

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Shmini



Torah WELLSPRINGS

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings - Shmini

"Aharon was Silent"

It states (10:1-2) וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נֹדֶב וְאַבִּיהוּא אֵישׁ מִקְדָּחַתּוֹ... וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה' "Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before Hashem foreign fire, which He had not commanded them. And fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." There are different explanations for why they deserved this punishment (see Rashi), but one reason was that everyone should see how cautious they must be with the kedushah of the Mishkan.

Hashem had told Moshe that this would occur. As he said to Aharon (10:3) הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר "This is exactly as Hashem said, 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me'..." Rashi explains that Hashem wanted to punish בְּקָרְבֵי, the tzaddikim, those who are close to Hashem, because אֶקְדֹּשׁ, that creates a greater *kiddush Hashem*. It will show that if tzaddikim are punished for an aveirah (such as the aveirah of not properly upholding the kedushah of the Mishkan), and their closeness to Hashem couldn't protect them, certainly, this will be the fate of regular people who sin. Moshe said to Aharon, "Aharon, my brother! I knew this House was to be sanctified through the beloved ones of Hashem, but I thought it would be either

through me or through you. Now I see that Nadav and Avihu are greater than us!"

The pasuk concludes, וַיֵּדֶם אֶהֱרֹן, "Aharon was silent." He didn't complain. He believed and trusted that Hashem was treating him justly, and that it was for the good.

Some add that וַיֵּדֶם is from the word דומם, inanimate items. This describes how strong Aharon was. He didn't allow what occurred to his children to cause him to complain or question Hashem. He accepted Hashem's decree with emunah in Hashem.

Reb Yosef Shaul Nathanson zt'l (in his sefer Divrei Shaul) explains the words (ibid.) בְּקָרְבֵי אֶקְדֹּשׁ, וְעַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָעָם אֶפְבֵּד, as follows: בְּקָרְבֵי, the tzaddikim, who are close to Hashem, אֶקְדֹּשׁ they sanctify My name because of their high level of emunah, that they believe that even a tragedy such as this one is also from Hashem.¹ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָעָם, but for average people, אֶפְבֵּד, they find what occurred to be very heavy (כבדות)... They feel deep heaviness in their hearts. It is hard for them to believe that it was for the good.

It states (Tehillim 94:12) אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר תִּיַסְרֶנּוּ "Fortunate is the man whom You, Hashem, gives yesurim..." The Midrash (Tanchuma Ki Seitzei 2) states on this pasuk: "A person must be grateful to Hashem when he endures yesurim because the yesurim will draw him close to Hashem. As it states (Mishlei

1. More than eighty years ago, a young man was niftar in Yerushalayim, leaving behind a widow and young *yesomim*. The mother had to stay home to care for the young children, so her oldest daughter took on the responsibility to support the family. There was a famine in Yerushalayim then, and even getting bread was challenging. One day, this girl went to Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l and cried bitterly about her difficult life and her family's situation. Rebbe Shlomke listened to her, and then he fell into deep thought. After a minute, he said, "For what price are you willing to sell me the yesurim you are enduring?"

Hearing those words, the girl recognized the great merit she was earning, giving her the strength to go on. (I heard this story from a close relative of this family.)

Rebbe Shlomke was from the great tzaddikim and had ruach hakodesh on a very high level. Yet, he was interested in buying this girl's yesurim because he understood the value of yesurim.

3:12) "כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח וקצב את בן ירצה" For Hashem chastens the one He loves, as a father placates a son."²

The Midrash says that we can draw an analogy to when a king is angry at his grandchild, and someone restores peace between the two. Shouldn't the grandson be appreciative of the one who brought him back to the king? Similarly, if someone's child dies, r'l, he should express appreciation to Hashem because this child will bring him back to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as it states כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח, "For Hashem chastens the one He loves..."

Everything is for the Good... But it is ok to Cry

The parashah begins (9:1) ויהי ביום השמיני "It was on the eighth day..." Rashi writes, "It was the first of the month of Nisan, the day on which the Mishkan was erected. This day took ten 'crowns' [of distinction, which are enumerated in *Seder Olam* 7]."

It was a very happy day, so we wonder why the pasuk begins with the words ויהי ביום? The Gemara (Megillah 10b) states that whenever it states ויהי בימי, it represents a sad event. What sadness is being alluded to here?

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh answers, "Perhaps the pasuk alludes to Moshe's distress. Moshe saw the greatness Aharon received, and the greatness that was given to Aharon's children, and he knew that Aharon's children would receive this honor forever, for generations." Moshe was upset that he lost this opportunity.³ This is alluded to in the words ויהי ביום.

