled*” (*Bereshith 37:1*). The Sages say, “*This may be compared to a man who saw a pack of dogs, and being afraid of them he sat down among them. Likewise when Jacob saw Esav and his chiefs, he was afraid of them and so he dwelt among them*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:5*).

In the book *Semuchim La'ad* by the saintly tzaddik Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen Zatzal (*author of Shevet Mussar and Me'il Tzeddakah*), he goes into great detail in explaining the Midrash’s remark, which seems very surprising because the parable does not seem to mesh with the lesson that we draw from it. In fact the nature of dogs is given to them by G-d, which means that a man cannot be attacked by dogs when he sits among them, something that cannot be said for men. In the latter case, why settle among them so that they don’t attack him?

He explains by basing himself on what the commentators have written on the verse, “*Let him offer his cheek to the one who strikes him; let him take his fill of insults*” (*Eicha 3:30*). This means that when a person turns his cheek to his enemy so he can strike him – when he delivers himself into his hands and is filled with humiliation – his enemy will be overcome with shame and will no longer attack or strike him. Thus when Jacob saw the chiefs of Edom, he settled among them, meaning that it was as if he had delivered himself into their hands, hoping that they would be ashamed to attack him.

He also cites the opinion of the book *Chesed Shemuel*, which examines this juxtaposition mentioned earlier and questions the explanation given by the Sages: “*The Patriarch Jacob wished to settle down in peace in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph’s Satan [i.e., the troubles involving Joseph]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:3*). Why did Jacob want to settle down in peace now, rather than before? Furthermore, why did troubles strike him precisely on account of Joseph? What measure for measure punishment did this entail?

In my humble opinion, we may explain this by saying that Jacob wanted to settle down in peace now, rather than before, because he saw the chiefs of Esav and was afraid of them. To protect himself, he therefore wanted to settle among them in peace so they would be filled with shame and have no power over him.

Yet immediately, trouble struck him in regard to the incident involving Joseph, for in this way the Holy One, blessed be He, hinted to Jacob that the path he chose did not please Him. In fact the deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign for their descendants, and settling down in peace among non-Jews constitutes a danger for the Children of Israel, since they are likely to learn from those around them and thus neglect the study of Torah and bring pain to the Shechinah. They are also likely to forget the pain of the Shechinah by the fact that they are at peace.

I would like to add that it is precisely when we are living among our enemies and studying Torah that our enemies lose all their power, for as long as the voice is the voice of Jacob, the hands of Esav are powerless. Thus when Jacob saw his brother Esav living at peace, he was afraid and tried to distance himself from him and live nearby only, for Jacob was afraid that his sons would forget that the voice must be the voice of Jacob. He did not want to distance himself completely from Esav, but instead he just wanted to live nearby. In this way, Esav would be ashamed to harm him, for otherwise he would be transgressing the condition that their father Isaac had established for them: When the voice is the voice of Jacob, the hands of Esav shall be powerless over him.

Jacob also wanted to remind his sons of another condition for rendering Esav powerless over them, namely that they must devote themselves solely to the study of Torah. For Esav, this would be like a hypnotic drug, preventing him from doing anything. It is precisely when such Torah study is interrupted that Esav's descendants awaken from their stupor and attack them. However the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want things to play out like this, and He reminded Jacob that he had to completely distance himself from Esav and his descendants; they had to make an effort in studying Torah rather than settling down in peace and studying Torah in tranquility.

What is the best way to protect ourselves from the chiefs of Esav and those like them? By cleaving to G-d, Who is the rock and fortress of Jews, and by making an effort in learning Torah, for it is our life and the length of our days. We must make a tremendous effort in studying it both day and night.

In fact the measure for measure punishment relates to Joseph, for he represents the middah of yesod [attribute of foundation], which refers to preserving the sanctity of the covenant of circumcision, which is the essence of every Jew. Indeed, it is the first mitzvah given to a Jew from his earliest days, and which protects him from the forces of impurity, as explained by my forefather the kabbalist Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, may his merit protect us. We must safeguard this mitzvah throughout our lives, which is only possible on account of Joseph. In other words, each day we must add (*yosif*) to our study of Torah and our effort in learning it, which is the exact opposite of settling down in peace.

The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore hinted to Jacob through the intermediary of Joseph that settling down in peace leads to a diminishment of Torah study. We see this today, for when people go on vacation, it leads to taking more vacations and a

diminishment in their service of Hashem. Hence the secret to being protected from the chiefs of Esav lies in Yosef ("Joseph"), meaning lehossif ("to add") to our effort in learning Torah each day, without succumbing to the forces of evil or appearing to be under their control. When we agree and commit ourselves to making an effort in study, the Holy One, blessed be He, protects us, and then non-Jews are the ones who themselves will yield to those who study.

We have already seen things like this among the great tzaddikim of Morocco, whom kings and nobles have sought to please in order to benefit from their blessings and advice. There are dozens and indeed hundreds of stories about the kabbalist Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, to whom kings and ministers of Morocco offered precious gifts just to find favor in his holy eyes.

We may add that the entire reason why Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, adopted the path of settling down in peace was because he wanted to teach his descendants that a person who wants to settle down in peace will end up being punished and delivered into the hands of non-Jews. The right path consists of the very opposite of settling down in peace, namely to make a constant effort in the study of Torah.

Parsha Mikeitz

The Discussion with Joseph's Brothers And the Fight Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, “*The day dawned and the men were sent off, they and their donkeys. They had left the city, but had not gone far when Joseph said to the overseer of his house: ‘Get up. Pursue the men, and when you overtake them, say to them: “Why do you repay evil for good....”’* ... [They replied,] ‘Whichever of your servants with whom it is found will die, and we will become slaves to my lord.’ He replied, ‘...the one with whom it is found will be my slave, and you will be innocent’” (*Genesis 44:3-4, 9-10*).

From this story we can all learn how to fight against the evil inclination. In fact when a person sins and wants to repent, when he is looking for a light in his life – meaning the Torah, as it is written, “*The Torah is light*” (*Proverbs 6:23*), and as the Sages have said, “*Light means Torah*” (*Megillah 16b*) – this same evil inclination will attack him. It will try to make him sin even more and prevent him from getting away. We find this concept alluded to in the verse, “*The day dawned and the men were sent off.*” That is, when sinners want to escape the prison of the evil inclination and step out into a great light, the light of Torah, when “*they had left the city, but had not gone far,*” the evil inclination will pursue them by fulfilling the order, “*Get up. Pursue the men.*” A discussion will then ensue between the evil inclination and the one who wants to repent, just as in the discussion between Joseph’s brothers and his servant. The evil inclination will say, “*The ways of the wicked work! As long as you were under my control, you succeeded. Instead of being punished for all the sins that you committed, you experienced nothing but success. It was because of me that you became rich, so why leave me now and repay evil for good?*” At that point, however, the ba’al teshuvah is obligated to say: “*Before I completely repented, I was like a small boy who didn’t know that he was doing wrong or what the consequences of his actions were. Yet now I realize that I need to repent, not because I want to repay evil for good, but because I’ve taken it upon myself to overcome every hardship, difficult though it may be. It doesn’t matter to me if the evil inclination takes back all the good that it did for me. Not only that, but now I realize that all its benefits were really misfortunes, for pain and anguish are my lot because of all the good that I received while doing wrong. From now on, I prefer to die rather than to follow the evil inclination by going after sin. I want to remain a slave to Hashem alone, now that I’ve recognized His continual kindnesses to me.*” We find this idea alluded to in the verse, “*Whichever of your servants with whom it is found will die, and we will become slaves to my lord.*” That is, it is better to die in order to be slaves of “*my lord,*” meaning Hashem.

Nevertheless, the evil inclination will not let go of a person. It tells all ba’alei teshuvah that great difficulties and suffering await them, and that eventually they will

become its servants again, just as before. This concept is alluded to in the verse, “*The one with whom it is found will be my slave*” (v.10). It’s in this way that the war between the evil inclination and a ba’al teshuvah unfolds. Each tries to bring down the other, as in the expression: “*Each one lowered his sack to the ground*” (v.11).

However a person must strengthen himself and realize that this lowering is the source of a tremendous spiritual elevation. He must realize that hope is not lost, and that through effort and prayer he will, G-d willing, get back on his feet. The evil inclination asks a person how it’s possible that now, just as he is studying Torah, his future looks bleak. By doing so, it is attempting to convince a person to heed its advice and ensure a more successful future. To this a person must reply, “*G-d has found the iniquity of your servants*” (v.16). In other words: I reached a lowly state because of the sins I committed, but I will still continue to serve Hashem, even if I’m in a worse state.

Still, the evil inclination never gives up or lets go, as the Sages have said: “*The evil inclination grows with a person from childhood until old age, and each day it tries to make him fall*” (*Tanhuma, Beshalach* 3). The Sages have also said, “*The evil inclination of a man grows in strength from day to day and seeks to kill him*” (*Sukkah* 52b; cf. *Kiddushin* 30b). It never stops trying, and it uses all sorts of tricks in order to distance a person from Hashem and bring him back to it like at first. However the war against the evil inclination must be waged even if a person has to risk his own life in the process, just as Judah risked his life by standing before Joseph in order to appease or fight him. This action threatened his very life, for Joseph was the viceroy of Egypt, and every Egyptian would certainly have supported and fought for him. Judah was nevertheless adamant. Why? Because “*your servant took responsibility for the youth from my father, saying: 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I will have sinned to my father for all time'*” (*Genesis* 44:32). The same applies to every ba’al teshuvah: He must be ready to give his life in the war against his evil inclination, for he is responsible for the youth – meaning the days of his youth – when he didn’t know what he was doing. His deliberate sins will then be transformed into inadvertent ones, and he will be forgiven for all he did. Therefore now, “*How can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me*” (v.44), for now the ba’al teshuvah understands the gravity of sin and the punishment it entails. If he falls back into transgression, he will then be judged for the deliberate sins of his youth, which will once again be viewed as deliberate!

Hence a person must go out to war against the evil inclination, which is the Satan, the Angel of Death (*Bava Batra* 16a). Even though a person knows that he is but flesh and blood, while the Satan is a fiery angel (*Zohar* I:80a) and much stronger than him, he must still go out to war against it. He must do this because he has been promised, “*When you go out to war against your enemies...the L-RD your G-d will deliver him into you hand, and you shall take captives*” (*Deuteronomy* 21:10).

How a Person Comes to Know Hashem

It is written, “*Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him*” (*Genesis 42:8*). This is surprising, for the Sages tell us that Joseph resembled Jacob (*Bereshith Rabba 84:8*). Therefore how could his brothers not have recognized him? Furthermore, Joseph was not called Tzafnat Pa’aneach, for the name given to him by Pharaoh had been forgotten. That being the case, perhaps a few Egyptians called him Joseph? Since Joseph is a Hebrew name, how could his brothers not have recognized him by it?

We must perforce say that his brothers did recognize him. Why then does the Torah state that they did not recognize him? It is because they refused to recognize his sovereignty. The proof is that, as we read in the very same chapter, they said to him: “*All of us are the sons of one man*” (*Genesis 42:11*) – thereby including Joseph among them, as our Sages have said (*Bereshith Rabba 91:7*). Furthermore, we read that Joseph’s ten brothers went down to Egypt (*Genesis 42:3*), and Rashi notes that the text does not say that “*the sons of Jacob*” went down to Egypt. This teaches us that they regretted having sold Joseph and decided to act towards him in a brotherly manner and free him regardless of the price. Hence when they descended into Egypt, it was to free him and allow their brotherly feelings to resurface. However they did not go to Egypt to find a sovereign, and they still refused to recognize his sovereignty and admit that his dreams had been correct.

Along the same lines, concerning Pharaoh we read: “*A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*” (*Exodus 1:8*). Our Sages are divided as to the meaning of this statement: “*Rav and Samuel [differ]. One said that he was really new, while the other said that his decrees were new. He who said that he was really new did so because it is written ‘new,’ while he who said that his decrees were new did so because it is not stated that [the former king] died and that he reigned [in his place]. ‘Who knew not Joseph’ – he was like one who did not know [Joseph] at all*” (*Sotah 11a*). This must be the case here, since further on it is written, “*They drank...with him*” (*Genesis 43:34*), which the Sages explain to mean: “*With him they drank, but away from him they did not drink, for Rabbi Levi said: ‘During the entire 22 years that he did not see them, he tasted no wine, and they too tasted no wine until they saw him’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 92:5; see also Shabbat 139a*). If they avoided wine during all those years, why did they drink it now? After all, did they know that this viceroy was none other than Joseph?

We are forced to say that they knew who he was, although they still refused to recognize his sovereignty. When did they recognize it? It was when he told them, “*I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you*” (*Genesis 45:4-5*). He said to them: “*I am Joseph your brother*” – know that I did not willingly become a ruler, for do you think that I desire all this glory? I became a ruler only to feed you during this famine. Furthermore, there was already a decree that you would descend into Egypt, and had I not become a ruler in Egypt, you

would have come here in chains. Now that I've become the ruler of Egypt, you will come down in chariots and with great honor. The Sages cite Joseph as telling them: "*Hashem decreed that we are to descend into Egypt in chains, as it is written: 'Your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own' [Genesis 15:13]. However the Holy One, blessed be He, created the remedy before the illness, sending me before you to prepare the way.'*"

This is why Joseph said to them, "*I am Joseph your brother.*" In other words: "*I am not a ruler, but rather your brother. I know that you do not recognize my sovereignty, and that you came to Egypt in order to free me, though only as your brother, not as a ruler. You should realize, however, that it was Hashem Who brought me here for your good, not mine.*" When his brothers heard these words, they immediately recognized his sovereignty and bowed before him.

We must all learn a lesson from this, namely that we can perform mitzvot and study Torah, yet still fail to recognize Hashem. As the Sages say on the verse, "*These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart*" (*Deuteronomy 6:6*): "*Rabbi states, 'Why mention this? Since it is written, "You shall love the L-RD your G-d will all your heart,"* [it means that] I do not know how to love G-d. Therefore it is written, *"These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart."* Place these things upon your heart, and as such you will recognize the One at Whose utterance the world was created, and you will cleave to His ways'" (*Sifrei, Devarim 33*). This is surprising, for will a person not recognize Hashem if he does not place these things upon his heart?

There are thousands of people who perform all the mitzvot and study Torah! Can we possibly say that they have failed to recognize the One at Whose utterance the world was created? From here we learn that a person will not recognize the Holy One, blessed be He, unless he separates himself from the meaningless pursuits of this world in order to cleave to Hashem. When a person is in love with the things of this world, he will not love G-d or even recognize Him. Even if he performs all the mitzvot, it will not constitute a true recognition of G-d. Of King Solomon it is written, "*Know the G-d of your father and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing soul*" (*I Chronicles 28:9*). This means that man is commanded to know the Holy One, blessed be He. How? By loving Him!

On the verse, "*Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him*" (*Malachi 3:18*), the Sages have said: "*The 'righteous' is the same as 'one who serves G-d,' the 'wicked' is the same as 'one who does not serve Him.'* [Hillel] said: *One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times*" (*Chagigah 9b*). This teaches us that there is righteous person who serves G-d and a righteous person who does not serve Him. How is this possible? One who studies a chapter more than necessary does so not only to understand it, but because the Creator commanded him to study Torah. That is, he studies it out of his love for

G-d, which leads him to recognize Him. As for a person who does not study more than is strictly necessary, this indicates that he studies only for the sake of understanding it, not because he loves G-d. Hence he is not described as one who serves Him.

How Does One Love G-D?

It is written, “*Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him*” (*Genesis 42:8*). This is surprising, for the Sages tell us that Joseph’s face resembled Jacob’s (*Bereshith Rabba 84:8*). Therefore how could his brothers not have recognized him? Furthermore, Joseph was not called Tzafnat Pa’aneach, for the name given to him by Pharaoh had been forgotten. If we say that some Egyptians called him Joseph, how could his brothers not have recognized him, since Joseph is a Hebrew name?

We must therefore say that his brothers did recognize him. The explanation of the expression “*they did not recognize him*” is that they refused to recognize his sovereignty. The proof is that, as we read in the very same chapter, they said to him: “*All of us are the sons of one man*” (*Genesis 42:11*) – including Joseph – as our Sages have said: “*They said to him, ‘You and we are the sons of the same man’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 91:7*). Likewise with regards to what we read beforehand, “*Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt*” (*Genesis 42:3*), Rashi notes that the text does not say “*the sons of Jacob*” went down to Egypt. This teaches us that they regretted having sold Joseph and decided to act towards him in a brotherly way, freeing him at all costs. Hence when they descended into Egypt, it was to free him and allow their brotherly feelings to resurface. However they did not go to Egypt expecting to find that he was a ruler! They still refused to recognize his sovereignty and admit the truth of his dreams.

We find something similar with regards to Pharaoh, as it is written: “*A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*” (*Exodus 1:8*). Our Sages are divided as to the meaning of this statement: “*Rav and Samuel [differ]. One said that he was really new, while the other said that his decrees were new. He who said that he was really new did so because it is written ‘new,’ while he who said that his decrees were new did so because it is not stated that [the former king] died and that he reigned [in his place]. ‘Who did not know Joseph’ – he was like one who did not know him at all*” (*Sotah 11a*).

We are forced to say this, for afterwards it is written: “*They ate and became intoxicated with him*” (*Genesis 43:34*). The Sages have explained, “*With him they drank, but away from him they did not drink, for Rabbi Levi said: ‘During the entire 22 years that he did not see them, he tasted no wine, and they too tasted no wine until they saw him’*” (*Bereshith Rabba 92:5; see also Shabbat 139a*).

For Your Good, Not For Mine

Let us think about this: If they avoided wine for all these years, why did they drink it now? Did they know that this viceroy was someone besides Joseph? We are forced to say that they knew who he was, although they still refused to recognize his sovereignty.

When did Joseph's brothers recognize his sovereignty? It was when he said to them, “*I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you*” (*Genesis 45:4-5*). He said to them: “*I am Joseph your brother*” – know that I did not willingly become a ruler, for do you think that I yearn for glory? I became a ruler only so as to feed you during this famine. Furthermore, there was already a decree that you would descend into Egypt, and if I had not become a ruler in Egypt, you would have come here in chains. Now that I've become the ruler of Egypt, you will come down in chariots and with great honor.

The Sages cite Joseph as telling them, “*Hashem decreed that we are to descend into Egypt in chains, as it is written: ‘Your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own’ [Genesis 15:13]. However the Holy One, blessed be He, created the remedy before the illness, sending me before you to prepare the way*” (*Midrash Sechel Tov, Bereshith 45:5*).

This is why Joseph said to them, “*I am Joseph your brother.*” In other words: “*I am not a ruler, but rather your brother. I know that you do not recognize my sovereignty, and that you came to Egypt in order to free me, though only as your brother, not as a ruler. You should realize, however, that it was Hashem Who brought me here for your good, not for mine.*” When his brothers heard these words, they immediately recognized his sovereignty and bowed before him.

The lesson that we must all learn from here is that it is possible to perform mitzvot and study Torah, while still failing to recognize Hashem. As the Sages have said on the verse, “*These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart*” (*Deuteronomy 6:6*): “*Rabbi states, ‘Why mention this? Since it is written, ‘You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart,’ [it means that] I do not know how to love G-d.* Therefore it is written, “*These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart.*” Place these things upon your heart, and as such you will recognize the One at Whose utterance the world was created, and you will cleave to His ways”” (*Sifrei, Devarim 33*).

Out of a Love for G-d

In reality, we must ask the following question: If we say that a person who fails to reflect upon these things does not truly know the Holy One, blessed be He, then how many thousands of people who perform mitzvot and study Torah fall into this category? How can we possibly say that they have failed to recognize the Creator of the world?

From this we learn that a person will not recognize the Holy One, blessed be He, unless he separates himself from frivolous pursuits and the concerns of this world in order to cleave to Hashem. When a person is in love with the things of this world, he will not love G-d or even recognize Him. Even if he performs mitzvot, he still does not truly know Him. From here we learn that it is a mitzvah to understand and know Hashem. How? By loving Him.

Hence on the verse, “*Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him*” (*Malachi 3:18*), the Sages have said: “*The ‘righteous’ is the same as ‘one who serves G-d,’ the ‘wicked’ is the same as ‘one who does not serve Him.’ [Hillel] said: One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times*” (*Chagigah 9b*).

We therefore learn that there is a tzaddik who serves G-d and a tzaddik who does not serve Him. How is this possible? One who studies a chapter more than necessary, in order not to forget what he has learned, is not only studying to remember, but because the Creator commanded him to study. That is, he studies out of his love for G-d, which leads him to recognize Him. As for a person who does not study more than necessary, this indicates that he studies only for the sake of understanding, not because he loves G-d. Hence he is not described as one who serves Him.

Happy is the Man Who Trusts in G-d

It is written, “*It came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh was dreaming, and behold, he was standing by the river*” (*Bereshith 41:1*).

A great deal of ink has been spilled on this episode in the Torah to explain the dreams of Pharaoh and the interpretation which Joseph gave to them. Yet in our time, when every Jew needs his faith and trust in G-d strengthened, in a time when the coming of Mashiach is so close, it is good to again reflect upon these events in light of the explanations given by our Sages in the Midrash, as well as to strengthen our faith and trust in G-d.

Pharaoh had a dream, and he awoke terrified and trembling. However he fell back to sleep and had another dream, different from the first but resembling it in a few ways. He was again awoken by his dream, but fell back into a deep sleep until the early morning. When he awoke, he remembered his dreams and “*his spirit was troubled*” (*Bereshith 41:8*). The strange dreams of that night robbed him of his peace of mind, leaving him unable to regain any sense of calm or composure. He consulted his wise men, princes, and advisers, as well as the seers and sorcerers of Egypt. Pharaoh, who was then the all-powerful ruler of the world, went to great lengths and exerted unimaginable effort in consulting the wise men of all the nations so they could interpret his dreams. Yet despite all these attempts, “*none could interpret them for Pharaoh*” (*ibid.*). All the wise men in the world were useless. Indeed, their interpretations and “*insights*” could not satisfy him, for they were unable to interpret his dream and calm his spirit. He even threatened them with death if they did not provide him with an interpretation, and yet no one was able to relieve Pharaoh of the anxiety that oppressed him. Suddenly, someone remembered that while he had been in prison, he met a young Hebrew man who interpreted his dream. He recalled that this young man had asked him to intercede

on his behalf before Pharaoh. As soon as Pharaoh heard this, he had the young man summoned.

Imagine what would have happened if Pharaoh had released him from prison at another time, on any other day! Would it not have appeared ridiculous to his subjects? However that was not just any day, for that moment differed from all others. On that day, Pharaoh felt weighed down and oppressed. He would have even leaned on a broken reed, for he was ready to put his trust in a young Hebrew man in prison. Perhaps he would succeed where all of Pharaoh's wise men had failed? Perhaps he would know how to interpret his dream? Without waiting any further, Joseph was released from prison and hastily brought to Pharaoh's palace. In a single instant, this worthless Jewish slave became Egypt's savior. Thus Joseph stood before Pharaoh, who described his dream to him: Cows by the riverside, some thin and others fat. He listened, understood his words, and held the long-awaited interpretation. With calmness and composure, Joseph explained the meaning of his two dreams and underlined that they were really one. Furthermore, at the end of this discussion, after he had finished interpreting these dreams, Joseph advised Pharaoh on what he should do during the years of famine and the years of abundance. He proposed a detailed economic strategy that was actually a national rescue plan. He told him what to do and how to do it! Curiously enough, Pharaoh did not object to this, nor did he oppose it, nor did he tell Joseph: "*Who asked you for advice?*" On the contrary, he carefully listened to his every word, took the necessary steps, and appointed Joseph as a royal minister. In fact he appointed him viceroy! Thus in seconds, this Hebrew slave – rushed out of prison only a few moments earlier – became the savior of Egypt!

The Midrash has much to say on Joseph's wisdom, on account of which Pharaoh named him Tzafnat Paneach (*"he who explains what is hidden"*). In this incident, Joseph reacted by carefully and calmly weighing all the facts, thereby demonstrating a virtue not often seen.

Imagine yourself in the same situation: You have been, until just recently, a young Hebrew thrown into an Egyptian jail without any chance of release. Even the Egyptian in whom you had placed your hopes has not helped you, since it has been two years that he was released, and yet nothing has been done for you. Suddenly, the heavy gates of the dungeon open, and the next thing you know is that you are standing in the middle of the royal palace! Pharaoh asks you to interpret a dream that multitudes of wise men have been unable to understand. How can you remain calm under such circumstances? Is it even possible to think straight, to consider things in a logical and composed manner?

As for Joseph, not only was he composed, he also presented the long-awaited interpretation without any hesitation, with ease and clarity. Furthermore, he quickly realized the underlying implications and analyzed the economic dilemma facing Egypt. How can a person undergo such a drastic change without being disoriented and flustered?

It is Possible

There exists almost no virtue comparable to this ability to carefully and calmly weigh all the facts, an ability that Joseph clearly demonstrated. It is based on a unique principle: Trust in G-d. Someone who places his trust in G-d never feels pressured, never allows himself to be troubled, and knows that everything which happens to him has a deeper reason and objective. He knows that everything is part of a bigger plan, one that G-d wrote and which He is carrying out.

Joseph was able to reach a high level because his trust in G-d was complete. As our Sages say, “*Happy is the man who has made Hashem his trust [Tehillim 40:5] alludes to Joseph; and has not turned to the arrogant or those who stray after falsehood [ibid.] – because he said to the chief butler, ‘If only you would think of me...and mention me’ [Bereshith 40:14], two years were added to his suffering*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 89:3). The virtue that characterized Joseph was this thrust. Among all the ups and downs in his life, Joseph placed all his trust in G-d, beginning with his sale to the Ishmaelites, and continuing with his journey into Egypt and trial with Potiphar’s wife. He experienced everything as stages in the Divine plan, understanding that it was all part of G-d’s will. Nevertheless, he sinned while in prison, making the mistake of turning “*to the arrogant or those who stray after falsehood,*” meaning that he asked the chief butler to intervene on his behalf before Pharaoh. Because of this sin – and because G-d is extremely exacting with the righteous – Joseph had to spend two more years in prison. During that time, he reflected and repented of this sin, strengthening his trust in G-d and his faith. It was for this reason that he emerged from prison. Joseph was not stunned by the drastic change in his condition, and his trust in G-d was now solid. In fact darkness and light held the same meaning for him, and emerging from the darkness of the dungeon to enter the splendor of Pharaoh’s palace changed nothing. Joseph had faith in the Creator, and saw each event as an expression of G-d’s will. In that case, there was no reason to be disturbed by his experiences.

Such is the power of one who possesses faith and trust in G-d. He does not feel oppressed by the changes that occur in the world – not by earthquakes, not by stock crashes, not by losses or gains, not by illness, and not by war (*G-d forbid*). He looks at everything with wisdom, analyzing things in order to learn the lesson which they hold. He evaluates himself and rectifies what needs to be fixed, but always does everything calmly and with composure. That is the great lesson to draw from this aspect of Joseph’s story.

Pharaoh Did Not Pass Up the Opportunity

After Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, Pharaoh and his servants unanimously agreed to appoint him as leader of Egypt, as it is written: “*Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘... You shall be in charge of my palace, and through your command shall all my people be sustained’”* (*Bereshith* 41:39-40).

Although Joseph was a slave, and according to Egyptian norms a slave cannot reign, they still decided to coronate him because they believed in his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. Now according to those dreams, Egypt was in danger of being completely wiped out during the seven years of famine that were to come. Hence they had no choice but to elevate Joseph to a lofty position and give him power to govern, all to prevent Egypt from perishing through lack of food.

Thus when the years of famine arrived, “*Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, ‘Go to Joseph. Whatever he tells you, you should do’*” (*Bereshith 41:55*). Here our Sages explain that Joseph told them to circumcise themselves. They were obligated to obey him, for otherwise Egypt would have been wiped off the face of the earth during those seven years of famine (*Bereshith Rabba 91:5*).

We need to better understand this idea. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, a grave evildoer and master over the powers of impurity during that era, said of himself: “*Mine is the river, and I have made myself*” (*Ezekiel 29:3*). He was as far from faith in G-d as east is from West! How could he, as well as his impure magicians and sorcerers, have believed in the holy words of the tzaddik Joseph, who told them that Pharaoh’s dream was a sign of divine providence, meant to prevent Egyptians from dying as a result of the seven years of famine that were to come?

Furthermore, how are we to understand that Pharaoh, this evildoer who considered himself divine – indeed as the Creator and Almighty – yielded to Joseph to such a degree that he admitted to his own people that he himself could not help them? He instead told them, “*Go to Joseph. Whatever he tells you, you should do.*” Let us try to understand all this. Our Sages tell us, “*On Rosh Hashanah, Joseph emerged from prison*” (*Rosh Hashanah 10b*) – he emerged on the Day of Judgment, on the day of prayer, the day when we make G-d reign over us.

It is certain that Joseph was infused with additional holiness on that day. His prayers ascended to Heaven, causing the Divine Presence to rest upon him and giving him the radiant appearance of an angel of G-d. His physical appearance also conferred splendor and majesty upon him, as it is written: “*He shaved and changed his clothes*” (*Bereshith 41:14*).

Heaven also sent Joseph an influx of grace and favor that provided him with an aura of holiness and purity. It was in this way that the spirit of impurity left that place, at which point genuine words were able to emerge from the mouth of Pharaoh, who acknowledged the evidence of divine providence. He admitted that Hashem is seated on the Celestial Throne, that He watches over all His creations, and that He sent Pharaoh these dreams precisely so as to introduce the cure before the ailment by preparing for the seven years of famine that were to come.

It was for this reason that Pharaoh and his servants unanimously decided to accept Joseph as governor of Egypt, and to follow his every advice. Likewise, upon seeing that impurity had left that place, Joseph seized the opportunity that G-d had provided

by taking him out of prison, and he put forward a suggestion: “*Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man*” (*Bereshith 41:33*).

From here we learn just to what degree the presence of a tzaddik and his words can arouse faith in his fellowmen, and just to what degree a little light can dispel great darkness. Likewise when faith is aroused in a person, ungodliness immediately disappears from his heart, and he becomes attentive to the words of a tzaddik, who is helping him to progress along the right path.

Very often, those who are far from Torah come to see me. They sit in my office, faced with a library filled with holy books, in a room where the walls are covered with portraits of tzaddikim, a place where a spirit of holiness reigns. As soon as we start talking, they begin to weep with emotion, lowering their heads out of shame or regret, for they are surrounded by an atmosphere of sanctity and find themselves in the presence of someone who is aware of the truth, meaning someone who believes in G-d and is committed to using all his powers to help others along this path. Since falsehood has no foundation (*Shabbat 104a*), teshuvah awakens in them as soon as they find themselves confronted by established truths, even under difficult circumstances.

I read in the book Marganita that Rabbi Meir raised the following question: In the account of Pharaoh’s dreams, it is written: “*He was standing over the river*” (*Bereshith 41:1*). Yet when Pharaoh recounted this dream to Joseph, he said: “*I was standing upon the edge of the river*” (*v.17*). Why did Pharaoh diverge from the truth in recounting his dream, saying that he was “*upon the edge of the river*”? Rabbi Meir answers that Pharaoh was actually trying to test Joseph to see if he would detect this lie.

This comes back to what we said earlier, namely that Pharaoh realized that he was standing before a holy man who, through his words and majesty, could cleanse that place of all darkness and impurity. Thus for better or for worse, everyone felt dependent on him. Now Joseph, the tzaddik, replied that there was nothing besides G-d: “*Not I. G-d will give an answer [that will bring] peace to Pharaoh*” (*v.16*).

Therefore to see that he wasn’t dreaming, that this wasn’t all some illusion, and that he was actually standing before a holy man, Pharaoh modified the version of his dream by saying “*upon the edge of the river*,” even though he was actually “*over the river*.” This latter description nevertheless bode well for his reign, as it is written: “*Kings are anointed only over a spring, so that their reign may be prolonged*” (*Keritot 5b*).

Yet in recounting his dream, Pharaoh said that he was standing “*upon the edge of the river*,” alluding to the fact that he was on the edge of his reign, unable to stand firm and continue governing. In fact Joseph noticed this change, and said that in order to provide the cure before the ailment, Pharaoh’s reign had to continue. He had to find a prudent and wise man to lead the country, for otherwise famine would devastate the land of Egypt.

Parsha Vayigash

Confronting Trials

The Sages say that when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, his brothers struck him on the shoulder and said: "*What? You are a thief and the son of a thief!*" This was a reference to his mother Rachel, who had stolen the idols of her father Laban (*Genesis 31:19*). To this Benjamin replied: "*Have we a he-goat here? Have we brothers here who sold their brother!*" (*Bereshith Rabba 92:8*). *Midrash Tanhuma*, however, states that Benjamin gave no reply, and as a result the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Because you did not respond, by your life, the Temple will be built between your shoulders." Thus it is written: "*He hovers over him all day long and rests between his shoulders*" (*Deuteronomy 33:12*). Now as we know, the neck designates the Temple (*Zohar I:209b*), which was built on Benjamin's territory.

From here we learn a very lofty concept, namely that for having endured some blows without protest, Benjamin merited an enormous reward: The Temple was built on his territory! This occurred because he refused to protest, thereby diminishing the power of baseless hatred. This recalls the lesson taught in the Mishnah: "*Do not placate your fellow in the moment of his anger*" (*Perkei Avoth 4:18*). The Sages have also taught, "*We must not try to placate a man in the time of his anger*" (*Berachot 7a*), for his anger will only grow. In Benjamin's case, if he had fought with his brothers or argued that he wasn't a thief, who knows what would have happened? Perhaps the brothers would have harbored a grudge in their hearts, the results of which would have been unforeseeable. Yet Benjamin gave no reply whatsoever, and he waited for their anger to subside. The brothers eventually realized that they had erred, and Judah later said: "*Please let your servant remain instead of the lad [Benjamin] as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers*" (*Genesis 44:33*). The great reward that Benjamin received was measure for measure. In fact he repaired the dissension that existed among his brothers by making sure not to start an argument that would end in complete ruin. The reward he received was that the Temple would be built on his territory, for the Temple is the symbol of unity. As the Sages have said, the Holy of Holies within the Temple is the heart of the world (*Zohar 1:84b*), and G-d has said that He will dwell among the Jewish people (*Exodus 25:8*), within the heart of each of them. It is not without reason that Benjamin is called "*G-d's beloved*" (*Deuteronomy 33:12*), for he brought brotherly love into the world by calming the flames of dissension between his brothers and himself. How did Benjamin draw the strength to restrain himself, even though his brothers struck him unjustly? It was because he realized that if he was enduring such a trial, then it must be Hashem's will. At that point he clearly understood that the Holy One, blessed be He, never does anything bad to a person, for everything

is always for his good. Benjamin understood that Hashem reprimands the one He loves (*Proverbs 3:12*), and he knew that “*just as a man corrects his son, the L-RD your G-d corrects you*” (*Deuteronomy 8:5*). Therefore only good resulted from this misfortune, for it was on Benjamin’s territory that the Temple was built.

We see a great principle at work here, namely that the Holy One, blessed be He, desires to grant merit to man so that everyone can benefit from it. In this way their reward can be increased in the World to Come, much like our Sages have said: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to confer merit upon Israel; therefore He gave them the Torah and many commandments*” (*Makkot 23b*). It is in this way that goodness spreads to the whole world. Hashem therefore puts man in difficult situations so he can overcome them, ensuring the bestowal of goodness upon the world. In order for an individual to overcome his difficulties and not lose hope, he must always feel that “*I am the L-RD.*” He must realize that if he is struck, it must be Hashem’s will. He should not raise questions or have doubts.

People who suffer and are inundated with misfortunes (be they anything from judicial to medical problems) should not try to first seek a lawyer or doctor. Before all else, they must recognize that what they are going through is just. A person must understand that it is indeed coming from Hashem, and that He does not make a person endure hardships or trials without reason. It may be that he committed sins, even sins he is unaware of. It may even be possible that Hashem wants to confer merit upon him, as well as others, and that through him a great reward will be shared by many. In fact the Sages have said that as long as Rabbeinu Hakadosh suffered from a painful toothache, no woman miscarried in Eretz Israel (*see Bava Metzia 85a*). In other words, his suffering protected everyone from illness and trials.

We must therefore begin by accepting our situation, and only then should we go, with complete confidence in Hashem, to see the lawyer or doctor. Thus by a person’s awakening, as well as through his prayers and acceptance of justice, he will arouse Heaven’s mercy. He will then, for example, be saved through the intermediary of the treatment prescribed by a doctor. However if he does not accept the situation that he finds himself in, his illness will continue, and even going to the doctor will be useless. Therefore when Joseph and Benjamin met, it is written: “*He fell upon the tzaverei [“necks”] of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck*” (*Genesis 45:14*). Here the Sages have said, “*How many necks did Benjamin have? Rabbi Eleazar said: He wept for the two Temples that were destined for the territory of Benjamin and to be destroyed. And Benjamin wept upon his neck: He wept for the tabernacle of Shiloh, which was destined for the territory of Joseph and to be destroyed*” (*Megillah 16b*).

This is surprising. Joseph and Benjamin were now seeing each other after an absence of 22 years, yet instead of rejoicing, they suddenly began to weep for the destruction of two Temples that had not yet been built! Should they not have kept these tears for later, and instead have wept with joyful emotion at being reunited?

The answer is that in their hearts, Joseph and Benjamin constantly felt the reality of “*I am the L-RD.*” They were also keenly aware of Hashem’s providence in all things. They knew and therefore believed that, since they had not seen each other for 22 years, it was certainly because this was G-d’s will. Now since everything that the All-merciful One does is for the good, they had no reason to weep on account of their long separation. On the contrary, they had to accept this situation, for nothing but goodness and abundance resulted from it. As Joseph told his brothers, “*G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance*” (*Genesis 45:7*). Yet because they realized that this entire situation resulted from the baseless hatred that Joseph’s brothers felt for him, they wept over the destruction of the future Temples, destroyed on account of baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*).

The Damage Caused by Baseless Hatred

It is written, “*Joseph could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out: ‘Remove everyone from before me!’ No one remained with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers*” (*Genesis 45:1*).

The Sages say in the Midrash, “*When they recognized him, they wanted to kill him. An angel came and dispersed them to the four corners of the house. Judah then screamed with a powerful voice, and all the walls of Egypt fell, all the women who were in labor had a miscarriage, Joseph fell from his throne, Pharaoh descended from his throne, both of them fell, and the faces of all the strong men who were standing before Joseph turned backwards and did not return to their place until their death*” (*Tanhuma, Vayigash 5*).

This is surprising, for when Joseph saw his brothers going from street to street (*Tanhuma, Yashan Mikeitz 17*), and he asked them why they were running like this throughout the land, they said to him: “*We have a brother that we sold as a slave. Since the time that we sold him, our father has been mourning for him. Therefore we have come with money to buy him back wherever we find him.*” He said to them, “*Can someone who sells something change his mind?*” They replied, “*That is why we have come, for we have double the money needed to buy him back.*” Joseph said to them, “*And if his owners don’t want to sell him back to you?*” They replied, “*Even if we have to burn because of him, we will not leave before having bought him back.*”

On the verse, “*Joseph’s ten brothers went down*” (*Genesis 42:3*), the Sages also stated: “*Scripture should have said, ‘Jacob’s sons.’ Why ‘Joseph’s ten brothers’? In the beginning they did not treat him with brotherly love, but instead they sold him. However they later regretted it, and each day they would say: ‘Let us go and inquire about him and restore him to his father.’ When Jacob told them to go down to Egypt, they all resolved to show him brotherly love*” (*Beresheit Rabba 91:6*).

This means that they eliminated the resentment that they felt for him in their hearts, and they were even willing to be burned for his sake. Therefore how can the Midrash

say that Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him when they discovered who he was, and that if an angel had not prevented them, they would have in fact killed him? Had their hatred for him returned? This is very surprising!

The Mishnah says, “*Any love that is dependent upon a specific consideration, when that consideration vanishes, the love ceases. Yet if it is not dependent upon a specific consideration, it will never cease*” (*Pirkei Avot 5:16*). Likewise all hatred that is dependent upon a specific consideration will cease when that consideration vanishes. We see examples of this all the time. A person may despise someone and curse him each day, but if he were to be told that the object of his hatred has died, he would immediately forget his hatred and mourn the person's passing. Yet if he were to be told, “*Actually, that person is still alive*,” his hatred for him would immediately return.

Since we only hate someone when he is alive, hatred is dependent upon life. When the object of our hatred dies, our reason for hating him vanishes, and so our hatred ceases. Similarly, Joseph's brothers despised him when they sold him into slavery, and afterwards they thought he was dead, as it is written: “*His brother is dead*” (*Genesis 44:20*). Our Sages have said (*Hadar Zekenim, Genesis 44:20*) that Joseph asked, “*You saw that he was dead?*” They said yes. Joseph asked further: “*You went to his grave?*” They again said yes. Since they thought he was dead, their hatred for him ceased. However when they recognized him and saw that he was actually alive, their hatred for him returned.

Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt looking for him only when their father Jacob said, “*Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down and purchase for us from there*” (*Genesis 42:2*). The Sages explained, “*Since the day that Joseph was stolen, however, the Holy Spirit departed from him [Jacob], so that he saw yet did not see, heard yet did not hear. Why does it not say, ‘Jacob heard that there was bar’ or ‘There was okel,’ but rather: ‘There was shever [grain]’? Do not read shever [grain] but sever [hope]: He saw in a vision that his hope was in Egypt, namely Joseph*” (*Bereshit Rabba 91:6*). Although the brothers did not know that Joseph was still alive, it was revealed to Jacob.

I say that hatred which has returned is more vehement than when it first appeared. The Holy One, blessed be He, accepted it the first time, as the Sages have said: “*Let us bind ourselves with a malediction to never tell our father Jacob! Judah said to them, ‘Reuven is not here, and the malediction is only valid with ten.’ What did they do? They joined the Holy One, blessed be He, to themselves in this malediction, so that He would say nothing to their father. Although it is written, ‘He tells His word to Jacob’ [Psalms 147:19], this He did not tell him, due to the malediction*” (*Tanhuma, Vayeishev 2*). The hatred that returned to the brothers was baseless hatred, and the tribal ancestors believed that Joseph was liable to death because of the Lashon Harah he had spoken about them. In fact they wanted to unleash dogs on him (*Bereshit Rabba 84:14*), since one who speaks Lashon Harah deserves to be thrown to the dogs (*Pesachim 118a*). Joseph was eventually exiled for 22 years, and exile is considered as death (*Midrash Tehillim 71*). Therefore even if Joseph's brothers believed during his sale that he was liable for death, his exile atoned

for his sin, and they no longer had any right to hate him. It was the hatred that returned to them which caused the death of the ten martyrs by the Romans (*Midrash Mishlei 1:13*).

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, their faces changed and they could no longer look at him. At that point we read, “*His brothers were not able to answer him*” (*Genesis 45:3*), and in the Midrash our Sages explained: “*Woe to us for the day of judgment. Woe to us for the day of rebuke! ... Joseph was the youngest of the tribal ancestors, yet his brothers could not withstand his rebuke.... Thus how much more when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and rebukes each man according to his deeds*” (*Bereshith Rabba 93:10*). Judah said to Joseph, “*You are judging us dishonestly!*” Joseph replied, “*There is no judgment more dishonest than to sell a brother*” (*Tanhuma, Vayigash 5*).

In any case, this sin was not rectified before the ten martyrs were murdered on account of it.

The Gravity of Baseless Hatred

It is written, “*Joseph could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out: ‘Remove everyone from before me!’ No one remained with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers*” (*Genesis 45:1*). The Aggadah states, “*When they recognized him, they wanted to kill him. An angel came and dispersed them to the four corners of the house. Judah then screamed with a powerful voice, and all the walls of Egypt fell, all the animals lost the young they were carrying, Joseph fell from his throne, Pharaoh fell from his throne, both of them fell, and the faces of all the brave warriors standing around Joseph turned backwards, remaining that way until the day of their death*” (*Tanhuma, Vayigash 5*).

I find this surprising! When Joseph saw that his brothers were going from street to street, he asked them: “*Why are you going about the land like this?*” They replied, “*We have a brother that we sold as a slave. Since the time that we sold him, our father has been mourning for him. We have come with money, and wherever we find him, we will buy him back.*”

Joseph replied, “*Can someone who sells something change his mind?*” They told him, “*That is why we have come with twice as much money to buy him back.*”

Joseph asked them, “*And if his owner does not want to sell him back to you?*”

They said, “*Even if we have to burn for his sake, we will not leave before having bought him back.*”

From here it seems that they uprooted the resentment that they felt for him in their hearts, to the point of being willing to burn for his sake. Therefore how can we say that they wanted to kill him when they recognized him, and that they would have done so if an angel had not intervened? Can we say that their hatred returned at that point? This is quite surprising!

When the Condition Ceases, Hatred Ceases

The Sages have said: “*Any love that is dependent upon a specific consideration, when that consideration ceases, the love ceases. Yet if it is not dependent upon a specific consideration, it will never cease*” (*Pirkei Avoth 5:16*). Likewise all hatred that depends upon a condition will cease when that condition ceases. We see examples of this every day: A person may despise someone and constantly wish him harm. Yet if he were to be told, “*So and so is dead*,” his hatred would immediately cease and he would mourn his passing. If he were to be told, “*Actually, that person is still alive*,” his hatred for him would immediately return, just as at first. Why? Given that we only hate someone when he is alive, and given that hatred is dependent upon life, as soon as that person dies, our hatred for him will also die.

Likewise Joseph’s brothers despised him when they sold him into slavery, and afterwards they thought that he was dead, as it is written: “*His brother is dead*” (*Genesis 44:20*). The Sages have said (*Hadar Zekenim, Genesis 44:20*) that Joseph asked, “*You saw that he was dead?*” They said yes. Joseph asked further: “*You stood by his grave?*” They again said yes. Since they thought that he was dead, their hatred for him ceased. However when they recognized him and saw that he was actually alive, their hatred for him returned.

Joseph’s brothers did not go to Egypt in order to find him, but because their father Jacob had told them: “*Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down and purchase for us from there*” (*Genesis 42:2*). The Sages have explained, “*Since the day that Joseph was stolen, the Holy Spirit departed from him [Jacob], so that he saw but did not see, heard but did not hear. Why does it not say, ‘Jacob heard that there was bar’ or ‘There was okel,’ but rather: ‘There was shever [grain]’? Do not read shever [grain] but sever [hope]: He saw in a vision that his hope was in Egypt, namely Joseph*” (*Bereshith Rabba 91:6*). Although the brothers did not know that Joseph was still alive, it was revealed to Jacob.

The Ten Martyrs of the Roman Government

I say that hatred which has returned is more powerful than hatred when it first appears. The Holy One, blessed be He, accepted it the first time, as the Sages have said: “*Let us bind ourselves with a malediction to never tell our father Jacob! Judah said to them, ‘Reuven is not here, and the malediction is only valid with ten. What did they do? They joined the Holy One, blessed be He, to themselves in this malediction, so that He would say nothing to their father. Although it is written, ‘He tells His word to Jacob’ [Psalms 147:19], this He did not tell him, due to the malediction*” (*Tanhuma, Vayeishev 2*).

On the other hand, the hatred that returned to the brothers was baseless hatred, for even if Joseph’s brothers believed that he was liable to death because he had spoken Lashon Harah about them, and as a result they said, “*Let us kill him by inciting the dogs against him*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:14*) – since one who speaks Lashon Harah deserves to be thrown to the dogs (*Pesachim 118a*) – in any case Joseph had been exiled for 22 years,

and exile is considered to be like death (*Midrash Tehillim* 71). Therefore even if Joseph's brothers believed at the time of his sale that he was liable to death, his exile atoned for his sin, and they no longer had any right to hate him. It was this hatred, which returned to them, that led to the death of the ten martyrs by the Romans, as our Sages have said (*Midrash Mishlei* 1:13).

When Joseph told them, “*I am Joseph your brother,*” their faces changed and they could no longer look at him. At that point we read, “*His brothers were not able to answer him, for they were terrified at his presence*” (*Genesis* 45:3). In the Aggadah our Sages have explained: “*Woe to us on the day of judgment. Woe to us on the day of rebuke! ... Joseph was the youngest of the tribal ancestors, and yet his brothers could not withstand his rebuke.... Thus how much more when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and rebukes each man according to his deeds*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 93:10).

The Sages also taught that Judah said to Joseph, “*You are judging us dishonestly!*” Joseph replied, “*There is no judgment more dishonest than to sell a brother*” (*Tanhuma, Vayigash* 5). At that point they realized that their judgment had not been a judgment for truth, for if Joseph had been an evildoer, he would not have remained upright during all these years. When he showed them his circumcision and said, “*I have maintained the same sanctity as on the day that you sold me,*” they were afraid of him and recanted. This sin, however, was not forgiven until the ten martyrs were killed by the Romans on their account.

The Power of the Tzaddikim's Influence

It is written, “*When Pharaoh summons you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ then you shall say: ‘Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth until now, both we and our forefathers,’ so that you may settle in the land of Goshen, for all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians*” (*Bereshith* 46:33-34).

The Midrash asks why Joseph only took “*some of his brothers*” (*Bereshith* 47:2) to meet Pharaoh. It was to teach us that they were not very strong. Why did Joseph take five of his brothers? It was because he knew which ones were stronger than the rest, and he chose wisely. He said, “*If I present the strongest ones to Pharaoh, he will want to put them into his army.*”

I find this absolutely amazing! How can we possibly say that Pharaoh did not know that Joseph's brothers were strong and had killed the inhabitants of Shechem? Furthermore, our Sages have said: “*Judah then screamed with a powerful voice, and all the walls of Egypt fell, all the animals lost the young they were carrying, Joseph fell from his throne, Pharaoh fell from his throne, both of them fell, and the faces of all the brave warriors standing around Joseph turned back, remaining that way until the day of their death*” (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 5).

As a result, how can we say that Pharaoh was not aware of his brothers' strength? How could Joseph have thought of deceiving Pharaoh?

Joseph told his brothers, “*If I tell Pharaoh that you are shepherds and that you brought your flocks with you from Canaan, he will not make you officers in the Egyptian army, even if you are very strong. The Egyptians worship rams, and shepherds are an abomination to them. They are made neither into kings nor leaders, and Pharaoh will distance you from him.*”

Hashem Made Them Fertile

Why did Joseph not want his brothers in the Egyptian army? It was because he knew that the Children of Israel would remain in Egypt for hundreds of years, and that if they were to live in Egyptian cities, they would learn from their wicked deeds. Hence Joseph advised his brothers to say things that would prompt Pharaoh to distance them from him.

Likewise the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want the Children of Israel to assimilate among the nations and learn from their ways. In fact as long as Jacob and his sons were in Canaan, they numbered but 70 people. Yet when they descended into Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He, made them fertile, with each woman giving birth to six children at a time. Such was not the case beforehand, and if they had given birth in this way while in Canaan, maybe not all the Children of Israel would have descended into Egypt. Some may have remained in Canaan and assimilated among the nations, which is why Hashem limited their fertility until they descended into Egypt with Jacob. At that point, the tzaddik being with them, they would not learn from the deeds of the other peoples.

Furthermore, when Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians stopped worshipping rams. In fact we read, “*He took some of his brothers, five men, and presented them before Pharaoh*” (*Bereshith 47:2*). From what is stated earlier (“*for all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians*”), it follows that there were no shepherds in Egypt. This is because the Egyptians worshipped rams, meaning that no one had the right to graze and lead their god. Shepherds had therefore dispersed throughout the land. That being the case, why does Pharaoh go on to say: “*Make them officers over my livestock*” (*v.6*)? This is surprising, for if shepherds were abhorrent to the Egyptians, why would Pharaoh have appointed them over his own flocks?

He Had Repented

Our Sages say, “*When the tzaddik is in the city, he is its brilliance, its majesty, and its glory. When he leaves it, its brilliance, its majesty, and its glory depart*” (*Bereshith Rabba 68:6*). This teaches us that when the tzaddik is in the city, its residents learn his ways. When he does good deeds and studies Torah, they do the same. The Sages have also said, “*What is good for the tzaddik is good for his neighbor*” (*Sukkah 56b*).

We have learned that when people see a tzaddik improving himself, they will also improve themselves. When Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians also learned from their good deeds and stopped worshipping rams. This is why Pharaoh

told Joseph, “*Make them officers over my livestock,*” which teaches us that he had repented and no longer worshipped rams.

When did they return to this idolatry? It was when Pharaoh died, as it is written: “*A new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Joseph*” (*Shemot 1:8*).

How do we know that the Egyptians themselves stopped worshipping rams? It is because it is written, “*Joseph said, ‘Bring your livestock and I will provide for you in return for your livestock if the money is gone.’ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in return for the horses, for the flocks of sheep, for the herds of cattle, and for the donkeys. Thus he provided them with bread for all their livestock during that year*” (*Bereshith 47:16-17*). How did they have flocks? If they worshipped them as gods, does this mean that they sold their gods? Rather, from here we learn that when Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians observed their deeds and learned from them.

Since Pharaoh had appointed them over his own flocks, Jacob’s sons began to fear that they would assimilate among the Egyptians. Hence they decided to limit themselves in certain areas so as to avoid that possibility. They took it upon themselves to be very careful in regards to their customs and not to change their names, their language, and their way of dress (*Lekach Tov, Shemot 6:6*). By the merit of these things, they were saved.

We may logically infer that since the wicked in Egypt learned from the good deeds of Jacob and his sons, stopping their practice of idolatry as a result, how much more should we learn from the deeds of the tzaddikim! Furthermore, when they reprimand us, how much more should we listen to them! I often see people falling asleep as a Rav is giving a lecture, none of which they end up hearing. Of such people we read, “*He turns away his ear from hearing the Torah*” (*Mishlei 28:9*). There is no greater opportunity to repent than when a Rav delivers a lecture and makes his reprimands heard, as the Sages have said: “*When the Sage is teaching, I forgive and atone for the sins of the Children of Israel*” (*Midrash Mishlei 10*).

The Power of the Mezuzah

It is written, “*And Judah approached him and said, ‘If you please, my lord!’*” (*Bereshith 44:18*). I have found in the sefarim that the term *vayigash* [and he approached] has the same numerical value as *VeSha-dai*. I would like to clarify the meaning of this in light of what the Sages have said, namely that the righteous Joseph fulfilled the entire Torah on his own before it was given (*Vayikra Rabba 2:10*). We must therefore say that he had mezuzot on his doorposts. Yet in that case, how could the tribal fathers have not seen them and immediately realized that the viceroy was Jewish?

We cannot say that Joseph removed the mezuzot when his brothers arrived, and put them back after his brothers left, for a mezuzah protects those who dwell inside the home, as Onkelos states: “*According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells*

within while his servants keep guard outside. Yet with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard outside, as it is said: ‘Hashem will guard your going and your coming, from this time and forever’ [Tehillim 121:8]” (*Avodah Zarah 11a*). Furthermore, the Sages say that the Name Sha-dai must be written on the outside of the mezuzah (*Zohar III:266a*), and the initials of this Name stand for Shomer Daltot Israel (“Guardian of the doors of Israel”). Besides, could we possibly say that Joseph remained in the land of Egypt without protection for even an instant?

Furthermore, just as a mezuzah provides Israel with material protection, it also provides spiritual protection for the soul. This is because a person is immersed in material pursuits throughout the day, and he is liable to forget Hashem. Yet when he passes his door and sees a mezuzah, placing his hand on it and kissing it, he recalls Hashem’s mitzvot. Can we therefore say that Joseph removed his mezuzot without worrying about turning his focus away from the mitzvot?

We may explain this according to what our Sages say in the Gemara: “*The sukkah must have the character of an incidental residence, and hence requires no mezuzah*” (*Yoma 10b*). The Sages also say in the Aggadah, “*Why do we make a sukkah after Yom Kippur? On Rosh Hashanah, the Holy One sits in judgment on every living being, and on Yom Kippur He signs the decree. Perhaps the decree signed on Yom Kippur sentences Israel to exile. In order to fulfill any such decree, Israel builds flimsy dwellings and they exile themselves from their homes to dwell in these temporary structures, and the Holy One regards it as if they have been exiled to Babylon*” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra 653*).

Let us say that when a person exiles himself from his home to a sukkah, there is no reason to worry that he will forget the mitzvot, for at that point his eyes are turned to G-d for protection and to bring him back home. Along the same lines, it is written: “*We do not wear tefillin on Shabbat, for Shabbat is called a sign and tefillin are called a sign, and we do not place one sign upon another*” (*Mechilta, Bo*). We may therefore say that since the sukkah provides protection – as it is written: “*There will be a sukkah for shade by day from the heat, and as a protection and refuge from storm and rain*” (*Isaiah 4:6*) – we do not need one protection within another, meaning that the sukkah does not require a mezuzah.

He Considered Himself a Foreigner

I have seen in the Midrash that when Joseph was on the verge of leaving this world, he summoned his sons and said to them: “*I am leaving this world, and I want to divide all my money among you.*” He then took seven selayim from his pocket and gave them to his sons. Let us think about this: The Gemara states, “*Joseph hid three treasures in Egypt: One was revealed to Korach, another to Antoninus the son of Severus, and the third is stored up for the tzaddikim in the future*” (*Pesachim 119a*). In that case, why did Joseph bequeath only seven selayim to his sons?

We must say that of all the wealth that Joseph amassed, he took none of it for himself. Even the palaces that Pharaoh gave him, he did not take for himself. Why did he act in this way? It is because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, as

the verse states: “*For we are like foreigners before You, and like sojourners, as were all our forefathers*” (*I Chronicles 29:15*). This is how the righteous act: They are the foundation of the world, and yet they consider themselves to be insignificant. Thus Abraham was the foundation of the world, and yet he considered himself to be insignificant, saying: “*I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you*” (*Bereshith 23:4*). Likewise Jacob said to Esav, “*I have sojourned with Lavan*” (*Bereshith 32:5*), and likewise it is said of Israel: “*Strangers and sojourners*” (*Vayikra 25:23*). Thus King David said: “*Hear my prayer, Hashem, and give ear to my cry. Be not mute to my tears....*” Why? “...*for I am a foreigner with You, and a sojourner like all my fathers*” (*Tehillim 39:13*).

Our ancestors acted in this way because they were exiled from one place to another and studied Torah, as our Sages have said: “*Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was old, but he remained in a yeshiva, as it is said: ‘Abraham was old, advanced in age’ [Bereshith 24:1]. Our father Isaac was old, but he remained in a yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was old, but he remained in a yeshiva*” (*Yoma 28b*). Even the righteous Joseph, although he did not exile himself to study Torah, considered himself as a foreigner because he constantly reviewed his learning, just as a foreigner who is constantly checking his pockets, lest he lose something due to the fatigue of traveling.

How can we say that Joseph reviewed his learning? It is because on the verse, “*He sent Judah before him*” (*Bereshith 46:28*), the Sages taught: To establish a house of study where he could teach the tribal fathers (*Tanchuma, Vayigash 11*). Know that this is true, for when Joseph left Jacob, he remembered what passage he was learning, for he was constantly reviewing it. When the brothers came to tell Jacob that Joseph was still alive, “[Jacob’s] heart grew cold, for he did not believe them” (*Bereshith 45:26*). Jacob remembered which passage he was learning when Joseph left him, and he thought: “*I know that Joseph left during the study of the egla arufa [the heifer whose neck is broken].*” He therefore told his sons, “*Let him give me a sign indicating which passage he was learning when he left me, and I will believe you.*” Since Joseph also remembered the passage he was learning when he left, he sent agalot (*wagons*) to his father. When Jacob saw these agalot, “*the spirit of their father Jacob revived*” (*Bereshith 45:27*).

Joseph’s Reprimand

It is written, “*Joseph could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, and he called out: ‘Remove everyone from before me!’ Thus no one remained with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He cried out in a loud voice, and the Egyptians heard, and Pharaoh’s household heard. Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence*” (*Bereshith 45:1-3*).

After the lengthy exchange between Joseph and his brothers, when Judah said to him, “*How can I return to my father if the lad is not with me?*” (*ibid 44:34*), Joseph was

so moved that he could no longer restrain himself. At that point he said, “*Remove everyone from before me*” and revealed himself to his brothers. What was the first thing he said to them? “*I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?*”

A criticism often made is that Joseph should not have addressed his brothers in this way. Once he recognized them, a deeply emotional moment filled with surprise and joy, he should not have reprimanded them, especially not so severely by asking: “*Is my father still alive?*” The result was that his brothers were dismayed at his presence. Would it not have been better if Joseph had treated them with kindness and joy? Indeed, it would have been better to reassure and encourage them under such circumstances!

The verse takes the initiative by stating, “*Joseph could not restrain himself.*” Here the Ohr HaChaim writes, “*He no longer had the strength to wait for everyone to leave on their own, and he said in a loud voice: ‘Remove everyone from before me.’ This meant quickly, not that people should be asked to leave, for if they were to leave on their own, they would have taken their time, but Joseph could not tolerate any delay.*” In other words, Joseph was so moved by their words that he could no longer restrain himself. As the Rashbam says, “*Joseph could no longer restrain himself, for he did everything with great self-control up to that point, as mentioned earlier: ‘He restrained himself and said: ‘Serve food’*” [Bereshith 43:31] – meaning that until then, Joseph was able to restrain itself. Yet now he no longer could.”

This contains the answer to our question: When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he could no longer restrain himself. He spoke the words that arose from the depths of his heart, things which he truly and sincerely felt, and that is what he told them.

In reflecting upon this, we also see that from what he said, Joseph showed his brothers that he himself felt absolutely no anger towards them. “*I am Joseph,*” he said, adding nothing more. However there was something that he did not yet know: “*Is my father still alive?*”

During all those years, one thing occupied Joseph’s mind and gave him no rest: His respect for his father. How could his brothers have done such a thing to their father? Hence he immediately asked them, “*Is my father still alive?*” In other words: “*After all that you’ve done to me, after having sold me, is he still alive?*” That is why this question only came now, for only now did Judah say to him: “*How can I return to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father?*” Now that Joseph saw his brothers demonstrating a certain degree of respect for their father, he screamed out the question that had been on his lips for numerous years: “*How could you? How could you have sold me to a caravan of Ishmaelites? Had you nothing in your hearts for our father the tzaddik, our elderly father?*” That is why he addressed them by crying out, “*Is my father still alive?*”

Joseph demonstrated a tremendous degree of respect for his father. He lived in Egypt for numerous years, he was a slave in the house of Potiphar, and he was imprisoned. He arrived as a *na’ar* (“lad”), but now had a beard. His experience could have left him

bitter, but he overlooked everything because he knew that “*for preservation of life, G-d sent me before you*” (*Bereshith 45:5*). During all those years, Joseph thought about everything that had happened to him, to the upheavals in his life, and he understood that it was all part of the Divine plan. He understood that it had to happen, and to his brothers he also said: “*For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. G-d sent me before you to insure your survival in the land, and to sustain you for a great deliverance. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and a ruler of all the land of Egypt*” (*ibid. 45:6-8*). Yet one question remained: Joseph reprimanded his brothers for one thing, something that gave him no rest, namely how they could have done such a thing to their father and caused him such pain. Hence this question immediately came to his lips: “*I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?*”

Sforno explains: “*Is my father still alive? – how could it be that he didn't die from the pain he experienced on my account?*” This was Joseph's criticism of his brothers: You who claim that you have a duty to return Benjamin to your father, how could you not have worried then? I'm not angry with you on my account. On the contrary, I hold absolutely no resentment for you in my heart, since I'm now king over all Egypt, and I know and understand that G-d sent me to ensure your survival. As for yourselves, however, how could you have sold me? How could you have done such a thing, knowing that you would cause such pain to our father?

Upon hearing such a sincere, truthful, and justified criticism – without any self-interest or anger on Joseph's part – the brothers were dismayed at his presence!

The Midrash cites Abba Kohen Bardela as saying, “*Woe to us on the day of judgment, woe to us on the day of rebuke! ... Joseph was the youngest of the tribal fathers, and yet his brothers could not withstand his reprimand, as it says: 'His brothers could not answer him.' How much more when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and reprimands each man according to his deeds, as it says: 'I will reprimand you and lay it clearly before your eyes' [Tehillim 50:21]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 93:10*).

According to what we have said, this takes on even greater significance. Things in the future will be similar to what they were in the past, when Joseph reprimanded his brothers. Although he could have reprimanded them for their hatred of him, for having sold him to non-Jews – selling their own flesh and blood – he did not. Joseph rose above his personal feelings and reprimanded them for not respecting their father: How could they have been so ungrateful to their father? How could they have demonstrated such ingratitude by acting in a way that caused their father so much anguish? Likewise in the future, when we will stand before the Celestial Court, there will be ample reason to reprimand us for the deeds we committed. Nevertheless, we will be reprimanded in the same way that Joseph reprimanded his brothers, for man can be reprimanded on two levels: On the level of the sin itself, for how can someone commit a deed which is punishable and forbidden by the Torah? However he can also be reprimanded on

another level, namely for being ungrateful. That is, how can a person commit a deed that is completely contrary to G-d's will? How can he do such a thing to the Creator of the universe, Who gave him life and bestowed such goodness upon him? This is what Abba Kohen Bardela said: "*Woe to us on the day of judgment, woe to us on the day of rebuke!*" If Joseph's brothers, the fathers of the tribes of Israel, were reprimanded for their ingratitude – which was certainly ingratitude per se, but only concerned a human being – then what will we be able to say? Hence the Midrash states, "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and rebukes each man according to his deeds,*" meaning that everyone will be judged by the ingratitude he demonstrated in regards to all he received from the Creator of the universe!

This Too is for the Good

It is written, "*I am Joseph your brother; whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be grieved, and let it not be evil in your eyes that you sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. ... Thus G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land, and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d*" (*Bereshith 45:4-8*).

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they were afraid of him. He implored them, "*Come close to me, please*" (v.4), which Rashi describes as calling to them "*tenderly and pleadingly*." Yet what did Joseph proceed to tell them? Instead of soothing words, instead of assuring them, he turned to them and reminded them that he had been sold. He also repeats this several times: "*I am Joseph your brother; whom you sold into Egypt. And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here.*" He then says, "*And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d.*" It was as if he were saying, "*You sold me, but it was G-d Who sent me.*" Does this seem like a way of calming his brothers, who were afraid that he would avenge himself? Was this a way of showing them that he felt no resentment for what they did to him? We are not asking this question only in regards to Joseph's wisdom, but also in regards to his middot, to his courtesy. That is, he saw how frightened his brothers were, he saw how ashamed they were in his presence, and he saw how they were progressively growing paler as their shame increased. Could this be the right time to confront and lecture them? If not, then why remind them of the painful incident of his sale?

It seems, in fact, that Joseph's intentions were entirely different. To understand, let us examine the text very carefully. What is the difference between "*selling*" and "*sending*," such that Joseph said "...*for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you*?" The difference is simple: A person can do something with one intention or another, such that the nature of his action is entirely different, be it a sin or a mitzvah. This is because everything depends on intention.

Although the brothers had ruled that Joseph was liable to death, and although they had acted in accordance with a din Torah – for as we know, they even involved the

Holy One, blessed be He, in selling him – when they sold Joseph, they sinned in a very subtle way. Hence if they were being accused of this, it was in an extremely narrow sense. When we look at things from their point of view, this is how things actually stood. Nevertheless, when we look at things in retrospect, from the higher viewpoint of the Torah, we see that “*G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival.*” That is, there was something deliberate and hidden in his sale, the goal of which was to ensure that a great people would live and survive.

We now see that this is what Joseph was trying to tell his brothers, and it is why he said to them: “*Do not be grieved, and let it not be evil in your eyes.*” In other words: “*There is no reason to be sad, nor is there any reason to be afraid of me. As soon as I was sold – when I realized that things did not depend on me, but that something was being accomplished through me – I understood that it was G-d’s decree. I understand that ‘this too is for the good.’ I was certain that everything that the Merciful One does is for the good, and I was only waiting to see when I would understand what His intentions were. That is why you have absolutely nothing to fear from me, because from my point of view there is no reason to be angry. There is no reason to avenge myself, nor is there any reason to weep. In my eyes, everything is Hashem’s will, meant to do you good. I was only a messenger. That is how I have seen things from the moment I was sold until now. From the second that you handed me to the Ishmaelites, that is how I have seen everything that happened.*”

This is what Joseph told his brothers, explaining what his intentions were in all this. He thereby revealed a small aspect of his conduct, one that earned him the name Yosef HaTzaddik by the Jewish people. This consisted of not growing proud, but of reassuring his brothers not to fear him or dread his vengeance.

Regarding Joseph’s faith in G-d, the Sages say: “*Happy is the man who has made Hashem his trust [Tehillim 40:5] – this alludes to Joseph*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 89:3). The reason is that a person who trusts in Hashem is happy, being content with his lot both in this world and in the World to Come. He experiences neither agonies nor doubts, and he has no desire to avenge himself or harbor resentment. He does not get upset or angry, for his entire life is filled with pure joy in doing G-d’s will.

As a result, what Joseph told his brothers demonstrated that not only was he not lacking sensitivity, his words also concealed some amazing virtues: Confidence in G-d, self-annulment, and true concern for the feelings of his brothers. We can learn so much from his faith in G-d, not only externally, but above all, internally. If someone hurts or upsets us, we should immediately forgive him, since this represents Hashem’s will. Although it is one of the most difficult things to do, we should at least realize that such concepts and virtues, in all their greatness, stem from one thing only: Absolute confidence in the Creator of the universe. We may also be able to learn a lesson from this: When someone hurts or offends us, instead of harshly responding, we should realize that if we do get angry, it is a sign that our faith in Hashem is not very great. This is an extremely important lesson!

I am Joseph

When we examine the passage in question, we see that Joseph twice says “*I am Joseph.*” The first time is when he says: “*I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?*” The second time is when he says: “*I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.*” Why the repetition? Was saying it once not enough?

It seems that the name “*Joseph*” alludes to a great secret. This name has a numerical value of 156, which is six times that of the Tetragrammaton (26). This is what Joseph was trying to hint to his brothers, namely that for him, Hashem’s Name encapsulated his entire personality. Six represents the four cardinal points, along with two extra points, above and below. This is because in everything that Joseph did – even in Egypt, the land of depravity and sorcery – G-d’s Name rested on him. At every instant, every day and each hour, Hashem’s Name rested on Joseph. This is what he was telling his brothers by saying, “*I am Joseph.*” In other words: “*I am the same Joseph who was with my father Jacob, and I am the same Joseph who was with you. When I devoted myself entirely in the tent of Torah – when I invested all my strength into acquiring the sanctity of my father and his attachment to the Creator – that is precisely what I continued to do in Egypt as well, attaching myself to the Creator without limit, six times the Tetragrammaton, in every direction, on all sides, above and below. I surrounded myself with the Name of G-d. I am Joseph!*”

Tears Must Precede Punishment

It is written, “*He fell upon the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck*” (*Bereshith 45:14*).

