

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Chukas



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Chukas

Temimus

The parashah begins with the words זאת חקת התורה, "This is the law of the Torah..." and it goes on to discuss the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, related to the laws of parah adumah.

The Or HaChaim asks, "Why does the Torah refer to this mitzvah with a general name, חקת התורה, the law of the Torah? It should have stated... זאת חקת הטומאה or זאת חקת הטהרה, 'These are the laws of tumah,' or 'These are the laws of taharah?'"

The Kedushas Levi zt'l explains that here the Torah implies that the entire Torah is a chok.

The Kedushas Levi zt'l writes, "The reasons for the Torah and its mitzvos are concealed from every man... This is implied in זאת חקת התורה, the entire Torah with all its mitzvos are a chok, since its reasons weren't revealed to us. The primary purpose we keep the mitzvos is because צוה ה' לאמר, Hashem commanded us to do so."

And since we don't know the reasons for the mitzvos, it is impossible to rationalize or make exceptions. We do as we were commanded because this is Hashem's decree.¹

There is an ongoing battle between the neshamah and the body. The neshamah

1. When clocks were invented, a villager traveled to the city and returned with a clock. He proudly showed it off to all his friends and neighbors, and everyone was very impressed.

One of the other villagers also wanted a clock and began saving up for one. His family told him, "Why do you want a clock? It will only cause you trouble. You will be obligated to live by the clock. Let's say you are hungry, but the clock says it isn't noon yet, you won't be able to eat lunch! If you are tired, but the clock says it is still too early, you won't be able to go to sleep! What do you need it for? Forget about buying a clock."

The man agreed. He quickly went to his friend who bought the clock and said, "I pity you because you bought the clock. I'm certain your life has become so much harder because of it. Now you can't eat and go to sleep when you want to. You are bound to the dictates of the clock. I truly feel bad for you."

The man replied, "I thought about this problem too and found a solution. If I'm hungry, and it isn't yet noon, I just move the hands of the clock to 12:00, and then I can eat. If I'm tired, and it isn't yet 10:00 P.M., I move the clock to 10:00 and go to sleep."

This is how it appears when people try to adjust the Torah to their needs. They change things here and there to fit their schedule and desires. But when we embrace the Torah as it was taught, we don't change it to fit our personal needs.

In the *ketores*, we say that אילו היה נותן בה קרטוב של דבש אין אדם יכל לעמוד בפני ריחה, "If a drop of honey would be added into the ketores, the scent would be so overwhelming that no one would be able to resist the scent. ולמה אין מערבין בה דבש? So why don't we add honey? Wouldn't it be wise to put in a drop of honey so the ketores have this most wonderful scent? The answer is מפני שהתורה אמרה כי כל שאור וכל דבש לא תקטירו מומנו אשי לד, "It is because the Torah says, 'Do not sacrifice leaven and honey to Hashem.'"

These words exemplify that we don't do what our common sense dictates. Our first and only consideration is, "What did Hashem command? What is His will?" and that is what we do. We follow the Torah with temimus, knowing that Hashem knows what's best for us.

An alcoholic was drinking strong 96% vodka. His friends rebuked him. "Why do you drink? You are ruining your health and your *shalom bayis*. All your friends are leaving you. Why don't you stop?"

wants to serve Hashem while the body doesn't. The Kedushas Levi explains that this is because the neshamah knows the *taamim* for the mitzvos of the Torah, while the body doesn't. The body doesn't know the reasons for the mitzvos and, therefore, doesn't want to perform them.²

When we don't feel the need to understand everything, we will accept the halachah as Hashem told it to us. We won't try to make changes in the Torah, *chalilah*, to fit our opinions, worldviews, and the like. This is Hashem's decree, and we will keep it exactly as Hashem commanded it.

The first Rashi of the parashah states, "The Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish nation, and they say, 'What is this commandment [of parah adumah]? What is its purpose?' Therefore, the Torah labels parah adumah a decree (דוק). I have decreed it; You have no right to question it."

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 19:8) elaborates:

"A non-Jew told Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, 'The parah adumah process appears like witchcraft. You take a cow, burn it, crush it, and then take its ashes. If one became tamei to a human corpse, you sprinkle two or three drops on him and proclaim him pure.'"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai rebuffed the goy not to be so surprised by this procedure because goyim have similar methods to cure those who suffer from an evil spirit.

When the goy left, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai told his students the real answer.³ He said, "I swear, death doesn't create tumah, and water doesn't purify. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, וזאת חקת התורה, this is My rule, which you must comply with."

In other words, parah adumah is a *chok*, a rule that we keep without understanding its reason, logic, or explanation.

The Midrash continues:

"All korbanos are male. Why is the parah adumah female? It is a *mashal* to an infant, the child of a maidservant, who dirtied the king's palace with excretion. The king commanded, 'Let his mother come and clean up her son's mess.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'Let the parah adumah come and atone for the egel.'"

An egel is a young calf. The parah adumah is like the mother who comes to clean up her calf's mess.

The end of this Midrash seems to contradict the beginning of the Midrash. The Midrash begins by teaching that parah

The man answered, "You are right. There are ninety-five good reasons for me to stop drinking. But this ninety-six percent drink has a *taam* (taste) that overrides all your ninety-five *taamim* (reasons)."

