

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Pekudei



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Torah Wellsprings - Pekudei

Take Advantage of Opportunities

In the Machane Yehudah neighborhood of Yerushalayim, there was the renowned cheder "Eitz Chaim", and across the street was a police station. Two lions, made of stone, decorated the front of the police station.

Once, a melamed of Eitz Chaim said to his young charges, "Did you know? When the lions across the street hear music, they begin to dance."

The young children believed their melamed and were amazed. They decided among themselves that on the following day, they would come to cheder with tape recorders and play music before the lions and watch them dance.

They were disappointed when they saw that the lions weren't dancing. Even when they turned up the volume, the lions didn't dance. They returned to their melamed and asked him why he had lied. The melamed said, "I said the truth. When the lions hear music, they dance. The problem is that they never hear music."

The melamed explained to his students that he said this to inspire them to listen to what he teaches them. He noticed that many children were uninspired and didn't pay attention. He told them, "If you listen, you will dance with joy and love for the Torah. But if you don't listen, you won't dance."

For our purposes, Pesach is approaching. The yom tov Pesach has a beautiful nigun, which descends from heaven. The nigun is the joy of emunah that comes from this yom tov and the bounty that comes along with this yom tov. The problem is that people are deaf and don't pay attention to the music being played. If they would hear the beautiful tune, they will dance with joy.

The Shaarei Teshuvah writes that the most honorable limb in a human body is his ears. The proof is that Chazal tell us that if someone makes someone blind, he must pay him the worth of his eye, and if he amputates someone's arm, he has to pay for his arm. But if he makes someone deaf, he must pay the entire worth of his fellow man. The Gemara explains how this is measured in dollars and cents, but we see from this Gemara that the ear is the most crucial limb, more than other limbs. But that is solely when he uses the ears to hear.¹

Reb Moshe Shmuel Shapiro zt'l would say the following story every year in his yeshiva, before Neilah, to arouse the students to make use of the final holy moments of Yom Kippur: "I was a young child, living in Europe, and like children, I enjoyed playing outdoors, in the yard. Once, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l arrived in my city to visit the beis din. The beis din was near our house. My father came out of the house and said, "Moshe'le! Moshe'le! Come with me to the beis din, and you will see one of the gedolim of our generation - the Chofetz Chaim! And you will receive his brachah. Stop playing

1. It states (Esther 1:20) וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל מְלָכוּתוֹ כִּי רָבָה הִיא "Let the word of the King be heard throughout His entire kingdom, for it is great." It is known that המלך in the megillah refers to Hashem. Hashem's word is great, and it is appropriate that everyone in His kingdom should hear it. But that can only occur when people pay attention and bend their ears to listen.

פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ, "the King's word" refers to the emunah that everything happens by Hashem's command, not by chance. But it has to be וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ, that must listen to it. Ears are very important, but they only have value when used.

and come with me.' But I didn't want to stop playing with my friends, and I lost an opportunity of a lifetime to see the Chofetz Chaim and to receive his brachos. I cry my entire life, and I am upset that I missed the opportunity to see the Chofetz Chaim and receive his brachos. And it was just because I wanted to play."

Reb Moshe Shapiro concluded, "Now, we are before Neilah, and we have the privilege that Hakadosh Baruch Hu comes down to us, to listen to our tefillos. Let us leave behind our childish ways and come close to Hashem. The opportunity is before us; let us take advantage of it."

The same can be said about the upcoming yom tov of Pesach. It is an opportunity of a lifetime. So much kedushah, closeness to Hashem, and brachos can be attained. Let's not be like young children who don't recognize the opportunity and forfeit their chances.

The Ben Ish Chai (Pekudei) tells a mashal of a father teaching math to his son. He asked his son a math question: "If there are ten birds on a gate, and a hunter shoots one of them, how many are left?"

The child answered, "One remains."

The father asked, "Why don't you say that nine remained? He only shot one bird!"

The child replied, "After he shot one, all the others flew away. All he is left with is one dead bird."

The Ben Ish Chai explains that throughout a person's life, he chases gold and silver and wastes his years without a significant, true accomplishment. He doesn't realize that he has captured "dead birds". Everything "alive," such as Torah and mitzvos, flew away, leaving him without anything.

Pesach is approaching. Let us grasp what is real and important, and we shouldn't let the opportunities fly away.

The Rebbe of Stutchin tells that he heard from Reb Moshe Dovid Shtrum a"h, a story

that he heard several times from the baal hamaaseh - a grandson of the Rebbe of Gorlitz zt'l. Every time the grandson told the story, he would sit and cry. This is his story:

As a child, I was at the seder of my grandfather, the rebbe of Gorlitz (Rebbe Boruch of Gorlitz, a son of the Tzanzer Rav zt'l). In the middle of the seder, my grandfather took the זרוע from the קערה and said, 'זרוע spells זרע, children.' Then he called for me because he wanted to give me the זרוע as a sign that I will bear children. But I was very embarrassed to take the זרוע, and I didn't go to my grandfather. My grandfather, the tzaddik, stood up, and he came over to me to give me the זרוע, but I ran away from him. My grandfather chased after me, and I ran around the table. He chased me around the table several times, but I didn't take the זרוע. Now I know why he wanted to give me the זרוע. He saw with ruach hakodesh that I wouldn't have children, and this was an eis ratzon to grant me children. Sadly, I didn't take the opportunity, I didn't take the זרוע, and I never had children."