Rashi explains that Joseph wept upon Benjamin’s neck on account of the two Temples that would be built upon Benjamin’s territory and later destroyed. As for Benjamin, he wept upon Joseph’s neck because of the Sanctuary at Shiloh, which would be built upon Joseph’s territory and later destroyed. This explanation raises an important question: It is said that “*suffering is sufficient for its time,*” meaning that a fixed time is established for weeping and mourning over each misfortune. That being the case, why did Joseph and Benjamin mourn over calamities that had not yet taken place? Furthermore, they were currently facing other trials, such as the exile of Egypt and the weight of servitude, meaning that they should have been saddened by these misfortunes, not by future ones!

Furthermore, the destruction of both Temples was not yet irreversible at that point in time. In fact the Temple was later destroyed because of baseless hatred and as punishment for the spies and those who needlessly wept over the land of Israel. Since such complaints were baseless, G-d said to them: “*Because you have wept without reason, I will set [this day] aside for weeping throughout the generations to come*” (*Taanith 29a*). Yet during the encounter between Joseph and Benjamin, the Children of Israel had not yet committed the sin of the spies, and this decree may never have been

enacted, for they could have repented. As a result, the planned destruction was not yet confirmed at that point in time. Why then did both brothers weep over a hypothetical calamity?

Finally, it is said that when Jacob wanted to reveal the time of the exile's end to his sons, he forgot it because the spirit of prophesy escaped him. Hashem intentionally made Jacob forget this date in order to teach the generations to come that although the time of the Final Redemption has already been established, we are obligated to wait for the coming of Mashiach each day. By the power of repentance, we can speed the end of the exile and G-d will hasten our deliverance. In fact it is commonly known that the Final Redemption will occur either at its set time or earlier, as G-d says: "*I will hasten it*" (*Sanhedrin 98a*). That said, it is forbidden to lose hope and we must await it each day.

As such, Joseph and Benjamin should have also felt that the decree of destruction had not been sealed, and that the repentance of the Jewish people could have revoked it. Knowing this, why did they feel it necessary to weep over the Temple, since at the time they were confronted with other misfortunes?

In reality, they wanted to transmit to future generations that we must precede the illness by the remedy. Thus the very possibility of the Temple's destruction obligated them to do everything to avoid it. Just that possibility, even if not yet confirmed, must awaken people to complete repentance. This destruction was caused by baseless hatred and a breakdown in the unity of the Jewish people, and it was for this reason that the brothers wept. They wanted to teach the Children of Israel that they were now about to be enslaved to Pharaoh in order to later be delivered through miracles and wonders. As we know, the Torah was only given to the Jewish people when they were united. In fact the practice of Torah and the presence of the Shechinah require the unity of the people and a sense of mutual responsibility among them. As soon as strife arises among G-d's people, He quickly withdraws the Shechinah from them.

Unfortunately, the Jewish people did not learn from the approach of these two brothers. During the incident of the spies, the people incited strife by mocking and disparaging the land of Israel. They did not preserve their unity at that point, but deepened their hostility toward one another, which finally brought about the Temple's destruction.

The following story is told in regards to this subject: An elderly woman left this world, bequeathing the same amount to each of her offspring – except for one granddaughter, who received as much as all the others combined. The family of the deceased went to the Beit Din in order to make sure that there had not been any mistake in her will. The judges then looked at all the writings of the deceased, and in their search they found a diary in which the elderly woman had written everything that happened to her. In one of her entries, she described how she had gathered all her children and grandchildren to describe the dark days of the Holocaust to them.

In her diary, the elderly woman described how all her grandchildren had listened carefully to her, but that one granddaughter related especially to her words, her face

filling with tears as she listened to her terrifying account. The elderly woman added that she was convinced that this little girl would transmit to future generations what had occurred during those fateful years, so worried she was by these stories. In light of this account, the judges understood why the elderly woman had bequeathed such a large sum to the little girl: She felt that she was able to pass these stories on to future generations.

The weeping of the brothers teaches us that we must mourn over the destruction of the Temple. If Joseph and Benjamin were so saddened despite the planned destruction being uncertain at that point, then how much more should we – after the destruction of the Temple has already taken place – mourn and repent in order to see its rebuilding. As such, we must strengthen our unity, bring people closer to Hashem, and avoid dissension in order to merit the coming of Mashiach, speedily and in our days. Amen.

Providing the Cure Before the Ailment

It is written, “*Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck*” (*Bereshith 45:14*).

Rashi explains that Joseph wept on Benjamin’s neck because of the two Temples that would be built on the territory of the latter, both of which would be destroyed. As for Benjamin, he wept on Joseph’s neck because of the Sanctuary at Shilo, which would be located on the territory of Joseph and later destroyed.

Rashi’s comment raises a serious question: We say that “*one suffering is sufficient for its time*,” meaning that a set time is fixed for weeping and grieving over each tragedy. Yet in that case, why did Joseph and Benjamin mourn over a tragedy that had not yet taken place? Furthermore, they were currently faced with other problems, such as their exile in Egypt and the burden of servitude, so they should have been saddened by those tragedies, rather than a future tragedy!

Furthermore, at that point destruction was not yet certain. In fact the Temple would be destroyed as a result of baseless hatred, and as punishment for the spies and the fact that the people had wept without reason for the land of Israel. Since their complaints were unfounded, G-d said to them: “*Because you have wept without reason, I will set [this day] aside for weeping throughout the generations to come*” (*Taanith 29a*). Yet during the encounter between Joseph and Benjamin, the Children of Israel had not yet committed the sin of the spies, and the decree of destruction might never have been made, for they could have hastened to repent. As a result, the planned destruction had not been confirmed at that point in time. Why then did both brothers weep over such a hypothetical tragedy?

In reality, they wanted to transmit to the generations to come that we must provide the cure before the ailment. Thus the mere possibility of the Temple’s destruction obligated them to do everything to avoid it. That possibility alone, even if not

confirmed, should arouse the people to complete repentance. Destruction was caused by baseless hatred and a breach in the unity of Israel, and that is why the brothers wept. They wanted to teach the Children of Israel that they now had to endure the enslavement of Pharaoh in order to be delivered later on amid miracles and wonders, for that deliverance would lead them to the giving of the Torah. As we know, the Torah was only given to the Jewish people when they were united. In fact the observance of Torah and the Shechinah are predicated upon the unity of the people and their sense of mutual responsibility. As soon as quarrels arise among His people, G-d quickly withdraws His presence from them.

Thus the tears of Joseph and Benjamin came to teach the Children of Israel that they must provide the cure before the ailment: By being united and living in harmony, they could avoid the destruction of the Temple. Unfortunately, the Jewish people did not learn the proper attitude from the two brothers. They incited a rebellion by scorning and slandering the land of Israel, and then they failed to preserve their unity and became hostile toward one another, which finally led to the destruction of the Temple.

In regard to this subject, a story is told of an elderly woman who left this world. In her will, she bequeathed the same amount of money to all her descendants, except for one granddaughter, to whom she bequeathed an inheritance equal to that of all the others combined. The members of the elderly woman's family went to the Beit Din to make sure that there hadn't been a mistake in her will. The judges then examined all the written documents of the elderly woman. In their research, they discovered her personal diary, in which she wrote just about everything that ever happened to her. In one of her entries, she recounted that she had gathered all her children and grandchildren in order to describe the dark days of the Holocaust to them. She underlined in her writings that all her grandchildren had carefully listened to her. However one granddaughter had especially identified with her story, and the girl's face had filled with tears as she listened to these horrifying accounts. The elderly woman added that she was convinced her granddaughter would convey to the generations to come what had happened during those terrible years, since she had been so moved by her story.

In light of this diary entry, the judges understood why the elderly woman had bequeathed such a large sum to the girl: She felt that her granddaughter would perpetuate these accounts.

Joseph and Benjamin also proved that they identified with the Children of Israel and feared for their future, to the point of being able to ignore their current suffering and weep over a future, possible destruction. Aware that unity was the foundation and precondition for the continuity of the Jewish people and G-d's presence in their midst, they warned the Jewish people in this regard. In fact harmony is the cure for the destruction of the Temple, which we are lacking to the present day. It is even one of the reasons for the Holocaust.

The tears of the brothers therefore teach us that we must weep over the destruction of the Temple. Since Joseph and Benjamin were so troubled over a destruction that was yet uncertain, how much more should we – after the destruction of both Temples has actually taken place – mourn and repent in order to merit seeing its reconstruction.

It is certain that in order to cure the tragedies that have struck the Jewish people, we must rectify the same elements that led to the destruction of the Temple. Thus we must strengthen our unity, bring souls closer to Torah, and avoid disputes in order to merit the coming of Mashiach, speedily and in our days. Amen..

Parsha Vayechi

Judging Everyone Favorably According to the Present Time

It is written, “*Israel saw Joseph’s sons and said, ‘Who are these?’”* (*Genesis 48:8*). The Midrash cites Rabbi Yehudah bar Shalom in stating, “*Did he not know who they were? They studied Torah with him every day, and yet now he asks, ‘Who are these?’ Although they took care of him in Egypt for 17 years, did he not know them?* The answer is that he saw Jeroboam the son of Nabat and Ahab the son of Omri, who would arise from Ephraim and worship idols, and the Divine Presence left him. When Joseph realized this, he bowed to the ground and asked the Holy One, blessed be He, for help: ‘Master of the universe, if they are worthy of the blessing, do not send me away today in shame!’ Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, returned the Divine Presence to Jacob, and he blessed them” (*Tanhuma, Vayechi 6*).

This is quite surprising. Since Ephraim and Manasseh cared for Jacob during the 17 years that he lived in Egypt, why was it only now, when they came to him for a blessing, that Jacob saw the wicked that would arise from them? Why didn’t he sense this before? We also need to understand, given that the Divine Presence left him because the wicked would arise from them, why it did not leave him when he blessed the other tribes (it left him only when he wanted to reveal the end time), since the wicked would arise from them as well! To explain this, we may say that as long as Ephraim and Manasseh were close to Jacob, the Shechinah (*Divine Presence*) did not leave him. It departed only when he was about to bless them, for he saw by Divine inspiration that the wicked would arise from them. Jacob did not want them to benefit from these blessing as well, for in that case he would be empowering the forces of impurity. Since at that point Jacob was grieved to see that the wicked would arise from Ephraim, the Shechinah left him, as it is written: “*The Shechinah abides...only through a matter of joy*” (*Shabbat 30b*). This lasted until Joseph brought joy to his heart by saying, “*These are my sons*” (*Genesis 48:9*). In other words: Just as I descended into Egypt, and just as I retained my righteousness and did not damage the covenant of circumcision (*Zohar 1:71b*), so too for my sons. They are tzaddikim like myself, and they did not damage the covenant. Therefore they are also worthy of a blessing.

Joseph also said to Jacob, “*Just because the wicked will be among their descendants, must they now be deprived of a blessing? At the present time they are tzaddikim, and as for their future, their descendants may repent.*” Thus the Midrash teaches: “‘*Gilead is mine and Manasseh is mine. Also Ephraim is the strength of my head. Judah is my lawgiver. Moab is my washbasin. Over Edom will I cast my shoe; over Philistia will I shout in triumph’* [*Psalms 60:9-10*]. *Gilead is mine alludes to Ahab king of Israel, who died in Ramoth Gilead. Manasseh is mine refers, literally, to Manasseh the son*

of Hezekiah. Also Ephraim is the strength of my head alludes to Jeroboam, the son of Nabat, the Ephrathite” (*Bamidbar Rabba* 14:1; see also *Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:2).

Why did Joseph say, “*These are my sons, whom G-d has given me here*” (*Genesis* 48:9)? It seems that the word “here” is redundant. What he was doing, however, was telling Jacob by allusion: “*Bless them according to their present state, for hear and now they are tzaddikim.*” Rashi tells us that Joseph showed his father the betrothal document and marriage contract, and also that he prayed for mercy concerning the matter and that G-d’s spirit returned to rest upon Jacob. From this we learn that we must not judge based on what may happen in the future, or in later generations. Instead we should look at others in a positive light, as they are now, righteous and pure at the present time. It is from this perspective that we must explain the verse, “*Israel's eyes were heavy with age; he would not see*” (v.10). This statement is difficult to understand, for was Jacob really so old? After all, he had yet to reach the age of his fathers (*ibid.* 47:9). This is especially hard to understand in light of what the Sages have said, namely that Jacob is not dead (*Taanith* 5b). That is, his eyes must still be good. Why was this verse not written immediately after Joseph was told, “*Behold, your father is ill*” (*Genesis* 48:1)? Why does Scripture break off to speak about Joseph’s children?

According to what we have said, Jacob asked Joseph to help him through his prayers. He made this request so as not to be grieved when he looked to the future of his children – whose descendants would not be worthy on account of their misdeeds – for Jacob wanted to wholeheartedly bless them with love. Joseph answered his father’s request, and his prayer was heard. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, dimmed the eyes of the tzaddik – who could see from one end of the world to the other – so that he would only see his descendants at favorable times. Even if he should see that some among them would sin, that should not cause them to lose out.

From here we see the power of Jacob, the chosen one and crown of the Patriarchs (*Bereshith Rabba* 76:1; *Zohar* I:119b), a man of truth whose Torah was perfect truth. Jacob was convinced by what Joseph said, namely that his children were tzaddikim like himself and were not responsible for the sins of their descendants. Even if some individuals within a tribe did wrong in the eyes of Hashem, the entire tribe should not be punished by depriving them of blessings. Happy is the generation in which the greater agrees to what the lesser says.

Above all else, here we see that Joseph only wanted the best for his brothers when he brought his two sons to Jacob. By doing so, he ensured the Jacob would not see or regret what would become of his sons’ descendants. All the tribes would also be blessed, each according to its characteristics, even if there would be sinners among their children in future generations.

Such was the righteousness of Joseph, who hastened to bring his children to Jacob so they could be influenced by him. In this way all the tribes would receive a blessing, even though Joseph’s brothers seemed to have wronged him by selling him as a slave into Egypt. Joseph did not pay any attention to this, for he wanted all his brothers to be

blessed. Hence he brought his sons before Jacob, all while knowing that sinners would arise from them many years later.

Since it was because of Joseph that all the tribes were blessed, after the death of their father his brothers said to him: “*We are your slaves*” (*Genesis 50:18*) – for without you, we would not have received blessings from our father. From here we must all learn a lesson for life: We are not to look at what might happen in the future, but instead we must strive to bless people and judge them according to the present time.

The Existence of the Torah and the Jewish People Depends on Unity

It is written, “*Jacob called for his sons and said: ‘Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father’*” (*Genesis 49:1-2*).

Why did Jacob summon his sons twice by saying “*assemble yourselves*” and “*gather yourselves*”? From the fact that they assembled themselves, had they not gathered themselves? Our Sages say that Jacob wanted to reveal the end time to them, but the Shechinah left him (*Pesachim 56a*). Why did he want to reveal it to them before leaving this world? Furthermore, if he had actually revealed the end time to them, they would have become discouraged on account of the long exile that awaited them, and they would not have been motivated to repent and regret their deeds, since they would have known when the exile ends.

It seems that when the Sages said that Jacob wanted to reveal the end to them, they did not mean that he wanted to tell them when Mashiach would arrive. This is because no man knows the time of the Final Redemption, and he especially cannot reveal it to others, as the Sages have said: “*Three come unawares: Mashiach, an object that is found, and a scorpion*” (*Sanhedrin 97a*). What Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons, however, was how to hasten the Final Redemption, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has promised that it would come quickly if Israel is worthy of it, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said concerning the verse, “*I the L-RD will hasten it in its time*” (*Isaiah 60:22*): “*If they are worthy, ‘I will hasten it. If not, [Mashiach will come] in its time’*” (*Sanhedrin 98a*). Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons how they could hasten the arrival of the redeemer, and how they could lighten the yoke of slavery.

He began by saying, “*Assemble yourselves*,” a reference to unity, which shows us that they were dispersed and that Jacob assembled them through Ruach HaKodesh. Jacob taught his sons that the existence of the Jewish people in exile among the nations depends on unity, which is why he said “*assemble yourselves*” and “*gather yourselves*.¹” It was for this reason that he summoned them, and it was also why he gathered them together by Ruach HaKodesh – in order to show them that unity was the main thing, and that without unity we have nothing. When Jews are united, no nation can harm them, in which case the Final Redemption can take place, as our Sages state in the Midrash (*Tanhuma, Nitzavim 1*). We also find that the Jewish people will not be delivered

before they unite into a single group, as it is written: “*In those days and in that time – the word of the L-RD – the Children of Israel will come, they together with the children of Judah*” (*Jeremiah 50:4*). It is when they come together as one that they can welcome the Shechinah.

This is why Jacob gathered his sons before dying. He said to them: “*My children, I fear that you will argue with one another after my death and that you will never escape enslavement.*” He therefore assembled them, taught them the mitzvah of loving one’s brother, and gathered them together with the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is the One and only G-d. Together they replied, “*Just as there is but One in your heart, there is but One in our heart,*” as our Sages have said.

The Children of Israel were reduced to slavery in Egypt only after they lost this unity. When Moses saw the Children of Israel fighting among themselves, he said: “*Surely the thing is known*” (*Exodus 2:14*). Here the Sages cite Rabbi Alexandri as saying: “*Moses was thinking in his heart, ‘How has Israel sinned, such that they are more enslaved than all the nations?’ When he heard these words, he said: ‘Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for salvation?’ Hence ‘Surely the thing is known’ – now I know the cause of their enslavement*” (*Shemot Rabba 1:30*). The Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt only when unity existed among them, as we shall explain.

What did Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, do to the Children of Israel? He appointed taskmasters to oppress them, as it is written: “*The foremen of the Children of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had appointed over them, were beaten*” (*Exodus 5:14*). I say that something is concealed in these words, for instead of placing Egyptian foremen over the Children of Israel, Pharaoh placed Jewish foremen over them. This requires an explanation.

Pharaoh was the great enemy of the Jewish people, for he was the one who made them breach the 49 gates of impurity. He knew that as long as the Children of Israel were united, they could not be reduced to slavery, in which case it would not be long before they left Egypt. Hence Pharaoh resorted to trickery by appointing Jewish foremen to supervise the work, which would result in disputes and fighting among them, leading to a lack of unity. These Jewish foremen realized what Pharaoh wanted to do, and therefore they did not disrupt the unity that existed among them. As Scripture tells us, “*The foremen of the Children of Israel...were beaten*.” Although the Egyptian taskmasters struck the Jewish foremen because the Children of Israel had not completed their work, the Jewish foremen did not strike their own brothers in return. Hence by the merit of having protected their unity, the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt. Further on we read that Hashem told Moses, “*Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and with a strong hand will he drive them from his land*” (*Exodus 6:1*).

Although they did not have the Torah and mitzvot, the Children of Israel were able to leave Egypt on account of the unity that reigned among them. The Sages say,

“The generation of Ahab all worshipped idols. Yet owing to the fact that there were no informers among them, they would go out to war and emerge victorious” (*Vayikra Rabba* 26:2). Concerning the generation that left Egypt, the Sages say that they were delivered because there were no informers among them. Jethro as well, when he wanted to leave Midian in order to venture into the desert to receive the Torah of Moses, heard that the Children of Israel were united. The verse states, *“Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that G-d did to Moses and to Israel His people”* (*Exodus* 18:1). Here our Sages say: *“What news did he hear that he came and became a convert? Rabbi Yehoshua said, ‘He heard of the battle with the Amalekites’”* (*Zevachim* 116a). According to our Sages, when the Children of Israel were standing by the sea, it immediately split when Nachshon the son of Amminadav jumped into it (*Sotah* 37a). In other words, Nachshon sacrificed himself for the community, and by the merit of his love for Israel, the sea split. Hence it only split for the Children of Israel when they were united. This is precisely the news that Jethro heard – that Nachshon had been ready to give his life for the Jewish people. Now when Jews demonstrate love for one another, the Holy One, blessed be He, performs miracles for them, which is why the sea split. On the other hand, Jethro also heard something negative on their account. He heard about the war with Amalek, who came and attacked the Children of Israel because there was no unity among them. The Midrash (*Tanhuma, Yitro* 5) states that Amalek heard their quarreling and attacked them. Jethro realized that when the Children of Israel are united, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His Shechinah dwell among them and performs miracles for them. Therefore perhaps when they are not united, and when they quarrel with one another, He brings them Amalek and causes destruction. Hence Jethro left Midian in order to join them, in order for their unity to be complete. The same evil inclination that existed at the time of the Temple, the inclination geared at created division among people, is still with us, and it constantly tries to sow discord in our hearts and baseless hatred among Jews. Now when the evil inclination wants to sow discord among the Jewish people, it begins by introducing pride in people’s hearts. It stresses the importance of a person in his own eyes, while at the same time lowering his opinion of others, until finally a dispute arises between people and their unity is shattered.

How to Hasten the Final Redemption

It is written, *“Jacob called for his sons and said: ‘Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father’”* (*Genesis* 49:1-2). We need to ask why Jacob summoned his sons twice by saying “assemble yourselves” and “gather yourselves.” From the fact that they assembled themselves, they had obviously gathered themselves!

Our Sages say that Jacob wanted to reveal the end times to them, but the Shechinah left him (*Pesachim* 56a). Why did Jacob want to reveal it to them before leaving this world? Not only that, but if he had actually revealed the end times to them, they would

have become discouraged on account of the long exile that awaited them. They would not have made an effort to repent and regret their deeds, since they would have known when the exile ends!

It seems that when the Sages said that Jacob wanted to reveal the end to them, they did not mean that he wanted to tell them when Mashiach would arrive. This is because no one can know the time of the Final Redemption, and he certainly cannot reveal it to others, as the Sages have said: "*Three come unawares: Mashiach, an object that is found, and a scorpion*" (*Sanhedrin 97a*).

What Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons, however, was how to hasten the Final Redemption, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has promised that the redeemer will come quickly if Israel is worthy of it. Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons how they could hasten the arrival of the redeemer, and how they could lighten the yoke of slavery.

He began by saying, "*Assemble yourselves*" – meaning "*unify yourselves*," as the Aggadah states: "*This teaches that they were scattered, and he [Jacob] assembled them by means of Ruach HaKodesh*" (*Bereshith Rabba 98:3*). Jacob taught his sons that the entire existence of the Jewish people in exile among the nations depends on unity, which is why he said "*assemble yourselves*" and "*gather yourselves*." In other words, he summoned them for that very reason. He therefore gathered them together through Ruach HaKodesh in order to teach them that unity is the main thing, and that without unity we have nothing.

There is But One in Our Heart

When the Jewish people are united, no nation in the world can harm them, and the Final Redemption can then take place. This is why Jacob assembled his sons before leaving this world, lest they quarrel with one another after his death and never escape slavery.

It is why he assembled and taught them about loving one's brother. He united them with the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is the One and only G-d. Together they replied, "*Just as there is but One in your heart, there is but One in our heart.*"

The Children of Israel were reduced to slavery in Egypt only after their unity was disrupted. When Moses saw the Children of Israel fighting among themselves, he said: "*Surely the thing is known*" (*Exodus 2:14*). Here the Midrash cites Rabbi Alexandri as saying: "*Moses was thinking in his heart, 'How has Israel sinned, such that they are more enslaved than all the nations?' When he heard these words, he said: 'Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for deliverance?' Hence, 'Surely the thing is known' – now I know the cause of their enslavement*" (*Shemot Rabba 1:30*). Thus the Children of Israel were only delivered from Egypt when they were united.

What did Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, do to the Children of Israel? He appointed taskmasters to oppress them. I say that something is concealed in these words, for instead of placing Egyptian taskmasters over the Children of Israel, Pharaoh placed their own foremen over them. This requires an explanation.

Pharaoh, the great enemy of the Jewish people, was the one who made them breach the 49 gates of impurity. He knew that as long as the Children of Israel were united, he could not enslave them, in which case it would not be long before they left Egypt. Hence Pharaoh resorted to trickery by appointing foremen from among their own people to supervise their work, which would result in disputes and infighting, and a lack of unity among them.

However these Jewish foremen understood what Pharaoh wanted to do, and they did not disrupt the unity that existed among them. Scripture tells us, “*The foremen of the Children of Israel...were beaten.*” That is, the Egyptian taskmasters struck the Jewish foremen because the Children of Israel had not completed their work, but the Jewish foremen did not strike their own brothers in return so they could quickly finish their work. Thus by the merit of having safeguarded their unity, the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt.

Although they did not possess Torah and mitzvot, the Children of Israel were able to leave Egypt on account of their unity. The Sages have said, “*The generation of Ahab all worshipped idols. Yet owing to the fact that there were no informers among them, they would go out to war and emerge victorious*” (*Vayikra Rabba* 26:2). Concerning the generation that left Egypt, the Sages say that they were delivered because there were no informers among them.

What Did He Hear?

Jethro as well, when he wanted to leave Midian and venture into the desert to receive the Torah of Moses, heard that the Children of Israel were united. The verse states, “*Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that G-d did to Moses and to Israel His people*” (*Exodus* 18:1). Here our Sages say, “*What news did he hear that he came and became a convert? Rabbi Yehoshua said, 'He heard of the battle with Amalek'*” (*Zevachim* 116a).

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said, namely that when the Children of Israel were by the sea, it immediately split when Nachshon the son of Amminadav jumped into it (*Sotah* 37a). That is, Nachshon sacrificed himself for the community, and the sea split by the merit of his love for Israel. Hence it only split before the Children of Israel when they were united. This is what Jethro had heard. When Jews demonstrate love for one another, then the Holy One, blessed be He, performs miracles for them, which is why the sea split before them.

The Heritage of the Righteous Joseph

It is written, “*Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am about to die, but G-d will surely visit you and bring you out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob'*” (*Bereshith* 50:24). In the Midrash the Sages say, “*As Joseph was about to leave this world, he summoned his sons and said to them: 'I am leaving this world, and I want to share my entire fortune with you.' At that point he took out seven selayim [coins] from his bosom.*”

This is absolutely amazing, for the Gemara states: “*Joseph hid three treasures in Egypt: One was revealed to Korach, one to Antoninus the son of Severus, and the third is stored up for the tzaddikim in the future*” (*Pesachim 119a*). Therefore what reason did Joseph have to bequeath but seven selayim to his sons?

Hashem Grants Success to Those Who Fear Him

The Sages have taught, “*At the time of a man’s passing from this world, neither silver, gold, precious stones, nor pearls accompany him, but only Torah [learning] and good deeds, as it is stated: ‘It will guide you when you walk, it will watch over you when you lie down, and it shall speak to you when you awake’ [Mishlei 6:22]. ‘It will guide you when you walk’ – in this world; ‘it will watch over you when you lie down’ – in the grave; ‘and it shall speak to you when you awake’ – in the World to Come*” (*Pirkei Avot 6:9*).

On the verse, “*Joseph gathered up all the money*” (*Bereshith 47:14*), our teacher the Ramban explains: “*Scripture relates this and goes on to complete the subject in this entire section in order to demonstrate Joseph’s greatness in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.... [It shows] that he was a faithful man because he brought all the money into Pharaoh’s house and did not accumulate for himself treasures of money and secret hiding places for wealth in the land of Egypt, nor did he send it to Canaan. Instead, he gave all the money to the king who trusted him, and he purchased land for him and even the bodies of the Egyptians. In doing so, he found favor among the people, for it is G-d Who causes those who fear Him to prosper.*”

Consequently, why did Joseph not take anything from among all this wealth for himself or his children? It is because he knew that a person does not come into this world for money, but rather to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. When he leaves this world, he takes none of the wealth that he accumulated in life. On the verse, “*Neither has he power over the day of death*” (*Kohelet 8:8*), the Sages teach: “*A man cannot say to the Angel of Death, ‘Wait for me until I settle my accounts, and then I will come’*” (*Kohelet Rabba 8:11*). This is why Joseph did not hide any of this money, but transferred it to Pharaoh and his kingdom. Joseph did all this because he wanted to teach his children the tremendous importance of not working to earn money, but rather to acquire mitzvot and good deeds, which we will bring with us in the World to Come.

We can now understand why Joseph bequeathed such a small amount as seven selayim to his sons: Seven corresponds to the seventy years of man’s life, and the selayim are a reminder not to forget that the fate of all men is to be buried under a *sela* (stone), taking nothing with them but mitzvot and good deeds. Before these, the *sela* cannot resist, as it is written: “*Like a hammer that breaks the rock (sela) in pieces*” (*Jeremiah 23:29*). Even if a man were to possess all the silver and gold in the world, they would be unable to resist the stone or death, and once a person dies, his wealth will go to others.

He Did Not Grow Proud

Furthermore, Joseph did not grow proud despite being one of the ten men who ruled from one end of the world to the other. As the Sages say, “*The third king was Joseph, who ruled from one end of the world to the other, as it is said: ‘All the earth came to Egypt to Joseph’ [Bereshith 41:57]. It is not written ‘came from Egypt’ but ‘came to Egypt,’ for they brought their tribute and their gifts to Joseph in order to purchase [grain]. For 40 years he was second to the king, and for 40 years he was king alone, as it is said: ‘A new king arose over Egypt’ [Shemot 1:8]”* (Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 10). The Sages have also taught, “*Joseph reigned from one end of the earth to the other, as it is written: ‘Joseph was the governor over the land; he was the one selling to all the peoples of the earth’ [Bereshith 42:6]*” (Midrash Asseret Melachim).

Whatever the case, Joseph’s heart did not grow proud, nor did he feel superior to his brothers because he was a ruler. He knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had sent him into this world in order to save Israel, as he himself said: “*For G-d sent me ahead of you to be a provider*” (Bereshith 45:5). He also said, “*It was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler throughout the entire land of Egypt. Hurry, go up to my father and say to him: ‘So says your son Joseph: G-d has made me master of all Egypt’*” (vv. 8-9). He was careful to say, “*G-d has made me*” in order to tell his brothers that it was for this reason that his soul descended into this world. He wanted them to know that he had not grown proud as a result of becoming a ruler, thereby fulfilling the words: “*So that his heart does not feel superior to his brothers*” (Devarim 17:20). After the death of their father Jacob, Joseph also told them: “*Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good, in order to do as this day, to keep a numerous people alive*” (Bereshith 50:20). Targum Yonatan translates this to mean that as long as Jacob was alive, his sons ate with him and sat before him according to age. Joseph sat at the head of them all, for that is what Jacob wanted. Now that their father was dead, and despite the fact that the brothers asked Joseph to sit at the head of the table, he did not accept. Instead, he did not eat with his brothers out of respect for them. They, however, believed that it was because he detested them. Joseph therefore told them, “*Not so. I cannot take a seat at the head of the table, and I have no desire to show that I am greater than you. I was only made a ruler over you to keep a numerous people alive.*”

Since royalty did not go to his head, he wanted to teach this to his sons. Furthermore, he kept none of the money that he had collected for Pharaoh. Instead he brought it all to Pharaoh in order to teach us that gold, silver, and precious stones do not accompany man when he leaves this world, but only Torah study and good deeds.

The Final Redemption Will Come Through Jewish Unity and Love

Concerning the verse found in this week's parsha, "*Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather yourselves together, and I will tell you what will happen at the end of days'*" (*Bereshith 49:1*), the Sages have explained: "*Jacob wished to reveal the end of days to his sons, at which point the Shechinah left him*" (*Pesachim 56a*).

Before leaving this world, Jacob revealed to his sons the secret of the Jewish people's existence in exile among the nations. It consists of complete unity and boundless love among Jews. This is the secret of the Final Redemption, for when Jews will be united and connected to one another, they will merit to emerge from exile. Yet as long as they are divided and quarrel with one another, they will not be rescued. They were not driven into slavery in Egypt until they quarreled among themselves, and the informers among them – Dathan and Abiram – rose up against one another. At that point, Moshe immediately realized that "*surely the thing is known*" (*Shemot 2:14*), namely the reason for their enslavement in Egypt.

The Children of Israel were not rescued from Egypt before there was unity and a sense of brotherhood among them. Although the Egyptians struck the Jewish foremen, they in turn did not strike their brothers. Also, the Sea of Reeds did not split before them until Nachshon ben Amminadav demonstrated selfless love by jumping into the sea. On the other hand, Amalek could not do anything against the Children of Israel until disputes arose among them, and we know that the Temple was destroyed only on account of baseless hatred.

Loving Your Fellow Whatever May Happen

The Ramban explains the verse, "*You shall love l'rei'acha [literally: to your fellow] as yourself*" (*Vayikra 19:18*) by stating: "[*This*] Torah mitzvah means that one is to love one's fellow in all circumstances, just as one loves all good things for oneself. It is possible that since it does not say, '*you shall love et rei'acha [your fellow] as yourself*', but instead it likened them in the term *l'rei'acha* [*to your fellow*] – just as it states with reference to the proselyte, '*You shall love lo [to him] as yourself*' [*ibid. 19:34*] – it means to equate the love of both in his mind."

From these words, we learn that the great power of the mitzvah of loving one's fellow resides in not growing proud over others. When the evil inclination wants to introduce strife among Jews, it starts by infusing pride into the heart of one Jew against another, increasing a person's importance in his own eyes. At the same time, it diminishes the importance of others in his eyes, until finally a dispute arises among them and unity suffers as a result.

The holy Torah states, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*." It uses the term *l'rei'acha* in order to tell us that even when your fellow acts with evil (*ra*) towards you, you must still love him. Even when you see that he does not love you, you must still love him, as the Ramban makes clear: You must love your fellow in all circumstances, just as you love yourself. If you detest your fellow, there will never be peace among you, and the foundation upon which the Torah rests will collapse.

Yet even in regards to humility, we must be careful not to let the evil inclination lead us into false humility, which is nothing but pride disguised as humility. Sometimes the evil inclination confuses a person's perception and gives him the impression of great humility, just as when the Children of Israel said: "*Is Hashem with us or not?*" (*Shemot 17:7*). The evil inclination tells man, "*Do you deserve Hashem's Presence dwelling in you? You're so insignificant! You were created from a putrid drop, and Hashem certainly doesn't pay attention to your deeds!*"

In this way, the evil inclination tries to entice a person and turn him away from G-d. However if he were to reflect upon the fact that his soul was taken from beneath the Throne of Glory, and that it is a Divine spark, he would have no doubts that Hashem will indeed make His Presence dwell in him.

On the verse, "*Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them*" (*Shemot 25:8*), the commentators (*Rabbeinu Ephraim*) notes that it says "*among them*," meaning among each of them. Each person is a miniature Sanctuary in which Hashem makes His Shechinah dwell. In other words, He makes it dwell in the heart of a person who has prepared himself for it. The evil inclination, however, tries to infuse a false sense of humility in man's heart ("*Is Hashem with us or not?*").

The term *yesh* ("there is") can be divided into two parts: *yud-hei* and *shin*. The first part (*yud-hei*) relates to Hashem, and Y-H has the same numerical value as the term *ga'avah* ("pride"). This tells us that pride only befits G-d, as it is written: "*Hashem has reigned; He has donned grandeur*" (*Tehillim 93:1*). The second part (*shin*) has the same numerical value as the term *kar* ("cold"), which relates to the expression *asher karcha baderech* (*Devarim 25:18*), an allusion to the cold introduced by Amalek. Now the evil inclination is Amalek, which infuses man's heart with resentment against his fellow. How? Through a false sense of humility, as in the expression: "*Is Hashem with us or not?*" In this way, a person's service of Hashem is cooled and he dons the garment of the King – pride – which befits Hashem alone. Now one who wears the garment of a king is liable to death, as the Midrash states: If someone dons the coat of a human king, can he live? How much less if he dons the coat of the King of kings (*Midrash cited in Ma'ilot HaMiddot, Middah 5*).

Thus the Aggadah states, "*Once He gave them everything they needed, they began to ask: 'Is Hashem among us or not?' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'You have doubted Me? By your life, I shall make you sense My Presence: The dog will come and bit you.'* What does this refer to? To Amalek, as it is written: '*And Amalek came'*' [*Shemot 17:8*]" (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 3:1*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "*For the hand is on the Throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation*" (*Shemot 17:16*). Since the Torah uses the name Y-H, which as we have said alludes to pride, Amalek (the evil inclination) constantly seeks to infuse pride into man under the guise of humility; that is: "*Is Hashem with us or not?*" This is why the war against Amalek is from generation to generation, for as long as the Satan has not been destroyed, there

is still a danger that a person will fall into its trap. Therefore Hashem fights against Amalek through the Name Y-H, which alludes to pride, one thing corresponding to the other.

By the hidden pride which the evil inclination tries to infuse in man, a person will neglect the mitzvah of loving his fellow as himself. This, as we have said, is the foundation of the entire Torah, for personal honor is all important in a person's eyes.

Judah is a Young Lion

It is written, “*Judah, your brothers shall acknowledge you. Your hand will be at the nape of your enemies; your father’s sons will prostrate themselves before you. Judah is a young lion; from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself.... The scepter shall not depart from Judah*” (*Bereshith 49:8-10*).

This blessing, which Jacob bestowed upon his son Judah, gave him an extraordinary gift: The crown of royalty for all the generations. In fact it was so great, says the Ramban on this verse, that despite their piety, the Hasmoneans [descendants of the tribe of Levi] were punished in this regard by having no further male descendants. In fact anyone who said, “*I come from the house of the Hasmoneans,*” was necessarily a slave, all because they had assumed the crown of royalty, since it belonged to the tribe of Judah alone.

Why is this so? Why does royalty belong to Judah alone? Rashi explains, “*From the prey – from what I suspected you of regarding: ‘Joseph has surely been torn to pieces,’ [namely that] ‘A wild beast devoured him’*” [*Bereshith 37:33*], where he was referring to Judah, who is compared to a lion; you elevated yourself – you elevated yourself [from murder] and said, ‘*What profit is there if we kill our brother?*’ [*ibid. 37:26*]. Likewise when Tamar was sentenced to death, he confessed: ‘*She is more righteous than I*’ [*ibid. 38:26*].”

The Kli Yakar says, “*Judah, your brothers shall acknowledge you – because you, Judah, recognized the truth in regards to Tamar, as the name Judah indicates. Thus measure for measure, your brothers will acknowledge that royalty belongs to you. Because you were not ashamed to acknowledge the truth, your brothers will not be ashamed to acknowledge that in truth royalty belongs to you alone.*”

He adds, “*Judah is a young lion – although he is compared to a lion, which usually tears its prey, you elevated yourself from your prey, my son. You did not agree that Joseph should be torn, but you elevated yourself; you looked higher than did your brothers, as it is said: ‘Judah descended from his brothers’*” [*Bereshith 38:1*]. This means that he separated himself from them, not wanting to be part of their group.”

Thus Judah merited, through his actions, to save Joseph from death. Furthermore, by saying “*she is more righteous than I,*” he merited royalty, something that all his brothers acknowledged. We need to understand what all this means.

Once Judah acknowledged that “*she is more righteous than I,*” he attained an impressive level, the level of one who acknowledges the truth. Judah did this despite the fact that he was publicly humiliated, for he made this admission before the court, before all Israel, and with no hesitation. Yet why did this earn him the crown of royalty? Furthermore, how could he be promised the crown for all the generations? How can we say that every king should descend from the tribe of Judah? Let the individual who is worthy of being a king reign! It is clear that this was not done by mistake, but deliberately, and it is incumbent upon us to understand why.

In addition, Jacob sent Judah ahead of him before descending to Egypt, as the verse states: “*He sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to direct him to Goshen*” (*Bereshith* 46:28). The Sages cite Rabbi Nechemia in explaining, “*To build a yeshiva for him where he could teach Torah, and where the tribes could read Torah*” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 152). Why did Jacob choose Judah for this task? If Jacob yearned for Torah, he should have sent Issachar, since from among all his sons, Issachar possessed knowledge of the times and received the blessing of Torah. In that case, why send Judah on this mission?

It seems that royalty is not what we think it is. Indeed, royalty represents an extremely lofty level, and we have to recite a special blessing upon seeing a king. We normally think that a king is someone who rules over people, as it is written: “*There is no king without a people.*” We should realize, however, that a true king is not someone who simply possesses a lofty outer status, but a lofty inner status as well, someone with tremendous spiritual greatness. A king is a man who knows how to control himself, who can muster his strength and control his passions. A true king is a man whose every deed is weighed and measured with the greatest of care.

On the passage, “*For behold, the kings assembled; they came together. They saw and were astounded. They were stunned and fled in haste. Trembling gripped them there, pangs like a woman in travail*” (*Tehillim* 48:5-7), the Sages have said: “*For behold, the kings assembled – this alludes to Judah and Joseph; they came [avru] together – each being filled with wrath [evra] for one another. They saw and were astounded – ‘The men were astounded with one another’ [Bereshith 43:33]. They were dismayed and fled in haste – ‘His brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence’ [Bereshith 45:3]. Trembling gripped them there, pangs like a woman in travail – this alludes to the tribal fathers, who exclaimed: ‘When kings contend with one another; what has it to do with us? Let a king to contend with a king!’*” (*Bereshith Rabba* 93:2).

The tribal fathers saw Joseph and Judah contending with one another – one wept and the other wept, one spoke harshly and the other spoke harshly – and the brothers were dismayed. They did not see the viceroy of Egypt speaking to their brother, their own flesh and blood, but rather “*kings contend[ing] with one another*.” That said, why did trembling grip them?

The answer is that when the brothers witnessed this exchange, this dispute, they really saw “*kings*,” meaning that they witnessed the essence of kingship. They

noticed that each word was weighed, that none of them lost their composure, and that everything which they said was measured. Upon seeing such self-control, they were gripped with trembling, recognizing that these were “*kings contend[ing] with one another.*” Although they did not realize that the viceroy standing before them was their brother Joseph, they could not ignore such majestic conduct.

In reflecting upon this, we see that Judah’s behavior up to that point proved that no one merited royalty as much as him. When the brothers decided to kill Joseph, he did not yield to their demands. The majority could not impose their view on Judah, for whom such a deed was clearly wrong. Hence despite the difficulty, he turned his back on them – “*from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself*” – until they finally agreed with him. The very same character trait appears in the incident with Tamar: Judah had complete control over what he said, and he acknowledged the truth despite the great difficulty involved. Although he risked losing his status in the eyes of the people, he was not afraid. Hence he could say, “*She is more righteous than I.*”

Is there a king greater than this? Is there a man who controls himself more than Judah?

Neither society as a whole, nor the views of individuals could influence Judah! From the moment he decided that he should do something, that is what he did!

We now fully understand why Jacob made Judah responsible for establishing a yeshiva. It was because, on the one hand, Judah possessed the characteristic required to learn Torah and grow spiritually – the ability to acknowledge the truth – something that is crucial in the Beit HaMidrash. In fact denying the truth and refusing to change viewpoints is at the heart of all tendencies to veer off the path. A person who fails to recognize the truth will not grow in Torah or spirituality, for he believes that he is perfect as is. This will prevent him from acquiring any virtues, and he will not merit the truth of the Torah. It was not just for this reason, however, that Jacob sent Judah. It was also because Judah was, by his very nature, a king! He ruled over himself, over his desires and wants, and such a man is worthy of establishing a yeshiva. He is worthy of leading and guiding the people, worthy of standing at the head of the people and serving as an example for them. True, while living in the house of Potiphar and successfully confronting numerous trials, Joseph also became worthy of royalty, just as his brothers saw in Egypt even before recognizing him. However Joseph did not reach the same level as Judah, the level of, “*She is more righteous than I.*”

The Patriarch’s Final Days

It is written, “*The days approached for Israel to die*” (*Bereshith 47:29*). The Rishonim and Acharonim have asked how Jacob knew that he was about to die. The Ramban explains this verse in the following way: “*When the days approached for Israel to die, which was during the last year of his life, he summoned his son Joseph. The purport of this is that he felt exhaustion and undue weakness in himself, though he was not sick.*

Rather, he knew that he would not live much longer, and therefore he called his son Joseph. Now after Joseph returned to Egypt, [Jacob] became ill, whereupon Joseph was informed, and he came before him with his two sons so that he would bless them. In a similar sense is the verse, ‘Now the days of David drew near, that he should die’ [I Kings 2:1], and there it says: ‘I am going the way of all the earth’ [v.2].”

He was therefore aware of his condition, as Rabbeinu Bechaye writes. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider the view of the Ohr HaChaim, who offers an entirely different explanation: “*Jacob felt certain things that are perceived before death. In fact our Sages have said that we lose our tzelem Elokim [Divine image] 30 days before death (Zohar I:217b). The story of Shimon bar Yochai, who saw that the face of Rabbi Itzchak no longer reflected the tzelem Elokim, is also told there. In general, this knowledge is not accessible to man, only to the tzaddikim who sense and perceive all things spiritual.*”

The Ohr HaChaim raises a difficulty in regards to the words of this verse: “*The days approached.*” Is “approached” the correct term to use when speaking about days? He responds by saying, “*We must understand this in light of the Arizal’s concept, developed in his book Kehilat Yaakov.*” That is, souls are divided into several sparks that are distributed among different reincarnations. The number of sparks corresponds to the number of days in a person’s life. For days in which he fulfills mitzvot, his spark corresponding to that day is rectified. Alternatively, the days in which a person does not fulfill mitzvot, his spark corresponding to that day remains defective. The Ohr HaChaim concludes by saying, “*This passage will enlighten an intelligent man in his understanding of the texts.*”

Before the Celestial Court Each Night

Let us explain these words. Nighttime is when people go to sleep and rest from the work of the day. Nevertheless, only the body sleeps. The soul, which is a Divine spark, does not rest. It goes to give an accounting for all its deeds of that day. In fact in the morning we recite: “*I give thanks to You, living and eternal King, that You have restored my soul to me,*” for in the morning, Hashem in His great compassion returns our soul to us. When it is before the Celestial Court, the deeds which a person did during that day are examined. If he is worthy – if he has put an effort into learning Torah, fulfilling mitzvot, and performing good deeds – then fortunate is he and fortunate is his lot, meaning that the spark corresponding to that day will ascend towards its source in Heaven. On the other hand, if he did not act as such, a day will be missing from his soul. Thus upon returning to this world, his soul will be unable to rectify what it could have rectified on that day, which will be lost. Hence our Sages instituted that if we have not completed our Torah learning for a given day, we should make an effort to complete it before going to bed, for on the following day we will have another session to complete.

Such was the level of our forefathers, who filled their days and took advantage of each of them by using their potential to the fullest. Hence in their regard, it is said that

baim bayamim (*literally, “they came with days”*). They took full advantage of each and every day, as well as the spark belonging to it. They were all filled and rectified, according to their objective and their hidden meaning.

A Tanna once said: “*Do not say, ‘When I have free time, I will study,’ for perhaps you will never have free time*” (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*). In fact if we intend to serve our Creator “when we have time,” we are liable to lose that opportunity and never study, for that day will be lost and the following day will be dedicated to another mission. The spark of that day will be extinguished, giving way to the following day’s spark, new and specific to that day.

Eternal Life in an Instant

We can therefore understand what our Sages affirmed in several places throughout the Talmud, as well as in the midrashim: “*Where penitents stand, even perfect tzaddikim cannot stand.*” This is also mentioned in the Gemara: “*One can acquire eternal life in an instant*” (*Avodah Zarah 10b*). In fact a person who does teshuvah can instantly “recapture” all the days that he missed. In one fell swoop, he can rectify all the sparks of days gone by, a concept that does not even exist for complete tzaddikim. The latter, who save little by little in order to earn much, rectify sparks and elevate them day after day, hour after hour.

In reflecting upon this further, we realize that this is precisely why the first generations lived much longer lives. Concerning this subject, the Ohr HaChaim wrote: “*To the complaint of men, ‘What has G-d done to us?’ What a great change has occurred in our generations and the preceding ones! Adam lived 930 years, and his children and grandchildren lived 800 and 700 years. Yet in our days, we live a maximum of 100 years. The answer jumps out at us.*” In the past, they were capable of rectifying and filling their days by achieving the potential contained in each of them. They were therefore given long lives. Yet because of the great decline of the generations, the wellsprings of strength have been exhausted. If we were to live such long lives, we would transform this advantage into a loss, for we would damage the days instead of improving them. G-d therefore reduced the length of our lives so we could fulfill the task that we have been given and rectify our days.

He himself explained this concept with a parable: “*It is like a king who distributes beautiful stones to craftsmen so they can work them into jewels with which to make beautiful objects, such as royal treasures. The king announces that anyone who devotes himself to this task with zeal and effort, as he has decreed, will be rewarded with these beautiful stones as ornaments. He therefore gives each craftsman a large number of stones: To one he gives 300,000, to another he gives 350,000, and so on. He then sets an allotted time for each task, one day for each stone, and announces that they will be retrieved at a set date. Once that time elapsed, the king summoned all his craftsmen, and they gathered before him with the stones entrusted to them. However they had not worked or adorned these stones. On the contrary, they had become tarnished and deteriorated while in their possession, meaning that they were now ruined! The king*

*became furious with all these craftsmen, and he replaced them with their own children. He showed them the punishment that their fathers had received, and warned them not to do the same. He then continued to reign, all while diminishing the workload of these craftsmen. For their own good, he gave them no more than 30,000 to 40,000 stones each, hoping that they would pay attention to their task, which was now considerably lighter. The same applies to Hashem, the King of Israel: He distributes these stones to us – namely souls, known as “precious stones” – and we have been given the tools of Torah and mitzvot. By explaining and fulfilling them as we should, by persistently doing good and distancing ourselves from evil (*Zohar I:82*), we will confer tremendous value upon our soul, which will shine with the light of the Torah and enable us to prepare a throne for it. This corresponds to the precious objects mentioned in the parable, and it too will acquire a royal crown. Hashem thus began by entrusting a heavy task to the first generations by granting them lofty souls comprised of many parts. Each of them corresponded to a day of their life. For example, He gave Adam more than 300,000 parts [which actually corresponds to the number of days that he lived (*930 years*)], and more or less for all those who lived during the first generations. Yet when they began to grow corrupt, Hashem became angry with them and replaced them with Noah and his sons. From then on, He diminished the heavy load that He gave to them. In this way, their end would be closer and they would tremble at the thought of that moment. In seeing that people were not worthy enough, He further reduced the length of their lives. Thus because of our sins, today we live about 70 years, which is around 25,000 days. Nevertheless, many of our fellow Jews do not correctly understand the simple task that is incumbent upon us.”*

At the end of this exposition, he writes: “*The meaning of the verse, ‘The days approached for Israel to die’ now becomes clear to us. The sparks of his soul, which ascended each day, were approaching the Throne of Glory, as the verse states: ‘You send forth Your breath,’ this denoting the concept of death. Jacob sensed that the time for perfection had come, and he summoned his son Joseph.*”

In fact, each day a certain spark from Jacob’s soul ascended to Heaven and was rectified there. It remained hidden beneath the Celestial Throne, where the likeness of Jacob is found. Hence at the end of his days, he experienced fatigue. He felt that his strength was leaving him, and that the sparks of his soul had achieved their mission and role on earth.

This is a profound lesson that must infuse us at the deepest of levels: Each day given to us by the Creator is a particular gift to us all. Each day is a precious stone, a true marvel. Now the year is made up of 365 days, meaning 365 dazzling and magnificent precious stones that we are obligated to cut, polish, clean, and make shine. Nevertheless, instead of doing this, we often take these precious stones, these diamonds, and use them for our own needs. We tarnish them by following our own useless pursuits, through slander, gossip, and all kinds of transgressions. It’s horrible what we do to them, for we are destroying a precious stone each day!

How can anyone not be afraid of this? Suppose that we see someone near a river, and in his hand he is carrying a bag filled with diamonds. If we catch him throwing a diamond into the river each day, we will consider him to be insane. Anyone with just a little compassion will go up to him and reprimand him, for he clearly doesn't realize the great value of these diamonds. Nevertheless, we ourselves are standing here each day and throwing away the most precious gift that the Creator has given us – life itself (*"In His goodness He renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation"*). We are discarding it in a disgraceful manner, wasting it and tarnishing it. How is this possible? How can we do something like this?

Sanctifying G-d's Name in this World

It is written, “*And 40 days were fulfilled for him, for so are fulfilled the days of those who are embalmed; and Egypt bewailed him for 70 days. ... So Joseph went to bury his father, and with him went all of Pharaoh's servants, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt.... When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad, they said: 'This is a grievous mourning of Egypt.' Therefore it was named Avel Mizraim, which is across the Jordan”* (Bereshith 50:3-11).

The Children of Israel and the Egyptians mourned Jacob's passing for 40 days, followed by an additional 70 days. Joseph and his brothers left Egypt to accompany their father to his final resting place, and all the elders and dignitaries of Egypt joined them. When the Canaanites witnessed this great mourning, they said: “*This is a grievous mourning for Egypt.*” In fact they described Jacob's passing as an avel mizraim (“mourning of Egypt”).

This is very surprising, since it was a mourning of the Jewish people. Why, then, did the Canaanites describe it as a mourning of Egypt? What sense does that make?

Furthermore, Joseph went up to Canaan accompanied by Pharaoh's entire army, as well as by his princes and servants. Hence they could have easily conquered all the nations living in Canaan. We know that they were not afraid of falling into the hands of these nations, so why did the Jewish people decide to return to Egypt rather than conquer the land of Canaan at that very moment?

I believe that the Canaanites were extremely surprised to see the Children of Israel burying Jacob in Canaan and then returning to Egypt. In fact they knew that the land had been promised to them, meaning that they could have remained and conquered all the nations that dwelled there. Furthermore, Jacob's sons were known as powerful warriors who had crushed all the neighboring peoples when Shechem the son of Hamor defiled their sister Dinah. Nevertheless, all the Children of Israel immediately returned to Egypt after mourning Jacob, rather than to fight the nations of the land, as it is written: “*Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father, after he buried his father*” (Bereshith 50:14).

In my view, the Jewish people knew the terms of the covenant that G-d had made with the Patriarchs: They would first be subjugated and enslaved in Egypt for 400 years prior to leaving with great wealth, receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, and entering the land of Israel. As such, the Children of Israel did not want to hasten their deliverance, and they acted according to Hashem's orders. This is why they quickly returned to Egypt once their mourning ended.

Confronted by the Children of Israel's behavior, the Canaanites described this great mourning as the "*mourning of Egypt*." In fact the Jewish people travelled to Canaan "*as Egyptian citizens*," so to speak, for they still felt connected to Egypt. They did not consider themselves a full-fledged people because they had not yet been delivered or received the Torah. Hence they quickly returned to their work until G-d Himself would deliver them. The actions of the Children of Israel inspired respect for G-d among the nations of the world, who were forced to see that the Jewish people had completely submitted themselves to His commandments. In fact despite being powerful and accompanied by the entire Egyptian army, the Children of Israel yielded to Hashem's decree and returned to Egypt.

The Torah recounts that Avimelech and Phicol, the head of his army, went to see Abraham and Isaac in order to enter into a covenant with them, a covenant that obligated the Children of Israel not to wrong their descendants or harm them in any way. Avimelech's great desire to seal this covenant with Abraham and Isaac demonstrated his faith in G-d's promise. That is, Avimelech was convinced that Hashem would take the Children of Israel out of Egypt and give them the land of Canaan, where he was currently living. Furthermore the Grgashites, one of the seven nations living in Canaan, left the land even before war broke out. In fact they were fully aware that this land was the property of the Jewish people.

As we mentioned earlier, when Jacob died all the princes of Egypt left their homes to accompany the deceased to his final resting place. Though aware that the land of Canaan belonged to the Jewish people, the nations living in the land at the time were not afraid that the Children of Israel would chase them out during their mourning for Jacob. In fact the moment had not yet come for them to inherit the land, for the first part of the covenant had not yet occurred. It was only after their enslavement in Egypt for 400 years that the Jewish people would merit to be delivered and enter the land of Israel.

The Canaanites therefore described the mourning of the Jewish people for Jacob as the "*mourning of Egypt*," for they saw that this nation was still under the trusteeship of Egypt and did not consider itself a full-fledged nation. Hence there was no chance that they would fight the Canaanites and chase them from the land. The Children of Israel's conduct brought admiration and the glorification of G-d's Name in the world; all the other nations were forced to see that the Jewish people yielded before G-d and followed His ways. In fact fulfilling His will is the main thing; only afterwards should we weigh material considerations, in this case the land of Israel.

The Connection Between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

It is written, “*When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad, they said: ‘This is a grievous mourning of Egypt.’ Therefore it was named Avel Mizraim, which is across the Jordan*” (*Bereshith 50:11*).

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I believe that the Canaanites were very surprised to see the Children of Israel burying Jacob in Canaan and then returning to Egypt. In fact they knew that the land had been promised to them, and they could have remained there and conquered all the nations that dwelled in the land. Furthermore, Jacob’s sons were known as powerful warriors who had crushed all the neighboring peoples when Shechem the son of Hamor defiled their sister Dinah.

Nevertheless, all the Children of Israel immediately returned to Egypt after the mourning period had ended, rather than fighting the nations of the land, as it is written: “*Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father, after he buried his father*” (*Bereshith 50:14*).

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Confronted by the Children of Israel’s behavior, the Canaanites described this great mourning as the “*mourning of Egypt*.” In fact the Jewish people travelled to Canaan “*as Egyptian citizens*,” so to speak, for they still felt connected to Egypt. They did not consider themselves a full-fledged people because they had not yet been delivered or received the Torah. Therefore they quickly returned to their work until G-d Himself would deliver them. The actions of the Children of Israel inspired respect for G-d among the nations of the world, who were forced to see that the Jewish people had completely submitted themselves to His commands. In fact despite being powerful and

accompanied by the entire Egyptian army, the Children of Israel yielded to Hashem's decree and returned to Egypt.

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The Canaanites therefore described Israel's mourning for Jacob as the "*mourning of Egypt*," for they saw that this nation was still under the trusteeship of Egypt and did not consider itself a full-fledged people. There was therefore no chance that they would fight the Canaanites and chase them out of their land. Israel's conduct brought admiration and a glorification of G-d's Name in the world; all the other nations were forced to see that the Jewish people yielded before G-d and followed His ways. In fact fulfilling His will is the main thing, and only afterward should we weigh material considerations, in this case the land of Israel.

Shemot

Humility Makes a Person Worthy of All Blessings

When the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Moses to return to Egypt in order to save the Children of Israel, he refused by saying: “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt*” (*Exodus 3:11*). He then added, “*I am not a man of words, neither yesterday nor the day before*” (*ibid. 4:10*), and capped it off by telling Hashem, “*Send, please, through whomever You will send*” (*v.13*).

This refusal by Moses to carry out Hashem’s mission to save the Children of Israel from Egypt needs to be explained, for it is quite surprising. The Jewish people had reached the very limits of spiritual and material subjugation, having endured 210 years of cruel exile. Yet now, when Hashem asks Moses to save them, he distances himself and indeed refuses to undertake this mission, using various pretexts as an excuse! He should have immediately gone to save the Children of Israel. Let us attempt to explain. The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Horev, which is Mount Sinai. It was precisely there – and from within a bush – that He ordered Moses to save the Children of Israel. By doing so, G-d was telling Moses by allusion that the essential purpose of saving them was to bring them to that mountain to receive the Torah, as it is written: “*When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain*” (*Exodus 3:12*). What does “*this mountain*” mean? Since they were used to bowing their heads and being subjugated in Egypt, how much more should they be subjugated to the Holy One, blessed be He, Who would give them the Torah. Only in this way could the Torah endure with them.

This is alluded to by Mount Sinai itself, for it merited the giving of the Torah because it was a lowly mountain. It considered itself unworthy for the Holy One, blessed be He, to reveal Himself on so low a mountain, which is precisely why He chose it. By then Mount Sinai was already sanctified, as it is written: “*Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground*” (*Exodus 3:5*). Its holiness was due to the fact that it completely humbled itself before Hashem. Such is the way of the Torah, for it endures only with those who humble themselves before it (*see Taanith 7a*), and who are called holy. Yet Moses, when he heard the words of Hashem, understood the greatness of Israel’s service of Hashem, for they had merited turning Egypt into an immense tikkun, such as had never been. Now they were about to receive the Torah, a privilege that no man or woman had yet earned. Moses knew very well just how tremendous the giving of the Torah would be, for the descent of Hashem upon Mount Sinai would occur amid thunder and lightening, and the soul of any person who witnessed it would take flight. However Hashem wanted this giving of the Torah to occur through him!

Therefore in his humility, Moses was overcome with fear. He was afraid that he was unworthy of being sent to save the Jewish people, which had reached such a lofty spiritual level because they had merited to elevate the 288 sparks of holiness in Egypt. The Children of Israel were submissive and humble, which was appropriate for receiving the Torah. Moses therefore refused his mission by saying, “*Send, please, through whomever You will send.*” In other words: Aaron is worthier than I, so he should save the Children of Israel from Egypt; the Torah should be given to Israel through him.

Moses’ reaction was due to the fact that he considered himself unworthy of such an honor. This is especially true since the Children of Israel had almost merited to restore the initial holiness of the first man’s soul, and because the time had come for them to be saved. There was therefore no reason to worry that they would breech the fiftieth gate of impurity, for they possessed numerous good middot and positive things, and the tribe of Levi was free to study Torah (*see Shemot Rabba 5:16*). Therefore it was better for someone else to rescue them.

However it was precisely because Moses refused to be sent to Egypt that Hashem loved him even more, for this demonstrated his humility. Although Hashem became angry with him, He still did not punish him because He knew that Moses was still very humble and his intentions were good. That is, Moses had negated himself like a desert, having reached Mount Horev in order to feed his flock (*Exodus 3:1*). He was therefore worthy of feeding Hashem’s flock, the Children of Israel.

It was for another reason that Hashem was upset with Moses. He did not want to reveal the secret ways of Aaron the Priest, who had reached the level of “*when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart*” (*Exodus 4:14*). This is because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not usually reveal the secret ways of the righteous who serve Him. It was only because Moses feared for the honor of his brother that Hashem revealed Aaron’s greatness to him. Not only would Aaron not become jealous of Moses, he would rejoice in his greatness, and not only would he be happy on the outside, he would rejoice and harbor no grudges or feelings of jealousy in the depths of his heart (unlike flatterers, who demonstrate joy on the outside but harbor misgivings within). Indeed, Aaron would be completely happy for Moses, just as Hashem testified of him: “*When he sees you he will rejoice in his heart.*”

Hashem therefore joined Aaron to Moses in order to carry out his brother’s orders and set a tremendous example for the Children of Israel. That is, if Moses’ older brother completely humbled himself before him, then Moses should feel even more humility with regards to him. From here we must all learn a lesson, namely that when someone wants to deal with matters of the community, he should pray at great length for success, not rush out to perform this task immediately. This is especially true if his intention is to become famous and sing his own praises, which is certainly wrong. He must simply present himself in reverent prayer before Hashem and ask for success. He should pray to be a faithful messenger and that nothing bad should happen through him.

Above all, a person must rejoice in the greatness of others. For example, when several people are appointed as leaders or dayanim, sometimes one of them is greater than the others, and he receives more respect from the community. In such a case, the others should guard against feelings of jealousy, and on the contrary they should rejoice in his success. In that case they are all considered his associates. That is, since they rejoice in his success, they are necessarily associated with his work.

Similarly, there are times when great Torah figures are worthy of being dayanim and leading the community, yet people still heed the authority of the local rav. In such cases, if these Torah figures rejoice in the success of the local rav and do not oppose him, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will rest His Shechinah upon them. They will then be considered as associates in the administration of this rav, and their merit will greatly increase.

Leaving Egypt by the Merit of Faith

It is written, “*Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them: ‘The L-RD, the G-d of your forefathers, has appeared to me, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying... “I shall bring you up from the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivvite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”’* They shall heed your voice. You and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The L-RD, the G-d of the Hebrews, happened upon us. And now, please let us go on a three-day journey into the desert, and we shall bring offerings to the L-RD our G-d’” (*Exodus 3:16-18*).

From the order of these words, we learn that G-d commanded Moses to first approach the Children of Israel and tell them that the time for their deliverance had come. If they would not believe him, Hashem gave Moses two signs to show them, after which he was to go to Pharaoh and ask him to release the Children of Israel. If he would not believe Moses’ words, he would once again demonstrate the wonders that he had shown to Israel. Moses did what G-d asked him to do, as we read further on: “*Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the L-RD had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. The people believed, and they heard that the L-RD had remembered the Children of Israel and saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves*” (*Exodus 4:29-31*).

It is also written, “*Afterwards Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, ‘So said the L-RD, the G-d of Israel: Send out My people, that they may celebrate for Me in the desert’”* (*ibid. 5:1*). I have seen an objection raised in a certain book, namely why G-d told Moses to first go to the Children of Israel and perform miracles before them, and only then to go before Pharaoh and again perform these miracles. Why did G-d not just tell him to first go to Pharaoh and perform miracles before him? In that case, the Children of Israel would have seen and heard that Moses and Aaron had performed

miracles before Pharaoh, and they would have believed that G-d had sent them. Why did G-d tell him to perform these miracles on two separate occasions?

The Rambam wrote, “*The Children of Israel believed in Moses our teacher not because of the miracles he performed. If one believes in something because of miracles, he may suspect that they were performed through sleight of hand or sorcery. All the miracles that Moses did in the desert were performed for the needs of the moment, not in order to prove his prophecy to them*” (*Yesodei HaTorah* 8:1). Thus we may say that G-d did not tell Moses to first go before Pharaoh, since in that case this evildoer could have said, “*These people do not believe in their G-d. They believe the words of Moses and Aaron only because of the signs and miracles that they performed before me. Their faith in G-d has only come about through me!*” To shut the mouth of this evildoer, Hashem told Moses: “*First go to the Children of Israel and perform these signs before them. Do this not because they will believe in Me as a result, but because I know you will perform these signs before Pharaoh, lest this evildoer say that the Children of Israel only believe on account of miracles, and that these miracles were only done for him and therefore he will be rewarded for it!*” Proof for the fact that the Children of Israel did not believe in Hashem due to the miracles that Moses did for them is found in the text itself, for it states: “*The people believed, and they heard that the L-RD had remembered the Children of Israel.*” It does not say, “*The people believed in the miracles,*” but rather “*the people believed,*” teaching us that they had faith in Hashem and were saved by this faith. As the Sages state in the Midrash, “*The Children of Israel were saved from Egypt only as a reward for their faith, as it is said: ‘The people believed’*” (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 6).

Although the Children of Israel had a great deal of merit – since they did not change their names or their language, nor did they speak Lashon Harah, and none of them were found to be immoral, as our Sages have said (*Vayikra Rabba* 32:5) – nevertheless they were only delivered from Egypt as a reward for their faith. If they had not excelled in these four areas, they would have been unable to survive because they would have assimilated among the Egyptians, meaning that faith would have been impossible for them. Since they were meritorious in these four areas, they were separated from non-Jews and thus saved as a result of their faith.

Why is faith so important? What can it be compared to? It is like a man who is forced to enter a coal mine. When he leaves and sees that he is completely covered in dirt, he will ask for some soap to clean himself off. Will anyone then say to him, “*Why did you go and dirty yourself in a mine?*” Everyone knows that people entering a mine will get dirty. Hence when he was forced into the mine, everyone knew that he would become completely filthy as a result. Likewise when the Children of Israel descended into Egypt, the source of impurity, they reluctantly breached the 49 gates of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro* 39a). Was it reasonable to ask them, “*Why did you contaminate yourselves with the impurity of Egypt?*” In response they could say, “*It is You Who brought our fathers into Egypt, and by doing so You knew that their descendants would become*

contaminated through the impurity of the land. Now that we have descended into this impurity, we are only asking You for one thing: Please give us the Torah, for it will enable us to climb out of this impurity.”

Since the Children of Israel trusted Moses, they believed in what he was telling them, namely that G-d had spoken to him and said: “*When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain*” (*Exodus 3:12*). In fact it was as if they were saying, to use our previous analogy: “*Please, give us some soap so we can wash this impurity off ourselves.*” Much in the same way, the Sages have said: “*When you ask Me, ‘By what merit shall I bring them out of Egypt,’ know that it is for the sake of the Torah, which they will receive on this mountain from your hands, that they will go forth from here*” (*Shemot Rabba 3:4*). We therefore learn that they left Egypt by the merit of having trusted in G-d, and by having asked Him to give them the Torah in order to be cleansed from the impurity of Egypt.

The Power of Habit

It is written, “[G-d] said, ‘Do not come any closer to here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground’” (*Shemot 3:5*). Here the Sages in the Midrash state, “*Wherever the Shechinah appears, one must not go about with shoes on, and so we find in the case of Joshua: ‘Remove your shoe’ [Joshua 5:15]. Hence the kohanim served in the Temple barefoot*” (*Shemot Rabba 2:6*). I would like to explain why it is forbidden to wear shoes in a place where the Shechinah dwells, rather than removing any other garment with which a person covers himself. The reason is that Scripture is teaching us proper conduct. Concerning Moshe we read, “*Hashem spoke to Moshe face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend*” (*Shemot 33:11*), and we might suspect that Moshe could have become accustomed to Hashem’s glory, since he constantly spoke with Him. Since Moshe was accustomed to this, perhaps he would no longer pay attention to His glory because of the temptation to grow proud. This is because a student who speaks with his master once or twice is not the same as one who speaks with him nine or ten times, in which case he grows proud. In the Gemara we read, “*Ravina was sitting before Rabbi Jeremiah of Difti when a certain man passed by without covering his head. ‘How impudent is that man!’ he exclaimed. He replied, ‘Perhaps he is from Mata Mahasya, where Sages are common’*” (*Kiddushin 33a*). Rashi explains that since there were so many Sages in that town, its residents treated them like one of their own.

Since there was good reason to suspect that Moshe would become accustomed to the glory of Hashem, He warned him by saying: “*Remove your shoes from your feet.*” In other words: Be careful not to act like someone who is used to speaking with his master, and each time that you speak with Me, it should seem like the first time you are speaking with the Shechinah. The reason is that the ground upon which you are standing is holy, for there My holiness dwells at all times.”

