

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

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

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Torah Wellsprings

Bo

Hashem Runs the World with *Hashgachah Pratis*

The purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim is to teach us *emunah*. One first lesson is to know that Hashem runs the world with *hashgacha pratis*.

Rebbe Mendel of Vitebsk zy'a (*Pri HaAretz, Bo*) writes, "Pharaoh believed in Hashem, and he believed that the world was created intentionally and not by accident, ch" v. Still, he didn't believe in *hashgacha pratis*. He followed the belief of many heretics who think that after Hashem created the world, He abandoned the world and

gave it over to the *mazalos*, the constellations. This is why gentile nations worship the stars and the *mazalos*, as is known (though we prefer not to elaborate on that). Therefore, Pharaoh said (*Shemos* 5:2), לא ידעתי את הוי"ה, 'I don't know the name which is Hashem's name that represents the concept of *hashgacha pratis*'¹

Since this was Pharaoh's world view, he influenced his nation to think that way, too.

As the Teshuas Chein (*Va'eira* ר"ה והפלותי) writes, "In Mitzrayim, the belief was מקרייה, that things happen by chance. Pharaoh didn't

1. The *Pri HaAretz* concludes, "The truth is, it is very far and distant for *resha'im* to believe in...*hashgacha pratis*, and that a person doesn't hurt his finger if it wasn't decreed in heaven (see *Chulin* 7), and that a grass doesn't dry up... and a stone isn't thrown, only at the time and place that it was destined and planned. As it states (*Koheles* 11:3), אל מקום שיפול העץ, the place where the tree falls, שם יהוא, that is where it was destined to fall..."

believe that the world is run with *hashgacha pratis*, by Hashem's righteous judgment. Since the Jewish nation was living under his rule, they were influenced by Pharaoh's philosophy. The sweet poison of heresy gradually caused the Yidden to adapt his way of thinking. They believed in Hashem, but they said, 'Hashem is so great and so holy, and his *malachim* are holy, it makes no sense that Hashem would be involved with this lowly world.' Indeed, the Rambam, in *Morah Nevuchim*, writes that the Jewish nation in Mitzrayim was confused on this matter. And the truth is, to some extent, we haven't completely cleansed ourselves from this *tumah*. The *yetzer hara* dances among us and

brings into our hearts the belief that matters happen by chance. To free us from these doubts, Hashem gave us the mitzvah of remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim* every day. The miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim demonstrate that everything happens by Hashem's decree.² A person doesn't stub his toe down here if it wasn't decreed from Above. Everything that happens to us is directed by Hashem. As Reb Leib Mochiach zt'l taught (*Shmuel I* 20:26), מקרה הוא, בלתי טהור הוא, if a person says things happen במקרה, by chance, בלתי טהור הוא, he isn't *tahor*. The Jewish nation must believe with a perfect belief in Hashem's *hashgacha*; that everything comes from Him..."

2. The Teshuas Chen writes, "Pharaoh thought everything happens by rote, but then the *makos* came and Pharaoh saw clearly, without a shadow of a doubt, that it wasn't natural. From each *makah* Pharaoh discovered in a new way that the world isn't run by nature..."

There is a famous Ramban³ at the end of this week's *parsha*. He writes, "Ever since people began worshipping *avodah zarah*, they became confused with the fundamentals of *emunah*. Some think the world always existed and don't believe in Hashem. Others say Hashem doesn't know what's happening in the world. As it states (*Tehillim* 73:11), ויש דעה בעליון, 'Is there awareness Above?' Some admit that Hashem knows everything that happens in the world, but they don't believe that Hashem leads it with *hashgacha pratis*. They consider man to be like the fish in the ocean, which don't have *hashgacha pratis*,⁴ and they don't have reward and punishment. But when Hashem chooses an individual or a nation and

performs miracles beyond nature's rules, this disproves all these false ideas. The wondrous miracles reveal that Hashem created the world, וידוע ומשניה ויכול, and that He knows [what happens in the world], He leads it with *hashgacha pratis*, and can do [everything He wants]. If before the miracle occurs, a *navi* prophesied in Hashem's name that it will happen, this will also give credence to the truth of *nevuah*, that Hashem speaks with man, and reveals His secrets to His servants, the prophets..."

There is only One Hashem.

Another aspect of *emunah* that was obtained from the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim is the belief that

3. The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (Stolin) told his chassidim to study this *Ramban*, each day.

4. They don't have *hashgacha pratis* in the manner that human beings have.

there is one Hashem, and not like some religions said, that the good comes from one god and the bad from another god, *chalilah*.

(Baruch Hashem, we don't have such thoughts, nevertheless, we will discuss how this lesson was obtained from the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, because this will teach us an important lesson, which is applicable for all of us.)

The Teshuas Chen (ibid.) writes that after Pharaoh discovered that Hashem runs the world with *hashgacha pratis*, he fell victim to another philosophical error. He came to believe that there are two gods, *chalilah*, one who metes out punishment, and one who bestows kindness.

