

לעילו נשמת: פייגה בת הרב אהרן ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

לזכות רפואה שלמה: מלכה בת רחל, מיכאל בן שולמית, יעקב משה בן דבורה שירי, ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה.

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Shmini



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Torah Wellsprings

Shmini

Sefiras Ha'Omer

"When the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* counted *sefiras ha'omer*, his face would turn black like coal, and he climbed up straight walls¹." This is how his student, Rebbe Avraham Yehoshua Freund, the Nasadar Rav *zt'l* described the Sanzer Rav's overflowing *hislachavos* when he performed the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*.

I had a glimpse of this kind of *hislachavos*. When my grandfather, Reb Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, was old, he lived at my parent's home, and he davened *maariv* and counted *sefiras ha'omer* in my parents' house. He was weak and old, but this didn't prevent him from counting *sefiras ha'omer* with all his strength and

concentration, and his excitement was palpable. He would repeat, around ten times, with intense yearning and emotion ואטער ואתקדש בקדושה של מעלה... and ולתקן את נפשותינו מכל סיג ופגם (from the *tefillah* after *sefiras haomer*).

(After he finished *sefiras ha'omer*, my mother used to look around the house to make sure that everything was okay and that nothing broke due to her father-in-law's powerful *sefiras ha'omer*.)

Here we are discussing the *hislachavos* that others can see, but more important is the *hislachavos* that is felt in the heart and is concealed from others that only Hashem knows about.

Because *hislachavos* has two sides: the external and the internal. The external

1. The Yiddish expression is: ער האט געדראָפּעט אויף די גראָדע ווענט.

hislahavos is what people can see, such as a tzaddik's loud, emotional voice, his glowing face, and eyes closed in deep meditation. But the primary *hislahavos* is the internal *hislahavos* of the heart, one's fiery yearning for Hashem.

The goal is the internal *hislahavus*, the feelings of the heart.

Hashem calls the Jewish nation (*Shemos* 19:6) גוי קדוש, which can be translated as "holy inside" (see *Bava Kama*

9: שליש מלגו). Rebbe Henoch of Alexander zt'l explained, גוי קדוש, the *inside* of the Yid should be holy. Don't be satisfied with an external expression of *hislahavos*. The goal is that the enthusiasm should be in the heart, too.

Similarly, we say, ובקרב קדושים תתהלל (end of *Nishmas*). The Rizhiner Rebbe zt'l translates it, קרב, the *inside* of a Yid should praise Hashem. The praise should emerge from the heart.²

2. The *ishah haShunamis* said to her husband (*II Malachim* 4:9), הנה נא, ידעתי כי איש אלקים קדוש הוא עובר עלינו תמיד, "Behold I know that a holy man of G-d is always coming here..."

The Gemara (*Brachos* 10:) says, "How did she know that Elisha was holy? It is because she never saw a fly on his table."

The commentaries ask, why doesn't the Gemara say the *ishah haShunamis* knew Elisha was holy because she watched his actions, and witnessed Elisha's devotion to Torah and mitzvos? Why did she know that Elisha was holy only because flies didn't come on his table?

The Rizhiner zy'a replies that good deeds do not necessarily prove that one is holy. Because there are charlatans who behave righteously, but they aren't. They just act that way to trick people. Therefore, the *ishah haShunamis* expressed a more definite proof that Elisha was a holy man.

Nevertheless, the external *hislahavos* has its virtue and place, as it helps people develop the internal *hislahavos*.

As the Mesilas Yesharim (ch.7) teaches, "The most precious *avodas Hashem* is the desire of the heart... As it states (*Tehillim* 84:3), צמאה נפשי לאלקים, 'My soul thirsts for Hashem...' If your heart isn't yearning for Hashem, you should perform mitzvos with *zrizus*, as this will increase your yearning, since the body's deeds arouse the heart's emotions..."

You can test it. For example, when you pretend that you are happy about *sefiras ha'omer*, this will become a reality. Whereas, if you perform the mitzvah with laziness, this is how you will feel about the mitzvah.

This is because when a person pretends to be excited and happy with the mitzvos (external *hislahavos*), he will attain those feelings

(internal *hislahavos*). His external actions influence the heart until he feels the joy.

To explain, we quote the following Gemara (*Pesachim* 117.): "When a chapter of *Tehillim* begins with לדוד מזמור, this means Dovid had *ruach hakodesh* and then sang praises to Hashem. However, when it states, מזמור לדוד Dovid sang praises to Hashem first, and then he attained *ruach hakodesh*."

This is because singing praises to Hashem can be the *result* of having *ruach hakodesh*, and singing can also *inspire* and *help* one attain *ruach hakodesh*.

Something similar occurs when we employ *hislahavos* when davening and performing mitzvos. The *hislahavos* can be the expression of the fervor and joy that is already felt in the heart. And, at other times when one isn't inspired at all, the *hislahavos* is external. Nevertheless,

due to his outward show of *hislahavos*, he will acquire genuine, internal *hislahavos*.

At the end of this week's *parashah* it states (11:44) והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים. The Chasam Sofer zt'l translates, "Act as though you are holy, and you will be holy." The *pasuk* is urging us to *pretend* we are *kadosh*, which will then become our reality.

The tzaddikim of Slonim would say that although שקר, falsehood is a terrible trait, it is permitted and advisable to pretend that you are happy even when it is not so because pretending makes it happen.

Similarly, pretend that you are excited and overjoyed with the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*, and then it will be so.

