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maskil Le'David

Observing Chukim Leads to Absolute Faith in Hashem

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 8b) tells us, "Mitzvah messengers are not harmed." However, we sometimes do find that a person passes away whilst occupied with a mitzvah; for example, he may be killed in a road accident on his way to helping a Jew. There are also people who honor their parents with tremendous *mesirut nefesh*, yet they die at a young age, despite the Torah promising (*Shemot* 20:12), "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened."

Many years ago, the holy Rabbi Rafael Pinto zt"l was murdered in Morocco by Arab rioters. His tragic death left everyone in great shock. He was famous for his exceptional righteousness and profundity in Torah, remaining secluded in his home without leaving for any reason. In addition, Rabbi Rafael was known as someone who had connections amongst the Arabs and often treated them charitably, even supporting them when necessary.

Similarly, the entire history of the Jewish people is replete with difficult circumstances where great *tzaddikim* suffered through terrible hardships. During the empire of the wicked Greeks, Chana's seven sons, from oldest to youngest, were killed in front of her eyes, after which she threw herself off the roof. The Gemara also tells us that all of Rabbi Yochanan's sons died during his lifetime (*Berachot* 5b, Rashi). Over the course of time, and during the terrible Holocaust, European communities suffered indescribable atrocities. The wife and children of the Satmar Rebbe were killed, among millions of others.

This harsh reality can undermine our faith and, G-d forbid, even lead to denying Hashem's existence. In order for Am Yisrael to remain faithful to Hashem despite all the challenges and troubles which the human mind cannot grasp, Hashem commanded us to observe *chukim* – decrees – which we do not understand. We accustom ourselves to fulfilling mitzvot which are beyond our comprehension, and

thereby attain absolute faith in Hashem – despite the many questions that may crop up from time to time as a result of various difficult events.

This week's *parshah* cites the verse (*Bamidbar* 19:14), "... a man who would die in a tent." What is the connection between the opening verse of the *parshah*, "This is the decree of the Torah," to the later verse, "... a man who would die in a tent?" Man must know that he receives the strength to cope with all the hardships that befall his "tent" – his home – even in the most difficult of circumstances, when death and bereavement enter his personal abode, by observing the *chukim*. When a person educates himself not to ask questions and fulfils *chukim* that he does not comprehend, only because it is Hashem's Will, from this he draws the strength to cope with his troubles without casting doubt on Hashem's providential justice.

Parshat Beha'lotcha tells us (10:35), "When the Ark would journey, Moshe would say, 'Arise, Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered, let those who hate You flee from before You.'" Rashi explains, "Since the Ark would travel ahead a distance of three days' journey, Moshe would say, 'Stand in place and wait for us and do not go further.'" Let us try to picture this awesome sight! Bnei Yisrael walked in the Wilderness with the pillar of cloud leading the way and straightening the path, while at night the pillar of fire went ahead of them to light up the darkness. Furthermore, Am Yisrael were nourished by the manna and their thirst was quenched from Miriam's well which accompanied them on their journey through the Wilderness.

The Ark went before Am Yisrael and showed them the way, but Moshe Rabbeinu called to it, "Arise, Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered..." Moshe was asking the Ark to wait for Am Yisrael and not advance more than a distance of three days' travel so that Bnei Yisrael would feel safe and protected by the Ark's presence. Were it to go any further ahead, Bnei Yisrael would no longer feel its presence and may feel vulnerable.

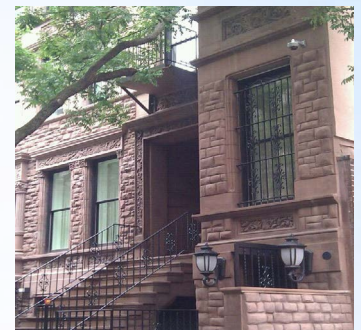
Furthermore, the Ark was the symbol of Torah since it contained the Luchot. Similarly, every Jewish person possesses a spark from Moshe Rabbeinu's soul, therefore he calls out to Hashem saying, "Do not distance Yourself from me too much. I need to feel Your closeness." Hashem, on His part, turns to man and says, "I remain in My place. If you feel lost and distant, it means *you* are the one who has distanced himself from Me."