His entire life, he was upset with himself that he didn't take the זרוע.

On Pesach, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is running after us to give us hashpaos tovos, brachos, and yeshuos. The truth is, the entire month of Nisan is a time of yeshuos, as we say in the yotzros, ישועות בו מקיפות, that salvations surround us in this month. We can receive them when we take advantage of these special times and immerse in avodas Hashem.

The grandson of the Gorlitzer didn't know that he needed the brachah for children, and that's why he didn't realize how important it was for him to receive the זרוע. His grandfather, with ruach hakodesh, wanted to help him, but he didn't realize how much he needed. We also don't always know which brachos we need. We don't know what the future will bring. But Hashem wants to give us brachos. We can gain so much; let us be prepared to accept.

Nisan

The month of Nisan is an exceptional time.

The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* (*Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim* 336) writes in a letter, "I received your letter *Erev Shabbos* close to *Shabbos*. You asked that I answer some of your questions regarding the *yom tov Pesach*. You asked a difficult request because these are priceless days — each hour is like a day...² Nevertheless, since you expressed your strong desire that I answer you and wrote that it will be your pleasure and *simchas yom tov*, I dedicated some time to write this letter..."

The Shem MiShmuel *zt'l* said that his father, the Avnei Nezer, would be *מסובב והולך בעולמות העליונים*, "Walked in the upper worlds" throughout Nisan (*Avir HaRo'im* 264). Once, the Shem MiShmuel heard his father say that during Nisan he doesn't need to sleep due to the holiness of these days (*Avir HaRo'im* 299).

Shulchan Aruch (429:2) states, "We don't say *tachanun* the entire month of Nisan."

The Shlah Hakadosh (*Pesachim, Ner Mitzvah*, 7) explains that this is because the entire month has the *kedushah* of *Rosh chodesh*. He writes, "It states, *החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים*, 'This month is for you *Rosh chodesh*.' This means each day of Nisan is like *ראש חדש*. The entire month is *Rosh chodesh*."³

The Agra d'Kala (*Pekudei*) teaches in the name of Rebbe Mendel of Rimanov *zt'l* that the first twelve days of Nisan represent the twelve months of the year, and *tzaddikim*

can perceive on these days what will occur in the world in the corresponding months. "The Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* would write down what he perceived with his *ruach hakodesh* would happen that year. On א' ניסן he wrote what would happen in Nisan. ב' ניסן he wrote what would happen in Iyar, and so on. When it was the final year of his life, he only wrote down what would occur up to Av. He didn't write what would happen in the world in the following months because he was *niftar* in Av that year. This story is known among the Chozeh's students."

Once, at the start of Nisan, the directors of Satmar institutions came to the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* to discuss the institutions' finances. The Satmar Rebbe asked them to return after *Pesach*. He explained, "Reb Yehoshua of Kroli *zt'l* said if one doesn't attain *ruach hakadosh* at the Seder, he isn't a human being."⁴ "So, we must prepare. Therefore, I prefer to discuss financial issues after *Pesach*."

The Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Shabbos HaGadol*, ד"ה בגמרא) writes, "By all other holidays [*Succos*, *Shavuos*, and so on], the holiness of the *yom tov* arrives gradually. Each *tefillah* ushers in another aspect of the holiday. But *Pesach*, the *kedushah* of the *yom tov* comes at once. It is called *פסח*, which means *to jump* [because it doesn't come in gradually, step by step. One jumps right into the peak of the *kedushah* of the *yom tov*]. So, *Pesach* needs preparation. A bright spiritual light will come down to us regardless of our deeds, but one needs to be pure to receive this bright light. It can be compared to the sun that shines brightly, but its rays can't enter one's home if the window shades are closed..."

2. In the Avnei Nezer's words, *שעה ליום יחשב, יקרי הערך, שעה ליום יחשב*.

3. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* writes, "Don't think that it is only Nisan [that the entire month is considered like *rosh chodesh*]. It is the same with all months. If we observe *rosh chodesh* properly, the entire month becomes like *rosh chodesh*. As the saying goes, *גופא בתר רישא אזיל*, the body follows the head. Therefore, it is proper for the wise to serve Hashem on *rosh chodesh*, which will make the whole month good. Even if just one hour of *rosh chodesh* is utilized properly, the entire month will be good."

4. Some say that Reb Yehoshua of Kroli said, "If one doesn't have *giluy Eliyahu* at the Seder night and on *Yom Kippur*, it is a sign his forefathers weren't at Har Sinai."

So, it is a time to prepare, to live with holiness and purity, so that when the great light of Pesach shines, we will be able to receive it.

There are many ways to prepare for Pesach. For example, you can daven for a good yom tov, yearn for it, learn about the mitzvos, etc. Furthermore, every good deed you do that adds to your kedushah and taharah (such as learning a daf Gemara and so on) can be intended as a preparation for the upcoming mitzvah.

Furthermore, every preparation for Pesach is a great preparation. The Kav HaYashar (90) writes, "I received a *kabbalah* that every effort that one invests in honor of Pesach, and he becomes tired and exhausted from that work, it kills all the *mazikim* that are called נגעי בני אדם. When one works for Pesach, this rectifies [severe sins]. The heart knows the bitter truth that almost none of us are clean from that [severe] sin. Therefore, everyone is obligated to fix whatever he can, and Hashem, with His immense mercy and kindness, will accept the thoughts of the Jewish people, His nation, and will redeem us quickly."