Your Feet, Your Habits

We must realize that an allusion is contained in the words that the Holy One, blessed be He, used in speaking to Moshe: “*Remove your shoes from your feet.*” The term ne’aleicha (“your shoes”) actually designates closure (*neila*), and ragleicha (“your feet”) is actually hergel (“habit”). In other words: As a treasure trove is closed before all men, so should My word be to you. Just as no one enters a treasure trove or can see what is inside, likewise is My word to you. You must feel like a man who is looking at a treasure trove, not knowing what is inside. Each time that he looks at it, he wants to open it. My word should seem this way to you, as if it were completely closed from the outside. Each time that I come to speak with you, it should seem as if you have never heard My voice before.

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, warn Moshe, since this was not the case with the other prophets? The answer is that because Moshe saw “*through a clear glass*” – whereas the other prophets saw “*through a dim glass*” (*Yebamot 49b*) – it was specifically Moshe who was told by the Holy One, blessed be He, to remove his shoes. In other words, he was not to become accustomed to the Shechinah.

In reality, we find that Moshe was careful in this regard and did not gaze upon the holy Shechinah, although he could have. Our Sages explain that Hashem waited, as it were, for Moshe to look at Him and to see the revelation of the Shechinah (*Berachot 7a*). However he avoided looking, as it is said: “*Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to look at G-d*” (*Shemot 3:6*). In his eyes, the Shechinah was like a closed treasure trove, into which no eye could look.

The Kohanim Went Barefoot

The kohanim, when they served in the Temple, also had no right to wear shoes, for the offering of sacrifices and incense atoned for the Children of Israel. The kohanim were the representatives of the people, and Hashem wanted to show the Children of Israel that they must not perform mitzvot out of habit. Otherwise, mitzvot would seem burdensome to them, which is why the kohanim went barefoot in the Temple. This served as a constant reminder that we must not act out of habit. All Jews must learn from their example and not perform mitzvot out of habit. Hence everywhere we find the Shechinah, we also find a prohibition against wearing shoes. This is because, when walking barefoot, a person remembers that he must not act casually with the Shechinah.

We are familiar with the explanations of the Ba’alei HaMussar on the verse, “*One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary*” (*Tehillim 27:4*). Here they ask why King David only wanted to “visit” Hashem’s Sanctuary, not to “dwell” in it. They explain that a student who visits his teacher is not like one who lives in his teacher’s home. This is because a student who merely visits him – coming only from time to time – stands before his teacher with reverence, whereas one who constantly finds himself in his teacher’s home and is a regular there will act casually with his teacher and not truly appreciate his presence. Hence King David

wanted to be like a student who merely visits his teacher, not like one who is a regular in his home. He wanted to constantly sense the pleasure that one feels upon seeing him the first time, for by visiting only from time to time, one does not grow accustomed to it.

Along the same lines we read, “*The wise man says: ‘If you want your friend to hate you, visit him constantly. If you want him to love you, visit him infrequently.’ In this regard it is said, ‘Let your feet be scarce in your fellow’s house, lest he grow weary of you and hate you’ [Mishlei 25:17]*” (*Orchot Tzaddikim, Shadar HaSina*).

Extra Caution in the Holy Land

King David asked the Creator of the world, “*One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary*” (*Tehillim 27:4*). The Ba’alei HaMussar have asked why King David only wanted to “visit” His Sanctuary. Did he not want to “dwell” in it, rather than just visit?

They have explained that a student who visits his teacher is not like one who regularly stays at his teacher’s home. A student who merely visits him – coming only from time to time – stands before his teacher with reverence, whereas one who is a regular in his teacher’s home will take him lightly and no longer sense the gulf between them. This is why King David asked to be like a student who visits his teacher’s home, not like one who is too often there. He wanted to constantly sense the pleasure that one feels upon seeing him for the first time, for by visiting only from time to time, he will not get used to this pleasure.

We can therefore understand what our Sages have said, namely that it is a mitzvah for every person, on the night of Passover, to consider himself as having personally left Egypt (*Pesachim 116b*). In fact the Sages were afraid that one who recalls the exodus from Egypt each day, morning and night, will end up growing accustomed to it. Hence the Torah has fixed a special time for revitalization, so that the exodus from Egypt should seem new in a person’s eyes, as if he himself had left Egypt. We find the same idea in regards to the study of Torah, which should seem new in our eyes (*Sifri, Va’etchanan 6:8*), so that we do end up learning Torah and performing mitzvot out of habit.

This may possibly be why the Torah commanded every Jew to travel to Jerusalem three times a year. The Sages have termed this Aliyah laRegel, an expression that requires an explanation. Were they going to spy (*laregel*)? They only went to Jerusalem and to the Temple! Yet because a person would go to Jerusalem for the holidays, he would succeed in removing the tendency for performing mitzvot out of habit (*hergel*), a tendency that made its way into him as he performed mitzvot without focusing on what he was doing.

Routine Mitzvot

In fact we find that when the Children of Israel stopped going to Jerusalem for the holidays, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*My soul detests your New Moons and*

your appointed times" (*Isaiah 1:14*). The Sages say that a non-Jew once asked Rabbi Akiva why Jews celebrate the holidays, since Hashem had expressed Himself in this way. Rabbi Akiva replied, "*If He had said, 'My soul detests My New Moons and My appointed times,' I would say as you do. However He said, 'your New Moons and your appointed times' – the holidays instituted by Jeroboam. As for the real holidays, they will never be abolished*" (*Tanchuma, Pinchas 17*).

This teaches us that G-d did not say that He abhors the holidays of the Children of Israel, but only the holidays of Jeroboam, who did not allow the people to reach Jerusalem. When the Children of Israel stopped going to Jerusalem, they grew accustomed to the mitzvot, which became routine mitzvot, performed without any real concentration. Thus Hashem said, "*My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times*" – for as long as the holidays were those of G-d, and as long as people were careful not to fall into a rut, they would give G-d satisfaction. Yet when they stopped being those of G-d and became those of Israel, their intention was no longer to carry out Hashem's commands, but to simply rejoice during the holidays with family and friends. It was in this regard that Hashem said: "*My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times*" – you have grown accustomed to the mitzvot and forgotten the One Who gave them. I want nothing to do with them, for they are not Mine.

As long as the Children of Israel came to Jerusalem for the holidays, their deeds were performed for the sake of Heaven, and they did not fall into a rut or trample upon the mitzvot. Yet when they stopped going to Jerusalem for the holidays because of Jeroboam, they immediately began to forget their Creator. They ended up performing mitzvot out of habit, and celebrating the holidays only for their own pleasure, not for the sake of Heaven. In so doing they irritated G-d, Who said that He had no desire for such holidays.

Like the First Time

According to what we have said, we can fully understand the command that G-d gave to Moshe: "*Do not come any closer to here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground*" (*Shemot 3:5*). The Sages say in the Midrash, "*Wherever the Shechinah appears, one must not go about with shoes on, and so we find in the case of Joshua: 'Remove your shoe' [Joshua 5:15]. Hence the kohanim served in the Temple barefoot*" (*Shemot Rabba 2:6*). We need to understand why it is forbidden to wear shoes where the Shechinah dwells.

We may explain this by saying that the verse is teaching us a lesson in proper conduct. Given that "*Hashem spoke to Moshe face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend*" (*Shemot 33:11*), we could have thought that Moshe would have grown used to Hashem's glory and no longer paid attention to it out of force of habit. In fact a student who speaks with his teacher once or twice is not the same as one who speaks with him nine or ten times, the latter's sensitivity having been dulled by habit.

We find a story related to this in the Gemara: "*Ravina was sitting before Rabbi Jeremiah of Difti when a certain man passed by without covering his head. 'How*

impudent is that man!" he exclaimed. He replied, 'Perhaps he is from Mata Mahasya, where Sages are common'" (*Kiddushin* 33a). Rashi explains that since there were so many Sages in that town, the sensitivity of its residents to the Sages was dulled, for they treated the Sages like one of their own.

Since there was reason to fear that Moshe would grow accustomed to the glory of G-d, He warned him by saying: "*Remove your shoes from your feet.*" In other words: Be careful not to act like someone who is used to speaking with his teacher. Each time that you speak with Me, it should seem like the first time you are speaking with the Shechinah. The reason is that "*the ground upon which you are standing is holy,*" My holiness being constantly the same.

Surely the Matter is Known

It is written, "*It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and observed their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brothers. He turned this way and that, and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. He went out the next day, and behold: Two Hebrew men were fighting. He said to the wicked one, 'Why would you strike your fellow? 'He replied, 'Who appointed you as a man, a ruler, and a judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me like you killed the Egyptian? 'Moshe was frightened, and he thought: 'Surely the matter is known'*" (*Shemot* 2:11-14).

Rashi explains: "*Moshe was frightened – as its plain meaning would indicate. However the midrashic interpretation is: He was concerned that he saw, among the Israelites, wicked people who were informers. He thus thought: 'If this is so, then perhaps they do not deserve to be redeemed.' Surely the matter is known – as its meaning implies. However the midrashic interpretation is: 'The matter has become known to me, for I had been wondering about it. In what respect was Israel's sin greater than that of the 70 nations, to be subjugated to forced labor? Yet now I see that they deserve it.'*"

When Moshe saw the terrible suffering of the Children of Israel, he looked into the question and tried to understand why there was such great indignation against them. However he could find no answer, and he was puzzled. Now the Sages have said that when the Children of Israel left Egypt, the ministering angels asked: "*How are the Children of Israel different than the Egyptians? These are idolaters and those are idolaters*" Furthermore, they were living in the era of Egyptian servitude, in an extremely degraded spiritual state, having breached the 49 gates of impurity. As such, how could Moshe not have understood why they were reduced to slavery?

If we examine Rashi's language very closely, we find the answer to this question, for he writes: "*The matter has become known to me, for I had been wondering about it. In what respect was Israel's sin greater than that of the 70 nations?*" In other words, Moshe was surprised not because they had sinned, but because none of

their sins were as grave as those of the 70 nations, among whom were sorcerers and idolaters, murderers and the depraved. Nevertheless, the 70 nations were not reduced to slavery or punished. Why had they, the Children of Israel, been punished for their deeds, especially since they had not yet received the Torah? They were, in fact, at the same level as the other nations, being considered Bnei Noah. That said, why was more demanded of the Children of Israel?

It is true, there were sinners among them, and there were idolaters among them. Yet why was it just now that they had been reduced to slavery, not the 70 nations, who were also evil and sinful? Why exactly were the Children of Israel reduced to slavery? Their sins were not worse than those of the other nations, so why were they being punished?

That is why Moshe was surprised, and that is what gave him no rest. However he found the answer to his question in an instant: “*Surely the thing is known.*”

In other words: The thing that puzzled me lies in the words of this Hebrew: “*Are you thinking of killing me like you killed the Egyptian?*” This response contained the answer, for if such people existed among the Children of Israel – individuals without love for their fellowman, informers, and talebearers – it is understandable that they were reduced to slavery. Not only that, but this may have made them unworthy of being delivered.

If we think about it, Moshe was correct in saying this, for the enslavement of Egypt occurred because of Lashon Harah. In fact the story of Joseph’s sale, which is what brought him to Egypt – after which his brothers arrived in Egypt with their father Jacob – would never have happened if Joseph had not spoken Lashon Harah about his brothers, telling their father about the wrongs they did, despite his good intentions. “*Surely the thing is known*” – our fathers arrived in Egypt because of Lashon Harah and talebearing, and although it was known long before that they would be enslaved, for “*your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them*” (*Bereshith 15:13*), the way in which this enslavement occurred was through Lashon Harah.

Hence when Moshe said, “*They will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice*” (*Shemot 4:1*), he was immediately reprimanded: “*Hashem said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ and he said, ‘A staff.’ He said, ‘Cast it on the ground,’ and he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent, and Moshe fled from it. ... Hashem said further to him: ‘Bring your hand to your bosom,’ and he brought his hand to his bosom. Then he withdrew it, and behold: His hand was leprous like snow*” (vv. 2-6).

The art of the serpent consisted of speaking Lashon Harah, Furthermore, as we know, the punishment for Lashon Harah is leprosy, as Rashi states in commenting on this passage: “*Mazeh [What is that] in your hand? – Mazeh is written as one word so that it may be explained: ‘From what is in your hand, you deserve to be punished, for you were suspicious of righteous people.’ ... It became a serpent – He hinted to him that he spoke slanderous words against Israel by saying, ‘They will not believe me,’ and so he adopted the art of the serpent. ... leprous like snow...He hinted to him that*

he spoke slanderously by saying, ‘They will not believe me.’ It is for this reason that He struck him with leprosy, just as Miriam was struck for speaking Lashon Harah.”

Moshe was shown that the sin which led the Children of Israel into Egypt and servitude was indeed the sin of Lashon Harah, and that if he wanted to deliver them, he was to rectify this sin, not repeat it. Despite the fact that what Moshe said was for the good of the Children of Israel (being for a practical purpose, not something sinful), it stemmed from a real concern over Klal Israel: How could Moshe make them listen, since it is clear that they did not listen to him on account of their troubles and harsh labors? The explanation is that when we want to rectify a sin, we must do its very opposite: We must repent in the opposite direction of that sin and head in the right direction. That is why Moshe, who came to deliver Israel, was not to speak Lashon Harah, not even for a practical purpose. In fact he had to do the very opposite: He had to double his love for them, his feelings of peace, harmony, and friendship, and he had to judge them favorably.

This is how things stand, both then and now, for as we know, our exile is the result of baseless hatred. The introduction to the book Chafetz Chaim discusses this subject in detail: Together, baseless hatred and Lashon Harah caused this sin, as well as our lengthy exile. Therefore if we want to hasten the Final Redemption, we must double our baseless love for one another, even more intensely than baseless hatred, which is what creates dissension among us. We must also put an effort into judging others favorably, and not just other individuals, but entire communities as well, each with their own leaders and their own rabbis. We must all love and accept others who are different than us. If we do this, we are promised that the Final Redemption will soon take place, for once the tribes of Israel are united, immediately there will be “*a King in Yerushun*” (*Devarim 33:5*).

The Concept of Preserving Jewish Names

It is written, “*These are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob; each man and his household came*” (*Shemot 1:1*).

This verse seems to require an explanation. Why does it begin with, “*These are the names*”? If Scripture wanted to enumerate them, it should have said: “*These are the sons of Israel who came into Egypt*.” Why the insistence on names, especially since in Hebrew the entire book is called *Shemot* (“Names”)? Whoever reads the Chumash can only be surprised by this, for where are “*the names*” that is the main point of this book? Would it not have been better for this book to be called “*Exodus from Egypt*,” or something along these lines? Why call it *Shemot*?

Our Sages have examined this question in the Midrash: “*Rav Huna said in the name of Bar Kaparah, ‘For four merits the Israelites were delivered from Egypt: Because they did not change their names, because they did not change their language, because they did not inform against one another, and because none of them was depraved’*”

(*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 4:25). Hence this is what Scripture stresses by stating, “*These are the names of the sons of Israel,*” namely that preserving these names is what caused them to be delivered from Egypt.

Yet this is precisely where the difficulty lies: Is the importance of a name so great that having preserved their names is what earned them deliverance?

This teaches us that it is not without reason that the Creator “placed names in the land” (*Berachot* 7b on *Tehillim* 46:9), for the names of the Children of Israel – Jewish names – have deeply sanctified roots. As the Sages explain in regards to the names of the twelve tribes (*Berachot* 7b), and as the commentators explain on this Gemara (see the *Maharsha* and others), although Leah was not a prophetess, prophesy came upon her when she named her children. We also know from our holy books that a certain degree of prophesy is involved when we name our children, for a person’s character traits are alluded to in his or her name, and there is no name that does not have a meaning.

Furthermore, in explaining this verse according to Kabbalah, the Arizal reveals that it deals with this world and the world of souls. He writes: “*These are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt – these are the names of holiness that came down into this world, which is called Mitzraim [Egypt]; with Jacob; each man and his household came – all names are accompanied by the holy Patriarchs, whose names originate from Torah secrets, which accompany the Children of Israel when they descend into this world.*”

Still on the subject of the greatness of a name given to a person at birth, as we know, when the soul arrives in Heaven after 120 years on earth, it is asked for its name. At that point, a special segula is required for it to remember its name and to say it. This is why we usually recite, at the end of the Amidah, a verse that begins with the first letter of our name and ends with the last letter. This contains profound secrets.

We now understand that this is precisely the case in this week’s parsha. The greatness of the Children of Israel stemmed from the fact that they did not change their names. That is what protected them, and that is why they did not perish, nor did any of them assimilate in Egypt. The “names” of the Children of Israel were the spiritual foundations with which they descended into Egypt, accompanied by their father Jacob, names that remained with them and protected their identity.

This is how Jews have conducted themselves in every generation, and a Jewish custom is from Torah. They have always named their children in connection to the parsha of the week or some event, the basis of all this being to bring down the sanctity connected to the person mentioned in the parshiot, such as Moshe, Aaron, Miriam, and so on.

We need to carefully examine the verse in question: “*These are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob; each man and his household came*” (*Shemot* 1:1). This seems to contain a mistake, for the term *habaim Mitzrayma* (literally, “coming into Egypt”) is in the present tense, whereas “*each man and his household came*” is in the past tense. Why the present and past tense in the same verse?

This teaches us that these names, which we currently give to our children, are names that have already come into the world, names whose origins lay in the heights of sanctity.

However we have not fully resolved the question. Was all this something mystical, the fact that their names protected them? Perhaps there was something more to it?

Before explaining this, let us think a little about the enslavement of the Children of Israel in Egypt from a spiritual point of view. When they descended into Egypt, they numbered 70 people, a single family. They were closely united and fulfilled all the mitzvot of the Torah, the easiest as well as the hardest. At the time, Egypt was known as a country immersed in immorality, “*whose issue is like that of horses*” (*Ezekiel 23:20*). Although Egypt was filled with depravity and sorcery, the Children of Israel were stronger than this harmful influence. Following Joseph’s advice, they went to live in Goshen, where they formed a kind of Jewish enclave within the heart of Egypt itself, which was filled with idolatry and perversion. In a short time, these 70 people greatly multiplied, and the more numerous they became, the more they “*filled the land*.” That entire generation passed away, Jacob and his children, as well as those who came after them. Thus a new king arose, one who had not known Joseph, and years of enslavement and suffering ensued, years of forced labor. Egypt, immoral and idolatrous, had become an empire – an empire of sorcery and magic – which constituted its strength and glory. Tremendous spiritual blindness reigned in Egypt, and little by little the Children of Israel were also influenced by it. Hence they began to frequent places of entertainment and to celebrate popular holidays, as the Midrash states. The Children of Israel therefore “*descended*” – their descent into Egypt was a frightening descent – and little by little the outward Jewish identity of the Children of Israel began to disappear. In fact it reached such a point that when they left Egypt, the ministering angels sought to understand how the Children of Israel differed from the Egyptians, saying: “*These are idolaters, and those are idolaters.*”

The desire to resemble the Egyptians, as well as the burden of forced labor and complete enslavement to Pharaoh and his henchmen, made them lose their heads and prevented them from maintaining their own identity. In fact when Moshe first addressed them, they did not listen to him at all due to “*shortness of spirit and hard labor*” (*Shemot 6:9*). Yet during all that time, they preserved their names, they did not inform on one another, and none of them was depraved. How did they do this?

There is only one answer: Through Jewish pride.

The Promise of Deliverance and the Importance of Prayer

It is written, “*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 Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob*” (*Shemot 2:23-24*).

This period of slavery in Egypt had been decreed by Hashem. He had promised the Patriarchs that the Jewish people would emerge after 400 years of exile with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and with great wealth. This is why I'm surprised: Would the Children of Israel not have been delivered without their prayers? After all, the exodus from Egypt was included in the covenant that G-d made with the Patriarchs! Deliverance would automatically follow their enslavement, not being dependent on anything else, such as prayer for example. That being the case, why does the Torah point out that G-d heard the moaning and cries of the Children of Israel, and that only then did He agree to save them? In reality, the very purpose of delivering the Jewish people was to create a bond between them and their Creator, a bond without which freedom would have been completely meaningless. As we know, prayer establishes a connection between a person and his Creator. By imploring Hashem, the Jewish people merited deliverance by cleaving to G-d and belonging to Him. It is prayer that supplied the content and meaning of their deliverance. Without their supplications, they would not have been worthy to receive the Torah. Obviously, because of the covenant sealed between G-d and the Patriarchs, the Children of Israel would have been delivered even without prayer. However prayer enabled them to enjoy complete deliverance, infusing them with a realization that everything comes from G-d. Hence the Torah made certain to mention the moaning of the Jewish people before their deliverance.

I know several people whom we have helped release from prison by praying and beseeching G-d without their knowledge, but who today still think that it was fate which led to their freedom. They fail to realize Who is truly responsible for their joyous release, and therefore are not grateful for it. This is the purpose of prayer, for by beseeching the Creator and pouring out our hearts to Him, we become aware that He is the source of everything and we thank Him for having helped and delivered us from our distress once it is over. Such was the situation of the Children of Israel: Their prayers encouraged them to thank G-d and demonstrate their gratitude to Him, for their prayers were answered when they were saved from the hands of the Egyptians. The Gemara (*Berachot 10a*) recounts the story of King Hezekiah, to whom the Prophet Isaiah announced that he was about to die, and that he would also lose his portion in the World to Come because he had never married, thus neglecting a Torah mitzvah. Filled with despair, the king begged Isaiah to help him to rectify his error. However the prophet replied that it was already too late, for his fate had already been sealed. Sensing that he was about to die, Hezekiah asked Isaiah to end his prophesy and leave. He then went onto his bed and, feeling nothing abnormal in his feet (*we know that death first arrives through the feet*), he cried out to Hashem and implored Him to give him another chance, to prolong his life in order that he could marry. G-d responded by giving him another chance, by letting him live so he could marry. In fact G-d granted him 15 more years of life in order to rectify his conduct, for He saw that King Hezekiah's prayer emanated from the depths of his heart, from a sincere feeling of remorse. In fact even if a sharp blade is placed on a man's neck, he should not stop imploring G-d for mercy.

This story is difficult to understand, for the Prophet Isaiah knew that as long as a person is still alive, errors can be rectified, meaning that the king still had a chance to ask G-d to annul the decree. As we have said, even in our most agonizing moments, we must not stop imploring G-d for mercy. That being the case, why did Isaiah tell the king that it was already too late and that he couldn't set things right? Given the king's distress, we would have at least expected Isaiah to pray for him, not to discourage him! The answer is that the prayers that others say for us cannot be compared to the prayers that we say for ourselves. Isaiah knew that at that point, once Hezekiah's death had been decreed, only his own prayers – emanating from the depths of his heart, and uttered with all his might and sincere intentions – had the power to change things. King Hezekiah's prayers exerted a much greater influence than those of the Prophet Isaiah, for the prayers that we say for ourselves are the most effective of all.

Hezekiah merited for his experience to teach the Jewish people a new principle, namely that we must not stop beseeching G-d for mercy regardless of the situation that we find ourselves in.

The Prophet Isaiah did not merit this, for he had used disparaging terms to describe the Children of Israel: "*I dwell among a people of impure lips*" (*Isaiah 6:5*). Because he accused and disparaged the Children of Israel, he did not merit having his own situation serve as an example for the generations to come. This was reserved for King Hezekiah, who (despite the trial that he endured) did not stop imploring G-d for mercy, beseeching Him with the little strength he had left. I remember that my father was constantly busy with prayer, attempting to awaken Divine mercy for the Jewish people, for the land of Israel, and for the Final Redemption. I'm certain that if someone did not personally deserve to have his prayers answered, the merit of my father's sincere prayers would enable his prayers to be heard and answered. If we go see a tzaddik, we will be delivered on account of his prayers, as well as by the fact that we are annulling ourselves by going to see a tzaddik.

The Disastrous Effects of Holding Grudges

It is written, "Moshe said to G-d, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?'" (*Shemot 3:11*).

Rashi explains that Moshe was raising two issues: (1) Of what importance am I, such that I can speak with kings; and (2) Even if I am of importance, what merit do the Children of Israel possess, such that a miracle should be performed for them and that I should take them out of Egypt?

The second issue raised by Moshe is extremely surprising. Hashem spoke to him and announced that the moment had come to deliver the Jewish people from Egypt, as He had promised Abraham during the Covenant Between the Parts, and G-d is now commanding Moshe to bring them out of Egypt. Yet Moshe is surprised and asks how they are worthy of this, and how such a miracle will take place. After all the clear

statements from Hashem – according to which the end of the exile had arrived, and with it the time of deliverance – was there any reason to ask such a question?

There is something that is even more difficult to understand: Why did Moshe try to escape this mission by offering various excuses, refusing to take upon himself the role of Israel's deliverer? While still in Egypt and growing up in Pharaoh's home, he rejected the ways of the royal palace and all its pleasures in order to share in the suffering of his brothers, who were being crushed by the Egyptians, and he encouraged them as best he could. He suffered in all their sufferings, experienced their pain, and helped them in the harsh labor imposed on them. And when he saw an Egyptian striking one of his Hebrew brothers, he immediately went to save him by putting himself in danger, as we know. That being said, now that Hashem is giving Moshe an opportunity to lighten the burdens of the Jewish people and deliver them from servitude, he should have rejoiced, willingly accepted this mission with joy, and fulfilled it as quickly as possible. Instead, why does Moshe actually hide behind various pretexts, such as “*of what importance am I, such that I can speak with kings,*” or “*what merit do the Children of Israel possess, such that a miracle should be performed for them,*” or “*perhaps they won't believe me?*”

We shall attempt to explain. Let us begin by citing the Midrash on the verse “*G-d pakod yifkod [will surely visit you] and bring you up out of this land*” (*Bereshith 50:24*). Here the Sages say, “*This was a sign for Israel that every deliverer who comes with this sign – pakod pakadeti [I have surely visited you] – will be a true deliverer*” (*Tanchuma, Shemot 21*). Indeed, Joseph had told them, “*G-d pakod yifkod [will surely visit you].*” On the verse, “*Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them...pakod pakadeti [I have surely visited you]*” (*Shemot 3:16*), the Sages also teach: “*G-d said to [Moshe]: 'They have a tradition from Joseph that will I deliver them with this expression. Go and give them this sign'*” (*Shemot Rabba 3:8*).

We need to understand how these words represent an actual sign from a genuine deliverer. After all, everyone knew this secret, and perhaps a false deliverer would arise and proclaim pakod pakadeti. In that case, how could the Children of Israel know if he was an actual deliverer sent by Hashem to save them?

We must explain that the expression pakadeti means that Hashem remembers them for the purpose of doing good and for deliverance, as it is written: “*Hashem visited [pakad] Sarah*” (*Bereshith 21:1*). Likewise we read, “*I have surely visited you and what is done to you in Egypt*” (*Shemot 3:16*). And in regard to Samson, it is stated: “*And Samson visited [vayifkod] his wife with a goat kid*” (*Judges 15:1*). In each of these cases, although there was a reason for the bad situation, the “*visit*” did good and transformed the actual bad into good. In other words, we ignore the reason for the bad and proceed to make it into something good.

That was the sign which the Jewish people possessed. When would they be delivered? When the deliverer would come with the sign pakod pakadeti, meaning there would be pakod from the Jewish people and pakadeti from Hashem. This means that

when the Jewish people would be united and would care about each other – ignoring the deficiencies of others and concentrating solely on the good they possessed and by praising Hashem – then measure for measure He would also ignore their sins and the deficiencies of the Jewish people, and He would visit them with compassion to deliver them from their enslavement in Egypt.

We may say that this is precisely why Jacob gave this sign to his children through Joseph, in order to encourage him to forgive his brothers for having sold him, and to remove every trace of a grudge that he might still hold against them. In fact their entire deliverance from Egypt depended on pakod, on the unity and mutual love of the Jewish people, and by ignoring the wrongdoings of others, which was a cause of division.

We now understand how this constitutes a sign. When the Jewish people perfect their love for one another, looking at the virtues of others and by holding them in esteem, they would be ready for deliverance, and the deliverer who arrives at that point would be a genuine deliverer. This explains the double expression pakod yifkod.

Now when Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe, telling him that the time had come for deliverance, and when He commanded him to announce this to the elders of Israel and to Pharaoh, Moshe was surprised and said that the Children of Israel had not yet reached the level of pakod. When Moshe had been in Egypt, he had gone out to see the suffering of his brothers in order to help them, and he saw two Hebrews disputing with one another. When he reprimanded the wicked one by telling him, “*Why are you going to strike your friend?*” (*Shemot 2:13*), he answered: “*Do you plan to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*” (*v.14*). Moshe became frightened and said, “*The thing is known!*” (*ibid.*) Rashi explains that Moshe was worried because he saw wicked men, informers in Israel. He thought, “*Perhaps they do not deserve to be delivered. The thing is known: The thing I was wondering about – why the Israelites are considered more sinful than all the 70 nations, to be subjugated with back-breaking labor – has become known to me. Indeed, I see that they deserve it.*”

Hence when Moshe heard from Hashem that He intended on delivering the Children of Israel, Moshe asked what merit they possessed so as to be delivered. There were evildoers among them, informers and slanderers, who told Pharaoh that Moshe had saved a Jew from the hands of an Egyptian and that he had killed him. When there is no pakod, there cannot be pakadeti either, for the sign to give them for an actual deliverer had not yet arrived.

In this regard, Hashem told him that the Children of Israel had abandoned their evil ways. They were worthy of deliverance and prepared to receive it. Hashem hinted this to Moshe by commanding him to throw his staff to the ground, which then changed into a serpent. This showed Moshe that nature and habits can change, and that just as an inanimate object can be transformed into a serpent, likewise the Jewish people can repent and better themselves.

Parsha Va'eira

Everything that Hashem Does is for the Good

It is written, “*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*” (*Exodus 6:3*). Here Rashi writes, “*I appeared – to the Patriarchs.*” He continues by citing the Midrash’s statement that Hashem spoke to Moses in a harsh manner because he had asked, “*Why have You done evil to this people?*” (*Exodus 5:22*). The Midrash states that Hashem told Moses, “*Oh, for those that are gone and cannot be replaced! Many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but I did not make it known to them that My Name is the L-RD, as I have told you, and still they did not criticize My ways...or asked Me, as you asked Me, what My Name is*” (*Shemot Rabba 6:4*).

We need to understand the nature of Hashem’s charge here, in that He criticized Moses for having asked, “*Why have You done evil to this people?*” We also need to explain why Rashi writes, “*I appeared – to the Patriarchs.*” What is Rashi telling us here that we don’t already know, since the names of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are clearly mentioned in the verse?

We know that the Holy One, blessed be He, demands that everyone observe the ways of the holy Patriarchs, for they cleared a path for us to follow and established deeds that we must perform until the arrival of Mashiach (*may he come speedily and in our days*). We are forbidden to deviate from this path, be it by any degree, similar to the spirit of the verse: “*You shall not deviate from the word they tell you, either right or left*” (*Deuteronomy 17:11*). Hence the Torah recounts in great detail how the holy Patriarchs lived inside and outside of Eretz Israel, as well as how they conducted themselves in exile. All this is meant to motivate us to follow in their footsteps and to find a path among them in which we too can walk.

There is more. The holy Patriarchs certainly saw the entire future of the Jewish people, and they certainly prayed and continued praying to Hashem regarding every tragedy that strikes us. Therefore they definitely foresaw the Holocaust brought upon the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis, may their name be blotted out.

Hence Hashem told Moses: Why don’t you follow the path of the Patriarchs? They saw the entire future of their descendants in every generation and in every exile, including the Holocaust, and yet they never complained. They never asked, “*Why have You done evil to this people?*” nor did they ever say, “*You have not saved Your people,*” although they could have said such things. They were content with knowing that I will put an end to all suffering. As for you, to whom I revealed Myself by the Name Hashem – the Name denoting mercy, the Name that demonstrates that deliverance is near – you were precisely the one who did complain! You asked, “*Why have You done*

evil to this people?" and you said, "You have not saved Your people!"

Even during the sacrifice of Isaac, Hashem continued, Abraham could have asked Me, "*If I slaughter Isaac, what will become of Your promises? How will the Jewish people continue to exist?*" Although human intelligence prompts us to ask such questions, Abraham was satisfied with the fact that Hashem revealed Himself to him. He did not ask any questions, nor did he express any doubts. This is what Rashi meant by stating, "*I appeared – to the Patriarchs,*" signifying that they were the fathers of the nation, men at the forefront of all things holy, and they did not ask any questions. As for Moses, he did not reach the level of the Patriarchs despite his greatness, for he questioned Hashem's deeds.

This is why Hashem criticized Moses. He even went so far as to punish him for not having followed the path of self-control, the path laid out by Patriarchs for their descendants whenever ones sees troubles increasing from day to day. Everyone must realize that these things come from Hashem. Even in a time of trial, a person must control himself, show himself to be wholehearted with Hashem, and not ask questions.

Above all, we must learn a lesson from the story of Purim. Whenever people, including the king's servants, prostrated themselves before Haman, the righteous Mordechai remained standing and neither bowed nor prostrated himself (*Esther 3:2*). Haman nevertheless did not kill Mordechai. He controlled his emotions, as it is written: "*Haman restrained himself*" (*ibid. 5:10*). Haman demonstrated great restraint here, for he knew that he would have killed Mordechai had he failed to control himself. In that case he would have had to answer to the king, even though Mordechai was a Jew and therefore liable to death, as were all Jews at the time. Despite this, Haman did not try to kill Mordechai, and instead he controlled himself until he reached his home.

How much more does this apply to us? If that evildoer could restrain himself and not kill Mordechai (despite the fact that he had greatly offended him) just so he wouldn't have to explain to the king why he had killed Mordechai – the king's favorite servant, having saved him from an assassination attempt by Bigtana and Teresh – then how much more should every Jew control himself when Hashem sends him trials? It is obvious that he should accept everything with love. He must not become angry with Hashem, but rather control himself by saying that everything Hashem does is for the good, since nothing evil can come from Him.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, criticized Moses for not having acted as the Patriarchs did. Instead he protested to Hashem and said, "*Why have You done evil to this people?*" Moses should have learned from the holy Patriarchs – to whom Hashem revealed Himself by the Name E-l Sh-ddai, not the Name that denotes mercy – for the Patriarchs did not protest. In doing so, they cleared a path for their descendants after them, the path of fearing nothing but Hashem and having complete faith in Him. Everyone must follow in the footsteps of the holy Patriarchs and not protest G-d's actions. We must control ourselves and realize that everything the Merciful One does is for the good. When we understand this, we will experience good in this world and

in the World to Come.

Our Forefathers Could Content Themselves with Little

It is written, “*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*” (*Exodus 6:3*). We need to understand what the expression “*I appeared*” is doing here, since G-d is about to reprimand Moses for having asked: “*Why have You done evil to this people?*” (*Exodus 5:22*). Furthermore, did G-d not reveal Himself to the Patriarchs using the name “*the L-RD*”? In fact G-d said to Abraham, “*I am the L-RD, Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim*” (*Genesis 15:7*), and He said to Jacob: “*I am the L-RD, the G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac*” (*ibid. 28:13*).

Our Sages cite the Holy One, blessed be He, as saying: “*Alas for those who are gone and not to be found! For how many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the Name E-l Sh-ddai, and they did not question My character or say to Me, ‘What is Your Name?’ I said to Abraham, ‘Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you’*” [*Genesis 13:17*]. However when he sought a place to bury Sarah, he did not find one, but had to purchase it for 400 silver shekels. However he still did not question My character. I said to Isaac, ‘*Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you*’ [*ibid. 26:3*]. However his servants sought water to drink and did not find it without a dispute, as it is said, ‘*The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying: “The water is ours”*’ [*v.20*]. Still he did not question My character. I said to Jacob, ‘*The ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants*’ [*ibid. 28:13*]. However when he sought a place to pitch his tent, he did not find one until he purchased it for 100 pieces of money. Still he did not question My character, nor did he say to Me, ‘*What is Your Name?*’ Yet now you say to Me, ‘*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*’ [*Exodus 5:23*]” (*Sanhedrin 111a*).

It is difficult to understand the connection between the question, “*What is Your Name*” and “*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*.¹” Can we possibly think that Hashem would get angry with Moses for asking, “*What is Your Name*,” but not angry for saying, “*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*? In fact what is the phrase, “*What is Your Name*” doing here?

According to the Midrash, “*May E-l Sh-ddai grant you mercy*” (*Genesis 43:14*) means that Jacob was praying to G-d Alm-ghty and saying: “*He Who said to Heaven and earth dai [enough], may He say to my misfortunes dai*,” for when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Heaven and earth, they continued to expand until He said, “*enough*” (see *Tanhuma, Mikeitz 10*).

It seems that the Name Sh-ddai represents reduction and scarcity, for it was through

this Name that Heaven and earth were stopped from expanding further. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “*Perhaps you believe that you merited to speak with Me because I revealed Myself to you by the Name “the L-RD,”*” and therefore you think that you can reprimand Me and learn how I direct the world. Consider that the Patriarchs, despite being great tzaddikim who overcame trials, did not ask Me for anything or try to learn how I direct the world. Because you seek to know My Name, it means that you are not content with little, as they were, for they did not ask me if My Name was Sh-ddai or the L-RD. Furthermore, your fathers felt like foreigners in this world, for just as foreigners do not ask for anything and are satisfied with little, they did not ask for anything and were satisfied with little.”

The Name Sh-ddai contains the notion of restriction, and the Sages have said: “*Thus Scripture says, ‘For we are like sojourners before You, and like temporary residents, as were all our forefathers’ [I Chronicles 29:15]. Likewise the tzaddikim are the essential part in this world, and yet they make themselves as nothing. Thus we find that although Abraham was essential to the world, he made himself secondary, as it is written: ‘I am an alien and a resident among you’ [Genesis 23:4], and Jacob said: ‘I sojourned [garti] with Laban’ [like a ger, a foreigner]*” (Agadat Bereshith 58).

The Mishnah teaches, “*Whoever possess the following three characteristics is among the disciples of our father Abraham, and the three opposite characteristics is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam. The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul*” (Pirkei Avoth 5:19).

Therefore what G-d said to Moses (“*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*”) was really a rebuke. In other words: Do not think that you can take Me to task as you try to understand My ways! Your fathers did not try to understand My ways, and there were satisfied with everything that I did to them. They were content to see and accept it, just as a servant who is told by his master to do something: He does not ask why, but instead goes and does it as soon as he is told.

This is what constitutes “*I appeared.*” It is why Hashem told Moses, “*With My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them,*” for they did not seek to know it. Instead, they did everything that Hashem told them, doing so immediately and without protest.

We may also explain this by noting that the term *va’eira* (“*and I appeared*”) has the same numerical value as *achar* (“*after*”). In fact the word *achar* appears in three places that describe the trials endured by the Patriarchs. With regards to Abraham we read: “*It happened achar [after] these things that G-d tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham,’ and he replied, ‘Here I am’*” (Genesis 22:1). Further on we read, “*Behold, a*

ram achar [behind] caught in the thicket by its horns" (*ibid. 22:13*), and concerning Isaac we read, "*Sojourn [gur] in this land*" (*ibid. 26:3*). The word gur has the same numerical value as achar. This is similar to what Jacob said to Esau, "*I have sojourned with Laban va'echar [and delayed] until now*" (*ibid. 32:5*). Concerning Joseph we read, "*May E-l Sh-ddai grant you mercy before the man, that he may release your acher [other] brother to you*" (*ibid. 43:14*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Although your forefathers endured trials before you, they were content with little and accepted My decrees without protest. You should have done the same by not protesting.

Being Content with Little

It is written, "*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*" (*Exodus 6:3*).

We need to understand what the expression "*I appeared*" is doing here, since G-d is reprimanding Moses for having asked Him: "*Why have You done evil to this people?*" (*Exodus 5:22*). We also need to understand something else: Did G-d never reveal Himself to the Patriarchs using the name "*the L-RD*"? We find that G-d said to Abraham, "*I am the L-RD, Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim*" (*Genesis 15:7*). He also said to Jacob, "*I am the L-RD, the G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac*" (*ibid. 28:13*).

Our Sages have taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "*Alas for those who are gone and not to be found! For how many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the Name E-l Sh-ddai, and they did not question My character or say to Me, 'What is Your Name?' I said to Abraham, 'Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you'*" [*Genesis 13:17*]. Yet when he sought a place to bury Sarah, he did not find one, but had to purchase it for 400 silver shekels. However he still did not question My character. *I said to Isaac, 'Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you'* [*ibid. 26:3*]. However his servants sought water to drink and did not find it without a dispute, as it is said: '*The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying: "The water is ours"*' [*v.20*]. Still he did not question My character. I said to Jacob, '*The ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants*' [*ibid. 28:13*]. However when he sought a place to pitch his tent, he did not find one until he purchased it for 100 pieces of money. Still he did not question My character, nor did he say to Me: '*What is Your Name?*' Yet now you say to Me, '*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*' [*Exodus 5:23*]" (*Sanhedrin 111a*).

This is difficult to understand. What is the connection between the questions, "*What is Your Name*" and "*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*"? Can we possibly think that Hashem would get angry with Moses for having asked, "*What is Your Name,*" but not angry for, "*Neither have You delivered Your people at all*"? Therefore what is

the phrase, “*What is Your Name*” doing here?

The Tzaddikim Consider Themselves as Nothing

Consider the verse, “*May E-l Sh-ddai grant you mercy*” (*Genesis 43:14*). Here the Aggadah states that Jacob was praying to G-d Alm-ghty and saying: “*He Who said to Heaven and earth dai [enough], may He say to my misfortunes dai*” (*Tanhuma, Mikeitz 10*), for when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Heaven and earth, they continued to expand until He said “*enough*.”

This teaches us that the Name Sh-ddai denotes restriction and scarcity, for it was through this Name that Heaven and earth were stopped from expanding further. Hashem said, “*Moses, do you really believe that you spoke with Me because I revealed Myself to you by the Name ‘the L-RD’? Do you really think that you can reprimand Me and ask how I guide the world and act in the way that I do? Consider that the Patriarchs, despite being great tzaddikim who overcame their trials, did not ask Me for anything or try to learn My ways. The fact that you are trying to know My Name indicates that you are not content with little, as they were, for they did not ask me if My Name was Sh-ddai or the L-RD. Furthermore, your fathers acted like foreigners in this world, for just as foreigners do not ask for anything and are content with little, likewise they did not ask for anything and were content with little.*” As the Sages said on the verse, “*For we are like sojourners before You, and like temporary residents, as were all our forefathers*” (*1 Chronicles 29:15*): “*Likewise the tzaddikim are essential to this world, and yet they consider themselves as nothing. Thus we find that although Abraham was essential to the world, he assumed a less important status, as it is written: ‘I am an alien and a resident among you’ [Genesis 23:4], and Jacob said: ‘I sojourned [garti] with Laban’ [like a ger; a foreigner]*” (*Aggadat Bereshith 58*).

The Sages have also said, “*Whoever possesses the following three characteristics is among the disciples of our father Abraham, and the three opposite characteristics is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam: The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul*” (*Pirkei Avoth 5:19*).

Therefore what G-d said to Moses (“*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*”) was a rebuke. In other words: Do not think that you can criticize Me and try to understand My ways! You should instead emulate your fathers, who did not try to understand My ways. They considered and accepted all that I did for them, just as a servant who is told by his master to do something. He does not ask why, but instead goes out and does it as soon as he is told.

That is the meaning of “*I appeared*.” It is why Hashem said to Moses, “*With My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them*,” for they did not seek to know it. Instead, they did everything that Hashem told them to do, immediately and without

questioning G-d's ways.

Va'eira and Achar

We may also explain the meaning of the term *va'eira* ("and I appeared") by noting that it has the same numerical value as *achar* ("after").

In fact the word *achar* appears in three places that describe the trials endured by the Patriarchs. Concerning Abraham it is written, "*It happened achar [after] these things that G-d tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham,' and he replied, 'Here I am'*" (*Genesis 22:1*). In the same parsha it is written, "*Behold, a ram achar [behind] caught in the thicket by its horns*" (*ibid. 22:13*).

Concerning Isaac it is written, "*Sojourn [gur] in this land*" (*ibid. 26:3*). Here the word *gur* has the same numerical value as *achar*. Similarly, Jacob said to Esau: "*I have sojourned with Laban va'echar [and delayed] until now*" (*ibid. 32:5*). Concerning Joseph it is written, "*May E-l Sh-ddai grant you mercy before the man, that he may release your acher [other] brother to you*" (*ibid. 43:14*).

Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Although your forefathers endured trials before Me, they were content with little and accepted My decrees without protesting My actions. You should have adopted the same conduct and not have questioned My ways.

The Greatness of the Patriarchs

It is written, "*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Sh-ddai, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them*" (*Shemot 6:3*). Here Rashi explains: "*I appeared – to the Patriarchs.*"

We know that many of the Torah commentators who pay great attention to the illuminating words of Rashi, the greatest of the commentators, are stunned by this remark. What does he mean by this? After all, the verse itself mentions the names of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – so what is Rashi trying to teach us here?

We must also recall what our Sages have said, namely that the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob constitute the Chariot of the holy Shechinah (*Bereshith Rabba 47:6*). Furthermore, the Zohar states that the Holy One, blessed be He, added King David as a fourth wheel to the Chariot, for a chariot consists of no less than four wheels (*Zohar I:248b*). We need to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, did not add Moshe rather than King David. How was the greatness of the Patriarchs and King David greater than that of Moshe, of whom it is said, "*You made him slightly less than Heavenly beings*" (*Tehillim 8:6*), as well as: "*Never has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face-to-face*" (*Devarim 34:10*)?

They Refrained From Asking Questions

Upon examining the subject more closely, we may say that here the Holy One, blessed be He, suggested to Moshe that, although the Patriarchs experienced many

hardships – Abraham overcoming 10 trials, Isaac overcoming the trial of Abimelech and his servants, and Jacob overcoming the trials of Shechem and Joseph – they still did not question the Holy One, blessed be He. On the contrary, they accepted everything with love because they did not want to speak unnecessarily, and they personally fulfilled the teaching: “*Sanctify yourself in what is permitted to you*” (*yebamot 20a*). They would have been allowed to ask questions, but they refrained from doing so because they sanctified themselves over and above the norm, even in things that were permitted to them.

Since the holy Patriarchs conducted themselves in this way, they merited being the Chariot of the Shechinah, something that others did not merit. Perhaps it is for this reason that Rashi referenced the Patriarchs here, in order to suggest that this is what constituted their greatness. In fact the term *haAvoth* (“the Patriarchs”) has the same numerical value (414) as *kadosh* (“holy”) when the 4 letters of the latter are added to the sum. This means that the Patriarchs were infinitely sanctified, to the point that they controlled themselves even in permitted things and did not ask questions. Hence they deserved everything they received. We do not find the same thing with Moshe, who when sent to Pharaoh asked Hashem: “*Why have You done evil to this people? Why have You sent me?*” (*Shemot 5:22*).

Although Moshe was allowed to ask such questions, in this area the Patriarchs were at a greater level.

His Only Joy

The Holy One, blessed be He, added King David as the fourth wheel of the Chariot because when he served as King of Israel, he made himself into a stranger, acting as if the Holy One, blessed be He, owed him nothing. Thus we read, “*Hear my prayer, Hashem, and give ear to my cry. Do not be silent at my tears, for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner like all my fathers*” (*Tehillim 39:13*). Here the Midrash states, “*Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David became as if non-existent, as if strangers in this world*” (*Aggadat Bereshith*).

We also find David saying, “*I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the House of Hashem’*” (*Tehillim 122:1*). King David rejoiced when someone came to him and said, “*Your majesty, I want to study Torah!*” He would immediately stop everything he was doing and sit down to study. In this regard it is written, “*That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life*” (*ibid. 27:4*). This was his only joy, in accordance with the verse: “*The orders of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart*” (*ibid. 19:9*).

He Never Rejected Anyone

In the Gemara we find that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “*Sovereign of the universe, am I not pious? All the kings of the East and West sit with all their pomp among their hosts, whereas my hands are soiled with blood, with the fetus and the placenta, in order to declare a woman clean for her husband*” (*Berachot 4a*). In other words, he never rejected anyone who wanted to study Torah. He had every right to

rejoice in his majesty, but he chose not to because he sanctified himself in what was permitted to him. Since King David made himself into a stranger – like someone who felt that everything the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him was a gift – how much more did he not ask questions! This is because whoever depends on others for his sustenance will be happy with what he is given, and he will not dare make demands. To him, whatever he receives is enough.

Pride Prevents Teshuvah

On the verse, “*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart*” (*Shemot 7:3*), which we find in this week’s parsha, the Ramban cites a statement by our Sages in the Midrash: “*Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Does this not provide heretics with a reason for arguing that he had no means of repenting...?’ To which Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish replied, ‘Let the mouths of the heretics be stopped up. ‘If to the scoffers, He will scoff’*” [*Mishlei 3:34*]: When G-d warns a man once, twice, and even a third time – and he still does not repent – G-d then closes his heart against repentance so that He may exact vengeance from him for his sins. So it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Since G-d warned him five times and he paid no attention, G-d then said: “*You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart. Very well, I will add to your impurity*” ” (*Shemot Rabba 13:3*).

Pharaoh Planned on Sending Them Away

The Ramban explains this Midrash in the following way: “*Half of the plagues came upon him because of his transgressions, for in connection with them it is only said: ‘Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,’ ‘Pharaoh hardened his heart.’ Thus Pharaoh refused to let the Children of Israel go for the glory of G-d. But when the plagues began to bear down on him and he could no longer tolerate them, his heart softened and he planned on sending them away on account of the onslaught of the plagues, not in order to do the will of his Creator. Then Hashem hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, for the glory of His Name.*”

What the Ramban wrote, namely that Pharaoh should have sent the Children of Israel away for the glory of G-d and to do His will, means that Pharaoh should have understood Hashem’s greatness and power from the plagues, and he should have returned to Him and done His will, as we have previously explained. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, sent the plague of darkness near the end, after the other plagues. It was the last plague before that of the firstborn, for Rashi wrote that in that generation, there were evildoers among the Children of Israel who did not want to leave Egypt, and all of them died during the three days of darkness.

This is why G-d waited to kill these evildoers, for by that time they would have seen the strong hand that He displayed in Egypt through all the plagues that had occurred up to that point. Then they may have acknowledged the greatness of Hashem and His kindness towards all Israel, and realized that there was nothing good to expect from the Egyptians, since they had been struck down and beaten. They would then repent and want to leave Egypt, as did the Children of Israel who always feared His word. Yet since He already sent the plagues and they did not repent – since they persisted in their

rebellion and did not want to leave Egypt – He brought the plague of darkness upon them, and they died during the three days of darkness. Likewise, Pharaoh should have marveled at the miracles that he witnessed and repented. Since he did not, Hashem hardened his heart.

Incredible That Pharaoh Did Not Repent

We have learned that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not prevent Pharaoh from doing teshuvah. He simply hardened his heart so he would not do teshuvah because of the severity of the plagues. It is actually incredible that the wicked Pharaoh did not repent, for the Egyptians already knew the truth of Hashem's existence, as well as His ability to do anything He desires. As the magicians told Pharaoh, "*This is the finger of G-d*" (*Shemot 8:15*), and it was already said concerning the plague of hail: "*Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem*" (*ibid. 9:20*). Furthermore, Pharaoh himself told Moshe and Aaron after the plague: "*This time I have sinned. Hashem is righteous, and I and my people are wicked*" (*v.27*).

This is also mentioned in the Midrash, namely that Moshe warned Pharaoh for 24 days before each plague (*Shemot Rabba 9:12*). He did this in order to give Pharaoh enough time in between plagues to reflect upon the truth and repent. It is therefore incredible that he failed to do so.

Pride Prevents Teshuvah

It seems that Pharaoh did not do teshuvah because he considered himself to be a god, as the Sages say in the Midrash: "*Only in the morning did [Pharaoh] go out to the water, because this evildoer used to boast that he was a god and did not require to ease himself*" (*Shemot Rabba 9:8*). Thus we read, "*Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great serpent that crouches within its rivers, who has said: 'Mine is the river, and I have made myself!'*" (*Ezekiel 29:3*). Hence Pharaoh's pride prevented him from doing teshuvah, for he did not want to obey Hashem!

This is what we see among certain individuals who believe in G-d: Although they truly want to repent because they realize that their deeds are not good, they fail to do so because of pride. Each person must reflect upon the reality that the Holy One, blessed be He, created all the worlds, and that He alone can do what He pleases above and below. This is why we must obey His commandments and do His will, for in this way we will merit to return to Him. As it is said, "*His heart will understand, and he will repent and be healed*" (*Isaiah 6:10*).

The Exodus from Egypt is the Foundation of Faith

In the long and complicated process of making Pharaoh's heart yield by means of the plagues that struck Egypt, there are many edifying points that constitute for us a living, tangible lesson in faith and trust in the Creator of the universe.

G-d struck Pharaoh and all of Egypt with various supernatural plagues, and in great

quantity. Yet following these plagues, He hardened Pharaoh's heart. Why was all this necessary this? If the plagues were destined solely to make him release the Children of Israel from Egypt, then why harden his heart, and why to such a great extent? The heart of kings and rulers is completely in G-d's hands, so why send plagues throughout Egypt? All G-d had to do was incline Pharaoh's heart to free them.

The answer to this question is explicitly given in Scripture. The plagues were not meant as a simple punishment, but as a lesson for all the generations. As Hashem told Moshe, "*You shall speak everything that I will command you, and Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, that he should send the Children of Israel from his land. But I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and I will multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh will not heed you, and I shall put My hand upon Egypt, and I shall take out My hosts, My people the Children of Israel, from the land of Egypt with great judgments, and Egypt will know that I am Hashem*" (*Shemot* 7:2-5). In other words, G-d wanted to multiply miracles throughout the land for one reason only, so that "*Egypt will know that I am Hashem*." Sforno explains, and we find the same idea among other commentators, that the main purpose of the plagues and miracles was to lead the Egyptians to repentance. They were designed to show the Egyptians that there is none but G-d, to strengthen and renew in their heart a faith in the Creator of the world.

Understanding this point is crucial in learning the parshiot that deal with the exodus from Egypt. Everything that happened in Egypt, from beginning to end, had but a single and solitary purpose: To strengthen people's faith, to prove before the whole world that kingship belongs to Hashem, and that it extends to all that exists.

The Sequence of the Plagues

From the sequence of the plagues, the Kli Yakar concludes that they had a deliberate purpose, with one plague following the next, for each comprised a special lesson in faith. He states, "*Thus says Hashem: "Through this you will know that I am Hashem"*" [*Shemot* 7:17]. This is said only for the first of the Detzach plagues. For the first of the Adash plagues, we read: 'So you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the earth' [*ibid.* 8:18], and for the first of the Be'achav plagues we read: 'So you will know that there is none like Me in all the earth' [*ibid.* 9:14]. The Abarbanel examined this and said that Pharaoh objected to three things. The first was the existence of G-d, which he denied by saying: 'I do not know Hashem' [*ibid.* 5:2]. Hence in the first plague we read: 'Through this you will know that I am Hashem.' The second was Pharaoh saying that even if G-d existed, He would have no interest in His creations. Hence we read: 'I am Hashem in the midst of the earth.' The third was that Pharaoh argued against G-d's ability to change the course of nature, and for this we read: 'There is none like Me in all the earth,' meaning that He can do as He wishes."

This teaches us that the Creator of the universe, Who creates ex nihilo [out of

nothing], guides all that takes place in His universe, and that now, just as before, He can change the laws of nature as He desires. From the words of the Kli Yakar, we see how he divides the ten plagues into three groups, according to the pneumonic signs of Rabbi Yehuda that we find in the Passover Haggadah: Detzach, Adash, Be'achav. These are truly amazing words.

Whatever the case, we clearly see that the goal of the plagues was not just to bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt, but mainly to strengthen the faith of the Egyptians, the Children of Israel, and the entire world. That is why we received the commandment to recount the exodus from Egypt, to remind ourselves of what happened at that time, as the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe just prior to the plague of locusts: “*For I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may put these signs of Mine in his midst, and that you may tell in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem*” (*Shemot 10:1-2*).

In other words, there is a special requirement to recount all the plagues in great detail, in a mocking fashion, as Rashi states: “*I have made a mockery – I have mocked,*” and the commentators have looked into this. All this is for one purpose – “*that you may know that I am Hashem*” – for by recounting the plagues, our faith in the Creator is strengthened.

The Plague of Frogs – Ex Nihilo

To strengthen our faith, we only have to look at a few plagues and examine their lesser-known details. For example, take the plague of frogs: We know that a large frog arose from the river and that millions of frogs emerged from it. The miracle that everyone discusses, however, is how frogs suddenly emerged from the river, and how in a single instant all the frogs vanished from Egypt. Yet there is something else that constitutes a miracle, namely the very existence of this frog, which appeared ex nihilo [out of nothing]. This is because the plague of blood killed all the frogs in the river, and the river itself became putrid. This means that the river became a place of death, which is to say that no living being could survive in it. In that case, from where did this frog come, the one which emerged from the river? It had to be a miracle.

All this occurred so that Pharaoh – who said, “*mine is the river*” (*Ezekiel 29:3*) – could realize that he had no authority over the river; he could not decide what would live or die in the river. He did not even have authority over animals, which could appear suddenly, ex nihilo, just like this frog. When Hashem explained to Moshe what he was to say to Pharaoh, He told him: “*If you refuse to let [them] go, behold – I will strike all your borders with frogs. The river will swarm with frogs, and they will go up and come into your house and into your bedroom and upon your bed, and into the house of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls*” (*Shemot 7:27-28*). Why mention the river? Was there some curse in the presence of frogs near the river? We also read, after Moshe prayed for the removal of the frogs: “*The frogs will depart from you and your houses, and from your servants and from your people. Only*

in the river will they remain" (*Shemot* 8:7). Why must they remain in the river? Sforno speaks of this, writing: "*Only in the river will they remain – for all the generations, and they will not ascend upon the land.*" In other words, the frogs will remain in the river for the generations to come, thereby demonstrating that they do ascend upon the land, but remain only in the river. This is to highlight the great miracle of the plague of frogs, namely that the frogs left the river, where they lived, and came up on land.

Without these words, we could have only said that the presence of frogs around the river proved that G-d controlled Egypt and made a mockery of their idols. This is because the river (*i.e., the Nile*), as we know, was an Egyptian god. They worshipped it and ensured that it was clean. The very fact that it became dirty, putrid, and swarmed with frogs like any other river or pond constituted a plague for the Egyptians. Hence the frogs remained in the river for all the generations, to demonstrate that it was an ordinary body of water, just like any other.

From what we have said, we realize that the appearance of a frog in the river was a miracle, for at that point all the fish in the river had died, and yet life suddenly appeared, *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, this astounding appearance of life was preceded by an explicit order to Moshe, to demonstrate that only the Creator of the universe, Who holds all life in His hands, is the One Who can create a frog and make it emerge from the river. Hence frogs have remained there forever, in order to recall the miracle of the frog's emergence from the river.

For us, this constitutes an additional proof that the Creator of the universe directs all of creation. There is none but Him, and "*Egypt will know that I am Hashem.*"

The Wickedness and Pride of Pharaoh: A Lack of Teshuvah

During the ten plagues, Pharaoh was obstinate and refused to send the Jewish people out of Egypt, as it is written: "*Yet Pharaoh's heart became obstinate*" (*Shemot* 9:7). Nevertheless, his advisors stressed and implored him: "*Send out the men, that they may serve Hashem their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?*" (*ibid.* 10:7). Moreover, we know that at certain times it was G-d Himself Who strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, as we read: "*Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh*" (*ibid.* 9:12).

Pharaoh's obstinacy is surprising, since a blinding truth came upon him as he realized the supremacy of Hashem our G-d. In fact during the third plague (*lice*), his advisors were already telling him: "*It is the finger of G-d*" (*Shemot* 8:15). Likewise, when Egypt was struck by the plague of hail, Pharaoh's servants begged him: "*Send out the men, that they may serve Hashem their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?*" Pharaoh finally grew fearful during the plague of wild beasts, for even the animals that he had "*tamed*" through magic and placed in front of his royal palace began to attack and devour his servants. At that point he found himself in danger. Thus he knew that his life was threatened, depending only upon the benevolent prayer that Moshe and Aaron would say for him. Under such conditions, how could Pharaoh have continued

to be obstinate?

Furthermore, despite the fact that G-d Himself strengthened Pharaoh's heart, he could have always repented if he really wanted to. In fact regarding Elisha ben Avuya, our Sages say that a celestial voice came forth and declared: "*Return you backsliding children – except Acher*" (*Chagigah 15a*). (Note: As a result of his complete denial of Torah, Elisha is called Acher in the Talmud.)

This text is difficult to understand. Can Hashem prevent someone from repenting? Clearly not! However He usually helps whoever begins the process of teshuvah. In the above case, the celestial voice declared that Elisha ben Avuya would not receive such help. All the same, if he had been prepared to summon all the strength required, the path of teshuvah would not have been closed to him.

In regards to Elazar ben Durdanya, our Sages recount that as he was with a harlot, "*she blew forth breath and said: 'As this breath will not return to its place, so will Eleazar ben Durdanya never be received in repentance.'*" However he did not lose hope, and he went to sit between two mountains, placed his head between his knees, and wept to such a degree that his soul left his body. At that point a celestial voice was heard proclaiming, "*Rabbi Eleazar ben Durdanya is destined for the life of the World to Come!*" (*Avodah Zarah 17a*).

That being the case, Pharaoh (who was an extremely intelligent man and had proof of Hashem's great power) should have been able to control his heart of stone. What's more is that – being a firstborn himself, and after having seen all the warnings uttered by Moshe and Aaron at G-d's command being fulfilled – Pharaoh should have been afraid to be among the first to die during the plague of the firstborn!

That's not all. Following the plague of darkness, Pharaoh chased Moshe and Aaron from his presence, as it is written: "*Go from me! Beware – do not see my face anymore, for on the day you see my face, you shall die!*" (*Shemot 10:28*). Such a threat seems absurd, for Moshe was above nature, and if Pharaoh had been unable to kill him in the past, how could he do so now?

We may draw the following conclusions from this discussion: Pharaoh knew that Hashem our G-d has no equal, and yet he was unable to yield before Him and admit the truth. Why? Because he was proud and had made himself into a god, as we read: "*Go to Pharaoh in the morning. Behold, he goes out to the water*" (*Shemot 7:15*). (In other words, Pharaoh claimed to be a god by pretending that he did not need to relieve himself, which is why he rose early in the morning to secretly relieve himself in the Nile.) As long as he had not humbled himself before G-d and explicitly acknowledged that he was a simple man, not a god, all attempts to turn to the true G-d remained impossible for him. In fact his teshuvah depended only on his willingness to yield. Because Pharaoh still wanted to sin, however, it meant that he had not yet yielded to Hashem.

Further on, we note that Pharaoh finally seemed to repent, for he said: "*Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones*" (*Shemot 9:27*). Nevertheless,

this realization was only superficial, for deep down Pharaoh was unable to compromise when it came to his honor, which is why he was able to risk his own life for it. In fact he knew that he was unable to kill Moshe and Aaron, and it was only for this reason that he did not try. Still, in order to protect his pride and honor before his servants, he adopted this foolish attitude of resistance. Despite all this, he eventually turned to G-d by ignoring his pride when he realized that there was no longer any need to risk it. Upon seeing the prince of Esav drowning, as well as his own cavalry and army, Pharaoh realized that chasing after honors was not worth it. He understood that pursuing honor, jealousy, and pride was useless, since everything in the world passes away, and he himself was on the verge of perishing. At that point he was drained of energy, having no more subjects to control or being able to honor him, since they had drowned. He retroactively understood that he should not have tried to resist G-d in Egypt, for it was the same G-d Who was now subjugating him.

Pharaoh finally attained the truth when he said, at the splitting of the sea: “*Who is like You among the strong, Hashem?*” (*Shemot 15:11*). Through force of will, he could have attained this truth in Egypt, since his life was in danger with each plague, as it was at the sea. In that case, he would not have arrived at such an extreme situation.

We must realize, therefore, that teshuvah was very difficult for Pharaoh, just as forgoing his self-declared status as a god to his servants was. Hence he preferred to risk his life (*by resisting G-d*) rather than to renounce his self-deification. This fear of revealing his true identity to his servants no longer existed when the sea split, for all his servants had died at that point. It was then that Pharaoh realized the immensity of his error, as well as his foolishness.

Rescinding Free Will

It is written, “*Go to Pharaoh in the morning. Behold, he is going forth to the water, and you shall stand opposite him on the bank of the Nile, and the staff that was turned into a serpent you shall take in your hand*” (*Shemot 7:15*).

In his commentary, Rashi explains why Hashem ordered Moshe to the riverbank in the morning, saying that Pharaoh claimed to be divine, having no need to relieve himself. Hence he would get up early and go to the Nile and relieve himself in secret. Hashem ordered Moshe to go out to the river to show Pharaoh that he knew of his secret, and that he was deceiving his people by proclaiming to be divine. In fact Pharaoh should have felt shame before Moshe, and he should have repented of his stubborn refusal to release the Children of Israel. Moshe already knew of Pharaoh’s deception in claiming to be divine, and yet he still hardened his heart, continuing to proclaim himself a god without shame.

We can explain something else according to this view. Someone I know asked me the following question: Why did Hashem harden Pharaoh’s heart during the last five plagues, since He only punishes a person when he acts out of free will, when he has the

ability to choose between good and evil? It would seem, therefore, that Pharaoh did not deserve to be punished! This question is answered by the Ramban in his commentary on the verse, “*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart*” (*Shemot* 7:3). Here the Ramban states that Pharaoh exercised free will during the first five plagues, the fifth being the plague of pestilence. During these plagues we read, “*Pharaoh’s heart was hardened*” (v.13), “*Pharaoh hardened his heart*” (8:28), etc.

For the remainder of the plagues, however, the Torah uses the expression: “*Hashem hardened Pharaoh’s heart*.” The Ramban explains that Pharaoh hardened his own heart during the first five plagues. Yet after the plague of pestilence, Pharaoh would have tried to repent and not harden his heart. At that point it was Hashem Who hardened it at the end of each plague, until the plague of the firstborn. That being said, why was Pharaoh punished? After all, it was Hashem Who hardened his heart!

According to this explanation, we must say that during the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his heart after each plague, arrogantly claiming to be a god before Moshe, who surprised Pharaoh when he caught him relieving himself by the river. Even after the first five plagues – during which Hashem saw Pharaoh consistently choosing the path of evil, hardening his heart, and not once trying to choose good, to see what it was like – all that Pharaoh wanted to do was evil. Hashem then punished him by rescinding his free will, the result being that Pharaoh continued to act in accordance with the forces of evil that dwelled in him. According to what a person decides to do on his own, Heaven decides the rest of his conduct by removing, if necessary, his free will and committing him to the path that he himself chose at the outset.

I also found the following in the Midrash: “*Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Does this not provide heretics with grounds for arguing that [Pharaoh] had no means of repenting, since it says: For I have hardened his heart [Shemot 10:1]?’ To this Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish replied: ‘Let the mouths of the heretics be closed! If it concerns scoffers, He will scoff them [Mishlei 3:34]. When G-d warns a man once, twice, and even a third time – but he still does not repent – G-d then closes his heart against repentance so that He can exact vengeance from him for his sins. So it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Since G-d sent him [a warning to let His people go] five times, but he paid no attention, G-d then said: “You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; I will add defilement to your defilement” ’” (*Shemot Rabba* 13:3).*

Heartfelt Repentance

It is written, “*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). This occurred during the plague of hail, when Moshe warned Pharaoh and his servants that whoever wanted to be spared from this plague should bring everything inside. Those who believed in Hashem brought everything inside and did not suffer any damage, whereas those who did not believe in Hashem brought nothing inside and suffered serious damage. Now it’s difficult to understand how some people still did not believe

in Hashem, since during the plague of lice the Egyptian sorcerers had told Pharaoh: “*This is the finger of G-d*” (*Shemot 8:15*).

In his book *Kesef Mezukak*, the gaon Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, may his merit protect us, explains that starting from the first plague, feelings of repentance were already beginning to stir in Pharaoh and his servants. However this repentance was superficial, devoid of any heartfelt sentiment. Hence they did not bring their livestock inside following Moshe’s warning. When a person’s repentance is superficial, he maintains his negative attitude and believes that he has repented. In reality, however, his “repentance” was never accepted in the first place.

On the verse, “*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*” (*Shemot 10:1*), the Rif explains that when Hashem saw that Pharaoh’s repentance was completely superficial, He hardened his heart so he could tolerate additional plagues – locusts, darkness, and the plague of the firstborn – until he would truly repent.

Hashem again hardened Pharaoh’s heart after the plague of the firstborn so he would pursue the Children of Israel to the sea, the reason being that Pharaoh’s repentance during the plague of the firstborn was only due to a fear of punishment, not because he was yielding to G-d.

This contains a great lesson, namely that it is not enough to repent superficially. Rather, we must sense repentance in our heart. To do this, we must engage in deep soul-searching to see if the repentance we are doing is also present in our heart. When repentance is only superficial, not being accompanied by a broken heart, we remain in our transgressions and our repentance is not true teshuvah. Hence we are unable to fear or respect G-d’s word.

The Pride that Prevented Repentance

On the verse “*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart*” (*Shemot 7:3*), the Ramban cites a statement by our Sages in the Midrash: “*For I have hardened his heart [Shemot 10:1] – Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Does this not provide heretics with a reason for arguing that he had no means of repenting...?’ Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish replied, ‘Let the mouths of the heretics be stopped up. ‘If to the scoffers, He will scoff’*” [*Mishlei 3:34*]: When G-d warns a man once, twice, and even a third time – and he still does not repent – then G-d closes his heart against repentance so that He may exact vengeance from him for his sins. So it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Since G-d warned him five times and he paid no attention, G-d then said: “*You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart. Very well, I will add to your impurity*” ” (*Shemot Rabba 13:3*).

To explain the words of the Midrash, the Ramban states: “*Half of the plagues came upon him because of his transgressions, for in connection with them it is only said: ‘Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,’ ‘Pharaoh hardened his heart.’ Thus Pharaoh refused to let the Children of Israel go for the glory of G-d. Yet when the plagues began to bear*

down on him and he could no longer tolerate them, his heart softened and he planned on sending them away on account of the onslaught of the plagues, not in order to do the will of his Creator. Then Hashem hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate for the glory of His Name.”