When keeping the Torah, there may be ninety-five reasons and explanations for doing things differently. Our common sense may advise us to do differently, but we accept what Hashem tells us to do with *temimus*. We follow His will over human logic and all other considerations.

Perhaps this is hinted in the words פרה אדומה תמימה; we keep the mitzvah of parah adumah, and all mitzvos of the Torah, תמימה, with *temimus*, exactly as Hashem taught us, without adjusting anything to make the mitzvos compatible to what we think or want.

2. This is also why a person's body is tamei upon his demise. Because during its lifetime, the body didn't want to serve Hashem.

Chazal (in one opinion) say that the graves of tzaddikim do not cause tumah. The Kedushas Levi explains that this is because tzaddikim purified their bodies until even their bodies wanted to serve Hashem.

3. It is forbidden to teach Torah to goyim, so Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai answered the goy just to silence his mockery and to satisfy his curiosity, but he didn't tell the goy the true answer.

adumah doesn't have an explanation, and then the midrash brings down a reason for this mitzvah - to atone for the egel!

Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorke zt'l answers that parah adumah is a chok. We don't know the reason for this mitzvah, and we keep it solely because we believe in Hashem. And now that we have displayed our emunah in Hashem, the emunah atones for the egel. The egel was *avodah zorah*, a lack of *emunah*, which we rectify by demonstrating our emunah in Hashem.

Mikvah

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l said he achieved his levels through immersing in the *mikvah*.

We don't have the parah adumah to attain taharah, but we still have the *mikvah*, which also purifies us immensely.

The *Rishonim* teach us that *mikvah* also removes the tumah of aveiros. The Shlah Hakadosh (*Shaar HaOsiyos 9, Taharah*) writes, "Fortunate is the one who always accustoms himself to have purity. It cleans away all *tumos*, including the *tumah* of aveiros."

Or Zarua writes, "In our generation, we can't punish a murderer. All we can do is not have anything to do with him. We shouldn't look at him either because Chazal say one may not look at the face of a *rasha*. He is *pasul* for all *eidus*. Even if he killed by accident, we shouldn't permit him to daven for the *amud*. Nevertheless, if he does *teshuvah*, he immediately becomes a perfect tzaddik. Only he needs *tevilah* to cleanse himself from the *aveirah* because it made him tamei. *Aveiros* cause *tumah*. The Midrash on (Tehillim 51:4) הָרַב כִּבְּסֵי מַעֲוֵי וּמַחְטָאֵי טְהַרְנִי, 'Cleanse me a lot from my sin, purify me from my iniquity' teaches that whoever commits an *aveirah*, it is as if he became tamei from a dead person. I learned from Rabbeinu Simchah, 'All people who want to do *teshuvah* must go to the mikvah.'

"A story is told in Avos d'Rabi Nosson (3) about a girl captured by gentiles. When she

was freed, they brought her to a mikvah because she ate the foods of non-Jews. Non-kosher food doesn't make a person tamei. Nevertheless, they had her *tovel* to cleanse her from the *aveirah*..."

That mikvah purifies us from sins shouldn't surprise us because one of the primary reasons everybody goes to the *mikvah* on *erev Yom Kippur* is to purify themselves from aveiros.

The Radvaz (vol.3 415) states, "To do *teshuvah* for every type of sin, one needs *mikvah* first."

Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl zt'l said, "If someone comes to me without first immersing in the mikvah, I can see all his bad deeds, even those he committed behind closed doors. But if he went to the mikvah before coming to me, I don't see anything bad. The mikvah purifies him" (*Raza d'Uvda*).

Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld would immerse himself in the mikvah every day, sometimes even twice daily. Reb Isser Zalman Melzer zt'l asked Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l why he goes so often. "Wouldn't it be better to learn Torah at that time?"

Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l answered, "If *mikvah* can turn a goy into a Yid, imagine what it can do to a Yid!" Rebbe Isser Zalman said that Reb Yosef Chaim's response changed his perception of mikvah.

How does mikvah remove aveiros?

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Tishrei*, 4:11:31) teaches that being in a mikvah is like becoming batel, nonexistent. Indeed, בטל are the same letters of בטל, batel, non-existent. Therefore, when he comes out of the mikvah, he is a brand-new person; he isn't the person who performed the aveiros.

The Bnei Yissaschar writes, "The [four walls of the] mikvah is in the form of a ם, the form of a womb. The person immersing in a mikvah is bent over [his head over his chest, and his feet bent up to his torso] in the form of a child in its mother's womb... [In

the mikvah, he appears like a child in the womb, and when he comes out] it is like he was newly born. All the days of his past, including the days he sinned, fall away."

The Chinuch (173) writes that the mikvah's waters represent the water at the beginning of creation, covering the earth. When one goes to the mikvah, he should imagine himself going to that place before the creation of man, and when he emerges from the water, he should consider himself newly created.⁴

Purity of Torah Study

The Shlah (Chukas) writes, "Although we don't have the ashes of the *parah adumah* anymore, a person can purify himself...by studying, teaching, and keeping the Torah.."

A non-kosher cooking utensil is *kashered* by purging it in boiling water (הגעלה). An even more thorough mode of *kashering* is to heat the cooking utensil in a fire (ליבון) until the utensil becomes red hot. The Or HaChaim zt'l (*Rishon L'Tzion*) teaches that these two approaches of *kashering* represent two paths people take to attain purity from their aveiros. One way is through *yesurim*, such as afflictions, fasting, etc. This method is compared to boiling water, which cleanses and purifies the cooking utensils from their non-kosher status. Learning Torah is a greater purifier because Torah is compared to fire. As it states (*Yirmiyahu* 23:19), הלא כה דברי, "Behold My words are like fire." Fire is an even greater form of cleansing and *kashering*.