It is known that after Yom Kippur passes, we remain clean from aveiros for four days. The Shlah Hakodesh explains that this is because people are preparing for the Yom Tov of Succos, choosing the four *minim* and building a succah, and they do so with emotion and joy. This purifies them, and the taharah of Yom Kippur remains. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says that the same happens each year before Pesach. Everyone is cleaning, searching, and burning the chametz. When we come to the Seder, we're entirely clean from aveiros and fitting to receive the holiness of the yom tov.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev *zy'a* said, "By cleaning for Pesach, one should be able to attain *ruach hakadosh*; only anger ruins it."⁵

Chazal (*Shabbos* 105) say, כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה, "Whoever becomes angry, it is as though he worshiped idols."

Why is anger compared to idol worship? We can explain that it's because neither accomplish anything. One doesn't gain anything from idol worship, as we say in *Hallel*: פה להם ולא ידברו... "They have a mouth, but they can't speak..." Anger is also futile, as Chazal (*Kiddushin* 41.) say, "Whoever becomes angry, all that he has is anger." Nothing else was accomplished.

Rebbe Asher of Stolin *zt'l* explained that this is the reason the *pasuk* puts together the mitzvah of Pesach with *avodah zarah*, as it states (*Shemos* 34:17-18) אלהי מסכה לא תעשה לך את חג המצות תשמר, "Don't make molten gods for yourself. Keep the holiday Pesach..." What is the connection between *avodah zarah* and Pesach? When people prepare for Pesach, they are often liable to become angry, and the *passuk* warns us to be cautious. And when we clean for Pesach and are careful to avoid anger, this is an excellent preparation for the approaching yom tov.

Chesed

In addition to cleaning the homes, one of our preparations for Pesach is *chesed*.

At the beginning of *Hilchos Pesach*, it states מנהג לקנות חיטים לחלקן לעניים לצורך פסח, "There is a custom to buy wheat and to distribute it to the poor for Pesach" (429:1). In our generation, we give matzah and other yom tov products to the poor for Pesach.⁶

5. Rebbe Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev *zy'a* once saw women cleaning and scrubbing their homes for Pesach and said, "May the *malachim* that come forth from קשר"ק, which is an acronym for קראצין שאייערין רייבין קיערין (different versions of cleaning and scouring) go up before Hashem's throne and arouse mercy for the Jewish nation." He called it קשר"ק, alluding to the *malachim* associated with *tekiyas shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, as is written in the *machzorim*.)

6. Immense reward is bestowed upon people who assist those in need.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* would have high levels of *ruach hakodesh* at his Seder, and after the Seder, he would speak about how other tzaddikim of his time conducted their Seder that year. (He saw with his *ruach hakodesh* the Sedarim of other tzaddikim, and the impression that these Sedarim made in Heaven, and he would speak about them.) One year, he particularly praised the Seder of Rebbe Eliezer Mendel of Lelov *zt'l*. "The Seder of Rebbe Eliezer

Mendel of Lelov *zt'l* shone this year more than the Sedarim of all other *tzaddikim*."

Until this point, the story is known. But I heard an addition to this story:

What was so unique about Rebbe Eliezer Mendel's Seder that year? He lived in Yerushalayim, and that year he received a sizeable sum of money from a wealthy person in *chutz l'aretz* to distribute to the

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* shared the following story:

There was a poor woman who, despite her poverty, tried to help those less fortunate than her. Every day, she baked four loaves of bread. She would keep one loaf for herself and her family and distribute the rest to the poor.

One morning, after distributing three breads, a poor man came to her door asking for food. He said he hadn't eaten in days. She compassionately gave him her last loaf, which she had prepared for her family. "I will bake another bread for my family," she told herself.

As she had used all her flour, she took a bag of wheat kernels to the seashore where the communal mill was located and ground the grain into flour. She filled her bag with flour, flung the bag over her shoulder, and headed back home to bake bread for her family. Just then, a powerful gust of wind snatched the bag from her hands and tossed it into the sea. She was left with nothing. She cried, "Why do I deserve this punishment? Is this the reward for my *tzedakah*?"

There was a yeshiva near the shore. She went in and asked the *rosh yeshiva* for an explanation. "I gave extra *tzedakah* today. I gave away my own family's bread to help the poor, and now I have nothing. Is this my reward for my selfless deeds?"

The *rosh yeshiva* agreed that he didn't understand why this happened to her. Nevertheless, he encouraged her to believe it was *bashert* and for good reason.

The woman was still present when two merchants suddenly entered the yeshiva holding two jugs filled with gold coins. "These are for the yeshiva," they said.

The *rosh yeshiva* was shocked and asked why they were donating so much money to the yeshiva.

"It is to express our gratitude to Hashem for the miracle He performed for us. We have just returned from a business venture overseas," they said. "The water was stormy, and the ship crashed into a large boulder. Water poured into the ship, and our lives were in danger. We vowed that if we survived, we would donate a large sum of money to the first yeshiva we found. As soon as we made this promise, miraculously, something plugged the hole in the ship. That's why we are bringing you these jars filled with gold."

"Do you know what sealed the ship's hole?" the *rosh yeshiva* asked.

"Yes. We looked to see what saved our lives when we got off the boat. We were shocked to see that it was a sack of flour! The flour became dough in the sea and glued the bag onto the ship, exactly in the right place to plug the hole and save our lives!"