The Or HaChaim writes, "When the time came [that Aharon and his children received this honor], Moshe was disappointed that he lost the honor and splendor of being a kohen. Although Moshe was extremely righteous and humble, nevertheless, הלא כל לב חי מרגיש behold, the heart of every living being will feel its distress. Especially when it is about losing a precious and wonderful mitzvah, like this one."

We don't have any understanding of the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu. Nevertheless, these words of the Or HaChaim teach us an important lesson. It is ok to feel pain, to feel distressed. As the Or HaChaim writes, הלא כל לב חי מרגיש, "behold, the heart of every living being will feel its distress." The feeling of remorse and disappointment is a human reaction, which doesn't necessarily mean one lacks emunah in Hashem. We believe that everything is for the good, nevertheless,

2. It states (10:4) ויקרא משה אל מישאל ואל אלזפן בני עוזאל דד אהרן ויאמר אליהם קרבו שאו את אחיכם מאת פני הקדש אל מחוץ למחנה "Moshe summoned Mishael and Elzafan, the sons of Aharon's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, 'Draw near; carry your brothers from within the Mishkan, to take them outside of the camp.'" Generally, there isn't more than one *trop* per word in the Torah. However, on top of the word קרבו there are two *taamim*, two *trop*, teaching the tunes we say as we say this word. It appears like this: קָרְבוּ. (On top of the ק there is a תלישא גדולה, and on top of the ב there is a גרשיים. We can translate תלישה גדולה to mean "very detached." גרשיים can mean "banished". It is written in plural, גרשיים, so it is being doubly banished. So, the word קָרְבוּ is alluding to a person who has become "very detached" from Hashem, and "doubly banished" and the Torah tells him קָרְבוּ, which means "draw near." This teaches us that even when one goes through very difficult times, Hashem is waiting for him to draw near.

The *taamim* are on top of the letters ק and ב. These two letters ק"ב are gematria אמונה. This hints that with emunah, a person can feel close to Hashem, even when going through challenging times, r'l.

3. The Or HaChaim explains that Moshe was destined to be the kohen gadol, but when Hashem told him to go to Pharaoh and take the Jewish nation out of Mitzrayim, Moshe pleaded with Hashem numerous times to be relieved of the mission. Hashem became angry with Moshe, which is why he lost the opportunity to be the kohen gadol, and neither would his children be kohanim (see Rashi Shemos 4:14).

it is ok to feel the pain, and to feel the distress. The Torah wasn't given to malachim.

Aharon was unique. The Torah praises him by saying וידום אהרן, that he remained silent, and he didn't allow the distress to reach his heart. But even if one does feel the pain, this doesn't disqualify him. It is natural to feel pain and remorse.

There is a prohibition to rip one's skin or to pull out one's hair due to distress when a relative dies (see Devarim 14:1-2). The Ramban points out that, "The Torah doesn't forbid crying [over a dead relative] because it is natural for one to cry when others depart, even when they are all still alive." Feeling remorse is natural and allowed.

So, how should a person react when confronted with tzaros, r'l? What should be the focus and thought process?

The first thing he must know is that although feeling sadness and distress is permitted, one is not obligated to feel that way even after suffering a loss. The Gemara (Succah 25a) calls the distress one has during the mourning period, מרדא דרשות, a permitted

thought. Rashi explains: "Although he is obligated to keep the laws of *aveilus*, such as not wearing shoes and not bathing, to show honor for his deceased relative, he is not obligated to feel tzaar."

Even if one does feel distressed and pained, he shouldn't focus on his tzaros. He shouldn't think about them all day long. He should try to turn his thoughts to other matters as much as possible.⁴

Furthermore, he should remember that everything that occurs is bashert from Hashem, our compassionate father, who solely does good for Klal Yisrael. Although now he doesn't understand how this can be for the good, the time will come when he will recognize that כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד, everything Hashem does is for the good.

The essence of ניהום אבלים, the mitzvah to console mourners, is essentially to help the mourner reframe his thoughts and to view his distress in a new way that will give him comfort. Rashi (Bereishis 6:6) states, כל לשון ניהום, שבמקרא... כולם לשון מחשבת אחרת הם, "Whenever the Torah writes the word ניהום... the intention is to think another thought."⁵

4. I heard from Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter Shlita that the yetzer hara causes people to have temptations that are fitting for very lowly people. When this occurs, the person asks himself, "How did I fall so far? How can I have such thoughts and temptations? I must not be on the level I thought I was on. It must be that I am on a low level." When this occurs, the person is at risk of falling to that low level he judges suited for himself.

However, a person should tell himself, "Where does it say in the Torah that it is forbidden for a person to have a yetzer hara, which draws him to aveiros? The prohibition is to *listen* to the yetzer hara! Having a yetzer hara isn't an aveirah. On the contrary, with the yetzer hara (which he overcomes), he can reach the highest levels.