But then came *makos arov*, the mixture of wild animals that smote the Egyptians and didn't touch the Yidden. As it states (*Shemos* 8:19), וַשֹּׁמֵתִי פְרוֹת בֵּין עַמִּי וּבֵין, Hashem separated the Jewish nation from the Egyptians during this

makah. This showed Pharaoh that the same G-d does *chesed* and *din*. Everything comes from Him.

The Teshuas Chen adds that the Magid Meisharim (the *malach* who taught the Beis Yosef) said that Yisro also initially erred on this matter. He thought that there are two gods, *chalilah*, one to bestow kindness and one for harsh punishment. But when he witnessed *kriyas Yam Suf*, which punished the Mitzrim and saved the Yidden, he discovered that everything is from the One Hashem.

This week's *parsha* discusses the *korban Pesach*. The Maharal (*Gevuras Hashem* ch.60) explains that many aspects of the *korban Pesach* point to number one. The sheep must be (12:5) בֶּן שָׁנָה, one-year-old; (12:46) בְּבֵית אֶחָד, eaten in *one* house; and it is forbidden to break any of the bones into *two*; the bones must remain *one*. The Maharal (*Gevuras Hashem*

ch.60) explains that the *korban Pesach* reminds us that everything comes from the One Hashem. Nothing happens by itself without Hashem. Nothing exists exclusive of the One Hashem.

Everything is for the Good

The awareness that there aren't two gods, *chalilah* (one that bestows good and one that does bad) teaches us an important lesson. Since everything is from Hashem and He is endlessly compassionate and kind, therefore, everything that occurs in the world is unquestionably for the good, even if it doesn't always seem so at first glance.

The Tanya (ch.26) writes, "The way to cleanse one's heart from sadness and all worries is as Chazal say, 'Just as one blesses Hashem for the good, so too, must he praise Hashem for the bad. The Gemara explains this to mean that a person

must accept hardship with joy. He should be just as happy when he endures hardship as when he receives good - because *גם זו לטובה*, 'This too is for the good.' Human eyes are unable to see perceive how hardship can be good because this good comes from the concealed world (*עלמא דאתכסיא*), which is a higher world than the revealed world (*עלמא דאתגליא*). The revealed world is *ו"ה* from Hashem's name *הי"ה*, and the concealed world is *י"ה* [a higher world]. And it states *אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרנו י"ה*, 'Fortunate is the one who is afflicted by *י"ה* from the concealed world because then those afflictions come from a higher and even better place. "

The Tanya adds that when one is enduring pain, he is closer to Hashem because he is connecting to Hashem on a higher level, in the concealed world, which is the world that will be revealed in the future.

The Yidden were enslaved in Mitzrayim, and that was also for their good. They were destined to leave Mitzrayim after 400 years, but due to their slavery and harsh conditions, they were freed after 210 years.

The Pri HaAretz (ibid.) explains that the Egyptians couldn't imagine that slavery was for the Yidden's benefit. They thought the slavery proves that Hashem abandoned the earth and let things happen by chance. How else could they enslave Hashem's chosen nation?

The Pri HaAretz adds that the Mitzrim enslaved the Jewish nation to prove their view, that Hashem

left the world to its own devices.

At the beginning of this week's *parsha*, Hashem sent a message to Pharaoh, explaining to him that his understanding of how the world works is wrong.

"Come to Pharaoh" and Rashi writes, *כי אני והתורה בו*, "and teach him, *אני הכבדתי את לבו*, that I hardened his heart." It isn't as you think, Pharaoh, that slavery is bad for the Jewish nation, and that I'm not involved in the world. Slavery is for their good. In fact, Pharaoh, you didn't even cause the slavery, I did. *אני הכבדתי את לבו*, I made your heart hard, and I convinced you to enslave the Jewish nation because it is for their ultimate good."⁵

5. We quote here the Pri HaAretz:

"It states, *ויעבדו את בני ישראל בפרך*, 'The Mitzrim enslaved the Jewish nation with hard labor.' The Egyptians did so to support their belief [that Hashem abandoned the world, because if Hashem is watching over the world, why does Hashem permit His chosen nation to suffer?] But they didn't know that slavery was Hashem's

Zerizus – Performing Mitzvos Right Away

Have you ever seen hand - made matzos being prepared? There is a spirit of *zrizus* in the bakery. Everyone is rushing, because the matzos have to be made quickly.

This is appropriate because we eat matzah on Pesach to remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim quickly, and there wasn't even enough time to let the dough rise. As it states (12:17), ושמרתם את המצות, "Be cautious with the matzos" be careful that they don't become *chametz*," the reason for this is to remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim quickly.

Rashi on this pasuk writes "Don't read it מצות, matzos, read it מצוות, mitzvos. Just as we don't allow the matzos to become *chametz*, so too, we shouldn't let the *mitzvos* become *chametz*. When a mitzvah comes your way, perform it right away." This *pasuk* has two meanings. It is telling us to guard the matzos so that they don't become *chametz* and teach us to perform *mitzvos* with alacrity and *zerizus*.