The poor woman was astonished when she heard this story. The *rosh yeshiva* told her, "Now you have the answer to your question. You wondered why your bag flew out of your hands and why you deserved this punishment after you gave *tzedakah* with so much *mesirus nefesh*. But now you understand that it wasn't a punishment at all. It was a reward. In the merit of your *tzedakah*, you were granted the merit to save all the people on the ship. This is your reward for giving *tzedakah* with *mesirus nefesh*."

poor Yidden of Yerushalayim. Rebbe Eliezer Mendel distributed all the money. He didn't take a cent for himself, although he was also poor. This merit elevated his Seder to such great heights.

Reb Shimshon Aharon Polanski, the Tepliker Rav *zt'l*, once came to his beis medresh in Yerushalayim a few days before Pesach and announced, "*Rabboisai!* There are many *almanos*/widows in Yerushalayim who need help cleaning for Pesach."

Everyone stopped what they were doing and was ready to help. The Tepliker Rav told each person their own address and explained, "I was referring to your wives. They need help. Why are you letting them struggle alone as if they are widows? Why aren't you helping them get ready for *yom tov*?!"

Try, and Hashem will Help

It states (*Shemos* 35:27), והנשיאים הביאו את אבני השהם ואת אבני המלוואים לאפוד ולחשן, "The *nesi'im* brought the *shoham* stones and the [filling] stones for the *eifod* and the *choshen*." Where did the *nesi'im* obtain these precious gems? Did they own them?

Targum Yonason writes, "The clouds of glory went to Pishon and picked up precious stones...to be placed in the *eifod* and *choshen*."⁷

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (*Toras Moshe, Terumah* אשר ידבנו לבו) writes, "When one desires to donate, but he doesn't have enough money [Hashem will help him achieve his wish]. This happened to the *nesi'im*. They wanted to donate the stones for the *kohanim*'s clothing but didn't own gems. Hakadosh Baruch Hu

brought the gems to them in the clouds. When they collected the *mon*, they collected the gems. This teaches us that when a person desires to do something, Hashem will help him succeed.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 38) relates that Niknor transported two beautiful doors from Alexandria, Egypt, to Eretz Yisrael to donate to the Beis HaMikdash. However, a powerful storm at sea forced the sailors to toss all heavy objects overboard. They also threw one of the doors overboard. Niknor jumped onto the second door, and hugging the door, he proclaimed, "If you throw this door into the water, throw me in too." As soon as he uttered those words, the storm subsided.

When the boat docked in Eretz Yisrael, they found the first, missing door floating beside the ship.

Those doors were installed in the Beis HaMikdash, and the doorway was named Shaar Niknor (Niknor's entrance). The doors were made from copper, and they shone like gold. Eventually, all the Beis HaMikdash doors were switched to gold, but the *chachamim* said that Niknor's doors should remain because of the miracles that happened with them.

Let's analyze this story: Niknor was *moser nefesh* to bring even one door to the Beis HaMikdash. What good would one door serve if two doors are needed for the gate?

The answer is that Niknor was *moser nefesh* to do what he could, even when it seemed that one door was insufficient, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu helped him. Because

7. There are two definitions of נשיאים:

Nesi'im are leaders of the nation.

Nesi'im also means clouds.

Both definitions are correct. והנשיאים הביאו את אבני השהם ואת אבני המלוואים, the clouds and the nesi'im brought the precious stones to be used for the kohen gadol's clothing.

The Gemara elaborates (*Yoma* 75.): When the *mon* came down from the sky, precious stones came along. The nesi'im gathered those precious stones and donated them to the Mishkan (for the בגדי כהונה).

when a person tries, Hashem helps. Both doors were installed in the Beis HaMikdash.

We add that also, when it comes to praying for the coming of Moshiach, we must do the best we can.

As the Mesilas Yesharim (19) writes, "If one asks, who am I, and how important am I really, that I should daven for [the gathering of] the galus and for Yerushalayim? Could it be that because of my tefillah, the galus will end, and the redemption will sprout? The answer is, as Chazal (Sanhedrin 37.) say, man was created alone, to demonstrate 'The world was created for me.' Hashem has pleasure when His children pray for this matter. Even if the prayers cannot be answered – because the time hasn't come yet or for some other reason – they did their share, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu is happy with them... We are obligated to pray and shouldn't refrain because of a lack of strength. As Chazal (Avos 2) say, לא עליך המלאכה, לגמור ואי אתה בן חורין לפטר הימנה, 'You are not obligated to finish, but you don't have the right to refrain...'"⁸

Toiling in Avodas Hashem

It states (37:1-2), ויעש בצלאל את הארון עצי שטים... ויצפהו זהב טהור מבית ומחוץ, "Betzael made the aron from shittim wood... and covered it with pure gold, inside and outside.

The pasuk says there were three aronos, one inside the other. The innermost box was gold, the outermost was gold, and the middle was wood.

This represents the three stages of teshuvah:

(1) The golden era is the beginning of one's teshuvah. That is when Hashem is helping him, and he is succeeding in his teshuvah process.

(2) Then comes the struggle because it isn't always easy. Hashem takes away the initial euphoria and "light" that prevails at the beginning of the teshuvah, and now the person must walk on his own. He is confronted with hardships and tests. He isn't confident he can succeed.

(3) If he keeps trying, he will reach the golden, third era. He will succeed in his teshuvah.

These three stages also exist when one desires to grow in Torah. At the beginning of his resolve to learn Torah, he is interested, inspired, and excited. The Torah is sweet to him.