Chazal (*Brachos* 63:) say, "Torah knowledge is found solely among those who are *moser*

4. Reb Boruch Ber Levovitz zt'l (the *Birchas Shmuel*) excelled in the mitzvah of *kibud av va'em*. When his father was ill, he stayed with his father every night. But one night, he couldn't care for his ailing father, so he asked someone to take his place. That night, his father was *niftar*. Reb Boruch Ber was brokenhearted. He felt that had he been *moser nefesh* to care for his father that night, perhaps his father would still be alive.

He traveled to Radin, to the *Chofetz Chaim* zt'l, to receive *chizuk*. The *Chofetz Chaim* zt'l told him, "After you do *teshuvah*, you aren't the person who sinned. Chazal say, 'When one does *teshuvah*, he is like a newborn child.'"

Reb Boruch Ber left the *Chofetz Chaim's* home dancing. "I'm a new Boruch Ber! I'm a new person!"

Through the influence of the *Magid of Mezritch* zt'l, Reb Aharon Gradya zt'l became a *baal teshuvah* and a great *tzaddik*. One day, he complained to the *Magid* that the *yetzer hara* kept returning to him, enticing him to return to his sinful past.

The *Magid* told him a *mashal*:

Someone owned a tavern and earned a good living from it. But he was bothered by the rowdy drunkards who patronized his inn. Every night, there were fights, and the furniture in his inn was constantly being broken and needed to be replaced. One day, he decided to close the inn, and in the same place, to open a store that sold fabrics.

The drunks, however, who were used to coming to his tavern, kept returning. They stood at his door, howling for drinks. They even came in the middle of the night.

The fabric store owner would holler from his window, "The bar is closed. This is a fabric store now. The tavern you're looking for doesn't exist anymore!"

The *Magid* said, "When the *yetzer hara* comes to you, tempting you with sins, tell him that he came to the wrong address. You are no longer the Aharon Gradya of your youth. You are a new person, and he should, therefore, go elsewhere."

As we explained above, *mikvah* helps us imagine this.

nefesh to know Torah, as it states in this week's parashah (19:14) *וזאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל*, "Where do you find Torah? By those who die in the tents of Torah."

Dying for Torah means that one should study Torah with all his heart, soul, and energy. It means that he feels that his life has no purpose without Torah knowledge. If he doesn't know something, it bothers him immensely, like a part of his life is lacking.

This teaches us the attitude we should have when we study Torah. Torah should be studied with a passion to know it, and as Chazal tell us, only in this manner will we succeed in knowing Torah. This is the Torah's lesson with the words *וזאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל*.

But the question is, why is this essential lesson written specifically in the parashah of parah adumah? It could have been written anywhere else in the Torah!

The Rokeach explains that this tells us that studying Torah in this manner purifies a person. Just as parah adumah purifies, studying Torah as if one's life depends on it purifies as well.

Why is toil needed to attain purity? Why isn't it enough to study Torah nonchalantly? We can explain that it is because one needs to be immersed in Torah study. When one goes to a mikvah, he must be entirely immersed in the water. (If one's hair is outside the water, he doesn't become pure. He must be wholly immersed in the water.) The *taharah* that comes from

Torah study is also, ideally, when one is completely immersed in Torah study.⁵

However, we must also know that even just a drop of connection with the Torah purifies immensely. Each line that one learns, each Mishnah, etc., purifies immensely.

Perhaps a hint that even a tiny connection to Torah can purify someone is in (Yechezkel 36:25) *וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טמאותיכם* (I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you will be clean; from all your impurities and all your abominations will I cleanse you.) Even if one isn't entirely immersed in Torah but has a sprinkle of the purifying waters of Torah on him, this will purify him immensely.

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 42:) mentions *עמילין של טבחים*, which is dough made from not fully grown wheat kernels. This dough was placed on top of a cooking pot to draw out the impure particles found in the food.

A more common translation of *עמילין* is toil. Chazal hint that toiling in Torah draws out and removes a person's impurities, making him pure before Hashem.

Magen Avraham (580:9) writes, "It is written in kabbalah sefarim that it is proper for all Jews to cry when the Torah is burned because this causes Torah to be given over to the tumah. May Hashem return it to us quickly. Tzaddikim fast on Friday of parashas Chukas. This is because in the year 5004 (1244 l'misparam), on Friday parashas Chukas, twenty wagons filled with sefarim were burned in France. They didn't establish

5. It states (19:2) *פרה אדמה תמימה*, "A perfectly red cow." Rashi explains that *תמימה* in this context means "It shall be perfect in redness. Even two black hairs disqualify it." However, if it has only one black hair, the parah is kosher. It is still called *תמימה*, completely red.

In contrast, it states (Devarim 18:13) *תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך*, "Be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d." The same word is used, *תמים*, *תמימה*, but there is a difference in the extent of *temimus* that is needed. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l teaches that when it comes to *temimus* of the parah adumah, it can have one black hair, and it is still called *tamim*, entirely red. But for our *temimus* in our devotion to Hashem, one must be one hundred percent wholehearted with Hashem. Not even one hair of one's essence should be left out.