A poor person once came to Rebbe Dovid Lelover's *zt'l* door asking for matzos. At this time, all that Rebbe Dovid Lelover had in his home was שמורה מצה which are matzos that were watched carefully to

gift to the Jewish people, because the slavery helped complete the quota of four hundred years sooner. This is the explanation of the *pasuk*, בא אל פרעה, 'Come to Pharaoh' and Rashi writes, והתרה בו, 'and teach him, כי אני הכבדתי את לבו, that I hardened his heart.' Hashem told Moshe to explain to Pharaoh that even the Jewish nation's enslavement didn't happen by Pharaoh's own choice. Therefore, slavery isn't a sign that Hashem abandoned the world. On the contrary, it is an example of Hashem's hashgacha pratis."

ensure that they don't become *chametz* from the time the grains were harvested. It was hard to obtain such matzos, and Rebbe Dovid Lelover was planning to use them for his Seder. But Rebbe Dovid gave the pauper those special matzos, and he decided that he would use regular matzos for the seder.⁶

People asked Rebbe Dovid'l, "Why did you give away your own special matzos that you wanted for the Seder?"

The Rebbe replied, "It states *ושמרתם את המצות* and

Rashi has two explanations: (1) to guard the matzos from *chametz*, (2) to be quick to perform the מצוה. This time, I followed Rashi's second explanation, and I gave the pauper my matzos right away."

Now let us read the entire *pasuk*. It states (12:17), *ושמרתם את המצות כי בעצם, היום הזה הוצאתי את צבאותיכם מארץ מצרים* *ושמרתם את היום הזה לדורתכם מצות*, "Guard the מצות because in the midst of this day I took you out of Mitzrayim..." Now, if we read it *מצות* matzos, according to Rashi's first explanation, the *pasuk* is

6. The matzos that we use for the Seder need to be *מצה שמורה* matzos with which extra precaution was taken so they didn't become *chametz*. *Shulchan Aruch* (453:4) states, "The grains of wheat for *מצה* *מצוה* with which we make the matzah for the mitzvah [for the first two nights of Pesach] have to be guarded that water shouldn't touch them from the time they were harvested (*משעת קצירה*), or at least from when the grains were ground into flour (*משעת מחינה*). If this isn't possible (*בשעת הרחק*), one can buy flour from the market."

The custom is to use *מצה שמורה* for of the entire Pesach. As the *Mishnah Berurah* (25) writes, "Yisrael *kedoshim*, the Jewish nation is holy, and their custom is to use matzos that were safeguarded from *chametz* from the grinding..."

saying, "Make certain that the matzos don't become *chametz*, to remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim quickly."

But, if we read the *pasuk* according to Rashi's second explanation, the *pasuk* is saying, "Be cautious with the *mitzvos*, and perform them right away, because Hashem took us out Mitzrayim" a question arises. Why is being quick to perform *mitzvos* associated with *yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The Ksav Sofer *zt'l* explains:

Our sages tell us that if the Yidden were in Mitzrayim for another moment, they would have descended into the fiftieth level of *tumah*, from where there was no return.⁷ The

pasuk is saying, ושמרתם את המצות, don't push off performing a mitzvah. When an opportunity comes your way, do it right away. כי בעצם היום הזה הוצאתי את צבאותיכם מארץ מצרים, remember what happened in *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Hashem took the Yidden out of Mitzrayim swiftly. If they had been in Mitzrayim for another moment, they would have fallen into the fiftieth level of *tumah*, and then they would have never been redeemed. Let this inspire us to do *mitzvos* as quickly as possible because every moment counts. If you push it off for later, you might lose out on the opportunity.

This story illustrates the importance of doing a mitzvah right away:

7. The Or HaChaim writes that in our generation we fell into the fiftieth gate of *tumah*, but since we are in the post-matan-Torah era, we can be redeemed even from this intense impurity by learning Torah.

Someone once told the Ba'ch that he runs a tavern, and he pays rent to the poritz. Recently, someone convinced the poritz to rent the tavern to him because he would pay a higher rent.

The Ba'ch summoned a wealthy person who he taught *hilchos tzedakah*, each day. The Ba'ch said to him, "You know the poritz personally because you do business with him. Please go to the *poritz* and convince him to keep his original tenant."

The wealthy Yid promised he would do so.

Outside the Bach's home, the wealthy *baal tzedakah* said, "I have to travel to the Leipzig Fair. This is something I simply can't miss. But I will take care of it as soon as I return."

The tavern keeper said, "I'm afraid that by the time you return, the *poritz* may have already signed a

contract with my competitor. And even worse, he might already be living in the tavern, and then it will be harder to send him out. Please take care of it immediately, before you go to Leipzig."

The wealthy *baal tzedakah* replied, "I am liable to lose all my money if I don't go to this fair. I have no choice. I must go. But don't worry, for the fair is only for one week, and I will speak to the *poritz* as soon as I return. I won't go home before I speak to the *poritz*. Everything will be fine."

The *baal tzedakah* added, "Your competitor can't take the tavern away from you if it wasn't decreed on Rosh Hashanah. Everything is in Hashem's hands. We just have to do our *hishtadlus*..."

The tavern keeper was convinced, and he went home to tell his wife the good news. But his wife was anxious. The tavern keeper repeated the ideas of *emunah* and *bitachon* that

he heard from the *baal tzedakah*, but they didn't calm her. She said, "If it was anyone else, the *baal tzedakah* would take care of the matter immediately. But it's for you, and everyone knows that they can push you around. You let people take advantage of you!" She screamed and insulted her husband with her sharp words.