Then comes the challenging times. He doesn't understand and cannot keep up with the pace he initially set for himself. He wonders whether success in Torah is possible for him.

But if he keeps trying, he will reach the third stage, when he truly loves Torah and understands it. The Torah will now be sweeter to him than ever before.

The aron's three boxes represent these three stages. But notice that the aron is called, ארון עצי שטים, an aron of wood. It isn't called ארון של זהב, "a golden aron." To teach that the essential stage and the real purpose is the struggle (represented by the wood).⁹

When the Torah lists the items that Yidden donated to the Mishkan, they are

8. My father zy'a told me that when he was a child living in Tel Aviv, there was no running water in their home one night. Every night, my father and his brothers would prepare negel vasser next to their beds before going to sleep, but that night, they went to sleep without preparing water. Their father, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l, asked them, "Why didn't you prepare negel vasser?"

They replied, "We couldn't. There was no water."

"That's true," their father replied, "but why didn't you at least place the empty negel vasser utensils near your bed?" Because a Yid must do what he can, and then Hashem will help with the rest.

9. Chazal tell us that Moshe understood how all the utensils of the Mishkan should appear, except for the

listed in the order of value, from the most precious to the least expensive. As it states (35:5), זהב וכסף ונחשת, gold, silver, and copper... and so on.

But then it states (35:9), אבני שהם ואבני מלואים, the precious gems that were to be used for the בגדי כהונה. These gems were the most precious items, more precious than gold and silver, but they are listed last. Why?

The same question appears in *parashas Terumah* when Hashem told the Jewish nation to donate these items to the Mishkan. The *pasuk* begins with (Shemos 25:7) זהב, וכסף, ונחשת, listing the items in the order of most precious to the least expensive. And then, at the end of the list, the precious gems are listed. As it states (25:9), ואבני שהם ואבני מלואים, לאפור ולחשן.

The Or HaChaim (*Terumah* 25:7) asks:

"We have to understand why אבני שהם are written only after the eleven items. Since the stones were more precious, it would be proper to write them first, before זהב וכסף ונחשת!"

One of the Or HaChaim's answers is that these precious stones were brought without toil since they came down with the *mon*. The *nesi'im* only had to pick them up after they rained down together with the *mon*. Although they were the most expensive, the donation ranked lower because they were brought without toil. They didn't compare to the donations that people gave from their own pockets, even when those donations were of a lesser value.

This is an important lesson to remember. If you find *avodas Hashem* difficult, be happy. It is a good sign because that is how *avodas Hashem* is meant to be. The hardships greatly

increase and enhance the value and the joy of our *avodas Hashem*.

There was a soldier in Czar Nicholai's army who enjoyed drinking, and when he ran out of money, he gave all of his weapons to the owner of a tavern as collateral in exchange for drinks. He carried around a large bag so people would think his weapons were inside the bag.

One day, Czar Nicholai visited the army base. He was pleased with the order and discipline he saw. But then he called over this soldier and asked him to open the bag. The Czar saw it was filled with straw, and the soldier was punished severely.

Rebbe Asher of Stoln *zy'a* repeated this story and asked: How did Czar Nicholai know to ask this soldier specifically to open his bag? Other soldiers were going about carrying their bags, and the Czar didn't suspect them. What about this soldier roused his suspicion?

The answer is, the Czar saw that the soldier was carrying his bag without difficulty. That aroused the Czar's suspicion because weapons are heavy.

Rebbe Asher of Stoln said that similarly, *avodas Hashem* is meant to be a challenge. If it is easy, that's a sign that something is wrong. One should encounter difficulty and challenge. One should feel like he's working hard, putting in an effort. And because of the hardships, our *avodas Hashem* is so precious to us and to Hashem.

As it states in *Avos d'Reb Noson* (3:6), "Performing the mitzvos once with *tzaar* is equivalent to a hundred times without hardships." And *Sefer Chassidim* (145) states, "When one triumphs over his *yetzer hara*, the

menorah. Therefore, Hashem told Moshe to throw the gold into fire, and it miraculously became a menorah. The question is, what exactly about the menorah didn't Moshe understand?

We can answer that the menorah was made from pure gold; it didn't have any wood at all. Wood represents the *yetzer hara*, challenges. Moshe couldn't understand how Hashem would have a *nachas ruach* from any mitzvah that is perfect like gold, without any obstacles or *yetzer hara* at all.

reward will be greater than the reward given for a hundred mitzvos, performed without hardships." And Chazal (*Avos* 5:23) say, לפום צערא אגרא, "the reward is in accordance with the hardships."

Pirkei Avos is a part of Mishnayos, which are generally written in *lashon hakadosh*. So why does it say (*Avos* 5:23), לפום צערא אגרא in Aramaic?

Tosfos (*Brachos* 3.) writes, "We say Kaddish in Aramaic because it is a beautiful praise, and we don't want the *malachim* to understand what we are saying and be jealous of us." Similarly, we can explain that the phrase לפום צערא אגרא is a great praise, when a Yid overcomes his challenges to serve Hashem. We don't want to rouse the *malachim's* jealousy. Therefore, it is written in Aramaic.¹⁰

A group of chassidim complained to the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* about their *yetzer hara*. The Chidushei HaRim told them, "What purpose would there be to life if there wasn't a *yetzer hara*?"¹¹

The Yidden in the desert complained (*Shemos* 16:3), מ' יתן ... בארץ מצרים בשבתנו על סיר הבשר, באכלנו לחם לשובע, "If only...we were in

Mitzrayim, where we sat near the pot of meat, and we ate bread to satiation." According to the simple meaning, they complained that they didn't have meat any longer and that they didn't have bread.