This week we begin reading Pirkei Avos. We conclude each chapter of Pirkei Avos with the words רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל הלך הרבה

להם תורה ומצוות, Hashem wanted to give merits to Bnei Yisrael, therefore, He gave them a large Torah with many mitzvos. As it states ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר." The Chinuch (mitzvah 16) explains, כי האדם נפעל כפי פועולתיו, "A person becomes like the deeds he performs because one's heart and thoughts follow what he is doing for the good or bad." The many mitzvos in the Torah enable a person to always be involved in Torah and mitzvos which transforms him into a better Yid.

As the Chinuch writes, "Even if a *rasha* who thinks bad thoughts all day would study Torah diligently and perform the mitzvos without proper *leshem shamayim* intentions, he would immediately become good. Conversely, if a person is a perfect tzaddik but does bad deeds (for example, the king forces him to do something corrupt, repeatedly), with time, he won't be a tzaddik anymore.

Because a person becomes what he does..."

The Chinuch explains that this is the reason we have many mitzvos to remind us of yetzias Mitzrayim. The many mitzvos ingrain in our minds the truth that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, in a way that fewer mitzvos couldn't accomplish.

He writes, "Don't ask me, why did Hashem command us to do so many mitzvos to remember the miracles that happened at *yetzias Mitzrayim*? Hashem could have given us one mitzvah so that we remember, and that would have been sufficient. Know that the *yetzer hara* is convincing you to ask this question..." because it is important to do many deeds, as these make an imprint on one's heart and thoughts.

Mitzvos influence the heart. As we explained above, the same applies to

how we perform the mitzvos. If we show *hislahavos*, our hearts will adopt these emotions.

Rebbe Yochanan of Stolin zt'l taught that this concept is the foundation of chassidus. Chassidus emphasizes the importance of emotions and serving Hashem with joy and enthusiasm, but how does one attain these feelings? It begins with deeds because what we do influences our heart.

Counting towards *Mattan Torah*

We discussed the importance of showing desire and yearning to do the mitzvos. This attitude is essential when it comes to counting the *omer*, because one of the main reasons for *sefiras ha'omer* is to express desire and yearning.

The Sefer HaChinuch (306) writes, "We are commanded to count to show our anticipation for

this special day [of *mattan Torah*], similar to a slave who is counting the days to when he will be freed. He counts constantly, and he waits, 'When will I finally be free?' Counting shows anticipation to reach that time."

The Ran (*Pesachim* 28.) writes, "The Midrash states when Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish nation that they would receive The Torah on Har Sinai the Jewish nation asked Moshe, 'When will this be?' Moshe replied that it would be in fifty days. The nation began counting the days. Because of this count, the *chachamim* instituted *sefiras ha'omer*."

Although the Chinuch and the Ran appear similar, there's a difference between them. According to the Chinuch, we count in anticipation of the holiday

Shavuot, when we will receive the Torah, each year anew. According to the Ran, we commemorate the Jewish nation's anticipation and count towards *mattan Torah* on Har Sinai. So, the Chinuch is about our excitement of the present, and the Ran is to commemorate the anticipations of the past. Nevertheless, according to both commentaries, the purpose of the count is the expression of excitement and yearning. So since the mitzvah's essence is about yearning, therefore, it is appropriate to perform this mitzvah with a yearning for Hashem.

We add that the Shem MiShmuel (*Emor* תרע"ב) writes, "The heart's nature improves [via counting the *omer*] that it shouldn't want improper matters."³ So, in

3. The *sefarim* teach that in the summer the *yetzer hara* becomes stronger. This is one of the reasons we read *Pirkei Avos* on Shabbos afternoons in the summer. The *mussar* of *Pirkei Avos* tames the *yetzer hara*. Perhaps, for the same reason, we have the mitzva

summary, *sefiras ha'omer* is associated with the yearning for Hashem and for wanting the right things, and therefore we should employ these feelings when we count the omer.

A Time for Purity

According to some countings of the 613 mitzvos (the Maharam Shi" k and others)⁴ *sefiras ha'omer* is the middle mitzvah of the

Torah. There are 306 mitzvos before *sefiras ha'omer*, and 306 mitzvos after it, *sefiras ha'omer* is mitzvah #307, the exact middle of the 613 mitzvos.

The Barnover Rav zt'l (Reb Avraham Simchah, in his *sefer Orah v'Simchah*) writes that just as a middle beam holds up the entire structure, *sefiras ha'omer* is the middle mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos and it holds

sefiras ha'omer at this time of year. *Sefiras Ha'Omer* increases our desire for *kedushah*, and that gives us strength to fight the yetzer hara.

4. Chazal tell us that there are 613 mitzvos but counting the 613 mitzvos isn't as simple as it sounds, and the *rishonim* and *achronim* seek to figure out exactly which are the 613 mitzvos.

Because not every obligation is counted among the 613 mitzvos. For one example, according to the Rambam, the בגדי כהונה, the clothes the kohanim wore, are counted as one of the 613 mitzvos. However, the Ramban disagrees and says that the בגדי כהונה is part of the mitzvah of the *avodah* in the Beis HaMikdash. It isn't a mitzvah on its own.

It can also be debated that the בגדי כהונה should be two mitzvos of the 613 (as the Ramban asks on the Rambam) because there are the clothes of the *kohen gadol* and the clothes of the *kohen hedyot*.

So, as you see, it isn't so simple to count the mitzvos.

up all 613 mitzvos of the Torah.