Now they were both worried, and their *shalom bayis* was affected too.

The *baal tzedakah* returned a week later, as he promised, and he went straight to the *poritz*'s home, as he said he would. He succeeded in convincing the *poritz* that he shouldn't rent out the tavern to someone else.

Many years later, the *baal tzedakah* was *niftar*, and he came to the Ba'ch in a dream the day after his *petirah*. He said, "When I was *niftar*, heaven greeted me with joy and honor. The court ruled that I may

go to a very high place in Gan Eden; a place where there are many *tzaddikim*. I went to the gate that leads to Gan Eden, but there was a large, beautiful *malach* in my path, preventing me from passing through. "Please!" I pleaded. The court ruled that I can go to a high place in Gan Eden. Let me pass.'

"The *malach* replied, 'I was created when you spoke to the *poritz* on the behalf of the tavern keeper. I'm a beautiful *malach*, because I was created from this wonderful, good deed. However, the *mitzvah* wasn't perfect; you should have spoken to the *poritz* immediately before traveling to Leipzig. For a week, the couple was distraught, and for a week, you ruined the *shalom bayis*. Therefore, I request that the court judge you again.'

"I was brought before the heavenly court a second time. The court ruled that for seven days -the number of days the couple suffered

- I needed to stand outside Gan Eden. I am now standing in the corridor outside of Gan Eden, and I gaze at the tzaddikim inside. You can't imagine how painful it is for me to be here. So close to Gan Eden, yet unable to enter. Each hour feels like many years..."

The next morning, the Ba'ch gathered the entire community and told them the dream he had. He explained, "Let us learn from this to perform mitzvos immediately. When you can do a good deed, don't push it off for later."

From the Brain Down to the Heart

The kings of Mitzrayim were called פַּרְעֹה. Rearrange the letters, and it spells הַעֲרֵף, the neck. The neck divides the mind from the heart. This is what the Egyptians wanted. Even when the mind sees *emunah* they

want the heart not to be affected by it.

The translation of מַצְרִים is a narrow strait. יְצִיאת מַצְרִים can be translated as "going out of the narrow straits." This implies that we left the narrow constraints of the neck and allowed the *emunah* of the brain to reach the heart.

The Shem MiShmuel (ו"ח תרע"ה) writes in the name of Rebbe Bunim of Pershischa zt'l, "Eisav guarded his heart so that the intelligence of his mind shouldn't influence it." Therefore, his head was separated from his heart, and only his head was buried in מערת המכפלה.

A doctor once asked the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz what he does for a living. He replied that he builds bridges.

The doctor was shocked.

The Divrei Chaim explained that he is busy building a bridge that connects his intellect to his heart.

The Lechovitzer *zt'l* said that the distance between the brain and the heart is greater than the distance between heaven and earth.

The Chazon Ish (*Emunah u'Bitachon* 2:3) writes, "Reuven is a man of *mussar*. The songs of *bitachon* are always on his lips. He always expresses his distaste for those who overdo their *hishtadlus* and chase after *parnassah*. However, Reuven speaks this way at a time when he is doing well in his business and his store is filled with customers. He doesn't need to perform a lot of *hishtadlus* [because everything is going well for him]. He loves *bitachon* because *bitachon* is shining its face on him. But then, surprisingly, we hear Reuven anxiously whispering to his friends, 'What should I do? Someone is opening a store to compete with mine!' Reuven is anxious. At first, he keeps these thoughts to himself, because he is

embarrassed to admit his fears. His friends might mock him for losing his *bitachon*. He does *hishtadlus* and tries to convince his competition not to open a store in his neighborhood. When standard *hishtadlus* didn't accomplish anything, he began doing crooked *hishtadlus*. Shame has disappeared from his heart. He does disgusting things, openly. The competition between the two shopkeepers becomes the topic of conversation in the neighborhood. Unashamed, he makes up false claims to prove that he is acting correctly. He says he is acting *leshem shamayim*, according to *mussar*, etc."

What happened to Reuven's *bitachon*? Why did he lose it? This is because he only had *bitachon* in his mind, and that isn't sufficient. *Emunah* and *bitachon* must reach the heart.

There was once a *bachur* who was straying off the *derech*. The Divrei Shmuel

of Slonim *zt'l* said to the *bachur*, "Since you are among our *chassidim*, I'm certain that you won't leave this world without doing *teshuvah*."

Once, this *bachur* was swimming in the ocean, and he began to drown. People swam out and saved his life.

When he recovered, the people who saved his life asked him, "We heard you shouting '*Teshuvah... Teshuvah...!*' when we came to save you. What did you mean by that? Are you planning to do *teshuvah*?"

He told them that he was telling Hashem that he isn't doing *teshuvah* yet. He explained, "The Divrei Shmuel told me that I won't die without doing *teshuvah*. I was saying that I'm not doing *teshuvah* yet, and therefore, it's too early to take me from the world."

This *bachur* obviously believed in Hashem and believed in *tzaddikim*, yet

he was still living as an irreligious Yid. Why is that? The answer is the same: There was a disconnect between his mind and heart. Intellectually, he believed in Hashem, but that doesn't mean his heart was affected.