We can say the same regarding the thoughts of distress and sadness people have when tragedies happen to them, r'l. These thoughts of tzaar aren't an aveirah, it is natural for a person to have such thoughts. His job is to overcome these feelings and not allow himself to dwell on his sorrow.

5. The Imrei Emes zt'l lost his son, Reb Yitzchak, when he was young. The *petirah* was close to Shabbos, parashas Vayeira. It was a very sad moment for the rebbe and the chassidim, but when Shabbos arrived, and throughout Shabbos, one couldn't detect any sign of distress on the Imrei Emes's face or actions. He appeared the same as he did every Shabbos. Friday night, his divrei Torah was on the pasuk קח נח את בנך אשר אהבת את יצחק (which discusses bringing his son, Yitzchak, as a korban to Hashem).

When Shabbos was over, he sat down on the ground to sit shivah and was very broken. He couldn't get to himself. Many tried to console him, including many great rabbanim and tzaddikim from Poland, but their words didn't succeed in comforting his broken heart. But then a simple person came, a Yid from

Changing the mindset can help alleviate feelings of heaviness and distress.

The Rashbam (10:3) translates **וְעַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָעָם** **וְעַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָעָם**, that Hashem is honored when people have a tzarah, and they forget about their tzarah and instead focus on avodas Hashem.

Parnassah Comes from Hashem

It states (11:27) **וְכָל הוֹלֵךְ עַל כַּפָּיו בְּכָל הַחַיָּה הַהֹלֶכֶת עַל אַרְבַּע טְמוּאִים הֵם לָכֶם**, "And every one that walks on its paws... they are tamei to you." The Divrei Binah writes that the pasuk hints that when a person thinks his parnassah comes from the work of his hands, this thought is tamei because parnassah doesn't come from one's work; it comes from Hashem.

Also, it states (11:29) **וְזֶה לָכֶם הַטְּמֵא בַשָּׂרָץ**, "This is tamei for you among the creeping creatures..." The Avodas Yisrael explains that **בַּשָּׂרָץ** means that it runs (from the word **רָץ**). This alludes to the people who are always rushing back and forth, from here to there to earn their parnassah, speak to a shadchan, or with an askan, etc. This attitude is tamei because a person must rely on Hashem. He thinks he will benefit more by conducting more hishtadlus, forgetting that one cannot receive more or improve his situation beyond what is destined for him.⁶

When one knows that parnassah is from Hashem, he will designate times for studying Torah. However, when one thinks his parnassah results from his hard work, finding time for Torah study is challenging.

In this week's parashah, one of the tamei (unkosher) birds mentioned is (11:17) **הַשֹּׁלֵה**. Rashi writes that it is called so because it is **הַשֹּׁלֵה** "scoops up fish from the sea."

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l teaches that the sea represents Torah,⁷ fish represent the Jewish nation,⁸ and the **שֹׁלֵה** bird represents the yetzer hara. As Rashi writes, this bird **הַשֹּׁלֵה** "scoops up fish from the sea." This is a *remez* to the yetzer hara, who attempts to prevent people from studying Torah. How does the yetzer hara succeed? Mainly with the claim that we need many additional hours daily to engage in parnassah, until there is no time left for studying Torah.

Our response should be the same as in the Gemara (Brachos 61b). The Gemara tells that the cruel kingdom (Rome) once decreed that Yisrael may not study Torah. Papus ben Yehudah found Reb Akiva gathering people and learning Torah with them.

Papus asked him, "Aren't you afraid of the government?"

Hungary. He said, "Chazal (Megillah 31b) say, **סְתִירַת וְקִנִּים בְּנִין**, when elders [tzaddikim, gaonim] break something, it will result in building. Something positive will result from it.

This Yid said to the Imrei Emes: If this is said about **וְקִנִּים**, elderly tzaddikim, it is undoubtedly so when Hakadosh Baruch Hu causes a **סְתִירָה**, when He breaks something. He is the **זָקֵן מְלֵא רַחֲמִים**, the elder with much compassion. His breaking is certainly for the sake of building. A grand, wonderful edifice will come from what Hashem breaks.

The Imrei Emes noted, "This Yid comforted me."

6. Reb Moshe Sternbuch shlita relates that his mother once asked Reb Elchanan Wasserman zy'a hy'd, how much hishtadlus one is obligated to do? Reb Elchanan replied, "One thing must be clear: From doing a lot of hishtadlus, a person won't earn a penny more than what was destined for him to earn on Rosh Hashanah. So, why should he work and toil for no purpose or gain?"

7. There are many sources that compare water and the sea to Torah. One is the Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabba (5:14). People call Gemara **יַם הַתַּלְמוּד**, the sea of Talmud, because Torah is compared to water.