We add that also, when it comes to Torah study, one should be totally attached.

the fast on the date of the month that this occurred because in a dream (shaa'las chalom) it was revealed to them that the tragedy was associated with the parashah (parashas Chukas), as it states וזאת חקת התורה, and Unkelus writes, דא גזירת אורייתא, 'This is the decree on the Torah.' Also, in the year ת"ה, two large communities were destroyed on this Friday, as is written in the Selichos composed by the Shach."

We don't fast in these generations, but Friday, parashas Chukas, is a day to increase our respect and honor for the Torah. One way to do so is to toil in Torah and make plans to improve our attachment to it. One of the benefits will be the taharah that we will attain from it.

On the Right Path

Chazal (Eichah, Pesichta 1) say, "The light in the Torah will direct a man to improve his ways." Also, Chazal (Kiddushin 30:) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Yisrael, 'I created the yetzer hara, and I created Torah as its spice [to tame the yetzer hara]. If you will study Torah, you won't be given over into his hands.'"

So, in addition to the purity from sin that one attains from studying the Torah, Torah study will lead him onto the right path.

Towards the end of the *parashah*, it states (21:27), על כן יאמרו המושלים באו חשבון, The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 78:) explains, "The מושלים refers to

[the tzaddikim] who rule over their *yetzer hara*. [They say] באו חשבון, come and make the *cheshbon*, reckoning, of the world הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה ושכר עבירה כנגד הפסדה."

The Gemara is teaching us another method to overcome the yetzer hara. באו חשבון, one should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* to measure gain vs. loss. This is because for every deed a person does, there is a loss and a gain, and one should measure the gain opposite the loss and then decide what he should do. For example, when performing mitzvos, there is often a loss. The Rashbam writes, "He will lose profit since he is occupied with the mitzvos. And if he gives *tzedakah*, he loses money. [He should compare this loss] in contrast to the great reward in the future that he will receive for doing the mitzvah."⁶

The same is with aveiros, r'l. There might be a moment of gain and pleasure from the aveirah, but when measured against how much he will suffer from it in this world and the next world, he will understand that he should be wise and refrain.⁷

This contemplation is undoubtedly worthwhile and will help the person choose the right path and what he should do. But there is an even greater *segulah*, and that is the study of Torah. Without any contemplation at all, the Torah will direct him on the path of *ehrllichkeit* and *yiras Shamayim*.

6. The Vilna gaon zt'l cried into his tzitzis moments before his passing. He explained, "In this world, for a few groshen, one can buy a mitzvah, and the reward is meeting the Shechinah!"

If a person knew that he would receive a million dollars if he invested five dollars, he would undoubtedly make the investment. So, when we think about the enormous reward from performing the mitzvos, we will be inspired to perform the mitzvos, even if there will be some initial loss.

And, upon deeper contemplation, there is no loss at all. The *tzedakah* he gives will grant him blessings and success, and the time he sets aside for Torah study and *tefillah* will increase his overall success in his work. Nevertheless, even if there would have been a loss, when compared to the huge gains received by performing the mitzvah, he understands it is well worth the investment.

7. Imagine a food laced with poison. He will enjoy eating the food, but is it worth it? Or a thief who steals and then spends years in prison. Similarly, there might be an initial gain from aveiros, but the pain afterwards is immense, r'l. When one makes this calculation, he will avoid aveiros.

The next *pasuk* (21:28) states, **כִּי אִשׁ יֵצֵא מִחֶשְׁבֹן**. Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* explains that the *pasuk* says: From making this cheshbon, this contemplation, a fire comes forth, which will direct a person onto the right path. Due to his contemplations, he will choose mitzvos and avoid aveiros.

The *pasuk* continues, **לְהֵבֵא מִקְרִית סִיחֹן** "a blazing fire emerged from the cities of Sichon." Targum Yonoson translates **סִיחֹן** as **מְשִׁיחֵן בְּאוֹרֵייתָא**, "speaking Torah." The *pasuk* is saying that a **לְהֵבֵא**, a blazing fire, comes forth from studying the Torah. Although making a cheshbon hanefesh and contemplating what is important in life is like a fire that directs people on the right path, it doesn't compare to the direction that comes from studying the Torah. The light of the Torah will direct him onto the right path.⁸

Refuah

When one studies the *pasukim* (21:4-9) with the *miforshim*, we find that several aveiros were committed at this time, which resulted in biting snakes. Bnei Yisroel were about to enter Eretz Yisrael. They asked Edom for permission to pass through his land, but Edom refused. They had to travel around the outskirts of his land to find another route into Eretz Yisrael, and that is when the nation panicked. Rashi (21:4) writes, "They said, 'We are so close to entering the Land, and now we are turning back. So did our

fathers turn back and remained in the desert for thirty-eight years, until today.' They became disheartened by the hardship of traveling."

וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֱלֹקִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה, the nation complained against Hashem and against Moshe, and they complained about the manna, which was their only source of food.

They were punished with snakes. Rashi (21:6) explains, "Let the snake, which was punished for speaking slander, come and punish those who spread slander. Let the snake, for which all types of food taste the same, come and punish those ingrates (*kafuy tovah*), for whom one thing [the manna] changes into various tastes."