According to the Ramban, Pharaoh should have sent the Children of Israel away for the glory of G-d and to fulfill His will. As a result of the plagues, he should have realized Hashem’s greatness and power, and he should have returned to Him and carried out His will. As we have previously explained, Hashem chose to send the plague of darkness after all the other plagues, just before the death of the firstborn, because as Rashi states, “*there were among the Israelites in that generation wicked people who did not want to leave. They died during the three days of darkness.*” Why did Hashem wait until then to punish them? Because He hoped that upon seeing the hand of G-d and the great plagues that had already been sent, they would acknowledge Hashem’s greatness and the kindness that He bestows to His people, and they would realize that they could expect nothing from the Egyptians, those lowly and immoral people. They would then repent and want to leave the land of Egypt, as did the honorable Jews who were filled with a fear of G-d. Yet Hashem had already sent them eight plagues and they still did not turn from their evil ways, remaining rebellious and not wanting to leave Egypt. He then brought the plague of darkness, and they all died during those first three days. Likewise, Pharaoh should have learned from these miracles performed by G-d, and he should have repented. Since he did not, Hashem hardened his heart.

Time to Reflect

Thus G-d did not prevent Pharaoh from repenting. He simply hardened his heart so he would not repent as a result of the severity of the plagues. It is very surprising that Pharaoh did not repent, since the Egyptians had already acknowledged G-d’s presence and knew that everything was within His power, as the sorcerers had said: “*This is the finger of G-d*” (*Shemot* 8:15).

Likewise, concerning the plague of hail it is written: “*Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem*” (*ibid.* 9:20). Even after that plague, Pharaoh himself admitted to Moshe and Aaron: “*This time I have sinned. Hashem is righteous, and I and my people are wicked*” (*v.27*). Furthermore, the Midrash explains that Moshe warned Pharaoh for 24 days prior to each plague in order to give him time to reflect and repent between each plague (*Shemot Rabba* 9:12). Hence it is very surprising that Pharaoh did not repent.

Pride Prevents Repentance

In reality, Pharaoh did not repent because he considered himself to be a god. Our Sages deduced this from the verse, “*Go to Pharaoh in the morning – behold, he goes out to the water*” [*Shemot* 7:15], as we read in the Midrash: “*Only in the morning did [Pharaoh] go out to the water, because this evildoer used to boast that he was a god and did not need to believe himself*” (*Shemot Rabba* 9:8). Similarly we read, “*Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great serpent that crouches within its rivers,*

who has said: ‘Mine is the river; and I have made myself!’” (Ezekiel 29:3). Because of his pride, and because he did not want to obey G-d, Pharaoh did not repent.

We see the same attitude among regular individuals. Even if they believe in G-d, and even if they know that they are doing evil but they truly want to repent, their pride prevents them from doing so. However each of us must realize that G-d created the universe and that only He can act, both in the upper and lower worlds. Hence we must observe G-d’s commandments and do His will in order to return to Him, as it is written: “*His heart will understand, and he will repent and be healed*” (Isaiah 6:10).

Parsha Bo

Purity Among Jews Leads to Victory Over the Wicked

On the verse, “*Come to Pharaoh...*” (*Exodus 10:1*), the holy Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk states in his book Noam Elimelech: “ ‘Come to Pharaoh...that you may tell....’ It seems that the Creator’s main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make it a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him, in order that not even a single letter would be missing from the Sefer Torah. When Moses went to Pharaoh, it was not of his own accord, for he did not want to look at a wicked man. Therefore Hashem told Moses to ‘come,’ meaning to come and find him of his own accord, for in this way an additional decree of holiness would be added by the extra letters used in the Torah for this purpose. It was therefore not fitting to say ‘go,’ for going may even be against one’s will. That is, even if one disagrees, his legs will still carry him where he goes. As for ‘coming,’ the term applies when one consents of his own free will, which leads him to come. This is what constitutes, ‘So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai],’ a word that evokes otiot, the ‘letters’ of the Torah.” This is what the holy Rav said.

We need to understand what the Rav means by saying, “...to make it a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him, in order that not even a single letter would be missing from the Sefer Torah.” Was it necessary for the wicked Pharaoh to complete what was missing in the Torah? Could Moses not have issued an additional rebuke in order for the Sefer to be complete? It would have been preferable for Moses to do so, for the less he spoke with that evildoer, the better. Therefore what is the meaning of, “*So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai]*,” which designates the letters (*otiot*) of the Torah? We may explain it in the following way: Pharaoh was at the head of the forces of impurity, and he clearly knew that in order for the Children of Israel to leave Egypt with a high hand and to receive the holy Torah, which has 600,000 letters, they would also have to number 600,000 souls. The Sages note that the word Israel is formed from the initials of *yesh shishim ribo otiot laTorah* (“there are six hundred thousand letters in the Torah”).

This is why Pharaoh tried to kill as many of the Children of Israel as he could, as well as why he decreed, “*Every son that will be born, into the river shall you throw him*” (*Exodus 1:22*). As such the Children of Israel would be fewer in number, and therefore unable to leave Egypt.

Furthermore, by bringing despair upon the Children of Israel, Pharaoh made them lose faith and confidence in the Creator of the universe. Yet the Children of Israel strengthened their faith in the Creator. Through whom? Through none other than the wicked king of Egypt, Pharaoh himself! As a result, it was Pharaoh himself who

caused so many extra words in the Torah to be written about him, thus reinforcing the Children of Israel's faith in Hashem. It was also in this way that number of the letters of the Torah reached 600,000, the same number as the Children of Israel. This is why it is stated, "*They could not delay*" (*Exodus* 12:39). Why not? Because once the letters in the Torah reached their full number, and once the Children of Israel strengthened themselves and emerged from the 49 gates of impurity (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a), the Holy One, blessed be He, immediately took them out of Egypt. We find this idea in the words of the Noam Elimelech: "*The Creator's main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make this a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him.*" In other words, what was said concerning Pharaoh represented a sign for the Children of Israel, meaning that there is a tikkun for one Jew after another, and as such the Torah would be complete.

Since we have reached this point, we can understand why Pharaoh often drove Moses from his presence (see *Exodus* 10:28). Pharaoh did this because he wanted to minimize his conversations with Moses, for otherwise he knew that the extra words they spoke would complete the letters of the Sefer Torah, and thus the souls of the Children of Israel would attain their tikkun. He also knew that many of them would die in the plague of darkness, and therefore they would need to greatly add to their numbers.

However Moses went to meet him by the edge of the river (*ibid. 7:15*) – where he could return home whenever he wanted – precisely in order to increase their words. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to go willingly to Pharaoh ("come to Pharaoh"), for he would not want to speak if he went unwillingly. The Sefer Torah would therefore be missing letters, which would affect the souls of the Children of Israel.

As we said, Pharaoh was at the head of the forces of impurity, the one responsible for the spiritual descent of the Children of Israel into the 49 gates of impurity (*Zohar, Yitro* 39a). Pharaoh did this in order to make them feed off impurity. However by the lengthy conversations that Moses had with him, Moses extracted everything that Pharaoh had absorbed, completing what was missing, as in the verse: "*He devoured chayil [strength], but he will disgorge it*" (*Job* 20:15). From the mouth of Pharaoh, the leader of the forces of impurity, Moses extracted what he had devoured.

In the Passover Haggadah we say, "*My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a few. There he became a nation – great, strong, and numerous*" (from *Deuteronomy* 26:5). What connection is there between, "*My father was a wandering Aramean*" and "*He went down to Egypt*"?

This can be fully understood in light of what we have said. As previously explained, Laban wanted to destroy everything, and when he realized that he could not defeat Jacob, he used his magic to make the sparks of holiness descend into Egypt. Jacob and his descendants would therefore have to go there in order to achieve a tikkun. However the Children of Israel achieved a tikkun with all the sparks, and therein lay the completeness of the Jewish people. Just as it is forbidden for a Torah scroll to be

missing a single letter, which would invalidate it, so too is it forbidden for a single soul to be missing among the Children of Israel. If a single soul is missing, the letters will fly off and a great danger will confront the Jewish people. However through Torah study and unity among Jews, all that is missing will be complete. Therein lies the completeness of the Jewish people, and it is precisely in this way that they can defeat their enemies. It is also in this way that the forces of impurity growing in this world will be defeated and that holiness will increase.

Serving G-d Both Inwardly and Outwardly

It is written, “*The L-RD will pass through to strike Egypt, and He will see the blood that is on the lintel and the two doorposts. The L-RD will pass over the door and He will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you*” (*Exodus 12:23*). This seems odd, for did the Holy One, blessed be He – Who knows the thoughts of every creature and Who sees deep within the heart – need to see a sign of blood in order to pass over the houses of the Children of Israel and not kill their firstborn? On the contrary! The heart and mind may be hidden from view, such that nobody can know what the other is thinking, but the Holy One, blessed be He, knows the thoughts of every person. Thus when it comes to a house, whose residents are known by all, would it not be obvious that Hashem knows who is inside?

To answer this question, we first note that there are two ways to perform mitzvot. Some people say, “*I won’t be stricter than necessary, otherwise people might ridicule me. It’s enough that I believe in Hashem.*” On the other hand, some people carry out all the mitzvot, but without conviction. They do so out of habit, performing them only superficially because they are used to doing them in this way.

In response to the first group, those who are afraid of what others might think, Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim Zatzal began his book by citing Yehudah ben Tema in Pirkei Avot 5:20: “*Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer; and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven.*” He explains the specifics of these four things insofar as they pertain to serving Hashem, beginning with “*bold as a leopard,*” which represents a great principle in serving the Creator (*see Tur, Orach Chaim 1*). In fact a person sometimes wants to perform a mitzvah, but he will hesitate when others are around because he is afraid that they may ridicule him. He should therefore demonstrate boldness against these scorners, not refraining from performing mitzvot on account of them. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai told his disciples, “*May the fear of Heaven be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood*” (*Berachot 28b*).

In response to the second group, those who perform mitzvot only outwardly, without paying attention to what they are doing, it is said: “*Man sees what his eyes behold, but the L-RD sees into the heart*” (*1 Samuel 16:7*). This means that a person sometimes performs mitzvot without being aware of it, like a monkey that is trained to do something without understanding why. When the Children of Israel tied a lamb

to their bedposts, and the Egyptians looked into their homes and saw that their idol was tied up in this way, they cried out and asked what they were doing to the lamb. The Children of Israel replied, “*Our G-d commanded us to sacrifice this lamb in His honor.*” In fact the Sages say that when the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to slaughter the Passover offering, Moses replied: “*Master of the universe, how can I possibly do such a thing? Do You not know that the lamb is the god of the Egyptians?*” Thus we read, “*Behold, if we sacrifice the god of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?*” (Exodus 8:22). G-d replied: “*As you live, Israel will not depart from here before they slaughter the Egyptian gods before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing*” (Shemot Rabba 16:3). This is exactly what Hashem did, for on the same night that He struck the firstborn of Egypt, the Children of Israel slaughtered the Passover offering and ate it. The Egyptians saw their firstborn dead and their idols slaughtered, but they could do nothing.

When the Children of Israel rebelled against the gods of Egypt, Hashem’s faith entered their hearts in abundance, thereby extirpating idolatry from there.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to put blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes, for blood alludes to inner devotion, the blood being the soul. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to tell them by allusion that the main thing in serving Him is service of the heart, of the soul. Worshipping Hashem in a superficial way is not acceptable, as our Sages have said: “*Torah and mitzvot without fear and love of Heaven cannot endure before Hashem*” (Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 10,25b). The Torah commands us to love Him: “*You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul*” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Exactly how do we love Him in this way? By diligently studying Torah and carefully performing its mitzvot. That is how we love Hashem with all our heart and soul.

It is not acceptable, however, for a person to serve Hashem only inwardly, being ashamed to serve Him in public. By doing so, a person is substituting the fear of Hashem for the fear of men, which is why Hashem wanted the Children of Israel to place blood – symbolizing inner devotion – on their doorposts and lintels, for these are located on the outside. This tells us that we must serve Hashem both inwardly and outwardly; we cannot choose to serve Him in only one way.

Because the Children of Israel served their Creator with inner devotion, since they repudiated idolatry by sacrificing the Passover offering, they immediately went on to serve Him outwardly as well, without fear of the Egyptians. The Sages tell us that initially the Children of Israel did not want to circumcise themselves in Egypt: “*When G-d was about to deliver them, He could find no merit in them. What did He do? He summoned Moses and said, ‘Go and circumcise them.’ ... Many of them did not agree to be circumcised. G-d, however, commanded that the Passover should be celebrated, and when Moses prepared the Passover lamb, G-d decreed that the four winds of the world should send forth the scent of the breezes of the Garden of Eden. At that point they went and joined in the Passover, for it says: ‘Awake, O north wind, and come,*

O south. Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out' [Song of Songs 4:16]. This scent spread over a distance of a 40-day journey. All the Israelites then came flocking to Moses and said: 'Please give us some of the Passover lamb to eat,' for they were famished on account of the odor. His reply was, 'G-d has commanded that unless one is circumcised, he cannot partake of it,' as it says: 'The L-RD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover...."' At that point they immediately agreed to be circumcised, and the blood of the Passover offering mingled with that of circumcision" (Shemot Rabba 19:5).

Since they circumcised themselves and offered the Passover offering, they served Hashem both inwardly and outwardly. Their outward service is alluded to in the mitzvah of circumcision, which is external, a drop of blood, whereas the blood of the Passover offering represents their inward service, as we have said. Hence serving G-d must be both inward and outward. A person should not be afraid of those who might ridicule him, and a mitzvah should not be carried out automatically or by rote. This is why the Sages said that the blood of the Passover offering mingled with that of circumcision. The Holy One, blessed be He, passed over all of them, embracing and blessing them, as it is written: "*I passed over you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you: 'In your blood [the Passover offering] you shall live.' I said to you: 'In your blood [circumcision] you shall live'*" (Ezekiel 16:6). The Arizal (*Sha'ar HaKavanot, Derushai HaPesach, Derush 3*) wrote that the term Pesach ("Passover") comes from *peh sach* ("the mouth that speaks"), in accordance with the statement of our Sages: "*Pegiah [intercession] means only prayer*" (*Berachot 26b*). The Sages also said, "*What is service of the heart? You must perforce say [that it is] prayer*" (*Taanith 2a*). In other words, the Passover offering and holiday teach us the importance of serving Hashem with inner devotion, from the bottom of our hearts. However it is not enough for our service to be limited to the heart, for it must also come from the mouth. This is *peh sach*: The mouth (*peh*) corresponds to outward service, and speech (*sach*) corresponds to inward service.

Hashem Grants Wealth to Those Who Merit it

It is written, "*Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man borrow from his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels*" (*Exodus 11:2*). The Gemara states, "*The word na means 'please.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Please, go and tell Israel, 'Please borrow from the Egyptians vessels of silver and vessels of gold,' so that this tzaddik [Abraham] may not say, 'And they shall serve them, and they shall afflict them'*" [*Genesis 15:14*] He did fulfill for them, but "*and afterwards they will leave with great wealth*" [*ibid.*] He did not fulfill for them'" (*Berachot 9ab*).

This is extremely surprising. Could anyone possibly think that Abraham, in the World to Come, would torment himself, worry, and complain about the silver and gold that his descendants would fail to receive? If they had not received food or clothing, that we could understand. However once they left Egypt, the clouds of glory provided

them with everything they needed. In fact they had absolutely nothing to do, for the manna descended for them and in it they could savor all the tastes in the world. Would Abraham therefore worry about the silver and gold that his descendants would have failed to receive?

Rather, this is what Hashem told Moses: “*This tzaddik said to Me, ‘How will I know that I will inherit it?’ [Genesis 15:8]. Do you think that he did trust Me that his descendants would inherit the land? Certainly not! What he feared, however, is that his descendants would not serve Hashem, that they would assimilate among the nations and no longer observe Torah. I said to him, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them and they will oppress them 400 years. But also the nation that they will serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth’ [Genesis 15:13-14].*”

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, tell him “*and afterwards they will leave with great wealth*”? Does a person who is held hostage by bandits ask for great wealth in return? He only asks to be released! Thus the Gemara states, “[*It is*] like a man who was kept in prison and people told him: ‘Tomorrow they will release you from prison and give you plenty of money.’ He replies, ‘Please, let me go free today and I shall ask for nothing more!’” (*Berachot 9b*).

Yet here, Abraham was told that his descendants would not assimilate among the nations of the world. G-d told him, “*Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens.*” He revealed to Abraham that there was a decree that the Children of Israel would be exiled in Egypt, telling him: “*Although they are destined to live among the Egyptians for 400 years, I will protect them so they will not be assimilated. I will take them out before they reach the 50th gate of impurity. Furthermore, I will give them a few mitzvot, and by observing them they will merit to emerge from there.*” He also promised that the Children of Israel would be worthy of receiving a great reward in this world by their good deeds, just as long as they do His will: “*If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing. You will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land*” (*Leviticus 26:3-5*). G-d also told Abraham: From the fact that they will leave with great wealth, they will know that they have done My will, for otherwise – if they had not been meritorious – I would not have given them great wealth.

He Should Not Have to Suffer

Furthermore, when the Children of Israel do G-d’s will, the Holy One, blessed be He, gives them a reward in this world, namely the ability to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. This is because, as the Sages have said: “*Three things deprive a man of his senses and a knowledge of his Creator*” (*Eruvin 41b*), and one of them is poverty. When the Children of Israel fail to perform G-d’s will, He does not give them money, since in any case they are not doing His will and have no need for peace of mind. Yet when

the Children of Israel do His will, G-d yearns for them to fulfill all the mitzvot, some of which cannot be done without money. Although the clouds of glory provided them with all they needed, a wealthy man who fulfills a mitzvah cannot be compared to a poor man who does the same. In fact a wealthy man embellishes the mitzvot that he performs, whereas a poor man – who depends on others – spends the least amount possible to perform them.

This is why Hashem told Moses: “*Please, go and tell Israel, ‘Please borrow from the Egyptians vessels of silver and vessels of gold,’ so that this tzaddik may not say, ‘And they shall serve them, and they shall afflict them’*” He did fulfill for them, but “*and afterwards they will leave with great wealth*” He did not fulfill for them.” In that case, Abraham would have suffered upon seeing them leave Egypt without great wealth. Since this tzaddik elevated himself to a lofty level, it was not fitting for him to suffer by thinking that the Children of Israel did not perform Hashem’s will. Thus Moses had to tell them to borrow silver and gold vessels from the Egyptians.

He Elevated Himself to a Lofty Level

Why did G-d not say, “*So that Abraham may not say,*” rather than: “*So that this tzaddik may not say?*” Tosaphot (*Eduyot 3:4*) teach, “*One who has disciples, he is called ‘Rabbi.’ When his disciples are forgotten, he is called ‘Rabban.’ When everyone is forgotten, he is called by his name.*” In the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, the Rambam explains this statement by saying: “*This divides the people who are mentioned in the Mishnah, numbering 128, into three groups. Whoever is at the highest level is called by his own name, such as Hillel, Shammai, Shemaya, and Avtalyon. This testifies to the greatness and honor of their level, for it is impossible to find a title that befits their name, just as the prophets did not carry titles. However the Sages who, in His eyes, are lower than this level are called ‘Rabban,’ such as Rabban Gamliel and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai. Those who are lower than this level are called ‘Rabbi,’ such as Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah.*”

As a result, the greater the man, the fewer titles he is given. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, called Abraham “*this tzaddik*” because he elevated himself to a tremendous level in the World above, where he could not even be called by his own name.

The Blood of the Passover Offering

It is written, “*Hashem will pass through to strike Egypt, and He will see the blood upon the lintel and the two doorposts; and Hashem will pass over the entrance and not allow the destroyer to come into your homes to strike you*” (*Shemot 12:23*). Did the Creator of the universe – Who created all things, Who knows the thoughts and plans of everyone, and Who probes hearts and minds – need to see blood on the doorposts in order to pass over the homes of the Children of Israel and not kill their firstborn?

The Sages have said, “*How is the Passover offering roasted? We bring a spit or pomegranate wood and thrust it into its mouth [right down] as far as its buttocks, and*

we place its knees and its entrails inside" (*Pesachim 74a*). This is surprising, for how does the Passover offering differ from the other offerings in regards to its entrails? For the other offerings, the entrails are not brought with the main offering, but are brought separately by the kohanim who remove them.

The Sages have also taught that the Children of Israel took the Paschal lamb and tied it to the foot of their beds. When the Egyptians heard the bleating of lambs, they gnashed their teeth because their gods were going to be slaughtered, but they could do nothing to stop it (*Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim 430*). This requires an explanation, for why did the Holy One, blessed be He, order the Children of Israel to tie the Paschal lamb to the foot of their beds? Could they not have tied them elsewhere? They could have tied them to their front doors, where people would have seen them, not inside their homes where nobody looks.

Like Your Fear of Men

This signifies that there are two ways of fulfilling mitzvot. Some say, "*I refuse to add pointless restrictions to my life because people will ridicule me. It's enough that I believe in Hashem in my heart.*" Others fulfill all the mitzvot, but without conviction. Instead, they fulfill them out of habit.

In regards to the first category, those who are afraid of what others may think, Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim Zatzal cites Yehudah ben Tema as saying, "*Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven*" (*Pirkei Avot 5:20*). He detailed these four ways of serving the Creator beginning with the boldness of a leopard, for it represents a great principle in serving Hashem. Indeed, a person may sometimes want to perform a mitzvah, but will avoid it because people may ridicule him. Hence we are taught to be bold in regards to scoffers, and not to avoid performing a mitzvah. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai told his students, "*May your fear of Heaven be like your fear of men*" (*Berachot 28b*).

In regards to the second category, those who perform mitzvot superficially, without paying attention to what they are doing, the Sages have said: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written: 'But Hashem looks at the heart' [I Samuel 16:7]*" (*Sanhedrin 106b*). This means that a person will sometimes fulfill mitzvot, but feel that he has not fully accomplished them, just like a monkey that is taught to jump, but does not know what it is doing.

One who feels shame before scoffers will end up sinning, for he fears men but not the King of kings. The Sages have said that the Children of Israel in Egypt neglected the mitzvah of circumcision in order to gain favor with the Egyptians. Hashem therefore changed their hearts so they would detest His people.

Separating Them From Idolatry

When the Children of Israel tied a lamb to the foot of their beds, the Egyptians looked into their homes and saw their god tied to a bed. They screamed and asked the Children of Israel why this lamb was tied up, and they replied: "*Our G-d has*

commanded us to slaughter this lamb in His honor.”

In the Midrash our Sages say, “*When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe to slay the Paschal lamb, Moshe replied: ‘Sovereign of the universe, how can I possibly do this thing? Do You not know that the lamb is the god of Egypt?’ Thus it says: ‘Behold, if we were to slaughter the god of Egypt before their eyes, will they not stone us?’ [Shemot 8:22]. G-d replied, ‘As surely as you live, Israel will not leave here before they slaughter the gods of Egypt before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing at all.’ This is what He did, for on that night He slew the Egyptian firstborn, and on that night the Israelites slaughtered their Paschal lamb and ate it. When the Egyptians beheld their firstborn slain and their gods slaughtered, they could do nothing”* (*Shemot Rabba 16:3*).

Since the Children of Israel rebelled against the gods of Egypt, an abundance of faith entered their hearts and extirpated the spirit of idolatry that had been there. Taking the lamb served to distance them from idolatry, and it accustomed them to the performance of mitzvot, as the Sages have said: “*Remove yourselves from idolatry and attach yourselves to mitzvot.*”

In principle, it is impossible for a person to have two different sentiments – the fear of G-d and the fear of man – at the same time, for in that case he will act in accordance with one, but not the other. A person who believes in Hashem will not feel shame before men. However a person who feels shame before men due to his fear of them demonstrates that he does not really believe in Hashem.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to place blood upon the two doorposts and the lintel of their homes, for blood alludes to man’s innermost sentiments, blood being the soul. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to hint to the Children of Israel that the main thing in serving Him is sincerity, service from the depths of the heart. Serving Hashem superficially is not acceptable, and by the fact that a person studies Torah and fulfills mitzvot by paying attention to what he does, it follows that he will love Hashem with all his heart and all his soul.

Furthermore, even when a person serves Hashem with complete sincerity, yet feels shame before others, his service is not pleasing, for he is replacing the fear of G-d with the fear of man. Hence the Children of Israel received the commandment to place blood – which, as we have said, alludes to man’s inner sentiments – upon the doorposts and the lintel, which are located outside. This alludes to the fact that serving Hashem inwardly and outwardly are both necessary, and it is impossible to choose one over the other. This also explains why the Passover offering differs from the other offerings in regards to the entrails. It is to teach us that in order to attain the level of being Hashem’s servant, a person must serve his Creator both inwardly and outwardly.

Rectifying the Sparks of Holiness from Egypt

It is written, “*Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man borrow from his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, vessels of silver and vessels of gold*” (*Shemot 11:2*). This requires a lengthy explanation. Why did Hashem order them to borrow these vessels, rather than to take them by force? Can Hashem not do everything He wishes? We also need to understand the existence of the spoils in Egypt and the spoils at the sea, as Rashi writes: “*The spoils at the sea were greater than the spoils in Egypt*” (*Rashi on Shemot 15:22*). Why did Hashem divide these spoils in two? He could have made them into a single massive treasure!

We know what our Sages have said, namely that the objective of the descent into Egypt was to rectify the sparks of holiness that had fallen into the kelipot. The Gemara states: “*They emptied out Egypt [Shemot 12:36]. Rabbi Ammi said, ‘This teaches that they made it like a snare without grain.’ Resh Lakish said, ‘They made it like the depths is empty of fish’*” (*Berachot 9b*). They explain that the Children of Israel took from there all the sparks of holiness through slavery and suffering, to the point that none whatsoever remained.

According to these words, we may say that the Children of Israel’s departure from Egypt with great possessions of silver and gold simply alludes to the fact that they left with numerous sparks of holiness, which they had rectified, and which represented the essence of that wealth. Since they rectified the sparks of holiness, He gave them great possessions. Therefore if they had not done so, it would not have been worth it for them to leave Egypt with great possessions.

We know that in Egypt, the Children of Israel descended to the threshold of the 50th gate of impurity. They practiced idolatry, and when they were near the sea, the accuser turned against them and said: “*These [the Egyptians] are idolaters and so are these [the Children of Israel]*” (*Zohar II:170b*) – the Children of Israel do not deserve a miracle, nor do the Egyptians deserve to be drowned in the sea for them.

Given that we know all this, we must reply to the question that we asked at the outset: Why did Hashem command the Children of Israel to borrow expensive items from the Egyptians, rather than to take them by force, and why were the spoils divided in two? The answer is that Hashem wanted to hide from the accuser the fact that the Children of Israel left Egypt with great possessions. As such, the accuser would have no pretext for accusing the Children of Israel of not having rectified the sparks of holiness, meaning that they were not worthy of taking anything with them. As we have explained, they took great possessions on account of the sparks of holiness that they had rectified, which is why Hashem commanded that they only take them under the guise of borrowing. It is also why the spoils of Egypt were not excessively large – in order to hide from the accuser that they were leaving with great possessions. Such was not the case at the parting of the sea. At that point they had already started to emerge from the 49 gates of impurity, and they began to enter the 50 gates of wisdom and

holiness. Furthermore, the power of the accuser was broken at the splitting of the sea, and so the Children of Israel could acquire all spoils, which they took.

Greater Understanding to Fulfill the Torah

Our Sages have taught, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: Please, go and tell Israel, ‘Please borrow from the Egyptians vessels of silver and vessels of gold,’ so that this tzaddik [Abraham] may not say, ‘And they shall serve them, and they shall afflict them’*” [Bereshith 15:13] He did fulfill for them, but “*and afterwards they will leave with great wealth*” [ibid.] He did not fulfill for them”” (*Berachot 9ab*). Could anyone possibly think that Abraham would worry and complain about the silver and gold that his descendants did not receive?

We can understand this in the following way: When Israel does G-d’s will, He gives them a reward in this world by granting them the necessary conditions to fulfill Torah and mitzvot, as the Sages have said: “*Three things deprive a man of his senses and a knowledge of his Creator*” (*Eruvin 41b*), and one of them is poverty. When Israel fails to perform G-d’s will, He does not give them money, since in any case they are not doing His will and have no need for greater understanding. Yet when they do His will, Hashem yearns for them to fulfill all the mitzvot, some of which can only be performed with money. Although the Clouds of Glory provided the Children of Israel with all they needed, a wealthy man who fulfills a mitzvah in the best possible way cannot be compared to a poor man who depends on others for his food, and who fulfills a mitzvah in the simplest way possible.

This is why Hashem told Moshe to borrow vessels of silver and gold from the Egyptians, so that “*this tzaddik*” (i.e., Abraham) would not suffer in noting that: “‘*And they shall serve them, and they shall afflict them’ He did fulfill for them, but ‘and afterwards they will leave with great wealth’ He did not fulfill for them.”*

Due to his Greatness

We should also note the precise language of the phrase, “*So that this tzaddik may not say,*” since it could have simply said: “*So that Abraham may not say.*” The expression “*this tzaddik*” alludes to what the Sages have said: “*One who has disciples, he is called ‘Rabbi.’ When his disciples are forgotten, he is called ‘Rabban.’ When everyone is forgotten, he is called by his name*” (*Tosefta, Eduyot 3:4*).

In the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, the Rambam explains this statement by saying: “*This divides the people who are mentioned in the Mishnah, numbering 128, into three groups. Whoever is at the highest level is called by his own name, such as Hillel, Shammai, Shemaya, and Avtalyon. This testifies to the greatness and honor of their level, for it is impossible to find a title that befits their name, just as the prophets did not carry titles. However the Sages who are lower than this level are called ‘Rabban,’ such as Rabban Gamliel and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai. Those who are lower than this level are called ‘Rabbi,’ such as Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah.*”

Thus the greater the man, the fewer titles he is given. That is why Hashem called Abraham “*this tzaddik*,” for this extraordinary title recalls just how great he is in the World above, to the point that he cannot even be called by his own name.

That You May Tell Your Son

In the parshiot that begin Sefer Shemot (*Shemot, Va'eira, Bo, whose initials spell shuv*), Moshe again (*shuv*) and again asks Pharaoh to release the Children of Israel from slavery, to remove the yoke of Egypt from them, the forced labors to which they were subjected. Thus chapter after chapter, verse after verse, Scripture is filled with subjects regarding faith and confidence in G-d, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, and little by little we begin to see the amazing story of our deliverance from Egypt, one of the foundations of our faith in the Creator of the universe.

Between the lines of this incredible story, and by the plagues that fall one by one on Pharaoh and his people, we also witness the discussion between the Holy One, blessed be He, and Pharaoh through the intermediary of Moshe and Aaron. Not only that, but the Torah also shows us the twists and turns of Pharaoh’s heart, along with the magnitude of his evil. King Solomon, the wisest of all men, said: “*The heart of kings is unsearchable*” (*Mishlei 25:3*), and the Sages have explained: “*Rabba bar Mehasia also said in the name of Rabbi Chama bar Goria in Rav’s name: ‘If all seas were ink, reeds pens, the heavens parchment, and all men writers, they would not suffice to write down the intricacies of government.’ Rav Mesharshia said: ‘What verse [teaches this]? ‘The heaven for height, the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable’ [Mishlei 25:3]’*” (*Shabbat 11a*). On Sefer Mishlei, Rashi explains: “*The heart of kings is unsearchable – they must judge, wage war, and pay attention to everyone. Even if they speak all languages and write all laws, this they cannot write.*” If this applies to all kings, how much more does it apply to Pharaoh, who ruled Egypt and dominated most of the nations of the world at the time, as we read in books. It is clear that he possessed great wisdom, and yet he was completely wicked, denying the essential truth and making himself into a god.

Despite Pharaoh’s tremendous wisdom, the hearts of kings and princes are in the hands of Hashem, as King Solomon says: “*Like streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of Hashem. Wherever He wishes, so He directs it*” (*Mishlei 21:1*). The Holy One, blessed be He, prevented Pharaoh from repenting, as Scripture testifies by stating: “*For I have hardened his heart*” (*Shemot 10:1*), all in order “*that you may tell in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have made a mockery of Egypt, and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem*” (*v.2*). Here the Torah is telling us that the entire goal behind the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, all the incessant demands of Moshe (“*send out the people, that they may serve Me*”), was to increase the glory of Heaven in order for faith in the Creator to be strengthened for all the generations, the goal being “*that you may tell in the ears of your son...that you may know that I am Hashem.*”

Let us think for a moment: A Jew is learning the parsha, reading it twice in Hebrew and once in Aramaic, but does not stop to think about the marvels of faith that it reveals. Can we really say that he has fulfilled the Creator's will?

Another Jew is sitting down, surrounded by his family, relatives, and friends, to celebrate the Passover Seder. He drinks four cups of wine, eats matza, and reads the entire Haggadah. Yet during all the mitzvot that he performs, he doesn't stop for a moment to reflect upon the significance of each miracle surrounding the exodus from Egypt. He fails to reflect upon the fact that there is One Who creates and guides everything, the One Who sent us into this world, nor does he think about faith for a single instant. Can we say that this Jew has fulfilled the objective behind the mitzvot of Passover and the Seder?

It is clear that these two Jews – as honorable as they may be, and although meriting a reward – have not succeeded in performing the will of the Creator. In fact they have missed the point. True, one has read the parsha, and true, the other has read the Haggadah. Yet they resemble a body without a soul, for the main purpose of these parshiot and the whole story of the exodus from Egypt is to strengthen our faith, "*That you may know that I am Hashem.*" This is the goal, and whoever has not attained it has missed the mark. He has missed the essence, the whole reason for why the exodus from Egypt was necessary, the reason why there were ten plagues, and for which the Children of Israel waited in Egypt during all that time: "*That you may know that I am Hashem.*"

In fact it is clear that G-d could have struck the Egyptians with a single, powerful blow that would have defeated them, at which point they would have agreed to liberate the Children of Israel. Furthermore, it is clear that if G-d had not hardened Pharaoh's heart, there would not have been a need for the ten plagues. Yet in that case, there also would not have been an opportunity to derive the greatest benefit from the Exodus and its recounting. Hence G-d made the Egyptians, with Pharaoh at their head, go through the crucible of faith step by step, one plague after another. Each plague had its own particular objective, each containing a specific teaching. First the destruction of Egypt's idols, then the revelation of an outstretched arm, then more and more, everything that the Creator did for our sake. We have a duty to draw the greatest lesson from these miracles, to use this incredible opportunity which we have in order to attain faith and confidence in G-d. We must implant these in our heart in order for them to grow there, that they may push us towards a love for the Creator.

The Sanctity of the Firstborn – He is Mine

Among other things in Parsha Bo, we find orders dealing with the sanctity of the firstborn of both man and animal, as the verse states: "*Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among the Children of Israel, of man and animal; it is Mine*" (*Shemot 13:1*). We also have what follows: "*You shall set apart every issue of the*

womb to Hashem, and of every first issue that is dropped by livestock that belong to you, the males are Hashem's. Every first issue donkey, you shall redeem with a lamb or kid; if you do not redeem it, you shall axe the back of its neck. And you shall redeem every human firstborn among your sons" (vv.12-13). The reason for this is also given in the text, clearly expressed for everyone to see: "It shall be that when your son asks you at some future time, 'What is this?' you shall say to him: 'With a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it happened that when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to send us out, Hashem killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of man to the firstborn of animal. Therefore I offer to Hashem all male first issue of the womb, and I will redeem all the firstborn of my sons'" (vv.14-15).

"Of man and animal; it is Mine" – be it the firstborn of man or animal, it belongs to G-d. Therein lay the greatness of the firstborn. The first issue of every womb does not belong to man, for "it is Mine." To one examining this subject, it would appear that man and animal are the same in this verse, being included in the same concept, namely that "it is Mine." In fact within the passage that tells us of the firstborn's sanctity, no verse specifically applies to man alone, but rather to both man and animal. We need to understand what this is alluding to. Furthermore, the letters of the word rechem ("womb") are the same as those of chamor ("donkey"), which again tells us that the first issue of the womb, be it of man or donkey (*which is an unclean animal*), are equal. We first need to understand why they are compared, and then we need to understand why they are compared precisely in this week's parsha.

Let us begin by examining the nature of the firstborn's sanctity. In Egypt, the firstborn were sanctified by transforming them into objects of worship, as the Midrash says. This is why the last plague with which the Holy One, blessed be He, struck Egypt concerned the firstborn and idols of Egypt. This proved that He is G-d, and that there is no other.

Even according to the Torah, the firstborn has precedence. We note that the blessings given by Isaac were meant for the firstborn. We also note that Jacob went to purchase the birthright from Esav, and that he removed the birthright from Reuven. The reason is simple: The firstborn is sanctified and elevated, and all the firstborn of men were consecrated to the priesthood until the sin of the golden calf. From that time forwards, they were to be redeemed. The sanctity of the firstborn from the Torah perspective differs from the sanctity attributed to it by the Egyptians. According to the Torah, the firstborn is not independent. Its essence and sanctity are instruments designed to serve the Master of the universe, and to assume the service of Hashem that rests upon it. The birthright is first and foremost an obligation; the firstborn is required to conduct himself at a higher level than others, and to guide his younger brothers. We see this with Reuven (who was reprimanded in this regard), as well as in other cases. This is why Esav despised the birthright and said, "*Of what use to me is a birthright?*" (*Bereshith* 25:32). Yet Jacob, since he served Hashem and was an upright man who dwelled in camps, wanted it.

This is why these two orders were given together in the same verse, so as to compare man to animal. It is also why the expression “*the first issue of every rechem [womb]*” – which evokes chamor [donkey] – is used. It tells us not to commit the same mistake as the Egyptians, who viewed the firstborn of man as an object of worship. We must fully realize that the firstborn, with all its greatness and importance, is but a tool in the service of G-d. It is consecrated to his Creator and considered a high-ranking soldier, nothing more, just as the firstborn of an animal is but a slightly more important animal. The same applies to all firstborn: Be it of man or animal – it belongs to G-d – and exists only to serve Him.

This is what our Sages tell us in the Gemara, “*Adam was created on the eve of Sabbath. Why? Lest the Sadducees say: ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, had a partner in His work of creation.’ Another answer: In order that, if a man’s mind grows proud, he may be reminded that gnats preceded him in the order of creation*” (*Sanhedrin 38a*). It is also written in the Midrash, “*If man acts meritoriously, they say to him: ‘You preceded all the works of creation.’ If not, they say to him: ‘A gnat preceded you, a snail preceded you’*” (*Vayikra Rabba 14:1*). This teaches us that if a person grows proud, he should realize that he is nothing but an instrument designed to serve G-d, just like a gnat or snail. Why take the example of a gnat or snail? Because an ordinary person finds it difficult to understand why they were created. In fact, it initially appears that there is no reason for their creation. This question is raised in some midrashim. Now there is no limit to the creations of G-d, and it is clear that the world also needs gnats and snails. As we read in the Gemara, “*Rav Yehudah said in Rav’s name: Of all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He did not create a single thing without purpose. He created the snail as a remedy for a scab, the fly as an antidote to the [sting of a] hornet, the mosquito [crushed] for [the bite of] a serpent, a serpent as a remedy for an eruption, and a [crushed] spider as a remedy for [the bite of] a scorpion*” (*Shabbat 77b*). Here the Meiri comments, “*This is among the principles of faith, not to attribute a futile deed to G-d, even if the reason for numerous things escapes us. We find an allusion to this in the teaching: ‘Of all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He did not create a single thing without purpose.’ This is what man is told: Know that even the things that were created before you were created to serve the Master of the universe.*”

Self-Sacrifice for the Fulfillment of Mitzvot

It is written, “*Speak to the entire assembly of Israel, saying: On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household*” (*Shemot 12:3*).

G-d commanded the Children of Israel to bring Him an offering from among the herd, for the ram was the god of the Egyptians. By slaughtering and offering it to G-d, the Children of Israel would demonstrate that they had no connection whatsoever to the paganism of Egypt. Offering the paschal lamb required great self-sacrifice on the

part of the Children of Israel. Indeed, Hashem commanded them to tie these lambs to their bedposts four days before slaughtering them so they could verify that they had no blemishes. Now the Egyptians would have been overcome with anger upon seeing the Jewish people preparing to offer their god as a sacrifice. However the Children of Israel were not afraid, and they cleaved to G-d's command and fulfilled it at risk to their own lives. Starting from the second year of the exodus from Egypt, they again began to fulfill the mitzvah of the paschal lamb. Nevertheless a few men, having become impure due to carrying Joseph's bones, could not join their brothers in fulfilling this mitzvah. Hence they went to Moshe and said, "*Why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem's sacrifice at its appointed time among the Children of Israel?*" (*Bamidbar* 9:7). They also implored Moshe to ask G-d if it was nevertheless possible for them to offer the paschal lamb like the rest of the people. Seeing their great desire to fulfill Hashem's word, Moshe spoke to Hashem, Who told him that the men could fulfill this mitzvah afterwards, on Iyar 14, which was a month after the festival of Passover. Thus we read, "*In the second month, on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon shall they make it, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs*" (v.11).

Not only did these men correctly celebrate Passover and bring an offering to G-d, they were also worthy of being at the origin of the mitzvah of Pesach Sheni ("Second Passover"). In fact they so yearned to fulfil Hashem's commandments that He gave them Pesach Sheni, an extra and new mitzvah. This serves as a great lesson for us all, teaching us just to what point we should want to fulfill G-d's mitzvot.

The principle stated in the Mishnah is well-known: "*One mitzvah brings about another, and one transgression brings about another*" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:2). Thus when G-d sees us fulfilling a mitzvah with joy and enthusiasm, He gives us the opportunity to fulfill another mitzvah and augment our merits. The more we express our desire to fulfill Hashem's commandments, the more He protects us from sin and grants us additional opportunities to obey Him.

Conversely, whoever openly transgresses G-d's word and in no way regrets not fulfilling Torah mitzvot, such a person will neither be blessed nor protected by G-d. The more he sins, the more Hashem will send him opportunities to sin even more, to the point that he will constantly be transgressing.

Furthermore, Hashem links good intentions with deeds (*Kiddushin* 40a). Thus if we yearn to fulfill a certain mitzvah, but for whatever reasons we cannot, G-d will consider it as if we had indeed fulfilled it. Not only that, but He will send us an additional mitzvah, as if we had actually fulfilled the original one, according to the principle that "*one mitzvah brings about another*."

Judging by Disappointment

Almost all of us can attest to intensely wanting to fulfill G-d's word, yet being prevented by the grind of our daily routine. We should then conduct a simple test in order to assure ourselves that this desire is a priority for which we are prepared to make every effort, not just a simple wish like so many others.

Imagine that someone has chosen some lottery numbers to play. Yet when he goes to purchase a ticket, he discovers that the ticket counter is already closed.

Clearly he will return home disappointed, but on the following day when he sees that the very same numbers he wanted to play actually won the jackpot, his pain will be indescribable. In fact he will be incredibly upset that he lost such a golden opportunity. Likewise, we should search our souls and ask ourselves, following the loss of a mitzvah, if we are as frustrated as the person who went to purchase a lottery ticket but discovered that the ticket counter was closed. Or are we deeply disappointed, like the person who realizes that the numbers he chose – but could not play – ended up winning the jackpot? The picture is one of extreme distress. The fact is that we are naturally drawn to material possessions, and only someone of exceptional character will truly feel distressed when a mitzvah he sincerely desires to fulfill has escaped him. The more we accustom ourselves to thinking about the value of the mitzvot and their great reward, the more our desire to fulfill them will increase, even if at great cost and tremendous self-sacrifice. We also have the explicit promise that whoever invests his energies in the fulfillment of mitzvot will receive additional opportunities from G-d to perform good deeds, to the point of constantly enjoying goodness and kindness.

The Pleasure that the Tzaddikim Derive From Defeating the Evil Inclination

It is written, “*Bo [Come] to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart*” (*Shemot 10:1*).

The Zohar (*II:34a*) explains that the expression “*Come to Pharaoh*” implies: “*Let us go, You and I.*” Why did G-d have to accompany Moshe? Because Moshe no longer wanted to see Pharaoh. Moshe had sanctified himself to such a degree during the seventh plague that his eyes could no longer look upon the face of an evildoer.

Let us try to explain this at a deeper level. Pharaoh recognized Hashem’s greatness and acknowledged that “*Hashem is the Righteous One*” (*Shemot 9:27*). Yet instead of repenting, he hardened his heart, as it is written: “*He hardened his heart, he and his servants*” (*v.34*). As we know, when a person has repented but then sins again, he becomes even more evil. Hence Moshe was afraid of going to see Pharaoh upon G-d’s command, lest the sight of Pharaoh would have a detrimental effect on him. In fact our Sages say that it is forbidden to look upon an evildoer (*Megillah 28a*), and it was for this reason that Aaron was also afraid of accompanying Moshe to go see Pharaoh.

G-d therefore told Moshe, “*Come to Pharaoh*,” which meant: “*Let us go, You and I.*” In other words, “*I will enter first before him, and I will eliminate the kelipah [literally the “husk” of impurity] that surrounds him. You in turn can then enter without any fear.*” He alludes to this idea in the word *bo* (“come”), which is formed by the letters *beit* and *aleph*. The letter *beit* (numerical value: two) alludes to Moshe and Aaron, while the letter *aleph* (numerical value: one) alludes to the Sovereign of the universe.

We still need to understand why the text chose to use the term *bo*, for even if it has used the term *lech* (“go”) – as in “*Go to Pharaoh*” – we still would have understood that

G-d was accompanying them. Can we possibly think that up until that point, Moshe and Aaron had gone alone, G-d forbid, without Hashem's help?

I would like to explain this according to Rashi's explanation on the verse, "*G-d went up from above Abraham*" (*Bereshith* 17:22), namely that "*the tzaddikim are the chariot of the Omnipresent.*" Thus the tzaddikim have always walked before Hashem, as we read concerning Abraham: "*Walk before Me and be perfect*" (*Bereshith* 17:1). Abraham's trial to "*Go for yourself*" (*Bereshith* 12) was sent to him for his own good and benefit, because the pleasure of the tzaddikim comes from the sanctification they achieve through their own efforts when they walk before the Divine Presence and clear the way before it through their piety. They uproot idolatry in doing so, which constitutes a lofty level in the service of G-d. That being the case, until now Moshe had been preceding G-d and clearing the way before Him as he went to Pharaoh. Yet now, the humility of Moshe and Aaron made them fear going alone to Pharaoh, and they told Hashem by allusion that they were not sure they could see him without being affected by his harmful influence. Hence G-d said, "*Bo [Come] to Pharaoh*" – meaning, "*I am going as well, and I will precede you.*"

The fact that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart and reached him prior to Moshe in order to pour out an abundance of holiness upon him teaches us a great principle in the service of G-d. Indeed, we may ask why G-d created the evil inclination in the first place, since it disrupts our lives! Hashem even needs to help us overcome it, as it is written: "*Man's evil inclination gathers strength against him each day and seeks to kill him...and were the Holy One, blessed be He, not to help him, he would be unable to defeat it*" (*Kiddushin* 30b). It may have therefore been better had G-d not created the evil inclination at all, in which case He would not need to save us from it!

In reality, it was for our good that G-d did not want to give us this "gift," which would have been akin to charity. He created the evil inclination so that it would disrupt us. For our part, we must rouse ourselves and fight against it. Upon seeing this, G-d will strengthen the evil inclination so that it continues to oppose us. And if we continue to confront and fight it, Hashem will precede us by destroying the kelipah of the evil inclination. As a result of the appearance of the Divine Presence, we will receive spiritual strength at the very moment that the kelipah gives in.

Yet afterwards, when the tzaddik has defeated the kelipah and no longer senses the irritable presence of the evil inclination, he experiences a certain degree of pain, for he no longer has anything to fight against. Hence Hashem gives it additional strength in order to disrupt the tzaddik once more, His only objective being for the pious to fight against the evil inclination with greater vigor, to subjugate the kelipah, and to derive even more sanctity from it.

I believe that in a competition, the winner is the one who comes in first and receives a gold medal. However if he was aided by someone during the competition, can we really say that he won?

In the spiritual realm, when a person fights against the evil inclination, Hashem precedes him and subjugates the evil inclination. Spurred on, that person is then able to destroy the evil inclination. Thus it is written: “*When you go out to war against your enemies*” – which in reality signifies the evil inclination – “*Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand*” (*Devarim 21:10*). Not only that, but you will benefit as a result, for it is written: “*You will take his captives*” (*ibid.*)..

Parsha Beshalach

The Torah is Nothing Without Holiness

It is written, “*The sea saw and fled*” (*Psalms 114:3*), concerning which the Sages have said: “*What did the sea perceive? It saw the casket of Joseph*” (*Midrash Tehillim 114:9*). We need to understand what the Sages meant by this. Rabbi Yochanan said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, made a stipulation with the sea that it should split before Israel. Thus it is written, ‘The sea returned le-etano [to its strength]’ [Exodus 14:27]*, i.e., in accordance with its agreement [*li-tenaoj*]” (*Bereshith Rabba 5:5*). Therefore even without seeing Joseph’s casket, the sea should have split before the Children of Israel because that was the agreement made at the time of Creation.

There is something else we need to understand. It is said that the sea split before the Children of Israel because it saw that they respected the mitzvah of circumcision (see *Shemot Rabba 23:12*). The book *Netivot Shalom* asks, “*The sea should have split even without seeing this, for when the world was created, Hashem obligated it to split for the Children of Israel upon leaving Egypt. Why did it suddenly split only when it saw that they observed the mitzvah of circumcision?*”

Let us try to explain this as best we can. We know that Abraham performed all the mitzvot of the Torah even before they were given (*Yoma 28b*). He performed them of his own free will, without even being commanded, as it is written: “*Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My statutes, and My commandments*” (*Genesis 26:5*). How can we possibly think that he transgressed a mitzvah of Hashem because he had not yet received it?

We might think that Abraham did not observe the mitzvot because he was not yet circumcised, for only a circumcised man can enter Hashem’s covenant and is strong enough to shoulder the burden of Torah study and mitzvot performance. Only such a man can truly feel them and be protected from all spiritual harm, for circumcision is the sign of the covenant and a symbol of Judaism. Yet Abraham, although he was not yet circumcised, devoted himself to Torah study and meticulous mitzvot performance, all without the thought of reward. He overcame every obstacle and constantly yielded to Hashem’s will. This enables us to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to circumcise themselves before leaving Egypt. Since they were already occupied with the mitzvah of the Passover offering, why did they need an extra mitzvah? Furthermore, if they needed an extra mitzvah, why was it precisely circumcision that they were given? Hashem could have given them another mitzvah. Why did He specify the mitzvah of circumcision, such that the blood of

circumcision mingled with the blood of the offerings?

It seems that in order for a person to truly sense the Passover offering, meaning to offer himself in the service of Hashem and change for the better, he needs the mitzvah of circumcision. In fact a man cannot be a Jew and serve Hashem with devotion unless he is circumcised. This is why a person who tries to purify himself and serve Hashem in holiness must remove the kelipah [the outer shell or covering, in this case the foreskin], the symbol of evil.

This explains why the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted the Children of Israel to be circumcised before leaving Egypt. When they arrived at the sea, it was to split before them. However if they arrived without being circumcised and ready to wholeheartedly serve Hashem, how could the sea split for them? It also had to demonstrate devotion in order to split! Although this is an absolute prerequisite, it deals with Jews who wholeheartedly learn Torah and perform mitzvot. Hence Hashem wanted the Children of Israel to be circumcised, for then the sea would perceive their devotion to Torah and its mitzvot, and it would split for them.

However in the opposite case, when a Jew does not respect the holy covenant, what good will circumcision do? He lacks devotion in serving Hashem, and when that is missing he will never be able to transform evil into good. Similarly, what good will circumcision do if he does not study Torah and perform mitzvot? The same question also applies to one who studies Torah and performs mitzvot, yet is not circumcised. A person must have it all together: The mitzvah of circumcision, the study of Torah, the performance of mitzvot, and loyalty to the covenant of circumcision. The Sages have said, “*The Torah was given for study only to the eaters of manna*” (*Mechilta, Beshalach 17*). What is the connection between the Torah and manna? The manna was food from Heaven, as the Sages have said: “‘*Man ate the bread of the mighty*’ [*Psalms 78:25*], i.e., *bread that ministering angels eat*” (*Yoma 75b*). This means that they were purified of all evil, and we know that we cannot be purified without the Torah, for only it can purify the body of man.

From all that we have said, we see that it is precisely after the Children of Israel were circumcised that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave them a few mitzvot to study and perform in order to eat the manna. Without Torah, they would not have had the merit or the right to eat it, since they were not yet purified. Only by the power of Torah study could they merit to eat it.

Such is the message of the verse, “*You shall be holy, for holy am I, the L-RD your G-d*” (*Leviticus 19:2*). In what ways must we be holy? The Sages have said, “*Separate yourselves from sexual immorality and from sin*” (*Vayikra Rabba 24:6 and Rashi*), meaning that it is not enough to study Torah and light the menorah. A man must perform the mitzvah of circumcision all while studying Torah, for only by properly guarding his holiness

will he come to study Torah, and through it to merit perfection.

We Can Only Achieve Complete Faith by Receiving the Torah

It is written, “*Az yashir [Then sang] Moses and the Children of Israel to the L-RD, and they spoke, saying: I will sing to the L-RD”* (Exodus 15:1). The Midrash states, “*It is not written that Moses shar [sang] but yashir [will sing], which teaches us that the resurrection of the dead is mentioned in the Torah*” (Mechilta).

The Midrash also states: “*Another explanation of, ‘Then sang Moses’ – it is written: ‘Then they believed His words, they sang His praise’ [Psalms 106:12]. Rabbi Abahu said: Although the people had already believed [in G-d] while still in Egypt, as it is said, ‘And the people believed’ [Exodus 4:31], yet they lost faith afterwards, for it says: ‘Our fathers in Egypt gave no heed to Your wonders’ [Psalms 106:7]. As soon as they came to the sea and saw the might of G-d in His execution of judgment upon the wicked – as it says, ‘My hand shall grasp judgment’ [Deuteronomy 32:41] – and how He drowned the Egyptians in the sea, they at once believed in the L-RD. It was on account of this faith that the Holy Spirit rested upon them and they recited the shira [song]. Hence it says, ‘Az yashir Moses and the Children of Israel,’ for the word *az* is always used in connection with faith, as it says: ‘And it happened, *mei-az* [from the time] that he appointed him in his house’ [Genesis 39:5], after which it is written: ‘He left all that he had in Joseph’s hand’ [v.6]. For this reason it says, ‘Then they believed His words, they sang His praise’*” (Shemot Rabba 23:2). We may say that the Children of Israel were only able to sing this shira to Hashem once they believed in Him with complete faith. When they achieved this faith, the Holy Spirit rested upon them, at which point they could immediately sing with Moses as he recited the shira to Hashem. It is not written, “*Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang,*” but rather, “*Then sang Moses.*” Thus Moses sang and all the Children of Israel followed him, which is precisely what the Midrash tells us: “*And so it says, ‘Then sang Moses. Note that it does not say *az yashiru* – that Moses and the Children of Israel sang – but *az yashir*. This proves, said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, that this section was first recited by Moses, and afterwards it was repeated by our forefathers at the sea*” (Shemot Rabba 23:9). How did the Children of Israel achieve faith at that particular time? We cannot say that it is because they saw the marvels of Hashem as He executed justice upon the wicked at the sea, for in Egypt as well the Holy One, blessed be He, executed justice upon the wicked and inflicted ten plagues upon them, and yet of that time it is written: “*Our fathers in Egypt gave no heed to Your wonders*”! However when they left Egypt, the Children of Israel believed in the Torah, for they only left Egypt to receive it, as we read: “*When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d on this mountain*” (Exodus 3:12). Since they believed in the Torah, they achieved faith in Hashem. While they were in Egypt, however, they did not have the Torah, as it is written: “*You were naked and bare*” (Ezekiel 16:7), and the Midrash

states: “*The time had come for them to be delivered, but they did not possess good deeds; they were ‘naked and bare’ of good deeds*” (*Tanhuma, Shemot 12*).

This is the meaning of the verse, “*They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant*” (*Exodus 14:31*). The expression “*Moses His servant*” designates the Torah, which carries Moses’ name, as it is written: “*Remember the Torah of Moses My servant*” (*Malachi 3:22*). Rashi also explains, “*When someone is called ‘Moses,’ it means that he is to his generation what Moses was to his*” (*see Shabbat 101b*). In other words, every talmid chacham who teaches a novel Torah concept carries the name of Moses, as it is written: “*There is a manifestation of Moses in every generation and in every tzaddik*” (*Tikkunei Zohar 114a*). The Children of Israel were able to leave Egypt because they believed in the Torah that they were going to receive, and the Shechinah rested upon them because they had faith in Hashem. Thus they were able to join with Moses in singing the shira.

How can we say that when a person studies Torah, he merits for the Shechinah to rest upon him? It is because the Sages have taught that whenever a talmid chacham sits down to study Torah, Scripture, and Mishnah, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him, reading along and repeating with him. Therefore when the Children of Israel believed in the Torah and wanted to receive and study it, they immediately became worthy for the Shechinah to rest upon them.

However it is impossible to have faith without having first studied the Torah and performed mitzvot. Signs and miracles are not enough to lead a person into having faith in Hashem, and there is nothing better for this than the study of Torah.

Can this really be true, or do signs and miracles lead a person to having faith? Concerning Pharaoh it is said, “*When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying: ‘Provide a sign....’ Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake*” (*Exodus 7:9-10*). What do we read afterwards? “*The heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them*” (*v.13*). We therefore have to admit that signs and miracles do not distance a person from sin, nor do they lead him to having faith, the wicked Pharaoh being the proof of this.

With my own eyes, I have seen many people who witnessed miracles that Hashem did for them. Some people even escaped death, and yet it had no effect on them whatsoever, for they did not mend their ways. Why not? Although they believed in Hashem, because they did not believe in the Torah or study it, their faith in Him was not complete. It was not complete as long as they failed to have faith in the Torah as well.

How did the Children of Israel achieve faith in the Torah? It was by having faith in Moses. Since they believed in the tzaddik, they were able to have faith in the Torah, and through it they achieved faith in Hashem. In fact it is impossible for a person to cleave directly to Hashem, as the Sages have noted (*see Sifrei, Eikev 13*) on the expression “*cleave to Him*” (*Deuteronomy 11:22*). Hence they ask how a person can ascend to Heaven and cleave to Him, since it is written: “*The L-RD your G-d is a consuming fire*” (*ibid. 4:24*) and “*His throne was of fiery flames*” (*Daniel 7:9*). The answer is that we must cleave to the Sages and their disciples. Since the Children of Israel cleaved to Moses, the

words of the Torah attached themselves to them. When a person cleaves to the tzaddik, the words of the Torah immediately attached themselves to him, as it is written: “*‘One who walks with the wise will grow wise’ [Proverbs 13:20]. This is like someone who walks into a store that sells perfume. Even if he sells nothing or buys nothing, upon leaving he will carry the smell of perfume on his clothing all day long*” (*Yalkut, Mishlei* 150).

How do we know that the Children of Israel believed in Moses? It is because it states, “*They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant.*” Since they cleaved to Moses and believed in Him, they achieved faith in the holy Torah, which led them to having faith in Hashem. Thus we read, “*They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant. Then Moses sang*” – and shira designates Torah, as it is written: “*So now, write this shira for yourselves*” (*Deuteronomy 31:19*). Since they believed in Moses, they were able to achieve faith in the Torah and faith in Hashem. Furthermore, since the Shechinah rested on Moses, it rested on the Children of Israel as well, for they cleaved to him. Hence they were able to recite the shira along with him.

The Torah Protects Man from the Forces of Impurity

It is written, “*It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for G-d said: ‘Lest perhaps the people reconsider when they see war, and they return to Egypt.’ So G-d turned the people toward the way of the desert to the Sea of Reeds*” (*Exodus 13:17-18*).

Since it is written, “*Lest perhaps the people reconsider when they see war, and they return to Egypt,*” we learn that G-d only guided the Children of Israel by the longer route, through the desert, lest they consider returning to Egypt upon seeing war in the land of the Philistines. This is surprising. Were the Children of Israel not more afraid of entering the desert with their women and children than facing the prospects of war? After all, the desert is described as “*that great and terrible wilderness where there were venomous serpents, scorpions and drought, where there was no water*” (*Deuteronomy 8:15*).

If we say that war is even worse than trying to live in the desert, can we not also say that G-d could have prevented a war with the Philistines? In fact we read: “*If you shall say in your heart, ‘These nations are more numerous than I. How will I be able to drive them out?’ Do not fear them! You shall remember what the L-RD your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt. ... No man will be able to stand before you, until you have destroyed them*” (*Deuteronomy 7:17-24*). In that case, the Children of Israel would have been left alone, and G-d would not have been obligated to lead them through the desert.

Miracles for Free

The Sages have said, “*The effect of Israel’s acceptance of the Torah would be that no nation or tongue could prevail against them*” (*Avodah Zarah 5a*). Until the Children of Israel accepted the Torah on Sinai, however, they did not merit a miracle to be performed on their behalf, and for their enemies not to prevail against them. Thus had G-d led them by way of the land of the Philistines, the latter would have provoked and

attacked them, as commonly occurs in the world. At that point, however, they would not have yet had the merit of the Torah to protect them before their enemies.

In that case, how were the Children of Israel rescued from Pharaoh and his servants when they pursued them? It is said that the Children of Israel merited being rescued from Pharaoh at the sea only because of faith, as we read further on: “*They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant*” (*Exodus 14:31*). How did they achieve this faith? It was by G-d leading them through the desert, as our Sages have taught: “*And they did so [Exodus 14:4]. What did they do? They said, ‘Whether we want to or not, we can only act upon the word of the son of Amram’*” (*Mechilta, Beshalach 1*). Since they had achieved this faith, they were able to be saved from Pharaoh and his army, and the sea split before them. Although strict justice protested, “*These and those are uncircumcised; these and those grow sidelocks; those and these wear garments of linen and wool,*” they were still saved because they had faith. The Sages also taught (*Mechilta, ibid. 6*) that the Children of Israel were saved from Egypt only as a reward for their faith, as it is written: “*The people believed*” (*Exodus 4:31*).

We now see that the only reason G-d led the Children of Israel through the desert was so they would believe in Him and be worthy of being rescued from Pharaoh. He also wanted to teach them that as long as a person does not take the yoke of the Torah upon himself, he will not be protected from the forces of impurity, nor from his enemies. Although Hashem could have performed a miracle by preventing their enemies from attacking them, He did not want to do it for free.

Regarding a man for whom a miracle had been performed, the Sages of the Talmud said: “*How lowly was this man, that the nature of Creation was changed on his account!*” (*Shabbat 53b*). Accusers could have said, “*By what merit was a miracle performed for the Children of Israel and the laws of nature changed on their account?*” We find an allusion to this in the parsha: “*G-d did not nacham [lead] them by way of the land of the Philistines*” (*Exodus 13:17*). The term nacham is formed by the same letters as chinam (“free”), meaning that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to lead them through the land of the Philistines because that would have necessitated performing a miracle for the Children of Israel for free, something that G-d did not want.

Only If They Study Torah

When did the Holy One, blessed be He, perform miracles for the Children of Israel? It was when they took upon themselves the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, as we read elsewhere: “*No man shall be able to stand up against you until you have destroyed them*” (*Deuteronomy 7:24*). This promise was only given on condition that they study Torah and perform mitzvot, as it is written: “*If you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them*” (*ibid. 7:12*). Elsewhere on the same subject we read: “*For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to love the L-RD your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him, the L-RD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will drive out greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place where the sole of your foot will tread will be*

yours – from the desert and the Lebanon, from the river, the Euphrates River, until the Western Sea – shall be your boundary. No man shall be able to stand up against you. The L-RD your G-d will set your terror and your fear on the entire face of the earth where you will tread, as He spoke to you” (ibid. 11:22-25).

We may say that the Children of Israel were not worthy of seeing the downfall of their enemies before taking the yoke of the Torah and the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven upon themselves. As long as they had not received the Torah, they could not do so. Hashem therefore had to lead them through the desert, for it was better to exhaust them by taking them through the desert than to perform a miracle that could have aroused accusations against them.

A Lost Opportunity

It is written, “*Vayehi [It happened] when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for it was near*” (Shemot 13:17). The Sages say that wherever we find the term vayehi, it indicates sorrow (*Megillah 10b*). What sorrow is the verse speaking of here? It cannot be referring to the suffering of the Children of Israel, and if it is referring to the suffering of the Egyptians, it has already been stated: “*The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the land, for they said, ‘We are all dying’*” (Shemot 12:33). In other words, the suffering of the Egyptians ended once the Children of Israel left.

Furthermore, our Sages say in the Mechilta, “*Vayehi beshalach Paro [It happened when Pharaoh sent out] – the root shalach always evokes escorting. Now from the fact that he escorted them, we know that he did not regret it.”*

There Where He Is

We may explain this as follows: Even if Hashem is fully aware that a person will sin before Him, He only judges him according to his present deeds. Thus where we find His greatness – since He knows everything – we also find His humility, for He acts with compassion towards His creations.

This is what we learn with regards to Ishmael, whom Hashem enabled to find water in the desert. At that point the ministering angels accused him by saying, “*Sovereign of the universe, will You provide a well for one who will eventually slay Your children with thirst?*” Hashem replied, “*What is he now?*” “*Righteous,*” they said. “*I judge man only as he is at the moment,*” said Hashem (*Bereshith Rabba 53:14*). Thus we read, “*There where he is*” (*Bereshith 21:17*). The Gemara also states, “*Man is judged only according to his actions of that hour*” (*Rosh Hashanah 16b*).

According to what we have said, we can understand the words of Shemot 13:17 in light of what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: “*One more plague shall I bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that, he shall send you forth from here*” (Shemot 11:1). The question is clear: We see that Hashem sent them numerous plagues by

the sea, so why does it say “*one more plague*”?

An Opportunity to Repent

As we have explained, although Hashem knew that Pharaoh was going to pursue the Children of Israel, he still had the choice of yielding before Hashem during the plague of the firstborn. If he had been worthy, the Name of Heaven would have been sanctified by him at that time, just as it was sanctified by the sea, as it is written: “*People heard, they trembled; terror seized the dwellers of Philistia*” (*Shemot 15:14*). Our Sages have explained, “*When the peoples heard that Pharaoh and his army perished in the sea, and that the kingdom of Egypt was no more, they judged their idols and began to tremble*” (*Mechilta, Shira 9*).

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: “*One more plague shall I bring upon Pharaoh.*” It is because He would judge him according to the present moment only, and at that moment it was as if He was certain that Pharaoh would repent of his wickedness and allow the Children of Israel to leave Egypt. In that case, He would not need to send him plagues by the sea, for Pharaoh would immediately sanctify the Name of Heaven, just as he was forced to do by the sea. Although G-d knew that this evildoer would pursue the Children of Israel, He wanted to give him an opportunity to repent, so as not to send him plagues by the sea. Hence the verse speaks of just one more plague, for G-d awaited Pharaoh’s repentance in order not to send him more than one more plague.

Why did Hashem think that Pharaoh would immediately repent? It is because He sent him the plague of the firstborn – a tremendous blow, given that Pharaoh himself was a firstborn (*Mechilta, Bo 13*) – meaning that he would be so afraid of dying that he let them leave Egypt.

What eventually happened? *Vayehi beshalach* – vayehi always representing sorrow. That is, Pharaoh was tormented and preoccupied with having to send the Children of Israel out of his country. He did not send them out because he had recognized the power for Hashem, but because the Egyptians themselves sent them out, not being able to tolerate the plagues that overwhelmed them.

At that point, Pharaoh was like someone standing at a crossroads: Two paths stood before him, and he did not know which to take. He thought to himself, “*If I yield before Hashem and readily send the Children of Israel out of my country, all the kings of the nations will mock me. Yesterday I said that I had created the Nile, and today will I yield before the G-d of Israel? Yet if I harden my heart, their G-d will come and seek vengeance!*” As he was thinking, his pride got the upper hand, and he did not send them out willing, but through suffering. Hence the verse states *Vayehi beshalach Paro* – meaning that Pharaoh suffered. Since he did not yield and the Name of Heaven was not sanctified in the world when they left Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He,

hardened his heart. He then pursued the Children of Israel and drew more punishment upon himself, to the point that his entire army was drowned in the sea. Although he repented at that point, because of the fact that he did not repent from the outset, he provoked Amalek's attack upon the Jewish people, thereby dampening the impact of Israel among the nations.

Don't Learn From Him!

From here we learn just how much a person must watch his deeds. He must not do something that he will later regret, and which he cannot rectify. Even if he repents at that point, it will be too late, as it is written: "*A twisted thing cannot be made straight*" (*Kohelet 1:15*). Our Sages have explained, "*From the time that a man diverts himself from words of Torah, he cannot make himself straight*" (*Kohelet Rabba 1:35*).

Suppose that a person wastes his time in the Beit HaMidrash, and makes others waste their time there as well. In that case, even if he repents and begins to study, if others have seen him waste his time and emulated him without repenting, then his deeds cannot be rectified.

This is why a person must carefully weigh all his deeds, in order not to regret them later.

Without Good Middot, It's Impossible to Repent!

It is written, "*The heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people, and they said, 'Why have we done this, to have let Israel go from serving us?'*" (*Shemot 14:5*).

From the words, "*I will strengthen the heart of Pharaoh, and he will pursue them*" (*v.4*), I understand that Pharaoh regretted the fact that he sent the Children of Israel out of Egypt. This needs to be understood, for while the Children of Israel were in Egypt, Pharaoh and his people endured plagues without respite, plagues in Egypt and by the sea. In fact our Sages in the Midrash (*Mechilta, Beshalach 6*) counted the number of plagues they endured, with Rabbi Akiva stating that the Egyptians experienced 250 plagues by the sea. Can anyone possibly think that once Pharaoh sent the Children of Israel away by saying, "*Rise up, go out from among my people*" (*Shemot 12:31*), he would still pursue them? Did he not realize that as long as the Children of Israel were in Egypt, they would endure plagues, both he and his land, and that all the firstborn of Egypt had died, as it is written: "*There was not a house where there was no corpse*" (*v.30*)? Nevertheless, he fervently pursued the people in order to bring them back, to the point that he harnessed his own chariot, as the Sages have said: "*'He [Pharaoh] harnessed his chariot' [Shemot 14:6]. He did it with his own hand. Kings usually stand by while others prepare their chariot and harness it. The wicked Pharaoh prepared and harnessed his own chariot. As soon as his courtiers saw what he was doing, they followed suit*" (*Mechilta, Beshalach 1*).