8. Fish represent the Jewish nation (see Bereishis Rabba 97:3, on the words **וַיִּדְגוּ לְרוּב**). The Midrash says, "Just as fish live in water, the Jewish nation lives in the sea of Torah."

Reb Akiva replied, "I will tell you a mashal: A fox was walking near a river and saw fish gathered and rushing from place to place. The fox asked the fish, "Why are you running away?"

They replied, "We are escaping from the nets and traps humans cast to catch us."

The fox offered, "Join me on the dry land. We will live together, as your ancestors lived together with my ancestors.

The fish replied, "Is it you that people call the wisest animal? You aren't wise, you are foolish. If we are afraid in the place where we can survive, we should certainly be afraid in the place where we will die!"

Similarly, Reb Akiva explained to Papus ben Yehudah, "Torah is our life, as it states (Devarim 30:20) *הוא חייך ואורך ימך*, 'It is your life and the length of your days.' If we are in danger when we learn, certainly we are in danger if we stop learning Torah!"

Shortly afterwards, Reb Akiva was caught and placed in jail. Papus ben Yehudah was also captured and imprisoned. Papus ben Yehudah told Reb Akiva, Reb Akiva, you are fortunate, because you were arrested for teaching Torah. Woe to Papus, who was jailed for trivial matters."

Similarly, we should say to the yetzer hara, "Torah is our life and the source of our sustenance. If when we study Torah, we struggle with parnassah, certainly if we stop learning Torah, our financial situation will be much worse."

We shouldn't be lax with tefillah, either, due to our desire to earn parnassah. We must believe that davening well increases our parnassah, rather than diminishing it.

After Nadav v'Avihu were niftar, Moshe warned Aharon (their father), and he warned Elazar and Isamar (their brothers) not to leave the Mishkan in the midst of the *avodah*. He said (Vayikra 10:7) *ומפאת אהל מועד לא תצאו פן תמותו*, "Do not go out of the entrance of Ohel Moed, lest you die..."

The Rambam (ביאת המקדש פ"ב ה"ה) explains that they might be devastated from the deaths of Nadav v'Avihu, and due to their confusion, they might want to leave the Mishkan. Moshe warned them they must remain inside the Mishkan until the *avodah* is completed.

The Rambam adds that this obligation is for every kohen. It is forbidden for a kohen to leave the Beis HaMikdash during an *avodah*. The Rambam writes, "A kohen who leaves the Beis HaMikdash when the *avodah* is being performed, he is *חייב מיתה* (deserves the death penalty)... as it states (Vayikra 10:7) *ומפאת אהל מועד לא תצאו פן תמותו*, 'Do not go out of the entrance of Ohel Moed, lest you die....' This means they shouldn't abandon the *avodah* and go outside *מבהלים ודחופים*, confused and rushing because of a decree."

Reb Shimshon Pinkus *zt'l* (Tiferes Shimshon, Shemini p.95) explains that to leave in the middle of an *avodah* is a disgrace for the *avodah*. He must finish the *avodah* first, and then he can leave, or ask another kohen to complete the *avodah* for him. But he can't abandon the *avodah* and leave it hanging. That is a disgrace for the *avodah*.

We learn from this a lesson regarding tefillah. When one is in the middle of davening, it is a disgrace to get up and leave. Tefillah, in our generation, is in the place of the *korbanos*. It is a disgrace to leave the tefillah before it is completed.

It states (10:10) *ולתבדיל בין הקדש ובין החל*, "To distinguish between holy and profane..." The Divrei Yisrael explains that *הקדש* represents Torah and tefillah. *החל* represents parnassah and other worldly matters. The Torah teaches that we must separate them. When we are davening or learning, it isn't the time to think about one's business. Now it is time to be fully engaged in *avodas hakodesh*.

Keep On Trying

A child wanted to see the rebbe at a tish of the Beis Yisrael, so he stood on his toes to

see past the people in front of him and blocked his view. He tried several times, and each time, a bachur who stood behind him knocked him back down, as if to tell him, "Take it easy. Stop jumping up and trying to see the rebbe."

The Beis Yisrael noticed. He ignored the bachur who was trying to stop the child, and looked at the child, and with his two hands, the rebbe made a sign that meant "You are doing good. Keep it up. Don't give up!"

Sometimes, the yetzer hara comes to a person and tells him, "You took on kabbalos tovos to improve your way, but you soon forgot about them, and you returned to your old ways. Eventually, you made another kabbalah, hoping this time would be different. But that didn't last either. Then you took on another kabbalah and failed a third time. This pattern has been going on for months and years. What did you gain from all those kabbalos? You don't keep them and are at the same place where you started. It is obvious that you are a failure at avodas Hashem."