Sefiras ha'omer purifies us. As we say in the prayer after *sefiras ha'omer*), אתה צויתנו... לספור ספירת העומר כדי לטהרנו מקליפותינו ומטומאותינו וכו' "You commanded us...to count *sefiras ha'omer* to purify us from our impurities..." This purity connects us to Hashem. Counting the *omer* is the foundation, the middle, the central beam that enables us to keep the entire Torah.⁵

It states (*Shemos* 26:10), ועשית חמישים לולאת, "you shall make fifty hooks." The Chida *zt'l* (*Lechem Min HaShamayim*, *Trumah*, 21)

quotes Rabbeinu Efraim, who says that the fifty hooks correspond to the fifty days of *sefiras ha'omer*. Just as the fifty hooks connected the sheets of the Mishkan, the fifty days of *sefiras ha'omer* connect us to our Father in heaven.

If we want a source that *sefiras ha'omer* purifies us, we don't have to look further than the Torah, itself. It states (*Vayikra* 23:15), וספרתם לכם ממהרת השבת, "Count...from the day after *yom tov*..." The Or HaChaim Hakadosh says that וספרתם comes from the word ספיר, sapphire. וספרתם לכם means that by counting the *omer*

5. The Orah v'Simchah writes, "Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer* to purify us from *tumah*. What is so significant about this mitzvah that it has the *segulah* to purify us?

"We can explain, *bederech tzachus*: If a person has many sins when he performs a mitzvah, the mitzvah doesn't protect him, because the mitzvah becomes *batel* (annulled) by his many sins. However, the mitzvah of counting the *omer* is דבר שבמנין, something that is counted, and the halachah is דבר שבמנין אינו בטל, something that is counted can never become annulled. Now, since this mitzvah doesn't become annulled, it has the ability to purify us from our *tumah*..."

you will become pure and your *neshamah* will shine like sapphire.⁶

The Shem MiShmuel (*Bamidbar* תע"ב) writes, "Even if a person doesn't feel the purity that comes from *sefiras ha'omer*, he must believe that his *neshamah* is being purified... The degree of purity one attains varies. For some, only the source of their *neshamah* becomes pure. For others, their *nefesh* also becomes pure..."

Reb Efraim Waxman Shlita, Rosh Yeshivas Me'or Yitzchak, told me that when he was a child learning in *cheder*, one of his *milamdim* was a holocaust survivor. When the children were acting up and misbehaving, he would mumble something under his breath. The children could sometimes make out

a few of the words that he said. They didn't know the meaning of the words, but they were sure that he was cursing them in Hungarian.

At the end of the year, the children asked their *milamed* forgiveness for causing him so much distress over the year, until he cursed them.

The *milamed* replied, "*Chas v'shalom!* I never cursed you. I was saying קנכרי טרקיא פנטרי etc. These words are Onkelus's translation to סמקן ירקן וברקן, the precious gems of the *choshen*, which the *kohen gadol* wore."

The *milamed* explained, "The gems on the *choshen* represent the Jewish nation, and it teaches that they are precious gems before Hashem. To control my anger, I reminded myself

6. Rebbe Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* would count the *omer* several times a day. Whenever he remembered that we are in the days of *sefiras ha'omer*, he would say, again ... לעומר שהם ... היום יום.

that you are all precious children of Hashem."⁷

And as we explained, the polishing of these precious stones (of our holy neshamos) happens when we count *sefiras ha'omer*.

A Time for Growth

In agriculture, we see crops reaching their full potential during the days between Pesach and Shavuot. The crops are fully grown by Pesach time

7. The Ben Ish Chai (יורא שנה שניה) writes, "When a person fights with his wife, children, or servants [on Fridays], he certainly thinks that he is in the right, and that he should make this machlokes, because they did something wrong in the home. But the truth is, someone who has intelligence will understand that even if they did something wrong, it wasn't their fault. It was the Satan who tries to make a fight at this time... Therefore, everyone should understand that... he shouldn't blame his wife or children or maid, and he shouldn't fight with them. Instead, remember this excuse, as it is true. He will remain silent, he won't fight with them, he won't get angry, and it will be good for him in this world and in the next world."

There are *segulos* that save us from the Satan, who evokes fights on Fridays. The Shlah HaKadosh (מסכת שבת, נר מצוה אות ד') writes, "The Reishis Chachmah taught in the name of his rebbe [the Rema'k] that one should clean away all the cobwebs of his home on erev Shabbos... And I will reveal a secret... These cobwebs are the kelipos, which seek to destroy the shalom bayis. Therefore, we have to get them out of the home..."

The Kaf HaChaim (ר"נ סק"ד) quotes this segulah and adds, "Get rid of the cobwebs on Friday before the fifth hour of the day, because from the fifth hour on begins the light of Shabbos."

Another segulah is from the Ateres Tzvi of Ziditchov zt'l: "We have a kabbalah that to banish this Satan [who seeks to make fights in the home on Fridays and Shabbos] one should put on the Shabbos tablecloth before midday."

(חג האביב), and Shavuot time (חג הקציר) and they are ready to be harvested. The Maharal (*Chiddushei Agados, Rosh Hashanah*) explains that this agricultural reality represents what is happening on a spiritual realm. On the days between Pesach and Shavuot, we improve until we reach the level of perfection by Shavuot.

On Pesach we sacrifice the korban Omer, made from barley, which is fitting for animal fodder. On Shavuot we bring the *shte halechem* sacrifice, made from wheat flour, which is fitting for human consumption. The *meforshim* (see, for example *Aruch HaShulchan* 489:3) explain that this implies that we rise from the level of animals to the level of human beings during these days. It is a time for growth.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 23:36) says that the days of *sefiras ha'omer* have *kedushah* like Chol Hamoed. Because just as Chol

HaMoed comes between the first and final days of *yom tov, sefiras ha'omer* comes between Pesach and Shavuot.