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12 Tamuz 5786
27 June 2026

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Chukat Balak



Hilula

12 Tamuz
Rabbeinu Yaakov,
the Ba'al HaTurim

13 Tamuz
Rabbi Elchanan
Wasserman Hy"d,
author of *Kovetz Se'orim*

14 Tamuz
Rabbi Ya'akov Melul,
Av Beit Din of Vezean

15 Tamuz
Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar
zy"ta, the *Ohr Hachaim*
Hakadosh

16 Tamuz
Rabbi Emanuel Mishali

17 Tamuz
Rabbi Shimon Bitton, Av
Beit Din Marseille, France

18 Tamuz
Rabbi Yosef Kapach





WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v' Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

Using our Imagination to Strengthen our Faith

With regards to Pesach we are told (*Pesachim* 116b), “One is obligated to regard himself as though he himself has actually left Egypt.” The purpose of this is to awaken the power of man’s imagination in a positive, practical, beneficial way, leading to absolute faith in the Creator. The more a Jew delves into the story of the Exodus and imagines that he and his family endured the enslavement and then merited being redeemed with wondrous miracles, the more he intensifies his faith and connection with Hashem.

This is a blessed form of imagination that brings benefit and blessing to man. I read that even the Chafetz Chaim would use this technique; he used his imagination to visualize the Ten Plagues Hashem brought on the Egyptians, so as to strengthen his faith in Hashem.

In this vein one can add that the Ashkenazim suffered the atrocities of the Holocaust while the Sephardic Jews were mostly not under the threat of the Nazis. Reading and hearing stories about the Holocaust makes me want to really feel the terrible pain that the European Jews endured, and thereby partake in their suffering.

Perhaps because my family and I are of Sephardic descent and we were far from the atrocities of the German oppressors, I always found this hard to achieve.

One day I came across an album of Holocaust pictures depicting over one hundred horrific photographs from that accursed period in our history. One picture shows a Jewish mother holding her young baby in her arms; behind her stands a brutal Nazi pointing a gun to her head. The next picture shows the mother lying lifeless with the wicked soldier standing beside her, murdering the baby.

From the day I saw those pictures, I began to feel a much more intense pain for what the European Jews went through at that time. The horrific pictures helped me perceive and feel the pain throughout my 248 limbs and 365 sinews. And so, every time I wish to feel the pain of those who lost their lives in the Holocaust, I look at these difficult scenes which awaken my imagination and lend me the ability to once again feel that dark and terrible period.

cont. from p. 1 >>>

How can man feel constant closeness to Hashem? Through cleaving to the Torah and mitzvot, even in matters that are considered a *chok*, incomprehensible to our human minds. When a person fulfills all the mitzvot without leaving anything out, he merits feeling constant closeness to Hashem even if, G-d forbid, death visits his home. If man accustoms himself to fulfilling Hashem’s Word indisputably, sudden, unexplainable death will not make him lose his composure since he feels Hashem’s love and closeness.



FROM THE TREASURY

Based on the teachings of Moreinu v' Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

Torah Study Requires Submission

“This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent” (*Bamidbar* 19:14).

“A man who would die in a tent” — Chazal expound on these words (*Berachot* 63b), “The Torah only endures in one who kills himself over it.” The explanation seems to be that this refers to someone who is willing to defer to someone else, listen to him, and accept his opinion. It is not referring to one who studies Torah on his own, but one who studies with a *chavruta*. This type of study affords the opportunity to show submission to one’s friend, and Torah studied with a *chavruta* cannot be compared to independent learning.

Chazal say, in the future Hashem will teach us Torah from His mouth and then *lashon hara* will be completely eradicated from the world. What is the connection between Torah studied directly with Hashem and the disappearance of *lashon hara*?

One can say that studying Torah straight from Hashem without an intermediary is comparable to fine flour, free of any external influence such as honor or power. Rather, it is Torah studied for its own sake, considered like “a man who would die in a tent.” When a person toils in Torah with a *chavruta*, with self-sacrifice, it affords him the power of being saved from the sin of *lashon hara*. That merit of his pure Torah learning creates a protective shield; it empowers him to resist the temptation of speaking ill of others.

It is interesting to contemplate why, during the era of David Hamelech, when Torah study was prevalent, people nevertheless sinned. I would like to suggest that they had a blemish in their personal *avodah* and as a result did not attain the height of spirituality achieved during the reign of Shlomo Hamelech. What was the flaw? They spoke *lashon hara*, thinking it was for a beneficial purpose. But had they worked on themselves and shown submission to their friends, they would not have felt the need to speak *lashon hara*, even though they had beneficial intentions.

Beware! The situation today makes it much more challenging to refrain from *lashon hara* than previous generations. With the advancement of technology, man has easy access to diverse opportunities through which he can easily sin. In the past, to stumble with *lashon hara* one had to speak face to face to another person, but today with just the press of a button on a phone, computer, or fax, derogatory words are disseminated; and not to just one person, but throughout the world — all in just a few seconds.