However, one can turn this discouraging claim into a source of *hischazkus*. One can respond to the yetzer hara, "Why do you say that I am distant from avodas Hashem? The exact opposite is true. No matter what happens, I keep trying. My trying proves that I am very connected to Hashem."

Reb Mendel Futterfas zt'l tells that when he was in prison, in Russia, he once watched a spider spin a web on one of his cell walls. A fly flew into the web, tried to get out, but after each attempt, the fly fell back down. Reb Mendel noticed that the spider was watching the fly from a distance, but wasn't doing anything. However, when the fly lost hope and stopped trying to escape the web, the spider came in to finish the job.

One can learn lessons from every occurrence in life, and Reb Mendel contemplated what he saw, trying to learn a

lesson in avodas Hashem. He came up with the following thought. The spider represents the yetzer hara (see Succah 52a). When the yetzer hara sees a person trying, it leaves him alone. He knows that at this time, he can't conquer him. But when the person loses hope, the yetzer hara swoops down.

It states (11:21) אַךְ אֶת זֶה תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל שָׂרְץ הָעוֹף הַהַלֵךְ ... עַל אַרְבַּע ... לְנִתְרָה בָּהֶן עַל הָאָרֶץ, "However, among all the flying insects that walk on four legs, you may eat from those... which hop on the ground. Those who "hop" (לְנִתְרָה) are kosher. They fall down afterwards, but they try to jump up and reach higher, so they are kosher creatures.

In contrast, Rashi (Bereishis 1:20) states, כָּל דָּבָר שֶׁרִץ גָּבוֹה מִן הָאָרֶץ קְרוּי שָׂרִץ, "Anything that isn't higher than the earth is called a שָׂרִץ." This hints at a person who doesn't elevate himself; he doesn't try to go higher. He is compared to a שָׂרִץ, an impure creature.

It states (11:7) וְאֵת הַחֲזִיר כִּי מִפְרָסִים הוּא וְשֹׁסֵעַ. The literal translation of the pasuk is that a chazir is impure because, although it has split hooves, it doesn't chew its cud. But are pshatim according to remez on this pasuk. When the Arvei Nachal visited Rebbe Reb Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh, he said the following pshat on this pasuk: When a person wants to jump high, he will first take a few steps back, and then with a running start, he can jump high. The same can be said about ruchniyus. To reach higher levels, one must first experience setbacks. As it states (Mishlei 24:16) כִּי שֶׁבַע יִפֹּל צַדִּיק וְקָם, "The tzaddik falls seven times and rises." This is alluded to in the pasuk וְאֵת הַחֲזִיר, if a person falls back from his level, it isn't really a descent. Rather, כִּי מִפְרָסִים הוּא, he will take a larger step forward. The fall will help him reach even higher levels. The condition is וְהוּא גָּרָה לֹא יֵגֵר, he mustn't live (גֵּר) at that low level. If he plans to remain at that low level that he fell to, he will likely drop even further. Instead, when one falls, he must be prepared to bounce back, and then he will rise to even higher levels than ever before.⁹

9. A gadol said that once, in a mikvah, he saw a sign, "Use cautious not to slip on the stairs." The gadol

The Ramban writes (quoting a Sifra), "Aharon saw the form of an ox on the mizbeiach [which represents the egel] and he was frightened. [He understood that the 'ox' was a sign that he wasn't worthy to bring the korbanos, since he had an association with the formation of the egel.] Moshe came to him and said, 'Aharon, my brother, don't be afraid. Be proud and approach the mizbeiach.'"

The Baal HaTurim teaches that Aharon looked at the קרנות, the corners of the mizbeiach, and they appeared to him like the horns of a calf. This was to break his spirit, to make him feel unworthy of bringing the korbanos. Moshe told him, "Don't look at the קרנות. Go to the mizbeiach. You were chosen to do this service."

The lesson is a reminder for all Yidden that we are worthy to serve Hashem. Hashem chose us to do His service. It is just the yetzer hara who tells us that we aren't worthy of greatness.¹⁰

Imrei Chanoch (written by a student of the Avnei Nezer) writes that Chazal (Sotah 5a) tell us that a talmid chacham should have an 1/8th of an 1/8th of pride (שמיני שבשמיני). The words שמיני שבשמיני can be translated as the eighth pasuk of parashas שמיני. This pasuk is וַיִּקְרַב אֶהְרֹן אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּיחַ וַיִּשְׁחַט אֶת הָעֵגֶל הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, "Aharon approached the mizbeiach and slaughtered the egel of his chatas." The lesson is that a person must always lift his moral, and regardless of what occurred in the past, feel confident that he can now serve Hashem properly and well and accomplish great things.¹¹

noted that when one descends the stairs, which implies that he is going down levels, he must be careful not to slip and fall even further, chalilah.