However, the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains that they couldn't have eaten the meat because it wasn't kosher. They were saying that they remember how it was in Mitzrayim, בשבתנו על סיר הבשר, when we sat next to the Egyptians who were cooking pots filled with non-kosher meat, באכלנו לחם לשובע, but we didn't partake in the non-kosher foods, and all we ate was bread. They were reminiscing about how it was in Mitzrayim when they were faced with great tests. They missed the tests because passing them is the purpose of life.¹²

Chazal (*Brachos* 54.) say, "When one sees the stone that Moshe sat on when Yehoshua was fighting the war with Amalek, one must praise Hashem."

We can explain this as follows:

Moshe held his hands high in prayer to win the war. When Moshe's hands were heavy, Aharon and Chur supported his

10. Rebbe Mordechai Nadvorna *zt'l* said, "There's a malach that has a thousand tongues. When he sings, the music is exceptionally beautiful. But Hashem has greater pleasure from a Yid when he puts his hand behind his ear and sings *zemiros* Friday night."

Although the *malachim* serve Hashem on a loftier level than we can, our *avodas Hashem* requires effort, and that is why it is way more precious to Hashem than the perfect *zemiros* of the *malachim*.

Chazal (*Yoma* 69:) tell us that the *Anshei Kneses HaGedolah* succeeded to abolish the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zarah* and from the *yetzer hara* for *arayos* among family members.

It seems that this was a remarkable accomplishment. However, the Chazon Ish *zt'l* said it is nothing to be proud of. It would be better to have the *yetzer hara* and triumph over it through our good choices.

11. When a person makes a *brachah* on an *esrog* and *lulav*, the *pitom* is down. In Yiddish, this is called, מיט די פיטום אראפ, which is also an expression used for someone who is going through challenges. But we make a *brachah* specifically when the *pitom* is down because challenging moments are the most significant moments of our life.

12. The Chesed L'Avraham (Radomsk) writes a similar interpretation as the Chasam Sofer. But instead of discussing non-kosher meat, he refers to kosher meat. The Yidden didn't want to eat the kosher meat because they didn't want to indulge in the pleasures of this world. He writes, "The intention of the *pasuk* is that...although they were right near a pot of meat, they didn't give in to temptation. They chose instead to eat bread."

arms. But how were they able to reach his arms? Moshe was very tall. At those times, Moshe sat on a low stone. That way, Aharon and Chur could reach his arms and help him spread them out in *tefillah* (see Ha'amek Davar).

Thus, the stone signifies a weak moment when Moshe couldn't hold his hands in prayer alone. And it is those challenging moments that are the most extraordinary. Therefore, this stone is so significant.¹³

One Hundred Daily *Brachos*

It states (38:27), ויהי מאת כנר הכסף לעקת את אדני, "The one hundred *kikar* of silver should be used to make the holy *adanim* – one hundred *adanim*..." These were the 100 silver foundations of the Mishkan.

The Baal HaTurim writes, וכנגדם תקנו ק' ברכות בכל יום, "Corresponding to the one hundred *adanim*, the *chachamim* established one hundred daily *brachos*."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says that Hashem resided on the Mishkan, and today, Hashem resides in Yidden. The Mishkan in our generation is every Yid. The original Mishkan had one hundred *adanim* for its foundations. The foundations of today's Mishkan are the one hundred daily *brachos* we recite. They are called אדנים because with them, we become aware that Hashem is the אדון, master of the world.¹⁴

The *Tur* (Orach Chaim 46) writes, "Every day, one hundred people of Bnei Yisrael died, and they didn't know why this was happening. Dovid HaMelech investigated,

13. People asked the Ateres Yehoshua of Dzikov *zt'l* why he had sufficient *parnassah* while his father and grandparents were all poor.

The Ateres Yehoshua answered with a *mashal*:

A poor person passed a theatre, where many people were waiting to buy tickets.

"How much does a ticket cost?" he asked one of the people in line.

"A regular seat costs a hundred dollars. There are better seats, which cost up to three hundred dollars."

The poor man was shocked. "A hundred to three hundred dollars just to see a show?! What's the show about?"

"It's about a poor person collecting money."

Now, the poor man was totally confused. He said, "I'm poor, and I collect money all the time, and all I get is a few coins!"

The man explained that people aren't interested in watching this in real life. They want to see a show, played by actors..."

With this *mashal*, the Ateres Yehoshua explained to his chassidim, "My father and my grandfathers were true Rebbes, therefore they only received a small amount of money. But I'm an actor, copying what they did, therefore I receive more money."

The Ateres Yehoshua said this due to his immense humility, but we can learn a lesson from it: Why do people pay more money to watch actors? Because the actors show talent, expertise, and years of training and hard work. People value that and are willing to pay to see it. But when something comes naturally, it loses value in people's eyes. Hashem desires our deeds that require effort, talent, and willpower. That is why we have challenges. For these deeds, we will be rewarded immensely.