Baal HaTurim writes that they were punished "because they acted like a snake, to speak lashon hara on the manna."

The Or HaChaim writes, "It is because Bnei Yisrael spoke lashon hara against Moshe, and then they spoke lashon hara even against Hashem."

It states (21:5) **וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֱלֹקִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה**, "The nation spoke against Hashem and Moshe..." Rashi writes, **הֵשׂוּ עַבְדִּי לְקוֹנוֹ**, "They equated the servant with his Master."⁹

Because of these aveiros, they were punished with snakes, and many people died. The nation repented and asked Moshe to daven for them. Hashem gave them a

8. It is important to designate times for Torah study. Chazal call this **קְבִיעַת עֵיתִים לְתוֹרָה**. For example, he can set aside an hour before going to work and another hour at night. These times elevate the person and give purpose to his day. In addition, as we explained above, the Torah will direct him on the right path.

The Kotzker *zt'l* says that occasionally a person should find more moments in his day to study Torah, which is the most important pursuit in life. Let's say he generally works from 9-5; one day, he should take an hour off to study Torah. He said that this is hinted at in the words **קְבִיעַת עֵיתִים לְתוֹרָה**, because one translation of **קְבִיעַת** is to steal (see *Mishlei* 22). So, **קְבִיעַת עֵיתִים לְתוֹרָה** means one should "steal" time from his busy schedule and use it to learn Torah.

9. When you consider two unequal things equal, the problem is either raising one too high or lowering the other. Indeed, the *miforshim* explain this Rashi in these two manners. Some explain that their aveirah was that they put Moshe too high, considering him equal to Hashem (see *Meshech Chachmah*, *Devarim* 4:15). Others explain that their aveirah was that they considered Hashem low, at the level of Moshe Rabbeinu (see *Eitz Yosef*, *Midrash*).

cure, as it states (21:8) עשה לך שרף ושים אתו על נס (21:8) "Make yourself a serpent and put it on a pole, and let whoever is bitten look at it and live."

The Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 29.) asks, "Does a snake cause death or life? Rather, when the Jewish nation looked heavenward and subjected their hearts to their Father in heaven, they were healed, but if not, they would waste away."

In other words, their cure came from turning to Hashem.

The Sfas Emes (Chukas (תרל"ז) asks, why did there need to be a copper snake in the first place? Why didn't Hashem simply command the nation to look up at the sky to be healed?¹⁰

The Sfas Emes replies, "The [copper] snake had the segulah of refuah. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave it that segulah, as the Ramban writes that it is Hakadosh Baruch Hu's way to sweeten bitterness with bitterness. Therefore, according to nature, for someone bitten by a wild dog, seeing a dog will harm him more; Hakadosh Baruch Hu did the opposite here, that they were cured by looking at the snake. Nevertheless, Hashem's will is that even when we do acts of refuah according to nature, one should look up to heaven. His heart should be to heaven. He should think, 'Could this [copper] snake cure and give life?' This is the meaning of Chazal, מִסְתַּכְּלִין וּמִשְׁעַבְדִּין לַבַּיִת; they should devote their hearts to heaven. Even while engaged in natural healing, their eyes should focus on heaven. This is the meaning of עשה לך שרף, which means that a person's hislahavus should be to connect with Hashem."

Hashem wanted them to be occupied with refuos while simultaneously turning their hearts to Hashem, the true source of

refuah. The same occurs today when someone takes medicine and is occupied with refuos. Although he is taking worldly steps toward refuah, his heart should be to Hashem, the source of refuah.

The Ramban (21:9) writes, "It is the way of the Torah that all of its ways are נס בתוך נס, one miracle within another miracle. Hashem removes the illness with the matter that caused the damage... As Chazal say (*Mechilta*, *Shemos* 15:25) ויורהו ה' עץ (that the bitter waters in Marah were healed when a bitter branch was thrown into the waters), and it states (*Malachim* 2, 2:21) regarding the salt with Elisha (that the waters of Yericho were salty and bitter, and Elisha cured the waters when he poured salt into the origin of the water. For this is Hashem's way, to heal bitterness with bitterness).

"It is known from the paths of medicine that those bitten by a poisonous animal will be in greater danger when they see the species that bit them or when they see a resemblance of the species that bit them... Doctors are cautious not to even mention the species before them because if the patient thinks about the animal that bit them, it can kill them. Therefore, it would seem proper that those bitten by poisonous snakes should not look at snakes or think about snakes at all.

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Moshe to make a form of a snake, which caused the death. Just mentioning a snake should cause danger, but HaKadosh Baruch Hu wanted to cure them with something that naturally should cause the opposite. When they looked at the snake, they would be healed. And this was to teach them that Hashem causes death and life." It was a נס בתוך נס, a double miracle because they were healed by something that should have made them even more ill.¹¹

¹⁰ The Imrei Emes zt'l (son of the Sfas Emes) answers that the nation might have thought their illness was natural, not due to their aveiros. There are snakes in the desert, after all, and snakes bite. Therefore, Hashem arranged that looking at the snake cured them. So, they would realize that both the illness and the cure were from Hashem.

¹¹ Medications are generally bitter and often have negative side effects. How could something bitter and

Hashem Wants Our Connection

Chazal (Pesachim 118.) states, קשה זיווגו של אדם, בקריעת ים סוף, that keviyachol, it is hard for Hashem to find a person's bashert to marry. It is as difficult as it was for Hashem to split the sea.