WORDS OF THE SAGES

The Power of One Shekel

Kind words and good *middot* have enormous, inherent power to create a *Kiddush Hashem*, as this week's *parshah* mentions, "To sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel" (*Bamidbar* 20:12). Hagaon Rabbi Aharon Toisig *shlit"z* tells about the exemplary conduct and exceptional *middot* of Rabbi Chaim Brim *zt"l*. He was someone who completely felt for a fellow Jew, actually living his pain, subsequently understanding the ideal way to address him and elevate his spirit.

When travelling by taxi, he customarily gave the driver a shekel or two more than the amount displayed on the meter.

He explained: "Taxi drivers suffer from a negative, public image. Even if here and there some behave in a way that justifies this image, the generalization makes life hard for many of them. But let us think for a moment: What creates this negative image? The answer is, the fact that we entertain negative feelings about them creates this low self-image, and their behavior is just a result and expression of our attitude. The taxi driver thinks to himself, 'If this is what they think of me, I will behave accordingly.' Instead of seeing his positive aspects and trying to change any undesirable characteristics, he establishes his image according to widespread public opinion. Frustrated by his projected image, he tries to prove the public right."

There is a simple solution for this: Raise their esteem. How does one do this? First of all, by treating them with respect – this will diminish their feelings of inferiority. If it comes from a genuine place, it will permeate and have an effect. Another very effective way is by giving them another shekel or two above the asked-for price, as a gesture and expression of appreciation. The daughter of Rabbi Chaim related, "We once travelled together by taxi and upon arrival at our destination the meter showed thirty shekels. Rabbi Chaim gave the driver thirty-one shekels. The driver said, 'Excuse me, the Rav gave me an extra shekel.'

"Rabbi Chaim replied, 'It is not extra! Thirty shekels are for the journey and the extra shekel is for you, as a sign of appreciation!'

"The driver was impressed at the Rav's small gesture and they parted on good terms.

"Several weeks later," the daughter continued, "I was trying to hail a taxi for a long time, but to no avail. Suddenly a taxi drew up next to me; the driver turned to me and said, 'You should know, the truth is I am not available right now, but I remember you from the trip with your father. Do you remember he gave me an extra shekel? What a *tzaddik*! Get into the taxi, I will take you, even though I don't really have time now.'

"On the way the driver said, 'You should know, for me that single shekel was worth a million times more than the thirty shekels, because with it your father demonstrated that he understands I am a human being.'"

Let us take a lesson from this episode. One can acquire one's world with one shekel! Without too much effort, with an investment of just one shekel, one word, or one smile, one can affect a radical change in another person's esteem.



PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

Balaam's Name Shows His Essence

"So now, please come and curse this people for me, for it is too powerful for me" (*Bamidbar* 22:6).

This verse gives rise to two questions:

First of all, why did Balak ask Balaam to come and curse Bnei Yisrael and not ask for a blessing for his own success?

Furthermore, why did Balak say, "Whomever you bless מבורך – *is blessed* and whomever you curse יואר – *will be cursed*?" He should have either used the words 'מואר' (is cursed) and 'מבורך' (is blessed), or 'בורך' (will be blessed) and 'יואר' (*will be cursed*).

Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar *zy"z*, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (see also *Kli Yakar*) writes, "Balaam's blessing was like the blessing of a donkey." Balaam had no power to bless. He could only curse since he had an evil eye and knew the most advantageous time to invoke G-d's wrath. If someone came to Balaam for a blessing, since he was a sorcerer he would consider the person's *mazal*. If it showed that this person was to become rich in the future, Balaam blessed him with wealth and the recipient of the blessing thought he became wealthy due to Balaam's blessing. He did the same to Balak when he blessed him with kingship; he simply saw in Balak's *mazal* that he was destined to become king.

This answers the above questions. Since Balak knew that Balaam "blesses" in accordance with the person's *mazal*, he did not ask for a personal blessing. Rather he asked Balaam to come and curse the Jewish people, since this was his power. He personified his name, Balaam, an expression of swallowing and destruction.

This is the meaning of "for I know": "I, Balak, am aware of your strengths; whomever you bless *is blessed*", "blessed" in the past tense because this person is already blessed – in accordance with his *mazal*. Only "whomever you curse *will be cursed*," in the future tense, because in truth, your singular power is to curse.

His End Will Be by the Sword

"Now, flee" (*Bamidbar* 24:11).

As an allusion, Rabbeinu Yosef Chaim, in his *sefer Aderet Eliyahu*, writes that the word "ברח – flee" can be re-arranged to spell "חרב – sword."