During the plague of *barad*, Pharaoh said (*Shemos* 9:27), ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים, "Hashem is the *tzaddik*, and my nation and I are the *resha'im*." At this point, Pharaoh believed in Hashem, and he knew that he was a *rasha*. But Pharaoh didn't change his ways. A few *pesukim* after, it states (9:25), ויחזק לב פרעה ולא שלה את בני ישראל, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he didn't allow Bnei Yisrael to leave." This is because the mind's knowledge isn't sufficient if it doesn't reach the heart.

Before *makas bechoros*, Moshe said that the plague will come (11:4), בַּחצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה, "around midnight". Hashem told Moshe that the plague will happen at midnight. Why did Moshe

change it, and say that it will be "around midnight"? Rashi writes, "Perhaps Pharaoh's astrologists will err [in the clock] and they will say that Moshe lies." If the Egyptians' looked at their clock at midnight, and *makas bechoros* didn't happen, they would say Moshe lied to them. To avoid this problem, Moshe said *בהצוה*, "The plague will happen sometime around midnight."

It is surprising that they would suspect Moshe of lying. The Mitzrim already experienced nine *makos*. Whatever Moshe said would happen, happened. *Makas bechoros* also occurred. As it states (12:30), ותהי צעקה גדלה במצרים כי אין בית אשר "There was a great shout in Mitzrayim, because there wasn't a house without a death." And yet, they would say, "Moshe said it would happen at midnight, and it didn't happen exactly at midnight"!

The Brisker Rav *zt'l* says that this demonstrates that when one doesn't want to believe something, he will find excuses and reasons to deny it. As we explained, in their minds, they knew the truth, but they didn't allow the truth to infiltrate their hearts.

Small Steps

When it comes to doing *teshuvah*, should one rush and improve quickly, or should he improve his ways gradually, step by step?

There is a time and place for both approaches.

It states (12:11), ואלכתם אתו, בחפזון פסח הוא לה' "Eat it in haste because it is a *korban Pesach* for Hashem." Rashi, in one explanation, writes that the *korban* is called פסח, which means jumping because, אתם עשו כל עבודותיו לשם שמים דרך דילוג וקפיצה זכר לשמו שקרוי פסח, "You shall do all of its mitzvos *leshem shamayim* in the form of jumping and rushing, as it is called פסח."

The Torah also writes (ibid.), וככה תאכלו אותו מתניכם חגרים, נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם, that we should eat the *korban Pesach* while girded in our belts, shoes on our feet, and walking stick in our hands. These things show that we are prepared to leave, immediately. All of these matters represent the rushing atmosphere in which we ate the *korban Pesach*.

However, all these *halachos* apply only to the first *korban Pesach*, which was sacrificed in Mitzrayim. Afterward, there is no obligation to dress like we are ready to travel, and there is no mitzvah to eat it *בהפזון*, in haste.

The Tzidkas HaTzaddik (1) explains, "When a person begins *avodas Hashem*, he must act in haste. As we see that for the *Pesach* made in Egypt, it had to be eaten with haste. All other *korban Pesachs* don't need to be eaten in haste. When one begins, one must detach

himself from the temptations of this world, which he is so attached to. Therefore, when he has a moment of inspiration to become better, he must quickly grasp the opportunity, and perhaps he will succeed. But afterward, he should take slow, gradual steps, as this is demonstrated by the *korban Pesach* of all the other generations."

There are times when a person must jump in and hastily improve his ways. However, the standard rule is that one should grow gradually, step by step.

Hashem didn't ask Pharaoh to free the Yidden forever. He asked that he release the Yidden for a three-day holiday in the desert. And after they serve Hashem, they will return.

This is because Hashem doesn't ask people to do more than they can handle. Pharaoh wasn't capable of sending the Yidden out

from Mitzrayim forever. Therefore, Hashem requested less.

Similarly, when we do *teshuvah*, we should be aware that *teshuvah* is a process; it takes time. Hashem isn't asking us to do more than we can handle.

For example, if someone makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* and he realizes that he is wasting a lot of time that could be used for studying Torah, and he resolves to improve, Hashem doesn't expect him to become the greatest *masmid* immediately. Hashem wants him to take a step forward, in the right

direction, whatever is within his capabilities.

A student once saw Reb Binyamin Rabinovitz *zt'l* studying seven hours straight, without interruption, and he asked Reb Binyamin how he attained his *hasmadah*. Reb Binyamin replied, "When I was younger, I made a *kabbalah* that I will learn for the first fifteen minutes of *seder* without interruption. After doing this for a while, I took it upon myself to refrain from speaking for the first half-hour of *seder*. From time to time, I added on some more time and now I am up to seven hours straight, without interruption."⁸

8. There were two brothers, one was learning Torah amidst poverty, and his wealthy brother would send him eight *zlot*es each month to help him out.

Once the wealthy brother said he wants a contract, to clarify that he will get reward in Olam HaBa for the Torah that he is supporting.