The Gemara says that the same applies to parnassah. It is difficult for Hashem, keviyachol, to arrange a person's parnassah, as it was difficult for Hashem to split the sea.

The question is that nothing is difficult for Hashem. Hashem can easily do anything and everything, so what is the explanation of this Gemara? Why is splitting the sea, shidduchim, and parnassah referred to as קשה, hard for Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

We can explain it with a different translation for קשה.

Chazal say that about Shemini Atzeres, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says קשה עלי פרידתכם, "It is hard for Me when you leave," and therefore, Hashem requests that we celebrate with Him one more day after Succos.

So, we can explain that when it states that kriyas Yam Suf, shidduchim, and parnassah are קשה, hard for Hashem, it means that keviyachol, it is difficult for Hashem when we depart from Him.

This is because Hashem desires our tefillos, and we turn to Hashem and cry to Him when we have problems. These moments are very precious to Hashem.

At the Yam Suf, the Jewish nation cried out to Hashem. The same occurs when one awaits his shidduch or parnassah. People shout, pray, and cry to Hashem, and the closeness this creates is special to Hashem.

When the Yidden were at the shore of the Yam Suf, the sea was in front of them, and the Mitzrim were pursuing them from the

rear. The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 21:5) asks, "Why did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do so? It is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires their tefillos."

The Midrash brings the pasuk (Shir HaShirim 2:14) השמיעני את קולך כי קולך ערב, "Let me hear your voice, for your voice is pleasant..." When the nation davened, Hashem wanted to save them and split the sea, but He knew that now the Yidden would stop davening and shouting out to Him, and that was קשה, hard, keviyachol for Hashem.

The same is true of parnassah and shidduchim. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to hear our tefillos. When salvation comes, the person will stop davening, and that is hard, keviyachol, for Hashem.

Therefore, never depart from Hashem. After you receive your yeshuah, continue connecting with Hashem by praising Him.

The tzaddik Reb Yitzchak David Gutfarb zt'l went to the Kosel for forty days to daven for a yeshuah. When he received his salvation, he returned to the kosel for another forty days to praise Hashem. The lesson is to always connect to Hashem, either with prayer or with praises, and never depart from Hashem, and then it won't be קשה, hard, keviyachol, for Hashem to send His salvation.

There were tzaddikim who wouldn't go to sleep at night as long there was money in the home. They first gave every penny to tzedakah, and then they would go to sleep. For the next day, they would daven, and they would trust in Hashem, and Hashem would support them and give them parnassah again. Examples of tzaddikim who would do so were the Baal Shem Tov, Reb Mordechai of Neshchiz, and the Sanzer Rav zt'l. Maybe they did this in order to feel totally dependent on Hashem. When there's money in the home, it is harder for the heart

harmful cure? This is how Hashem made refuos, that bitterness will cure bitterness, so we should know that the refuah is from Hashem.

to feel how much we are dependent on Hashem.

In his will, Reb Shlomo Kluger zt'l requested that he be buried next to a poor person. "I request... that you don't bury me next to the wealthy, even if he was ehrlich. Only bury me next to the poor, and even if he was extremely poor, as long as he was ehrlich." And the explanation is that wealth can sometimes cause the heart to depart from Hashem. The person doesn't feel just how much he is dependent on Hashem.

One of the difficult tests of the desert was that they were forced to live with total dependence on Hashem. For their food, for their water, for their protection, they needed Hashem's help. There were no supermarkets in the area to get what was missing. Their only hope was to turn their hearts to Hashem. It was a special time because the Jewish nation learned to connect their hearts to Hashem, but it was also a trying time, and they failed some tests. It is about this period that Hashem says, קשה עלי פרידתכם, it is difficult for Me when you depart from Me.

Rabbeinu b'Chayei discusses why it states לחם ואין מים ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל... וישלח ה' בעם את הנשים השרפים, "The nation spoke against Hashem and Moshe... for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread." Why did the nation say that they didn't have bread and water? Hashem gave them bread from heaven and water from a stone. Rabbeinu b'Chayei (ד"ה ב'י אין) writes that they complained that all nations have plenty of bread and water, not just enough for one day, and their parnassah isn't dependent on them being worthy. "Why are we different from all nations that we totally depend on You and not on nature?"

were so dependent on Hashem that they wanted to be like all other nations that Hashem led them according to the rules of nature. Therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu removed His hashgachah from them. He did to them as they wanted, and they were affected by the rules of nature and bitten by the snakes."

It isn't easy to live with the feeling of total dependence on Hashem, but the benefits are great because when one lives that way, Hashem will always help him.

It states (21:5-6) וידבר העם באלקים ובמשה... כי אין לחם ואין מים ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל... וישלח ה' בעם את הנשים השרפים, "The nation spoke against Hashem and Moshe... for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread."

But it was for their benefit so that they would turn their eyes to Hashem.

קוה אל ה' means to trust and to turn our eyes to Hashem at all times. The gematriya of קוה is 111, the same as אל"ף. This hints that the alef beis, the very basics of being a Yid is to turn our eyes to Hashem that He should help us.¹²

12. A bachur told Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l that a shidduch was suggested that sounded interesting, but the other side is asking that his family give a lot of money for the dowry, more than they can afford now. The question is whether they should pursue this shidduch, even with these terms.