This hints that in the end he would fall prey to the sword, and indeed he was killed, as it says, "And Balaam son of Beor they slew with the sword."

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



Who Has Counted the Dust of Yaakov?

"If you ask me, I personally do not feel I have made any sacrifice in my efforts to observe the mitzvot in general, and in particular my observance of *shemittah*," relates R' Oded Korakin from Ramat Hasharon. He regularly hosts delegations of rabbanim from all over the world in his fields and each time anew succeeds in leaving them moved; proving to them that despite all the decrees and attempts to uproot Torah from Am Yisrael, the Jewish nation survives and exists and with all its heart and soul desires to maintain true closeness to Hashem, even if this closeness involves self-sacrifice.

The mitzvah of *shemittah*, observed in Eretz Yisrael, is referred to in Balaam's declaration "Who has counted the dust of Yaakov." Rashi explains: who can count the number of agricultural commandments that Jews fulfil with the dust of the earth? R' Oded's story, publicized in the Kol Beramah magazine, serves as testimony:

"Hashem was so kind to me that one needs to be blind not to see the wonders and miracles." While he was blessed from Above, his friends, the local farmers of Kibbutz Yakum, also look pleased.

When the elderly farmer decided to harvest his hay fields at the beginning of Iyar during the sixth year of the previous *shemittah* cycle, his friends all laughed at him. "What are you doing? Why are you harvesting so early? Let the hay grow a little more!" The farmers chuckled derisively and thought he had lost his mind.

But Oded did not listen to them. He preferred to obey his sense of smell that forewarned him already at the beginning of Iyar in the midst of the hot, dry weather that rain was on the way. And so he harvested and went on to form the stacks of hay, storing them in his

massive storehouse. All this while his friends had not even begun harvesting their huge hay fields. The final result astonished the farmers, no less the delegation of rabbanim who visited his fields. What was clear above all doubt was that Oded's fields were the complete antithesis to the drought that was announced in the North and South. The proof was, Korakin immediately managed to sell all the hay stacked in his storehouse, something no other nearby farmer managed to do...

Although Oded Korakin and his brother Michael, his partner in his agricultural efforts, were born as Jews in the Holy Land and were exposed to a Jewish way of life, they went through many encounters until they achieved their lofty level of observing *shemittah*, expressing complete readiness to stop all work in their fields, spread over more than 1,500 *dunam* in one of the most expensive zones in the Holy Land. "If not for the constant support we received from the *gedolei Yisrael*, we would never have arrived at where we are today," they say. The love that is heaped on them and the blessings they are showered with during the visits of the *gedolei Torah* to their fields are proof of their statement.

This past *shemittah*, all those who entered their fields were astonished to see wheat stalks waving high in the air. "How did such high, plump wheat stalks grow for the *shemittah* observers in the seventh year?" asked the visitors. The great miracle that occurred in these fields, next to Kibbutz Yakum, demonstrated the greatness of Hashem's goodness to "the strong warriors who do His bidding." You may ask, what is the connection between the months of Adar and Nissan of the sixth year, to what happened in the seventh year in Korakin's wheat fields? And the answer is: Since it

seems there should be no connection, this is the great miracle...

Probably no one remembers the strong rain that suddenly fell at the end of Adar of the previous sixth year. It was an open miracle, for if not for these rains, all the wheat that had been sown would have been completely lost.

For most of the fields, the fact that the wheat of the sixth year was saved was a miracle and a great salvation. For Oded Korakin, the miracle swept over into the seventh year.

"The rain was so strong that even after this sixth year harvest, wheat remained in the fields. It sprouted already in the sixth year and grew to its best in the *shemittah* year," relates Oded.

The rare sight of wheat standing tall in the middle of the winter was one of the open miracles of the previous *shemittah* year. Korakin's tractor workers worked in the fields with great energy.

They removed all the water pipes so they wouldn't disturb the harvest. This harvest was, of course, used for animal feed, but let us make a calculation: We are talking about wheat that was not sown by the owners of the field. **In addition, in contrast to the other *shemittah* observers who sow wheat for animal feed, Oded did not touch this wheat which grew and sprouted by itself because of the rains of the sixth year. And now his fields were full of tall stalks of wheat, allowing him to sell the wheat as animal feed and earn a profit.**

"Earn a profit?" the farmer with his *tzitzit* showing is shocked. "It was not my profit and I have no interest in personal profit! The main gain here was the *Kiddush Hashem* that resulted from the miracle."



"Contemplate and see that Hashem is good"

Exciting update: With *siyata diShmaya*, the *shiurim* of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, the Admor Rabbi David Chananya Pinto shlit"a, are now available in Hebrew, English, French and Spanish

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