The brother, the scholar, replied that he needs time to think it over, and he asked Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l*. Reb Chaim

It states (*Mishlei* 19:3), אולה "Man's foolish ways ruin his path, and he gets angry at Hashem." The Vilna Gaon explains, "Chazal (*Shabbos* 104.) say, הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו, 'When one strives to be pure, he is helped from Above.' Sometimes, a person begins learning Torah or performing a mitzvah and then he stops and he doesn't continue because it became too hard for him. After all, he didn't get help from Above. וזועף לבו 'על ה', he becomes angry at Hashem. He asks, 'Why isn't Hashem helping me?'

But really, he failed because of his own foolishness. A person should seek to grow according to his level; one shouldn't jump levels. If he strives to grow according to his level, he will have *siyata dishmaya* and succeed. But this person didn't climb up to his level, therefore he wasn't helped. This is the translation of the *pasuk*, אולה, because of his foolishness, which was that he didn't act with *yishuv hadaas*, and he tried to reach levels that were beyond him, סילוף דרכו, this causes him not to succeed. וזועף על ה', למה לא סייעהו

Volozhiner said that even without a contract, the wealthy brother will receive reward for the Torah he is supporting. As the Gemara says, נשים במאי זכי, which merit do women have? And the Gemara replies that they earn the merit of Torah, because they help their husbands learn Torah. Similarly, since this wealthy brother is enabling his poor brother to study, he will get the reward of Torah for this.

Nevertheless, Reb Chaim Volozhiner added, he won't get the special reward that is given for those who study Torah מתוך הרחק, when one is poor. The wealthy brother has the merit of Torah, but it is without any hardships. He earns reward for Torah, but not the ultimate reward that will go to his poor brother, for studying Torah מתוך הרחק, amidst difficulties and poverty.

with Hashem, and he asks, 'Why doesn't Hashem help me?'"

Similarly, it states (*Mishlei* 19:2), אין ברנלים חוטא. The Vilna Gaon explains, "The רגלים refer to good *middos* that one can accustom himself to until they become his second nature. (רגלים, or רגילות means to become accustomed to these good *middos*.) However, one must grow from level to level, like someone climbing a ladder. He shouldn't jump to levels that are beyond him. This is the translation of אין ברנלים, when a person jumps to a high level that is beyond him, חוטא, he is sinning, and he will end up without anything because he will fall from that level."

Nevertheless, as we explained, there are times when a person must leap and throw himself into *avodas Hashem*, which might be beyond his level. This is hinted at by the *korban Pesach* that was sacrificed in Mitzrayim. It was a new beginning, and

there was a need to rush. Afterward, one should take the standard path of gradual growth.

"Ten Laughs" - Making *Avodas Hashem* Easy

The Steipler Gaon *zt'l* said, "With ten laughs, one can travel from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim." In his days, the trip from Bnei Brak and Yerushalayim was quite long. The Steipler's advice was to think of the trip in ten parts. Each tenth of the journey isn't all that long. As the Steipler called it, "It's a laugh." You laugh, you jump, and you've traveled a tenth of the distance. Do that ten times, and you traveled the entire way to Yerushalayim, and you won't even feel that it was a long ride.

This can be used as a counsel to make *avodas Hashem* appear easy. Let's say a person wants to study Torah for two hours. If he isn't used to it, it seems like

a very long time. But if you divide two hours into ten parts, it is only 12 minutes each section. (2 hours is 120 minutes. A tenth is 12 minutes). 12 minutes is "a laugh". It isn't so hard to study for twelve minutes. Do that. And then do another 12 minutes. It's not so hard. Do it ten times, and you've learned for two hours straight.

The same concept can be applied to "covering ground" in Torah. For example, let's say you want to study the entire *masechta Yevamos*. It's a hard *masechta*, and there are 122 *blatt*. How will you succeed? When you begin, you might be certain that you will fail. So, let's divide the Gemara in our minds, into ten parts, which is 12 *blatt* in each section. If you would be studying a *masechta* with only 12 *blatt*, you will certainly be able to study it, finish it, and know it. Do that for 12 *blatt* of *Yevamos*. It's like a laugh. Do so another nine

times, and you completed the entire *masechta*.

Or let's say you are learning a long *Tosfos*. It is frightening just to look at it. How will you manage to study this long *Tosfos*, with all the many questions, proofs, logic, etc. You give up before you begin. But if you will look at the *Tosfos* in smaller increments, it isn't so frightening anymore. Tell yourself, "I will learn just *Tosfos's* question." After you know the question, now read the answer. Just one answer isn't so hard. When you get there, you can go on to the next line of *Tosfos* and conquer that. Breaking it down into smaller sections makes a deed that seems intimidating doable.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* gave similar advice to a *bachur* who had a hard time studying Torah for a long time. The Chazon Ish advised him to learn a little bit from many *sefarim*, because many short tasks

are more manageable than one large task.

For example, one can make a plan to study *Chumash* for ten minutes, *Nach* for ten minutes, *Mishnah Berurah* for ten minutes, *Mishnayos* for ten minutes, *Gemara* for ten minutes, and then to study *mussar* for ten minutes. In this way, he studied for an hour, and he didn't feel the pressure and the heaviness of having a long chore. Dividing the chore into sections makes it lighter – psychologically.