10. On the words וישחט את עגל, the rishonim explain that Aharon slaughtered the yetzer hara who wanted him to dwell on the golden calf. He said, "Even so, I will go and do Hashem's will."

11. We say in Haggadah shel Pesach, מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבדתו. The Machnovka Rebbe zt'l said that his father would say, מתחילה, when a person focuses on the past, what used to be, that is avodah zarah. ועכשיו, but to focus on the present, קרבנו המקום לעבדתו, that will draw a person to avodas Hashem.

Teshuvah through Love

It states (9:2) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל אֶהְרֹן קח לך עֵגֶל בֶּן בָּקָר, לְחַטָּאת, "Hashem said to Aharon, "Take for yourself a calf as a chatas." The meforshim explain that the egel was to atone for the חטא העגל. The question is, there is a rule: אין קטיגור, נעשה סניגור, something used to prosecute, and remind heaven of our sins, can't be used as an advocate, to remove our sins. How then can the calf rectify the sin of the golden calf?

The Kli Chemdah answers, quoting the Sfas Emes, that Aharon and Yidden did teshuvah with love, and the Gemara (Yoma 86b) states that when Yidden do teshuvah through love, the aveiros become mitzvos. Therefore, an egel is no longer a prosecutor; rather, it is our advocate. Due to their teshuvah, the egel became like a mitzvah.

It states (Yeshayahu 40:2) כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנוֹהָ, "Her sin has been appeased." The Kli Yakar explains that the sin itself goes up before Hashem and becomes our advocate. So great is teshuvah from love, that the aveiros turn around and become merits. A hint to this concept is the הלבנה, one of the components of the ketores in the Beis HaMikdash. The הלבנה has a foul scent, representing the sinners of Yisrael. But they, too, become part of the ketores, a beautiful scent before Hashem. This is because when baalei aveirah do teshuvah with love, they create a nachas ruach before Hashem.

Moshe told the nation to bring the korbanos he listed because (9:4) כִּי הַיּוֹם ה' נִרְאָה אֵלֵיכֶם, "for today Hashem is appearing to you." The Alshich Hakadosh notes that Moshe didn't say כִּי הַיּוֹם ה' נִרְאָה אֵלַי, "for today

Hashem is appearing to us". It seems that Hashem will come to Aharon and to the nation, but not to Moshe. How can that be?

אך פרי תבואה (written by Rebbe Hershele Liske zy'a) answers that Chazal teach us, "The place where baalei teshuvah stand, the greatest tzaddikim can't stand." The Shechinah will come down to dwell with Aharon and the Jewish nation because they did teshuvah. Moshe never sinned with the egel, so he didn't get this privilege.

Moshe said to Aharon (9:7) קרב אליהמזבח, "Approach the mizbeiach" to bring the korbanos. Rashi explains that Aharon needed encouragement: שְׁהָיָה אַהֲרֹן בּוֹשׁ וְנִרְאָה לְגַשְׁתָּ, אָמַר לוֹ: מוֹשֶׁה, לָמָּה אַתָּה בּוֹשׁ? לָכֵן נִבְחַרְתָּ. "Aharon was embarrassed and he was afraid to approach the mizbeiach [due to his association with the egel]. Moshe told him, 'Why are you embarrassed? You were chosen for this!' The Chasam Sofer explains that Moshe was telling Aharon that his merits are greater than his, because Aharon had the merit of teshuvah with love. Therefore, this aveirah became a merit. לָמָּה אַתָּה בּוֹשׁ? לָכֵן נִבְחַרְתָּ, so why are you embarrassed? This matter, which you think is to your detriment, is the reason you were chosen.

The Alshich HaKadosh (Vayikra 7:2) advises people to do teshuvah with love before they die, because then they will benefit even from their aveiros in Olam HaBa. We quote: מֵאֲהַבָּה טָרַם יְמֹת בְּאוֹפֵן שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לּוֹ לְזִכּוֹת וַיֹּאכֵל וַיִּהְיֶה מֵהַזְדוּן בְּעִצְמוֹ, כִּי תַחַת הָיָה הַחַטָּא טוֹמְאָה – קֹדֶשׁ קְדוּשִׁים הוּא, כִּי תִהְיֶה לּוֹ לְזִכּוֹת וּלְקְדוּשָׁה, "One should do teshuvah

from love before he dies, and then it will turn over and become his merits, and he will eat and enjoy the aveiros themselves. Instead of being an impure sin, it is now kodesh kadoshim, because it turned over to be holiness and merit."¹²

It states (9:24) וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל עַל הַמִּזְבֵּיחַ אֶת הָעֹלָה וְאֶת הַחֲלָבִים וַיֵּרָא כָּל הָעָם וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם, "A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed the olah and the fats upon the mizbeiach, and all the people saw, sang praises, and fell upon their faces." The Divrei Shmuel writes in the name of the Alshich HaKadosh that וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם "they fell upon their faces" means that they fell on their faces and did teshuvah.