Hatred Ruined Everything

Our Sages have taught, “*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from this world*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:21). From where did they learn this? From Pharaoh. Although he saw that the land of Egypt had been laid waste – to the point that the magicians told him, “*How long will this be a trap for us? Send out the men so they may serve Hashem their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?*” (*Shemot* 10:7) – he still did not listen to them. Why? Because he desired royalty and honor, not wanting other kings to say: “*Look at how weak Pharaoh is! He had hordes of slaves who built him numerous cities, and yet he sent them out of his land because Moshe and Aaron, the leaders of the Children of Israel, asked him to! We once thought that the king of Egypt was a god who had created the Nile. Yet now that he is afraid of these two leaders, we know that he is not a god and that he did not create the Nile.*”

Pharaoh was afraid that other kings would say this. Furthermore, because he sought honor, he hardened his heart during all this time and refused to let the Children of Israel go. He would send Egypt to its ruin, but he would not let anything get in the way of his honor!

The teaching, “*There is nothing that cannot be found in the Torah,*” is evoked by the verse: “*It happened [vayehi] when Pharaoh sent out the people*” (*Shemot* 13:17). The Sages state, “*Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates sorrow*” (*Megillah* 10b). Here it states vayehi beshalach, teaching us that Pharaoh suffered from having become weak in the eyes of other kings, for the term beshalach contains the letters of the word halash (“weak”). Everyone knew that he was not a god, that he had not created the Nile, and so he felt disgraced.

The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately said to Moshe: “*I will strengthen the heart of Pharaoh, and he will pursue them. I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am Hashem*” (*Shemot* 14:4). The Sages have explained, “*When Hashem exacts vengeance on the wicked, His Name is magnified and glorified in the world*” (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 1). Therefore once Pharaoh expelled the Children of Israel and G-d strengthened his heart, Pharaoh and his servants grew hostile towards the people as soon as they pursued them, and the Holy One, blessed be He, exercised His justice upon them. Hatred ruined everything, and Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot, something he had never done before. That is why Hashem acted in this way, to show Pharaoh that he had already lost his kingdom, and that it was useless for him to pursue the Children of Israel. Hashem only strengthened his heart in order to increase His glory in the eyes of every living being.

In general, no person can eliminate envy and honor-seeking from his heart unless he works on character-building. As long as a person does not put an effort into perfecting his character, good middot will not come to him on their own. Even if he studies Torah for his entire life, he will not improve his character traits and he will never be able to eliminate bad middot from his heart. Pharaoh, who was arrogant and said, “*Mine is the river, and I have made myself!*” (*Ezekiel* 29:3), did nothing to improve his character, and in the end he fell.

We find proof of this with Jeroboam the son of Nabat. Since he sought honor, he descended into Gehinnom and was judged for all the generations (*Rosh Hashanah 17a*). Although he studied Torah and is said to have expounded new Torah teachings that nobody had ever heard of (*Sanhedrin 102a*) – and although in comparison to him the talmidei chachamim seemed like the grass of the field, the mysteries of the Torah were revealed to him, and there was no fault in his Torah – he was still driven from this world because he grew proud.

In the Aggadah our Sages say, “*The pride which possessed Jeroboam drove him from the world, as it is written: ‘Jeroboam then thought, “Now the kingdom will revert to the house of David. If this people goes to bring offerings in the Temple of Hashem in Jerusalem, the heart of this people will revert to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah”*” [I Kings 12:26]… He reasoned as follows: It is a tradition that none but the kings of the house of Judah may sit in the Temple Court. Yet when they see Rehoboam sitting and me standing, they will say, ‘The former is the king and the latter is his subject’” (*Sanhedrin 101b*).

It therefore seems that although Jeroboam the son of Nabat studied Torah and given truly novel interpretations, he descended to Gehinnom and will never return because he was proud!

The Gemara also says, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, seized Jeroboam by his garment and urged him: ‘Repent, then I, you, and the son of Jesse [i.e., David] will walk in Gan Eden.’ He asked, ‘Who will be the leader?’ ‘The son of Jesse shall be the leader.’ ‘If so, I do not want it!’*” (*Sanhedrin 102a*).

We therefore see that because of his pride, Jeroboam was unable to return to G-d.

A Single Thought of Repentance

The Torah describes the exodus from Egypt by underlining the order in which events unfolded, for we can draw a tremendous number of lessons from each verse. The Egyptians were hastily liberating the Children of Israel, who had already been calling for this liberation long beforehand. The long-awaited time finally arrives, and the Children of Israel leave Egypt. Yet as soon as that happens, the Egyptians arise and pursue them. Is this conceivable? What about everything that had happened until now? In regards to Pharaoh and his servants, the verse states that G-d hardened their hearts in order to punish them. Yet that is not said in regards to the rest of the Egyptians, so why were they not opposed to pursuing them? In fact they even placed soldiers and horses at Pharaoh’s disposition!

During that time, the Children of Israel fled from Egypt. They left on that very same day, carrying with them all the wealth they had taken in Egypt. They arrived before the sea and looked behind them to see Egyptian horses rushing their way. They found themselves between a rock and a hard place: The Egyptians pursuing

them and the sea before them. There was no longer any way out. It was then that Moshe cried out and one of the greatest and most famous miracles in history took place for the Children of Israel, the miracle of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. It split into twelve parts as the people passed through the midst of the water on dry ground. Yet that was not all, for during that time all the surrounding gardens and vineyards suddenly dried up, whereas the Egyptians drowned in the sea. Thus all Israel, the male and female slaves, the *erev rav* ("mixed multitude"), and the skeptics alongside the great men of Israel, the righteous ones, and the leaders of the nation, saw the hand of G-d in all its power. They reached the pinnacle of faith, as Rashi states in citing the Mechilta: "*A maid servant at the sea saw what the prophets did not see*" (*Mechilta 20:15*). It was then that Moshe arose and praised G-d through song. What an extraordinary event! The entire people joined in this song, without any preparation or prior coordination, as it is written: "*Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang*" (*Shemot 15:1*). A spirit of prophesy infused the people as a whole, with everyone singing the very same song.

Let us point out something else that is extraordinary: Although the entire Jewish people had barely left Egypt, having just emerged from the 49 gates of impurity, they already benefited from prophesy! (Indeed, while still by the sea, the ministering angels cried out to G-d and asked, "*What is the difference between them [the Egyptians and Israelites]? These are idolaters and those are idolaters!*") Just a moment earlier, they were still awash in the abominations of Egypt, in its impurity and witchcraft, and yet now they were uttering a song to G-d, even before receiving the Torah! How could that be? It's astounding!

Here the Torah is revealing to us the extent of man's power, for in a single instant he can go from evil to good, from a state of wickedness to a state of righteousness. Along the same lines, we read in the Gemara: "[*If a man betroths a woman by saying,*] 'On condition that I am righteous,' then even if he is absolutely wicked, she is betrothed" (*Kiddushin 49b*). Let us reflect upon the Gemara's words: A man is about to marry a woman, but he makes it conditional by saying: "*You are betrothed to me on condition that I am righteous.*" He does not say "average," nor does he say "religious." Rather, he specifies "righteous," nothing less. Even if he is absolutely wicked, meaning not "slightly wicked" – not someone who acts as he should for the most part, yet stumbles from time to time – but someone who is "absolutely wicked," she is still betrothed to him. How so? The Gemara explains that it is because "*he may have had a thought of repentance*" (*ibid.*). In fact if he reflects, he can go from a state of impurity to a state of purity in an instant, immediately proceeding from wickedness to righteousness. This is precisely what happened to the Children of Israel: When they experienced a Divine revelation with their own eyes – when they saw the miracles and wonders at the sea when the heavens opened up, and they pointed to Him with a finger and said: "*This is my G-d, and I will praise Him*" (*Shemot 15:2*) – they felt such complete faith that they were able to elevate themselves and reach a true degree of prophesy. Such is the power

of man: He can climb to the greatest heights in an instant. A single thought can make the difference between a ba'al teshuvah – next to whom even tzaddikim cannot stand – and a complete evildoer.

All this comes to teach us that “*a single thought of mussar*” is incredibly powerful. “*A single thought of repentance*” carries tremendous weight.

Let us go further: Even a burst of repentance can quickly fade if a person does not adhere to it, as we saw with the Egyptians. Soon after the death of the firstborn, a few days after having released (*of their own freewill*) the Children of Israel in order to stop the plagues, the Egyptians forgot everything and went out to capture them. Such is the nature of man: He forgets quickly. The same applies to the Children of Israel, for just after their tremendous spiritual elevation at the Sea of Reeds, they began to complain at Marah. Furthermore, they committed the sin of the golden calf after the giving of the Torah. We therefore learn that if a person puts no effort into maintaining the spiritual level that he has attained, he will finish by losing it, for spiritual gains easily evaporate. All the spiritual heights that a person attains, even if he has worked hard for them, are as fragile as a glass container, especially if given to him as a gift, as was the case when the sea spilt for the generation of the desert, or when the Torah was given to the Children of Israel.

We must draw a tremendously important lesson from all this: We have a great obligation to work each day at preserving what we have, to engage in serious reflection! Even if we have merited to progress and elevate ourselves spiritually, we must not be complacent. We must not be satisfied with our gains and rest on our laurels. We must continue to study and persevere, to battle and deepen our understanding, to fight and improve ourselves. This is the only way in which we can defeat our evil inclination and thus inherit the “*310 worlds*” promised by G-d to those who love Him.

Self-Interest Blinds

Regarding the verse, “*Speak to the Children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-Zephon; you shall encamp opposite it, by the sea*” (Shemot 14:2), Rashi cites the Sages in explaining the expression before Baal-Zephon: “*It alone was left from all the gods of Egypt, in order to mislead them so that they might say that their god was [too] difficult [to defeat]*” (Mechilta, Beshalach 1).

The commentators have examined this issue and said the following: Rabbi Yehudah is surprised by Rav. “*How could G-d command them to encamp by the sea, ‘before Baal-Zephon’? After all, we know that it is forbidden to tell your fellow, ‘Wait for me by the side of that idol’ [Sanhedrin 63b], since it would demonstrate too much consideration to its worship.*” We therefore have to understand why the name of this idol is mentioned here, since Hashem could have told the Children of Israel to backtrack without mentioning this idol by name.

Furthermore, how could it be that Pharaoh and his entire army were not afraid of pursuing the Children of Israel all the way to the sea [as it is written: “*Egypt pursued and came after them – every horse of Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen – into the midst of the sea*” (*Shemot 14:23*)]? After having experienced the extraordinary power of Hashem, Who fought them in Egypt, did they not think that He could drown them at the sea? (*Da’at Zekenim Miba’alei HaTosafot*).

We shall attempt to explain all this. Our Sages say, “*Man is led along the path which he desires to take*” (*Makkot 10b*), be it for good or evil, as it is said: “*If one comes to defile himself, he is given an opening. If one comes to purify himself, he is helped*” (*Shabbat 104a*). Man is free to choose his own path in life.

When the Children of Israel left Egypt, Pharaoh, his army, and his servants were only concerned about the material consequences of their departure. By exclaiming, “*What is this that we have done, that we sent away Israel from serving us!*” (*Shemot 14:5*), they only considered the economic damage that was caused by the Children of Israel’s departure. They were so worried about satisfying their own interests and desire for personal gain that they forgot all about their downfall and the intense suffering they recently endured for having enslaved Israel more harshly than had been decreed.

The book Sha'ar HaPessukim (*Parsha Shemot*) notes that the initials of Et Bnei Israel Befarech (“[they enslaved] the Children of Israel with harshness” [*Shemot 1:13*]) forms the word aviv (“spring”), for they were freed in the spring, in the month of Nissan. Since the Egyptians overwhelmed the Children of Israel with excessively harsh work, Hashem hastened the end of the enslavement, which was to have lasted 400 entire years. Instead, He freed them as soon as it was spring.

Thus by seeking only material gain, the Egyptians were harming themselves. They chased after the Children of Israel in order to bring them back to Egypt, despite the numerous punishments they had received on their account, and despite unconsciously knowing what would still happen to them if they harmed the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, they ignored all this, just as they failed to heed Moshe’s warnings when they were given.

Why did G-d continue to strengthen their hearts? In order to lead them astray and allow them to think that everything that had happened up to now was nothing more than coincidence, having no connection to the Children of Israel’s enslavement. The Egyptians would therefore think that nothing could prevent them from returning these former slaves to Egypt, meaning that they could pursue them as far as the sea without worrying about them or the Creator. We now understand why Hashem commanded Moshe to encamp before the idolatrous Baal-Zephon. He wanted Pharaoh to think that it was his god which had stopped the Children of Israel in the desert, and that they were now lost and wandering about, not knowing where to go, having encamped before Baal-Zephon.

Having concluded that he himself had trapped the Children of Israel in the desert on account of his divine strength and power, Pharaoh aroused himself to “*defeat Hashem*.”

As a result, he didn't even consider the risk he was running by pursuing the Children of Israel into the sea. This reaction was similar to that of Samson when he exclaimed: “*Let me die with the Philistines!*” (*Judges 16:30*).

G-d destroyed all the idols of Egypt except for one, namely Baal Zephon. This choice alludes to the unhealthy *matzpun* (conscience) of the Egyptians, who instead of repenting, worried about losing slaves who had become Hashem's subjects. G-d therefore allowed this idol to remain, in order to incite Pharaoh into pursuing the Children of Israel, and then to strike him along with his army.

The words of our Sages shed light on this issue: “*The wicked do not repent even at the gate of Gehinnom*” (*Eruvin 19a*). Pharaoh could have repented after claiming that he was a god (*Mechilta, Beshalach 8*), as it is written: “*Mine is the river, and I made it myself*” (*Ezekiel 29:3*). Even upon seeing the Children of Israel backtracking and encamping before an Egyptian idol, Pharaoh erred by thinking that he was cause of their wandering.

In reality, if Pharaoh and his servants had abandoned their attempts to benefit from the Children of Israel's enslavement, he would not have pursued them. In that case, he would have reached the ultimate conclusion that “*Hashem, He is G-d. There is none but Him*” (*Devarim 4:35*). Pharaoh would have also been able to declare, while still in Egypt, and without having to wait for the drowning at the sea: “*Who is like You among the heavenly beings, Hashem?*” (*Shemot 15:11*).

However since they chose their own path, Heaven allowed them to see what they wanted to see. Hashem continued to lead them into error until He drowned them. He certainly strengthened their hearts, but they worked even harder in this regard, to the point of believing that Pharaoh, due to his great strength, had fenced the Children of Israel in the desert and led them to encamp before Baal Zephon.

In that case, the difficulty raised by Da'at Zekenim Miba'alei HaTosafot is solved: It is forbidden to tell your neighbour to wait for you by such-and-such an idol, in order not to add to its importance. However G-d intentionally commanded them to encamp before Baal Zephon, for He wanted to use this idol to induce the Egyptians into error. In this way, they would think that it had been the idol that had brought the Children of Israel to camp before it so as to deliver them into the hands of the Egyptians.

In reality, Hashem sought to strike Pharaoh and his army, to save Israel, and to magnify His Name throughout the world. The whole world would then know that Baal Zephon possessed no value whatsoever. It seems that this very same idol was destroyed, as it is written: “*Against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgment*” (*Shemot 12:12*) – each in its own time. In this way, the Name of Hashem would be glorified throughout the world.

The Power of Influence

It is written, “*Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang this song to Hashem, and they said: ‘I will sing to Hashem, for He has triumphed gloriously. Horse and its rider, He threw into the sea’*” (*Shemot 15:1*).

At the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the waters that drowned the Egyptians also drowned their horses, as we read in the Shira: “*Horse and its rider, He threw into the sea.*” This means that the horsemen were not the only ones punished, for the horses upon which they rode were also punished. This is surprising, for why did the horses meet such a violent death when it was the Egyptians who had pursued the Children of Israel? The Ba'alei HaMussar usually respond by saying that these sinners were aided by their horses, and that G-d sends evil through evildoers, which is why these animals were condemned to die by drowning in the Sea of Reeds. This teaching contains an important principle, namely that if we ourselves have not transgressed a Torah commandment, but have simply supported a sinner, his transgression is imputed to us and we will have to render an accounting for it. Thus if horses, which have no desire to do evil, were severely punished by drowning alongside their riders, how much more will we – who possess both heart and mind – be punished if we participate in a transgression! Furthermore, even the nations of the world strictly judge criminal accomplices: Even if someone is not the instigator of a crime, the fact that he drives the instigator to the crime scene or provides him with refuge after the fact renders him guilty and punishable.

This explanation remains difficult to understand, however, for did the horses willfully agree to help their riders pursue the Children of Israel? Clearly not. It was the Egyptians who saddled them in their haste to pursue those who were escaping. Even Pharaoh refused to climb into his royal chariot, preferring instead to pursue them on horseback! The fact that these animals were eventually punished raises a question: Must the vehicle driven by a criminal give an accounting for its participation in the actions of its driver, despite being incapable of understanding where it is being led or discerning the intentions of its driver? Likewise, the Egyptian horses were guided by their riders without knowing where they were being led. That being the case, why were they judged like their riders, suffering a terrible death? In reality, all this stems from just how susceptible people are to the power of influence. In fact we know that G-d was not content with transmitting the principles of the Torah to Moshe on earth. He asked him to ascend to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, even at risk to his own life. Why so? Because G-d wanted Moshe to transmit the Torah to the Children of Israel in all its power and intensity. In order for that to happen, Moshe had to ascend to Heaven and sense that unique spiritual environment and see the Patriarchs meditating upon its concepts, for only then could he teach it with the necessary intensity and enthusiasm. If Moshe had remained on earth to receive the Torah, he would have not sensed the intense atmosphere of the supernal worlds, meaning that the Torah would have been given in a less than perfect way. By our very

nature, we are easily influenced and inclined to emulate the behavior of those around us. Hence the Torah commands us to keep away from bad neighbors (*Pirkei Avoth 1:7*), and to dwell among people who are righteous and charitable. In fact by seeing our neighbors on the right path, we will be tempted to do the same, and therefore they will exert a positive influence on us. Conversely, someone who decides to live among evildoers will be influenced in a similar way, as the Rambam states (*Hilchot De'ot 6*). That being the case, we may say that when the Egyptians saddled their horses in order to commit a sin, riding upon these horses to pursue the Children of Israel, they exerted a harmful influence on them, and they became accomplices in that sin. The power of influence is such that it can modify the very nature of animals, which act on instinct, and give them satisfaction to participate in doing evil. Likewise we know that animals were also wiped out along with the generation of the flood. In fact the animals of that generation had been negatively influenced by men, with adultery being so common during the time that even the behavior of animals was changed, for they acted contrary to their own natures. Thus the horses of the Egyptians were punished by drowning in the Sea of Reeds in order to make us realize the power of influence, be it for better or for worse. Even these animals, which lacked free will, were infused with the zeal of the Egyptians and hastened to pursue the Children of Israel. That being the case for horses, how much more does it apply to human beings, who act according to their own desires and thoughts. We must all infuse this concept in our minds, realizing and remembering it at all times. How powerful is the power of our entourage to influence us! We must therefore constantly associate with G-d fearing people who mediate upon His Name, so they may influence us solely in the right way.

Making Our Faith More Concrete

It is written, “*And they had faith in Hashem, and in Moshe His servant*” (*Shemot 14:31*).

I find this difficult to understand: What is the Torah telling us by pointing out that the Children of Israel had faith in G-d and in His servant Moshe? Wouldn’t that be normal, given that they witnessed so many miracles in Egypt and while in the desert?

Furthermore, we already saw that when the nations of the world heard about the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the war with Amalek, even Jethro the priest of Midian came and converted. What more is the Torah telling us here by pointing out that the Children of Israel ended up completely believing in the Creator and in His faithful servants?

We shall attempt to explain: We know that Hashem begins by performing miracles and wonders in order to spiritually awaken us, this being to encourage us to believe in Him and detach ourselves from the superficiality that disrupts our service of G-d. It is incumbent upon each of us to pass this test and rid ourselves of the impurity of the evil inclination. This awakening enables us to free ourselves of the dust of materiality and coarseness.

Nevertheless, we must realize that G-d will not perform miracles for us forever. At some point in our lives, we must continue by ourselves with the momentum generated by what we witnessed and felt at the outset. In fact only a person who makes an effort to purify himself will receive Heaven's help. Even if Hashem has nourished us until the present time, we must now nourish ourselves, for there is a limit to what Heaven will give us in terms of gifts.

To what can this be compared? It is like a child that we take care of until he matures. Once he grows into an adult, we ask him to take care of himself. He is then obligated to quickly and wisely take care of himself, making sure not to eat things that are unhealthy or dangerous, and not to rely on his own talents. This was the situation in which the Children of Israel found themselves when they left Egypt. They were like children that G-d had taken care of until they acknowledged Him. Yet once they reached the Sea of Reeds, they were already adults who should have believed in G-d on their own, not because of external reasons. Until that point, they had witnessed miracles and learned to instill faith in themselves. Yet from then on, they had to overcome trials on their own without wavering in their faith or waiting for other wonders to believe in Him. In fact they were already believers and sons of believers who no longer needed any "*lessons*" on having faith in G-d. Everything they had seen up to that point was meant only as gift so they could learn from it.

By reflecting on this, we see that the situation of the Children of Israel at that time was similar to our own situation today. In fact some people only have faith in G-d as long as He gives them what they want. Likewise they form a bond with a tzaddik and have complete faith in him as long as their prayers are beneficial to them. Yet as soon as their prayers are not accepted, or the prayers of the tzaddik can no longer help them, they immediately look to someone else.

That's precisely the situation in which the Children of Israel found themselves before the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. Until that point, they had experienced clear miracles, but now they found themselves at a dead end! Their time of testing had finally arrived, and they were faced with an incredible trial: Would they continue to have faith, to confront the hardship facing them with their own strength while retaining the influence of what they had witnessed and felt in the past – invigorating themselves with strength sent to them by Heaven – or not?

What happened? The Children of Israel overcame the trial of faith in G-d. They cried out and implored Hashem without complaining, as it is written: "*They were very frightened, and the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem*" (*Shemot 14:10*). Furthermore, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin even jumped into the sea with tremendous faith. They were the first ones to encourage and strengthen the Children of Israel to do the same. Thus by the merit of this faith, the sea split for them, as Hashem said: "*The faith that Israel had in Me is sufficient cause that I should divide the sea for them*" (*Shemot Rabba 21:8*). This was the beginning of "*independent*" faith, thanks to which the Children of Israel were able to attain tremendous spiritual levels, for the Midrash

explains that a maidservant at the sea witnessed what the prophet Ezekiel ben Buzi never witnessed.

To support this view, I would like to recount something that once happened to me. One day I told someone about a great miracle that had occurred, but he wasn't moved by it at all. He simply listened to me in silence, then wished me a good day and left. For my part, I was so impressed by all the kindnesses of Hashem when I witnessed this miracle that it put me in a sanctified and purified frame of mind, leaving me overjoyed for the entire day. That being the case, I found it difficult to understand how the person to whom I had described this miracle wasn't at all moved by it!

I believe that the answer lies in what I explained earlier. We believe in miracles performed by the Creator when we actually witness them ourselves. That being the case, we are not affected by miracles that we hear other people describing, or which are described in the Torah or mentioned by our Sages, since we never witnessed them ourselves.

However this isn't just for a person to wake up each day and consider everything he sees and hears from a new perspective. By doing this, a person will always be influenced for the good. Thus anyone who is on the lookout for G-d's actions in order to strengthen his faith will always see the fruit of his labors, and he will be amazed to see the greatness of Hashem's deeds at every moment. Happy is he and happy is his lot.

Parsha Yitro

The Power of Torah Affects Inanimate Objects Wherever They Are

With regards to the giving of the Torah, it is written: “*The entire mountain trembled greatly.... The L-RD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain*” (*Exodus 19:18-20*). We need to understand what this trembling, this expression of fear, has to do with an inanimate object such as a mountain, which possesses no body, mind, or soul. We should also explain what it means that Hashem “descended” upon the mountain, since the whole world is filled with His glory (*Isaiah 6:3*) and no place is devoid of His presence (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro 57b*). Furthermore, why does the verse specify that Hashem descended to the top of the mountain? What would have been missing had the verse stated that Hashem simply descended to the mountain? We shall attempt to answer these questions. At the giving of the Torah, that great and awesome event, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to His people Israel so that everyone on earth would know and realize that the world has a Creator. He is the One from Whom the entire universe derives its existence, and every living thing is in His hands. He can kill or bring to life, lower or lift up from the abyss. We can clearly see the sign of Hashem in every created being, not only in terms of belief, but in terms of a concrete sense that everything comes from G-d and that the whole world is filled with His glory.

At the creation of the world, before the first sin, all of Creation knew that it had a ruler, and everything was good because the entire world clearly saw the connection between creature and Creator. It was only after the sin that this connection was broken and things looked different, for neither Hashem’s presence nor His power could be perceived.

At the giving of the Torah, however, all of Creation reverted to its previous state, for the Children of Israel were encamped before the mountain like a single person with a single heart. From G-d’s mouth they heard the words, “*I am the L-RD,*” at which point the evil inclination was torn from their hearts, as the Sages said (*Shabbat 146a; Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim 581*). Faith in Hashem was engraved in its place, and they were able to restore things to their initial state. Wherever the Children of Israel were, they infused it with a vibrant sanctity, causing the mountain itself to fear Hashem’s holiness and the greatness of His glory. In fact the Children of Israel were able to see the mountain’s fear, to actually perceive and sense the fear of an intimate object, an amazing thing indeed.

Why, however, was the mountain frightened? The answer lies in the fact that up to that point all of Creation depended on the giving of the Torah. If the Children of Israel accepted it, the universe would continue to exist. Otherwise it would return to a state of chaos (*Shabbat 88a*). Because the Children of Israel accepted it and said, “*We will do*

and we will hear" (*Exodus 24:7*), the mountain achieved its goal and was frightened, for at that point the reality of Hashem made itself felt. This is why "*the sound of the shofar grew increasingly stronger*" (*ibid. 19:19*), for the Children of Israel energetically prepared themselves to hear the sound of the Torah. Reflecting on this, we see a profound meaning in the mountain's fear. Hashem's descent upon Mount Sinai teaches us a great lesson, for due to the humility and self-effacement of Mount Sinai before the other mountains (since it did not grow proud), Hashem descended upon it and the Torah was given there (*see Sotah 5a*). Yet instead of rejoicing in the fact that Hashem descended upon it to give the Torah, the mountain was frightened. It was afraid that it was not worthy of such a gift.

This is truly amazing, for instead of rejoicing in its role and legacy in the giving of the Torah, Mount Sinai was afraid that Hashem had descended upon it. Equally amazing is the fact that an inanimate object could feel and speak.

As we know, the Shechinah dwelled in all places and was felt everywhere before the sin of the first man. However it later withdrew to its celestial abode. When the Children of Israel rectified the sin of the first man by redeeming the 288 sparks of holiness, the sentiment that "*His kingdom rules over all*" returned. Still, Mount Sinai completely nullified itself before the other mountains, for it was extremely frightened that the glory of Hashem would descend upon it. Therefore what can be said for us, among whom the Holy One, blessed be He, dwells at all times? We must obviously learn to sense a referential fear of Hashem and the glory of His kingdom in all places.

This is why the mountain, an inanimate object, could speak and even sanctify itself. In fact when the Holy One, blessed be He, considered giving His Torah to the Jewish people on a mountain, when He desired to descend upon one of them, all of the mountains became sanctified despite being inanimate objects. Nevertheless it was Mount Sinai that, on account of its humility, merited this event.

From here we understand the concept of Hashem's descent, as it were, upon the mountain. From the fact that the Children of Israel took upon themselves the yoke of the Torah and its mitzvot, and because they saw that Mount Sinai was frightened before Hashem, they also merited to feel and perceive the reality of Hashem. They logically inferred that if an inanimate mountain could sense Hashem's presence, then how much more should a human being, who possesses a soul, sense it! Actually, a pure soul is always sensing Hashem's presence, and it is only sin that hides this perception, as it is written: "*Your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d*" (*Isaiah 59:2*). Yet now that the evil inclination had been torn from their hearts, the Children of Israel merited perceiving and sensing the reality of Hashem. For them it was a sign that the Holy One, blessed be He, could be found in every place and at all times, though His holiness can only be felt through the study of Torah. Commenting on the verse, "*G-d saw the light, that it was good*" (*Genesis 1:4*), Rashi cites the Sages in stating: "*He saw that it was not proper for the wicked to use it, so He separated it for the righteous in*

the future” (see Ruth Rabba, Prologue 7).

In fact as the Torah was being given and Hashem revealed Himself on the top of the mountain, the Children of Israel were able to see the light that had been hidden in the Torah, as mentioned in our holy books. It is by the power of Torah that the righteous can ceaselessly study, and it is by its power that this hidden light is revealed to them. From here we learn that even inanimate objects can be affected by the power of Torah, and therefore the same is true of man. By the power of Torah a person can, even without a prior connection to it, awaken himself and return to Hashem with all his heart and soul.

Preparing to Receive the Torah

It is surprising that this week’s parsha is called Yitro, rather than a name that deals with the giving of the Torah, which the parsha describes. Nor is it named after Moses, who devoted himself entirely to the giving of the Torah, having ascended Mount Sinai and spent 40 days and 40 nights on it. We may be inclined to say that the Torah intended to honor Jethro in this way, since he converted and left his country and status behind, as the Sages have said: “*Why is he called Jethro [Yitro]? Because he added [yiter] a parsha to the Torah, as it is written: ‘Ve’ata te’chezeh [And you, you shall choose] from among the entire people’ [Exodus 18:21]*” (*Sifrei Beha’alotcha* 10:29). In that case, however, the entire parsha should not have been called by his name, only the passage *ve’ata te’chezeh*. Actually, Jethro was an idolatrous priest in Midian, and he left all his wealth and honor behind in order to venture into the desert and learn Torah (*Shemot Rabba* 1:32), for he had reflected upon his life. What led him to this was what he heard concerning the Children of Israel at the sea and their war with Amalek. In fact because the text states “*Jethro heard*” before “*Jethro came,*” we learn what led him into the desert, namely the things that he heard.

We may ask exactly what he heard, such that it motivated him to search his soul, to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to give up idolatry. We cannot say that he heard only that the sea split, for all the nations were aware of it, since all the waters in the world split. Nor can we say that he heard only about the war with Amalek, for what was there about this war that could have pushed him to repent and accept the Torah?

We must say that Jethro heard of both things: He heard about the sea splitting, which motivated him to search his soul and believe in Hashem, for it taught him the power of the Children of Israel’s prayer. He also heard about the war with Amalek, meaning the evil inclination that is called Amalek, which entices a person to run after the vanities of this world, to the point that it makes him forget his final destination and the World to Come. Since Jethro heard both things, he understood that it was not enough for a person to witness miracles and wonders, for he must reflect upon and internalize their significance. Hence Jethro immediately began to weigh the great honors that

he enjoyed in Midian – honors that were but ephemeral – against the eternal life of Torah, prayer, the service of Hashem, and the fight against the evil inclination. After comparing them, he quickly abandoned the honors of Midian and idolatry in order to go into the desert and receive the Torah from the mouth of Moses. This happened because a person only merits the words of Torah by separating himself from a life of pleasure and honor.

We may therefore say that it is impossible to receive the Torah without first searching our souls. There can be neither regret nor repentance without a prior reflection upon one's life and deeds. Hence this week's parsha, describing the giving of the Torah, is named after Jethro. As such the Torah is teaching us that no person takes the yoke of the Torah and the yoke of mitzvot upon himself without having first done some soul-searching. If Jethro, who enjoyed great honors – being one of Pharaoh's advisors (*Sotah 11a*) and a idolatrous priest of Midian – left all this behind so he could take upon himself the yoke of the Torah, and all because he searched his soul, then how much more should we – the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose feet stood on Mount Sinai when the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "*I am the L-RD your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt*" – start searching our souls and repent! How much more should we put an effort into obtaining the life of the World to Come, just as we put an effort into the fleeting life of this world! The Torah does not recount stories for no good reason, and as the Zohar points out, we must learn from all the stories and events it describes. In fact the entire Torah is a compilation of good advice that is meant for our good. We learn many fundamental laws from the story of Abraham's servant Eliezer, from the dispute of Korach, and from other accounts. We also learn from Jethro that a person can only permanently acquire the Torah by killing himself for it, just as he forsook his honor in order to venture into the desert and receive the Torah.

Although the Sages have said that converts are like a plague to the Children of Israel (*Yebamot 47b*), they also said that the Holy One, blessed be He, only exiled the Children of Israel among the nations in order for converts to join them (*Pesachim 87b*). How can these two statements be reconciled? A foreigner who converts and takes upon himself the yoke of the Torah and the yoke of mitzvot arouses a great accusation in Heaven against the Children of Israel. Accusers can say, "*Look at this idolater, who converted and now meticulously performs mitzvot, whereas those who are already Jewish pay no attention to them!*" Hence they constitute a plague for the Children of Israel. This does not prevent the Holy One, blessed be He, from wanting Jews to learn from them. Therefore He exiled them so that they could learn from these converts to perform each mitzvah with great attention and care. We must learn to be meticulous with regards to mitzvot and to put an effort into the Torah in order to silence our accusers.

We can learn from the first two converts, Jethro and Ruth the Moabitess, who lived royal lives that were replete with honor. Jethro was the high priest of Midian and Ruth was a descendant of Eglon, the king of Moab (*Nazir 23b*). Nevertheless, they forsook their lofty status and wealth in order to take upon themselves the yoke of Torah and

mitzvot. Although they lacked nothing in this world, they believed that it was right to abandon everything in order to accept the Torah's yoke. The Holy One, blessed be He, obviously brought this about only so the Children of Israel would learn from them. Since Hashem does not deprive any creature of his rightful reward (*Bava Kama 38b*), He provided them with theirs: Jethro elevated himself in Torah and a parsha carries his name, without mentioning the fact that Hashem participated in the mitzvah meal that was made in his honor, as it is written: "*Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, took a burnt-offering and feast-offerings for G-d, and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moses before G-d*" (*Exodus 18:12*). As for Ruth, she merited to become the ancestress of King David and his royal line, including Mashiach. Why all these honors? So the Jewish people would learn from them! It is not without reason that this week's parsha is named after Jethro. In fact he had seven names (*Mechilta, Yitro 1*), and this week's parsha, which describes the giving of the Torah, is called "Yitro" rather than another name precisely because just one letter separates "Yitro" from "Ruth," the letter yud. This tells us that Jethro and Ruth both committed themselves to the Ten Commandments by renouncing the life of this world. The Torah wanted the Children of Israel to learn that the parsha is named after Jethro – an idolater who searched his soul and abandoned idolatry in order to venture into the desert to receive the Torah – meaning that a person cannot receive the Torah unless he examines his ways.

Hashem wanted the Children of Israel to draw a lesson from these converts, who abandoned everything they had in this world in order to take upon themselves the yoke of Torah, setting an example for us by killing themselves for it.

The Power of the Tzaddikim's Vision

It is written, "*The entire people saw the thunder and the flames*" (*Exodus 20:15*). In the Midrash our Sages say, "*They saw what was audible and heard what was visual. They saw fire emanating from the mouth of G-d and writing upon the tablets*" (*Mechilta 9*). This requires an explanation. Let us think about this for a moment: People can only see material things, things that are tangible. Can one see something that is not tangible, such as a voice? Therefore how could the Children of Israel have "seen" the voice that emanated from the mouth of G-d?

Our Sages have said in the Aggadah, "[*From] the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see from one end of the world to the other. Yet as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion, and He saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: 'Light is withheld from the wicked' [Job 38:15]. For whom did He reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come, as it is said: 'And G-d saw the light, that it was good' [Genesis 1:4], and 'good' means only the righteous, for it is said: 'Tell the righteous that he is good' [Isaiah 3:10]*]" (*Chagigah 12a*).

Hence we learn that before the evil inclination entered the first man, he rejoiced in this great light that no other creature could use before a future time. With this light he could see from one end of the world to the other, for he possessed supernatural vision. Yet when he sinned and the evil inclination entered him, this light was hidden away. His eyes were closed and he could no longer see what was before him. His vision was no greater than that of any other animal.

Likewise the Baal Shem Tov stated (*see Genesis 29*) that if created beings had not sinned, they could have seen through walls. Since they sinned, however, their vision was diminished. The righteous, who have not sinned, can see from one end of the world to the other by means of Ruach HaKodesh, for they are connected to the Shechinah.

Even the Wicked See

Know that the righteous see more than an animal can see, for with regards to Abraham it is written: “*He saw the place from afar*” (*Genesis 22:4*). Our Sages have explained that Abraham asked Isaac, “*Do you see what I see?*” He replied, “*I see a cloud resting on the top of a beautiful and magnificent mountain.*” Abraham then asked those who accompanied them, “*Do you see anything?*” They replied, “*We see only the desert.*” Abraham said to them, “*Stay here with the donkey,*” for just as a donkey perceives nothing, they could not perceive anything. They were like a donkey, and so it was fitting for them to stay with the donkey (*Tanhuma, Vayeira 23*).

Furthermore, wherever the revelation of the Shechinah occurs, even the wicked see it. Our Sages have said, “*The people of Mata Mehasia are hard-hearted, for they see the glory of the Torah twice a year, and yet none of them has ever converted*” (*Berachot 17b*). Tosaphot state that a column of fire descended over them from heaven when the people gathered during Elul and Adar. Yet when this left no impression on them and nobody converted, the Sages concluded that they were hard-hearted.

Let us say that it was in this way that the Children of Israel saw the voice that emerged from the mouth of G-d and wrote upon the tablets. Nothing can compare to that event, which they witnessed because they were attached to the Shechinah and far from sin, for the evil inclination had been removed from their heart. Their impurity had vanished, and therefore they were able to see things that the eyes of others could not see. They even saw things that were not tangible.

I Have Opened Your Eyes

Why did G-d show the Children of Israel something supernatural? It was in order for them to understand the power of the voice. Likewise the Mishnah teaches, “*The world endures only for the sake of the breath of schoolchildren*” (*Shabbat 119b*). Our Sages have also said in the Midrash, “*Lashon Harah is graver than idolatry. When the Children of Israel sinned in the desert and made the golden calf, the decree came against them only when they sinned with their mouths, as it is written: ‘The L-RD heard the voice of your words’ [Deuteronomy 1:34], and it is said: ‘As I live, says the L-RD, as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you’ [Numbers 14:28]*” (*Midrash Tehillim 39*).

It is also written, “*My heritage was to Me like a lion in the forest; she cried out against Me, so I hated her*” (*Jeremiah 12:8*). Was there hatred in her voice? There was love in her voice, as it is written: “*Let Me hear your voice*” (*Song of Songs 2:14*)! In fact there was both love and hatred in her voice, and so we may say: “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (*Proverbs 18:21*).

G-d therefore said to the Children of Israel: “*Just as I have used My voice for words of Torah, you should use your voice to study Torah. If you use your voice to speak words of Torah, good. Otherwise I will hate your voice. Also, if you perform good deeds and distance yourselves from sin, I will open your eyes and you will see more than the animals. However if you commit evil deeds, your vision will not be superior to that of animals.*”

Since the Children of Israel committed the sin of the golden calf and harmed their voice, their vision returned to what it had been at first. How can we say that they harmed their voice? From the passage, “*When Joshua heard the voice of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses: ‘There is a voice like war in the camp.’ He said, ‘It is not the voice of those who shout for mastery, nor is it the voice of those who cry for being overcome. It is the voice of those who sing that I hear’*” (*Exodus 32:17-18*). Since they had used their voice for other things, their vision was seized and safeguarded for tzaddikim in the future.

Furthermore, every tzaddik who cleaves to the Shechinah can use this light even in this world. Hence Moses asked G-d, after the sin of the golden calf, “*Show me, please, Your glory*” (*Exodus 33:18*). G-d agreed and said to him, “*You shall see My back, but My face may not be seen*” (*v.23*). The Torah also says of Moses, “*The L-RD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow*” (*v.11*). This verse is really out of place here, and it was only written for us not to mistakenly think: Just as our vision has been removed, the vision of Moses was also removed. Hence the verse states that Hashem “*would speak to Moses face to face*.” Furthermore, Moses wanted to see the Shechinah, which he did, whereas the people did not see it.

Jethro's Intentions were Pure

It is written, “*Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel*” (*Shemot 18:1*). Even before venturing into the desert to take the yoke of Torah upon himself, Jethro had forsaken idolatry and was no longer the “*priest of Midian*.” Thus in the Midrash the Sages say, “*At first Jethro was an idolatrous priest. Yet when he saw that there was no truth in it, he despised it and thought of repenting even before Moshe came. He summoned his townspeople and said, ‘I have ministered to you up to now, but now I have become old. Choose another priest’*” (*Shemot Rabba 1:32*).

If all this is true, why does the Torah describe Jethro as the “*priest of Midian*”? Such a description does not befit him, since it was no longer the case.

The explanation is the following: Although Jethro forsook the idolatry of Midian even before venturing into the desert, and despite the fact that the inhabitants of Midian removed the priesthood from him, because Jethro did not immediately venture into the desert after forsaking idolatry (and before hearing all the rumors about the great miracles that Hashem had performed for Israel), Scripture considered it as if he were still an idolatrous priest of Midian. Why?

It is because it is impossible for a person to take two paths at the same time. Since Jethro remained in Midian and had not gone into the desert, he was still called the “*priest of Midian*.” Furthermore, since he had not gone to live in a place of Torah, it was as if he still acknowledged idolatry, for the Sages have said: “*I would not dwell anywhere but a place of Torah*” (*Pirkei Avot* 6:9).

How do we know that there was no Torah or fear of Heaven there? It is because Jethro had been relieved of his duties and excommunicated, and they also tormented his daughters. As the Midrash tells us, “[*Jethro*] asked the shepherds to look after his flock, but they refused, and he had to use his daughters. ‘They came and drew water’ [*Shemot* 2:16] – teaching that they used to arrive early on account of their fear of the shepherds. ‘The shepherds came and drove them away’ [v.17] – was it possible, he being a priest of Midian, that shepherds should drive away his daughters? It is in fact to teach you that they excommunicated him and drove away his daughters as a woman divorced.... ‘Moshe got up and saved them’ – this teaches that...he said: ‘Men usually draw water and women give the flock to drink. Here women are drawing water and men are watering the flock.’ It does not say ‘he delivered them,’ but ‘he saved them.’ Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar the son of Rabbi Yossi the Galilean: ‘The shepherds came with the intention of violating them, therefore Moshe saved them.’ ... The Sages say, ‘This teaches that they cast them into the water, from which Moshe drew them out’” (*Shemot Rabba* 1:32).

He Came to Me Only for the Sake of Heaven

Rashi wrote, “*What news did he hear that ouva [he came]?*” The term ouva has a numerical value (*including the word itself*) of ten, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. This means that Jethro did not come to convert and take the yoke of the mitzvot and the Torah so he could boast of being the king’s father-in law, but only for the sake of Torah. Thus we read in the Midrash:

“*It is written, ‘The wise inherit honor’ [Mishlei 3:35]. This refers to Jethro: What [great] honor he inherited when he visited Moshe! He said to Moshe, ‘I, your father-in-law Jethro, have come to you’ [Shemot 18:6]. ... Rabbi Eleazar said: G-d told Moshe: ‘... I am He Who commanded the world to come into existence,’ as it says, ‘Almighty G-d, Hashem, has spoken and called the earth’ [Tehillim 50:1]. ‘I am He Who brings near and Who removes far away,’ as it says: ‘Am I a G-d from nearby – says Hashem – and not a G-d from afar?’ [Jeremiah 23:23]. ‘I am He Who brought Jethro near and did not thrust him afar; for this man who is coming to Me is coming for a good purpose – to become a proselyte. Bring him near as well and do not cast him*

off.' Thus we immediately read, 'Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law' [Shemot 18:7]" (Shemot Rabba 27:2).

This is why we initially read, "*Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard....*" If the Torah had only stated "*the father-in-law of Moshe,*" we could have said that he only left Midian to boast of his son-in-law. The Torah therefore testifies that he was the "*priest of Midian,*" teaching us that he did not come in search of glory, for in that case he would not have been forced to leave Midian and forsake idolatry. In fact idolatry had earned him great honor, yet because he had renounced it in order to venture into the desert, we must say that he did not come seeking glory. Rather, he came only for the sake of Heaven, in order to take the yoke of the Torah upon himself.

Proof that Jethro acted for the sake of Heaven can be found in the words of our Sages, namely that he was called Jethro because he was the cause of an additional [yiter] parsha in the Torah (*Mechilta Yitro, Amalek 1*). This teaches us that he went to convert for the sake of Heaven – in order to learn Torah – not to receive a reward or for glory.

To Gladden Moshe

Furthermore, Jethro heard that all the miracles which had been done for the Children of Israel were only because of their unity, and that the sea had split because of unity. By the sea, the tribes competed with one another to be the first to descend into the water, and it was only through unity that they had defeated Amalek.

Thus when Jethro committed himself to unity and the yoke of the Torah, he fulfilled the beginning and foundation of the Torah. What did he do? He left Midian with Tzipporah the wife of Moshe and his children, and he brought them to Moshe in order to fulfill the mitzvah of loving one's fellowman as oneself, as well as to gladden Moshe. True, the Sages have said: "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe, 'Go deliver My people, the Children of Israel, from Egypt,' Moshe took his wife and his two sons and brought them to Egypt. Aaron came to meet him and asked, 'Who are these accompanying you?' He replied, 'They are my wife and sons.' 'Where are you bringing them?' He replied, 'To Egypt.' He exclaimed, 'We are grieving for those who are already there, and now we will have to grieve for these as well?' At that point he told Tzipporah, 'Return to your father's home'"* (Mechilta, Amalek 1).

Once they left Egypt, however, Moshe could have Tzipporah and his two sons returned to him. Hence Jethro brought them back with him, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of loving his fellowman as himself before going to receive the yoke of the Torah.

Jethro's Soul-Searching

I have always wondered why this week's parsha is named Yitro, rather than being named after the account of the giving of the Torah, which it contains, or why it is not called Moshe, who devoted himself completely to the Torah, having climbed Mount

Sinai and remained there for 40 days and 40 nights. If we say that the Torah wanted to honor Jethro (*Yitro*) because he converted and left his land and honors behind, the passage *ve'ata techeze* (*Shemot 18:21*) alone should have carried his name, not the entire parsha!

The Sages teach, “*This world is like a corridor before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the corridor so that you may enter the banquet hall*” (*Pirkei Avoth 4:16*). This means that every person has the duty to constantly search his soul by thinking about his fate in the World to Come. If a person fails to do this, he will never achieve a fear of G-d, which is the objective of this world, as it is written: “*The fear of Hashem is the beginning of wisdom*” (*Tehillim 111:10*).

What Did Jethro Hear?

When someone finalizes a business transaction, he usually counts his money and calculates how much he has spent and how much he has earned. He then records these numbers in a balance sheet. Has anyone ever heard of a businessman who fails to record his numbers? It won’t take long for such a person to lose everything, for without records he has nothing. Just as this concept applies to the fleeting life of this world, it applies even more to the affairs of the World to Come. As long as a person has not searched his soul to consider the reward of a mitzvah in comparison to what it costs, he will never attain the goal of this world, which why we descended into the world. Everyone knows that all men must die, and that we bring nothing with us when we go. Therefore why not make a precise accounting of all our deeds?

Jethro, who was the priest of Midian – an idolatrous priest – left all his possessions and honors behind in order to venture into the desert to study Torah. Why? Because he did some profound soul-searching. What led him to this self-examination? It was because he heard that the sea had split and that Amalek had attacked Israel. What was there in this news that led him to search his soul, to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to renounce idolatry? We cannot say that it was because he heard about the splitting of the sea, for all the peoples had heard about it, since all the waters throughout the world had also split. If we say that it was because he heard about Amalek’s attack, what was there about this event that made him think about repenting so deeply that he accepted the yoke of the Torah?

Hashem Does Not Perform Miracles Needlessly

With regards to the splitting of the sea, we read: “*Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and He turned the sea to dry land and the water split*” (*Shemot 14:21*). We must explain how the splitting of the sea differed from all the previous plagues, which had occurred in an instant, as it is written: “*Moshe and Aaron did so, as Hashem had commanded. He lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the river; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the river turned to blood*” (*ibid. 7:20*). Similarly, the plague of frogs occurred in an instant, as it is written: “*Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the*

land of Egypt" (*ibid.* 8:2), and likewise for all the plagues.

The answer is that the Children of Israel were praying to Hashem throughout the night to perform a miracle for them. This is because He does not perform miracles needlessly, as the Sages have said: "*Does the All-Merciful perform miracles for liars?*" (*Berachot* 58a). Hence the Children of Israel prayed to Him for the entire night, asking that He perform a miracle and save them from the Egyptians, who were pursuing them.

This is what Jethro heard, but which the nations did not. "*Jethro heard...everything that G-d did for Moshe and for Israel*" (*Shemot* 18:1). Why say "for Moshe and for Israel," given that Moshe was part of Israel? This tells us, however, that Jethro heard what the Children of Israel had done to be worthy of a miracle. What had he heard? That they prayed to Hashem throughout the night until the sea split, for they had not merited a miracle, given that accusers were saying: "*Both these and those were uncircumcised... those wore shatnez and these wore shatnez*" (*Vayikra Rabba* 23:2). The Sages have also said, "*The ministering angels were astonished and said, 'People who worship idols are walking on dry land in the midst of the sea!'*" (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 6). How do we know that even the sea was filled with anger against them? Because it is said, "*The waters were a wall [chomaj] to them*" (*Shemot* 14:22) – do not read choma, but chema (*anger*).

When were the Children of Israel delivered from the hand of the Egyptians? It was when they began to pray to Hashem. As soon as they prayed, they immediately became worthy of a miracle, for they took upon themselves the yoke of the Torah, as the Midrash states. What caused them to be saved both right and left? On the right was the merit of the Torah, which they would receive on the right, as it is written: "*From His right went a fiery Torah for them*" (*Devarim* 33:2), and on the left was prayer.

Why did G-d wait for the prayer of the Children of Israel on that night more than during all the plagues that He had inflicted in Egypt? He wanted to show the Children of Israel that a great deal of effort and prayer are required to obtain the Torah. They were then in the midst of the sea, and we know that "*words of Torah are like water*" (*Taanith* 7a). We also know that right and left allude to the Torah and prayer, as we have said. This means that a person who wants to understand words of Torah must work for it and pour out his soul before Hashem, that He may open his eyes to the light of the Torah.

The Danger of Harboring Doubt

It is written, "*Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard...*" (*Shemot* 18:1).

Here Rashi states, "*What news did he hear that he came? The splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the war with Amalek.*"

Even at that point, when Jethro took the decision to leave his land and venture into the desert to cleave to the people of G-d, the Torah still describes him as "*the priest of Midian*." This requires an explanation, for it is particularly difficult to understand given the fact that

already long beforehand, Jethro had abandoned his faith and left his priesthood aside, as the Midrash states: “*Jethro was initially an idolatrous priest. Yet when he saw that there was no truth to it, he despised it and thought of repenting even before Moshe arrived. He summoned his townsmen and said: ‘I have ministered to you until now, but now I have become old. Choose another priest.’ He returned all the emblems of his priesthood to them, at which point they excommunicated him*” (*Shemot Rabba* 1:32).

We also need to understand what there was in the fact that the sea split, as well as in the war with Amalek, that led Jethro to draw closer to G-d and cleave to the people of Israel, as opposed to all the other miracles that took place, foremost being the ten plagues and various other wonders that occurred in the land of Egypt. Jethro had surely heard of these, as the Torah testifies: “[*Jethro*] heard...that Hashem had brought Israel out of Egypt” (*Shemot* 18:1). The main reason for our surprise concerns the war with Amalek and its decisive role in Jethro’s decision to venture into the desert, since it was a war like any other, with one side winning and the other losing. It’s clear that the great miracles of Egypt were much more impressive than the military victory of the Jewish people in their war with Amalek, especially since they did not emerge from it unscathed. Israel’s victory was not complete, for Amalek struck the weak among them. That being the case, why did Jethro believe that this war demonstrated the greatness of Israel more than their stunning triumph over Pharaoh and his servants in Egypt?

Wavering

To explain all this, we may say that Jethro had actually recognized the falsehood of idolatry much earlier. The Sages say that he was familiar with all forms of idol worship in the world (*see Rashi on Shemot* 18:11), but eventually he renounced both his idolatrous faith and its priesthood. Nevertheless, Jethro did not yet recognize the truth, meaning that Hashem is G-d and that man should serve Him. Jethro therefore remained in his land until this time, not having joined his son-in-law Moshe. Jethro wavered between two things, for he already recognized falsehood and had distanced himself from it. However his heart wavered because he was not yet certain of where the truth lay. He was familiar with the religion of his son-in-law, but had not yet joined it because he was uncertain of its truthfulness.

This is why the Torah still describes him as “*the priest of Midian*,” for he was not yet completely detached from his entourage and had remained in his own land. Although he had already distanced himself from idolatry, it was still possible for him to return, in which case he would have served as “*the priest of Midian*” with even greater authority. This demonstrates the influence of one’s entourage and an evil society, which are liable to attract even tzaddikim who are on the right path. However the Torah does not detract in any way from Jethro’s spiritual awakening, which pushed him into venturing into the desert to seek the truth. The Torah also gives him the dignified title, “*the father-in-law of Moshe*,” like a disciple who cleaves to his teacher in order to learn wisdom and understanding from him. Nevertheless, since Jethro seemed to waver, believing yet not really believing, the two expressions are used together: “*the priest of Midian*”

and “*the father-in-law of Moshe.*” Even after Jethro’s arrival in the desert, he wavered and doubted once again, to the point that Moshe was forced to convince him of the truth of Hashem’s kingdom and the holy Torah, as the Midrash states on the verse, “*Moshe told his father-in-law*” (*Shemot 18:8*): “*In order to draw his heart to bring him closer to Torah*” (*Yalkut Shimoni*). It was only afterwards the Jethro arose and said, “*Now I know that Hashem is greater than all gods*” (*Shemot 18:11*). This “*knowing*” marks the beginning of moral laws and cleaving to them. Faith alone was now implanted in Jethro, for doubt had left his heart, he recognized the greatness of Hashem and His kingdom, and from now on the Torah describes him uniquely as “*the father-in-law of Moshe,*” as it is written: “*Jethro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took a burnt-offering*” (*v.12*). At that point Jethro rid himself of the descriptive “*the priest of Midian,*” and clearly decided to join Hashem’s people.

According to what we have said, we can fully explain why Jethro was amazed primarily by Israel’s passage through the Sea of Reeds and their war with Amalek, these being the two things which finally made him decide to venture into the desert and cleave to the Jewish people. Indeed, we have already explained that although Jethro had heard about and seen Hashem’s hand in Egypt, he still had doubts as to where the truth lay. Yet when the sea split, the light of truth radiated outwards in a brilliant way, as the Sages have said: “*A maid servant at the sea saw what the prophet Ezekiel did not see, and one could point with a finger and say, ‘This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him.’*” When the sea split, all doubts disappeared. All veils were torn and the kingdom of Hashem revealed itself before the eyes of everyone. By the power of this revelation, the Jewish people reached for the first time the level, “*They believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant*” (*Shemot 14:31*), a level of faith that was complete and tangible. This revelation reached all the way to Midian, forcing Jethro to leave his doubts behind. It pushed him into venturing into the desert to verify the truth, and to experience it from up close.

Amalek – Doubt Personified

The war with Amalek also contributed to tilting the balance between belief and doubt in Jethro’s mind. We know that Amalek attacked the Children of Israel in order to infuse doubt into them, so as to shake the truths which they held. In fact Amalek only attacked the Children of Israel when doubt crept into their heart and they asked: “*Is Hashem among us or not*” (*Shemot 17:7*). Hence Amalek attacked the weak among them, meaning the sinners whom the Cloud of Glory had rejected, only those into whom doubt could weave its way and diminish their faith. In fact the Sages have said that the term Amalek has the same numerical value as safek (“*doubt*”). This is the root of his name, his main characteristic and his essence. Thus Jethro saw just how dangerous doubt really is, for the Jewish people were safe from all the kings of the earth, who trembled and were powerless before them. Yet when Amalek arose, he was able by the power of doubt to cool the “*boiling bath.*” That is, Amalek was able to diminish the fear which the nations had of Israel, and to make victims of its stragglers. Thus Jethro

understood the power of doubt and its dangers, and he decided to eliminate it on his own.

The Torah and Israel Existed before Creation

The Sages say, “*The Holy One looked into the Torah and created the world*” (*Zohar II:161b*). This means that He established a building plan before the creation of the world, as is usually done for large construction projects. That is, we first prepare a detailed plan, and then we start building according to that plan. Likewise G-d established a detailed plan before the creation of the world, and He looked into that plan at the time of Creation to create the world according to its specifications. What was that plan? It was the Torah.

Furthermore, the concept of Israel already existed at the time of Creation, as the Sages have said: “*The intention to create Israel preceded everything else*” (*Bereshit Rabba 1:4*). This is alluded to in the Torah, for Sefer Devarim (the last book of the Torah) ends with the words “*in the eyes of all Israel*,” and Sefer Bereshith (the first book of the Torah) begins with the words, “*In the beginning*.” This hints that even before the creation of heaven and earth, it was already “*in the eyes of all Israel*.”

This allows us to understand something else. When the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give the Torah to the Children of Israel, they immediately said: “*All that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear*” (*Shemot 24:7*). This is surprising, for when people purchase something, they usually examine it thoroughly and verify its quality before buying, and here the Children of Israel were certainly about to enter into a permanent agreement by accepting the Torah. As a result, how could they have been bold and strong enough to immediately say “*we will do and we will hear*”?

According what we have said, however, this is completely understandable. In fact the Torah constituted the plan of the world’s creation, and it predated the world. Therefore already at that point, before the creation of the world, the Jewish people had seen the Torah and knew it so well that they could say immediately say, “*We will do and we will hear*” at the giving of the Torah.

We may add that if the Children of Israel had not been part of Hashem’s original plan, what purpose would have been served by Him looking into the Torah to create the world? Who would have studied and observed the Torah to ensure the world’s existence? Furthermore, the Children of Israel come under the same concept as the Torah, for the 248 limbs and 365 sinews which they possess correspond to the positive and negative commandments of the Torah. This may be why the Holy One, blessed be He, looked at man, who is called “*Torah*,” in order to create the world. In this way, the world could endure through the merit of the man who studies Torah.

Along the same lines, we may add that when the sea split, the Children of Israel said: “*This is my G-d, and I will praise Him*” (*Shemot 15:2*). This prompted the Sages (*Sotah 11b, 30b*) to say that the Shechinah rested upon them and they could point with their finger and say,

"This is my G-d, and I will praise Him." It is like a person who meets his friend of many years, recognizes him, and says: *"This is my longtime friend."* Likewise the Children of Israel pointed with their finger and said: *"This is my G-d, and I will praise Him."*

Yet where did they merit seeing G-d before the sea split, such that they were able to say: *"This is my G-d?"* How did they know that this was G-d?

Since we stated that the Children of Israel were with the Holy One, blessed be He, before the creation of the World, before the Divine light was withdrawn and veiled beneath the mask of this world – which hides G-d from the eyes of men – they were truly able to see Him before the creation of the world. Hence when the sea split, they remembered, recognized Him, and said: *"This is my G-d, and I will praise Him."*

If we are correct about this, however, a difficulty still remains. The Gemara states that when the Children of Israel declared, *"We will do and we will hear,"* the Holy One, blessed be He, said: *"Who revealed to My children this secret, which is used by the ministering angels?"* (*Shabbat 88a*). In other words, when G-d tells the angels to do something, they do it immediately, even before hearing it, meaning that they act according to the principle of *"we will do and we will hear."* We need to understand why this was so surprising, such that G-d said: *"Who revealed to My children this secret?"* Since the Children of Israel existed at the creation of the world, and since they saw the Torah at that time, it was normal for them to have immediately accepted it and said, *"We will do and we will hear."*

According to what we said early, we can fully understand this as well. In fact it is alluded to in G-d's own words, when He said: *"Who revealed to My children this secret?"* The term mi ("who") is formed by the same letters as yam ("sea"), meaning that it was the sea that revealed this secret to the Children of Israel. In fact when the sea split, they saw the Holy One, blessed be He, over the sea and they remembered what had existed prior to the creation of the world. Therefore they also remembered the Torah that they saw at that time. Hence immediately after the giving of the Torah, they instantly accepted it and declared, *"We will do and we will hear."* This is what G-d said: *"The yam [sea] revealed this secret to My children."*

As a result, in our days as well, the Jewish people are one. In every situation where we find a Jew, if he is shown the Torah and reminded of the Creator of the world, he too will immediately say, *"We will do and we will hear."* This is because his soul will remember that it saw the Torah even before the creation of the world. His soul will also remember that at the time of the giving of the Torah, it stood beneath Mount Sinai and said: *"We will do and we will hear."* As a result, every Jew is a guarantor for another.

Every Jew is also obligated to draw closer to a Jew who has not yet studied Torah and fulfilled mitzvot, for he also witnessed the truth. He also has a pure soul, and there is no reason to distance oneself from him. Rather, one must gently bring him closer

and remind him of the truth that he himself saw, and to which he cleaved before the creation of the world and at the giving of the Torah on Sinai.

Foreseeing Consequences

It is written, “*All the people saw [roim] 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*).

I find this verse extremely interesting, for we usually hear sounds; we don’t see them! That said, why does the Torah refer to the sense of sight rather than to the sense of hearing? If necessary, we can understand this verse to read: “*And they feared [vayiru] the thunder,*” understanding the verb as a reference to fear (*yira*), not to sight (*reiyah*). In fact they could have feared the sound of the shofar, the powerful sound of which was emanating from the mountain. As we know, the shofar was generally used to announce war or the day of judgment. However the initial meaning of the verse seems unavoidable, and we need to understand it. Let us approach it from an ethical perspective: The Gemara tells us, “*Who is wise? He who foresees [the] consequences [of his actions]*” (*Tamid 32a*). The Children of Israel were therefore like a wise man who could discern what would happen following these events. Yet clearly, the verb “*saw*” is out of place here, for even if a person tries to foresee the consequences of an event, he can still never fully see what will happen in the future. It is therefore not fitting to use such terminology here. In reality, this verse is saying that a person’s wisdom consists of foreseeing the consequences of his mitzvot. Is each mitzvah fulfilled to perfection, meaning solely for the sake of Heaven, or on the contrary does it contain a slight blemish, meaning an ulterior motive? In the latter case it would be “*a mitzvah connected to a sin*,” and thus better not to have been fulfilled.

The more that a person reflects upon his deeds, the more he can clearly foresee their consequences. Thus if we perform a mitzvah with the sole purpose of fulfilling G-d’s will and glorifying His Name in the world, we will be the beneficiary of divine aid and nothing harmful will result from our deeds.

Our Sages explain that the verse, “*The wise of heart will seize good deeds*” (*Mishlei 10:8*) refers to Moshe Rabbeinu when he occupied himself with Joseph’s bones while all the people were busy collecting the spoils of Egypt (*Sotah 13a*). I’ve asked myself why this verse only refers to Moshe, since the Children of Israel were also fulfilling a mitzvah at the same time. In fact G-d had promised Abraham, “*Afterwards they will leave with great wealth*” (*Bereshith 15:14*), and if Abraham’s descendants had not asked for such wealth from their Egyptian neighbors, they would have been criticized for neglecting G-d’s order. That being the case, why does the verse in Mishlei only consider Moshe to have performed a mitzvah, rather than all the Children of Israel, who were also occupied with a mitzvah – that of collecting the spoils of Egypt?

The answer is that the Children of Israel were certainly obligated to take the spoils

of Egypt. Yet in doing so, they were motivated more by a desire for wealth than a desire to fulfill G-d's order. Since the Children of Israel did not act for the sake of G-d's order alone, the verse "*the wise of heart will seize good deeds*" could not apply to them.

As for Moshe, he clearly illustrated the concept of "*who is wise? He who foresees consequences.*" Through his greatness and power, he was able to foresee the consequences of amassing riches, and he preferred instead to occupy himself with taking care of Joseph's bones, since "*one who is involved in one mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah*" (*Sukkah 26a*). Moshe probably took some object from Egypt in order to fulfill G-d's order, and furthermore he was considered like the son of Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, who joined them in the desert and certainly took possessions from her father's home. We can therefore assume that Moshe left Egypt with tremendous riches as well.

Since the Children of Israel did not make an effort to foresee the consequences of hastening to collect the spoils of Egypt, and since they were motivated by a desire for wealth, these riches eventually led them into committing a sin. In fact these riches contained the gold that was brought to Aaron to make the golden calf.

From here we learn that G-d blesses us materially not so we can waste our money, but rather to teach us to give to charity and support the needy and the weak. Nevertheless, we mix things up and see money as the goal, rather than as the means for achieving the goal. This is what is known as "*a mitzvah connected to a sin,*" and it constitutes a defect, an obstacle that prevents us from foreseeing the consequences of our actions.

We should note, however, that following this incident the Children of Israel purified themselves for 50 days. In fact they made the point of saying, at the giving of the Torah: "*We shall do*" before "*we shall hear.*" They had therefore attained the level of the angels, who agree to fulfill G-d's will even before knowing what it is. By saying, "*We shall do*" before "*we shall hear,*" the Jewish people understood how to foresee the consequences of their actions. From their level, similar to that of the angels, they could foresee the consequences of accepting the Torah. This is the meaning of the verse, "*All the people saw.*" The fact the Children of Israel said, "*We will do*" – and only then "*we will hear*" – raised them to the level of the angels, a level at which they could foresee the blessed consequences of accepting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot. This is how we can explain the meaning of the expression, "*All the people saw.*"

Don't Forget the Jewish People

It is written, "*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'*" (*Shemot 18:3-4*).

It seems that Moshe should have named his first son Eliezer, since the G-d of his

father had first saved him from the sword of Pharaoh. This was the first miracle that Moshe had experienced in Egypt, when Pharaoh wanted to kill him, but his neck became as hard as marble.

He should have named his second son Gershom, for it was only afterwards that Moshe became a sojourner in a strange land. That being said, why did Moshe do the reverse by naming his first son Gershom and his second son Eliezer?

Before answering this question, let us examine why Hashem first revealed Himself to Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, in a dream rather than while awake.

We may explain this according to the teaching that “*the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children*” (see *Sotah 34a*). Jacob was the first to be exiled from the house of his father and the Beit HaMidrash that he loved, and he feared that his descendants would experience spiritual darkness when they found themselves in bitter exile. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, informed Jacob in a dream: “*Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go*” (*Bereshith 28:15*) – therefore you have nothing to fear, for wherever your descendants go, the Shechinah will go with them, as it is written: “*In all their troubles, He was troubled*” (*Isaiah 63:9*).

Not only that, but even when the Children of Israel would be in exile, as if asleep with regard to Torah and mitzvot, and they would no longer cleave to Hashem, He will nevertheless protect them, exactly as He protected Jacob now, as he slept, by His angels who ascended and descended.

As a result, when Moshe fled from Egypt – where the Shechinah was protecting the Children of Israel day and night in the Egyptian exile, as Hashem had promised Jacob – and even though Moshe was free and had married Tziporah, the daughter of Jethro the priest of Midian, nevertheless he keenly felt the absence of the Shechinah. He felt far from his brothers, for whom he suffered, since he was now in Midian, an impure place, and his only desire was to reconnect with his brothers in Egypt so the Shechinah would rest upon him and protect him, as it had in Egypt.

Instead of rejoicing because he had escaped Pharaoh’s sword, which would have prompted him to name his first son Eliezer as a result of that miracle, Moshe was completely immersed in the pain of the Shechinah’s exile, and well as the suffering of his brothers in exile. He also suffered from not being able to sense the Shechinah in Midian as much as his brothers could sense it in Egypt.

That is why Moshe named his first son Gershom, which evoked the fact that he was a sojourner in a strange land and no longer lived with his brothers in Egypt, where the Shechinah was with them on account of their suffering.

I would like to add that Moshe named his first son Gershom in order to teach us that the Holy One, blessed be He, shared in the suffering of the Children of Israel in Egypt, and that the Shechinah in exile protected them. It was Moshe’s way of saying, “*Although I am a sojourner in a strange land, because I reconnect with my Jewish brothers in Egypt, I receive the same [Divine] influence and the Shechinah rests on*

me and protects me here in Midian. That's my sole desire, for what interest do I have in living in Midian if the Shechinah doesn't protect me? Better to die in Egypt!" This allows us to understand the statement of the Sages, "When the daughters of Jethro said, 'An Egyptian saved us from the shepherds' [Shemot 2:19], Moshe heard and remained silent – therefore he is not to be buried in his land" (Devarim Rabba 2:8). In reality, why did Moshe remain silent? Why didn't he say, "I'm a Hebrew"?

To explain this, we may say that Moshe had good intentions, for he was constantly thinking of how to reconnect with his brothers in Egypt, and he was constantly worried about them, even when far away. Furthermore, all he wanted was to draw upon himself the influence of the Shechinah, which was in exile with them in Egypt.

Hence when they said, "An Egyptian saved us from the shepherds," he remained silent because in his mind, he was still in Egypt with his Jewish brothers, under the influence of the Shechinah's splendor, even though he was actually in another land. Moshe's silence certainly didn't mean that he considered himself to be Egyptian!

Even though Moshe had good intentions, however, he was punished because Jethro and his family thought that he truly was Egyptian. Despite the fact that everyone later learned that he was Jewish, it still caused a slight desecration of G-d's Name, since for an instant everyone made the mistake of thinking that he was Egyptian. The Mishnah deals with this subject when it states, "Know what to answer" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:14), meaning that we must always think about what we will say when we have to answer, not to remain silent when it is forbidden to do so.

This shows us how much we should be concerned about the Shechinah, which is in this bitter exile because of us, not to think that we can live in peace and tranquility by ourselves. In fact it was precisely in Midian, a place of peace of tranquility, that Moshe felt like a sojourner because the Shechinah was in exile in Egypt and his brothers were being persecuted by the Egyptians. He didn't rejoice in any way over the fact that Hashem had saved him while in Egypt, for what did that matter since his brothers continued to be slaves to Pharaoh?