Reb Yechezkel asked the bachur whether his father was self-employed or if he had a job. The bachur replied that his father was self-employed. Reb Yechezkel said that in that case, his father could take on the dowry debt, and b'ezras Hashem, he would be able to cover the expenses.

Respectfully, the bachur asked Reb Yechezkel for an explanation. He said, "What difference does it make whether my father works for someone else or whether he was self-employed?"

"Make a Fence for the Torah"

Reb Yonoson Eibshitz *zt'l* (Yaaras Dvash, *drush* 5) teaches, "The primary teshuvah isn't the fasts that people take upon and the like. The main teshuvah is to establish boundaries [preventions and safeguards that will protect him from committing aveiros]... Dovid HaMelech said it beautifully, as it is brought in the Midrash (Tanchuma, Ekev 1), 'I am not afraid of the severe aveiros, because they are severe [and I will anyway be cautious]. I fear the lighter mitzvos because they are lighter [and I don't realize how cautious I must be not to transgress them].' The explanation is that a person won't commit a severe aveirah, *chas v'shalom*. However, when the aveirah is smaller in his eyes, he tells himself, what will be so bad if I transgress it? And this could lead him to more severe aveiros.

"This is hinted in the pasuk (Bamidbar 21:26) *כי חשבון עיר סיחון מלך האמרי הוא והוא נלחם במלך מואב הראשון ויקח את כל ארצו מידו עד ארנן*. 'For Cheshbon was the city of Sichon, king of the Amorites. He had fought against the first king of Moav, taking all his land from his possession, as far as Arnon.'

"[Initially], Cheshbon was a border city of Moav. If the king of Moav had paid attention to it, there is no doubt that Sichon wouldn't have been able to conquer it. However, since it wasn't a large city, he neglected to bring all his strength and army to that city. After Sichon captured Cheshbon, Sichon had an open path to conquer the entire country [of Moav]."

The following pasuk states, *על כן יאמרו, המושלים באר חשבון*, "Concerning this, those who speak in parables say, "Come to Cheshbon..."

Reb Yonoson Eibshitz explains that this indicates that the story of Cheshbon can be used as a *mashal* that teaches us a fundamental lesson in *avodas Hashem*.

"This is a *mashal*, to when one permits the foolish, old king [the *yetzer hara*] to conquer a little bit, in the end, he will conquer everything and rule as he desires. Understand this because this is the way of the *yetzer hara*. He works slowly. Today, he tells you to do this, and tomorrow, he tells you to do that... Therefore, we must be very cautious from the *yetzer hara* and his enticing tongue..."

In particular, we should uphold the safeguards that the leaders of our generation have established to protect us from the *yetzer hara*. We shouldn't take these matters lightly because if we are negligent and allow the *yetzer hara* to win a few small battles, it gives him a stronghold to conquer more and more.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* was once riding in a taxi, and the non-religious taxi driver—unaware of his passenger's stature—vented on the *rabbanim*. "They don't let you live. Every day, they come up with new rules and regulations."

Reb Shlomo Zalman didn't respond, but when they stopped at a red light, Reb Shlomo Zalman said, "The people in charge of the roads don't let us live. They keep making new rules and regulations. On red, we can't go, only on green. For driving quickly, one gets a ticket. If you don't wear a seatbelt, you may be fined, and they have many other laws. They simply don't let us live."

Reb Yechezkel replied, "When a person works for a boss, he trusts in his weekly paycheck. But when one is self-employed, he constantly places his trust in Hashem. When you told me you're your father is self-employed, I knew that he trusts in Hashem, and I knew that he has a greater chance of receiving Hashem's blessings.

Indeed, a short time after accepting this debt, the father began receiving reparation money from Germany and was able to keep his promise and pay the dowry.

The taxi driver frowned and said, "These laws give life. People would die if it weren't for these laws."

Reb Shlomo Zalman replied, "The laws of the *chachamim* are the same. If it weren't for their decrees, there would be many spiritual casualties."

Shimon worked as a *mashgiach kashrus* in a restaurant in Poland. A non-Jewish kitchen assistant noticed Shimon sitting bent over, oblivious to his surroundings. She called his name, but he didn't respond. She tossed a large empty pot near him to see his reaction, but he didn't stir. Not wasting a minute, she quickly called for an ambulance. The paramedics arrived and performed CPR without getting any response. They were ready to give up. The woman cried out, "He

has a wife and family in Israel waiting for him. You can't give up."

The paramedics tried some more, and *baruch Hashem*, Shimon began to breathe on his own. He was flown to Eretz Yisrael, where he fully recovered.

There's a story behind this story. That woman in the kitchen enjoyed singing, and Shimon asked her not to sing when he was around. She'd often "forget" and begin singing, and Shimon would say, "Sha! Sha!!" and she would stop singing. That day, she was singing and was expecting to hear "Sha!" but it didn't come. Shimon's silence prompted her to see what was wrong, and that ultimately saved his life. Had Shimon been discovered later, it would have been too late. This is as it states, *יראת ה' תוסיף ימים*, "fear of Hashem lengthens days" (*Mishlei* 10:27).¹³

13. Refael dreamed of becoming a special education teacher. He had no previous teaching experience, though he was confident he would make a great teacher. His only concern was how to control a classroom. He was thrilled when he was invited to try out for a teaching position.