In this episode, there were two times that the nation wanted to do teshuvah. The first time was when the fire didn't initially come down onto the mizbeiach (see Rashi 9:23). The nation understood this was a sign that Hashem wasn't happy with them and that He wouldn't dwell among them. The nation wanted to fall on their faces and do teshuvah, but they held themselves back. This is because they were so broken at that time, they knew that their teshuvah would lead them to sadness and depression.

After the fire miraculously descended from heaven on the mizbeiach, they wanted to do teshuvah a second time. This time they wanted to do teshuvah for their initial thoughts and fears, for having thought that Hashem wouldn't reside among them. They were embarrassed that they thought so. And

12. Twice a year, there is a custom to go to the river: On Rosh Hashanah, for tashlich, and before Pesach, to draw water to bake matzos. It is explained that on Rosh Hashanah we do teshuvah out of fear of Hashem, and we symbolically throw all those aveiros into the river. On Pesach, we do teshuvah with love. Therefore, we want to take back those aveiros that we threw away on Rosh Hashanah. Now those aveiros become merits.

We don't eat walnuts, אגוזים on Rosh Hashanah because its gematria of אגוז is חט. We don't want to mention חטאים, sins, on Rosh Hashanah (see Shulchan Aruch 583:2). In contrast, on Pesach, there is a custom to give children אגוזים, nuts at the seder, so they will see something different and ask questions (see Shulchan Aruch 472:16). Why specifically nuts and why are we okay with remembering aveiros on Pesach?

The answer is that on Pesach we want the אגוז because on this yom tov, the aveiros turn into merits.

that time, they succeeded in doing teshuvah, because it was teshuvah amid immense joy and singing, as it states וַיִּרְנְנוּ, "They sang praises." Now they could וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם, fall on their faces and do teshuvah because the teshuvah won't result in despair, *chalilah*.

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 walls¹³." This is how his student, Rebbe Avraham Yehoshua Freund, the Nasadar Rav *zt'l* described the Sanzer Rav's overflowing *hislahavus* when he performed the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*.

I witnessed a glimpse of this kind of *hislahavus*. When my grandfather, Reb Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, was old, he lived at my parents' home, and he davened *maariv* and counted *sefiras ha'omer* at home. He was weak and old, but this didn't prevent him from counting *sefiras ha'omer* with all his strength and concentration. His excitement was palpable. He would repeat, around ten times, with intense yearning and emotion ... ולתקן את and ואתה ואתקדש בקדושה של מעלה... (from the *tefillah* after *sefiras haomer*).

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

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

Because *hislahavus* has two sides: the external and the internal. The external *hislahavus* 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 *hislahavus* is the internal *hislahavus* of the heart, his fiery yearning for Hashem. The ultimate 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: שלישי מלוגו). 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 *hislahavus*. 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.¹⁴

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

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

13. The Yiddish expression is: ער האט געדראַפּעט אויף די גראַדע ווענט.

14. 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 him, and witnessed his 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 act that way to trick people. Therefore, the *ishah haShunamis* expressed a more definite proof that Elisha was a holy man.

should perform mitzvos with *zrius*, 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 you are happy and enthusiastic with *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 external actions influence the heart.

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, *לדוד מזמור* 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 daven and perform mitzvos with *hislahavus*. The *hislahavus* can be the expression of the fervor and joy that is already felt in the heart. And, at other times, when one isn't yet sufficiently inspired, the *hislahavus* begins externally, and helps acquire the genuine, internal *hislahavus*.

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* urges us to pretend we are *kadosh*, which will become our reality.

The tzaddikim of Slonim would say that שקר, falsehood, is a terrible trait. Nevertheless, it is permitted and recommended to pretend to be 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 learning Pirkei Avos. We conclude each chapter of Pirkei Avos

with the words רצה הקב"ה ליכות את ישראל הלכך, 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' הפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר כי האדם נפעל כפי, פעולתיו, "A person becomes like the deeds he performs because one's heart and thoughts follow his actions for the good or bad." The many mitzvos in the Torah enable a person to always be engaged in Torah and mitzvos, which transforms him into a better Yid.

As the Chinuch writes, "Even a *rasha* who thinks bad thoughts all day, if he would study Torah diligently and perform the mitzvos without proper *leshem shamayim* intentions, he will 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. They serve to 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 Hashem commanded us to do so many mitzvos that commemorate the miracles of *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 they 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 *hislahavus*, 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 hearts.