To reconnect with his brothers and be like them, as if he were still a slave, Moshe named his first son Gershom, for "*I was a sojourner in a strange land,*" just as I was a sojourner in Egypt.

Moshe even accepted to be called an Egyptian (*mitzri*), for he continued to suffer (*meitzer*) on account of their affliction.

Parsha Mishpatim

Companionship and Affection Among Friends Leads to Spiritual Growth

Regarding the passage on the Hebrew slave, Rabbi Abarbanel states: “ ‘He shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free, for no charge’ [Exodus 21:2]. This verse tells us that if he had the intention of making money by ridding himself of the weariness of having to support himself, his wife, and his children, then he will end up with nothing other than the shame of having worked as a slave for six years. In the end he will leave with nothing other than what he arrived with, his own body, having gained nothing from his work. If he has a wife and thinks that he can rely on his master to support her, in the end she will leave with him, and he will have to start working as at first. This is the meaning of ‘his wife shall leave with him’ [v.3].”

We see an amazing lesson here. The Torah is strict with this slave, who stole in the belief that he could gain by ridding himself of the responsibility of having to earn a living. The Torah leaves him with nothing other than the shame of having been sold as a slave, which is tremendously embarrassing in and of itself. Nevertheless, the Torah commands the slave’s master to conduct himself with respect and mercy, to the point that the Sages have said: “Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is like buying a master for himself” (*Kiddushin* 20a). His master must treat him as an equal in everything, including food, drink, and rest. Therefore if he has only one pillow, he must give it to his slave (*Tosaphot ad loc. from Yerushalmi, s.v. kol hakoneh*).

Similarly, we see that it is forbidden to treat a slave with contempt, for his master also has a mitzvah to give him things when he leaves. These are things that he, the master, was given from Hashem, as it is written: “Adorn him generously from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar” (*Deuteronomy* 15:14). Why must he do this? It is because “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt” (v.15), meaning that just as Hashem treated you with mercy and granted you great possessions and the spoils of the sea when you left Egypt, so too should you act with your slave. Furthermore, you should not become accustomed to scorning other free men.

From another angle, however, this teaches a slave to completely submit himself to Hashem. We see this by the fact that his ear is pierced against a door, as Rashi says in quoting Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai: “This ear, which heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, ‘The Children of Israel are slaves to Me’ – yet went out and acquired a master for himself – let it be pierced” (*Kiddushin* 22b). Hence a slave’s ear is pierced next to a mezuzah. In fact it would seem that the slave loves only his wife and children, as it is written: “I love my master, my wife, and my children” (*Exodus* 21:5).

Hence it is precisely next to a mezuzah that he is shown that he must also love Hashem, for in the mezuzah it is written: “*You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul*” (*Deuteronomy 6:5*).

Still, we need to ask why it is a slave’s ear that is pierced, rather than his mouth. After all, it was his mouth that said, “*We shall do and we shall hear*,” a declaration that the slave is now transgressing. Earlier, on Mount Sinai, he expressed his desire to be Hashem’s servant, to submit to Him and to do His will. Yet now he says that he loves his master and wants to serve a human being!

To explain this, we may say that the main thing is hearing, for hearing leads to action, as we see with Jethro: “*Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard...*” (*Exodus 18:1*). The Sages ask, “*What news did he hear, such that he came?*” (*Zevachim 116a*). This demonstrates that a person is primarily motivated by what he hears, which is what prompted Jethro to take action. He not only heard a rumor of what had happened, but a sound deep within his heart that pushed him to leave all his glory behind and to place himself in the shadow of Moses and the Children of Israel in the arid desert. This is why we pierce the ear of a slave, for he heard: “*The Children of Israel are slaves to Me*” (*Leviticus 25:55*). We see a similar thing today with people who return to Judaism. Many of them experience a spiritual awakening due to some Mussar they heard, or because of some reprimand that emanated from a pure heart and entered theirs, words that changed their entire way of life, as it is written: “*Words that come from the heart enter the heart*” (see *Berachot 6b; Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra, Shirat Israel, p.156*).

We must understand what the passage on the Hebrew slave is alluding to, and we must learn from it. One who serves Hashem is like a master his controls his instincts, and he must acquire a man like one acquires an object, as the Sages have said: “*Provide yourself with a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend*” (*Perkei Avoth 1:6*). Let a friend be like an acquisition and a personal belonging that is connected to us throughout life. We must not have friends who love us at certain times and hate us at others. Thus it is written, “*He shall work for six years*” the word shesh (“six”) having the same numerical value as the word kesher (“bond”). This also alludes to the sixty years of a man’s life (see *Moed Katan 28a; Maharsha ibid.; Ohr HaChaim here on v.4*), the time before he is exempted from observing mitzvot, meaning before he dies. Before that time comes, he should make sure to cleave to a special friend, as well as to other friends throughout life. In fact it is impossible to trust in just a single friend, for he may depart or get involved with other things. Hence a person needs many friends, as the Sage said: “*The more friends the better, as it is written: ‘In a multitude of counselors there is safety’ [Proverbs 11:14]*” (*Mivchar Peninim, Shaar Chaverim*). When one person is not available, a second or third person is, and in this way life becomes more secure. Yet a single enemy, even if all alone, can do a great deal of harm.

Only through friends can we elevate ourselves and progress in the service of Hashem and the fear of Heaven. Similarly, we can acquire many spiritual gifts by helping others, which is one of the ways in which the Torah is acquired, i.e., by “*the*

companionship of friends" (*Perkei Avoth 6:6*). Just as the giving of the Torah took place amid unity, with the Children of Israel being as one person with one heart, so too does a person's friend connect him to Hashem. The same principle applies throughout life.

This is why it is vitally important to have the companionship of friends. Thanks to friends, we can continue to grow in the service of G-d, for they help us (*Pesachim 88a*). When a person has the companionship of a friend, the latter can help him connect to Hashem and get closer to Him.

Making a Fence for the Torah

It is written, "*And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them.*" (*Exodus 21:1*) Rashi explains that everywhere we find the term "these," it is used to separate from what has previously been stated, whereas the expression "and these" is used to add to what has previously been stated. Just as the mitzvot that the Torah mentioned earlier were given on Sinai, likewise the ones mentioned here were given on Sinai. This is surprising, for could anyone possibly think of not performing certain mitzvot, even if they were not given on Sinai? We also need to understand what Rabbi Nehemiah said on the verse, "*The advantage of land is supreme*" (*Ecclesiastes 5:8*), namely: "*Even things that appear to you as additions to the actual revelation – for example, the laws of tzitzit, tefillin, and the mezuzah – are also included in the revelation, as may be inferred from the fact that it says, 'The L-RD gave me the two stone tablets, written with the finger of G-d, and written on them were all the words'*" [*Deuteronomy 9:10*]. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained...that *Scripture, Mishnah, Halachot, Talmud, Tosaphot, Aggadot, and even what a faithful disciple would say in the future before his master were all communicated to Moses on Sinai*" (*Vayikra Rabba 22:1*). It follows directly from the words of our Sages that every Halachic discussion that would ever be held by Torah scholars in future generations was given to Moses on Sinai. Therefore why did Rashi specifically inform us that these ordinances were also given on Sinai? It was already stated that every Halachic discussion that will ever be held in the future was given to Moses, and therefore how much more were these ordinances given on Sinai!

It would seem that Rashi wanted to teach us what man's duty is in this world. Sometimes the evil inclination tries to seduce a person in order to distance him from Hashem's mitzvot. It tells him that he only has to fulfill what was explicitly mentioned to Moses on Sinai, and with regards to what was not explicitly mentioned to Moses on Sinai, he does not have to take it into consideration at all. What must we still observe, despite not being explicitly mentioned on Sinai? These are the fences that the Sages in each generation have established in order to distance us from sin. Commenting on the teaching, "*Make a fence for the Torah*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:1*), Rabbeinu Yona noted that it is written: "*You shall safeguard My safeguards*" (*Leviticus 18:30*), meaning to make a fence to protect the fences that Hashem established (*Yebamot 21b*). It is an excellent thing to make fences around the mitzvot, lest they be transgressed. Therefore a person who observes the fences established by the Sages around the mitzvot, and one who fears

G-d, loves them even more than the mitzvot themselves. In fact observing a mitzvah does not prove that a person fears G-d. However one who observes the fences pays attention from the very start to not transgressing them. As for one who observes a mitzvah but not its fence, he thereby demonstrates that although he may accept the mitzvah, transgressing it matters little to him, for the fear of G-d will not stop him. The serpent will bite one who breaches these fences. The words of the Sages are solid principles that support the fear of G-d, which is the foundation of the world. With regards to them, all the mitzvot are but details. This is what Rashi was alluding to by saying that the expression “*and these*” is adding to what was previously stated. Just as the previous mitzvot were given on Sinai, these were also given on Sinai. This means that a person should not say, “*I'll perform the 613 mitzvot that were given by G-d, but I'll disregard the fences that were added by the Sages,*” for just as one must fulfill the mitzvot that were given in the Torah, likewise he must fulfill the decrees of the Sages that were also given to Moses on Sinai. If a person fulfills the mitzvot as they are, he will eventually do them out of habit. However if he adds to the Torah's mitzvot things that are even stricter than what is written, then he will never fall into the trap of doing things out of habit, for he will have a new mitzvah before him every day. Whoever does not respect the decrees of the Sages, it is as if he has done nothing, and he will eventually transgress the very core of the Torah's mitzvot.

Rashi continues his explanation by saying how a person can avoid doing mitzvot out of habit: The term “*these*” disqualifies what came before it, while the expression “*and these*” adds to what came before. Each day a person must rise to a higher level than the previous day, the service of which should appear to him as being obsolete. How can he render it obsolete? By adding to what came before. If we were to ask why a person must disqualify his prior service and add to it, we must respond: Because it is in this way that Hashem proceeds.

As the Arizal teaches in Sha'ar HaKanaot, the Holy One, blessed be He, restores man's powers each morning, as it is written: “*They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*” (*Lamentations 3:23*). When a person adds to the restrictions of a mitzvah itself, he becomes grateful to G-d and cleaves to His ways. What is his reward? The Holy One, blessed be He, allows him to ascend to a new level each day, enabling a person to serve Hashem with greater understanding than on the day before, as it is written: “*He who increases will have his life prolonged*” (*Taanith 31a*). Conversely, one who serves Hashem out of habit will have no reward.

The passage on the ordinances is next to the passage that speaks of the altar, thereby telling us that just as the Torah has prohibited a sword, which is made of metal, from coming upon the stones of the altar, and just as the altar must be made of earth, so too must man, who is like the altar, not want to boast over the crown of the Torah. He must instead conduct himself with humility, just as the earth is lowly. It is written in Otiyot D'Rabbi Akiva, “*Whoever has a contrite heart each day, whoever has a humble spirit and speaks little, the Shechinah is with him each day. Scripture considers him to have*

built an altar in his heart and brought offerings upon it before Hashem, as it is written: ‘The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart’ [Psalms 51:19].”

It is forbidden for a person to study in order to derive honor from it, as it is written: “*Do not make it a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an axe with which to cut*” (*Pirkei Avoth 4:5*). Pride is a destructive force, and whoever studies Torah and grows proud of it brings destruction, as Rashi said: “*The altar makes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven. Hence the cutter and destroyer shall not come upon it*” (*Rashi on Exodus 20:22*). Just as the previous laws came from Sinai, likewise these also came from Sinai. In other words they resemble Sinai, which humbled itself, for Mount Sinai merited the honor of the Torah only because it made itself small before Hashem (*Megillah 29a*).

If a person grows proud of the Torah and congratulates himself on it, his pride will never allow him to disqualify his service of the previous day. However when he studies Torah and performs mitzvot, as well as the decrees established by the Sages of each generation, and if he conducts himself with humility by adding fences to the mitzvot, this is a great proof of his fear of Heaven. His deeds demonstrate that he recognizes the entire Torah that was given at Sinai, including the commentaries, which are also part of the Torah.

The Temptation of Idolatry in our Time

It is written, “*If the slave shall say, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children – I will not go free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges and to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall bore through his ear with the awl, and he shall serve him forever*” (*Exodus 21:5-6*).

Rashi cites Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai as saying, “*Why was the ear singled out from all the other limbs of the body? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘This ear, which heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, “The Children of Israel are My servants” – and yet went out and acquired a master for himself – let it be pierced!’*” (*Kiddushin 22b*). It is difficult to understand this statement. Why is the ear of this slave pierced only when he declares – six years after having been sold as a slave because of his theft – “*I love my wife and my children*”? Would it not be fair for his ear to have been pierced when he initially stole, not when he was sold as a slave until the end of the Jubilee! What is the connection between the two?

It seems that we can explain this by a statement of the Sages: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal despotically with His creatures*” (*Avodah Zarah 3a*). When this person stole, the Holy One, blessed be He, tried to judge him favorably, saying: “*He may have taken things that did not belong to him because of his distress.*” This is why the Torah inflicts a light punishment on him, namely that he should be sold for only six years, after which his sin will be erased. Yet once six years have passed and the slave knows that he was sold to his master in order to atone for having sinned through theft – and yet he still wants to remain in slavery, out of the lure of gain – then the Holy One,

blessed be He, no longer tries to judge him favorably. He therefore punishes him both for the present and the past. His ear is thus pierced for two reasons, first because he heard that the Children of Israel are Hashem's servants, and second because he heard, "*You shall not steal.*" At first the Holy One, blessed be He, had pity on him and showed him favor, but now this favorable disposition has been annulled.

The Trap of Money

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra explains why the Torah began the parsha with the social laws that deal with slaves. He states, "*There is nothing more difficult for a man than to depend on another man like himself.*" This means that the Torah goes from hardest to simplest, and since there is nothing more difficult than servitude, the Torah begins with the laws pertaining to servitude.

From these words we learn that there is nothing more painful than to be a slave who is purchased with money. If this slave, who was punished with six years of servitude under the yoke of his master, still wants to remain enslaved and completely subjugated to money, then he is yielding before money when taking upon himself the yoke of his master. In fact his ear is pierced only because of money. Hence his ear is pierced only when he asks to remain with his master, for on Mount Sinai it heard the words, "*For the Children of Israel are My servants,*" and yet he still seeks a master for himself!

The parsha that describes the giving of the Torah is juxtaposed to the parsha that describes the Hebrew slave, thereby telling us that there is nothing worse than when a person runs after even the slightest possibility of gain. However the holy Torah has the power to free him from this trap, one that people eagerly seek, for a man who studies Torah becomes a devoted slave of the Holy One, blessed be He, not a slave to money, which is a form of idolatry.

As Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk wrote in Iggeret HaKodesh (*an annex to Noam Elimelech*): A great man once told me that it is surprising that the men of Great Assembly killed the evil inclination (*Yoma 69b*). How could they kill an angel, whose body is entirely spiritual? It is simply that they diverted it from its original task. That said, what is its present task? All angels were created with a mission! It has been given the task of disturbing men who pursue money and wealth, which is similar to idolatry, because of our numerous sins. Our Sages have taught, "*I created the evil inclination, but I [also] created the Torah as its antidote*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). Therefore one who studies Torah becomes free of the evil inclination of money, which is idolatry.

Joining in the Name of Hashem

A person should always give tzeddakah, the greatness of which is evidenced by the fact that it saves lives, as it is written: "*Tzeddakah saves from death*" (*Proverbs 10:2*). In the passage describing the offerings brought to the Sanctuary, we find that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses: "*They shall take an offering for Me*" (*Exodus 25:2*). The Torah does not state, "*They shall give,*" but rather "*they shall take.*" This teaches us that with regards to anything a person gives to tzeddakah, he is not giving from what belongs to

him. Rather, he is giving only what the Holy One, blessed be He, has given to him. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, entrusted him with money in order to determine if he loves mitzvot or not. When a person fails this test by not giving any of his money to tzeddakah, he will immediately become poorer. His money will be entrusted to others, for “riches [are] hoarded by their owner to his detriment” (*Ecclesiastes 5:12*). A person who does not give of his possessions to the poor is one who fails to realize that money belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. Such a person is close to idolatry.

This is why Rashi explained: “*Let them take for Me – for My Name,*” for just as money belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, a person who takes it must be careful to use it for the sake of the Holy One, blessed be He. The Torah alludes to this through the word terumah (“offering”), which can be subdivided into Torah mem – torem Hashem. In other words, a person merits giving to the Name of Hashem when he studies Torah. He will not be stingy, and he will give of his possessions to tzeddakah, for the study of the holy Torah teaches him to do what is good and right in the eyes of G-d and man. He is therefore spared from being enslaved and subjugated to the evil inclination of money.

The Principles of the Fear of Heaven

It is written, “*Ve’eleh [And these] are the ordinances that you shall place before them*” (*Shemot 21:1*). Rashi explains: “*Wherever eleh [these] is used, it replaces what was previously stated; ve’eleh [and these] adds to what was previously stated. Just as what was previously stated was from Sinai, these were also from Sinai.*” In reality, how could anything think of not observing the social laws, even if they were not given on Sinai? In fact why does the Torah need to tell us that just as the other laws were given on Sinai, these were also given on Sinai?

The words of the Zohar also require an explanation: “*These are the rules concerning reincarnation, the judgments of the souls, by which each of them receives its appropriate punishment*” (*Zohar II:94a*). The comparison made by the Zohar between the social laws and reincarnation is equally mysterious, all of which we will attempt to explain as best possible.

Our Sages say: “*Rabbi Nehemiah explained, ‘The advantage of land is supreme’* [Kohelet 5:8] means that even things which appear to you as additions to the actual revelation – for example, the laws of fringes, tefillin, and mezuzah – are also included in the revelation, as may be inferred from the fact that it says, ‘Hashem gave me the two stone tablets, inscribed with the finger of G-d, and upon them according to all the words that Hashem spoke’ [Devarim 9:10]. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained: ‘It says, “upon them according to all the words,” and it is also written, “all the commandment that I command you” [ibid. 8:1]. ... [This implies that every teaching,] even what a faithful student in the future will say before his teacher, were all conveyed to Moshe on Sinai’” (*Vayikra Rabba 22:1*).

Our Sages have explicitly said that every halachic teaching from Torah scholars in every generation was conveyed to Moshe on Sinai. Therefore why does Rashi feel the need to specifically tell us this about the social laws? It seems that he had another intention, namely to teach us about man's duty in this world, for the evil inclination will sometimes try to seduce man and distance him from Hashem's mitzvot by telling him: "*You only have to fulfill what was explicitly given on Sinai. Anything that was not given on Sinai, you do not have to fulfill.*"

What do we find that was not specifically given on Sinai, and yet we are still obligated to fulfill? These are the fences established by Torah scholars in every generation, fences meant to distance man from sin.

Regarding the statement, "*Make a fence around the Torah*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:1*), Rabbeinu Yonah comments: "*As it is said, 'You shall safeguard My charge' [Vayikra 18:30]. 'Provide a charge to My charge' [Yebamot 21a]. Fences are an excellent, essential protection for mitzvot, preventing G-d-fearing people from stumbling over them. These fences are decrees instituted by our Sages. One who acts in accordance with these decrees shows a greater love for G-d than one who observes only Torah mitzvot. ... Taking special care to observe them indicates greater reverence for the fear of Heaven than observing a mitzvah itself. One who only keeps the basic mitzvah as outlined in the Torah, without the rabbinical decrees that protect him from transgressing it...is not concerned with breaking fences, despite the verse telling us: 'One who breaks a fence will be bitten by a snake' [Kohelet 10:8]. The words of the Sages are a foundation and support for the fear of Heaven, which is the essence of the world and the basis for all good attributes, whereas all the mitzvot are secondary to it.*"

He Will Eventually Return

This is what Rashi is alluding to by saying that ve'eleh adds to what was previously stated. That is, just as the previous laws were given on Sinai, these were also given on Sinai, meaning that a person must not say: "*I will fulfill the 613 mitzvot given by G-d, but I won't bother with the fences that the Sages added to the Torah mitzvot.*" Just as it is a person's duty to fulfill the mitzvot written in the Torah, it is also his duty to fulfill the decrees of the Sages, which were also given to Moshe on Sinai. If someone fulfills mitzvot as is, he will eventually grow accustomed to them, as it is written: "*like rote learning*" (*Isaiah 29:13*). If a person adds more stringencies to the Torah's mitzvot than what is written, he will never observe mitzvot by rote in his life, for a new mitzvah will present itself to him each day.

Let us therefore say that whoever fails to heed the decrees of the Sages, it is as if he has done nothing, for he will end up transgressing the essence of the Torah. At that point, his soul will be reincarnated and return to this world because he did not pay attention to all the mitzvot. This is what Rashi was thinking of when he said that ve'eleh adds to what was previous stated (i.e., that the decrees of the Sages are also from Sinai), and one who ignores them will eventually return to this world. Hence the Zohar states that it deals with the rules of reincarnation.

Rashi also gives us some advice on how to avoid the rote fulfillment of mitzvot. The term eleh replaces what comes before it, and ve'eleh comes to add to what was previously said. Every day, a person must ascend to a higher level than the previous day, and yesterday's service should seem of little value to him. Likewise in regards to serving Hashem, his service of the previous day should seem as if it was done by rote. That said, how can it replace what came before? By adding to what came before.

Boasting Brings Destruction

The passage on the social laws comes immediately after the passage dealing with the laws of the Altar. This tells us that just as the Torah prohibited the use of a metal sword to cut stones for the Altar, commanding the building of an Altar of earth, likewise man (who resembles the Altar) must not seek to boast of the Torah. Instead he must conduct himself with humility, like earth, which is lowly.

It is forbidden to study Torah in order to gain the respect of others, as it is written: “*Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-glory, nor a spade with which to dig*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:5). Now a sword represents pride (*Devarim* 33:29), the term *cherev* (sword) being derived from the same root as *churban* (destruction), for one who boasts of his Torah study brings destruction, as Rashi explains: “*The Altar makes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, therefore the cutter and destroyer shall not come upon it*” (*Rashi on Shemot* 20:22). If it is a question of greatness, just as the first came from Sinai, these also come from Sinai. Now Sinai symbolizes self-annulment, for Mount Sinai merited the honor of the Torah being given upon it, for it had humbled itself before Hashem.

From here we learn that if a person observes the decrees enacted by the Torah scholars in every generation, and if he conducts himself with humility and adds stringencies and fences to the mitzvot, this provides solid proof that he fears G-d. This is because his deeds prove that he recognizes that the entire Torah was given on Sinai, including the words of the Sages, and that they are part of its essence.

A Person is Allowed to Follow the Path that He Wishes to Pursue

It is written, “*Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets and the Torah and the mitzvah that I have written to teach them.’ Moshe stood up with Joshua, his servant, and Moshe ascended to the mountain of G-d. He said to the elders, ‘Wait for us here until we return to you. Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a grievance should approach them.’ Moshe ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of Hashem rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. He called to Moshe on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud. 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* 24:12-18).

I would like to explain, with G-d's help, why this passage states three times that Moshe ascended the mountain, since this fact is mentioned at the outset. We must also understand why the cloud is mentioned three times in this passage, and why the Torah repeats it.

Who Will Ascend the Mountain of Hashem?

Our Sages have taught, “*Another verse says, ‘Moshe went into the midst of the cloud’ [Shemot 24:18]. This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, took hold of Moshe and brought him into the cloud. The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: The term betoch [into the midst] appears here and also appears elsewhere: ‘The Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea’ [Shemot 14:22]. Just as there it implies a path – as it is written: ‘The waters were a wall for them’ – likewise here too there was a path”* (*Yoma 4b*). This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, helped Moshe by opening a path for him. Furthermore, since he wanted to ascend the mountain of Hashem, He not only helped him, but also led him by this path, as the Sages have said: “*One is allowed to follow the path that he wishes to pursue*” (*Makkot 10b*) – whether he realizes it or not.

Here the Torah teaches us that it is impossible for a person to spiritually grow and conquer his evil inclination unless the Torah is with him. One who spiritually grows is said to “*ascend the mountain*,” as it is written: “*Who shall ascend the mountain of Hashem*” (*Tehillim 24:3*). No one can ascend the mountain of Hashem unless he possesses Torah, and although his evil inclination spreads out a cloud and darkness before him, preventing him from ascending, nevertheless since he possesses Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, opens a path for him in the midst of the cloud. He also helps him to speak, as the Sages have said: “*If one comes to purify himself, he is given help*” (*Shabbat 104a*). However if a person does not study Torah, then even if he observes mitzvot and performs good deeds, this will not help him to conquer his evil inclination, since its only antidote is Torah (*Kiddushin 30b*). If a person fails to study Torah, he will not know how to distinguish between a mitzvah and a sin, and he will fall into the hands of the evil inclination. Above all, he will not grow spiritually throughout his life.

I Will Deliver You from the Evil Inclination

Furthermore, as soon as a person wants to “*ascend the mountain*,” the evil inclination hastens to oppose him, transforming itself into a mountain, as the Sages have said: “[*The evil inclination*] will appear like a mountain” (*Sukkah 52a*). It also robs a person of all his virtues, to the point that the entire world seems like a cloud to him, for he can no longer sense Hashem’s Presence. What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He summons him from the cloud itself: “*Ascend to Me – this cloud is nothing but a notion of the evil inclination, and I will open a path for you by which you may enter through the cloud. I will also support you and remove you from the grasp of the evil inclination, for the Torah is its antidote. Since you study Torah, you have the right to ascend the mountain. If you are afraid of the cloud that covers the mountain, by your life, I am found within this cloud, and since you ascend the mountain, I will save you from the grasp of the evil inclination.*”

If this cloud is a test of wealth, Hashem will lead a person's heart to distance himself from wealth so he can ascend the mountain. It is in this regard that the verse states, "*Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain*" (*Shemot 24:18*). This teaches us that since he was inside the cloud, he conquered the evil inclination and immediately ascended the mountain.

If anyone thinks that only a person who possesses a complete grasp of Torah can reach this level, he should realize that any person can ascend the mountain of Hashem, even if he does not possess a complete grasp of Torah, for the Holy One, blessed be He, will open a path for him. The proof comes from Moshe Rabbeinu, for he only ascended the mountain to learn Torah from the mouth of G-d, as we read: "*Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights*" (*Shemot 24:18*). This means that only one who studies Torah may ascend. That is why it is repeated at the end of the passage: We are told that Moshe ascended the mountain before we read that he stayed there for forty days and forty nights, thereby teaching us that only a person who studies Torah may ascend the mountain.

Law and Justice Ensure the Torah's Existence

From the great spiritual elevation of the Jewish people and everything they attained at the giving of the Torah, having heard the words of the living G-d Himself, the Torah proceeds to the mitzvot that deal with the darkest side of man: A thief who is sold to pay for his theft, a murderer, someone who sold a person, etc. – laws that deal with the most vile of men. The sequence of these subjects amid the parshiot needs to be explained. Why did the Torah deem it necessary to bring the Jewish people down from the highest point – from a knowledge of Hashem and the acceptance of His kingdom at the giving of the Torah – to the lowest abyss, to laws dealing with the selling of slaves and the details related to the conflicts of men? Why not teach the noblest mitzvot first, such as Shabbat and tefillin?

There is another interesting aspect to the order of the parshiot that needs to be examined. After the description of the giving of the Torah in Parsha Yitro, and just before Parsha Mishpatim, the Torah inserts two mitzvot that seem out of place: "*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. You shall not ascend My altar on steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered on it*" (*Shemot 20:22-23*). We need to understand why the Torah placed these mitzvot here, since they have no connection to the surrounding texts: The giving of the Torah that comes beforehand, and the laws between man and his fellowman that come afterwards.

To explain this, we shall first discuss something that the Sages revealed to us, namely that the prerequisite for receiving the Torah is unity among the Jewish people. We learn this from the teaching, "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain [Shemot 19:2] – like a single person, with a single heart.*" It is only when they possessed a single heart that they became worthy of receiving the Torah and they prepared themselves for it.

In regards to the need for strong unity among the Jewish people in order to receive the Torah, we have already spoken about this elsewhere, and here we shall add another explanation from a different perspective. The mitzvot of the Torah number 613 in total, of which 248 are positive mitzvot and 365 negative mitzvot. In reality, a Jew cannot possibly fulfill them all, for some mitzvot apply only to the Kohanim or Leviim, others apply only to a king, while others apply only to women. Therefore how can an individual fulfill the entire Torah, all 613 mitzvot, which correspond to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews, physical and spiritual, and which cast light upon and breathe life into them, as mentioned in our holy books?

Nevertheless, this question only exists when each Jew is considered as an individual who is separate in terms of his obligations and mitzvot. Yet when the Jewish people are unified and form a single whole, when we consider all Israel as truly being a single person, divided into various members that perceive and live a life of mutual responsibility, this question no longer exists. In fact when a Levite fulfills his duty, he does not accomplish it alone; it is all Israel that accomplishes this mitzvah with him. Likewise when a king writes a Sefer Torah, all the people participate in that mitzvah. As a result, every Jew fulfills all 613 mitzvot by virtue of his connection and affiliation with the Jewish community amid complete unity, which is the secret of mutual responsibility.

We therefore have a new perspective on "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain – like a single person, with a single heart*": The need for unity in Israel did not stop with the giving of the Torah, with the need to prepare the Children of Israel for receiving the Torah. Furthermore, the Jewish people have an obligation to be constantly and permanently connected with one another in order to fulfill the Torah in its entirety.

Now that we have reached this point, we may explain that it was for this reason that immediately after the Torah was given, it deals with laws and mitzvot concerning man and his fellowman. This was meant to teach Israel the mitzvot that are the basis of the fulfillment of the Torah, those which consist of its pillars and without which the community of Israel would be unable to fulfill all 613 mitzvot. Hence immediately after the giving of the Torah, it warns those who received it by enacting numerous laws, doing so in order to show them just how much respect they must have for others, and just how much they should be concerned with protecting the possessions and physical welfare of others. Focusing on these mitzvot, which deal with the respect and importance of others, is what supports and maintains the unity of the Jewish people, which is the foundation of observing Torah.

What we have said fully explains why the mitzvot dealing with the altar are repeated after the giving of the Torah, just prior to Parsha Mishpatim. Rashi explains the mitzvah, "*When you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build them hewn*" by saying that the very existence of the altar and its role is to increase peace in the world. In fact one who sins is far from Hashem, and the altar rectifies his sin, draws him closer

to his Father in Heaven, and makes peace reign between them. Once he has repented and has been forgiven, a person is loved and appreciated by Hashem. That said, it is not fitting that something which slices and destroys should come upon the altar, which increases peace and harmony between Jews and the Holy One, blessed be He. The Gemara says something along the same lines: “*For him who divorces his first wife, the altar itself sheds tears*” (*Sanhedrin 22a*). It is precisely the altar that suffers and weeps when conflict and division arise between husband and wife, for that constitutes the opposite of the altar’s essence and its purpose.

The holy Torah shows us how to build the altar and attain the virtue of peace, which it contains. There are two prerequisites for increasing peace in the world, the first being: “*You will have raised your sword over it*.” That is, when you want to build and establish peace, you must distance the sword – a symbol of destruction that has been used in countless conflicts among men. You must put down the weapon of conflict and focus on unity and connecting with others. The second prerequisite for attaining peace is hinted to us in the second mitzvah pertaining to the altar: “*You shall not ascend My altar on steps*.” Man must not be filled with pride, nor should he dwell on his own worth or importance. He must not focus on his own virtues and accomplishments, but rather he should probe his own frailties, for in this way he will become humble. Now someone who humbles himself is generally protected from conflicts with others, for he accepts everything that happens to him with love and humility, as King David says: “*Because Hashem said to him, ‘Curse!’*” (*II Samuel 16:10*). Humility is the root and foundation of accepting justice, for a person who humbles himself is not quickly upset or angered by one who has affronted his honor. It is the cornerstone of peace and harmony among men, for all conflicts are rooted in pride and pretension, when everyone firmly holds their ground and asserts that justice is on their side.

These are the prerequisites for peace: Distancing oneself from conflict and pride, and reflecting upon one’s own lowliness in order to become humble before everyone. We find this concept alluded to at the beginning of the passage: “*An altar of earth shall you make*” (*Shemot 20:21*). That is, in order to build an altar, in order to obtain the peace that it alludes to, we must be like the earth, yielding and humble, just as we say in our daily prayers: “*May my soul be as dust to all*.”

The Torah placed these mitzvot, which teach us how to build the altar and attain the virtue of peace (which is the foundation of the mitzvot dealing with man and his fellowman) before Parsha Mishpatim. In fact by these virtues, by distancing ourselves from conflict and by humility, we can fulfill all the mitzvot dealing with man and his fellowman, and safeguard the honor of others and protect what is theirs. This constitutes the basis for the observance of Torah among the Jewish people, as we have explained.

From all that we have said, it follows that “*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain – like a single person, with a single heart*” is not only the prerequisite and the required preparation for receiving the Torah. Indeed, “*a single heart*” is the basis for fulfilling Torah and for its continued existence among the Jewish people.

Ordinances and Laws: The Fulfillment of Torah

After the account describing the greatness of the Children of Israel and the exceptionally high level which they reached during the revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah [when they heard the words of G-d coming literally from the mouth of the Divine], the Torah deals with down-to-earth subjects that return us to the basic human condition: A thief sold as a slave to pay for his crime, a killer who strikes another man...laws concerning the crudest of human actions. This juxtaposition is surprising: Why does the Torah bring the Children of Israel down from such a high level (the knowledge and perception of Hashem's essence and the acceptance of His kingdom) to the depths of the abyss (laws dealing with slaves and conflicts among men)? Instead, why did the Torah not choose at this point to teach mitzvot such as Shabbat or tefillin, noble and honorable concepts?

Another detail regarding the subjects in this part of the Torah also raises a question: Between the account of the giving of the Torah and Parsha Mishpatim, the text contains two mitzvot that seem to be out of place: "*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. You shall not ascend My altar on steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it*" (*Shemot* 20:22-23). We need to understand why the Torah inserts these two mitzvot here, which have nothing in common with what comes before (the giving of the Torah) or what comes after (the ordinances and laws between man and fellowman).

In trying to answer all these questions, we should recall a fundamental principle given by our Sages: To receive the Torah, the Jewish people must be united and its members must feel connected to one another. We learn this from the verse, "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain*" (*Shemot* 19:2). The verb "*encamped*" is in the singular, signifying that they all felt like one man, with one heart. It was only after the Children of Israel formed a single entity that they became fit to receive the Torah.

In previous issues, we have explained that the unity of the Jewish people was a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. We shall now approach this issue from another perspective. There are a total of 613 commandments in the Torah, with 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. Nevertheless, no single Jew can fulfill them all in practice, for some commandments pertain only to kohanim and Levites, others pertain only to the king, and still others pertain only to women. In that case, how can a Jew fulfill the entire Torah, meaning its 613 commandments? These commandments correspond to a Jew's 248 limbs and 365 sinews, physical and spiritual, which they infuse with light and vitality, as our holy books explain.

This problem only arises, however, when each Jew is considered as an individual in regards to his obligations and mitzvot. When the Jewish people are united and form a single entity – when we view ourselves as being truly part of the same body, all of whose parts perceive and experience the feelings and pains of others – then this problem automatically disappears. When the Levite carries out his obligations, he does

not act alone. Rather, all Israel is connected to him when he does so. Likewise when the king writes a Sefer Torah for himself, the entire Jewish people are partnered with him in this mitzvah of his. Thus every Jew can fulfill all 613 mitzvot because of the connection that binds the entire Jewish people together, a connection that he is an integral part of. This is the secret of their mutual responsibility.

We now have a new perspective on the verse, “*Israel encamped there,*” which had previously been interpreted to mean: “*Like one man, with one heart.*” We can now understand it to mean that the need for the Jewish people’s unity did not end with the revelation at Sinai, which made the people fit to receive the Torah. Rather, all Jews are obligated to be constantly united with one another for all time, so that every Jew can fulfill the Torah in its entirety.

This is why, immediately following the revelation on Sinai, the Torah discusses laws that deal with man’s relationship to his fellowman, for these laws constitute the foundation, the pillars and bases of the fulfillment of Torah! Without them, the Jewish people would not be able to fulfill all 613 mitzvot. Thus immediately after the giving of the Torah, by means of the “*social*” laws, G-d makes everyone aware of the importance of treating his fellowman – both his person and his possessions – with the utmost respect. The meticulous observance of these mitzvot, which deal with considering and valuing others, enables the Jewish people to survive and endure. This is the secret behind the true fulfillment of Torah.

The mitzvot dealing with the altar are therefore in their proper place, namely between the giving of the Torah and Parsha Mishpatim. Concerning the phrase, “*do not build them hewn,*” Rashi writes that by its very essence, the altar establishes peace in the world. In fact the sinner is held accountable by Hashem and is distant from Him. By atoning for his sin, the altar brings him closer to his Father in Heaven and makes peace reign among men. Once a person has repented and his sin has been forgiven, he is cherished and wanted by G-d. As a result, it is not proper for an object that cuts and injures (*an object made of iron*) to touch the altar, whose role is the establishment of peace and unity between Hashem and Israel. In regards to this subject, the Gemara states: “*For him who divorces his first wife, the very altar sheds tears*” (*Sanhedrin 22a*). It “*suffers*” as a result of a dispute or division among people, which runs counter to its very essence and purpose.

The holy Torah shows us just how to build the altar, meaning the way in which we can acquire the dimension of peace that it embodies, and how to fulfill the two prerequisites for peace in the world. The first of these is: “[*Do not raise*] your sword over it” – when you want to establish peace, you must first rid yourself of all iron (the material from which destructive implements and weapons are made). In other words, put down the weapons with which you quarrel and focus exclusively on drawing closer to others. As for the second prerequisite, the Torah alludes to it by the second mitzvah regarding the altar, which establishes peace: “*You shall not ascend My altar on steps.*” In fact we must distance ourselves from a sense of pride and not allow ourselves to

chase after vanity. We must not accentuate our own merits and success, but rather we should reflect on our own insignificance in order to attain humility. Generally speaking, a humble person is protected from all kinds of conflicts or disputes with others, for he accepts what happens to him with love and obedience, as King David said: “*Because Hashem has said to him, ‘Curse David’*” (*II Samuel 16:10*). Obedience is the root, the foundation for accepting the verdict, for an obedient person will not get quickly carried away when his honor is affronted. Humility is thus the cornerstone that allows for the establishment of peace and brotherhood. In fact every quarrel stems from pride and presumptuousness, which make everyone stand their ground and argue their cause.

These are the necessary prerequisites for acquiring peace: Distancing yourself from strife and pride, reflecting on your own insignificance, and demonstrating obedience in all things. Just prior to this week’s parsha, we find the verse: “*An altar of earth shall you make for Me*” (*Shemot 20:21*). This means that in order to build an altar and achieve the peace that it embodies, we must consider ourselves like the earth, meaning humble and obedient (as we read in the daily prayers: “*May my soul be as dust to all*”).

The Torah therefore gave these mitzvot, which provide us with the necessary tools to build an altar (in other words, for the acquisition of peace, upon which the relationship between man and fellowman is founded) before teaching us the laws of Mishpatim. By adopting such behavior – by distancing ourselves from disputes and being obedient – we can perfectly fulfill mitzvot regarding others, respecting our fellowman and safeguarding his possessions. As we have explained, this constitutes the foundation of the Jewish people’s fulfillment of Torah.

From here we learn that the explanation of “*Israel encamped before the mountain*” (i.e., that they were “*like one man, with one heart*”) is not a simple precondition and requirement for the giving of the Torah. In reality, it is the foundation for fulfilling the Torah and its continued existence among the Jewish people.

Regarding the subject of loving our fellowman and peace among men, our Sages have said: “*The generation of Ahab worshipped idols, and yet they were victorious when they went out into battle. Why? Because there were no informers among them*” (*Devarim Rabba 5:10*). Conversely, men were all righteous in the time of David, but often lost in battle because there were informers among them. We also know that the Tannaim, righteous and good men such as the students of Rabbi Akiva, died because they lacked respect for one another. Hence we see that an absence of love for one’s fellowman, and a lack of brotherhood among the Jewish people, denies them the right to spiritual existence (the fulfillment of Torah) as well as material existence.

The Torah Refines Character Traits

It is written, “*Moshe arrived in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain, and Moshe was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights*” (*Shemot 24:18*).

Moshe ascended to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, and there he remained for 40 days and 40 nights. The Sages say that when the angels saw him, they asked

the Holy One, blessed be He: “*What is this son of a woman doing among us?*” When they learned that he had ascended to Heaven to bring the Torah to the Children of Israel, they protested and asked Hashem to stop him because the Children of Israel would transgress and profane the Torah. The Sages add (*Pirkei Avoth 6:2*) that a Heavenly Voice goes forth and weeps, saying: “*Woe to the people because of their affront to the Torah!*” When the Holy One, blessed be He, heard the objections of the angels, He told Moshe to answer them. Moshe replied that these beings, who live in Heaven, did not possess an evil inclination. Hence they were not in a constant fight with their desires, nor did they need the Torah to protect them or refine their character traits and guide them along the right path. Conversely the Children of Israel possess, in addition to a good inclination, an evil inclination that does everything it can to make them stumble and veer off the right path, and only the Torah has the power to teach creatures of flesh and blood how to act and which behavior to adopt in order to subjugate their evil inclination. If there was any reason to worry that the Children of Israel would actually profane the Torah, there was no greater proof than the power of their evil inclination, which pushes them to turn away from good, as the Zohar teaches (*Zohar II:82b*).

The Torah is a book of practical advice for use against the evil inclination, and the mitzvot found within it actually constitute a book of laws and directives that encourage a person how to act in order to avoid becoming corrupt and falling into sin.

We may also say that just as the Torah is formed by the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, likewise a person who studies it receives strength and assistance to fight against the evil inclination through these divine Names. As the Sages have said, “*If the Holy One, blessed be He, were not to help him, he would be unable to withstand it*” (*Sukkah 52b*). Someone once came to see me in tears because whenever he stood in prayer, all sorts of thoughts came to mind, preventing him from praying with the proper concentration.

I advised him to study the laws related to the Amidah, for they have the power to reveal the greatness of prayer. In this way, he would be careful not to have forbidden thoughts when he stood before the King of kings. The Alter of Novardok adds that the Torah is a living book of Mussar, awakening a desire to fulfill Hashem’s mitzvot in a person who makes an effort to study it. Indeed, the Torah prevents him from obeying his desires and sinning, for studying the lives of the Patriarchs is all it takes to arouse a heartfelt desire to demonstrate goodness and kindness.

Giving Life to the Soul

The Zohar tells us that the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah to create the universe (*Zohar II:161a*). This means that everything is based on the Torah, and that nothing can survive without it. It is like a building that is astoundingly well-designed, and which rises to its full height and cannot be moved even by a hurricane. Yet if someone were to set off a car filled with explosives next to the building’s foundations, it would immediately crumble. All the intelligent planning and immense work invested

into its construction would have been in vain, for explosives have the power to bring down even the largest of structures.

The same applies to the world, which was created according to the holy Torah. In every corner of the universe, the Holy One, blessed be He, imprinted Creation with the seal of the Torah, which allows the world to endure. Yet regrettably, transgressions and negative character traits have the power to destroy, just like the planes that struck the twin towers and reduced them to dust, as if they had never risen to such great heights.

This is why Moshe asked the angels to agree to give the Torah to man, for it alone has the power to improve character traits and lead a person along the right path, as it is written: “*I created the evil inclination, but I [also] created the Torah as its antidote*” (*Kiddushin 30b*).

In fact all the parshiot during the Shovevim deal with improving character traits and the greatness of teshuvah as a preparation for receiving the Torah. I’ve read one commentator who states that as a great Torah scholar was reading Parsha Bo, he began preparing his suitcase. When asked what he was doing, he replied that he was going into exile to atone for his sins. See how the Torah has the power to give life to the soul and encourage people to do teshuvah, as if he himself was living during the time of the events that the Torah describes?

The stories in the Torah are like a living book of Mussar. They are a tool that enables us to improve our character traits, and they have the power to elevate man and lead him to great heights, just as the Children of Israel did when they received the Torah. We too should hope to learn the lessons found in these parshiot and sanctify ourselves before G-d. May it be considered as if we ourselves had been elevated along with the Children of Israel, proceeding from the 49 gates of impurity to the 49 gates of sanctity.

Man is His Own Master

On the passage concerning the Hebrew slave, the Abarbanel writes: “*He shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free, for no charge [Shemot 21:2]. Scripture is telling us that if he had the intention of earning a living by ridding himself of the burden of having to support himself, his wife, and his children, then he will end up with absolutely nothing but the shame of having worked as a slave for six years. In the end he will leave with nothing other than what he arrived with, meaning his own person, his work having not helped him at all. If he had a wife and was relying on his master to support her, in the end she will leave with him and he will face the same problems as he did at the beginning. This is the meaning of ‘his wife shall leave with him’ [v.3].*”

We learn an extraordinary lesson here. Although the Torah is strict with this slave, who stole in the belief that he could rid of himself of having to earn a living, it still has compassion on him and does not want him to remain with the shame of having been sold as a slave, which itself is already a tremendous disgrace. Nevertheless, the Torah

commands his master to act with respect and compassion toward him, to the point that the Sages have said: “*Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is like buying a master for himself*” (*Kiddushin 20a*). His master must treat him as an equal in every area, including food, drink, and sleep, and if his master has only one pillow to sleep on, he must give it to his slave.

We also see that it is forbidden to treat a slave with contempt, for his master also has a mitzvah to give his slave, upon his departure, something from all the blessings that Hashem has sent him, as it is written: “*Adorn him generously from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar*” (*Devarim 15:14*). Why must he do this? Because it is written, “*You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt*” (*v.15*), meaning that just as Hashem treated you with compassion and gave you great possessions and the spoils of the sea when you left Egypt, so too should you act with your slave. Furthermore, you should not become accustomed to scorning other free men, the reason being that since it is forbidden to scorn your slave, how much more is it forbidden to scorn your equals!

On the other hand, this teaches a slave to completely submit himself to the Holy One, blessed be He. We see this in the piercing of his ear against a door or lintel. As Rashi says, “*This ear, which heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, ‘The Children of Israel are My slaves’ – yet went out and acquired a master for himself – let it be pierced.*”

Hence a slave’s ear is pierced next to a mezuzah. In fact it seems that such a slave only loves his wife and children, as it is written: “*I love my master, my wife, and my children*” (*Shemot 21:5*). Hence it is precisely next to a mezuzah that he is shown by allusion that he must also love Hashem, for in the mezuzah it is written: “*You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul*” – and yet you want to remain a slave in order to rid yourself of numerous mitzvot that are written in the Torah!

We still must ask why it is the slave’s ear that is pierced, rather than his mouth. After all, it was the mouth that said, “*We shall do and we shall hear*,” a declaration that the slave is now transgressing. He had expressed his desire, earlier on Mount Sinai, to be Hashem’s servant, to submit to Him and carry out His will. Yet now he says that he loves his master and wants to serve a human being!

To explain this, we may say that the essential thing is hearing, for hearing leads to action, as we see with Jethro: “*Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard...*” (*Shemot 18:1*). Rashi cites the Sages in asking, “*What news did he hear, such that he came?*” (*Zevachim 116a*). It therefore seems that the essential thing is what we hear, which is what prompted Jethro to come. Because of what he heard – not only a regular sound, but an inner sound as well – Jethro gave up his privileged social position and placed himself in the shadow of Moshe and the Children of Israel in the inhospitable desert. That is why we pierce the ear of a slave, for it was the ear that heard: “*The Children of Israel are My slaves*” (*Vayikra 25:55*).

Today we find something similar with many people who return to G-d and Torah, for they heard reprimands that emanated from a pure heart and entered their own hearts, words that changed their entire way of life.

Hence when a slave misuses what he hears, his ear must be pierced. In this way, others will hear and see, and they too will rectify whatever deficiencies exist in their hearing. They will put an end to all their other forms of servitude, yielding only to the Holy One, blessed be He, and emulating all other Jews who are servants of Hashem, the Torah, and the mitzvot that free a person from the evil inclination.

We must draw a lesson from the passage of the Hebrew slave. A person who serves Hashem is like a master his controls his desires, and he must acquire a study partner like one acquires a precious possession, without which it is impossible to live. The Sages have also said, “*Provide yourself with a teacher; acquire for yourself a friend*” (*Pirkei Avoth 1:6*). The latter will be like a personal possession, being connected to him throughout life, not sometimes like a friend and sometimes like an enemy. And since all Jews are Hashem’s servants, it is written: “*When you acquire a Hebrew slave.*”

This is the meaning of, “*He shall work for six years*” – the term shesh (“six”) having the same numerical value as the word *kesher* (“connection”). This also alludes to the 60 years of a man’s life, the time before he becomes exempt from observing mitzvot, meaning on the day of his death, as it is written: “*The days of our years among them are 70 years...but their pride is toil and pain*” (*Tehillim 90:10*). For everything is sin if we do not study Torah, if we do not work to improve our character traits and fail to love our fellow.

All the days of his life, he must ensure that he is connected to his study partner and other friends, for it is impossible to depend on only one friend, who must sometimes leave for elsewhere or be separated from him for various other reasons. As the Sages have said, “*Seek out a thousand friends, and may a single enemy not seem as little to you, for the more friends the better, as it is written: ‘In a multitude of counselors there is safety’ [Mishlei 11:14]*” (*Mivchar Peninim, Sha’ar Chaverim*). When one friend is not available, a second or third friend will be, but a single enemy can do a great deal of harm, even though he is but one.

It is only with friends that we elevate ourselves and progress in the service of Hashem and the fear of Heaven. This is one of the ways in which the Torah is acquired, i.e., by “*the companionship of friends*” (*Pirkei Avoth 6:6*). Just as the giving of the Torah took place amid unity, with the Children of Israel being like a single person with a single heart, so too does a person’s study partner connect him to Hashem. Such is the case throughout life.

Parsha Terumah

Prepare Yourself for the World to Come by Observing Mitzvot in this World

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read, "Let them take for Me an offering, from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My offering" (*Exodus 25:2*). Here Rashi explains, "Let them take for Me – for My Name." Regarding this passage the Midrash Pliyah states: "Thus it is written, 'Hear O Israel, the L-RD is our G-d, the L-RD is One.'"

In examining this subject, two very difficult questions arise. First, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, select this mitzvah and encourage us to perform it "for My Name"? Should other mitzvot not be done for the sake of His Name? Why only with regards to this particular mitzvah is this stressed? Secondly, what is the significance of the Midrash Pliyah's statement? What connection is there between the Shema and the mitzvah of Terumah? The answer is that the subject of the building of the Sanctuary and its vessels alludes to the elevation of man and his path in serving G-d. In fact a person must work throughout his life to resemble the holy Ark, a vessel that contains holiness, that contains the Torah. When a person dies he is called righteous, and in eulogizing him we say, "*The holy Ark has been captured*" (*Ketubot 104a*).

A person must also develop, on his own, good characteristics inside and out, just as the Ark was covered with gold on all sides. In the observance of mitzvot, one must constantly look for ways to add a gold crown, an ornament, to the mitzvot. He must adorn each mitzvah that he performs, as it is written: "*This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him*" (*Exodus 15:2*), which the Sages explain as meaning: "*Adorn yourself before Him in mitzvot*" (*Shabbat 133b; Sukkah 11b*). How was the holy Ark lifted for transport – that is, how can a person lift himself to higher levels in Torah and the fear of Heaven? Just as the Ark of the Sanctuary was transported with poles, a person should grasp the poles of the Ark in order to lift it and walk. What do these poles allude to in a person's life? It is written, "*You shall make poles of acacia atzei [wood]*" (*Exodus 25:10*), a reference to the Torah, which is called etz [a tree] of life (*Perkei Avoth 6:7; Berachot 32b*). This means that by diligently studying Torah, and by the love that a person demonstrates for it and the effort that he puts into it, he can lift himself to ever-higher levels (*Psalms 84:8*). We must be careful to support it, as well as to help those who are devoted to grasping its poles, as it is written: "*It is a tree of life to those who grasp it*" (*Proverbs 3:18*).

The more a person holds on to these poles, the more he will grow. He will also come to appreciate the true value of holiness and love Torah more and more. He will understand it to an ever greater degree, until he feels his soul escaping due to his great love for it. Such a person will seek to fulfill mitzvot and recite sacred words. He will also spend a great deal of money for the Torah and its mitzvot, just as the Tannaim did

in expending large sums to fulfill mitzvot.

When those around us see what we are doing, they will certainly worry that we aren't acting properly. They will think that this wood is not made of shittim (*acacia*), but of *shtut* (foolishness), for they will claim that it is absurd to spend so much money on mitzvot. However one who loves Torah will not allow things to come apart. He will continue to diligently and continuously hold on to the poles of the Torah, which "*shall not be removed from it*" (*Exodus 25:15*), for that is Hashem's will. He wants us to persevere in our study and support of Torah, as well as in the performance of mitzvot. Above all, the Creator wants to help us perform this mitzvah and ease us through this trial. Hence in His compassion He reminds us of the day of death, the day when neither silver nor gold will accompany us – only the Torah that we studied and the mitzvot and good deeds we performed (*Perkei Avoth 6:9*) – for wealth will not help us then.

True, Hashem does not want a Jew to be affected by feelings of sadness that damage and ruin all that is good. He just wants a person to wake up and realize that he can give of his money and acquire a great mitzvah, the mitzvah of tzedakah. With a little effort, he can acquire true goodness for himself, a possession that will accompany him when his lengthy stay on earth draws to a close. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered the poles (which allude to the support of Torah) to be placed into the rings. Since the rings are round, they recall the day of death, a time of mourning, just as all round things do, which is why we eat lentils in a house of mourning (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 552:5*). Thus a person will remember, wake up, and give to tzedakah, and in this way he can win the difficult fight against his evil inclination. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, asked for an offering from the Children of Israel by saying: "*Let them take for Me an offering*." The Creator speaks to them using tender words, saying: "*Please, know that after 120 years you will be able to take only the Terumah [offering] with you*." This term is formed by the letters of the word Torah and the letter *mem* (numerical value: 40) – alluding to the Torah that was given in 40 days (*Menachot 99b*) – including this mitzvah of tzedakah along with the rest of the mitzvot.

This is the only thing you can take with you, which is why today is the time to collect more merits for this mitzvah, for it will sustain you for eternity. This is what the Midrash Pliyah means by citing the Shema: "*Hear O Israel, the L-RD is our G-d, the L-RD is One*." In fact it is through the rings that Hashem wants us to recall the last Shema that we will ever say, namely on the day of death. This is meant to awaken us so we can take full advantage of our time and money in this world, now while we are still alive, to collect more mitzvot and merits. Furthermore, in order to further awaken us to the mitzvah of tzedakah, the Holy One, blessed be He, is teaching us the importance of this mitzvah by saying: "*Let them take for Me an offering*" – for My Name. A person who gives tzedakah and supports Torah is as if he were truly supporting Hashem and connecting himself to Hashem's Name. The

fact that a person gives is what enables him to cleave to His Name. One who gives will also remember that he is building the Sanctuary by his gift. To conclude, we may say by allusion that the words *li lishmi* ("for Me, for My Name") form the initials of the expression *lekachtam yuchal leolam shekulo metukan yafeh* ("he can take them into the world that is entirely perfect"). This is because the only things that accompany a person into the World to Come are Torah and mitzvot, for only through them can he cleave to the Creator.

Peace Between Husband and Wife – The Purpose of the Creation of Heaven and Earth

It is written, "*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them*" (*Exodus 25:8*). The Sages have noted that it is not written "*within it [the Sanctuary]*," but "*among them*," which teaches us that the Shechinah dwells in each of them. Given that the Shechinah did not dwell solely within the Sanctuary, but in each of the Children of Israel, we may ask why the Sanctuary was needed! We also need to understand how it could be that, although we learn some very important mitzvot from the crowns upon the Hebrew letters, mitzvot that apply to all the generations, the Sanctuary itself was eventually destroyed and no longer stood in the generations that followed, and yet the Torah still spread abundantly over everything that concerned it.

At the beginning of Parsha Vayakhel, the Ramban states: "*Moses, after having commanded Aaron and the rulers and all the Children of Israel – the men – all that the L-RD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai, following the breaking of the Tablets and after he had put the veil on his face, again commanded that the people be assembled, whereupon the whole congregation gathered to him – men, women and children. It is possible that this occurred on the day following his descent from the mountain, and he told all of them the subject of the Sanctuary, which he had previously commanded, before the breaking of the Tablets. For since the Holy One, blessed be He, became reconciled with them and gave Moses the second Tablets, and also made a new covenant that G-d would go in their midst, He thereby returned to His previous relationship with them and to the love of their nuptials, and it was obvious that the Shechinah would be in their midst, just as He had commanded him at first*" (*Ramban on Exodus 35:1*).

Furthermore, Sforno (*on Leviticus 11:2*) states that once the Children of Israel had lost the spiritual crown acquired at the giving of the Torah, the moment when they merited the Shechinah dwelling upon them without an intermediary, Hashem did not want His Shechinah to dwell upon them right away, as it is written: "*I shall not ascend among you*" (*Exodus 33:3*). Through his prayer, Moses was able to have the Shechinah dwell among them through the intermediary of the Sanctuary, its vessels, its priests, and its offerings. How can these two things be reconciled? We still do not know whether the Shechinah returned to dwell among the Children of Israel, or whether it simply dwelled in the Sanctuary! The Midrash (*Pesikta Rabbati 6*) notes that in the description

of the work carried out by King Solomon, Scripture does state that “*the work*” was completed, but that “*all the work*” (*1 Kings 7:51*) was completed, a reference to the six days of Creation. Thus we read, “*All the work that G-d created to make*” (*Genesis 2:3*) – it does not state “*had made*,” but “*to make*,” meaning that more work still exists. When King Solomon came and built the Temple, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*The work of Heaven and earth is now done; all the work is shalem [complete]*.” That is why he was called Solomon, for Hashem *hishlim* (completed) the work of Creation through the work of his hands.

According to the Sages (*Sotah 17a*), if husband and wife are worthy, the Shechinah dwells among them; otherwise a fire devours them. Even when the Temple is no longer present, if husband and wife are worthy, peace reigns between them and the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and makes His Shechinah dwell among them. Hence the Torah speaks at great length about the smallest details of the Sanctuary. This teaches us that there is a Sanctuary that is not destroyed, one that exists forever, namely the home of every Jew – where the Shechinah rests when peace reigns between husband and wife. What is written concerning the peace that exists between husband and wife? The Sages say, “*The world was only made to be populated, as it says: ‘He did not create it for emptiness. He fashioned it to be inhabited’ [Isaiah 45:18]*” (*Gittin 41b*). This teaches us that when peace exists between husband and wife, the world endures, as well as the word “*that G-d created to make*.” The goal of Creation then becomes complete. Yet when there is no peace between husband and wife, the world cannot endure, and since there is no peace among them, Creation immediately returns to a state of chaos.

Thus the Sages have said, “*If a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears*” (*Gittin 90b*). The reason is because a man’s house should resemble the Sanctuary. Just as daily offerings, the *olah* (elevation offering) and *mussaf* (additional offering) were brought in the Sanctuary, likewise a man who marries a woman merits to *mossif* (add) and *oleh* (elevate) himself in the service of G-d, which he cannot do without a wife, as it is written: “*Any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness...without peace*” (*Yebamot 62b*).

When a man divorces his wife, Scripture considers him to have destroyed the Temple, for just as the altar without the Temple is nothing – not being worthy of receiving offerings – one who divorces his wife amid strife destroys the Temple. Therefore the elevation and additional offerings that are brought in his home will cease. Since the Temple is destroyed, even the altar sheds tears over it, for the main thing is the Temple. When the Temple stands, there is an altar. However without the Temple, even if there is an altar, it serves no purpose.

Therefore let us say that the Shechinah came and dwelled upon the Children of Israel. Exactly where did it dwell? In the house of each of them when peace reigned within. Even in our time, when the Temple no longer stands, the Shechinah still dwells in the Temple, for the house of a Jew is called a Temple. This is the sense of the verse, “*How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel*” (*Numbers*

24:5). This was said regarding the peace that reigned between husband and wife, as the Sages have stated: “*He saw that the doors of their tents did not exactly face one another, whereupon he exclaimed: ‘Worthy are they that the Shechinah should dwell upon them!’*” (Bava Batra 60a). We may therefore say that as long as the Temple does not stand – meaning as long as there is no peace in the homes of Israel – the work of Creation has not yet reached a state of perfection, and Heaven and earth have not been strengthened. When the Temple stands and there is peace between husband and wife, the Creation of Heaven and earth immediately reaches a state of perfection and they are strengthened. The world only endures by the merit of peace between husband and wife. Since it is written, “*If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*” (Jeremiah 33:25) – on which our Sages have said: “*If it were not for the Torah, Heaven and earth would not endure*” (Pesachim 68b) – then perhaps one could say that the world also endures by the study of Torah? The answer is that the Torah itself only endures when there is peace. As long as there is peace, there is Torah. When there is no peace, there is no Torah. The proof is that the Torah was only given to the Children of Israel when peace reigned among them, as the Sages have said on the verse, “*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain*” (Exodus 19:2): “*All the other encampments were with resentment and dissension, but here everyone was of the same heart, hence it is written: ‘Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain.’*” We also read, “*The L-RD will give strength to His people. The L-RD will bless His people with peace*” (Psalms 29:11). Thus when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, there was instant peace.

This is why we find, with regards to the Temple, that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.*” He said, “*Let them make,*” which corresponds to “*that G-d created to make*” (Genesis 2:3). This indicates that the goal of Creation is not completely attained before there is a Sanctuary and the Children of Israel offer sacrifices when peace reigns among them. Hence it is written, “*Let them make for Me*” – they must do everything together in peace. The term *li* (“for Me”) has a numerical value of 40, corresponding to the Torah that was given after 40 days. This teaches us that when Jews study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, and when there is peace between them, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His Shechinah dwell among them, for it is written: “*I will dwell among them,*” not “*I will dwell in it.*” This means that through peace, the Shechinah comes and dwells in everyone.

True Peace in the Home – The Source of the Shechinah

It is written, “*They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*” (Exodus 25:8). The Sages have noted that it is not written, “*I will dwell in it,*” but rather, “*I will dwell among them.*” This teaches us that the Shechinah rests upon everyone. This is actually surprising, for if the Shechinah does not rest solely on the Sanctuary, but also on every Jew, why did the Children of Israel need a Sanctuary? We must also

explain why the Torah goes into such detail about the Sanctuary and the way it was built. After all, the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that it was going to be destroyed! When we reflect upon the number of important mitzvot that we learn just from the crowns on the Torah's letters – mitzvot that apply to all the generation – and yet the Sanctuary was eventually destroyed and its laws do not apply to every generation, we must ask why the Torah goes into so much detail concerning the Sanctuary and its vessels.

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said concerning husband and wife: If they are worthy, the Shechinah dwells among them; if not, a fire devours them (*Sotah 17a*). Even when the Temple no longer stands, if husband and wife are worthy, peace reigns between them, and the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His Shechinah dwell among them. Hence the Torah speaks at great length about every detail of the Sanctuary's construction in order to teach us that there exists a Sanctuary and a Temple that are not destroyed, which exist forever, namely the home of every Jew. This is where the Shechinah rests when peace reigns between husband and wife, as it is said: "*He did not create it for emptiness. He fashioned it to be inhabited*" (*Isaiah 45:18*). The Sages have explained that the world was made only so that created beings would multiply, as it is written: "*The world was only made to be populated*" (*Gittin 41b*). Thus when there is peace between husband and wife, the world endures. The fulfillment of the verse "*that G-d created to make*" also occurs in that case, and the goal of Creation is attained. Yet the world cannot endure when there is no peace between husband and wife, in which case the verse "*that G-d created to make*" is not fulfilled. Thus Creation immediately returns to its initial state of chaos.

This is why the Sages said, "*If a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears*" (*Gittin 90b*). This means that a man's house should resemble the Sanctuary, for just as the daily offerings, the *olah* (elevation offering), and the *mussaf* (additional offering) were brought in the Sanctuary, likewise a man who marries a woman merits to *mossif* (add) and *oleh* (elevate) himself in the service of G-d. He cannot do this without his wife, as it is written: "*Any man without a wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness. ... [Some say] without Torah and without a [protecting] wall. ... [Others say] without peace*" (*Yebamot 62b*).

The Altar Sheds Tears

When a man divorces his wife, Scripture considers him to have destroyed the Temple. The explanation is that just as the altar without the Temple is nothing – not being worthy of receiving offerings – a man who divorces his wife amid strife has destroyed the Temple. Hence the elevation and additional offerings that are brought in his home will cease. Since the Temple has been destroyed, even the altar sheds tears over it, for the main thing is the Temple. When the Temple stands, there is an altar. Without the Temple, even if there is an altar, it serves no purpose.

We may therefore say that the Shechinah returns and dwells among Jews, within each person's home, when peace reigns inside. Even in our time, when the Temple no

longer stands, the Shechinah still dwells in the Temple, for the home of a Jew is called a Temple. The verse, “*How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel*” (*Numbers 24:5*) refers to the peace that reigned between husband and wife and between man and fellowman when the Children of Israel dwelled in the desert, as the Sages have said: “*He saw that the doors of their tents did not exactly face one another, whereupon he exclaimed: ‘Worthy are they that the Shechinah should dwell upon them!’*” (*Bava Batra 60a*).

Appropriating the Garments of the King

We may say that as long as the Temple is not built – meaning that as long as there is no peace in the homes of Israel – the work of Creation is not yet complete, and Heaven and earth cannot endure. When the Temple has been built and there is peace between husband and wife, the creation of Heaven and earth is immediately complete and they can endure. The world only endures by the merit of peace between husband and wife.

Hence we read, “*They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*” (*Exodus 25:8*) – upon each of them. This teaches us that the Shechinah will dwell upon people when there is peace in their home. When there is peace between them, the Name Y-H is among them.

We must realize that the sacred Name Y-H has the same numerical value as ga’avah (“pride”), which teaches us that when there is peace between husband and wife, a husband will not feel superior to his wife, nor will his wife feel superior to him. Only the Holy One, blessed be He, possesses glory, as it is written: “*The L-RD has reigned; He has donned grandeur. ... The world is also established; it shall not falter*” (*Psalms 93:1*). This teaches us that when there is peace between husband and wife, and only Hashem glorifies Himself, the work of Creation is solid and does not falter. However when there is no peace between husband and wife, and when one prides him or herself over the other and appropriates the garments of the King, the Name Y-H disappears from among them, leaving only aish, fire.

A Unique Creature

It is written, “*This is the offering that you shall take from them: Gold, silver, and copper, and turquoise, purple and scarlet wool; linen and goat hair; red-dyed ram skins, tachash skins and shittim wood*” (*Shemot 25:3-5*). Rabbi Meir said, “*The tachash of Moshe’s day was a unique creature, for the Sages could not decide whether it belonged to a type of wild animal or to a type of domestic animal. It had one horn on its forehead, and it presented itself to Moshe for the occasion, and he made of it a [cover for the] Sanctuary, and it was then hidden*” (*Shabbat 28b*). The Jerusalem Talmud explains that the Holy One, blessed be He, created a type of pure wild animal for Moshe in the desert, and once it was used for constructing the Sanctuary, it disappeared (*Shabbat 2:4*).

I have heard the Mashgiach of Yeshiva Ateret Israel, Rav Chaim Walkin Shlita, asking why the Holy One, blessed be He, decided that it was good to create a unique

creature solely for the needs of the Sanctuary. Were animal skins missing in the world, such that G-d had to create this creature? The Sages have also said, “*The world did not actually deserve the benefit of gold, but it was created for the sake of the Sanctuary and the Temple.... The cedars, too, should have disappeared, but did not, for Rabbi Chanina said: ‘The world did not deserve to avail itself of cedar trees, but they were created solely for the sake of the Sanctuary and the Temple’*” (*Shemot Rabba* 35:1). Here too we may ask what the difference is between the tachash, which was created solely for temporary use and ended up disappearing, and gold & cedar, which were also created for the Sanctuary but did not disappear.

Daily Renewal

We may explain this according to what we have already said, namely that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Moshe to make the Sanctuary so the Children of Israel could learn how to serve G-d. They entered it constantly, for the Torah only endures with one who studies at the Beit HaMidrash, as it is said: “*It is a covenant that was concluded*” (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 5:1). One who puts an effort into studying Torah in synagogue will not quickly forget his learning. The Sages have also taught, “*A man’s prayer is heard only in synagogue, for it is said: ‘To hear the cry and the prayer’ [I Kings 8:28]. Prayer is to be recited where there is song*” (*Berachot* 6a). Rashi explains this to mean: “*Where there is song, in synagogue, where the community recites songs of praise with a beautiful voice.*” This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, did not create new creatures anywhere else, but only for the construction of the Sanctuary. He wanted to show the Children of Israel that just as He created a new creature for the Sanctuary, they were also to renew themselves each day, and their service of today must not be like their service of yesterday, since they must renew themselves each day.

Hashem Requires the Heart

In the same spirit, the Arizal explains (*Shaar HaKavanoth*) that what we say each day in prayer – “*in His goodness He renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation*” – means that the Holy One, blessed be He, renews the strength of man every morning, as the verse states: “*They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*” (*Eicha* 3:23). Just as Hashem renews Creation each day for man, everyone must renew his strength to serve Hashem in order for his service of today not to resemble his service of yesterday.

The Sages have said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart*” (*Sanhedrin* 106b). This means that a person will sometimes fulfill a mitzvah, but only out of habit. Hashem looks as how he fulfills the mitzvah – “*He sees innermost thoughts and feelings*” (*Jeremiah* 20:12) – examining the heart of man when he fulfills a mitzvah to determine if it is done out of habit or not. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, created a new creature for the construction of the Sanctuary: The entire goal of the Sanctuary was for the Children of Israel to learn how to serve Hashem, and for them to renew

their deeds at every moment.

Doing Good for Others

Furthermore, G-d wanted to teach the Children of Israel to acquire good middot. In fact we can help others with gold and cedar, and gold also enables us to give money to the poor. This is why, although the world did not deserve the benefits of gold and cedars, the Holy One, blessed be He, did good to man by leaving him these things, so he can benefit from them and show kindness to others.

Concerning tzedakah we have learned: Naton titen – “*You shall surely give*” (*Devarim 15:10*) – even 100 times (*Sifrei*). In other words, a person should not fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah out of habit. Rather, every time that he gives, it should be as if he received the order today. On the other hand, in regards to the tachash, since people do not derive any special benefit from it, Hashem hid that creature. Are animal skins missing in the world? He did not create it for the needs of the Sanctuary, but so the Children of Israel could learn to renew their service every day.