This means that *sefiras ha'omer* is a holy time, a happy time. It is like Chol Hamoed. In contrast, *sefiras ha'omer* is also a time of mourning, as Reb Akiva's students were *niftar* then.

We don't make *chasunos* during the *sefirah*. We also don't make weddings on Chol HaMoed. The Rizhiner explains that if one lives in an uplifted manner during the days of *sefiras ha'omer*, with happiness and holiness, as though these days are like Chol Hamoed, he doesn't make *chasunos* during *sefiras ha'omer* because we don't make *chasunos* on Chol Hamoed. If he doesn't have any spiritual joy on these days, he will refrain from making *chasunos* because these are days of mourning...

The Mishnah (*Idiyos* 2:10) states, "Five things were

for twelve months: (1) The *mabul* (2) Iyov's afflictions. (3) The ten *makos* (4) The punishments for Gog and Magog (5) משפט רשעים בגיהנם, שנים עשר חדש, the *resha'im* are punished in Gehinom for twelve months... Reb Yochanan ben Nuri [disagrees and] says, מן הפסח ועד העצרת, the *resha'im* are punished in Gehinom from Pesach until Shavuos..."

There are different explanations for the final words of this Mishnah.⁸ The Shibolei HaLeket (and other commentaries) explain that מן הפסח עד העצרת is literal. The *resha'im* are punished only between Pesach and Shavuos.

As we know, the purpose of Gehinom isn't

to punish. Gehinom cleanses people of their *aveiros* so they can be worthy of going to Gan Eden. According to the Shibolei HaLeket, the purifying period of Gehinom is during the days of *sefiras ha'omer*. That is the only time that Gehinom is open (according to this view).

The Chidushei HaRim adds that for us too, the purifying period is between Pesach and Shavuos, when we count the *omer*. If we take advantage of this time to purify ourselves, we won't need the purification process in the next world, in Gehinom.

8. Rav Bartenara *zt'l* explains that Gehinom is open and active the entire year, but each *rasha* is only punished for fifty days, the amount of days between Pesach and Shavuos.

The יבין ובוני explains that מן הפסח עד העצרת means all souls are re-judged at this time. Even after the primary judgment was decided and determined, every year between Pesach and Shavuos the souls are judged again.

Nadav and Avihu

There are various explanations on why Nadav and Avihu died.

Reb Shamshon of Ostropola *zt'l* explains that they offered ketores and became very close to Hashem, which caused their death. Because there's a limit of how much spirituality one can endure. As it states (*Shemos* 33:20), כִּי, "לא יראני האדם וחי", "Man can't see Me and live." Nadav and Avihu crossed that boundary, and their *neshamos* departed. As it states (10:2), וימותו לפני ה', they died because they came too close to Hashem. Also, in *parashas* אחרי מות we read (16:1), אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבתם, לפני ה' וימתו, which implies that they died, בקרבתם לפני ה', because they came too close to Hashem.

The Ohev Yisrael *zt'l* (*Acharei*) explains that אחרי means מופלג, very distant and far away (see *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 15:1, and *Rashi Devarim* 11:30). When the *pasuk*

(*Vayikra* 16:1) writes, אחרי מות שני בני אהרן, this means their deaths were very different than the way most people die. As the Ohev Yisrael writes, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'How far and exalted were the deaths of Aharon's two children, who came close to Hashem. It states, בקרבתם אל ה', and this means they approached the sweet pleasure and the divine enjoyment... They felt their *neshamos* attaching to this divine pleasure, and they knew they would die from it. Nevertheless, they didn't stop their *mesirus nefesh*. They didn't want to separate themselves from this treasured attachment to Above."

So, was their death a negative thing, or perhaps positive because they merited this close connection to Hashem?

Perhaps, according to the Ohev Yisrael, it was positive, a close connection to Hashem, but there is also another way to look at

the matter, as we will explain:

After the Jewish nation heard the first two of the *Aseres HaDibros* directly from Hashem, the nation said (*Devarim* 5:22), ועתה למה נמות... אם יספים אנחנו לשמוע את קול ה' אלקינו עוד ומתנו "Why should we die...? If we hear Hashem's voice some more, we will die." Therefore, Hashem appointed Moshe to relay to them the final eight *dibros* of the Ten Commandments.

The nation understood that if they hear Hashem's voice, they will be very close to Hashem, which will result in their demise. Reb Yechezkel of Kozmir *zt'l* asked, why were they afraid of dying in this manner? Isn't this the greatest pleasure a person can hope for? Isn't this the most wondrous experience; to be so attached to Hashem until the soul departs?

Rebbe Yechezkel explains that they would prefer to die in this manner.

If it were only for their needs, they would choose to hear the *Aseres HaDibros* from Hashem and allow their souls to fly up to Hashem. But they wanted to live *for Hashem's sake*. Because the purpose of Creation was that people should live in this world of challenges and serve Hashem from here. If they died, this incredible benefit would be lost. Therefore, they pleaded that they want to hear the final eight *dibros* from Moshe so that they could live and serve Hashem.

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* offered another explanation on why Nadav and Avihu died. His lesson comes along with the following story:

Once, a milkman said to Rebbe Dovid of Lelov *zt'l*, "I don't understand why people buy milk from my competitor and not from me."