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

So, since the mitzvah's essence is about yearning, it is appropriate to perform it with an intense longing for Hashem.¹⁵

A Time for Purity

According to some calculations of the 613 mitzvos (the Maharam Shi"k and others) *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 center-beam holds up the entire structure, *sefiras ha'omer* is the foundational mitzvah of

the 613 mitzvos and it holds up all the 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 וכי, "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.¹⁶

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 coverings 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 ממחרת השבת, "Count...from the day after *yom tov*..." The Or HaChaim Hakadosh says that וספרתם comes from the word ספיר, sapphire. לכם וספרתם means that by counting the *omer* you will become pure and your *neshamah* will shine like sapphire.¹⁷

15. The *sefarim* teach that in the summer, the *yetzer hara* becomes stronger. This is one of the reasons we learn *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 mitzvah *sefiras ha'omer* this time of year. *Sefiras Ha'Omer* increases our desire for *kedushah*, giving us the strength to fight the *yetzer hara*.

16. The Orach v'Simchah writes, "Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer* to purify us. What is so significant about this mitzvah that it has the power to purify?

"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 a 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 can purify us from our *tumah*..."

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

The Shem MiShmuel (Bamidbar תע"ב) writes, "Even if a person doesn't feel the purity of *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..."

A Time for Growth

In agriculture, some crops reach their full potential during the days between Pesach and Shavuos. The crops are fully grown by Pesach time (חג האביב), and Shavuos time (חג הקציר) they are ready to be harvested. The Maharal (*Chiddushei Agados, Rosh Hashanah*) explains that this agricultural reality represents what is happening in a spiritual realm. On the days between Pesach and Shavuos, we improve until we reach the level of perfection by Shavuos.

On Pesach, we bring the korban Omer from barley, which is generally used as animal fodder. On Shavuos we bring the

shtei halechem sacrifice, 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 humans 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. Just like Chol HaMoed comes between the first and final days of *yom tov*, *sefiras ha'omer* comes between Pesach and Shavuos.

This means that *sefiras ha'omer* is a holy and happy time. It is like Chol Hamoed. In contrast, *sefiras ha'omer* is also a time of

Reb Efraim Waxman Shlita, Rosh Yeshivas Me'or Yitzchak, told me that when he was a child learning in cheder, one of his melamedim 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 words he said. They didn't know the meaning of the words, but they were sure he was cursing them in Hungarian.

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

The melamed replied, "Chas v'shalom! I never cursed you. I was saying קנברי טרקי פנטרי, etc. These words are Onkelos's translation to סמקון ירקון וברקון, the precious gems of the choshen, which the kohen gadol wore."

The melamed 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 that you are all precious children of Hashem."

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

The Ben Ish Chai (וירא שנה שניה) writes, "When a person argues with his wife, children, or servants [on Fridays], he certainly thinks that he is right, and that he is justified for making this machlokes, because they did something wrong. But the truth is, someone with intelligence would understand that even if they did something wrong, it wasn't their fault. It was the Satan who tries to cause fights at this time... Therefore, everyone should understand that...he shouldn't blame his wife, children, or maid and shouldn't argue 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 the next."

There are segulos that save us from the Satan, who causes fights on Fridays. The Shlah HaKadosh (מסכת שבת) writes, "The Reishis Chachmah taught in the name of his rebbe [the Rema'k] that one should remove the cobwebs from the walls 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 house..."

The Kaf HaChaim (ר"י סק"י) 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 start fights in the home on Fridays and Shabbos] one should put on the Shabbos tablecloth before midday."

mourning, as Reb Akiva's students were *niftar* then.

We don't make *chasunos* during the *sefirah*. We also don't perform weddings on Chol HaMoed. The Rizhiner explains that people who conduct themselves in an uplifted manner during the days of *sefiras ha'omer*, with happiness and holiness, as though these days are like Chol Hamoed, don't make *chasunos* during *sefiras ha'omer* because we don't make *chasunos* on Chol Hamoed. And people who don't have any spiritual joy on these days should 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 בגיהנום שנים עשר חדש, the *resha'im* are punished in Gehinnom for twelve months... Reb Yochanan ben Nuri disagrees and says,

מן הפסח ועד העצרת, the *resha'im* are punished in Gehinnom from Pesach until Shavuos..."

There are different explanations for the final words of this Mishnah.¹⁸ The *Shibolei HaLeket* (and other commentaries) hold that מן הפסח עד העצרת is literal. The *resha'im* are punished only between Pesach and Shavuos.

As we know, the purpose of Gehinnom isn't to punish. Gehinnom cleanses people of their *aveiros* so they can be worthy of going to Gan Eden. According to the *Shibolei HaLeket*, the purifying period of Gehinnom is during the days of *sefiras ha'omer*. That is the only time Gehinnom is active (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, Gehinnom ch'v.

18. Rav Bartenura zt'l explains that the Gehinnom is open and active the entire year, but each rasha is only punished for fifty days, the number 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.