This is why the Sanctuary was disassembled and reassembled, in order for the Children of Israel to know that they must serve their Creator each day in a renewed way. Even if they study Torah and fulfill mitzvot on a given day just as on the day before, they must still study Torah and fulfill mitzvot on the following day as well. Furthermore, they must study Torah and fulfill mitzvot with all their limbs, as it is written: “*All my bones will say*” (*Tehillim 35:10*). The Sages have taught: “*Beruriah [the wife of Rabbi Meir] once found a student who was learning in an undertone. Rebuking him, she exclaimed: ‘Is it not written: “Established for all time and secure” [II Samuel 23:5]? If it is “established” in your 248 limbs, it will be “secure.” Otherwise it will not’*” (*Eruvin 53b-54a*).

Shabbat Observance Makes the Shechinah Dwell Among Us

One verse states, “*I will dwell among the Children of Israel*” (*Shemot 29:45*), and another states: “*A cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the Sanctuary*” (*ibid. 40:34*). We also read, “*The cloud of Hashem was upon the Sanctuary by day, and fire was on it by night*” (*v.38*). How could all these verses be fulfilled at the same time? A third verse comes to reconcile them: “*They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*” (*Shemot 25:8*). The Sages have explained: “*It is not said ‘in it,’ but ‘among them’ – within each of them*” (*Rabbeinu Ephraim ad loc.*).

This is quite surprising: If Hashem wanted His Shechinah to dwell among the Children of Israel, not in the Sanctuary, then why did He command the Children of Israel to make Him a Sanctuary?

Concerning the verse, “*from all His work which G-d created to make*” (*Bereshith 2:3*), our Sages note (*Pesikta Rabbati 6*) that it does not say “*made*,” but rather “*to make*” – meaning that there is still more work. Lest we say that the creation of heaven and earth were not completed during the six days of Creation, the Sages (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 18*) have

said: Have heaven and earth ceased to exist? Of them it is written, “*Thus said Hashem, ‘Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool’*” (*Isaiah 66:1*). Nothing was created after the six days of Creation. It is also said, “*Whatever has been is what will be, and whatever has been done is what will be done. There is nothing new beneath the sun*” (*Kohelet 1:9*).

We have received a tradition from our Sages that heaven and earth were only created by the merit of the Torah, and they can only endure when the Children of Israel study Torah and observe mitzvot. Thus we read, “*If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*” (*Jeremiah 33:25*). Here the Sages explain, “*But for the Torah, heaven and earth would not endure*” (*Pesachim 68a*). Hashem created the first man, giving him 248 limbs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, which comprise 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. When a person studies Torah and fulfills the 613 mitzvot, Scripture considers him to have become G-d’s partner in Creation. It is as if he has completed Creation. In fact before Jews studied Torah, the existence of heaven and earth was not guaranteed. The Gemara tells us, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, stipulated with the works of Creation and said to it, ‘If Israel accepts the Torah, you shall endure. If not, I will return you to chaos and anarchy’*” (*Shabbat 88a*). When Jews study Torah, heaven and earth have a solid basis for existence. Let us say that whatever was created during the six days of Creation was not completed in such a way that it could endure. When were they perfected in the most stable way possible? It is when the Children of Israel took upon themselves Torah and mitzvot. At that point heaven and earth were completed, which is why the verse states, “*to make*.” The term “*make*” always designates something that is created, as it is written: “*The souls that they made in Haran*” (*Bereshith 12:5*). Here the Sages explain, “*If all the nations assembled to create one insect, they could not endow it with life. Yet you say, ‘The souls that they made in Haran!’ This refers, however, to converts. Then let it say, ‘that they had converted’ – why say, ‘that they had made’? This is to teach you that if one brings a proselyte close [to G-d], it is as if he has created him*” (*Bereshith Rabba 84:4*).

To Complete Creation

The Gemara states that Betzalel knew how to combine the letters by which heaven and earth had been created (*Berachot 55a*). It is written, “*He filled him [Betzalel] with G-d’s spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge*” (*Shemot 35:31*), as well as: “*Hashem founded the earth with wisdom. He established the heavens with understanding. Through His knowledge, the depths were cleaved*” (*Mishle 3:19-20*). The Sages said in the Midrash, “*With these three things, the world was created, for it says: ‘Hashem founded the earth with wisdom. He established the heavens with understanding. Through His knowledge, the depths were cleaved’*” (*Shemot Rabba 48:4*). The Sanctuary was made by these three things as well, as it is written: “*I have filled him with the spirit of G-d in wisdom, insight, and knowledge*” (*Shemot 31:3*). Therefore let us say that G-d only commanded the Children of Israel to build the Sanctuary so they could remember that they must study

Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order to sustain the world. Because they would constantly see the Sanctuary, they would make sure to study Torah in order to sustain the world, and to perfect the creation of the six days.

The Sages tell us, “*They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*” – it is not said “*in it*,” but “*among them*” – teaching us that since the Children of Israel built the Sanctuary and learned from it to observe Torah and mitzvot, they would fulfill their role as a dwelling place for the Shechinah. It will return to dwell in them, just as it did before, during the six days of Creation.

This is why it says at the beginning of this week’s parsha, “*Let them take an offering for Me*” (*Shemot 25:2*), to which the Sages add: “*For Me, in My Name*” (*Tanchuma, Terumah 1*). Now can anyone think that someone would bring a contribution to the Sanctuary without it being for Hashem? For whom else could it be? This teaches us, however, that neither the world nor the Sanctuary can endure unless man directs all his deeds towards Hashem. The word terumah is formed by the letters of Torah and the letter *mem* (numerical value: 40), alluding to the giving of the Torah in 40 days. It is part of Torah not to become proud, all while having the intention of growing through Torah. When we act in this way, we make the Shechinah dwell in us.

Offerings for the Sanctuary and Their Connection to G-d

It is written, “*Let them take an offering for Me*” (*Shemot 25:2*).

This week’s parsha, which deals with offerings for the Sanctuary, comes after Parshiot Yitro and Mishpatim, which deal primarily with the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, and continue with the laws and mitzvot that were also given on Mount Sinai.

We need to understand why the verse says, “*Let them take an offering for Me*.” What does “*for Me*” signify? True, Rashi explains it by citing the Midrash: “*For Me – for My Name*.” However we still need to understand why G-d’s Name is mentioned when it comes to giving an offering. There is a well-known question, one that we have already mentioned, namely why Hashem asked the Jewish people for an offering to build the Sanctuary. Do silver and gold not belong to Him, and does He not have the ability and power to do all that He wants?

We also need to understand the reason for the seemingly redundant expression in this verse: “*Let them take an offering for Me – from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My offering*.” The first part of this verse (“*Let them take an offering for Me*”) seems unnecessary, for all the Torah needed to say was, “*From every man....*”

In regards to the connection of Parshiot Yitro and Mishpatim with Parsha Terumah, we find the following commentary: “*Since the Children of Israel joyfully took upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven, and they said: ‘All that Hashem has said, we shall do and we shall hear,’ G-d immediately said to Moshe: ‘Speak to the*

Children of Israel, and let them take an offering for Me” (*Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabba 7*). This requires an explanation, for what connection is there between the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven, we shall do and we shall hear, and offerings for the Sanctuary?

We know that the goal of the Sanctuary was to make the Shechinah dwell among earthly beings, and to create a connection between G-d and Israel, a permanent connection effected by means of the Sanctuary and the rituals that took place in it, as the Ramban states in his commentary at the start of the parsha. This is the meaning of, “*I will dwell among them*” (*Shemot 25:8*), this being the goal of the Sanctuary.

Connecting to G-d by means of the Sanctuary was only possible when the Jewish people were able to completely annul themselves and their essence vis-à-vis Hashem. At that point, when they annulled their will and their thoughts before those of the Creator – when the Children of Israel said, “*we shall do and we shall hear*” – they were able to be united and connected to G-d, for the Shechinah would dwell among them on earth in a permanent and clear way. In fact it is not possible to be mutually connected and united when there are two different powers and personalities. Having two masters runs contrary to the concept of unity, and unity is only possible when one among the two is annulled and fused into the other.

At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people not only received the Torah, nor did they only agree to fulfill all 613 mitzvot. Above all, they annulled their personalities and will before that of G-d, this being expressed by the statement: “*We shall do and we shall hear*.” There is no reason to weigh different opinions and to think, for there is no other intelligence or will besides G-d’s. Hence we shall do and then we shall hear. Thus the entire Jewish people achieved perfect unity with G-d by accepting the Torah with the words, “*We shall do and we shall hear*.” This is the meaning behind the expression, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah, and Israel are one*.”

Since the Children of Israel reached this level, they became worthy for the Shechinah to dwell among them, the result of achieving perfect unity with Hashem. He came to dwell among them, so to speak, in a permanent and clear way. As Rashi explains on the verse, “*It was on the day that Moshe kalot [finished] erecting the Sanctuary*” (*Bamidbar 7:1*): “*On the day that the Sanctuary was erected, the Israelites were like a kalah, a bride coming beneath the chuppah*.” Like bride and groom, like two spouses, two bodies that form one, one spouse being like the other’s own body, likewise the Holy One, blessed be He, and Israel were connected and united like a married couple with a single body on the day of the inauguration of the Sanctuary, when the Shechinah came to dwell among them. We have already explained that this is why the Torah separated the account of the giving of the Torah from the detailed laws that follow it with the commandment: “*You shall not ascend My altar on steps*” (*Shemot 20:23*). Steps allude to pride, which is the opposite of humility and self-annulment. Pride prevents unity between Hashem and Israel by means of the Torah. Hence this warns us not to lose the “*we shall do and we shall hear*” on account of pride, commanding us not to ascend the

altar, which alludes to humility, by means of steps.

This was how the Children of Israel received the Torah. Through humility and by completely annulling themselves before G-d, they reached the level at which “*the Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah, and Israel are one*,” and thus they were joined with their Creator. This is what Hashem said to them before asking that they build the Sanctuary: “*Let them take an offering for Me.*” The foundation of the Sanctuary and the prerequisite for the dwelling of the Shechinah is that you take from yourselves an offering for Hashem. It is only when you continue to strengthen yourselves in the area of “*we shall do and we shall hear*” – by taking from yourselves an offering for Me, by devoting your entire being to Me, and by annulling yourselves before Hashem – that there is reason to continue by saying: “*From every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My offering.*” At that point, you will be worthy for the Shechinah to truly dwell among you, and you will be able to connect with G-d and become one with Him. Taking this offering means an acquisition, to be taken and completely acquired by the Holy One, blessed be He, like an offering that is consecrated to Hashem.

This self-annulment expresses itself by accepting the Torah through the statement, “*We shall do and we shall hear;*” meaning that we have renounced our own opinions. The Torah continues with Hashem’s request to the Children of Israel: “*Let them take an offering for Me*” – by annulling themselves in regards to the Holy Torah. This is how the Midrash explains it: “*Let them take an offering for Me. It is written, ‘For I have given you lekach tov [a good teaching]; do not forsake My Torah’ [Mishlei 4:2]*” (*Shemot Rabba* 33:1). The Torah and the Sanctuary are connected to one another. In fact the fusion of the Jewish people with their Creator began at the giving of the Torah through “*we shall do and we shall hear;*” and it ended with the lekicha (literally “taking”) of the Jewish people, a term used for the kiddushin. The Jewish people will therefore be acquired by their Creator through *ve’yikchu* (“*let them take an offering for Me*”), through the power of *lekach tov*, a good teaching, meaning through the Torah which they accepted.

We can now fully understand the verse, “*Let them take an offering for Me*” – which our Sages have interpreted to mean: “*For Me – for My Name.*” When the Jewish people are united with their Creator, they truly carry His Name, for they are one. As we know, the entire Torah is composed of the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He. Furthermore, the Jewish people are also alluded to in the words of the Torah. In fact the term *Yisrael* (“*Israel*”) is an acronym for *Yesh Shishim Ribo Otiyyot Latorah* (“*There are 600,000 letters in the Torah*” – this corresponding to the number of the Children of Israel). The letters of the Torah are the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He. Now it is written, “*Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you*” (*Devarim 28:10*). When the Children of Israel do the will of G-d by annulling themselves before Him and by cleaving to Him, His Name dwells upon them. Hence “*they will fear you*” – when non-Jews see the Jewish people, they will see, as it were, the Holy One, blessed be He, in person. This is what constitutes, “*For Me – for My Name,*” meaning that when you take yourself for Me and for My Name, you are “*taken*” (consecrated) at the same time, becoming part of the Name of

the Holy One, blessed be He.

When the Jewish people reach this level – the level of “*we shall do and we shall hear;*” making themselves into a complete acquisition of Hashem in order to become a holy offering for Him – He then says, “*I will dwell among them*” – literally in them: I will descend and become one with them so that we reside together, like a married couple that forms a single body. First comes an awakening below by means of, “*Let them take an offering for Me,*” by belonging to G-d, and then comes an awakening above: “*I will dwell among them.*”

We find an allusion to this idea in the last letters of the expression Ve’yikchu li terumah (“*Let them take an offering for Me*”), which has the same numerical value as the Name E-yeh, the Name of G-d that contains the Jewish people. As we know, this Name demonstrates the unity and connection of the Jewish people with Hashem, “*I will be with them*” (*Shemot 3:14; see Ohr HaChaim ad loc.*). The Name E-yeh is also alluded to in the initials of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs of the nation, men through whom the connection of the Jewish people with Hashem began, and who were completely connected to Him and annulled themselves before Him.

When the Jewish people reach the level of, “*Let them take an offering for Me,*” meaning complete self-annulment before G-d, their offering for the Sanctuary will be with true generosity. In fact since they will feel united with G-d, when they give for the Sanctuary they will feel that they are giving for themselves. This is the gift of a willing heart, the greatest gift possible. When a man gives to his son, he is happy to give and does so with all his heart. How much more when he gives to himself. Likewise when a Jew is united with G-d, it is truly himself that he is giving through his offering to Hashem. This is true generosity, to be of one heart with Hashem. It results in a gift that comes from the very root of life, meaning the heart, with the greatest sense of connection, a connection to the Creator with every part of the heart.

“*Let Them Take Me an Offering for Me*” – *Creating a Connection to G-d*

This week’s parsha, which deals with the offerings for the Sanctuary, comes after Parshiot Yitro and Mishpatim, primarily devoted to the revelation at Sinai, the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people, and the transmission of a few other mitzvot in addition to those already given at Sinai. Let us try and understand the connection between these subjects, as well as the nature and essence of this connection.

We should also stop and think about the choice of words used in this week’s parsha: “*Let them take an offering for Me*” (*Shemot 25:2*). That is, what does “*for Me*” mean? Rashi cites the Midrash in explaining it to mean: “*for My Name.*” Nevertheless, what connection is there between G-d’s Name and this offering? Another question that we previously asked arises once again: Why did Hashem ask the Jewish people to donate items for the construction of the Sanctuary, since silver and gold belong to Him, and

He possesses the power and strength to do all that He desires?

Furthermore, we should be surprised by the repetition found in the verse: “*Let them take an offering for Me – from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My offering.*” The first part of this verse (“*Let them take an offering for Me*”) seems unnecessary, for it would have been sufficient to say, “*from every man...you shall take My offering.*”

As for the connection between the previous parshiot (*Yitro and Mishpatim*) and this week’s parsha, Tanna D’vei Eliyahu explains (*Eliyahu Rabba*) that after the Children of Israel accepted G-d’s kingship with joy and declared, “*All that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear;*” G-d immediately commanded: “*Let them take an offering for Me.*” We may still ask ourselves what the connection is between accepting the yoke of Heaven, as expressed by the declaration “*we will do and we will hear;*” and the offering requested for the Sanctuary.

As we know, the goal behind the construction of the Sanctuary was to prepare an earthly abode for the Shechinah, to create a connection and link between the Holy One, blessed be He, and Israel, a permanent and concrete bond through the service performed in the Sanctuary, as the Ramban writes in commenting on the start of this week’s parsha. This is the meaning of what Hashem then says: “*I will dwell among them*” – this being the goal and calling of the Sanctuary.

Unity with Hashem by means of the Sanctuary only became possible when the Children of Israel humbled and annulled themselves before Him. When they annulled their thoughts and their will – when they subjugated their will before the will of the Creator by declaring, “*All that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear*” – they became worthy of being united with Him by His Presence among them in a discernible and permanent way. In fact no real connection is possible between two distinct entities if each of them demands a separate identity. The very existence of two separate identities contradicts the notion of unity, and there can be no true union unless one of the two parties yields in order to fuse into the other.

During the revelation at Sinai, the Jewish people did not just receive the Torah, nor did they just agree to fulfill all 613 mitzvot. They in fact annulled themselves and surrendered their will to G-d’s will by declaring, “*We will do and we will hear.*” They left no place for their own views or assessments, for they were completely convinced that there is no other intelligence or will besides G-d’s. Hence they first declared, “*We will do*” and only then did they say “*we will hear.*” By accepting the Torah from this perspective, the Jewish people reached a level of complete unity with G-d, as it is said: G-d, Torah, and Israel are one.

Having reached such a level, the Children of Israel became worthy of being surrounded by the Shechinah, the natural result of their complete unity with Hashem. He came to dwell among them in a permanent and discernible way, if we may express ourselves as such. Concerning the verse, “*It was on the day that Moshe kallot [finished] erecting the Sanctuary*” (*Bamidbar 7:1*), Rashi explains: “*On the day that the Sanctuary*

was erected, the Israelites were like a kallah [bride] coming beneath the chuppah." Just as a groom and his bride, man and woman, are two halves that become a single body (*as it is said, "His wife is like his own body"* [Berachot 24a]), likewise during the inauguration of the Sanctuary and dwelling of the Shechinah among the Children of Israel, the latter were connected and united to Hashem in order to form a single entity with Him. As we have already explained, it was for this reason that the Torah inserted the command, "*You shall not ascend My altar on steps*" (Shemot 20:23) between the account of the revelation at Sinai and other Torah laws (*Mishpatim*). In fact steps symbolize pride and arrogance, characteristics that are antithetical to humility and self-denial. Pride destroys the connection that the Torah elsewhere allows to be created between G-d and Israel. Hence the verse warns us against falling from the level that we attained when we declared, "*We will do and we will hear*" due to excessive pride. It enjoins us not to use steps to ascend the altar, which symbolizes humility.

By accepting the Torah with humility and complete self-denial, the Children of Israel attained such a high level that "*G-d, Torah, and Israel are one.*" Hence they were "*included*" within their Creator so as to form a single entity with Him. Before asking them to build the Sanctuary, Hashem said: "*Let them take an offering for Me.*" In other words: "*The very foundation of the Sanctuary and what is needed for the dwelling of the Shechinah is that you take yourselves as an offering for Hashem. This means that you must maintain the level that was yours when you declared, 'We will do and we will hear,' doing so by consecrating yourselves to Me and by annulling yourselves before Me.*" Only then does the rest of the verse have meaning: "*From every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My offering.*" That is, you will then be worthy of the Shechinah dwelling among you, and you will cleave to the Holy One, blessed be He, and become one with Him. This "*taking*" signifies an acquisition: It consists of belonging completely to Hashem and becoming His property, just as the offering that is consecrated to Him.

Our self-effacement is demonstrated when we accept the Torah by ignoring our own views ("*we will do and we will hear*") in order to satisfy G-d's demand: "*Let them take an offering for Me,*" meaning when we annul ourselves for the holy Torah. This allows us to explain the following Midrash: "*Ve'yikchu [Let them take] an offering for Me. It is written, 'For I have given you lekach tov [a good teaching]; do not forsake My Torah'* [Mishlei 4:2]" (Shemot Rabba 33:1). We may establish a link between the Torah and the Sanctuary: The union of the Jewish people and its Creator began with the giving of the Torah (when they said, "*We will do and we will hear*"), and it was completed with the acquisition of the people by G-d ("*Let them take an offering for Me*"), this being the result of the "*good teaching*," namely the Torah which they accepted.

We can now fully understand why our Sages interpreted the verse, "*Let them take an offering for Me*" to mean "*for My Name.*" When the Jewish people are connected to and united with their Creator, they are called by His own Name, since they are one with Him. Now as we know, the entire Torah is composed solely of G-d's Names. However

the Torah's words also allude to the entire Jewish people, since they number 600,000, just like the number of Jews at Sinai. Thus the letters of the Torah form G-d's Names and Israel. This is what is stated by the verse, "*Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you*" (*Devarim 28:10*). When the Children of Israel do G-d's will, when they annul themselves before G-d and cleave to Him, the Name of Hashem rests upon them, and they are called by His Name. That is why "*they will fear you*," for when the nations see the Jewish people, they will, so to speak, see Hashem in all His splendor. This is the meaning of "*for My Name*," namely that when you devote yourselves entirely to Me, you will be called by My Name and you will be included in Me.

Once the Jewish people reached the level of affirming, "*We will do and we will hear*," and once they were completely acquired by Hashem as an offering devoted to Him, He declared: "*I will dwell among them*." He would literally dwell among them: "*I will descend and unite with you so that we will dwell together; just as bride and groom become a single person*." When we demonstrate an awakening below by taking an offering for Hashem, then Heaven draws closer to us from above ("*I will dwell among them*").

The last letters of the expression *Ve'yikchu li terumah* ("*Let them take an offering for Me*") have a numerical value of 21. This is equal to that of the Divine Name *Ehyeh*, in which Israel is included, and which always refers to the Jewish people's connection and proximity to G-d: "*Ehyeh [I will be] with them*" (*Ohr HaChaim on Shemot 3:14*). The letters of this Name also form the initials of the three Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the source of the connection between the Jewish people and the Holy One, blessed be He, men who themselves were united and connected to G-d through their complete self-effacement before Him.

When Jews reach the level of, "*Let them take an offering for Me*," meaning when they completely annul themselves before G-d, their offering for the Sanctuary will stem from true generosity. In fact because of our unity with Hashem, each of us will have the sense that giving to the Sanctuary is equivalent to giving to himself. It is the most authentic gift possible. Giving to one's child is done automatically, something that rejoices the heart. How much more is giving to oneself! Thus when a Jew feels connected to G-d by taking an offering for his Creator, in his eyes he is taking it for himself. This is the kind of generosity of which the verse is speaking: That which consists of becoming one with G-d and giving from the depths of the heart, so intense is our attachment to G-d, and so intimate and profound is our connection to the Creator.

All Blessings by the Merit of Unity

It is written, "*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*" (*Shemot 25:8*).

G-d asked the Children of Israel to build Him a miniature Sanctuary so He could make His presence reside among them. Why does the verse say, "*I will dwell among*

them,” rather than: “*I will dwell in it?*” Our Sages see an allusion here, namely that G-d wants us to understand that He yearns to place His presence within each Jew, who constitutes a miniature Sanctuary. Jewish unity is the prerequisite for the Divine Presence dwelling within each of us. As long as the Children of Israel are connected to one another by a feeling of mutual responsibility, G-d can make His presence dwell among them. On the other hand, He withdraws it when contention and strife separate them, since He is entirely “*peace.*” In fact Hashem concluded the Birkat Kohanim (*Priestly Blessing*) with the word peace, and we also conclude the Amidah and the reading of Shema with this theme. Arguments, disputes, and conflicts are therefore contrary to His essence.

Thus Hashem did not give the Torah to the Children of Israel as long as they were not united, as it is written: “*Israel encamped opposite the mountain*” (*Shemot 19:2*). In Hebrew, the term “*encamped*” is in the singular, teaching us that they encamped before the mountain like a single person with a single heart. Hashem gave the Torah to His children after making certain that they were united, this being for the simple reason that the majority of mitzvot concern relations between man and fellowman. As a result, in order for the Torah to endure among the Children of Israel, they had to first prove that peace and unity characterized these relations. It was only afterwards that they could be worthy of receiving the Torah.

Rabbi Yehoshua Levi once met Eliyahu Hanavi and asked if he could follow him in order to observe and learn from his actions and deeds. At first Eliyahu Hanavi refused, but afterwards, after having made Rabbi Yehoshua promise not to ask any questions or criticize his actions, he agreed. Hence they took to the road and arrived in a village where the inhabitants did not welcome them properly. As they were leaving that place, Eliyahu Hanavi wished that they should all become respected community leaders. Rabbi Yehoshua was surprised by this blessing. Yet since he had promised not to bother the prophet with questions, he kept quiet.

They went to another village, but this time they were welcomed with great kindness and warmth. Eliyahu Hanavi gave them a different blessing: He wished that only one of them should have the merit of becoming a community leader. Upon hearing this blessing, the Rav could not keep silent. He asked the prophet why he had lavished such a blessing on those who had not welcomed them properly, whereas he was more reserved in his wish for those who had given them a better welcome. The prophet replied, “*Know that I did not bless the inhabitants of the first village. I cursed them by wishing that they should all become respected men and community leaders. In fact when all the people of a city become prominent officials, each of them feels especially important and peace cannot reign among them. The residents of the second village, on the other hand, received my blessing: If one of them becomes a community leader, peace and harmony will unite them, for that is what happens to a community that is led*

by a single person” (Oseh Peleh 62).

A Gift from Heaven

We read in Sefer Tehillim, “*Hashem will give oz [strength] to His nation; Hashem will bless His nation with peace*” (*Tehillim 29:11*). Since the Torah is also called oz, this verse means that the Torah has the power to bring peace and blessings to the Jewish people. By investing ourselves in Torah, which is called oz, the Jewish people become meritorious and G-d blesses them, making peace and harmony reign among them. How can the Torah bring peace into the world? It’s very simple: The mitzvot educate and train us not to think solely of ourselves, but also to care about those around us. Thus by studying Torah, by immersing ourselves in it and making an effort to fulfill mitzvot, we can better ourselves. We can free ourselves of bad character traits and acquire positive character traits that refine us and make us less selfish. In our days, however, when we have neither Temple nor Sanctuary, the home of husband and wife is considered as a “*miniature Sanctuary*.” Thus in order to be worthy of the Divine Presence dwelling among us, we must reflect upon how to increase love and peace in the home. When G-d sees that a couple loves and respects one another, He hastens to place His Shechinah (*the Divine Presence*) among them, and thus love and peace increase even more. Conversely, He withdraws His Shechinah from a place that is filled with contention and where people do not respect one another. Now without the Divine Presence and G-d’s help, there is but a small step to separation and divorce. This is also what our Sages have said: “*When husband [ish] and wife [ishah] are worthy, the Shechinah [yud - hei] abides with them. When they are unworthy, fire [aish – from the words ish and ishah when the letters yud and hei are removed] consumes them*” (*Sotah 17a*).

Tetzaveh

The Beneficial Influence of the Tzaddik Extends to Every Jew

It is written, “*And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually*” (*Exodus 27:20*). This verse raises some questions. First of all, why does it begin with the expression, “*And you, command*”? This is unlike other places in the Torah, where we usually find expressions such as, “*And the L-RD spoke to Moses*” or “*And the L-RD said to Moses*.”

We should ask ourselves another question: Since this oil was to be brought to light the Menorah, should it not have been written, “*Let them take for Me pure olive oil*,” similar to the statement in Parsha Terumah: “*Let them take for Me an offering*” (*Exodus 25:2*) – not “*for you*”? Now it is said, “*All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven, as it is written: ‘In all your ways know Him’ [Proverbs 3:6]*” (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 231:1*). Furthermore the Sages have said, “*Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven*” (*Perkei Avoth 2:12*), which includes things that concern daily living, things such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, and whatever else pertains to the needs of the body. Everything should be done to serve the Creator, or as things that lead to serving Him.

We need to understand how a person can be expected to completely focus on the Creator of the universe all day long. Since he is made of flesh and blood, how can he think only of the Creator throughout the day?

A human being goes through numerous trials in life, some of which are minor, as fine as a human hair. Yet the evil inclination makes such trials bigger and more numerous in a person’s eyes. On the other hand, each trial and every act of the evil inclination seems significant to the tzaddikim, for with regards to their strength and holiness, they perceive everything evil – regardless of how small – as being significant, meaning that it can lead to sin. The tremendous holiness of the tzaddikim leads them to consider the immense value of everything they do, which enables us to understand why the evil inclination puts so much effort into making the tzaddikim stumble even in minor things. Thus to them, such things appear as large as a mountain.

A person needs to grow spiritually, however, and it is not enough for him just to offer his money to Hashem. He must also make himself like an offering, much as Rashi says on the verse: “*Korach took*” (*Numbers 16:1*). That is, “*He took himself to one side*.” The same applies here: “*Let them take for Me an offering*” – let them also take themselves with the offering. In other words, an offering has to be given with complete devotion, which makes its imprint on the offering itself. Therefore whoever sees it will sense that it was given wholeheartedly.

This may seem surprising, for does a person have the strength to overcome the daunting task of having to annul his desires, to the point of taking himself as an

offering? Since the evil inclination constantly tries to make a person stumble, how can he truly take himself as an offering for Hashem?

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “*And you, command...that they shall take for you*” (*Exodus 27:20*). This means that for the Children of Israel to arrive at the level of “*Let them take for Me*” – taking themselves without reservation in the service of Hashem and eliminating all material desires from their heart – there must first be the concept of “*for you*.”

We shall attempt to explain: First, the Children of Israel must learn from you (*Moses*) that you have a spiritual influence on them, for you teach them Torah and the fear of Heaven. In fact when they see you serving Me, they will learn how to yield before Me. They will learn how they must serve Me with all their heart, until they themselves arrive at the level of “*let them take for Me*.”

It was obvious to see the fear of Heaven in Moses (*Berachot 33b*), so much so that he could teach it to the Children of Israel. All this was because in seeing a holy figure who serves Hashem, they would learn and be influenced by him. Since he is entirely taken by G-d, they would also be taken by Him. Their hearts would be filled with a sacred enthusiasm to take themselves for Hashem, with all their heart and soul.

It is not without reason that Hashem chose Moses as a role model for the Jewish people. In fact the tzaddik of the generation is as valuable as all of Israel combined, as the Sages have said: “*Moses was equal to all Israel*” (*Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot 18; Tanhuma, Beshalach 10*). He therefore had the ability to influence and spread his glory upon them, and they would also fear him, as it is said: “*Let the...reverence for your teacher [be] as the fear of Heaven*” (*Perkei Avoth 4:12*).

However in order for everyone to gather around the tzaddik and be influenced by him, there must be *ve’ata* (“and you”). The vav adds to what preceded it, meaning that only when the tzaddik encompasses the aspect of “*let them take for Me*” – only when he is taken by Hashem and loves Him wholeheartedly – will he then automatically be able to influence others. In this way the souls of the Jewish people will cling to him, giving everyone a tremendous spiritual elevation.

Why does all this happen, and through whose merit does it take place? The tzaddik of the generation merits that the Holy One, blessed be He, speaks through him, for he is taken by Hashem and shines upon the entire generation. People learn to fear Hashem by looking to him, for on his face they see the light of the Shechinah. It is Hashem’s will for us to enthusiastically cleave to him with a fiery devotion. From here we see that man has the power to annul his whims and desires, and to demonstrate that he is stronger than the desires of this world. However this only happens when he is “*taken*” for Hashem. As such we can rid ourselves of the feeling that we ourselves are strong, for we are “*taken*” solely for Hashem. If we truly act in this way, we will merit all that is good in both the material and spiritual realms.

Just to What Point Should Generosity Extend?

It is written, “*And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pounded olive oil for illumination, to light the lamp continually*” (*Exodus 27:20*). Why is the expression “*that they shall take for you*” different than what we find earlier: “*Let them take an offering for Me*” (*Exodus 25:2*)? Were they taking oil for Moses? They were taking it for Hashem in order to light the Menorah!

The Sages have taught that there are three olive crops, and that each crop yields three kinds of oil. The first is when the olives are picked from the top of the tree. They are pounded and put into a basket, yielding the first kind of oil. They are then pounded with a beam, yielding the second kind of oil. They are then ground and pounded again, yielding the third kind of oil. The first is used for the Menorah, while the others are for meal-offerings (*Menachot 86a*). We need to understand why the first kind of oil is so special that only it can be used for the Menorah.

We also need to understand what we read further on in the parsha: “*And you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother*” (*Exodus 28:1*). From the fact that it says, “*bring near;*” it seems that Moses had to do so because Aaron did not want to serve! Could anyone think that Moses had to convince Aaron to serve Hashem? Was Aaron not happy to have been chosen to serve as High Priest, which would enable him to reach a lofty spiritual level?

The Creator dealt with the creation of man for an entire day, giving him a soul that is a Divine spark, as it is written: “*The L-RD G-d formed man from the dust of the earth, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul*” (*Genesis 2:7*). The early commentators (see *Ramban ad loc.*) said that one who breathes into the nostrils of another gives him something from within himself. Our Sages have said, “*When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He brought three creatures into existence each day, but on the day before Shabbat He spent the entire day on man. At the first hour He had the concept of man, at the second hour He consulted the ministering angels, at the third hour He gathered the dust, at the fourth hour He began to knead it, at the fifth hour He shaped it, at the sixth hour He placed man on his feet, and at the seventh hour He breathed a soul into him*” (*Pesikta Rabbati 46*).

Why did the creation of man differ so greatly from that of all the other creatures, which came into existence with but a single word from Hashem, whereas man was fashioned by His own hands? This goes without mentioning the fact that his creation lasted an entire day, and that Hashem breathed a living soul – a Divine spark – into him. Although other creatures also have a soul, Hashem did not breathe a Divine spark into them. In fact He wanted to prove to everyone that “*I will see G-d from my flesh*” (*Job 19:26*), so that all the inhabitants of the world would reflect upon the fact that Hashem dealt with the creation of man for an entire day, whereas all the other creatures were created by a single word in a brief instant, and thereby learn to respect one another. Every person should take this to heart and show respect for others, for all men are the

work of Hashem's hands, as it were. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, disregarded His own honor by personally descending to deal with the creation of man, giving him 248 limbs and 365 sinews, how much more should each person defer to others and show them respect! The Torah warns, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Leviticus 19:18*). It does not just say, "*You shall love your fellow*," but "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*." In other words, just as a person loves himself and does not trust others for everything, so too must he not trust them to help his fellow, but must do this himself. As the Gemara states, "*It is more of a mitzvah to do it personally rather than through an agent*" (*Kiddushin 41a*), and the Mishnah states: "[*He who says,*] '*What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours*' is a pious man" (*Pirkei Avot 5:10*). In other words, piety consists of giving one's own possessions to others. From the creation of the world, we learn that this is what the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, did in creating man, having given him a soul that is a Divine spark, a part of Himself, so to speak.

This is why the text states, "*[T]hey shall take for you pure, pounded olive oil for illumination.*" When it comes to an offering for the Sanctuary, we read: "*Let them take an offering for Me*" – every man should offer his own possessions to others and give a great deal of tzedakah in order to emulate his Creator. As for the oil, "*[T]hey shall take for you pure, pounded olive oil for illumination.*" A person normally rejoices in the first oil that comes from his olive tree, and Hashem commands him to give this first oil for lighting the lamps.

How does one give it? In the same spirit as, "*What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours.*" Therefore it is said, "*[T]hey shall take for you*" – they are to give you the first oil and they are to take the second oil for themselves. Hence with regards to the Hebrew slave we read, "*It was taught: 'It is good for him with you' [Deuteronomy 15:16]. He must be equal to you in food and drink, so that you should not eat white bread while he eats black bread, nor should you drink old wine while he drinks new wine, nor should you sleep on a feather bed while he [sleeps] on straw. Thus it is said: Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is as if he bought himself a master*" (*Kiddushin 20a*).

Hence we read further on, "*And you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother*" (*Exodus 28:1*). Since the Torah states that the world can only endure through kindness and unity, here it says: "*And you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother*" – that everyone should perceive the other as his own brother, being close to him and helping him throughout life. In fact Moses also wanted to serve as High Priest, as our Sages said: "*When G-d was about to appoint a High Priest, Moses believed that he would be made High Priest, but G-d said to him: 'Go and appoint Me a High Priest. Moses replied, 'Master of the universe, from which tribe shall I appoint him?' The Divine reply was, 'From the tribe of Levi.'* Moses was then exceedingly happy, saying: '*So beloved is my tribe!*' G-d then said to him, '*It shall be Aaron your brother*'" (*Shemot Rabba 37:1*). Thus we read, "*And you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother.*" Since G-d told him to bring Aaron "near to yourself" – that is, to conduct himself according to the middah of, "*What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours*" – he brought Aaron so

close that it was as if he had said: “*Dare to carry out your service!*” Now the Children of Israel are called priests, as it is written: “*You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (*Exodus 19:6*). How can they all be priests? It is by unity; it is by not being envious of one another, just as Moses was not envious of Aaron. Although Moses wanted to serve as High Priest, he brought Aaron closer because Hashem ordered him to. Each person must conduct himself with other people in the same way. They must not be jealous of others, for this is the only way that Jews will merit to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Therefore it is written, “*You shall be for Me*” – similar to, “*And you, command,*” “*And you, bring near to yourself*” (not, “*The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying,*” a formula that is often found in the Torah) – for this parsha was addressed to each of the Children of Israel. Thus we read, “*And you, command,*” “*And you, bring near to yourself,*” for all the Children of Israel were in harmony with one another, and everyone seemed like a brother in the eyes of others. When acting in this way, the entire Jewish people are considered to be High Priests before Hashem. The Midrash Aggadah (*Bereshith 80*) asks why the names of the tribes do not appear on the stones of the Breastplate. It is because all the Children of Israel were called priests on Sinai, as it is written: “*You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*Is it possible for all of them to bring offerings upon the altar? They shall all be priests by the fact that their names will be upon the heart of the High Priest. When the High Priest comes to bring the offerings, they will all be like a High Priest before Me, clothed in the garments of the priesthood.*”

How Far Should Chesed Extend?

It is written, “*And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to light the lamp continually*” (*Exodus 27:20*). Why is there a change in the text here, since earlier it is written: “*Let them take an offering for Me*” (*Exodus 25:2*)? Were they perhaps taking oil for Moses? They were taking it for Hashem, and they were lighting the Menorah with it!

With regards to man, we see that the Creator focused on his creation for an entire day, giving him a soul that is a Divine spark, as it is written: “*The L-RD G-d formed man from the dust of the earth, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul*” (*Genesis 2:7*). The early commentators (see *Ramban ad loc.*) said that one who breathes into the nostrils of another gives him something from within himself. Our Sages have also said, “*When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He brought three creatures into existence each day, but on the day before Shabbat He spent the entire day on man. At the first hour He had the concept of man, at the second hour He consulted the ministering angels, at the third hour He gathered the dust, at the fourth hour He began to knead it, at the fifth hour He shaped it, at the sixth hour He placed man on his feet, and at the seventh hour He breathed a soul into him*” (*Pesikta Rabbati 46*).

Mutual Respect

Why does man differ so greatly from all the other creatures, which came into existence with a single word from Hashem, whereas man was fashioned by His own hands, and his creation took an entire day? Furthermore, Hashem breathed a soul into man, which is a Divine spark, whereas the souls of all the other creatures lack a Divine spark. The answer is that G-d wanted to teach the inhabitants of the world the verse, “*I will see G-d from my flesh*” (*Job 19:26*). All people need to reflect upon the fact that Hashem focused on man’s creation for an entire day – whereas all the other creatures appeared by a single word in a brief instant – and can therefore learn to respect one another. Every person should be careful to yield before the honor of others, for everyone in the world was created by the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, so to speak.

In fact just as the Holy One, blessed be He, disregarded His own honor by personally dealing with the creation of man, giving him 248 limbs and 365 sinews, how much more should each person disregard his own honor for the sake of others!

The Torah warns, “*You shall love your fellow as yourself*” (*Leviticus 19:18*). It does not simply say, “*You shall love your fellow*,” but rather: “*You shall love your fellow as yourself*.” In other words, just as a person loves himself and does not trust others to do everything, so too must he not trust them to help his fellow, but must do so himself.

In His Essence, Man is a Torah

Rabbi Akiva explains, “‘*You shall love your fellow as yourself*’ [*Leviticus 19:18*] is a great principle of the Torah” (*Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim 4:12*). He also told his disciples concerning his wife, “*My [learning] and yours are hers*” (*Nedarim 50a*), for the Torah only endures through unity. In fact the Torah was only given when all the Children of Israel were united, as it is written: “*Israel encamped there before the mountain*” (*Exodus 19:2*). Here the Sages have explained that they encamped “*like a single man with a single heart*.” Since they were all compared to a single man, they were good to one another, just as a man is good to himself and is never jealous of himself.

This is why G-d did not create man by a word from His mouth, but through the work of His hands, as it were. He only did this for the honor of the holy Torah, which was worthy that Hashem should personally deal with it. In fact man by his very nature is a “*Torah*.” The Creator engraved in his 248 limbs and 365 sinews all the mitzvot of the Torah, for He knew that man would fall into sin. Hence a mitzvah was created to correspond to each limb and each sinew, in order for man to repent when he so desires.

Thus each person must help the other when he is in need. A person must not say, “*I won’t tire myself for so-and-so, for I remember how much trouble he gave me. Why should I help him?*” The Sages have told us that man should cleave to the attributes of the Creator, saying: “*Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so should you be gracious and compassionate*” (*Shabbat 133b*).

This is why our parsha says “*that they shall take for you*,” whereas earlier we read: “*Let them take an offering for Me*.” When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah

to Israel, the ministering angels said: “*That secret treasure – hidden by You for 974 generations before the world was created – You wish to give to flesh and blood?!*” (*Shabbat 88b*). Elsewhere we read, “*Nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, the Torah was written and placed in the bosom of Hashem, and it sang His praises with the ministering angels*” (*Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan, ch. 31*).

You Shall Give From What is Mine

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave His delight, the holy Torah, as a gift to Israel. In the verse, “*Let them take an offering for Me,*” the term terumah (“offering”) has the numerical value of the word Torah and the letter mem (*numerical value 40*). This is a reference to the Torah, which was given after 40 days.

It is written, “*Let them take an offering for Me.*” Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, created man and breathed into him a soul that is a Divine spark – as if to say: “*What is Mine is yours*” – He also gave him, so to speak, His own essence. In other words: You too must accomplish, “*Let them take an offering for Me,*” for everything that you give to the Sanctuary, you are giving from what is Mine, since I gave you a part of Myself. Thus it is written, “*Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold*” (*Haggai 2:8*).

A person should not tell himself: “*Why should I give my money to tzedakah and support Torah institutions, kollelim, and the like, since it’s my money?*” The Holy One, blessed be He, also gave from Himself to man when He created him. Hashem did not say, “*I am giving him nothing,*” but instead He breathed into him a soul that is a Divine spark, and He placed him upon his feet.

The Power of Beginnings

It is written, “*They shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to light the lamp continually*” (*Shemot 27:20*). The Sages teach, “*There are three [crops of] olives, and each crop gives three kinds of oil. The first crop of olives is when the olives are picked from the top of the tree. They are pounded and put into the basket, yielding the first oil. They are then pressed with the beam, yielding the second oil. They are then ground and pressed again, yielding the third oil. The first [oil] is fit for the Menorah, and the others for the meal-offerings*” (*Mishnah in Menachot 86:1*).

We may ask why the first oil is so special, such that it alone may be used for the Menorah.

We can explain this according a statement in the Midrash: “[G-d says,] ‘Present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass.’ Rabbi Tanchuma, Rabbi Hunia, and Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Resh Lakish: It is written, ‘Desist and know that I am G-d’ [*Tehillim 46:11*]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘Desist from your evil deeds and know that I am G-d.’ Rabbi Levi said, ‘Were Israel to practice repentance even for one day, they would be immediately redeemed, and the scion of David would immediately come.’ How do we know this? Because it says, ‘For

He is our G-d, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would but hearken to His voice’ [ibid 95:7]” (Shir HaShirim Rabba 5:3).

The Holy One, blessed be He, asks for only one thing, namely that a person starts with repentance and good deeds. As soon as he begins to repent, the Holy One, blessed be He, will immediately help him to resist the evil inclination. The Sages teach, “*One is allowed to follow the path he wishes to pursue*” (*Makkot 10b*), something that depends solely on the beginning, as it is written: “*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem*” (*Tehillim 111:10*). Also, “*Now, O Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear*” (*Devarim 10:12*). When we have fear, we have everything; and when we lack fear, we have nothing. Without fear, even repentance is far from perfect.

From here we learn just how important beginnings are. The early Sages said, “*Fervor is never greater than at the beginning.*” When we start getting used to something, we lose our focus and pay less attention to it. In this regard our Sages have taught: Let it not seem in your eyes like the same old story that nobody can tolerate any longer, but like something new that everyone seeks (*Sifrei, Vaetchanan 6:8*). When words of Torah become old to someone, they lose their enthusiasm and people observe them out of habit. In that case, they are called “*commandments of men learned by rote*” (*Isaiah 29:13*), which people do not observe with full concentration. However when they seem new to someone, enthusiasm returns each day.

The essence of a mitzvah, and indeed the essence of everything, depends on its beginning. Hence the first kind of oil was suitable for the Menorah, thereby hinting to the Children of Israel that if they created an opening as large as the eye of a needle, G-d would widen it into a large opening and enable them to defeat the evil inclination. There is no reason to fear the outcome, for the Sages in the Mishnah have said: “*It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but you are not free to desist from it*” (*Pirkei Avoth 2:16*). This means that when you start something, G-d will immediately come and help you. A person should not think, “*How can I start learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot? The Torah is so vast, it contains hundreds of extremely important mitzvot, and hundreds of serious sins depend on it! How can I pay attention to it all?*” To answer these questions, the Torah says that the first kind of oil was required for the Menorah, meaning that we only need to start, and G-d will help us finish.

This is why the Menorah was lit by the kohen, who remained there until the flame ascended on its own (*Shabbat 21a*). In fact the Menorah alludes to the Torah, as it is written: “*For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light*” (*Mishlei 6:23*). When a person begins observing a mitzvah and lights it in his heart, the Holy One, blessed be He, helps him and the flame ascends on its own. As the Sages have said, “*If one comes to purify himself, he is helped*” (*Yoma 38b*).

They Can Maintain Peace

The power of beginnings is great in every area. Just as a good beginning is of capital importance when it consists of mitzvot, it is also important for everything else. Oftentimes, disputes arise between people or between a man and his wife. Yet because

people fail to control themselves at the beginning, when they see faults in others, they instantly get angry and everything degenerates from there. If they were to control themselves at the very beginning – thinking before getting angry, or before saying something that will lead to strife and hatred – they could maintain peace between them.

A wise man possesses the great characteristic of “*not rushing to answer*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:7), for he gives himself time to think before speaking. As our Sages have said, “*The commoner always jumps to the front*” (*Megillah* 12b). We know what Rabbi Israel Salanter said, namely that before a person says anything, he is the master of his words and can choose to speak or not to speak. However once he says something, he can no longer take it back. Even if he regrets it, he has already spoken and can no longer do anything about it.

This is why the Sages have said, “*Heaven and earth were created only for the sake of Israel, for it is written: ‘Because of reshith, G-d created Heaven and earth’* [*Bereshith* 1:1], and *reshith* cannot mean anything but Israel” (*Vayikra Rabba* 36:4). The Sages have also said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world only for three things that are called reshith, and these are: Torah, Israel, and the fear of Heaven*” (*Seder Rabba d'Bereshith* 5). When a person starts with Torah and the fear of Heaven, which are a beginning, he becomes worthy for the world to have been created for his sake, and Hashem helps him.

The Gemara gives us a wonderful example of this: “‘*The fear of Hashem is his treasure*’ [*Isaiah* 33:6]. ... This may be compared to a man who instructed his emissary, ‘*Bring up a kor of wheat to the loft*,’ and he went and did so. ‘*Did you mix in a kab of humton [a preservative]*?’ he asked him. ‘*No*,’ he replied. ‘*Then it would have been better had you not carried it up*,’ he retorted” (*Shabbat* 31a).

The Power of the Children of Israel by the Merit of the Tzaddikim

It is written, “*And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually*” (*Shemot* 27:20). This verse raises some questions. First, why does it begin with the expression, “*And you, command*”? This is unlike other places in the Torah, where we usually find, “*And Hashem spoke to Moshe*” or “*And Hashem said to Moshe*.” Second, since this oil was destined for a sacred purpose, namely the lighting of the Menorah, would it not have been better to state, “*Let them take for Me pure olive oil*,” much like the statement in Parsha Terumah: “*Let them take for Me an offering*” (*Shemot* 25:2)?

It is written that in all a person’s activities and dealing in this world, his intention should not be to seek personal gain. Instead, “*All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven, as it is written: ‘In all your ways know Him’*” [*Mishlei* 3:6]” (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 231:1). The Sages have said, “*Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 2:12), meaning that even things that have no direct connection to a mitzvah – eating, drinking, walking, and all the needs of the body – everything should be seen

as part of our service to the Creator, or as something that leads to His service. In other words, we must think solely of Hashem, even in the most material aspects of life.

We need to understand how a person can be expected to focus his complete attention on the Creator of the world all day long, as stated by the verse: "*In all your ways know Him.*" How is it possible for a person, made of flesh and blood, to think only of his Creator throughout the day? Also, how can a person who is closely attached to his evil inclination overcome his natural drives and desires?

Furthermore, someone who is rich and works all day long at trying to augment his business and increase his wealth, how can we ask him to understand that everything he owns really belongs to Hashem? How can we tell him that he shouldn't believe that his own efforts have made him wealthy? Is it really possible to expect people, regardless of the situation in which they may find themselves, to see the utter futility of the world and realize that it has no existence of its own?

Yet may G-d's Name be praised, for He does not seek to trap anyone. According to each person's abilities does the Holy One, blessed be He, put him to the test, meaning that He never sends a person trials that he cannot overcome. Regarding this subject, we have already cited the words of the Chiddushei HaRim on his explanation of the Gemara's statement that "*the laws relating to a Hebrew servant are in force only when the Jubilee is observed*" (*Gittin 65a; Kiddushin 69a*), for Heaven never sends a person a trial that he cannot overcome. People have the impression, however, that their trials are arduous and never-ending affairs. This is because the evil inclination, in trying to make people lose hope, attempts to have them believe that their problems are unbearable. When that happens, a person will simply abandon his religious way of life and become filled with doubt.

This is why we are astonished, for do we really have the strength to yield before G-d, to submit our will before His? Can we really connect with Hashem at such a level, all while coping with our supposed trials? This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "*And you, command...that they shall take for you*" (*Shemot 27:20*). In other words, for the Children of Israel to arrive at the level of taking for Me – taking their very selves and devoting everything to the service of holiness, all while removing material desires from their heart – there must first and foremost be the concept of "*and you.*" This means that the Children of Israel must first learn that you have a spiritual influence on them, for you teach them Torah and the fear of Heaven. Because they see you serving Me, it is from you that they will learn to yield before Me. It is from you that they will learn to serve Me with devotion until they have arrived – they themselves – at the level of "*let them take for Me.*" This will happen because, in seeing a holy person serving Hashem, they will learn and be influenced from him. In fact a sacred fire will enter their hearts, they who have a burning desire to be taken by Hashem with all their heart and soul.

It is not without reason that Hashem chose Moshe as an example for the entire Jewish people, for the tzaddik of the generation is as valuable as all Israel. As the Sages

have said, “*Moshe was equal to all Israel*” (*Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot 18; Tanhuma, Beshalach 10*). He had the ability to influence and spread his glory upon them, as well as to be feared by them, just as we are taught: “*Let the...reverence for your teacher [be] as the fear of Heaven*” (*Pirkei Avot 4:12*). However in order for everyone to gather around the tzaddik and be influenced by him, there must be “*and you*.” The “*and*” adds something extra, meaning that it is only when the tzaddik is at the level of “*let them take for Me*” – only when he is taken by Hashem and loves Him with all his heart – only then will he have the power to influence others. In this way the souls of the Jewish people will cling to him (i.e., “*they shall take for you*”) and make tremendous spiritual progress.

The tzaddik of the generation merits having the Holy One, blessed be He, speak through him. This is because the tzaddik’s entire being cleaves to Hashem and exerts an influence on the generation. It is from him that people learn to fear Hashem, for they can see the light of the Shechinah when they look upon his face. It is Hashem’s desire that we cleave to him with the burning flame of zealous devotion, for by his influence on the Jewish people the tzaddik of the generation can and will carry them from misery to plenty, from slavery to deliverance. What is the relevant issue here? This Shabbat is Shabbat Zachor, in which we find the commandment to erase the memory of Amalek from under Heaven. What happened to Amalek? Moshe summoned his disciple Joshua, the son of Nun, and told him to go out and fight against Amalek. The Torah tells us that “*Joshua weakened Amalek and its people by the sword’s blade*” (*Shemot 17:13*), meaning that the Jewish people conquered Amalek by the power of the tzaddik of the generation. That being the case, the same applies even today: The tzaddik of the generation can help us conquer Amalek, the evil inclination. However we must attach ourselves to the tzaddik for this to happen. When we do that, we will merit all that is good in both the material and spiritual realms.

A Jew’s Deepest Desire is to Fulfill His Creator’s Will

It is written, “*And you, command the Children of Israel, and they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually*” (*Shemot 27:20*).

“*May our master teach us: When do we circumcise a child? Our Sages taught: A minor is circumcised on the eighth day. Why? Just as Isaac was circumcised [likewise we do the same]. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, ‘Behold, is there anything more beloved to a man than his own son? What does the father do? He takes his son and circumcises him!’ How can he do such a thing? Rabbi Nachman bar Shemuel said, ‘Only because it is the will of his Creator. The father performs the mitzvah with joy, even though he sees his beloved son’s blood being shed.’ Rabbi Chanina said, ‘Not only that! The father makes the day of circumcision a day of rejoicing, and he incurs great expense to pay for the celebration, although there is no commandment for him to do so’*” (*Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 1*).

This Midrash is very surprising. What connection is there between the mitzvah of circumcision (and how Jews perform it) and this week’s parsha? From this Midrash we

see that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai focuses on something astounding, namely that by circumcising his son, a man harms what is most important to him. When the Midrash expresses its surprise at this and asks how it is possible, that a loving father can do such a thing to his son, Rav Nachman bar Shemuel responds: “*Only because it is the will of his Creator.*” What does he add by this response? It is obvious that he does so in order to fulfill Hashem’s mitzvot! How does this help us to understand something that is so surprising, namely the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision by a father who loves his son? Where does he obtain the incredible moral strength to cut the flesh of his beloved son?

To explain this, we must first examine the way in which the verse expresses itself: “*And you, command...and they shall take for you.*” What does “*and they shall take for you*” mean? It would have been better to say, “*so that they take for you.*”

The Sages have said, “*And you, command – this is a form of encouragement, for now and all the generations*” (*Midrash Hagadol*). The Baal HaTurim underlines that Israel is likewise commanded (“*command the Children of Israel*”) both in regards to the Menorah and the continual burnt-offering, for these two mitzvot must be performed each day, and they entail a financial loss. There is therefore a need for encouragement, which is why these mitzvot are given in the form of a command.

Hashem addressed Moshe and said to him, “*And you, command the Children of Israel – although this mitzvah entails great difficulty, for it involves a financial loss, and a man loves his money more than his own body, nevertheless command the Children of Israel to carry it out, and encourage them.*” Hashem told him, “*they shall take for you – they will certainly heed your voice and bring what is necessary, despite the difficulty and financial loss involved. You will then realize the magnitude of their devotion to mitzvot, and you will be assured that they will bring it to you and obey your orders.*” The Holy One, blessed be He, here revealed to Moshe the nature and character of the Children of Israel, who give when demands are made of them. In fact they obey, heed the word of Hashem, and turn neither to the right nor to the left from anything they are commanded to do.

This concept is confirmed by the Midrash: “*And you, command – the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: ‘I am making you king. Just as the people of a king obey his orders, you too must give them orders, and they will fulfill them’*” (*Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 6*). The Holy One, blessed be He, was thus telling Moshe that the Children of Israel would carry out his decrees, even though they entailed a financial loss.

We can now explain the connection between the mitzvah of circumcision and this week’s parsha. Intellectually, the mitzvah of circumcision is among the most difficult to carry out, for it means cutting off the flesh of a powerless baby that has just been born! Not only that, but it is the baby’s father, the one who produced him and loves him, who has received this command. Yet it is precisely this mitzvah that all Israel fulfills with joy and enthusiasm. No Jew thinks of avoiding it because he loves and has pity on his son. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai correctly highlighted the spiritual level of

the Jewish people, who fulfill this difficult mitzvah with great devotion. Rav Nachman bar Shemuel revealed the source of this power, the strength to fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision, in one short phrase: “*Only because it is the will of his Creator.*” This is the characteristic of a Jew, one that gives him the strength to carry out the mitzvah of circumcision. The Jewish soul yearns to do the will of its Creator. Before all other feelings or emotions arise in the heart, there is a powerful desire that surpasses all else, the desire to do the will of Hashem. This is an inherent quality of every Jew, regardless of identity. It is through the power of this desire that a Jew completely devotes himself and gives his son to fulfill the will of Hashem. Rabbi Chanina strengthens this idea by saying, “*Not only that! The father makes the day of circumcision a day of rejoicing, and he incurs great expense to pay for the celebration, although there is no commandment for him to do so.*” He rejoices when his son is circumcised, and invariably he does it gladly (in his desire to obey Hashem), not because of a sense of obligation or out of fear. The proof is the joy that he experiences, which only arises when a person feels that he is in complete harmony with his deeds and is satisfied by his actions. When a person can fulfill his yearning and desire to do the will of Hashem, joy bursts forth and arises, and he spends money to make it a day of celebration.

Every Jew possesses this virtue, this yearning to bring satisfaction to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to fulfill His word with devotion. Yet sometimes, over the course of time, this virtue becomes covered with dust and sleeps due to the evil inclination and the desires of the world. We must therefore awaken and renew it, as the Rambam states: “*He wants to be part of the Jewish people, and he wants to perform all the mitzvot and eschew all the transgressions; it is only his evil inclination that presses him*” (*Hilchot Gerushin* 2:20).

This is what Hashem told Moshe in this week’s parsha: When you give them orders, you will immediately see that “*they will take for you.*” What is foremost among a Jew’s will and desire is to fulfill the mitzvot of the King – and with devotion, no less – even if it entails a financial loss. This offers a marvelous explanation for the mitzvah of circumcision.

The Power of Purity vs. the Power of Impurity

It is written, “*You shall offer the one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep you shall offer in the afternoon*” (*Shemot* 29:39).

Rabbi Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai, explains the significance of the daily burnt-offerings: The burnt-offering of the morning atoned for the sins of the night, and that of the afternoon atoned for the sins of the morning. These daily offerings were purchased with public money, and they had the power to atone for the sins of the entire people. The Ben Ish Hai adds that the term *olat* (burnt-offerings) is similar to *tole’ah* (worm): There are destructive angels that stem from the forces of evil and resemble a worm, which devours and nibbles at everything before it. By making the daily burnt-offerings, we weaken these angels and prevent them from reaching and destroying us.

G-d created them as counterparts to one another. Just as there is an angel of punishment named Tole'ah, there is an angel of purity that is also named Tole'ah, the objective of which is to diminish the forces of the evil worm and prevent it from fulfilling its harmful objectives. From where does the good worm draw its strength to counter the evil worm? From the daily burnt-offerings of the morning and afternoon, which were offered by the people. It is by the merit of these offerings that the good worm is able to annul the forces of its adversary. It is in this regard that G-d turns to Jacob and says: “*Fear not, O worm [tola'at] of Jacob*” (*Isaiah 41:14*), meaning: “*Do not fear the forces of impurity, for you also have a worm that can destroy your enemies.*”

Nevertheless, a question arises: How did the nations of the world succeed in destroying the land of Israel? The question is that much more relevant, given that eminent Torah scholars used to live in Jerusalem, men who possessed a spirit of prophesy and whose exceptional greatness was immeasurable. These same Torah scholars made the ministering angels swear to fight destructive forces and prevent the nations of the world from destroying the land of Israel. In that case, how could that have happened? “*This question was put to the sages and the prophets, but they could not answer it – until the Almighty Himself did so, as it is written: ‘And Hashem said: ‘Because they have abandoned My Torah...’*” [*Jeremiah 9:12*]” (*Nedarim 81a*). In other words, it was because they stopped bringing the daily burnt-offerings. Since these offerings atoned for the sins of the day and the night, the Jewish people were left without protection. They could overcome their enemies only when they offered the daily burnt-offerings, the symbol of spiritual greatness and self-mastery, which granted power to the worm of holiness. The daily burnt-offerings must necessarily include the concept of daily spiritual growth. Thus when the Jewish people stopped bringing these offerings, the worm of holiness no longer had the power to overcome the husk of impurity, the result being that the nations of the world were able to destroy Jerusalem.

A Call to Repentance

It was on Tammuz 17 that the Jewish people stopped making the daily burnt-offerings, for there were no more sheep remaining, as the Gemara explains (*Ta'anit 16b*). Nevertheless, instead of worrying about a lack of sheep and reflecting upon their situation, they remained passive and did not realize the divine sign that was calling them to rectify their deeds. We can explain this with a parable: When a mother realizes that her son is not maturing and developing normally, that he tends to sleep more than usual and is not eating correctly, she will automatically fear that something is wrong with him, and she will seek out doctors to determine the cause of the problem. Likewise, when someone feels that he is not growing spiritually – and on the contrary is stagnant, even experiencing a spiritual decline at times – then he must worry about it and not rest easy until he finds a solution to his problem.

It was for this reason that G-d created people in such a way that their hair becomes grey as they grow older. Likewise, a person's face does not remain supple and radiant as in youth. Why is that? G-d could have easily arranged things in such a way that a

person leaves this world as youthful and vigorous as in his youth. Why instead do we become old and frail prior to death? In reality, the signs of old age come to remind us that our energy is not eternal, that the years of our life on earth are measured, and that a day will come when we must leave the world and be buried. We must all realize this and devote our lives to the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot, for a day will come when the ability for spiritual growth will be taken from us, and we will be judged for our actions without any way to correct them. Thus the Jewish people should have awoken and questioned the significance of not being able to make the daily burnt-offerings. In fact the absence of sheep for these offerings testified to a deficiency in regards to Torah, meaning that the Children of Israel were not fulfilling it in its entirety. Since the Jewish people remained indifferent to that fact and failed to strengthen the worm of holiness, forces of evil triumphed and Jerusalem was destroyed.

In our days, when the Temple no longer stands and we cannot bring the daily burnt-offerings, we must elevate ourselves in the holy Torah. We must examine our deeds in the hope of improving them, and we must always be in a state of spiritual growth. By acting in this way, we will transmit a double share of power and strength to the forces of purity in order to confront the forces of impurity. By way of allusion, we may add that the daily offering (*korban tamid*) touches upon the concept of constant self-annulment (*temidi*), meaning that a man should submit and annul himself before the Torah. As for the term *tole'ah* ("worm"), it comes from the same root as *hit'alut* ("elevation"), meaning that there exists an elevation of purity as well as an elevation of impurity. By submitting himself to the Torah, a person brings about an elevation of purity.

Ki Tisa

The World Endures by the Merit of the Jewish People

When the Children of Israel made the golden calf, Hashem told Moses: “*Go, descend, for your people...have become corrupt*” (*Exodus 32:7*). Here Rashi cites the Sages in stating, “*Descend from your high position. I gave you this high position only for their sake*” (*see Berachot 32a*). At that moment Moses grew so weak that he could no longer speak.

On the other hand, when Hashem told Moses, “*And now, leave Me alone. Let My anger flare up against them, and I will destroy them and I will make you a great nation*” (*Exodus 32:10*), Moses vigorously objected. Here the Sages have said, “*This teaches that Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a man who seizes his fellow by his garment, and said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the universe, I will not let You go until You forgive and pardon them’*” (*Berachot 32a*).

From here we see the greatness of Moses. He wholeheartedly agreed to descend from his greatness once Hashem told him to. In fact the spiritual heights that Moses attained by entering Heaven was due solely to the merit of the Children of Israel, enabling him to bring the Torah down for them. Yet now that they had sinned, there was no longer anything for Moses to do in Heaven. However when Hashem said to Moses, “*I will make you a great nation*,” he completely disagreed. Here Moses realized that Hashem wanted to elevate him again, but he could not agree because he knew that he was not the main thing, for that distinction belonged to the Jewish people. Since Hashem told him, “*Leave Me alone*,” it meant that hidden within justice was mercy, as the Sages have said: “*When [G-d] said, ‘Leave Me alone...and I will destroy them,’ Moses said to himself: ‘This depends on me’*” (*Berachot 32a*). Hence Moses grabbed Hashem “*by His garment*.”

In reality, we may ask how Moses could have dared to grab Hashem by His garment, for G-d a devouring fire. Furthermore, is it possible to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, even has a garment? This only makes sense for a being of flesh and blood, not for Hashem.

We shall attempt to explain. Hashem’s garment is the Torah, which He dons and covers Himself with, and which constitutes His eternal delight, as it is written: “*I was then His nursing. I was then His delight every day, rejoicing before Him always*” (*Proverbs 8:30*). The Holy One, blessed be He, studies the Torah and continually finds new explanations in it, for the Torah is the formula and blueprint for all of Creation. Furthermore, in sacred texts we read that the Torah is called the garment of the Holy One, blessed be He (*Zohar III, Tzav 28a*).

Hence this is what the Sages meant when they said that Moses grabbed hold of Hashem's garment. It signifies that he grabbed Hashem by the holy Torah and His middot. That is, Moses told Hashem that if He destroyed the Children of Israel, Creation would no longer have a reason to exist, for who would study the holy Torah? Our Sages have said that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, corresponding to the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people. If they were to disappear, what would become of the Torah? Moses also said that if the Jewish people were to disappear, over whom would Hashem reign in order to demonstrate His middot? In fact no king exists without a people, and without a people the kingdom of Hashem could not exist, for the Jewish people would not be there to declare Him King.

We may give a deeper explanation for why Moses implored Hashem not to destroy the Children of Israel. Moses said to Hashem: If You eliminate all the tribes that already exist, You will not be able to sustain the people that You propose to create from me. The entire Torah is formed by Hashem's Names, and it is composed entirely of the letters of the Children of Israel. Therefore it contains allusions to all the names of the Children of Israel – past, present, and future. Therefore how can You destroy the Children of Israel, since the new people that will emerge from me are not contained in the Torah? The Torah cannot be changed in any way, and Hashem's Names and those of the Children of Israel are already contained in it. If they are destroyed, how can a new people emerging from me endure before You, since they have no letters within the Torah and are not found in it? Since it cannot endure before You at the time of Your anger, You must allow the Children of Israel to live, for they are already found in the Torah.

This is what is meant by Moses grabbing hold of Hashem by the garment of the Torah. Here we many also raise an objection, for the Torah is made of fire, as it is written: "*From His right a fiery law*" (*Deuteronomy 33:2*). Therefore how can the Torah be actually held?

The answer is that a person is not burned by the Torah when he studies it. On the contrary, the Torah warms him. Although the Torah is fire, as it is written: "*My word is like fire, the word of the L-RD*" (*Jeremiah 23:29*), it will not burn a person as long as he studies it, for it is an elixir of life. In fact when he studies Torah, it elevates him and makes him great. Even the fire of Gehinnom does not affect him in that case, as it is said concerning Moses: "*When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shined*" (*Exodus 34:30*), for its light did not burn him.

Hence Moses could grab hold of Hashem by the garment of the Torah without being burned. Indeed, Moses had already studied the entire Torah during the forty days that he was on Mount Sinai, and he was not burned by it. Thus Moses wanted to speak to Hashem in favor of the Children of Israel, saying that all of Creation endured by their merit and therefore they could not be destroyed. However this only applies when they study Torah and practice mitzvot. It is only then that the world endures by their merit. This is why everyone must strengthen themselves in Torah study and mitzvot observance, for only in this way can the world endure at all times.

The Observance of Shabbat and Peace Hasten the Deliverance

It is written, “*He gave to Moses, when He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two Tablets of Testimony, stone Tablets inscribed by the finger of G-d*” (*Exodus 31:18*). This verse is located between the mitzvah of Shabbat and the making of the golden calf, which does not seem to be the right place for it, as Rashi states. We therefore need to understand why it is found here.

This contains an allusion to what the Sages taught us about the greatness of peace. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, may close His eyes to all sins, but not to a lack of peace. Hence the Temple was destroyed only on account of baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*). Although the Children of Israel possessed Torah and good deeds, their Torah did not protect them because there was no peace among them. Our Sages say, “*The generation of Achav was almost completely idolatrous. However since they did not have informers among them, they were victorious in war*” (*Pesikta D’Rabbi Kahana 4:2*). Baseless hatred is worse than idolatry, and as long as unity and peace exist among the Jewish people, they will defeat their enemies.

Now Shabbat is called “peace,” as the Gemara states: “*What is the meaning of, ‘My soul despaired of having peace’ [Lamentations 3:17]? ... This refers to the kindling of the light on Shabbat*” (*Shabbat 25b*). Rashi explains that light always represents peace, and the Zohar states: “*The world does not exist except through peace. When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, it could not endure until He came and made peace dwell upon them. What is it? It is Shabbat, which is the peace of the upper and the lower grades*” (*Zohar III:176b*). The Men of the Great Assembly decreed that in the Mincha prayer of Shabbat we must recite, “*A rest of peace and serenity*” and the Sages explain that this was instituted because of the verse, “*My people will dwell in a peaceful domain*” (*Isaiah 32:18*). The Midrash explains, “*A song for the Sabbath day [Psalms 92:1] – for the day when demons are prevented from harming the world, the day when they are seated with him in peace, as it is written: ‘They are with me in an oasis of peace, a sure dwelling place and a serene rest’*” (*Midrash Tehillim 72*). This is why the passage on the observance of Shabbat, which alludes to unity and peace, appears before the passage on the golden calf, despite being out of chronological order. It is meant to teach us that when peace exists in the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, acts with compassion, even when the Children of Israel deliver themselves to idolatry. When is Hashem filled with anger? When there is no peace among the Children of Israel. Even if they possess mitzvot and good deeds, but there is no peace among them, the Holy One, blessed be He, is filled with anger against them. Our Sages have said, “*If the Children of Israel would properly observe one Shabbat, the son of David would immediately arrive*” (*Yerushalmi, Taanith 1:1*). We therefore see that the Children of Israel will not be saved before having observed one Shabbat, which represents peace, and when there is peace in the world, the son of David will immediately arrive.