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov asked him, "Tell me the truth: How much water do you add to the milk?"

The milkman replied, "I don't add any water to the milk. That would be stealing. I tell my customers that it is 100% pure milk, and it is so."

Rebbe Dovid told him, "That's the problem. We live in a world of falsehood, and therefore, it's impossible to be successful in this world with one hundred percent honesty. I advise you to add a little water to the milk, and you'll see that people will buy from you, too." The Torah tells that Nadav and Avihu died because they had an *אש זרה*, a foreign fire. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai explained that Nadav and Avihu were so honest and truthful in their service, it was an *אש זרה*, foreign to the way of the world, and they couldn't survive here. This was the root of their deaths.

In a practical sense, we learn from this that we shouldn't be perfectionists – and this goes for all areas of life, including *avodas Hashem*. As Chazal tell us, *לא נתנה תורה למלאכי השרת*, "Hashem didn't give the Torah to *malachim*." Our aspiration should be "to do the best we can," but our goal isn't 100% perfection because that is beyond us.

There are many examples of this principle; we will share a few:

When studying Torah, one must strive to understand "as best as he can," but he shouldn't fall into the trap of perfectionism. He has to know when he should tell himself, "I understood this well enough. It is time to move on." If he is a perfectionist, he will never make a *siyum* on a Gemara. He will always be telling himself, "But I didn't learn this page well enough. And I'm not certain if I understood this. How can I

make a *siyum*, if I didn't really finish?"

A second example is related to tefillah. According to *halachah*, one must have *kavanah* by the first brachah of Shemonah Esrei, or he isn't *yotzei*. This causes some people to doubt themselves obsessively; afraid that they didn't have enough concentration and were not *yotzei*.

A third example is related to keeping the mitzvos. Perfectionists are always worried that perhaps they didn't perform the mitzvah correctly. They say, "Perhaps I wasn't even *yotzei*, because I erred in an essential aspect of the mitzvah..." They are never happy with the mitzvah they performed because they are constantly subjected to fear that they failed.

We live in a world of dishonesty, and we should use that element to our

advantage to be satisfied with less, too. Our *avodas Hashem* isn't perfect; it isn't with the highest level of *emes*, but it is the most we can do, and that is sufficient. As Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 3) say, אין הקב"ה בא בטרוניא על בריותיו, Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't demand from us more than our abilities.

"Aharon Remained Silent"

Reb Nissim Gaon relates the following Midrash:

Once, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi asked Eliyahu HaNavi to come along with him on his travels. Eliyahu HaNavi told Reb Yehoshua ben Levi that he can come along on one condition: Reb Yehoshua ben Levi cannot ask any questions.

Reb Yehoshua ben Levi agreed, and they set out on their travels.

At their first stopover, they knocked at the home of an elderly couple and said, "We are travelers, and we need a place to stay."

The couple graciously took them in, performed *hachnasas orchim* superbly, gave them whatever they requested, and honored them immensely.

Before leaving this home, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi heard Eliyahu HaNavi daven, "Please, Hashem, let their cow die..."

Reb Yehoshua ben Levi was shocked. The cow was the elderly couple's source of *parnassah*. Why did Eliyahu HaNavi punish them after they treated them so well?

But he didn't ask any questions, as he promised that he wouldn't.

Later, at nighttime, they knocked at the home of a very stingy person, and they asked him if they can stay in his home.

At first, the miser didn't let them in, but Eliyahu HaNavi pleaded with him, and he grudgingly allowed them in his home but

refused to give them any food.

In the morning, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi heard Eliyahu HaNavi daven, "Hashem, please, the wall that surrounds this house should be strong and firm. Don't let it collapse..."

"Why was Eliyahu HaNavi praying for this miser?" Reb Yehoshua ben Levi wondered. "He didn't give us food and didn't even want us to sleep in his home!" But he didn't ask Eliyahu for an explanation, as he had promised.

They traveled on, and they arrived at a very unfriendly city. The residents pretended not to see them, and no one invited them into their homes. Reb Yehoshua ben Levi heard Eliyahu daven and say, "May everyone in this city become a leader."

Once again, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi didn't understand but kept silent.

They traveled on and arrived at a very kind city. Everyone invited wanted to host them. Reb Yehoshua ben Levi thought, "If for the inhospitable people, Eliyahu blessed each of them to become a leader, he will certainly give a special *brachah* to this fine town. But Reb Yehoshua ben Levi heard Eliyahu HaNavi say in his *tefillos*, "May only one person of this city become a leader."

Reb Yehoshua ben Levi informed Eliyahu HaNavi that he no longer wants to travel with him because he couldn't understand anything at all. But now that they weren't traveling together anymore, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi had the right to ask the questions that were bothering him all along and asked Eliyahu HaNavi to explain.

Eliyahu Hanavi replied, "Our first stop was at the home of the elderly couple who honored us immensely and served us a fine meal. I thought, 'What can I give

them?' The woman of this home was destined to die shortly after we leave, so I davened that their cow should die instead of her.

"Then we came to the home of a miser. He just barely allowed us in his house, and he didn't give us a morsel to eat. He deserves to be punished for the way he treated us. The miser doesn't know about it, but there's a treasure buried in the ground, under the wall surrounding his home. The people who lived in his house, before him, buried the treasure there. As time passes, it is natural that the wall will collapse, and then the miser would find the treasure and become wealthy. I prayed that the wall should be solid and firm, and it shouldn't fall in his lifetime. He doesn't deserve it.