The difficulties began almost immediately. One student started moving his chair back and forth, right and left, creating a ruckus. Refael's disciplining skills were being tested. He told that boy, "I see you have a shaky chair. Go get another one." The student left the room to find another chair, and Refael was able to get on with his lesson.

Five minutes later, a paper airplane landed on the teacher's desk. Refael said in good humor, "The Ta'z (*Orach Chaim* 51:1) says that *ברוך שאמר* was established by the Anshei Kneses HaGedolah by a *פיתקא דנפל מן שמיא*, a paper that fell from heaven...' It seems that a paper just fell from heaven to me..."

The children laughed, and soon, order was restored. There were several other disturbances, but Refael didn't lose his temper. With humor, he avoided confrontations and continued teaching. But in his heart, he knew that he wouldn't get the job. How could he? He couldn't control the class.

But the principal was very impressed by how patiently Refael handled the class. He said, "Many teachers came to try out for the position, but after seeing your patience when the children misbehaved, you get the job."

Rafael thought the children's misbehavior would cause him to lose the job. Each time a new disturbance occurred, he viewed it as another nail in the coffin of his career as a teacher. But these disturbances were precisely what granted him the job.

Before returning home, Refael said goodbye to the children, particularly appreciating those who misbehaved. Because of them, he got the job.

The lesson from this story is the awareness that hardships are for our benefit. We go through difficult times and spiritual challenges, and we think these are ruining our hope to succeed when our growth and reward depend specifically on our passing these difficult tests.

When Reb Boruch Ber (the Birkas Shmuel) stayed in America for an extended time to collect money for his yeshiva, his supporters bought him a home so he could be there with peace of mind.

Jewish Clothes

וישמע הכנעני מלך ערד יושב הנגב כי (21:1-3) בא ישראל... וילחם בישראל... וידר ישראל נדר לה' אם נתן נתן את העם הזה בידי והחרמתי את עריהם. וישמע ה' בקול ישראל ויתן את הכנעני "The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the south, heard that Yisrael had come ... and he waged war against Yisrael... Yisrael made a vow to Hashem and said, 'If You deliver this people into my hand, I shall consecrate their cities.' Hashem heard Yisrael's voice and delivered the Canaanite..."

Rashi explains that they weren't really Canaanites. They were Amalek, as it states וישב הנגב, "Who lived in the south," and this refers to Amalek, as it states עמלק יושב בארץ הנגב (Bamidbar 13:29).

Amalek pretended to be Canaanites when they came to attack Bnei Yisrael. Rashi explains, "[Amalek] changed their language to speak Canaanite. They wanted Bnei Yisrael should daven to Hakadosh Baruch to deliver the Canaanites into their hands, and since] they were not Canaanites [their prayers would have no effect]. But Bnei

Yisrael noticed they were dressed like Amalekites, though they spoke in a Canaanite tongue. So they said, "We will pray generally," as it says, אם נתן נתן את העם הזה בידי 'If You deliver this people into my hand....'"

One wonderful lesson we can learn from this source is the power of tefillah. Even Amalek was aware of its power. They feared the tefillos of Bnei Yisrael.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks, why didn't Amalek dress up like the Canaanites? If they had done so, the Jewish people wouldn't have suspected anything. Why did they only change their language but not their clothing?

The Chidushei HaRim answers: If Amalek spoke like Canaan and dressed like Canaan, *they would be Canaan*. Because if one dresses and speaks like a certain nation, one becomes like them. Amalek would have actually become Canaanites.

We bring this Chidushei HaRim to teach the importance of maintaining the Jewish dress.¹⁴

But there was one thing that bothered Reb Boruch Ber immensely. There was a big cross in the home across the street from his. Every time he left or returned to his house, he had to be careful not to look at it, and this situation upset him immensely.

One day, he read a story which changed his perspective. He read that Reb Noson Adler *zt'l* was once traveling together with the Chasam Sofer *zt'l*, and one night, one of the horses died. The wagon driver looked for another horse but couldn't find one, so he attached a donkey to the wagon. In the morning, when they were ready to travel on, Reb Noson Adler noticed a donkey and a horse tied to the wagon, and he immediately jumped off the wagon and began to dance.

The Chasam Sofer asked him why he was so happy and dancing on that cold day. Reb Noson Adler told him that this was the first time in his life he could perform the mitzvah of לא תחרוש בשור וחמור יחדו, that one shouldn't work with two species together.

Reb Boruch Ber explained that he realized from this story that he should be delighted with the location of his home because every time he is outside his house, he can perform the mitzvah of לא תתורו אחרי לבבכם, which Chazal explain that it is forbidden to stray after avodah zarah. "So every time I have that avodah zarah before me, I should be extremely happy, because I can keep this mitzvah!"

The lesson is that tests aren't problems. They are opportunities to perform mitzvos and serve Hashem.

14. A Chasidic person began to change his lavish (*garb*) in favor of more modern attire. When a wise man questioned him about it, the "Chasidic" man replied that he was honest and couldn't live as a hypocrite. Since he isn't so good inside, he doesn't want to dress appropriately on the outside either.

The wise man replied that Chazal say that a person should be תוכו כבחו, his inside should match his outside.

If they would say that a person should be *ברו כחו*, his external like the internal, then you would be correct. Your external self should match your inside. However, they say that a person should be *תונו נברו*, and this means that he should begin with being good externally, and that will help him eventually be good inside, as well.