Here's another example: A person wants to daven with *kavanah*, but that's also challenging for him. He can tell himself, "I will say the *brachos* with *kavanah*." A small amount isn't so hard. And then he takes on the next part of the *tefillah*.

There are many places where one can use this concept to make *avodas Hashem* easier.

Serve Hashem in Your Way

An ox stood on a mountaintop and watched the birds flying. He wanted to be like the graceful birds. He jumped... but he obviously didn't start flying. This is a *mashal*, the *nimshal* is for us, to remember to strive to complete the mission that is meant for us. We shouldn't try to do the *avodas Hashem* that is not intended for us.

Once there was a bear who wasn't finding enough food in the forest. He decided to get a zoo job because the zoo always has enough food. The bear asked the zookeeper, "Do you need another bear in your zoo? I would like to work here."

"We have enough bears, but the eldest monkey died recently, and we are looking for a replacement. If you want, you can fill that position."

"How can I work as a monkey? Everyone will immediately see that I'm a bear."

"That's not a problem," the zoo manager told him. "We have a school on the premises. We will teach you how to climb on trees and how to act as a monkey."

The bear agreed. As the saying goes, "What doesn't one do for *parnassah*?"

It was difficult for the heavy bear to swing on the trees like a monkey, but he practiced until no one would guess that he was a bear.

The bear was sent to the monkey cage, and he worked hard all day long, pretending to be an oversized monkey.

Finally, the time that he was waiting for arrived. It was nighttime, and the zookeepers were giving out food. They threw him a few bananas. The bear thought to himself, "I

worked so hard just for this? This isn't enough for a large animal like me?"

He left his cage and walked around the zoo to see if he could find something to eat. He came to the bear cage and went inside. "I also used to be a bear," he explained to them.

He saw one bear sitting next to a lot of food, but he wasn't eating it. "Why aren't you eating from this good food?"

The animal replied, "I was born a monkey, and a little bit of food is enough for me. You see, I didn't find *parnassah* in the forest, so I asked the zoo manager if I could work in the zoo as a monkey. The manager told me that they have enough monkeys, however, one of the older bears died, and they needed a replacement. I told the manager that I don't know how to be a bear, but he assured me that there was a school on premises, and they will teach me

everything I need to know to be a bear. But it isn't easy being a bear. I would much more prefer being my old monkey self."

The bear replied, "I am a bear, pretending to be a monkey, and you are a monkey, pretending to be a bear. Let's tell our boss that we should change places. I should go to the bear cage, and you should work in the monkey cage."

It was an excellent idea, and they immediately went to the zookeeper to ask for permission to exchange places.

The zookeeper replied, "You can't do that here. You were hired to be a bear, and you were hired to be a monkey, and you can't change your positions in the middle of your contract."

The animals told him, "You speak like a donkey!"

The zookeeper replied, "Actually, I used to be a donkey. I came to the zoo

and asked whether they needed a donkey. They told me that they didn't need a donkey, but they said that they needed a zookeeper. The zookeeper who used to work in the zoo had died recently, and they were looking for a replacement. I told the zookeepers that I don't know how to be a zookeeper, and they told me that it isn't a problem. They have a school on the premises, and they will teach me how to be a zookeeper..."

This is how it appears when people try to live the life of others. Each person should serve Hashem according to the way that Hashem created him.

Reb Mendel Putterfus *zt'l* spoke about the time he was imprisoned in Siberia. The warden made a rule that the prisoners can't play cards. There was no reason for this law, other than to break the spirit of the prisoners. Some of the prisoners

smuggled in a deck of cards, and they would play in their barracks.

Once, one of the prisoners snitched on them. The guards came to their quarters and searched all over for the cards, but they didn't find anything.

This is what happened: One of the prisoners was an expert at pickpocketing. (Maybe that was why he was imprisoned.) He knew how to take a wallet out of another person's pocket, without the person feeling anything. This time, instead of picking a pocket, he used his talents to place the deck of cards into the pocket of one of the guards who was searching the barracks.

The guard looked for the deck of cards under the beds, inside the drawers, in everyone's pockets, and he didn't realize that it was in his own pocket.

The *nimshal* is that people think the treasure is

elsewhere. They want to copy others, because they are certain that others know how to serve Hashem better than they do. But this isn't necessarily true. Each person has his own treasure in his pocket. All he has to do is discover it and then master it.

Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l* expressed it this way: Someone once approached a king and said, "Tell me what I can do for you, and I will do it for you because I want to serve the king."

The king replied, "There isn't much that I need. I have enough soldiers, generals, advisors. But there is one job you can do. I need someone to guard my house. There is deep mud around my house. The guard must stand up to his knees in the mud and guard from there."

If this person was truly loyal to the king, he would be happy to do this service. But if all he was interested in was his own honor - to

be able to tell people that he works for the king – he would decline, because the job isn't respectable.

The *nimshal* is that each person must fulfill the mission that Hashem prepared for him. One might think, "I want to do the service that others do," but that might not be the mission that Hashem wants from you.

The Beis Avraham (ש"פ ר"ה נהר) describes it in the following way:

Some gems are mined from deep in the earth. It is extremely dark down there, and the air is suffocating. Only people who are broken, and have lost hope in life, work there. But from those places the gems that will be placed in the king's crown come forth.