"Then we arrived at the inhospitable city. No one even said *shalom aleichem* to us, and no one invited us to their home, and I gave

them what they deserve. I prayed that each of them should become a leader. This isn't good for them because it is better when there is only one leader. When there are many

heads, there are *machlokes* constantly. No one will want to live in that city.

"As for the hospitable city, I blessed them with one leader, which is indeed a blessing." ⁹

9. The Chida tells this story, and he explains with it the reason we have a כוס של אליהו at the Seder:

Originally, it was decreed that the Yidden would be enslaved for 430 years (see *Bereishis* 15:13)."

Hashem made the decree more lenient in two ways:

(1)The Yidden were in Mitzrayim for 210 years instead of 430 years.

(2)The original decree was that they should be slaves the entire time. Hashem lessened that decree, and the slavery and hard labor began 86 years before *yetzias Mitzrayim*.

$430 - 86 = 344$. This means they were saved from 344 years of slavery. Therefore, we drink four cups of wine. כוס is *gematriya* 86, and $86 \times 4 = 344$. We are celebrating the 344 years we were saved from slavery.

But there is a fifth cup, the כוס של אליהו ($86 \times 5 = 430$). This is because we should really celebrate the 86 years that we were enslaved, too, because even those years were certainly for our best.

We don't drink this cup of wine, because at the present time we still don't recognize that hardships are actually good. However, we are certain that even those painful years were for our benefit.

In fact, since they were difficult years, the kindness that was concealed there was even greater. As the rule is: לפום צערא אגרא, the reward is in accordance with the hardships.

The fifth cup is called *kos shel Eliyahu HaNavi* because Eliyahu

From this story, we learn that one shouldn't be surprised when life situations appear incorrect and unfair because this is only how it appears in this world. But everything is just and correct.

An example of this principle is found in this week's *parashah*:

Rashi (10:3) writes, "Moshe said to Aharon, 'Aharon my brother, I knew that the Mishkan would become holy through the ones whom Hashem loves. [Because when even tzaddikim are punished for dishonoring the Mishkan, this sends a message for everyone that they must treat the Mishkan with respect and awe (see *Bamidbar* 20:13).] I thought that it would happen to either you or me. Now I

see that they are greater than both of us."

Nadav and Avihu's death doesn't make sense to us. Why did these tzaddikim die, and why did it happen on the happy occasion when the Mishkan was finally built and the Yidden were celebrating its inauguration? It doesn't make sense to us, and yet, the Torah (10:3) tells us, וַיִּדָּם אַהֲרֹן, "Aharon was silent." He didn't complain. He didn't ask questions.

Reb Meir Yechiel of Ostraftza *zt'l* adds that וַיִּדָּם comes from the word דומם, inanimate objects. An example of דומם is a stone, which doesn't have feelings. One can throw a stone, humiliate it, laugh at it, beat it, and it isn't bothered in the least. This describes how strong Aharon was when he

Hanavi teaches us (as in the story above) that even when things appear bad, they are always for the good.

endured this tragedy. וידם everything is for the good,
 ,אחרון he was as silent and as even when we don't
 unaffected as inanimate understand why and
 items. He knew that how.¹⁰

10. About two months ago, there was a lottery drawing, organized to raise money for a holy *kehillah* in Eretz Yisrael. The *kehillah* advertised that the winner would receive three prizes: A house in Teveria, a brand-new car, and ten-thousands-shekel per month, for a year's time. The drawing took place on י' אדר תשפ"א at eleven at night, and they immediately called up the winner to tell him the exciting news, but the winner doesn't answer the phone at those hours, so they left a message on his voice mail.

The next morning, the fortunate winner heard the message, and he called the office to tell them that he is coming over to pick up his reward. When he arrived, they spoke to him in a very excited and bubbly way, because they figured that this is what he was feeling. Because how often does one earn so much money, and so suddenly?

But they were surprised to see that he was totally calm. He didn't lose his serenity.

When they asked him about that, he replied, "I knew I was going to earn the prize."

He explained, "I'm twenty-six, and I haven't yet found my shidduch. My parents can't help me with the wedding, so when I find my bashert, the expenses of the wedding will be entirely on my shoulders. Recently, my car broke. Furthermore, I am not able to work full time, which limits my parnassah. Many people in my situation would be worried. I have big expenses, without sufficient income. But I was never worried. I was certain that Hashem will help me buy a house, a car, and have enough money for my wedding, and to earn enough to cover my daily expenses..."

Kashrus

The Chasam Sofer once asked two community activists to set up a meeting with the mayor of Pressburg. "The issue is urgent, so schedule the meeting immediately."

The delegates asked the mayor's secretary to schedule a meeting for that very day, but the secretary replied, "All slots are filled for today. You can't get an appointment on such short notice. If you want, we can schedule it for next week..."

The delegates explained to the secretary that the matter was urgent, and it couldn't be postponed.

It wasn't easy, but with their determination and efforts, a meeting with the mayor was arranged for that very day.

They entered the mayor's room, and the mayor graciously offered them a cup of coffee.

"No, thank you," they replied.

"Why not?" the mayor asked. "Is it because it isn't kosher?"

That was the reason. The milk wasn't *chalah Yisrael*.

The mayor went into a rage. "If I offer you a drink, you should accept it!" he said.

As he was ranting and raving, the secretary opened the door and asked the mayor whether he had a cup of coffee.

"No. The mayor replied angrily. "I was about to, but these fellows ruined my appetite. I offered them a coffee, but they declined... because of kashrus."