14. During the weekdays, it isn't too difficult to get to one hundred *brachos*. By davening three times a day and washing twice daily for bread, you will reach one hundred *brachos*. On Shabbos, when *Shemonah Esrei* is shorter, *Shulchan Aruch* (290:1) states, "One should eat fruit, sweets, and smell *besamim* to complete the quota of one hundred *brachos*."

understood with his *ruach hakodesh*, and instituted that Klal Yisrael should recite one hundred *brachos* daily. Therefore, the *chachamim* established *birchas hashachar* [the *brachos* said in the morning at the beginning of the *tefillah*] to fill the quota of one hundred daily *brachos*".

The Prishah explains, "When a hundred people were dying each day, Dovid established that we say one hundred daily *brachos*, because that will stop the deaths..."

How did the one hundred *brachos* stop the daily one hundred deaths?

The Levush explains that Hashem does much kindness with the Jewish nation, but people take it all for granted and don't express their gratitude to Hashem. Dovid HaMelech realized that this was the source of the plague. When people don't thank Hashem for His kindness, this can *chalilah* stop the shefa. So, the solution was to praise Hashem. The solution proved correct because "from the time Dovid instituted this *takanah*, the plague ceased."

The *sefarim* say that the one hundred daily *brachos* protect us in our generation, the same way they protected us in Dovid HaMelech's time.

The *Zohar* (vol.1, 76:) calls the one hundred *brachos* "one hundred keys." They open Hashem's treasury of goodness.¹⁵

Hints to the 100 Brachos

The *Tur* (Orach Chaim 46) writes, "It states (*Shmuel* 2, 23), הוֹקֵם עַל, 'Dovid established על' and עַל is *gematriya* one hundred."

It also states, לְךָ לְךָ ... וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׂמֹךְ וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה, "Go...and I will bless you..." The *Zohar* (vol.1, 76:) notes that לְךָ לְךָ is *gematriya* one hundred. By reciting one hundred *brachos*,

וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה, one merits receiving Hashem's *brachos*.

It states (*Tehillim* 128:4), הִנֵּה כִּי כֵן יִבְרַךְ גֹּבֵר, "So will be a man blessed ..." The *Sefer HaManhig* teaches that כִּי כֵן is *gematriya* one hundred because by saying one hundred *brachos* daily, he is blessed with all types of blessings.

The Torah lists ninety-eight curses for those who transgress the Torah, and the Torah adds another two. As it states (*Devarim* 28:61), גַּם כָּל חָלִי וְכָל מַכָּה... "Also, (1) all diseases and (2) all plagues..." Together, these are one hundred curses. The one hundred *brachos* nullify these one hundred curses.

The Baal HaTurim writes, "The *tagin* on the *kuf* of (*Devarim* 6:7) וּבְקוּמְךָ, implies that when one awakens in the morning, he should say one hundred *brachos* [ק' is *gematriya* one hundred and וּבְקוּמְךָ means 'when you wake up']. And then he will be saved from the ninety-eight curses, plus two others, inferred in the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 28:61), גַּם כָּל חָלִי וְכָל מַכָּה...."

The Levush writes, "This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, ... מָה ד' אֵלֶיךָ שׂוֹאֵל מִמֶּךָ, 'What does Hashem ask from you?' Chazal say don't read it מָה, read it מֵאָה, that Hashem is asking for one hundred *brachos*..."

One of the benefits of the one hundred *brachos* is to help us remember Hashem. As the Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:3) writes, "The Chachamim established many *brachos*...so we can remember the Creator, always."

Shabbos HaChodesh

This Shabbos, we read *parashas HaChodesh*. The Midrash (*Shemos* 15:2) states:

Malachim ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam, when will You make *yom tov*?"

15. Compare this to a person who received permission to take whatever he wants from the king's treasury but finds the treasury locked. He stands outside the treasury and cries. Why doesn't he open the doors? He has the keys! The king gave them to him so he could open the treasury. The keys are the one hundred *brachos*.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, "I and you will agree to whatever the Jewish nation decides..." When Bnei Yisrael make rosh chodesh, that will determine when it will be yom tov.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Bnei Yisrael, "In the past it was in My hands... From now on, it is in your hands. When you say yes, it is yes. When you say no, it is no. החודש הזה לכם, the new month is up to you. If you choose to make a leap year, I accede to your decision..."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains, "Everything was given to us! Everything is in our hands! If a person appreciates who he is and his potential, he wouldn't waste a moment."¹⁶

Reb Yaakov Eliyahu Lazar *zt'l* was by the Shinover Rav *zt'l* for Shabbos Parah. On Sunday, he came to say goodbye (*gezegenen*) because he wanted to return home. The Shinover Rav asked him, "Are you leaving already? So soon?"

The *gabai* was present, and he understood that the Shinover Rav wanted Reb Lazar to stay longer, so he quickly spoke up for Reb Lazar. "No, Reb Lazar will remain with us for a few more days."

The Shinover Rav replied, "That's good, because it's very important for one to be with his Rebbe on Shabbos HaChodesh. On this Shabbos, one has the potential to become a new person."

Reb Lazar would often speak nostalgically about that Shabbos. He said it's impossible to repeat what he saw that Shabbos.

He only revealed one thing. When he davened אהבה רבה in *Shacharis*, he was suddenly overcome by emotion. He left the beis medresh and cried profusely from *deveikus*. He felt that he had become a new person.