Similarly, people go through different struggles and tests in life, but it is possible that from these challenges, Hashem's

honor will emerge in a marvelous way.

There was once a big battle going on, and the king's life was in danger. One loyal soldier fought with all his might and saved the king. The king praised the soldier, dressed him in expensive clothing, and granted him a high position in the palace. Whenever the king met the soldier, he was delighted to see him. It wasn't the golden threads in his clothing that impressed the king. It was his other clothes, the ones he wore in battle, that the king loved. Those clothes were soaked in blood because the soldier was wounded in the battle, but he survived, and he saved the king. The king kept that sullied uniform in his treasury because that was why the king loved him so much.

The *nimshal* is that Hashem loves our services that come out of our struggles to do His will.

When Yaakov Avinu was about to go down to Mitzrayim, Hashem called out to him in a dream, יעקב יעקב. Rashi writes that the double expression of Yaakov's name expresses love and affection. We wonder, why didn't Hashem call Yaakov ישראל ישראל, which is Yaakov's more exalted name, the name used when Yaakov was in a higher spiritual state? The answer is that Hashem's greatest love for us is when we endure difficult struggles, and yet we pass the tests that Hashem sets before us.

Shovavim

Chazal say that a *bas kol* goes out every day and announces (Yirmiyahu 3:22), שובו בנים שובבים, "Do *teshuvah*, rebellious children." During the weeks of Shovavim this call is heard more clearly.

The Baal Shem Tov asked, "No one hears the call of the *bas kol*, so what's the purpose in it?"

The Baal Shem Tov answers that our *neshamos* hear the call. There are moments when we are suddenly roused to *teshuvah*; this results from the call of the *bas kol*, calling us to return to Hashem. We can take advantage of this call – especially during the weeks of Shovavim – to improve our ways and return to Hashem.

The Pri Megadim (*HaMagid*) writes three translations for the word שובב:

- 1 - rebellious/מרד
- 2 - broken/שבירה
- 3 - banished/גירוש.

The *bas kol* says, שובו בנים שובבים. This is referring even to someone who rebelled against Hashem, he maimed his soul, and was banished from Hashem's presence, a *bas kol* tells him, שובו בנים שובבים, return to Hashem, ארפה משובתיכם, and everything will be forgiven and cured.

The Pri Megadim adds a fourth translation for

שובים. It is "People who have done *teshuvah* several times before." Thus, שובו בנים can be translated, "Do *teshuvah* children who have done *teshuvah* several times." Do *teshuvah* again, try again, and Hashem will accept your *teshuvah*.

Last year there was also Shovavim. We tried to do *teshuvah* then. There was also Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and many other days when we tried to do *teshuvah*. We repented, we made *kabalos* to become better, yet we didn't keep to resolutions, and we remained the same (or *chas veshalom*, we became worse). We might feel that it is too late to do *teshuvah* again. The *bas kol* announces, שובו בנים שובים, even if you did *teshuvah* many times before, do *teshuvah* again, ארפה משבותיכם, and I will accept your *teshuvah* and cleanse you from your sins.

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 15.) writes, that a *bas kol* announced, שובו בנים שובים חוץ מאחר. The Rebbe of Volednick

zt'l (Sha'aris Yisrael Shaar Shovavim, Drush 1) explains that חוץ מאחר means, someone who sinned so much until he is חוץ, outside the boundaries of *kedushah*, and he is אחר, a different person due to his sins, nevertheless, the *bas kol* calls to him, שובו בנים שובים, that he should return to Hashem.

The reason we can still do *teshuvah* is hinted at in the word בנים, children. A father will always accept his son when he returns to him. It is never too late for a child to return to his father.

A *mashgiach* once threw a *bachur* out of the yeshiva. The Klausenberger Rebbe zt'l asked the *mashgiach* why he did it. The *mashgiach* related all the *aveiros* that the *bachur* did, and added, "We can't keep a *bachur* in yeshiva like this."

The Rebbe said, "I agree, but I spoke to the *bachur*, and he said he is ready to change."

The *mashgiach* replied, "He said that to me, too. He told me a thousand times that he will become better. How many times can he say it and not do anything?"

The Klausenberger Rebbe pointed to his white beard and said, "I also said to Hashem many times that I will become better, and I haven't done so. In your opinion, should I give up?"⁹

9. Suppose a one hundred dollar bill falls in the mud, and people step on it and it gets wrinkled and muddy, is it still worth a hundred dollars? Similarly, if a diamond falls into mud, its value remains the same. The same is with a Yid. Regardless of where a Yid falls, he remains precious, and he can always return to Hashem. Despite what occurred, his value was never depreciated.

The Rebbe of Savran *zt'l* once accidentally blew out the Shabbos candles with his talis, and he was very upset about that; he wasn't able to sleep all night. In the morning, when it was time to say *pesukei d'zimra*, he didn't have any joy in his heart, and he couldn't daven. Then he thought, "If this was a sin, I will go to Gehinnom. Chazal says that *resha'im* sing *shirah* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Gehinnom. If that's the case, I will also sing *shirah* to Hashem here on Earth." With this thought in mind, he was able to daven properly.



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