"Good," the secretary replied. "I'm glad you didn't have a coffee because the milk is contaminated. Some people who drank from this milk got sick, and the doctor checked the milk and determined that it is

filled with unhealthy germs."

The mayor immediately changed his tone of speech, and he spoke with the two delegates respectfully. He told them, "I always admired the rabbis of the Jewish nation for their superior wisdom. I forgot about that, of late, and I was considering banishing all the Jews from Pressburg. But now that you reminded me of the wisdom of the Jewish sages, and I will cancel that decree."

The two delegates returned to the Chasam Sofer and told him what happened at the meeting. The Chasam Sofer replied that there was a *kitrug* in heaven on the Jewish community because they weren't careful enough with kashrus and with חלב. In the merit of the delegate's *mesirus nefesh* to keep the laws of kashrus, the decree was abolished. (Heard from Reb Elchanan Halperin zt'l of Radumishla, who heard it from his father-in-

law, Reb Shmuel Unsдорfer zt'l, a descendant of the Chasam Sofer.)

This week's *parashah* tells us that we can't eat worms and bugs. As it states (11:43), אל תשקצו את נפשותיכם בכל השרץ השרץ ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמתם בהם.

The Or HaChaim elaborates, "A person must be extremely careful not to eat anything that might be infested with worms. Especially in recent generations, the atmosphere and the earth have become polluted [in a spiritual sense], and everything that grows has worms and bugs. Therefore, the cautious should be aware."

Many chassidim have the custom to eat *shalashudes* in the dark. This custom probably began in the past when there wasn't yet electricity. There were candles and lamps on Friday night, but by *shalashudes* time, these were long extinguished, and

they sat at *shalashudes* in the dark. But whatever the origin of this custom, there is undoubtedly something very special about singing inspirational songs in the dark. My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, spoke longingly of this custom. He said that he would do the same but was concerned that he won't see what he is eating in the darkness. There might be an insect in his food, and he won't know about it.¹¹

What is wrong with the following statement? "The

hechsher on the package isn't the best, but there is, after all, some sort of rabbinic supervision. I will rely on that."

There are two problems: One obvious issue is that there might be a problem with the food's *kashrus*, and we don't want to eat non-kosher, even by accident. As the Or HaChaim (*Vayikra* 11:43) writes, "Klal Yisrael should be careful not to eat non-kosher foods, not even by accident, for even by accident, one becomes impure..."

11. Reb Yonoson Eibshitz (*Kriesi u'Pleisi* 84:19) writes, "To eat a salad [that might be infested] is a ספק תורה... *Bitul* doesn't apply, because you can check two or three times until you find a worm. Therefore, it is a ספק תורה and *chas veshalom*, one mustn't be lenient. When men and women check leafy vegetables in a hurry, because they are in a rush to get to their other chores, I don't rely on them. It is my custom, from my youth (מיום עמדתי על דעתי) that I won't rely on their checking. This is how all Torah Jews should do, because it is likely that there is a transgression."

The Be'er Heitev (84:10) writes, "[Insect infestation] differs from country to country, and from year to year. There are years when there are many worms, and there are years when there's less. A ,בעל נפש righteous person, should be careful..."

The second problem applies even if he guessed correctly, and the food was kosher. Nevertheless, his lax attitude causes him to lose his protection. Because those who are cautious about using the best *hechsherim*, and don't take any chances, receive *siyata dishmaya*, and Hashem helps them eat kosher, always. But if one is lax, he loses his divine protection.

The Or HaChaim says that this is indicated in the words (11:44), והתקדשתם והייתם, קדושים. As the Or HaChaim writes, תעשו גדרים וסייגים לכל, תטמאו ובוזו אני מבטיחכם שתהיו קדושים, "Place safeguards and precautions that you shouldn't become impure [with non-kosher food] and I guarantee you that you

will be holy [and protected from eating non-kosher]."¹²

Similarly, Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "Regarding food, one can transgress many *aveiros*. There are the forbidden fats (חלב), blood, insects; there's also טבל and כלאים and several other prohibitions. But if a person is always careful, to the best of his ability, and always checks the food before he eats it, Hashem will help that the food he eats will be kosher, and he will not sin, even inadvertently."

The Be'er Mayim Chayim (Chayei Sarah ואמר) bemoans how people aren't careful with kashrus. He writes, "In our generation...if someone claims he's a *shochet*, people

12. Being careful with kashrus is also *mesugal* to be protected from the gentile nations. Therefore, the *pasuk* concludes, ולא תטמאו... בכל, "You will not become impure... by the insects..." and the Or HaChaim writes, "The *pasuk* is hinting that by keeping this mitzvah, the nations of the world will not rule over, the Jewish nation, as they are called, שרצים ושקצים הרומשים על הארץ, insects and rodents that crawl over the earth."

trust him. They don't check him out to find out whether he is reliable. And if someone brings wine, milk, fish, or foods that need to be checked for worms, or any other food that may have a kashrus issue... people say, 'The person who brought it is a religious Yid. Why should we suspect that it isn't kosher? ... But if someone asks them for a loan, they suddenly speak differently. They don't trust anyone before verifying that he is trustworthy because they fear he might not pay him back. This is because money is the most important thing in the world for them, while mitzvos are less important to them, and therefore they assume that even if it isn't perfect, it's also okay.'