It is for this reason that the passage on the observance of Shabbat is juxtaposed to Parsha Shekalim, for the Sanctuary was built only through the power of unity. The

shekalim that the Children of Israel gave for the Sanctuary brought about unity and peace. Both rich and poor gave only a half-shekel. Although the rich could have given more, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the rich and the poor to each give a half-shekel, not more, thereby demonstrating that they are all equal before G-d. It is for this reason that the passage on the observance of Shabbat is found next to Parsha Shekalim, for the purpose of Shabbat and the shekalim are the same: To bring peace to Israel.

This is why the righteous in former times performed the mitzvah of tzedakah especially on the eve of Shabbat, going from door to door in order to collect money for the poor. It was also the custom of my forefather, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal, who went about collecting tzedakah all day long on the eve of Shabbat, taking what was needed for meals from the wealthy, and distributing it to the poor so as to increase peace among the people on the day before Shabbat.

The Tablets of the Covenant were also given to Israel by the merit of unity. In fact at the giving of the Torah, the Children of Israel were united, as the Sages said on the verse, "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:2*): "*This teaches us that they were all as one person with one heart*" (*Mechilta*). Although the Children of Israel had sinned with the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that in the future they would observe Torah and mitzvot, and they would increase peace and unity in the world. The merit of unity was therefore greater than the sin of idolatry, and so He gave the Tablets to Moses.

The Tablets were also given by the merit of Shabbat, which is why the Men of the Great Assembly decreed that in the prayers of Shabbat we are to say, "*Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion, for You called him a faithful servant...and he brought down two Tablets of stone in his hand, on which was inscribed the observance of Shabbat.*" Was it only the observance of Shabbat that was inscribed on the Tablets? Since Moses only merited the Tablets on account of Shabbat, it is the primary thing, and the Sages therefore decided that we should say, "*Thus it is written in Your Torah: The Children of Israel shall observe Shabbat.*" What merit does Shabbat have? It consists entirely of peace, and the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that when a person observes Torah and mitzvot, he increases peace in the world. It was by this merit that He gave them the Torah.

We also find, with regards to the first man when he sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not forgive him before Shabbat came to defend him. The Midrash states that when Adam sinned, he was sent out of the garden on that very same day, and on the next day, Rosh Hashanah, he was forgiven, for Shabbat came to defend him (*Pesikta Rabbati 46*). Hashem blessed him with light, providing him with light throughout the night and day of Shabbat, 36 hours of light in all. He did this in order for Adam not to suffer, since he had never experienced the darkness of night. Adam was therefore saved from the attribute of strict justice by the merit of Shabbat, which defended him. Hence we read, "*It is good to thank the L-RD*" (*Psalms 92:2*). Such is the merit contained in Shabbat, which consists entirely of peace.

The Difference Between the First and Second Tablets

Rabbi Abahu said, “All the 40 days that Moses was on high, he kept on forgetting the Torah that he learned. He then said, ‘Sovereign of the universe, I have spent 40 days, and yet I know nothing.’ What did G-d do? At the end of the 40 days, He gave him the Torah as a gift” (*Shemot Rabba* 41:6).

The Sages have also said that on Tammuz 17, Moses descended and broke the first tablets, and on Tammuz 18 he went back up and pleaded for mercy on Israel for 40 days and 40 nights. At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave Israel and told Moses to carve out the second tables and ascend. He descended on Av 28 in order to carve out the second Tables, ascending on Av 29, and the Torah was taught to him a second time.

Moses descended on Tishri 10, which was Yom Kippur, and told the Children of Israel that G-d had forgiven them, as it is written: “*You shall forgive our iniquity and sin, and make us Your heritage*” (*Exodus* 34:9). Hence this day has become a law and a memorial for all the generations, as it is written: “*This shall be to you an eternal decree*” (*Leviticus* 16:34).

The fact that Moses remained on the mountain for 40 additional days is surprising. Once he had learned the entire Torah and it had been given to him as a gift, why did he need to stay on the mountain for 40 more days to receive the second tablets? He already knew the entire Torah! If we say that Moses had to remain in order to appease the Creator, had he not already done so when the Children of Israel complained, as it is written: “*The people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the L-RD and the fire died down*” (*Numbers* 11:2)? When they sinned because of the spies, Moses proclaimed the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy before Him. In light of these things, could Moses not have prayed below, as he had done each time the Children of Israel sinned?

He Risked His Life for Israel

To explain this question, let us first say that when the Children of Israel made the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses: “*Go, descend.*” The Sages explain that at that point, Moses was judged by the Celestial Court. This means that he was judged by Hashem and lowered from his greatness before having completed 40 days. Since he had been lowered from his greatness, he interrupted his Torah study and forgot what he had learned. This is why he had to remain on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, to relearn what he had forgotten (see *Tanhuma, Ki Tisa* 22).

What did Moses do during these 40 days and nights? He immersed himself in prayer and asked for mercy on the Children of Israel. At the same time, he reviewed his learning in order to remember all the great concepts that he had understood during the first 40 days. Since he was completely devoted to the Children of Israel and prayed for them as he studied, he merited for the skin of his face to shine.

Moses’ first ascent – when he studied G-d’s Torah and reviewed it, and when there was only Torah in him – was unlike his second ascent, when he reviewed his

own learning while praying that the Holy One, blessed be He, should not destroy the Children of Israel. At that point Moses practiced serving Hashem (*avodah*) and bestowing good on others (*gemilut chesed*). Can there be a greater good than devoting your life to your people, to the point that the Sages have said: “*Moses implored [vayechal] the L-RD his G-d’ [Exodus 32:11]. ... This teaches us that Moses stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, until he wearied Him [chala]*” (*Berachot 32a*). The Sages have also said that Moses risked his life for the Children of Israel.

Every Generation Has its Sages

See the greatness of kindness! Before Moses prayed for the Jewish people, even if he had studied Torah with G-d during his initial ascension, his face still did not shine. Yet when he began to pray with wholehearted lovingkindness, the skin of his face instantly began to shine.

The Sages have said, “*There is an offshoot of Moses in every generation*” (*Tikkunei Zohar 114a*). Every tzaddik that possesses these three qualities, we know that the world rests upon him and his merit. Likewise Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: “*I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now*” (*Sukkah 45b*). This pertains to what kabbalists have explained on the verse, “*You ascended on high, you have taken shevi [captives]*” (*Psalms 68:19*). That is, the term shevi is formed by the initial of Shimon bar Yochai, meaning that when Moses ascended on high, he as it were “*captured*” the souls of the tzaddikim in every generation. Our Sages have said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Moses every generation and its judges...every generation and its leaders*” (*Vayikra Rabba 26:7*), and He gave them the power to support the world by their merit alone.

Since Moses, during his second 40-day stay on the mountain, was busy doing a great deal of chesed, he merited many things. His face began to shine, and the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “*I have forgiven according to your word*” (*Numbers 14:20*). He thereby obtained a day of forgiveness and atonement for all the generations. Not only that, but the second tablets contained what the first tablets did not. In fact the Sages say that when Moses felt regret for having broken the first tablets, Hashem said to him: “*Don’t regret it, for the first tablets only contained the Ten Commandments, whereas the second tablets that I am giving you contain Halachot, Midrashim, Aggadot, etc.*”

The Other Side of a Coin

It is written, “*This they shall 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*). Our Sages have said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, took what resembled a coin of fire from beneath the Throne of Glory and showed Moshe: ‘This they shall give,’ meaning they shall give a coin that resembles this one*” (*Bamidbar Rabba 12:3*). This is surprising, for why did Hashem have to show Moshe a shekel? Did he not

know what a shekel looked like, such that he had to be shown one? Furthermore, where do we find that the Holy One, blessed be He, hid a shekel under the Throne of Glory?

The Atonement Money

When we reflect upon the nature of these shekalim, we realize that they were primarily meant to procure atonement for the Jewish people because they had sinned through the golden calf, as we read further on: “*The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering to Hashem to atone for your souls*” (*Shemot 30:15*). The Torah is teaching us that these shekalim were offered for the maintenance of the Sanctuary and the service of the Tent of Meeting. They also procured atonement for the sin of the golden calf, as we read in the verse that follows: “*You shall take the atonement money of the Children of Israel, and you shall appoint it for the service of the Tent of Meeting: and it shall be a memorial to the Children of Israel before Hashem, to atone for your souls*” (*v.16*). This is what Rashi explains here: From the fact that the Children of Israel gave the half-shekel to maintain the Sanctuary, where the Shechinah dwelled, Hashem would forgive the sin of the golden calf.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: If the rich give according to their means and the poor give according to their means, then I will have provoked jealousy among them. This money will no longer bring atonement, since it will arouse jealousy! In that case, how will “*to atone for their souls*” be fulfilled, and when will the sin of the golden calf be forgiven?

This is why Hashem commanded both rich and poor to give but half a shekel, in order for a shekel to be complete only when both rich and poor person give half. In this way, the offering of one would complete the offering of another.

Just as Yom Kippur does not procure atonement unless everyone is united – as it is written: “*For sins between man and his fellowman, Yom Kippur does not procure atonement until he has pacified his fellowman*” (*Yoma 85b*) – likewise these shekalim did not procure atonement unless everyone was united. When people ask one another for forgiveness, unity immediately reigns among them and the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives all their sins. The Sanctuary and sacrifices could only exist and procure atonement if they stemmed from offerings that the Children of Israel brought in unity.

Furthermore, because each Jew gave a half-shekel for the maintenance of the Sanctuary and the offerings, they brought about the presence of the Shechinah in the Sanctuary, and Scripture accounted it to them as if they had become partners in Hashem’s unity. Since they were united and the Shechinah only dwells where there is unity, and because they maintained the Sanctuary in unity, this permitted Hashem to make His Shechinah dwell among them.

This may be why the Torah states, “*A half-shekel of the sacred shekel, the shekel is twenty geras.*” When two people each bring a half-shekel, it makes a complete shekel. This is also the explanation of, “*This they shall give – everyone who passes through*

the census – a half-shekel of the sacred shekel.” In other words, from the fact that everyone included in the census would give a half-shekel, with the rich giving a half-shekel and the poor giving a half-shekel, the complete shekel of the Sanctuary would come from both of them.

This sanctity has two aspects: One is the unity of the Jewish people, and the second is the presence of the holy Shechinah in the Sanctuary that was built with the offerings of the Children of Israel.

Who Can Redeem His Own Soul?

This is what appeared difficult to Moshe. He was surprised that a half-shekel could atone for a Jewish soul. In fact the Sages state (*Tanchuma, Tisa 10*) that when G-d said, “*Every man shall give a ransom for his soul*” (*Shemot 30:12*), Moshe was surprised and asked who could redeem his own soul, since it is written: “*Too costly is their soul’s redemption and unattainable forever*” (*Tehillim 49:9*). Hashem answered him, “*It is not what you think. Rather, they shall give something like this.*” This is still surprising, for what was G-d telling Moshe, given that this was precisely what he was wondering about!

Hashem said to Moshe, “*I will show you a coin of fire that I am taking from beneath the Throne of Glory.*” According to what our Sages have said, judgment is suspended by tzeddakah beneath the Throne of Glory, as it is written: “*Thus said Hashem: Observe justice and perform tzeddakah*” (*Isaiah 56:1*). He said to him, “*When Jews give tzeddakah, I forgive them and they are exempt from punishment.*” All the power of tzeddakah lies in unity, with one person doing good for the other. The fact that the Children of Israel give tzeddakah all in the same way – the rich not giving more and the poor not giving less – will produce unity.

The Holy One, blessed be He, found nothing better than money to demonstrate unity and love, for the term *kesef* (“money”) comes from the same root as *kissufim* (“yearning”). We find this yearning in regards to a love for Hashem: “*My soul yearns [nichsephah], indeed it pines*” (*Tehillim 84:3*). This is why Hashem wanted everyone to give a half-shekel, the term shekel evoking *shakul* (weighed). In other words, because both rich and poor are weighed in the same balance, love reigns among them and they can achieve a love for G-d. The Jewish people can then reach the level of *kesef* (money) – meaning *kissufim* (yearning) – for the Shechinah because they will possess love for both their fellowman and G-d, and they will be immediately forgiven.

What coin did Hashem show Moshe? It was a coin of fire, in order to show him that tzeddakah must resemble fire. When the Jewish people give tzeddakah for the Sanctuary and there is no jealousy among them, they become partners in His unity and their love for one another resembles a great flame.

Love is compared to fire, as stated in regards to a love for G-d: “*Love is strong as death...its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of G-d*” (*shir HaShirim 8:6*). He said to Moshe, “*These shekalim will not procure atonement unless love reigns among you like a fire, for love among people leads to love for G-d by fostering unity.*”

Great is the Power of Deeds of Kindness

On the verse, “*He gave to Moshe*” (*Shemot 31:18*), the Sages teach: “*Rabbi Abahu said, ‘All the 40 days that Moshe was on high, he kept on forgetting the Torah that he learned. He then said: ‘Sovereign of the universe, I have spent 40 days, and yet I know nothing.’*” What did G-d do? At the end of the 40 days, He gave him the Torah as a gift” (*Shemot Rabba 41:6*).

The Sages have also said that on the seventh day after the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moshe ascended the mountain. On Tammuz 17 he descended and broke the first Tablets, and on Tammuz 18 he went back up and pleaded for mercy on Israel. At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave Israel and told Moshe to carve out the second Tablets and to ascend the mountain. He descended on Av 28, carved out the second Tablets, and ascended again on Av 29. The Torah was then taught to him a second time, as it is written: “*I remained on the mountain as on the first days – 40 days and 40 nights*” (*Devarim 10:10*). Moshe descended on Tishri 10, which was Yom Kippur, and told the Children of Israel that G-d had forgiven them, as it is written: “*You shall forgive our iniquity and sin, and make us Your heritage*” (*Shemot 34:9*). Hence this day became a law and a memorial for all the generations, as it is written: “*This shall be to you an eternal decree*” (*Vayikra 16:34*).

Let us think about this: Since Moshe knew the entire Torah and it was given to him as a gift, why did he need to stay on the mountain for 40 more days to receive the second Tablets? He already knew the entire Torah! If we say that Moshe had to remain in order to appease the Creator, did Moshe only know how to appease the Creator by fasting on the mountain?

We note that when the Children of Israel made the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: “*Go, descend*” (*Shemot 32:7*). Here the Sages explain: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: ‘Moshe, descend from your greatness. Have I given you greatness other than for the sake of Israel? Now that Israel has sinned, what do you need with greatness?’*” (*Berachot 32a*). The Sages also say that Moshe was judged by the Celestial Court at that point (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 22). In other words, before the end of the 40 days, he was judged by Hashem, Who made him descend from his greatness. Moshe’s learning was then interrupted, and he forgot what he had learned. He therefore had to return to the mountain for another 40 days and 40 nights to relearn what he had forgotten.

What did Moshe Rabbeinu do during those 40 days and nights? He spent them in prayer, asking for the Children of Israel to be shown mercy. During that time, his learning returned to him, and he remembered everything that he had studied during the first 40 days and nights. Since he had completely devoted himself to the Children of Israel and prayed for them as he studied, he merited for the skin of his face to shine. Moshe’s first ascent – when he learned Torah from the mouth of G-d by repeating it, and he possessed only Torah – was not the same as the second time he ascended, when

he reviewed his learning while praying for the Holy One, blessed be He, not to destroy Israel. At that point Moshe was engaged in both the service of Hashem and doing good for others, since he devoted his life to his people.

The World Stands on Account of Moshe Rabbeinu

There is more. The Mishnah teaches us, “*The world stands on three things: On Torah, the service [of G-d], and deeds of kindness*” (*Pirkei Avot 1:2*). How do we learn this from Moshe? When he stood upon the mountain, Moshe practiced these three things: He studied Torah, prayed for his people, and concerned himself only with saving the Jewish people so they would not be destroyed by Hashem’s wrath. Can there be a greater deed of kindness than to risk your life to save your people? This is the point that the Sages made on the verse, “*Moshe implored [vayechal] Hashem his G-d*” (*Shemot 32:11*), namely: “*Moshe stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, until he wearied Him [chala]*” (*Berachot 32a*). The Sages also say that Moshe was ready to die for them. From here Shimon HaTzaddik learned about the three pillars upon which the world stands, for it was only because of Moshe Rabbeinu that Hashem did not destroy His people.

Where do we learn that the world exists by the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu? It is from the Sages’ teaching (*Mechilta, Beshalach, Parsha HaShira*) that Moshe is comparable to all Israel put together, and that the world was only created for the sake of Israel (*Vayikra Rabba 36:4*). When the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to destroy Israel, upon what would the world have stood? Upon Moshe Rabbeinu. Therefore the entire world may stand by the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, who would usually practice these three things: Learning Torah, serving G-d, and performing deeds of kindness.

When Moshe ascended the second time, he therefore practiced these three things. Just how powerful are deeds of kindness! As long as Moshe had not prayed for the Jewish people, although he had learned a great deal of Torah from Hashem when he ascended the first time, the skin of his face still did not shine. Yet as soon as he began to pray, immediately the skin of his face began shining.

The Sages have said that there is a little of Moshe in every generation and in each tzaddik (*Tikkunei Zohar 114a*). Every tzaddik who possesses these three things, we know that the world rests upon him and his memory. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, “*I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now*” (*Sukkah 45b*). This corresponds to what kabbalists have explained on the verse, “*You ascended on high, you have taken shevi [captives]*” (*Tehillim 68:19*). The term shevi is formed by the initial of Shimon bar Yochai, meaning that when Moshe ascended on high, he “*captured*” the souls of the tzaddikim in every generation. Our Sages have also said, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Moshe every generation and its judges...every generation and its leaders*” (*Vayikra Rabba 26:7*), and He gave them the power to sustain the world by their merit alone.

Because Moshe practiced deeds of kindness for 40 days and 40 nights, he merited many things. The skin of his face began to shine, the Holy One, blessed be He, said

to him: “*I have forgiven according to your word*” (*Bamidbar 14:20*), and he obtained a day of forgiveness for all the generations. Not only that, but the second Tablets contained what the first Tablets did not, as the Sages have said: “[Moshe] began to feel remorseful for having broken the Tablets, but G-d reassured him, saying: ‘Do not grieve about the first Tablets. They only contained the Ten Commandments, but in the two Tablets that I am now about to give you, there will also be Halachah, Midrashim, and Aggadot. ... Not only that, but you are now being told that I will forgive your sin’” (*Shemot Rabba 46:1*).

The Sin of the Golden Calf and its Atonement

This Shabbat we read Parsha Ki Tisa, which deals primarily with the sin of the golden calf, as well as Parsha Parah, which discusses the red heifer. Is it by accident that these parshiot are read together, or could there be a profound connection between them? Rashi already explained this on the verse, “*They shall take to you a completely red heifer*” (*Bamidbar 19:2*), an explanation that originates with Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan: “*They shall take to you – from their own. Just as they removed the golden rings for the calf from their own, so shall they bring this from their own as atonement; a red heifer – this is compared to the child of a maidservant who sullied the king’s palace. They said, ‘Let the child’s mother come and wipe away the filth.’ Similarly, let the cow come and atone for the calf*” (see Rashi on *Bamidbar 19:22*). Rectifying the sin of the golden calf therefore occurs through the mitzvah of the red heifer. Even this requires an explanation, for what connection is there between a heifer and a calf, other than the fact that one is the mother and the other is the offspring?

To begin with, let us briefly examine the sin of the golden calf. When the Torah describes this sin, it states: “*The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aaron and said to him: ‘Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe – who brought us up from the land of Egypt – we do not know what became of him’*” (*Shemot 32:1*).

All the commentators, each in their own way, have examined the incongruity of the incident of the golden calf. It is difficult to understand how the Jewish people, who had just received the Torah and seen “*darkness, cloud, and thick darkness*” (*Devarim 4:11*) – the darkness of sins and their punishment, as well as the light – were capable of falling so far from the highest height, Mount Sinai, all the way to the depths of the abyss, idolatry. We need to understand the root cause of this terrible fall. We also need to understand why G-d did not prevent the Jewish people from reaching such a point, meaning why He did not send Moshe before it happened.

It seems that there was no reason to reprimand the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, since it was the Satan that misled them. The Targum recounts that *ki boresh Moshe* (“Moshe had delayed”) is connected to the term *shesh* (“six”): At the *shisha assar* (“sixth hour”), the Satan came and confounded the people, showing them darkness, cloud, and confusion, until they said, “*Moshe is certainly dead.*”

Therefore it was the Satan that misled them, which showed them “*a vision of Moshe’s bier*,” proving to them by signs and wonders that their leader Moshe was dead. What could they do in such a desperate situation? Moshe their leader, the one who until that point had shown them the way, G-d’s emissary, was dead. What could they now do?

The answer was simple, and it was an answer which they had already given when they received the Torah: “*We shall do and we shall hear*.” This principle represents complete self-annulment, for how can a person commit himself to doing something before knowing what he must do? He can only do so when he commits himself to doing all that he is told – absolutely everything, regardless of the commandment – which represents complete self-annulment. That is what the Children of Israel committed themselves to doing at Mount Sinai. Yet here they failed in this regard. Although the Satan showed them through signs and wonders that Moshe was dead, they should have understood on their own that everything comes from the Creator of the universe. They should have first reflected upon things, for they could have been mistaken about the time. Next, even if Moshe had actually been summoned to the Celestial yeshiva, the Holy One, blessed be He, is the Creator of the universe and directs it. Thus just as He sent them Moshe up to now, He would have sent them another leader. Instead of this, instead of annulling themselves before Heaven, they followed their own reasoning and concluded that Moshe was dead, and they went to find Aaron so he could make them a calf.

We may say that the root cause of this sin was a lack of self-annulment before the Creator of the universe. This is also why the Holy One, blessed be He, did not send Moshe to the Children of Israel before they sinned: It constituted a test to see if they were worthy of receiving the Torah, to see if they would keep their promise to do and hear.

This may also be why their ornaments were removed from them, the ones which they had received at the giving of the Torah, as the verse states: “*And now, remove your ornaments from yourself*” (*Shemot 33:5*). Rashi explains: “*And now – this is the punishment that you will immediately receive, that you remove your ornaments from yourselves*.” We also read, “*Remove your ornaments – these are the ornaments that were given to them when they said, ‘We shall do and we shall hear’*” (*Baal Zekenim MiBaalei HaTosafot*). Angels of destruction removed these ornaments from them when they worshiped the calf. Given that in making the calf, they proved that they had not annulled themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, it follows that they were no longer at the level of “*we shall do and we shall hear*,” something that can be easily understood.

Let us return to what we said at the outset. According to our explanation, and as we know, the mitzvah of the red heifer atones for the sin of the golden calf. It is not without reason that these two parshiot are read together most of the time: *Ki Tisa* on the one hand and *Parah* on the other. According to what we have said, we see that this deals with two things that have a connection to one another, namely sin and its atonement.

The mitzvah of the red heifer is a chuk, a decree that we cannot understand. As Rashi says on the expression, “*This is the chukat [decree] of the Torah*” (*Bamidbar* 19:2): “*Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, ‘What is this commandment? What is the reason for it?’ Therefore the Torah referred to it as a chuk, a statute. I have decreed it, and you are not permitted to question it.*” As we know, King Solomon himself was unable to discover the reason for this mitzvah, concerning which he stated: “*I thought I would be wise, but it is beyond me*” (*Kohelet* 7:23). This teaches us that we cannot understand the mitzvah of the red heifer. According to all that we have said, we realize why it can atone for the sin of the golden calf, a sin that involves a lack of self-annulment, a lack of unconditional adherence to G-d’s will. As for the mitzvah of the red heifer, we publicly demonstrate that we are doing His will even without understanding it, only because He desires it. We therefore demonstrate the required humility and atone for that sin. This constitutes “*let the child’s mother come and wipe away the filth*” (*Rashi on Bamidbar* 19:22), for this is how we atone for that terrible sin.

The Sanctuary Teaches us How “I Will Dwell Among Them”

This week’s parsha comprises numerous laws regarding the construction of the Mishkan [Sanctuary] and the Divine service that was to take place in it. We have already mentioned the Alsheich’s interpretation of the verse, “*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*” (*Shemot* 25:8), namely that it does not say, “*I will dwell in it*,” but rather “*I will dwell among them*,” meaning within each Jew. The source of this interpretation is found in the Zohar: “*The Sanctuary was fashioned like the body*” (*Zohar II:140b*). In other words, the spiritual makeup and tendencies of a Jew resemble the structure of the Sanctuary.

Now the layout of the Sanctuary, its appearance, form, and the way in which the Divine service was performed in it enabled the Shechinah to dwell there. Hence the study of this subject teaches how we ourselves must serve G-d. It shows us how we must act in order to purify ourselves, sanctify ourselves, and become worthy of Him dwelling among us.

This week’s parsha begins with the mitzvah given to the Children of Israel to donate a half-shekel for the census in the desert. This donation would also be used to make the adanim [sockets] of the Sanctuary, meaning its base and foundation. In regards to this donation, it is explicitly stated: “*The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than a half-shekel*” (*Shemot* 30:15). Thus each man gave exactly a half-shekel, not more or less. Why so? Da’at Zekenim explains, “*To prevent the rich from saying that his share in the Sanctuary was greater than that of his neighbor.*” Likewise the Torah commanded that a half-shekel be given, rather than one full shekel, in order to remove all feelings of pride and superiority from man. In this way, a person would always realize that he is but a half, that he is incomplete. Indeed, “*A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise*” (*Tehillim* 51:19). G-d asks only for sincerity, and He loves a person who is humble and contrite, not one who is arrogant.

The half-shekel also teaches us that an individual does not form a complete entity by himself, meaning that he can only attain completeness by connecting himself to others, and in this way to the community. A Jew only becomes complete when he is united to other members of his own people. This is the virtue that characterizes the Jewish people vis-à-vis others peoples.

These twin concepts – humility and unity – are codependent, for a conceited person cannot establish a true connection with anyone. In fact, a person who is proud will set himself up as judge and jury so as to always find ways to justify his own feelings of superiority. Under such conditions, how can he establish a connection to others, since he has no regard for anyone else?

Self-effacement and humility, as well as the unity that stems from these, are the virtues that allow the Sanctuary to endure. This is why the sockets that supported the Tent of Meeting were made from the half-shekel donations, which symbolized these virtues. Thus to maintain the Sanctuary that is found in every Jew, it is crucial to flee from pride, which is diametrically opposed of the Shechinah. In fact G-d says of the proud, “*I and he cannot both dwell in the world*” (*Sotah 5a*), whereas of a modest and humble person He says: “*I abide in exaltedness and holiness, but I am with the contrite and humble of spirit*” (*Isaiah 57:15*).

The unity and proper makeup of a group are also prerequisites for the presence of the Shechinah, since it can only reside among at least ten assembled men (a minyan). Likewise, it is only when Israel encamped “*like a single person, with a single heart*” that G-d could descend upon Mount Sinai.

Our parsha continues with the order to make a basin along with its pedestal, meant for the washing of the kohanim’s feet and hands before they carried out their service, enabling it to be performed in a state of purity and holiness. Now each Jew has the status of a kohen when he serves G-d and when he prays, for our role in this world is to fulfill the will of our Father as perfect servants, with all of our actions being geared towards that goal. This status requires us to constantly think and act with a high degree of holiness and purity. In fact we must always be worthy of serving the King of kings, and “*none may enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth*” (*Esther 4:2*).

The fact that this basin was fashioned from mirrors can also teach us numerous things. When a person sees his face reflected in a mirror, it can awaken in him the realization that there is “*an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book*” (*Pirkei Avot 2:1*). Thus one who reaches the level of, “*My eyes are always directed towards Hashem*” (*Tehillim 25:15*), will perceive this open book and the hand that records, and he will maintain his purity and keep himself far from every sin and dispute, thereby meriting the dwelling of the Shechinah within him.

Next comes the order to prepare the sacred anointing oil, and to anoint the Sanctuary and its vessels. Now oil symbolizes good deeds, as it is written: “*A good name is better than good oil*” (*Kohelet 7:1*). We also read in Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabba: “*Oil always represents good deeds. In fact, ‘Your oils are better than fragrance’ means: ‘Your*

deeds are better than fragrance. ’’ Everyone must seek to perfect his character traits and improve his deeds so they can surpass his wisdom. Likewise, a person must try to acquire a good reputation and be loved by G-d and appreciated by man. In this way, following the example of the oil that sanctifies the Sanctuary and its vessels, a person’s deeds can make him holy and allow the Shechinah to dwell within him.

The incense that burned upon the altar teaches us that the Children of Israel are responsible for one another, and the mutual responsibility that the tzaddikim have for the impious is even greater. We learn this from the *chelbenah* (galbanum), which was used as an ingredient in the incense despite its unpleasant odor. Our Sages have also deduced, “*A fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast. For behold, the odor of galbanum is unpleasant, and yet it was included among the spices for the incense*” (*Keritut 6b*). Rabbeinu Bechaye makes the following point on this subject: “*The incense comes to teach us that we must not ignore the impious and sinners by excluding them from our fasts and our prayers. Our Sages also say that every assembly which is devoid of sinners is not an assembly. In fact the Name of G-d is exalted and sanctified when the impious repent and join the ranks of the tzaddikim. When that fails to happen, the tzaddikim are held accountable due to the responsibility that every Jew has for his fellow Jew.*” Thus the responsibility that everyone has for bringing the impious closer to G-d enables His Name to be sanctified and glorified, magnifying His Kingdom in the world. This is precisely the meaning of making the Shechinah dwell on earth.

Charity Brings Blessings

It is written, “*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*).

At the beginning of Parsha Ki Tissa, G-d tells Moshe that everyone among the Children of Israel must give a half-shekel in order to be counted. This half-shekel was a type of “*atonement*” for people that protected them from all plagues. In this week’s parsha, Hashem also commands us to observe Shabbat, as it is written: “*You shall observe Shabbat, for it is holy to you. Its desecrators shall be put to death*” (*Shemot 31:14*). The text then recounts the sin of the Children of Israel with the golden calf: When Moshe did not descend from the mountain, and he was late in returning according to their reckoning, they quickly made a calf and appointed it as a god and leader.

We need to understand a few things. First, what is the connection between the mitzvah of giving the half-shekel and the sin of the golden calf? Likewise, what is the connection between the mitzvah of Shabbat and the other subjects mentioned in this week’s parsha? In reality, G-d juxtaposed the mitzvah of the half-shekel with the sin of the golden calf in order to teach the Children of Israel that every penny must be devoted to holiness and purity; they must be used for a mitzvah. However by wasting even

modest sums of money on futile and material pursuits, small expenses accumulate and we risk doing harm to ourselves and diminishing our fear of Heaven. That is precisely what happened to the Children of Israel when they made the golden calf.

We sometimes think that a simple coin is worthless, and that it's useless to give to charity. That's not so. By giving whatever small amounts we have to charity, we are strengthening our virtues and increasing our fear of G-d. Our Sages have already affirmed, "*Everything is according to the majority of deeds*" (*Pirkei Avot 3:15*), and the Rambam explains that it is better to give a small amount 100 times than to offer a large amount once. Why? Because the act of constantly and regularly giving, even if it consists of small amounts, accustoms us to giving and refines our character traits.

Unfortunately, we all know people who are prepared to invest millions of dollars in futile and useless endeavors, people who are only concerned with multiplying their material wealth. Yet when it comes to donating their money to charity and demonstrating generosity, they start weighing the value of each penny and can't seem to find a way to help those in need. We need to realize that material wealth and financial investments in futile endeavors can bring us down to the abyss, being considered as idol-worship. Conversely, even using a small amount of our money for charity educates us and refines our character. Hence this is the connection between the mitzvah of giving the half-shekel and the sin of the golden calf: The juxtaposition of these two concepts teaches us the painful consequences that await those who waste their money in vain and useless pursuits, even with small amounts.

Steps in Building Faith

The passage that describes the mitzvah of Shabbat was inserted between the passages of the half-shekel and the sin of the golden calf in order to teach us that whoever uses his money prudently and invests it solely in holy endeavors demonstrates that he is filled with a fear of G-d, which in turn will help him strictly observe and respect the laws of Shabbat. On the other hand, whoever uses his money to obtain useless and futile possessions will slowly lose what remains of his fear of Heaven, and will soon desecrate Shabbat openly. Respecting Shabbat is therefore a symbol of faith, a faith that is built step by step beginning with the simplest and most basic of attitudes. By making the right choice in where to invest our money, we demonstrate the fear of Heaven that infuses and encourages us to observe this sacred day, or conversely (*G-d forbid*) to profane it.

In regards to the mitzvah of giving the half-shekel, we read: "*The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from a half-shekel*" (*Shemot 30:15*). Thus it is not necessary to be very wealthy in order to make one's offering to the community or give money to someone in need. A small amount is also sufficient, for a person is motivated by his will alone, not his money. Indeed, "*Nothing can stand before [the power of one's] will*," and as our Sages have explained: "*'You shall certainly tithe [asser te'asser]' [Devarim 14:22] – tithe that you may become rich [tit'asher]*" (*Tanchuma, Re'eh 18*).

Vayakhel

The Tzaddik Brings an Abundance of Good to Every Jew

In Parsha Vayakhel we again read about all the offerings made by the Children of Israel for the Sanctuary and its implements. This should surprise us, for already in Parshiot Terumah and Tetzaveh we went through the entire subject of the construction of the Sanctuary and the Children of Israel's offerings. Therefore why does the Torah again begin, as it did earlier on, by describing the offerings of the Children of Israel and the making of the Sanctuary and its implements?

Furthermore, at the beginning of the parsha we find a short passage that doesn't seem to fit the subject of the Sanctuary. It deals instead with the observance of Shabbat: "*On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy to you, a Sabbath of complete rest to the L-RD*" (*Exodus 35:2*). What is a passage on the observance of Shabbat doing here?

Rashi cites the Sages in stating that although the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded us to build the Sanctuary and its implements, this passage teaches us that the work of the Sanctuary does not supercede the observance of Shabbat. Still, we need to understand how that makes this the right place to put such a message, not to mention the fact that what the Torah is describing here is the making of the Sanctuary and its implements, not the actual order to make them. Incidentally, this also needs to be explained, for the Torah could have shortened its account here by stating that Moses and the craftsmen did what they had been ordered to do. Why does the Torah need to lengthen its account of the subject?

By delving into these issues, we will see that an important moral lesson is found here. As we know, the Sanctuary and its implements allude to the body of man, as our holy books state. The Sanctuary itself represents man's body, and its implements represent his limbs. If we think about this further, we will realize that man's brain is represented by the Ark, which is the Sanctuary's main implement. What is the Ark? The preceding section, Parsha Ki Tisa, describes the sin of the golden calf, after which Moses broke the Tablets of the Covenant. Although Hashem later told him to prepare new tablets, the second ones, what was done with the fragments of the first ones? Here the Sages say, "*Both the whole tablets and the fragments of the tablets were placed in the Ark*" (*Berachot 8b*). This means that the fragments of the first tablets are also contained in the Ark. However we need to understand what these fragments symbolize.

The Midrash states, "*When the Children of Israel sinned, Moses took the Tablets of the Covenant. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to snatch them from him, but Moses succeeded in preventing this*" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 291*). When Moses saw the golden calf at the base of the mountain, however, he immediately broke these tablets

in the sight of all the people, as the Torah states (*Exodus 32:19*).

This requires an explanation. Why did Moses fight so much for Hashem not to take the tablets away from him, since he knew that the Children of Israel had made the calf and therefore no longer needed the Torah? Furthermore, if Moses already knew in Heaven that the Children of Israel had made the calf, since Hashem had told him, “*Go, descend, for your people...have become corrupt*” (*Exodus 32:7*), then why did he break the tablets only when he saw the calf? Why didn’t he break them when he was in Heaven?

In order for the Children of Israel to accept the yoke of the Torah and prevail over the evil inclination, which constantly enticed them to sin, the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to fill the heart of every Jew with faith in His Torah. He therefore inscribed the tablets with the Ten Commandments – including the entire Torah – all written by His hand. In this way every Jew would have the Torah in his heart, and he could therefore study it and overcome the evil inclination.

Yet when the Children of Israel sinned with the golden calf, they transgressed the commandment, “*You shall have no other gods before Me*,” which made it seem that they did not want the Torah. Hence Hashem decided to snatch the tablets from Moses and prevent him from giving it to them. What did Moses think at that point? If Hashem takes the Torah back, then even what He engraved upon the heart of every Jew – the desire to study Torah, to believe in it, and to work for it – will be taken from them. What will become of them then?

Moses therefore stubbornly clung to the tablets so Hashem would not take them back, as we read at the end of Parsha Vezot Haberacha: “*In all that mighty hand*” (*Deuteronomy 34:12*). This is because Moses succeeding in retaining the tablets. In the end, Hashem also agreed with him, and therefore Moses’ conduct in refusing to yield the Tablets of the Covenant was a way of arguing that the Children of Israel had already repented and wanted to keep the Torah. Moses was actually the Children of Israel’s agent, and the Sages have said, “*A man’s agent is as himself*” (*Kiddushin 41b*). Thus by Moses wanting the Torah, it was as if the Children of Israel wanted it as well.

This is what Hashem tells us: “*Remember the Torah of My servant Moses*” (*Malachi 3:22*) – remember the fact that he was stubborn for your sake, in order for you to return to Me and “*piece the fragments together*” to study Torah, for “*both the whole tablets and the fragments of the tablets were placed in the Ark*.” This is why the Torah carries the name of Moses, for what was engraved upon the heart of the Children of Israel has remained there for all the generations because of him.

That being the case, we fully understand why the observance of Shabbat is found at the beginning of Parsha Vayakhel. Concerning Shabbat the Sages have said: “*Let him make his entire Shabbat a day of Torah*.” We can also understand why the complete description of the Sanctuary and its implements is repeated here, namely for everyone to infuse the Torah deep within himself, especially on

Shabbat. Even if he has sinned, the fragments of the Torah are also in the Ark, teaching us that despite a person's sins, he can strengthen himself and return to Hashem, all by the power of the Torah that is within him. If he also studies Torah, the fragments will unite to form a single whole, enabling him to return to Hashem to the greatest degree possible.

Studying Torah on Shabbat Atones for the Sin of the Golden Calf

It is written, “*You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day. Moses spoke to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, saying: ‘... Take from yourselves an offering for the L-RD’*” (*Exodus 35:3-5*). The Sages have asked why a warning is given concerning the observance of Shabbat before the order is given to build the Sanctuary. They explain that this teaches us the 39 forbidden kinds of work on Shabbat, and the fact that building the Sanctuary does not take precedence over Shabbat (*Shabbat 97b; Mechilta; Rashi on Exodus 35:2*). We still have to understand why the mitzvah of Shabbat is mentioned between the description of the sin of the golden calf and the construction of the Sanctuary. Even if Moses wanted to teach us that the construction of the Sanctuary does not take precedence over Shabbat, he could have mentioned it elsewhere, or it could have been a Halachah transmitted to him on Sinai. It is not without reason that the Children of Israel received the order to build the Sanctuary immediately after the incident of the golden calf. Deep allusions are hidden in this. As we know, when the Children of Israel committed the sin of the golden calf, the Shechinah stopped dwelling among them. Then when Hashem forgave them, they needed to build the Sanctuary, a place of holiness, in order for the Shechinah to return among them (*see Shabbat 87b*). It is written, “*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them*” (*Exodus 25:8*) – “*among them*,” not “*in it*,” meaning among each of the Children of Israel.

Now we know that the Sanctuary and its vessels, the Ark of the Covenant, the Shulchan, the Holy of Holies, the Altar and the Tent of Meeting, allude to the human body. The Holy of Holies represents the heart, the vessels represent the limbs and sinews, and the Ark represents the brain, where the Torah and good thoughts reside. The fragments of the first Tablets represent bad middot, which a person can break by working on himself, whereas the second Tablets represent good middot. The Shulchan and the Showbread allude to the fact that a person must be like a set table, filled with Torah that is likened to hot bread – the heat of the Torah. The Altar alludes to the fact that a person must be as humble as the earth, ready to sacrifice himself for the Torah, as in the verse: “*When a man among you sacrifices*” (*Leviticus 1:2*). The Menorah and oil represent the body and soul, which together must be attached to the service of Hashem, to the point that the flame ascends on its own. Like the High Priest who ascends the steps to light the Menorah, a person must constantly be ascending. The Altar of incense embodies the concept of, “*Let my prayer be set forth before You like incense*” (*Psalms 141:2*), a reference to serving G-d with devotion. The High Priest who performs the

service in the Sanctuary alludes to the fact that a person must resemble a High Priest, for just as he serves in the Sanctuary in order for the world to endure, likewise a person must feel that the world was created for him alone (*Sanhedrin 37a*). Since the world belongs to him, he must have an influence on it through his prayers, and by his service of Hashem in holiness and purity.

That being said, our dilemma gets worse, for why did Moses not begin with the essential issue first, namely the construction of the Sanctuary so the Shechinah could rest upon it? He could have then spoken about the observance of Shabbat. Since the Torah chose to begin with the subject of Shabbat before mentioning the construction of the Sanctuary, there must certainly be good reasons for it, ones that we need to understand. We may explain by saying that a person only becomes a miniature sanctuary that evokes the Sanctuary and its vessels when he humbles himself before the Torah. He must humble himself to the point that the Torah's opinion supersedes his own instincts and desires. To reach that point, he must work hard on himself and fight the evil inclination, which constantly tries to make him sin and ultimately to defeat him. The way the evil inclination works is that each day it renews its strength and approaches a person, enticing him to sin to such an extent that he is chased from the world. In order for a person to emerge victorious in this battle, he must first be careful that his mind is free from all worries.

During the week, a person is completely occupied by his business and daily concerns. Even if he prays three times a day and sets aside time for studying Torah, his mind is still not free from all his problems, and it is difficult for him to defeat the evil inclination when his mind is occupied. He is like a man who is encumbered by metal chains that prevent him from fighting his opponent, an especially daunting task if his opponent is strong. He can also be compared to someone who cannot see without glasses, or even to someone whose hands are filled with all kinds of things. In these cases, something is disturbing the person in question and preventing him from defeating a powerful enemy. Even if he possesses an effective weapon, he is encumbered to such a point that he cannot concentrate on the battle at hand.

Hence during the week, it is very difficult for a person to free himself from his concerns in order to concentrate on fighting the evil inclination. It is only on Shabbat, when it is forbidden to work, or even to think about work or make plans, that the mind is free to pursue spiritual objectives. Commenting on the verse, “*You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day*” (*Exodus 35:3*), the Baal HaTurim wrote: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*My fire [i.e., Gehinnom] stops for you on Shabbat; your fire must also stop.*” This means that even if a person is great in Torah, due to his mundane occupations during the week, his head is not free to occupy itself with holiness despite his desire to do so, especially since the sanctity of the week cannot be compared to that of Shabbat. As for Shabbat, a holy day when the mind is free from all problems and worries of the week, if a person sits down to study Torah, he receives new strength that he can use to fight the evil inclination. It is only by the study of Torah

on Shabbat, done with a tranquil mind that is free of the worries of this world, that a person can confront the temptations of the evil inclination and overcome his instincts and material desires. Yet as we know, the Sages have said: “*He who made an effort on the eve of Shabbat will eat on Sabbath*” (*Avodah Zarah 3a*). A great deal of preparation during the entire week is needed so that on Shabbat we can effectively receive this extra strength. Then, even after Shabbat, a person will have strength remaining for the coming week. In fact the Sages have said that all the days of the week are blessed through Shabbat (*Zohar I:75b; II:63b*), and therefore a person can free his mind from his concerns and the vanities of this world.

It is only when a person prepares himself and puts an effort as early as the eve of Shabbat that he can satisfy himself with Torah on Shabbat, to the point that Shabbat truly becomes part of his persona and he can become a miniature Sanctuary. This not only means that he has an additional soul on Shabbat, but that the Shechinah actually rests on him, as the verse says: “*That I may dwell among them.*”

To Whom Does Hashem Give Wisdom?

It is written, “*From Moses’ presence they took the entire offering that the Children of Israel had brought for the work for the labor of the sanctuary, to do it. But they continued to bring him free offerings every morning*” (*Exodus 36:3*).

This verse states that the Children of Israel brought their offerings for the Sanctuary every day, not because they could not bring it all at once, but because each day they grew in holiness. Because the entire offering of the previous day seemed insignificant to them, they brought new things to Moses every day, and they had to be stopped.

In truth the Sages have said, “*The words of the Torah should not seem in your eyes like an ancient order of the king, which a man does not appreciate, but like something new towards which everyone runs*” (*Sifrei, Va’etchanan 6:8*). This is why everyone must view their service of the previous day as being far from sufficient. If a person cannot renew his service of Hashem every day, he is liable to fall into the trap of performing mitzvot and studying Torah out of habit, meaning that they will not seem new in his eyes.

Always New

Why does the above verse mention the morning only? We may explain this according to the words of the Arizal (*Shaar HaKavanot, Drushei Birkat HaShachar*), for whom the expression, “*Who renews each day the work of Creation*” demonstrates that the Holy One, blessed be He, renews the strength of man every morning. Thus it is written, “*They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*” (*Lamentations 3:23*). Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, renews Creation every morning for man, a person must renew his strength in order to serve Hashem so that his service of today is unlike his service of yesterday. Hence the Children of Israel renewed their strength every morning, just as G-d renewed their strength every morning, so that their service of

yesterday would seem insignificant to them.

Whoever Adds, More is Added to Him

The Baal Shem Tov Zatzal told his disciples, “*Why do the talmidei chachamim not succeed in their learning? It is because they do not pay attention, as soon as they get up in the morning, to their duty of serving G-d throughout the day*” (see the testament of the *Rivash* 2:20). In fact a person’s mind is free in the morning, and if he reflects upon the fact that he is getting up to serve G-d, his service will bear fruit. This is why the Children of Israel brought more offerings every morning, for their service of the day before seemed like nothing to them. It was as if they had done nothing, and so every morning they put an effort into renewing their service of that day.

Each day a person must add to his service of G-d, renewing his strength by adding to his service of the previous day. The Sages have promised, “*He who increases will have his life prolonged*” (*Taanith* 31a). Yet for a person who does not add anything – a person who is content with saying, “*It’s enough that I served my Creator yesterday, so why should I add even more today?*” – the Holy One, blessed be He, will not renew his strength. In the Gemara we learn, “*See how the character of the Holy One, blessed be He, differs from that of flesh and blood. A mortal can put something into an empty vessel, but not into a full one. However the Holy One, blessed be He, is not so. He puts more into a full vessel, but not into an empty one, for it says: ‘If hearkening you will hearken’ [Exodus 15:26]. This implies: If you hearken [once], you will go on hearkening; if not, you will not hearken. Another explanation: If you hearken to the old, you will hearken to the new. Yet if your heart turns away, you will no longer hearken*” (*Berachot* 40a).

Good Refers Only to Torah

We learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, only adds to a person who has added to himself. Thus we read, “*The Holy One, blessed be He, gives wisdom only to one who already has wisdom*” (*Berachot* 55a). When a person adds, the Holy One, blessed be He, adds as well, and if a person’s heart is filled with wisdom and cannot receive any more, what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He enlarges that person’s heart in order for him to receive even more wisdom, as King David said: “*I will walk in broad pathways*” (*Psalms* 119:45). Our Sages have taught, “*Whoever occupies himself with the [study of] Torah for its own sake merits many things...he becomes like a fountain flowing with ever-increasing strength and like a never-ceasing stream*” (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:1). There is no greater love of Heaven in Torah study than to constantly add to one’s service of the previous day. As the Sages say, “*Anyone who occupies himself with the study of Torah becomes elevated*” (*ibid.* 6:2).

Even King David said, “*Taste and see that the L-RD is good*” (*Psalms* 34:9). Now good refers only to Torah (*Berachot* 5a), and the Torah’s words are flavorful. That is, just as a person tastes something good and wants more of it, so too for words of Torah. Just as he tastes and learns them, his soul yearns for Torah even more.

Elsewhere King David compares the study of Torah to a meal, saying: “*Your Torah is in my innards*” (*Psalms 40:9*). Just as a person’s innards – as long as he fills them with food and drink – grow larger and want more, the same applies to words of Torah. As long as a person tastes and enjoys them, he wants more, until the Holy One, blessed be He, increases his ability to receive them. In this way he can gather even more words of Torah, becoming like a vessel that is filled to the point of no longer having any place to receive things. The Holy One, blessed be He, then enlarges the heart of man and his ability to absorb the Torah’s words.

The Parts of Man Correspond to the Sanctuary

It is written, “*Moshe assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them: ‘These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them’*” (*Shemot 35:1*). We need to understand why Moshe assembled all of them here, rather than in another place.

The Ramban explains this as follows: “*Thus Moshe, after having commanded Aaron and the leaders and all the Children of Israel – the men – all that Hashem had spoken to him on Mount Sinai, following the breaking of the Tablets and after he had put the veil on his face, again commanded that the people be assembled, whereupon the whole congregation gathered to him – men, women, and children. It is possible that this occurred on the day following his descent from the mountain, and he told all of them the subject of the Sanctuary which he had previously commanded, before the breaking of the Tablets. For since the Holy One, blessed be He, became reconciled with them and gave Moshe the second Tablets, and also made a covenant that G-d would go in their midst, He thereby returned to His previous relationship with them and to the love of their nuptials, and it was obvious that the Shechinah would be in their midst... even as He said: ‘They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them’ [Shemot 25:8]. Hence Moshe now commanded them all that he had been told at first.*”

We therefore see that Moshe gathered all Israel only to tell them that the Shechinah would return to dwell among them. This is why he once again told them everything concerning the construction of the Sanctuary in every detail, for someone who relates something good to others usually goes into great detail by explaining just how good it is.

Even Hashem rejoiced over it, devoting four parshiot in His holy Torah (*Terumah, Tetzaveh, Vayakhel, and Pekudei*) solely to the Sanctuary, relating even the smallest detail of its construction two and three times over. The first time was when Moshe received the orders corresponding to it, the second time was when he spoke to the Children of Israel, and the third time was when the Children of Israel built the Sanctuary. Why so many times? It was in order to show the Children of Israel Hashem’s great love for them, the fact that He forgave them for the sin of the golden calf, and that He assured them that the Shechinah would return to dwell among them. Hashem wanted to show

them that this was the goal of Creation, namely that He should have a dwelling place here below. In the Midrash our Sages say, “*When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the World, He wanted to have a dwelling place in the world below, as much as in the world above*” (*Tanchuma, Nasso* 16).

In any case, although Moshe brought the Shechinah back to earth again, the first time it dwelled on earth was not like the second time. The first time, Hashem’s dwelling below was similar to His dwelling above, and His glory filled the entire earth; it was not located in a single place. The second time, since the Children of Israel had sinned by making the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “*On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them*” (*Shemot* 32:34). Hence they lost their crown, and the Shechinah dwelled only in the Sanctuary. How can we say that initially G-d wanted to make the Shechinah dwell among the Children of Israel themselves, and not just in the Sanctuary? It is from what is written at the beginning, “*They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*,” for it is not written “*in it*,” but “*among them*.” When G-d ordered Moshe that the Children of Israel should make a Sanctuary, He wanted to reside within each of them, not just in the Sanctuary. Hence it states “*among them*,” for they had not yet sinned. Once they had sinned, it is written: “*The Children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horev*” (*Shemot* 33:6), and in the Aggadah we read: “*When the Children of Israel joyfully accepted the kingdom of Heaven and said, ‘All that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear’* [Shemot 24:7], the Holy One, blessed be He, immediately told Moshe: ‘*Speak to the Children of Israel, and let them take an offering for Me*’ [*Shemot* 25:2]” (*Tanna D’vei Eliyahu*).

This is why Moshe gathered all Israel here, rather than in another place, since the parsha of the Sanctuary had only been given to the Children of Israel so they could learn to sanctify themselves and become a miniature Temple worthy of the Shechinah. He therefore gathered them all, for the Sages have said that one who hears admonishments from the teacher is not like one who hears them from the student. If the Children of Israel could have heard the entire Torah and all the mitzvot from someone else – even though they did not hear everything from Moshe himself – he had to gather everyone so they could hear these words of admonishment from the mouth of the teacher, not from the mouth of the student (*see the sermons of the Chatam Sofer*).

Though the Righteous One May Fall...

In the Aggadah we read, “*To all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in man, He created a parallel on the earth*” (*Kohelet Rabba* 1:9). We may say that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the brain of man, where his soul resides, in parallel to the Sanctuary and Temple on earth, where the Shechinah resides, for our Sages have compared the soul to the Shechinah (*Berachot* 10a), and man’s soul is a Divine spark. He created man’s heart to correspond to the Holy Ark, where the Tablets and Torah were placed, for the Sages speak about a discerning heart (*Berachot* 61b). Since different parts have been created in man, this teaches us that the Sanctuary is similar to man: Just

as the Sanctuary could be taken down and reassembled at each stage, and just as the Children of Israel journeyed at each stage, likewise man must journey in this world and look at what has been created in the world that corresponds to his brain and heart, which is the Sanctuary, and each day he must spiritually grow. Although he sometimes fails and does not overcome trials, he must still strengthen himself in the service of Hashem, for “*a man does not fully understand the Torah’s words until he has stumbled over them*” (*Gittin 43a*). As King Solomon said, “*Though the righteous one may fall seven times, he will arise*” (*Mishlei 24:15*). This is like the Sanctuary, which was constantly being taken down and put back up.

The Torah speaks at length about every detail of the Sanctuary because these parshiot were given only in comparison to man, who is like the Sanctuary, so he can learn from them. The Torah did not write anything about the Temple, for it is the Sanctuary that is similar to man. When a person sanctifies himself in this world, he becomes like the Sanctuary and the Shechinah dwells in him.

Between Man and G-d

It is written, “*The work was enough for all the work, to do it, and more*” (*Shemot 36:7*).

This verse requires an explanation. First, we need to understand why the term “*the work*” is mentioned twice. It would have been sufficient to state, “*The work was enough to do it, and more*.” Here Rashi explains, “*The [work] of bringing was enough for the workers of the Sanctuary. For all the work of the Sanctuary – to make it and to have some left over:*” In other words, there were two works: The work of bringing and the work of building. What had been brought was enough and more for the work of building. Yet if this was the intention of the verse, why does it mention “*the work*” twice, but does not distinguish between the two types of work: The work of bringing and the work of building? We also need to explain the meaning of “*enough for all the work, to do it, and more*,” since it would have been sufficient to say “*enough for all the work, and more*.”

Without a doubt, this is what the Ohr HaChaim meant when he objected by stating: “*What is the meaning of ‘enough...and more’? If there was enough, there was not more! And if there was more, then it is clear that there was enough!*” We may consult his writings on this verse.

The Ben Ish Hai gives a marvelous explanation for this verse, one that deals with all the construction work related to the Sanctuary. He writes, “*Betzalel and his associates, who made the vessels of the Sanctuary and performed physical work, performed another kind of work at the same time, namely spiritual work. Through the kavanot and yichudim which accompanied their every physical action in accordance with its supernal root, they brought down a sanctified light upon these physical vessels. It is like a person who fashions bronze vessels and then covers them with pure gold, thereby adding considerable value to them. Hence they elevated the vessels by adding to them, separating them from*

the category of the physical and connecting them to eternity through the holy light which they brought down by means of their kavanot and yichudim.”

In this regard the Sages said, “*Betzalel knew how to combine the letters by which the heavens and earth were created*” (*Berachot 55a*). By the power of their concentration, they united something physical (part of the earth) with spiritual light (part of the heavens). In this regard, it is said that the work of the Sanctuary was spiritual work accomplished by means of kavanot and yichudim that brought down spiritual light from above. It was that which was enough for all the physical work, “*to do it*,” to have all that was needed and wanted for everything related to the physical. As a result, there was “*and more*” – more and greater than the physical work – for it was connected to spiritual work, and what was accomplished was eternal. This would not have been the case without the spiritual work, for the physical work would have been vacuous, just like all physical work, which is subject to destruction and loss, and which is not eternal. Hence the Sages said that the hand of the enemy could not touch the vessels of the Sanctuary, which were hidden (*Yoma 72a*). We will see them again in the future, when the Third Temple will be built, speedily and in our days, for they have acquired eternity due to the spiritual work in question.

This means that the work of the Sanctuary was twofold: Physical and spiritual. The physical work consisted of making the vessels, and the spiritual work consisted of infusing them with the holiness they were to contain in order to make them into vessels for the service of the Sanctuary. This is the meaning of, “*The work was enough for all the work, to do it, and more.*” It is also the meaning of the doublet “*for all the work... and more*” – doing the work was physical, and what remained was spiritual.

In reflecting upon this, we see that the objective in building the Sanctuary and its importance did not reside in gold or copper, which have no inherent value. Rather, the objective was achieved by means of the necessary kavanot. Therein lay the power of Betzalel and the wise-hearted men who were with him, namely to possess the necessary intentions and thereby raise the physical to its goal. In reality, we have also been given the power to “*think thoughts*” – to transform the physical so as to make it achieve its spiritual goal. When a person cuts a piece of bread, he recites a blessing with concentration and begins to eat. When he drinks something, he recites a blessing with concentration and begins to drink. At that point, these physical objects have attained their goal, which is to participate in the glory of G-d. If a person uses the light generated by electricity to study Torah, he instantly transforms physical light into something spiritual. Let us cite another example: We know what was written by the Rama of Pano, namely that someone who neglects the study of Torah will eventually be reincarnated as a fish. In fact it is written, “*He expired and was gathered to his people*” (*Bereshith 49:33*), and concerning fish it is written: “*Shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them*” (*Bamidbar 11:22*). On Shabbat, all these incarnations achieve their *tikkun* (spiritual rectification). Therefore someone who eats fish, a physical thing that is part of the Shabbat meal, in honor of the holy Sabbath, effects a *tikkun* for that fish,

which at its root is a spiritual incarnation. This truly constitutes, “*The secret of Hashem is with those who fear Him*” (*Tehillim 25:14*).

This consists of the extraordinary wisdom and power that were given to Betzalel and Oholia in order to build the Sanctuary, and which were also given to each of us to build our own spiritual sanctuary, our own inner selves. Silver, gold, and copper, everything that surrounds a person, are but intermediary materials which, in an instant, a person can transform into something spiritual and help him build his sanctuary. For that, he does not need greater kavanot or yichudim, but rather a single, simple thought: That it should be for the sake of Heaven, for the sake of the mitzvah and in honor of G-d!

You cannot argue that such is not the case, for we find this idea alluded to in our parshiot. We are well-aware of what our Sages have said, namely that the Sanctuary and its vessels allude to man and his body. The vessels of the Sanctuary represent the bodily members of man, and the very fact that the Shechinah resides in the Sanctuary represents “*I will dwell among them*” – within the heart of each Jew. As the Alscheich notes, “*It does not say ‘in it,’ but ‘among them’ – among each of them.*” This idea also appears in the book Nefesh HaChaim: “*This is why a man who is among the holy people – including everything concerning Creation and the Chariot, the sum total of all that exists – is also an example of the Sanctuary, the Temple, and all the vessels, for this is all that connects his members together and all his potential.*” We therefore see that everything that was said of the Sanctuary is also said of man. Man acts through his five senses. His nature draws him towards the physical, for he was created from the earth. Hence he loves good food and a fragrant odor pleases him. Yet because he finds himself in this world, in a role that essentially consists of making the Shechinah reside in the world, physical pleasures related to his natural senses are opposed to his ultimate goal, just as gold in and of itself is simply metal, a physical object. It only achieves its goal through the kavanot, transforming itself into the cornerstone for building the inner Sanctuary.

We must eat with the goal of sustaining the body so as to serve the Creator. In that case, not only is it permitted to rejoice, it is even a mitzvah – just as long as we observe it to the right degree, for eating in this way sanctifies man and spiritually elevates him. The same applies to every action that man takes, for he can sanctify everything physical, transforming it into a mitzvah.

For one who reflects upon this, these things become like water to a parched soul. Think of how many great and important mitzvot we have an opportunity to do, and yet we pay no attention to them. If we simply consider the meals that we eat each day, the blessings that we recite before and after them, every meal will resemble the offering of a sacrifice! Each time that we drink something to satisfy our thirst, it is like a water libation! Each time that we give tzeddakah, or we do an act of chesed for someone, each word of Torah that we learn, of prayer that we say, of tehillim that we recite, its value is incalculable! May we all merit the construction of the Temple, speedily and

in our days, the general and individual Temple, and may "*I will dwell among them*" be

fulfilled in us!

Parsha Pekudei

Batei Midrashim as a Refuge Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, “*These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony*” (*Shemot* 38:21). Our Sages explain that the Sanctuary was a testimony for Israel that Hashem had forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. Moreover, the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 2) explains that until the sin of the golden calf, G-d dwelled among the Children of Israel. After the sin, however, His anger prevented Him from dwelling among them. The nations would then say that He was no longer returning to His people, and therefore to show the nations that this would not be the case, He told the Children of Israel: “*Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them*” (*Shemot* 25:8). In this way everyone would see that Hashem had forgiven Israel.

I have several questions concerning this incident. First of all, G-d told Moshe: “*Let them make Me a Sanctuary*” well before the sin of the golden calf. So how could it be that He ordered the building of a Sanctuary in order to forgive a sin that had not yet been committed? Secondly, the Sages (see *Rabbeinu Ephraim*) explain this verse to mean that Hashem would dwell “*among them*” – not in it – which is to say that G-d would reside within every Jew. Yet since G-d would reside among the Children of Israel, why was it necessary to build a Sanctuary?

The Sages have also taught, “*When He said to him, ‘Let them make Me a Sanctuary,’ Moshe replied: ‘Sovereign of the universe, heaven and all the heavens together are not enough to contain You. Yet You want us to build You a Sanctuary to dwell in?’ Hashem replied, ‘It will not be as you think. There will be twenty beams on the north, twenty beams on the south, eight on the west, and I will descend and dwell among you’*” (*Pesikta D’Rav Kahana* 2:10). This conversation is surprising, for Hashem’s answer does not correspond to Moshe’s question!

One Cannot Go Without the Other

We have often taught that a person must always study Torah and pray in a Beit HaMidrash, and that such study cannot be compared to that of a person who studies by himself at home. Thus our Sages have said, “*Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was an elder and a member of the yeshiva, as it is said: ‘Abraham was an elder; advanced in age’*” [*Bereshith* 24:1]. *Our father Isaac was an elder and a member of the yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was an elder and a member of the yeshiva*” (*Yoma* 28b).

The question arises: Were our Patriarchs unable to study anywhere, such that they had to carry their Batei Midrashim with them? From here, however, we learn that a man must study in a Beit HaMidrash. Likewise Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai asked

Vespasian for only one thing during the siege of Jerusalem: The city of Yavneh and its Sages. He did not just ask for the safety of the Sages, but also for the city itself, since Batei Midrashim were there and they were essential for assuring the continuity of the Torah among the Jewish people. Yavneh was indispensable because of its Batei Midrashim, and the Sages were also indispensable for what they represented. One cannot go without the other. It is a general principle that we can only study Torah in a Beit HaMidrash, for that is where the evil inclination leaves a person, and that is where he can overcome it. Thus it is said, “*If that wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit HaMidrash*” (*Sukkah 52b*).

Moreover, what a person studies will only stay with him if he studies in a Beit HaMidrash, as it is written: “*A covenant has been sealed concerning what we learn in the Beit HaMidrash, such that it will not be quickly forgotten*” (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 5:1*). I have often seen men enter a place of study without the intention of learning, but simply to look at what was happening there. Yet they eventually take a book in hand and sit down among the students. This can only be due to the sound of the Torah and its power, a sound that emerges from Batei Midrashim and conquers their evil inclination, lighting a spark in the heart of man so he begins to study.

Furthermore, the Jewish people can only defeat their enemies when their voice is heard in houses of prayer and Batei Midrashim. On the verse, “*The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau*” (*Bereshith 27:22*), our Sages have taught: “*When the voice of Jacob rings out in synagogues, Esau has no hands [i.e., he is rendered powerless]*” (*Bereshith Rabba 65:20*). Otherwise there are “*the hands of Esau*.”

Thus Hashem said to Moshe, “*Since the Children of Israel received the Torah and rid themselves of their impurity on Mount Sinai [Shabbat 146a], I will dwell among them, among each of them. Yet even if I dwell among them, please build a Sanctuary for Me that will serve as a Beit HaMidrash for the people, so they can study there and distance themselves from the evil inclination. When you said that the heavens cannot contain My glory, I did not tell you to build a dwelling place for Me, but rather a Sanctuary where the people can go to distance themselves from the evil inclination. The only place where the evil inclination leaves a person is the Beit HaMidrash, the place where the Shechinah dwells.*”

The Sanctuary Testifies About Them

Since the Children of Israel would enter the Sanctuary and thereby distance the evil inclination from themselves, they would immediately merit for Hashem to dwell among them, within each of them.

Since Hashem asked the Children of Israel to frequent Batei Midrashim in order to distance themselves from their evil inclination before the sin of the golden calf, how much more did this apply after the sin of the golden calf! The evil inclination was present in force at that point, and it was essential for them to build a Sanctuary in order to distance themselves from it. It was also built in order for them to enter it and study

there at all times, thus perpetuating the Torah within them and meriting the Shechinah among them.

As soon as the Sanctuary was built, the entire world realized that G-d once again dwelled among the Jewish people. It also proved that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven. The Sanctuary was therefore built so the Children of Israel could go there, drive away their evil inclination that had returned after the sin of the golden calf, and return to G-d. The situation can be compared to a father whose son joined a band of thieves. The son eventually became like them, standing by the roadside waiting to attack travelers. When word of this reached the father, he threw his son out of his house. At one point the son asked his father for forgiveness, but nobody knew if he would agree. Yet when the father built a house for his son and made certain to protect it against thieves, everyone realized that he had accepted his son's repentance and would love him as before.

Evoking the Destruction at the Inauguration of the Sanctuary

It is written, “*These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony, which were counted at Moshe’s command. The labor of the Levites was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aaron the kohen*” (*Shemot* 38:21).

At first glance, we may ask why the Torah found it necessary to mention the term “*Sanctuary*” twice in the same verse. Rashi views this repetition as an allusion to the two Temples that would be destroyed over the course of the generations, for the Jewish people did not strive to respect the laws and precepts they had received during their journeys in the desert and at the giving of the Torah. Since the Children of Israel scorned His mitzvot, Hashem poured out His anger upon wood and stone by destroying both Temples. Nevertheless, the Rebbe of Sanz asks why it was precisely at this exalted time, as Israel was inaugurating the Sanctuary and was at the pinnacle of joy, that the Torah evoked the destruction of both Temples, thus diminishing the joy of the people. Indeed, this message could have been transmitted to the Children of Israel at a more appropriate time! Why announce the future destruction of two Temples and mar the joy of the people while they were immersed in such intense rejoicing? To answer this question, let us first underline that the term *Mishkan* (“*Sanctuary*”) is formed by the same letters as *nimshach* (“*continuity*”). This teaches us that it is incumbent on every Jew to ensure that the Torah is maintained for three generations, and to adhere to the traditions of his fathers. Each of us is similar to the Sanctuary, for just as G-d made His Presence dwell in it, likewise He resides in each Jew who adopts the appropriate lifestyle and who honors Torah and mitzvot. Since the Shechinah [Divine Presence] is found within each Jew, he must feel responsible and perpetuate the traditions of his fathers by fulfilling mitzvot. When men scorn the commandments of Hashem and abandon the path of their fathers, the Shechinah leaves them as well as the Temple, thus precipitating its destruction.

Hashem wanted to convey this to the Children of Israel precisely during the inauguration of the Sanctuary, so that they would not grow proud as a result of their exaltation. On the contrary, evoking the destruction of both Temples – a truly painful thought – would encourage them to apply G-d's precepts with even greater intensity and to perpetuate the traditions of their fathers, who devoted their entire lives to the fulfillment of Hashem's word.

The same applies to a groom who evokes the memory of the Temple's destruction as he is standing beneath the chuppah, at the pinnacle of joy, ready to establish his home. This reminder teaches the young couple that if they want to build an exceptional home that is solidly founded for many years to come on the basis of love, mutual understanding, peace, and respect, then they must establish it according to the ways of the holy Torah. If not, their home is destined for destruction, G-d forbid, just as both Temples were destroyed because the Jewish people did not continue to observe the Torah for three generations, but turned away from G-d's commandments. Once as I was staying in Lyon, France, a woman came to tell me that her mother had not had any children for numerous years. In her distress, she had gone to see the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto and asked him for a blessing to have a child. To her great astonishment, the Rav asked her for a specific amount of money, multiplied threefold, so that his blessing would be fulfilled by the merit of the mitzvah of tzedakah. When the woman asked him about the threefold amount, he said that he wanted to include the woman's daughter and granddaughter in the blessing that he would give to her. Complying with the tzaddik's request, this woman gave him the stipulated amount. Thank G-d, she merited having a child not long afterwards. A few years later, all the newspaper headlines announced that a plane traveling from Lyon to Strasbourg had crashed, leaving but one survivor. It was a great miracle, for this survivor, a certain Mrs. Levy, was the woman who had come to see me along with her mother, who was telling me this story. She admitted that she now understands why the tzaddik had asked for the threefold amount. This money was destined to ensure her survival, as well as that of her daughter and the granddaughter she would have. In fact what benefit could there be in having a child, if that child were to die a generation later? Hence the tzaddik asked for the redemption price of all three generations.

I had the shivers when I heard this story. I also had a greater understanding of the tzaddikim's greatness and the extent of their vision. It's astounding how they can "see" what is going to happen and act accordingly. Along the same lines, the following story is told about Rabbi Akiva Eiger: He once met with a man who for years refused to give his wife a get [divorce], and she was forced to endure painful hardships over a long period of time. The Rav told this man that a woman can be released from a marriage in any one of two ways: By a get, or by her husband's death. The man in question, still refusing to give his wife a get, ridiculed the Rav's words and displayed enormous disrespect. Not long afterwards, the man suddenly died.

Reading these two stories strengthens our faith in the Sages. However this effect cannot remain in the abstract, for we must concretize this faith. Each of us must draw a lesson from these stories and demonstrate great respect for the words of the verse: “*You shall be careful to do according to all that they shall teach you*” (*Devarim 17:10*). That is, even if a rabbi tells you something that seems a little surprising at first, what he says must be followed without question. This is because the great men of the generation, on account of their deep insight, are the only ones who can anticipate what will happen in the future.