One of the specialties of Shabbos HaChodesh is that we can become new. As it states, החודש הזה לכם, the power of becoming new is in your hands. The Beis Avraham *zt'l* adds that the mitzvah of החודש הזה לכם was given to the Jewish nation when they were in Mitzrayim, at the 49th gate of impurity. Even at that lowly place, Hashem told them they could start anew.¹⁷

The Beis Avraham *zt'l* related that he once traveled to Italy with his uncle, Reb Zelig Lieder, an esrog merchant. They stopped at a hotel in Trieste, and they found a small *sefer* there, which discusses the words we say each morning in *Shacharis*, המחדש בטובו כל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית, that Hashem creates the world anew each day. Why did Hashem create the world in a manner that it needs to be recreated every day? Hashem could have made the world in a manner that the world endure for centuries.

The *sefer* explains that after a person committed *aveiros*, he thinks there is no hope for him anymore. The daily re-creation of the world is his reminder that he can become new each day, just as the world is new.

16. We say in Ashrei (Tehillim 145:12), להודיע לבני האדם גבורותיו. Literally, this means we should reveal to people Hashem's strength and greatness. However, according to the Yesod v'Shoreish HaAvodah *zt'l*, "his strength" refers to the strength and greatness of the Jewish nation. The pasuk is saying, להודיע לבני אדם גבורותיו, "Reveal to people their own abilities and greatness."

17. It states (Brachos 4:), "Whoever says Ashrei three times daily is a בן עולם הבא; he merits Olam HaBa. Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* explained that this is because we conclude Ashrei with the words, ... מעתה ..., "We will praise Hashem from now..." The key word is מעתה, to begin from now. When one starts anew, three times every day – always seeking to serve Hashem better than before – he will undoubtedly merit Olam HaBa.

This is the lesson of החדש הזה לכם. It is our reminder that we have the ability to begin anew.¹⁸

It states (Devarim 16:22), ולא תקים לך מצבה אשר, וְשָׂנֵא ה' אֱלֹקֵיךָ. A מצבה is something that is fixed and does not change. אשר שָׂנֵא ה', Hashem hates that. Hashem loves those who are ready to improve their ways.¹⁹

Rabbeinu Nisim Gaon (quoted in Seder HaDoros, Tana'im and Amaro'im, letter ך) tells the following story:

18. Reb Shimshon Pinkus zt'l told the following mashal:

There was a small town at the foot of a mountain, and the supermarket was built on the mountaintop. Every time the townsfolk needed something, they had to trek up and down the mountain, which was very difficult and inconvenient.

A baal chesed who lived in the town bought a van, and he advertised that he would be making the trip three times daily. Whoever wants can join him, free of charge.

The van filled up to capacity at each trip to the store. He drove them to the store and then back home again.

After some years, the van began showing signs of wear. The seats were ripped in several places, the air-conditioner didn't work anymore, and the engine was weak. People had to push the car from the outside to get it moving.

The city leaders approached the baal chesed and told him, "You did a great chesed for our city, but it is time that we buy you a new van. The city resident will chip in to buy it for you..."

The man refused. He performed so many mitzvos with the van, how could he stop using it?

The city leaders convened and decided that if he didn't want to change the van, they would refurbish it. They will replace the van's interior, install a new motor, a new air conditioner, etc.

They made up an excuse for why they needed to borrow his van for the night, and in the middle of the night, they redid his van.

In the morning, as his steady passengers were getting in, the baal chesed said, "Someone will have to go outside to push the van" because that's what they would do every morning.

They told him, "No, we don't. Put the key into the ignition and try."

He tried, and he saw that the van was working. He exclaimed, "How did this happen? Yesterday, it was so different!"

He turned on the air-conditioner, and it was working too, and they told him what had happened during the night.

The nimshal is that we go to sleep every night, and in the morning, we wake up a new person. It is like we were refurbished and fixed and wake up clean. We become new, and we can renew our ways.

19. When the Pnei Menachem of Gur zt'l was *niftar*, approximately 200 siddurim were found in his possession. He changed siddurim often, apparently to bring freshness into his *tefillos*. The depths of the Pnei Menachem's ways are beyond us, but it reminds us to constantly seek newness in *avodas Hashem*.

Nosson, a sinful man, once had the opportunity to commit a terrible sin, but he controlled himself. A few days later, Rabbi Akiva saw him riding on a donkey, and Rabbi Akiva perceived that Nosson's face was shining like the midday sun, and above his head was a halo of holiness. Rabbi Akiva asked his students, "Who is that man?"

"It is Nosson, the lowly sinner."

"Do you see anything above his head?"

"No. We don't see anything."

"Bring him to me, quickly."

Rabbi Akiva told Nosson, "My son, an aura of light is glowing on your head, so I know you will merit Olam HaBa. Tell me, what good deed did you do?"

Nosson told him that he did not give in to his temptations and held back from transgressing a grave sin. He had committed many sins before, but this time, he controlled himself.

Reb Akiva was stunned that Nosson had such strong willpower. "Indeed, you did a great deed, and Hashem placed an aura of light above your head. This reward is in this world. In the next world, you will certainly

become much holier and greater because of this good deed. Now, my son, listen to me. Sit before me, and I will teach you Torah."

Nosson became Rabbi Akiva's student. His heart opened for Torah, and within a short time, he became a scholar, the holy *tana*, Reb Nosson Tzutzisa, mentioned in Chazal.

This story teaches us many lessons. One lesson is that it is never too late to begin. Despite his late and unfortunate start, Noson Tzutzisa made a turnaround and became a great tzaddik and scholar.

This is the lesson of Shabbos HaChodesh: A person can change.