The Be'er Mayim Chaim then describes how Avraham Avinu was the exact opposite. When it came to money matters, he trusted Eliezer wholly. But when it came to mitzvos,

such as to find a *shidduch* for Yitzchak, he didn't trust Eliezer until Eliezer swore to him that he would do as he directs him.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim writes, "The Torah refers to Avraham Avinu as אברהם אהובי, 'Avraham who loves me.' Avraham didn't love anything, only Hashem's *mitzvos*. Everything else paled in comparison. He permitted Eliezer to oversee his wealth, but when it came to *mitzvos* he didn't trust him..."

New Beginnings

The holy *sefarim* discuss the importance of making sure that the first thought, word, and deed of the day should be a mitzvah.

We fulfill this by saying אני מודה first thing in the morning. We also wash our hands with *negel vasser*. It is crucial to make the first thoughts good ones, too. For example, one can concentrate on the words of *modeh ani*. Or, his first

thought of the day can be, "Hashem, I want to serve you today." Make the first *חודש, דיבור, ומעשה* of the day holy, and the rest of the day will follow in this manner.

Rosh Chodesh Iyar is approaching, the beginning of a new month. If we serve Hashem on this day, it will influence the entire month.

As the Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* writes, "When Rosh Chodesh is observed properly, the entire month will be like Rosh Chodesh, because *גופא בתר רישא אזיל*, the body follows the head... Therefore, it is proper for the wise to pay attention to Rosh Chodesh, to serve Hashem properly on that day, for that will influence and make the entire month good. Even just one hour on Rosh Chodesh, when it is observed properly, the

entire month will be good..."

Also, on Rosh Chodesh Iyar, many *kollelim* and yeshivos will renew their studies, and it is important to begin the new *zman* with an invigorated spirit.

If you will be lazy initially, if you will come late on the first day, etc., the next few months will likely pass in this lazy mode.

So, instead, start the *zman* enthusiastically. A good idea is to dedicate the first fifteen minutes to Torah, only, without any conversations. It is likely that after fifteen minutes pass, you won't want to speak about anything else. Because when the beginning is good, everything that follows becomes good.¹³

13. Reb Binyamin Rabinowitz *zt'l* (*dayan* for the Eidah haChareidis, and *rosh yeshiva* of Toldos Aharon) was a great *masmid*. Once, a *bachur* watched him learn in the yeshiva, on Shiva Asar b'Tamuz, for around eight hours straight, and he asked him how he can also

Torah

Reb Sheftel Ish Levi *zt'l* (the father of the Shlah Hakodesh) teaches: The obligation to study Gemara, *Rashi*, and *Tosfos* each day is no less than our obligation to wear tefillin every day.

The Ramchal *zy'a* says that when one studies Torah, he should consider it as if he's in the middle of *Shemonah Esrei*, and he cannot interrupt his studies.

(It would be a good thing if others would also think of those who are learning Torah as though they are in the middle of davening *Shemonah Esrei*, and not interrupt them.)

The Gemara debates whether the Torah was given on the 6th or the 7th of Sivan. "But all opinions agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos." This hints that no desire or opportunity to earn money should take us away from the times we set for studying Torah. No rationally thinking G-d fearing Jew would work on Shabbos to make money. Similarly, even when we have opportunities to make money, this shouldn't cause us to abandon the times we set aside for Torah study.

And there really is no reason to depart from Torah study because Torah study actually increases

get to that level of *hasmadah*. Reb Binyamin told him, "I didn't begin with this *hasmadah*. I began with not speaking during the first fifteen minutes of *seider*. Then I added that I wouldn't speak for the first twenty minutes. I continued adding on, and now I'm up to eight hours straight, without interruptions.

We say in the morning, שתרגילו בתורה, "make us accustomed to Your Torah," because to a large extent, *hasmadah* in Torah is a matter of becoming accustomed. And when one is accustomed to studying Torah, there is nothing sweeter...

one's *parnassah*. As the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 19) says, "Whoever studies Torah, his property prospers."

A chassid who wanted *hatzlachah*, success, wrote this request in a *kvittel*, which he gave to Rebbe Yochanan of Rachmestrfka *zy'a*.

Rebbe Yochanan replied, "Dovid HaMelech was also a great Rebbe, and he advises us that for success, one should study Torah. As it states (*Tehillim* 1), *כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו... וכל אשר יעשה יצליח*, if you want Torah, you will succeed in all your

endeavors. This isn't solely a *brachah*; it is a guarantee. If you study Torah, you will succeed."

Similarly, the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 19) states, "Whoever studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu fulfills his desires..."¹⁴

The tzaddikim of Slonim *zt'l* teach:

Each hour of the day, without Torah, is a zero. If you study Torah for an hour, you have a #1. If you place that one before all the zeros, it becomes a very large number.

14. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* would say, "Someone who doesn't study Gemara is *נישט קיין מענטש*, "not a Yid, and not even a human being."

He explained that this is the reason the *brachah* *השיבו* in *Shemonah Esrei* (the *brachah* for *teshuvah*) begins with a request for Torah, as we say, *השיבו אבינו לתורתך*, because without Torah, one is *נישט קיין איד און נישט*, "not a Yid, and not even a human being."

It is written, *ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל* (*Bereishis* 10:10). Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* would say that implied in this *pasuk* is the importance of learning Gemara. *ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל* "One should begin with Talmud Bavli."

How do you place the one hour of Torah at the beginning, before all the zeros? You do this when you consider the time you set aside for Torah as the most important hour of your day.

If you consider your work more important, then

the one hour of Torah comes after all the zeros, and the number isn't large. But if you consider this one hour as the most crucial hour of your day, this places the #1 at the beginning, and you have a very large number, which will result in a very great reward.



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